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London: CHATTO & WINDUS, Piccadilly.

THE FAT AND THE THIN

[LE VENTRE DE PARIS]

BY

ÉMILE ZOLA

TRANSLATED, WITH AN INTRODUCTION, BY
ERNEST ALFRED VIZETELLY

SOLE AUTHORISED ENGLISH VERSION

LONDON
CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY
1896

Let me have men about me that are fat:
Sleek-headed men, and such as sleep o' nights:
Yond' Cassius has a lean and hungry look;
He thinks too much: such men are dangerous.

SHAKESPEARE: *Julius Cæsar*, act i. sc. 2.

INTRODUCTION

'THE FAT AND THE THIN,' or, to use the French title, 'Le Ventre de Paris,' is a story of life in and around those vast Central Markets which form a distinctive feature of modern Paris. Even the reader who has never crossed the Channel must have heard of the Parisian *Halles*, for much has been written about them, not only in English books on the French metropolis, but also in English newspapers, magazines, and reviews; so that few, I fancy, will commence the perusal of the present volume without having, at all events, some knowledge of its subject-matter.

The Paris markets form such a world of their own, and teem at certain hours of the day and night with such exuberance of life, that it was only natural they should attract the attention of a novelist like M. Zola, who, to use his own words, delights 'in any subject in which vast masses of people can be shown in motion.' Mr. Sherard tells us[1] that the idea of 'Le Ventre de Paris' first occurred to M. Zola in 1872, when he used continually to take his friend Paul Alexis for a ramble through the Halles. I have in my possession, however, an article written by M. Zola some five or six years before that time, and in this one can already detect the germ of the present work; just as the *motif* of another of M. Zola's novels, 'La Joie de Vivre,' can be traced to a short story written for a Russian review.

[1] *Émile Zola: a Biographical and Critical Study*, by Robert Harborough Sherard, pp. 103, 104. London, Chatto & Windus, 1893.

Similar instances are frequently to be found in the writings of English as well as French novelists, and are, of course, easily explained. A young man unknown to fame, and unable to procure the publication of a long novel, often contents himself with embodying some particular idea in a short sketch or story, which finds its way into one or another periodical, where it lies buried and forgotten by everybody—excepting its author. Time goes by, however, the writer achieves some measure of success, and one day it occurs to him to elaborate and perfect that old idea of his, only a faint *aperçu* of which, for lack of opportunity, he had been able to give in the past. With a little research, no doubt, an interesting essay might be written on these literary resuscitations; but if one except certain novelists who are so deficient in ideas that they continue writing and rewriting the same story throughout their lives, it will, I think, be generally found that the revivals in question are due to some such reason as that given above.

It should be mentioned that the article of M. Zola's young days to which I have referred is not one on market life in particular, but one on violets. It contains, however, a vigorous, if brief, picture of the Halles in the small hours of the morning, and is instinct with that realistic descriptive power of which M. Zola has since given so many proofs. We hear the rumbling and clattering of the market carts, we see the piles of red meat, the baskets of silvery fish, the mountains of vegetables, green and white; in a few paragraphs the whole market world passes in kaleidoscopic fashion before our eyes by the pale, dancing light of the gas-lamps and the lanterns. Several years after the paper I speak of was published, when M. Zola began to issue 'Le Ventre de Paris,' M. Tournachon, better known as Nadar, the aëronaut and photographer, rushed into print to proclaim that the realistic novelist had simply pilfered his ideas from an account of the Halles which he (Tournachon) had but lately written. M. Zola, as is so often his wont, scorned to reply to this charge of plagiarism; but, had he chosen, he could have

promptly settled the matter by producing his own forgotten article.

At the risk of passing for a literary ghoul, I propose to exhume some portion of the paper in question, as, so far as translation can avail, it will show how M. Zola wrote and what he thought in 1867. After the description of the markets to which I have alluded, there comes the following passage:—

I was gazing at the preparations for the great daily orgy of Paris when I espied a throng of people bustling suspiciously in a corner. A few lanterns threw a yellow light upon this crowd. Children, women, and men with outstretched hands were fumbling in dark piles which extended along the footway. I thought that those piles must be remnants of meat sold for a trifling price, and that all those wretched people were rushing upon them to feed. I drew near, and discovered my mistake. The heaps were not heaps of meat, but heaps of violets. All the flowery poesy of the streets of Paris lay there, on that muddy pavement, amidst mountains of food. The gardeners of the suburbs had brought their sweet-scented harvests to the markets and were disposing of them to the hawkers. From the rough fingers of their peasant growers the violets were passing to the dirty hands of those who would cry them in the streets. At winter time it is between four and six o'clock in the morning that the flowers of Paris are thus sold at the Halles. Whilst the city sleeps and its butchers are getting all ready for its daily attack of indigestion, a trade in poetry is plied in dark, dank corners. When the sun rises the bright red meat will be displayed in trim, carefully dressed joints, and the violets, mounted on bits of osier, will gleam softly within their elegant collars of green leaves. But when they arrive, in the dark night, the bullocks, already ripped open, discharge black blood, and the trodden flowers lie prone upon the footways. . . . I noticed just in front of me one large bunch which had slipped off a neighbouring mound and was almost bathing in the gutter. I picked it up. Underneath, it was soiled with mud; the greasy, fœtid sewer water had left black stains upon the flowers. And then, gazing at these exquisite daughters of our gardens and our woods, astray amidst all the filth of the city, I began to ponder. On what woman's bosom would those wretched flowerets open and bloom? Some hawker would dip them in a pail of water, and of all the bitter odours of the Paris mud they would retain but a

slight pungency, which would remain mingled with their own sweet perfume. The water would remove their stains, they would pale somewhat, and become a joy both for the smell and for the sight. Nevertheless, in the depths of each corolla there would still remain some particle of mud suggestive of impurity. And I asked myself how much love and passion was represented by all those heaps of flowers shivering in the bleak wind. To how many loving ones, and how many indifferent ones, and how many egotistical ones, would all those thousands and thousands of violets go! In a few hours' time they would be scattered to the four corners of Paris, and for a paltry copper the passers-by would purchase a glimpse and a whiff of springtide in the muddy streets.

Imperfect as the rendering may be, I think that the above passage will show that M. Zola was already possessed of a large amount of his acknowledged realistic power at the early date I have mentioned. I should also have liked to quote a rather amusing story of a priggish Philistine who ate violets with oil and vinegar, strongly peppered, but considerations of space forbid; so I will pass to another passage, which is of more interest and importance. Both French and English critics have often contended that although M. Zola is a married man, he knows very little of women, as there has virtually never been any *feminine romance* in his life. There are those who are aware of the contrary, but whose tongues are stayed by considerations of delicacy and respect. Still, as the passage I am now about to reproduce is signed and acknowledged as fact by M. Zola himself, I see no harm in slightly raising the veil from a long-past episode in the master's life:—

The light was rising, and as I stood there before that footway transformed into a bed of flowers my strange night-fancies gave place to recollections at once sweet and sad. I thought of my last excursion to Fontenay-aux-Roses, with the loved one, the good fairy of my twentieth year. Springtime was budding into birth, the tender foliage gleamed in the pale April sunshine. The little pathway skirting the hill was bordered by large fields of violets. As one passed along, a soft perfume seemed to penetrate one and make one languid. *She* was leaning on my arm, faint

with love from the sweet odour of the flowers. A whiteness hovered over the country-side, little insects buzzed in the sunshine, deep silence fell from the heavens, and so low was the sound of our kisses that not a bird in all the hedges showed sign of fear. At a turn of the path we perceived some old bent women, who with dry, withered hands were hurriedly gathering violets and throwing them into large baskets. She who was with me glanced longingly at the flowers, and I called one of the women. 'You want some violets?' said she. 'How much? A pound?'

God of Heaven! She sold her flowers by the pound! We fled in deep distress. It seemed as though the country-side had been transformed into a huge grocer's shop. . . . Then we ascended to the woods of Verrières, and there, in the grass, under the soft, fresh foliage, we found some tiny violets which seemed to be dreadfully afraid, and contrived to hide themselves with all sorts of artful ruses. During two long hours I scoured the grass and peered into every nook, and as soon as ever I found a fresh violet I carried it to her. She bought it of me, and the price that I exacted was a kiss. . . . And I thought of all those things, of all that happiness, amidst the hubbub of the markets of Paris, before those poor dead flowers whose graveyard the footway had become. I remembered my good fairy, who is now dead and gone, and the little bouquet of dry violets which I still preserve in a drawer. When I returned home I counted their withered stems: there were twenty of them, and over my lips there passed the gentle warmth of my loved one's twenty kisses.

And now from violets I must, with a brutality akin to that which M. Zola himself displays in some of his transitions, pass to very different things, for some time back a well-known English poet and essayist wrote of the present work that it was redolent of pork, onions, and cheese. To one of his sensitive temperament, with a muse strictly nourished on sugar and water, such gross edibles as pork and cheese and onions were peculiarly offensive. That humble plant the onion, employed to flavour wellnigh every savoury dish, can assuredly need no defence; in most European countries, too, cheese has long been known as the poor man's friend; whilst as for pork, apart from all other considerations, I can claim for it a distinct place in English literature. A greater essayist by far than the critic to whom

I am referring, a certain Mr. Charles Lamb, of the India House, has left us an immortal page on the origin of roast pig and crackling. And, when everything is considered, I should much like to know why novels should be confined to the aspirations of the soul, and why they should not also treat of the requirements of our physical nature? From the days of antiquity we have all known what befell the members when, guided by the brain, they were foolish enough to revolt against the stomach. The latter plays a considerable part not only in each individual organism, but also in the life of the world. Over and over again—I could adduce a score of historical examples—it has thwarted the mightiest designs of the human mind. We mortals are much addicted to talking of our minds and our souls and treating our bodies as mere dross. But I hold—it is a personal opinion—that in the vast majority of cases the former are largely governed by the last. I conceive, therefore, that a novel which takes our daily sustenance as one of its themes has the best of all *raisons d'être*. A foreign writer of far more consequence and ability than myself—Signor Edmondo de Amicis—has proclaimed the present book to be 'one of the most original and happiest inventions of French genius,' and I am strongly inclined to share his opinion.

It should be observed that the work does not merely treat of the provisioning of a great city. That provisioning is its *scenario*; but it also embraces a powerful allegory the prose song of 'the eternal battle between the lean of this world and the fat—a battle in which, as the author shows, the latter always come off successful. It is, too, in its way an allegory of the triumph of the fat *bourgeois*, who lives well and beds softly, over the gaunt and Ishmael artist—an allegory which M. Zola has more than once introduced into his pages, another notable instance thereof being found in "Germinal," with the fat, well-fed Grégoires on the one hand, and the starving Maheus on the other.'

From this quotation from Mr. Sherard's pages it will be

gathered that M. Zola had a distinct social aim in writing this book. Wellnigh the whole social question may, indeed, be summed up in the words 'food and comfort'; and in a series of novels like 'Les Rougon-Macquart,' dealing firstly with different conditions and grades of society, and, secondly, with the influence which the Second Empire exercised on France, the present volume necessarily had its place marked out from the very first.

Mr. Sherard has told us of all the labour which M. Zola expended on the preparation of the work, of his multitudinous visits to the Paris markets, his patient investigation of their organism, and his keen artistic interest in their manifold phases of life. And bred as I was in Paris, a partaker as I have been of her exultations and her woes, they have always had for me a strong attraction. My memory goes back to the earlier years of their existence, and I can well remember many of the old surroundings which have now disappeared. I can recollect the last vestiges of the antique *piliers*, built by Francis I., facing the Rue de la Tonnellerie. Paul Niquet's, with its 'bowel-twisting brandy' and its crew of drunken ragpickers, was certainly before my time; but I can readily recall Baratte's and Bordier's and all the folly and prodigality which raged there; I knew, too, several of the noted thieves' haunts which took the place of Niquet's, and which one was careful never to enter without due precaution. And then, when the German armies were beleaguering Paris, and two millions of people were shut off from the world, I often strolled to the Halles to view their strangely altered aspect. The fish pavilion, of which M. Zola has so much to say, was bare and deserted. The railway drays, laden with the comestible treasures of the ocean, no longer thundered through the covered ways. At the most one found an auction going on in one or another corner, and a few Seine eels or gudgeons fetching wellnigh their weight in gold. Then, in the butter and cheese pavilions, one could only procure some nauseous melted fat, while in the meat department horse and mule and donkey took the place of

beef and veal and mutton. Mule and donkey were very scarce, and commanded high prices, but both were of better flavour than horse; mule, indeed, being quite a delicacy. I also well remember a stall at which dog was sold, and, hunger knowing no law, I once purchased, cooked, and ate a couple of canine cutlets which cost me two francs apiece. The flesh was pinky and very tender, yet I would not willingly make such a repast again. However, peace and plenty at last came round once more, the Halles regained their old-time aspect, and in the years which followed I more than once saw the dawn rise slowly over the mounds of cabbages, carrots, leeks, and pumpkins, even as M. Zola describes in the following pages. He has, I think, depicted with remarkable accuracy and artistic skill the many varying effects of colour that are produced as the climbing sun casts its early beams on the giant larder and its masses of food—effects of colour which, to quote a famous saying of the first Napoleon, show that 'the markets of Paris are the Louvre of the people' in more senses than one.

The reader will bear in mind that the period dealt with by the author in this work is that of 1857–60, when the new Halles Centrales were yet young, and indeed not altogether complete. Still, although many old landmarks have long since been swept away, the picture of life has in all essential particulars remained the same. Prior to 1860 the limits of Paris were the so-called *boulevards extérieurs*, from which a girdle of suburbs, such as Montmartre, Belleville, Passy, and Montrouge, extended to the fortifications; and the population of the city was then only 1,400,000 souls. Some of the figures which will be found scattered through M. Zola's work must therefore be taken as applying entirely to the past.

Nowadays the amount of business transacted at the Halles has very largely increased, in spite of the multiplication of district markets. Paris seems to have an insatiable appetite, though, on the other hand, its *cuisine* is fast becoming all simplicity. To my thinking, few more remarkable changes have come over the Parisians of recent years than this change

of diet. One by one great restaurants, formerly renowned for particular dishes and special wines, have been compelled through lack of custom to close their doors; and this has not been caused so much by inability to defray the cost of high feeding as by inability to indulge in it with impunity in a physical sense. In fact, Paris has become a city of impaired digestions, which nowadays seek the simplicity without the heaviness of the old English *cuisine*; and, should things continue in their present course, I fancy that Parisians anxious for high feeding will ultimately have to cross over to our side of the Channel.

These remarks, I trust, will not be considered out of place in an introduction to a work which to no small extent treats of the appetite of Paris. The reader will find that the characters portrayed by M. Zola are all types of humble life, but I fail to see that their circumstances should render them any the less interesting. A faithful portrait of a shopkeeper, a workman, or a workgirl is artistically of far more value than all the imaginary sketches of impossible dukes and good and wicked baronets in which so many English novels abound. Several of M. Zola's personages seem to me extremely lifelike—Gavard, indeed, is a *chef-d'œuvre* of portraiture: I have known many men like him; and no one who lived in Paris under the Empire can deny the accuracy with which the author has delineated his hero Florent, the dreamy and hapless revolutionary caught in the toils of others. In those days, too, there was many such a plot as M. Zola describes, instigated by agents like Logre and Lebigre, and allowed to mature till the eve of an election or some other important event which rendered its exposure desirable for the purpose of influencing public opinion. In fact, in all that relates to the so-called 'conspiracy of the markets,' M. Zola, whilst changing time and place to suit the requirements of his story, has simply followed historical lines. As for the Quenus, who play such prominent parts in the narrative, the husband is a weakling with no soul above his stewpans, whilst the wife, the beautiful Lisa, in reality wears the breeches and rules the roast. The

manner in which she cures Quenu of his political proclivities, though savouring of persuasiveness rather than virulence, is worthy of the immortal Mrs. Caudle: Douglas Jerrold might have signed a certain lecture which she administers to her astounded helpmate. Of Pauline, the Quenus' daughter, we see but little in the story, but she becomes the heroine of another of M. Zola's novels, 'La Joie de Vivre,' and instead of inheriting the egotism of her parents, developes a passionate love and devotion for others. In a like way Claude Lantier, Florent's artist friend and son of Gervaise of the 'Assommoir,' figures more particularly in 'L'Œuvre,' which tells how his painful struggle for fame resulted in madness and suicide. With reference to the beautiful Norman and the other fish-wives and gossips scattered through the present volume, and those genuine types of Parisian *gaminerie*, Muche, Marjolin, and Cadine, I may mention that I have frequently chastened their language in deference to English susceptibilities, so that the story, whilst retaining every essential feature, contains nothing to which exception can reasonably be taken.

E. A. V.

THE FAT AND THE THIN

CHAPTER I

AMIDST the deep silence and solitude prevailing in the avenue several market-gardeners' carts were climbing the slope which led towards Paris, and the fronts of the houses, asleep behind the dim lines of elms on either side of the road, echoed back the rhythmical jolting of the wheels. At the Neuilly bridge a cart full of cabbages and another full of peas had joined the eight waggons of carrots and turnips coming down from Nanterre; and the horses, left to themselves, had continued plodding along with lowered heads, at a regular though lazy pace, which the ascent of the slope now slackened. The sleeping waggoners, wrapped in woollen cloaks, striped black and grey, and grasping the reins slackly in their closed hands, were stretched at full length on their stomachs atop of the piles of vegetables. Every now and then, a gas lamp, following some patch of gloom, would light up the hobnails of a boot, the blue sleeve of a blouse, or the peak of a cap peering out of the huge florescence of vegetables—red bouquets of carrots, white bouquets of turnips, and the overflowing greenery of peas and cabbages.

And all along the road, and along the neighbouring roads, in front and behind, the distant rumbling of vehicles told of the presence of similar contingents of the great caravan which was travelling onward through the gloom and deep slumber of that matutinal hour, lulling the dark city to continued repose with its echoes of passing food.

Madame François's horse, Balthazar, an animal that was far too fat, led the van. He was plodding on, half asleep and wagging his ears, when suddenly, on reaching the Rue de

Longchamp, he quivered with fear and came to a dead stop. The horses behind, thus unexpectedly checked, ran their heads against the backs of the carts in front of them, and the procession halted amidst a clattering of bolts and chains and the oaths of the awakened waggoners. Madame François, who sat in front of her vehicle, with her back to a board which kept her vegetables in position, looked down; but, in the dim light thrown to the left by a small square lantern, which illuminated little beyond one of Balthazar's sheeny flanks, she could distinguish nothing.

'Come, old woman, let's get on!' cried one of the men, who had raised himself to a kneeling position amongst his turnips; 'it's only some drunken sot.'

Madame François, however, had bent forward and on her right hand had caught sight of a black mass, lying almost under the horse's hoofs, and blocking the road.

'You wouldn't have us drive over a man, would you?' said she, jumping to the ground.

It was indeed a man lying at full length upon the road, with his arms stretched out and his face in the dust. He seemed to be remarkably tall, but as withered as a dry branch, and the wonder was that Balthazar had not broken him in half with a blow from his hoof. Madame François thought that he was dead; but on stooping and taking hold of one of his hands, she found that it was quite warm.

'Poor fellow!' she murmured softly.

The waggoners, however, were getting impatient.

'Hurry up, there!' said the man kneeling amongst the turnips, in a hoarse voice. 'He's drunk till he can hold no more, the hog! Shove him into the gutter.'

Meantime, the man on the road had opened his eyes. He looked at Madame François with a startled air, but did not move. She herself now thought that he must indeed be drunk.

'You mustn't stop here,' she said to him, 'or you'll get run over and killed. Where were you going?'

'I don't know,' replied the man in a faint voice.

Then, with an effort and an anxious expression, he added: 'I was going to Paris; I fell down, and don't remember any more.'

Madame François could now see him more distinctly, and he was truly a pitiable object, with his ragged black coat and trousers, through the rents in which you could espy his

scraggy limbs. Underneath a black cloth cap, which was drawn low over his brows, as though he were afraid of being recognised, could be seen two large brown eyes, gleaming with peculiar softness in his otherwise stern and harassed countenance. It seemed to Madame François that he was in far too famished a condition to have got drunk.

'And what part of Paris were you going to?' she continued.

The man did not reply immediately. This questioning seemed to distress him. He appeared to be thinking the matter over, but at last said hesitatingly, 'Over yonder, towards the markets.'

He had now, with great difficulty, got on to his feet again, and seemed anxious to resume his journey. But Madame François noticed that he tottered, and clung for support to one of the shafts of her waggon.

'Are you tired?' she asked him.

'Yes, very tired,' he replied.

Then she suddenly assumed a grumpy tone, as though displeased, and, giving him a push, exclaimed: 'Look sharp, then, and climb into my cart. You've made us lose a lot of time. I'm going to the markets, and I'll turn you out there with my vegetables.'

Then, as the man seemed inclined to refuse her offer, she pushed him up with her stout arms, and bundled him down upon the turnips and carrots.

'Come, now, don't give us any more trouble,' she cried angrily. 'You are quite enough to provoke one, my good fellow. Don't I tell you that I'm going to the markets? Sleep away up there. I'll wake you when we arrive.'

She herself then clambered into the cart again, and settled herself with her back against the board, grasping the reins of Balthazar, who started off drowsily, swaying his ears once more. The other waggons followed, and the procession resumed its lazy march through the darkness, whilst the rhythmical jolting of the wheels again awoke the echoes of the sleepy house fronts, and the waggoners, wrapped in their cloaks, dozed off afresh. The one who had called to Madame François growled out as he lay down: 'As if we'd nothing better to do than pick up every drunken sot we come across! You're a scorcher, old woman!'

The waggons rumbled on, and the horses picked their own way, with drooping heads. The stranger whom Madame

François had befriended was lying on his stomach, with his long legs lost amongst the turnips which filled the back part of the cart, whilst his face was buried amidst the spreading piles of carrot-bunches. With weary, extended arms he clutched hold of his vegetable couch in fear of being thrown to the ground by one of the waggon's jolts, and his eyes were fixed on the two long lines of gas-lamps which stretched away in front of him till they mingled with a swarm of other lights in the distance atop of the slope. Far away on the horizon floated a spreading, whitish vapour, showing where Paris slept amidst the luminous haze of all those flamelets.

'I come from Nanterre, and my name's Madame François,' said the market-gardener presently. 'Since my poor man died I go to the markets every morning myself. It's a hard life, as you may guess. And who are you?'

'My name's Florent, I come from a distance,' replied the stranger, with embarrassment. 'Please excuse me, but I'm really so tired that it is painful to me to talk.'

He was evidently unwilling to say anything more, and so Madame François relapsed into silence, and allowed the reins to fall loosely on the back of Balthazar, who went his way like an animal acquainted with every stone of the road.

Meantime, with his eyes still fixed upon the far-spreading glare of Paris, Florent was pondering over the story which he had refused to communicate to Madame François. After making his escape from Cayenne, whither he had been transported for his participation in the resistance to Louis Napoleon's Coup d'Etat, he had wandered about Dutch Guiana for a couple of years, burning to return to France, yet dreading the Imperial police. At last, however, he once more saw before him the beloved and mighty city which he had so keenly regretted and so ardently longed for. He would hide himself there, he told himself, and again lead the quiet, peaceable life that he had lived years ago. The police would never be any the wiser; everyone would imagine, indeed, that he had died over yonder, across the sea. Then he thought of his arrival at Havre, where he had landed with only some fifteen francs tied up in a corner of his handkerchief. He had been able to pay for a seat in the coach as far as Rouen, but from that point he had been forced to continue his journey on foot, as he had scarcely thirty sous left of his little store. At Vernon his last copper had gone in bread. After that he had no clear recollection of anything. He fancied that he could

remember having slept for several hours in a ditch, and having shown the papers with which he had provided himself to a gendarme; however, he had only a very confused idea of what had happened. He had left Vernon without any breakfast, seized every now and then with hopeless despair and raging pangs which had driven him to munch the leaves of the hedges as he tramped along. A prey to cramp and fright, his body bent, his sight dimmed, and his feet sore, he had continued his weary march, ever drawn onwards in a semi-unconscious state by a vision of Paris, which, far, far away, beyond the horizon, seemed to be summoning him and waiting for him.

When he at length reached Courbevoie, the night was very dark. Paris, looking like a patch of star-sprent sky that had fallen upon the black earth, seemed to him to wear a forbidding aspect, as though angry at his return. Then he felt very faint, and his legs almost gave way beneath him as he descended the hill. As he crossed the Neuilly bridge he sustained himself by clinging to the parapet, and bent over and looked at the Seine rolling inky waves between its dense, massy banks. A red lamp on the water seemed to be watching him with a sanguineous eye. And then he had to climb the hill if he would reach Paris on its summit yonder. The Avenue de Neuilly seemed to him interminable. The hundreds of leagues which he had already travelled were as nothing to it. That bit of a road filled him with despair. He would never be able, he thought, to reach yonder light-crowned summit. The spacious avenue lay before him with its silence and its darkness, its lines of tall trees and low houses, its broad grey footwalks, speckled with the shadows of overhanging branches, and parted occasionally by the gloomy gaps of side-streets. The squat yellow flames of the gas-lamps, standing erect at regular intervals, alone imparted a little life to the lonely wilderness. And Florent seemed to make no progress; the avenue appeared to grow ever longer and longer, to be carrying Paris away into the far depths of the night. At last he fancied that the gas-lamps, with their single eyes, were running off on either hand, whisking the road away with them; and then, overcome by vertigo, he stumbled and fell on the roadway like a log.

Now he was lying at ease on his couch of greenery, which seemed to him soft as a feather bed. He had slightly raised his head so as to keep his eyes on the luminous haze which

was spreading above the dark roofs which he could divine on the horizon. He was nearing his goal, carried along towards it, with nothing to do but to yield to the leisurely jolts of the waggon; and, free from all further fatigue, he now only suffered from hunger. Hunger, indeed, had once more awoke within him with frightful and well-nigh intolerable pangs. His limbs seemed to have fallen asleep; he was only conscious of the existence of his stomach, horribly cramped and twisted as by a red-hot iron. The fresh odour of the vegetables, amongst which he was lying, affected him so keenly that he almost fainted away. He strained himself against that piled-up mass of food with all his remaining strength, in order to compress his stomach and silence its groans. And the nine other waggons behind him, with their mountains of cabbages and peas, their piles of artichokes, lettuces, celery, and leeks, seemed to him to be slowly overtaking him, as though to bury him whilst he was thus tortured by hunger beneath an avalanche of food. Presently the procession halted, and there was a sound of deep voices. They had reached the barriers, and the municipal customs officers were examining the waggons. A moment later Florent entered Paris, in a swoon, lying atop of the carrots, with clenched teeth.

'Hallo! you up there!' Madame François called out sharply.

And as the stranger made no attempt to move, she clambered up and shook him. Florent rose to a sitting posture. He had slept and no longer felt the pangs of hunger, but was dizzy and confused.

'You'll help me to unload, won't you?' Madame François said to him, as she made him get down.

He helped her. A stout man with a felt hat on his head and a badge in the top buttonhole of his coat was striking the ground with a stick and grumbling loudly:

'Come, come, now, make haste! You must get on faster than that! Bring the waggon a little more forward. How many yards' standing have you? Four, isn't it?'

Then he gave a ticket to Madame François, who took some coppers out of a little canvas bag and handed them to him; whereupon he went off to vent his impatience and tap the ground with his stick a little further away. Madame François took hold of Balthazar's bridle and backed him so as to bring the wheels of the waggon close to the footway.

Then, having marked out her four yards with some wisps of straw, after removing the back of the cart, she asked Florent to hand her the vegetables bunch by bunch. She arranged them sort by sort on her standing, setting them out artistically, the 'tops' forming a band of greenery around each pile; and it was with remarkable rapidity that she completed her show, which, in the gloom of early morning, looked like some piece of symmetrically coloured tapestry. When Florent had handed her a huge bunch of parsley, which he had found at the bottom of the cart, she asked him for still another service.

'It would be very kind of you,' said she, 'if you would look after my goods while I put the horse and cart up. 'I'm only going a couple of yards, to the Golden Compasses, in the Rue Montorgueil.'

Florent told her that she might make herself easy. He preferred to remain still, for his hunger had revived since he had begun to move about. He sat down and leaned against a heap of cabbages beside Madame François's stock. He was all right there, he told himself, and would not go further afield, but wait. His head felt empty, and he had no very clear notion as to where he was. At the beginning of September it is quite dark in the early morning. Around him lighted lanterns were flitting or standing stationary in the depths of the gloom. He was sitting on one side of a broad street which he did not recognise; it stretched far away into the blackness of the night. He could make out nothing plainly, excepting the stock of which he had been left in charge. All around him along the market footways rose similar piles of goods. The middle of the roadway was blocked by huge grey tumbrels, and from one end of the street to the other a sound of heavy breathing passed, betokening the presence of horses which the eye could not distinguish.

Shouts and calls, the noise of falling wood, or of iron chains slipping to the ground, the heavy thud of loads of vegetables discharged from the waggons, and the grating of wheels as the carts were backed against the footways, filled the yet sleepy air with a murmur which foretokened a mighty and sonorous awakening, whose near approach could be felt and heard in the throbbing gloom. Glancing over the pile of cabbages behind him, Florent caught sight of a man wrapped like a parcel in his cloak, and snoring away with his head upon some baskets of plums. Nearer to him, on his left, he could distinguish a lad, some ten years old, slumbering between

two heaps of endive, with an angelic smile on his face. And as yet there seemed to be nothing on that pavement that was really awake except the lanterns waving from invisible arms, and flitting and skipping over the sleep of the vegetables and human beings spread out there in heaps pending the dawn. However, what surprised Florent was the sight of some huge pavilions on either side of the street, pavilions with lofty roofs that seemed to expand and soar out of sight amidst a swarm of gleams. In his weakened state of mind he fancied he beheld a series of enormous, symmetrically built palaces, light and airy as crystal, whose fronts sparkled with countless streaks of light filtering through endless Venetian shutters. Gleaming between the slender pillar shafts, these narrow golden bars seemed like ladders of light mounting to the gloomy line of the lower roofs, and then soaring aloft till they reached the jumble of higher ones, thus describing the open framework of immense square halls, where in the yellow flare of the gas-lights a multitude of vague, grey, slumbering things was gathered together.

At last Florent turned his head to look about him, distressed at not knowing where he was, and filled with vague uneasiness by the sight of that huge and seemingly fragile vision. And now, as he raised his eyes, he caught sight of the luminous dial and the grey massive pile of Saint Eustache's Church. At this he was much astonished. He was close to Saint Eustache, yet all was novel to him.

However, Madame François had come back again, and was engaged in a heated discussion with a man who carried a sack over his shoulder and offered to buy her carrots for a sou a bunch.

'Really, now, you are unreasonable, Lacaille!' said she. 'You know quite well that you will sell them again to the Parisians at four and five sous the bunch. Don't tell me that you won't! You may have them for two sous the bunch, if you like.'

Then, as the man went off, she continued: 'Upon my word, I believe some people think that things grow of their own accord! Let him go and find carrots at a sou the bunch elsewhere, tipsy scoundrel that he is! He'll come back again presently, you'll see.'

These last remarks were addressed to Florent. And, seating herself by his side, Madame François resumed: 'If you've been a long time away from Paris, you perhaps don't

know the new markets. They haven't been built for more than five years at the most. That pavilion you see there beside us is the flower and fruit market. The fish and poultry markets are farther away, and over there behind us come the vegetables and the butter and cheese. There are six pavilions on this side, and on the other side, across the road, there are four more, with the meat and the tripe stalls. It's an enormous place, but it's horribly cold in the winter. They talk about pulling down the houses near the corn-market to make room for two more pavilions. But perhaps you know all this?'

'No, indeed,' replied Florent; 'I've been abroad. And what's the name of that big street in front of us?'

'Oh, that's a new street. It's called the Rue du Pont Neuf. It leads from the Seine through here to the Rue Montmartre and the Rue Montorgueil. You would soon have recognised where you were if it had been daylight.'

Madame François paused and rose, for she saw a woman bending down to examine her turnips. 'Ah, is that you, Mother Chantemesse?' she said in a friendly way.

Florent meanwhile glanced towards the Rue Montorgueil. It was there that a body of police officers had arrested him on the night of December 4.[1] He had been walking along the Boulevard Montmartre at about two o'clock, quietly making his way through the crowd, and smiling at the number of soldiers that the Elysée had sent into the streets to awe the people, when the military suddenly began making a clean sweep of the thoroughfare, shooting folks down at close range during a quarter of an hour. Jostled and knocked to the ground, Florent fell at the corner of the Rue Vivienne and knew nothing further of what happened, for the panic-stricken crowd, in their wild terror of being shot, trampled over his body. Presently, hearing everything quiet, he made an attempt to rise; but across him there lay a young woman in a pink bonnet, whose shawl had slipped aside, allowing her chemisette, pleated in little tucks, to be seen. Two bullets had pierced the upper part of her bosom; and when Florent gently removed the poor creature to free his legs, two streamlets of blood oozed from her wounds on to his hands. Then he sprang up with a sudden bound, and rushed madly away, hatless and with his hands still wet with blood. Until evening he wandered about the streets, with his head swimming,

[1] 1851. Two days after the Coup d'Etat.—*Trans.*

ever seeing the young woman lying across his legs with her pale face, her blue staring eyes, her distorted lips, and her expression of astonishment at thus meeting death so suddenly. He was a shy, timid fellow. Albeit thirty years old he had never dared to stare women in the face; and now, for the rest of his life, he was to have that one fixed in his heart and memory. He felt as though he had lost some loved one of his own.

In the evening, without knowing how he had got there, still dazed and horrified as he was by the terrible scenes of the afternoon, he had found himself at a wine-shop in the Rue Montorgueil, where several men were drinking and talking of throwing up barricades. He went away with them, helped them to tear up a few paving-stones, and seated himself on the barricade, weary with his long wandering through the streets, and reflecting that he would fight when the soldiers came up. However, he had not even a knife with him, and was still bare-headed. Towards eleven o'clock he dozed off, and in his sleep could see the two holes in the dead woman's white chemisette glaring at him like eyes reddened by tears and blood. When he awoke he found himself in the grasp of four police officers, who were pummelling him with their fists. The men who had built the barricade had fled. The police officers treated him with still greater violence, and indeed almost strangled him when they noticed that his hands were stained with blood. It was the blood of the young woman.

Florent raised his eyes to the luminous dial of Saint Eustache with his mind so full of these recollections that he did not notice the position of the pointers. It was, however, nearly four o'clock. The markets were as yet wrapped in sleep. Madame François was still talking to old Madame Chantemesse, both standing and arguing about the price of the turnips, and Florent now called to mind how narrowly he had escaped being shot over yonder by the wall of Saint Eustache. A detachment of gendarmes had just blown out the brains of five unhappy fellows caught at a barricade in the Rue Grenéta. The five corpses were lying on the footway, at a spot where he thought he could now distinguish a heap of rosy radishes. He himself had escaped being shot merely because the policemen only carried swords. They took him to a neighbouring police-station and gave the officer in charge a scrap of paper, on which were these words written in pencil: 'Taken with blood-stained hands. Very dangerous.' Then he had been dragged from

station to station till the morning came. The scrap of paper accompanied him wherever he went. He was manacled and guarded as though he were a raving madman. At the station in the Rue de la Lingerie some tipsy soldiers wanted to shoot him; and they had already lighted a lantern with that object when the order arrived for the prisoners to be taken to the dépôt of the Préfecture of Police. Two days afterwards he found himself in a casemate of the fort of Bicêtre. Ever since then he had been suffering from hunger. He had felt hungry in the casemate, and the pangs of hunger had never since left him. A hundred men were pent in the depths of that cellar-like dungeon, where, scarce able to breathe, they devoured the few mouthfuls of bread that were thrown to them, like so many captive wild beasts.

When Florent was brought before an investigating magistrate, without anyone to defend him, and without any evidence being adduced, he was accused of belonging to a secret society; and when he swore that this was untrue, the magistrate produced the scrap of paper from amongst the documents before him: 'Taken with blood-stained hands. Very dangerous.' That was quite sufficient. He was condemned to transportation. Six weeks afterwards, one January night, a gaoler awoke him and locked him up in a courtyard with more than four hundred other prisoners. An hour later this first detachment started for the pontoons and exile, handcuffed and guarded by a double file of gendarmes with loaded muskets. They crossed the Austerlitz bridge, followed the line of the boulevards, and so reached the terminus of the Western Railway line. It was a joyous carnival night. The windows of the restaurants on the boulevards glittered with lights. At the top of the Rue Vivienne, just at the spot where he ever saw the young woman lying dead—that unknown young woman whose image he always bore with him—he now beheld a large carriage in which a party of masked women, with bare shoulders and laughing voices, were venting their impatience at being detained, and expressing their horror of that endless procession of convicts. The whole of the way from Paris to Havre the prisoners never received a mouthful of bread or a drink of water. The officials had forgotten to give them their rations before starting, and it was not till thirty-six hours afterwards, when they had been stowed away in the hold of the frigate *Canada*, that they at last broke their fast.

No, Florent had never again been free from hunger. He recalled all the past to mind, but could not recollect a single hour of satiety. He had become dry and withered; his stomach seemed to have shrunk; his skin clung to his bones. And now that he was back in Paris once more, he found it fat and sleek and flourishing, teeming with food in the midst of the darkness. He had returned to it on a couch of vegetables; he lingered in its midst encompassed by unknown masses of food which still and ever increased and disquieted him. Had that happy carnival night continued throughout those seven years, then? Once again he saw the glittering windows on the boulevards, the laughing women, the luxurious, greedy city which he had quitted on that far-away January night; and it seemed to him that everything had expanded and increased in harmony with those huge markets, whose gigantic breathing, still heavy from the indigestion of the previous day, he now began to hear.

Old Mother Chantemesse had by this time made up her mind to buy a dozen bunches of turnips. She put them in her apron, which she held closely pressed to her person, thus making herself look yet more corpulent than she was; and for some time longer she lingered there, still gossiping in a drawling voice. When at last she went away, Madame François again sat down by the side of Florent.

'Poor old Mother Chantemesse!' she said; 'she must be at least seventy-two. I can remember her buying turnips of my father when I was a mere chit. And she hasn't a relation in the world; no one but a young hussy whom she picked up I don't know where and who does nothing but bring her trouble. Still, she manages to live, selling things by the ha'p'orth and clearing her couple of francs profit a day. For my own part, I'm sure that I could never spend my days on the foot-pavement in this horrid Paris! And she hasn't even any relations here!'

'You have some relations in Paris, I suppose?' she asked presently, seeing that Florent seemed disinclined to talk.

Florent did not appear to hear her. A feeling of distrust came back to him. His head was teeming with old stories of the police, stories of spies prowling about at every street corner, and of women selling the secrets which they managed to worm out of the unhappy fellows they deluded. Madame François was sitting close beside him and certainly looked perfectly straightforward and honest, with her big calm face,

above which was bound a black and yellow handkerchief. She seemed about five and thirty years of age, and was somewhat stoutly built, with a certain hardy beauty due to her life in the fresh air. A pair of black eyes, which beamed with kindly tenderness, softened the more masculine characteristics of her person. She certainly was inquisitive, but her curiosity was probably well-meant.

'I've a nephew in Paris,' she continued, without seeming at all offended by Florent's silence. 'He's turned out badly though, and has enlisted. It's a pleasant thing to have somewhere to go to and stay at, isn't it? I dare say there's a big surprise in store for your relations when they see you. But it's always a pleasure to welcome one of one's own people back again, isn't it?'

She kept her eyes fixed upon him while she spoke, doubtless compassionating his extreme scragginess; fancying, too, that there was a 'gentleman' inside those old black rags, and so not daring to slip a piece of silver into his hand. At last, however, she timidly murmured: 'All the same, if you should happen just at present to be in want of anything——'

But Florent checked her with uneasy pride. He told her that he had everything he required, and had a place to go to. She seemed quite pleased to hear this, and, as though to tranquillise herself concerning him, repeated several times: 'Well, well, in that case you've only to wait till daylight.'

A large bell at the corner of the fruit-market, just over Florent's head, now began to ring. The slow regular peals seemed to gradually dissipate the slumber that yet lingered all around. Carts were still arriving, and the shouts of the waggoners, the cracking of their whips, and the grinding of the paving-stones beneath the iron-bound wheels and the horses' shoes sounded with an increasing din. The carts could now only advance by a series of spasmodic jolts, and stretched in a long line, one behind another, till they were lost to sight in the distant darkness, whence a confused roar ascended.

Unloading was in progress all along the Rue du Pont Neuf, the vehicles being drawn up close to the edge of the footways, while their teams stood motionless in close order as at a horse fair. Florent felt interested in one enormous tumbrel which was piled up with magnificent cabbages, and had only been backed to the kerb with the greatest difficulty. Its load towered above a lofty gas-lamp whose bright light

fell full upon the broad leaves which looked like pieces of dark green velvet, scalloped and goffered. A young peasant girl, some sixteen years old, in a blue linen jacket and cap, had climbed on to the tumbrel, where, buried in the cabbages to her shoulders, she took them one by one and threw them to somebody concealed in the shade below. Every now and then the girl would slip and vanish, overwhelmed by an avalanche of the vegetables, but her rosy nose soon reappeared amidst the teeming greenery, and she broke into a laugh while the cabbages again flew down between Florent and the gas-lamp. He counted them mechanically as they fell. When the cart was emptied he felt worried.

The piles of vegetables on the pavement now extended to the verge of the roadway. Between the heaps, the market-gardeners left narrow paths to enable people to pass along. The whole of the wide footway was covered from end to end with dark mounds. As yet, in the sudden dancing gleams of light from the lanterns, you only just espied the luxuriant fulness of the bundles of artichokes, the delicate green of the lettuces, the rosy coral of the carrots, and dull ivory of the turnips. And these gleams of rich colour flitted along the heaps, according as the lanterns came and went. The footway was now becoming populated: a crowd of people had awakened, and was moving hither and thither amidst the vegetables, stopping at times, and chattering and shouting. In the distance a loud voice could be heard crying, 'Endive! who's got endive?' The gates of the pavilion devoted to the sale of ordinary vegetables had just been opened; and the retail dealers who had stalls there, with white caps on their heads, fichus knotted over their black jackets, and skirts pinned up to keep them from getting soiled, now began to secure their stock for the day, depositing their purchases in some huge porters' baskets placed upon the ground. Between the roadway and the pavilion these baskets were to be seen coming and going on all sides, knocking against the crowded heads of the bystanders, who resented the pushing with coarse expressions, whilst all around was a clamour of voices growing hoarse by prolonged wrangling over a sou or two. Florent was astonished by the calmness which the female market-gardeners, with bandanas and bronzed faces, displayed amidst all this garrulous bargaining of the markets.

Behind him, on the footway of the Rue Rambuteau, fruit was being sold. Hampers and low baskets covered with

canvas or straw stood there in long lines, a strong odour of over-ripe mirabelle plums was wafted hither and thither. At last a subdued and gentle voice, which he had heard for some time past, induced him to turn his head, and he saw a charming darksome little woman sitting on the ground and bargaining.

'Come, now, Marcel,' said she, 'you'll take a hundred sous, won't you?'

The man to whom she was speaking was closely wrapped in his cloak and made no reply; however, after a silence of five minutes or more, the young woman returned to the charge.

'Come now, Marcel; a hundred sous for that basket there, and four francs for the other one; that'll make nine francs altogether.'

Then came another interval.

'Well, tell me what you will take.'

'Ten francs. You know that well enough already; I told you so before. But what have you done with your Jules this morning, La Sarriette?'

The young woman began to laugh as she took a handful of small change out of her pocket.

'Oh,' she replied, 'Jules is still in bed. He says that men were not intended to work.'

She paid for the two baskets, and carried them into the fruit pavilion, which had just been opened. The market buildings still retained their gloom-wrapped aspect of airy fragility, streaked with the thousand lines of light that gleamed from the venetian shutters. People were beginning to pass along the broad covered streets intersecting the pavilions, but the more distant buildings still remained deserted amidst the increasing buzz of life on the footways. By Saint Eustache the bakers and wine-sellers were taking down their shutters, and the ruddy shops, with their gas-lights flaring, showed like gaps of fire in the gloom in which the grey house-fronts were yet steeped. Florent noticed a baker's shop on the left-hand side of the Rue Montorgueil, replete and golden with its last baking, and fancied he could scent the pleasant smell of the hot bread. It was now half-past four.

Madame François by this time had disposed of nearly all her stock. She had only a few bunches of carrots left when Lacaille once more made his appearance with his sack.

'Well,' said he, 'will you take a sou now?'

'I knew I should see you again,' the good woman quietly answered. 'You'd better take all I have left. There are seventeen bunches.'

'That makes seventeen sous.'

'No; thirty-four.'

At last they agreed to fix the price at twenty-five sous. Madame François was anxious to be off.

'He'd been keeping his eye upon me all the time,' she said to Florent, when Lacaille had gone off with the carrots in his sack. 'That old rogue runs things down all over the markets, and he often waits till the last peal of the bell before spending four sous in purchases. Oh, these Paris folk! They'll wrangle and argue for an hour to save half a sou, and then go off and empty their purses at the wine-shop.'

Whenever Madame François talked of Paris she always spoke in a tone of disdain, and referred to the city as though it were some ridiculous, contemptible, far-away place, in which she only condescended to set foot at night-time.

'There!' she continued, sitting down again, beside Florent, on some vegetables belonging to a neighbour, 'I can get away now.'

Florent bent his head. He had just committed a theft. When Lacaille went off he had caught sight of a carrot lying on the ground, and having picked it up he was holding it tightly in his right hand. Behind him some bundles of celery and bunches of parsley were diffusing pungent odours which painfully affected him.

'Well, I'm off now!' said Madame François.

However, she felt interested in this stranger, and could divine that he was suffering there on that foot-pavement, from which he had never stirred. She made him fresh offers of assistance, but he again refused them, with a still more bitter show of pride. He even got up and remained standing to prove that he was quite strong again. Then, as Madame François turned her head away, he put the carrot to his mouth. But he had to remove it for a moment, in spite of the terrible longing which he felt to dig his teeth into it; for Madame François turned round again and, looking him full in the face, began to question him with her good-natured womanly curiosity. Florent, to avoid speaking, merely answered by nods and shakes of the head. Then, slowly and gently, he began to eat the carrot.

The worthy woman was at last on the point of going off, when a powerful voice exclaimed close beside her, 'Good morning, Madame François.'

The speaker was a slim young man, with big bones and a big head. His face was bearded, and he had a very delicate nose and narrow sparkling eyes. He wore on his head a rusty, battered, black felt hat, and was buttoned up in an immense overcoat, which had once been of a soft chestnut hue, but which rain had discoloured and streaked with long greenish stains. Somewhat bent, and quivering with a nervous restlessness which was doubtless habitual with him, he stood there in a pair of heavy laced shoes, and the shortness of his trousers allowed a glimpse of his coarse blue hose.

'Good morning, Monsieur Claude,' the market-gardener replied cheerfully. 'I expected you, you know, last Monday, and, as you didn't come, I've taken care of your canvas for you. I've hung it up on a nail in my room.'

'You are really very kind, Madame François. I'll go to finish that study of mine one of these days. I wasn't able to go on Monday. Has your big plum tree still got all its leaves?'

'Yes, indeed.'

'I wanted to know, because I mean to put it in a corner of the picture. It will come in nicely by the side of the fowl-house. I have been thinking about it all the week. What lovely vegetables there are in the market this morning! I came down very early, expecting a fine sunrise effect upon all these heaps of cabbages.'

With a wave of the arm he indicated the footway.

'Well, well, I must be off now,' said Madame François. 'Good-bye, for the present. We shall meet again soon, I hope, Monsieur Claude.'

However, as she turned to go, she introduced Florent to the young artist.

'This gentleman, it seems, has just come from a distance,' said she. 'He feels quite lost in your scampish Paris. I dare say you might be of service to him.'

Then she at last took her departure, feeling pleased at having left the two men together. Claude looked at Florent with a feeling of interest. That tall, slight, wavy figure seemed to him original. Madame François's hasty presentation was in his eyes quite sufficient, and he addressed Florent

with the easy familiarity of a lounger accustomed to all sorts of chance encounters.

'I'll accompany you,' he said; 'which way are you going?'

Florent felt ill at ease; he was not wont to unbosom himself so readily. However, ever since his arrival in Paris, a question had been trembling on his lips, and now he ventured to ask it, with the evident fear of receiving an unfavourable reply.

'Is the Rue Pirouette still in existence?'

'Oh, yes,' answered the artist. 'A very curious corner of old Paris is the Rue Pirouette. It twists and turns like a dancing-girl, and the houses bulge out like pot-bellied gluttons. I've made an etching of it that isn't half bad. I'll show it to you when you come to see me. Is it to the Rue Pirouette that you want to go?'

Florent, who felt easier and more cheerful now that he knew the street still existed, declared that he did not want to go there; in fact, he did not want to go anywhere in particular. All his distrust awoke into fresh life at Claude's insistence.

'Oh! never mind,' said the artist, 'let's go to the Rue Pirouette all the same. It has such a fine colour at night time. Come along; it's only a couple of yards away.'

Florent felt constrained to follow him, and the two men walked off, side by side, stepping over the hampers and vegetables like a couple of old friends. On the footway of the Rue Rambuteau there were some immense heaps of cauliflowers, symmetrically piled up like so many cannon-balls. The soft white flowers spread out like huge roses in the midst of their thick green leaves, and the piles had something of the appearance of bridal bouquets ranged in a row in colossal flower-stands. Claude stopped in front of them, venting cries of admiration.

Then, on turning into the Rue Pirouette, which was just opposite, he pointed out each house to his companion, and explained his views concerning it. There was only a single gas-lamp, burning in a corner. The buildings, which had settled down and swollen, threw their pent-houses forward in such wise as to justify Claude's allusion to pot-bellied gluttons, whilst their gables receded, and on either side they clung to their neighbours for support. Three or four, however, standing in gloomy recesses, appeared to be on the point of toppling

forward. The solitary gas-lamp illumined one which was snowy with a fresh coat of whitewash, suggesting some flabby, broken-down old dowager, powdered and bedaubed in the hope of appearing young. Then the others stretched away into the darkness, bruised, dented, and cracked, greeny with the fall of water from their roofs, and displaying such an extraordinary variety of attitudes and tints that Claude could not refrain from laughing as he contemplated them.

Florent, however, came to a stand at the corner of the Rue de Mondétour, in front of the last house but one on the left. Here the three floors, each with two shutterless windows, having little white curtains closely drawn, seemed wrapped in sleep; but, up above, a light could be seen flitting behind the curtains of a tiny gable casement. However, the sight of the shop beneath the pent-house seemed to fill Florent with the deepest emotion. It was kept by a dealer in cooked vegetables, and was just being opened. At its far end some metal pans were glittering, while on several earthen ones in the window there was a display of cooked spinach and endive, reduced to a paste and arranged in conical mounds from which customers were served with shovel-like carvers of white metal, only the handles of which were visible. This sight seemed to rivet Florent to the ground with surprise. He evidently could not recognise the place. He read the name of the shopkeeper, Godebœuf, which was painted on a red sign-board up above, and remained quite overcome by consternation. His arms dangling beside him, he began to examine the cooked spinach, with the despairing air of one on whom some supreme misfortune falls.

However, the gable casement was now opened, and a little old woman leaned out of it, and looked first at the sky and then at the markets in the distance.

'Ah, Mademoiselle Saget is an early riser,' exclaimed Claude, who had just raised his head. And, turning to his companion, he added: 'I once had an aunt living in that house. It's a regular hive of tittle-tattle! Ah, the Méhudins are stirring now, I see. There's a light on the second floor.'

Florent would have liked to question his companion, but the latter's long discoloured overcoat gave him a disquieting appearance. So without a word Florent followed him, whilst he went on talking about the Méhudins. These Méhudins were fish-girls, it seemed; the elder one was a magnificent creature, while the younger one, who sold fresh-water fish,

reminded Claude of one of Murillo's virgins, whenever he saw her standing with her fair face amidst her carps and eels.

From this Claude went on to remark with asperity that Murillo painted like an ignoramus. But all at once he stopped short in the middle of the street.

'Come!' he exclaimed, 'tell me where it is that you want to go.'

'I don't want to go anywhere just at present,' replied Florent in confusion. 'Let's go wherever you like.'

Just as they were leaving the Rue Pirouette, some one called to Claude from a wine-shop at the corner of the street. The young man went in, dragging Florent with him. The shutters had been taken down on one side only, and the gas was still burning in the sleepy atmosphere of the shop. A forgotten napkin and some cards that had been used in the previous evening's play were still lying on the tables; and the fresh breeze that streamed in through the open doorway freshened the close, warm vinous air. The landlord, Monsieur Lebigre, was serving his customers. He wore a sleeved waistcoat, and his fat regular features, fringed by an untidy beard, were still pale with sleep. Standing in front of the counter, groups of men, with heavy, tired eyes, were drinking, coughing, and spitting, whilst trying to rouse themselves by the aid of white wine and brandy. Amongst them Florent recognised Lacaille, whose sack now overflowed with various sorts of vegetables. He was taking his third dram with a friend, who was telling him a long story about the purchase of a hamper of potatoes.[1] When he had emptied his glass, he went to chat with Monsieur Lebigre in a little glazed compartment at the end of the room, where the gas had not yet been lighted.

'What will you take?' Claude asked of Florent.

He had on entering grasped the hand of the person who had called out to him. This was a market-porter,[2] a well-built young man of two-and-twenty at the most. His cheeks and chin were clean-shaven, but he wore a small moustache, and looked a sprightly, strapping fellow with his broad-brimmed hat covered with chalk, and his wool-worked neck-piece, the straps falling from which tightened his short

[1] At the Paris central markets potatoes are sold by the hamper, not by the sack as in England.—*Trans.*

[2] *Fort* is the French term, literally 'a strong man,' as every market-porter needs to be.—*Trans.*

blue blouse. Claude, who called him Alexandre, patted his arms, and asked him when they were going to Charentonneau again. Then they talked about a grand excursion they had made together in a boat on the Marne, when they had eaten a rabbit for supper in the evening.

'Well, what will you take?' Claude again asked Florent.

The latter looked at the counter in great embarrassment. At one end of it some stoneware pots, encircled with brass bands and containing punch and hot wine, were standing over the short blue flames of a gas stove. Florent at last confessed that a glass of something warm would be welcome. Monsieur Lebigre thereupon served them with three glasses of punch. In a basket near the pots were some smoking-hot rolls which had only just arrived. However, as neither of the others took one, Florent likewise refrained, and drank his punch. He felt it slipping down into his empty stomach, like a stream of molten lead. It was Alexandre who paid for the 'shout.'

'He's a fine fellow, that Alexandre!' said Claude, when he and Florent found themselves alone again on the footway of the Rue Rambuteau. 'He's a very amusing companion to take into the country. He's fond of showing his strength. And then he's so magnificently built! I have seen him stripped. Ah, if I could only get him to pose for me in the nude out in the open air! Well, we'll go and take a turn through the markets now, if you like.'

Florent followed, yielding entirely to his new friend's guidance. A bright glow at the far end of the Rue Rambuteau announced the break of day. The far-spreading voice of the markets was becoming more sonorous, and every now and then the peals of a bell ringing in some distant pavilion mingled with the swelling, rising clamour. Claude and Florent entered one of the covered streets between the fish and poultry pavilions. Florent raised his eyes and looked at the lofty vault overhead, the inner timbers of which glistened amidst a black lacework of iron supports. As he turned into the great central thoroughfare he pictured himself in some strange town, with its various districts and suburbs, promenades and streets, squares and cross-roads, all suddenly placed under shelter on a rainy day by the whim of some gigantic power. The deep gloom brooding in the hollows of the roofs multiplied, as it were, the forest of pillars, and infinitely increased the number of the delicate ribs, railed galleries, and transparent shutters. And over the phantom

city and far away into the depths of the shade, a teeming, flowering vegetation of luxuriant metal-work, with spindle-shaped stems and twining knotted branches, covered the vast expanse as with the foliage of some ancient forest. Several departments of the markets still slumbered behind their closed iron gates. The butter and poultry pavilions displayed rows of little trellised stalls and long alleys, which lines of gas-lights showed to be deserted. The fish-market, however, had just been opened, and women were flitting to and fro amongst the white slabs littered with shadowy hampers and cloths. Among the vegetables and fruit and flowers the noise and bustle were gradually increasing. The whole place was by degrees waking up, from the popular quarter where the cabbages are piled at four o'clock in the morning, to the lazy and wealthy district which only hangs up its pullets and pheasants when the hands of the clock point to eight.

The great covered alleys were now teeming with life. All along the footways on both sides of the road there were still many market-gardeners, with other small growers from the environs of Paris, who displayed baskets containing their 'gatherings' of the previous evening—bundles of vegetables and clusters of fruit. Whilst the crowd incessantly paced hither and thither, vehicles of divers kinds entered the covered ways, where their drivers checked the trot of the bell-jingling horses. Two of these vehicles barred the road; and Florent, in order to pass them, had to press against some dingy sacks, like coal-sacks in appearance, and so numerous and heavy that the axle-trees of the vans bent beneath them. They were quite damp, and exhaled a fresh odour of seaweed. From a rent low down in the side of one of them a black stream of big mussels was trickling.

Florent and Claude had now to pause at every step. The fish was arriving, and one after another the drays of the railway companies drove up laden with wooden cages full of the hampers and baskets that had come by train from the sea-coast. And to get out of the way of the fish drays, which became more and more numerous and disquieting, the artist and Florent rushed amongst the wheels of the drays laden with butter and eggs and cheese, huge yellow vehicles bearing coloured lanterns, and drawn by four horses. The market-porters carried the cases of eggs, and baskets of cheese and butter, into the auction pavilion, where clerks were making entries in note-books by the light of the gas.

Claude was quite charmed with all this uproar, and forgot everything to gaze at some effect of light, some group of blouses, or the picturesque unloading of a cart. At last they extricated themselves from the crowd, and as they continued on their way along the main artery they presently found themselves amidst an exquisite perfume which seemed to be following them. They were in the cut-flower market. All over the footways, to the right and left, women were seated in front of large rectangular baskets full of bunches of roses, violets, dahlias, and marguerites. At times the clumps darkened and looked like splotches of blood, at others they brightened into silvery greys of the softest tones. A lighted candle, standing near one basket, set amidst the general blackness quite a melody of colour—the bright variegations of marguerites, the blood-red crimson of dahlias, the bluey purple of violets, and the warm flesh tints of roses. And nothing could have been sweeter or more suggestive of springtide than this soft breath of perfume encountered on the footway, on emerging from the sharp odours of the fish-market and the pestilential smell of the butter and the cheese.

Claude and Florent turned round and strolled about, loitering among the flowers. They halted with some curiosity before several women who were selling bunches of fern and bundles of vine-leaves, neatly tied up in packets of five-and-twenty. Then they turned down another covered alley, which was almost deserted, and where their footsteps echoed as though they had been walking through a church. Here they found a little cart, scarcely larger than a wheelbarrow, to which was harnessed a diminutive donkey, who, no doubt, felt bored, for at sight of them he began braying with such prolonged and sonorous force that the vast roofing of the markets fairly trembled. Then the horses began to neigh in reply, there was a sound of pawing and tramping, a distant uproar, which swelled, rolled along, then died away.

Meantime, in the Rue Berger in front of them, Claude and Florent perceived a number of bare, frontless, salesmen's shops, where, by the light of flaring gas-jets, they could distinguish piles of hampers and fruit, enclosed by three dirty walls which were covered with addition sums in pencil. And the two wanderers were still standing there, contemplating this scene, when they noticed a well-dressed woman huddled up in a cab which looked quite lost and forlorn in the block of carts as it stealthily made its way onwards.

'There's Cinderella coming back without her slippers,' remarked Claude with a smile.

They began chatting together as they went back towards the markets. Claude whistled as he strolled along with his hands in his pockets, and expatiated on his love for this mountain of food which rises every morning in the very centre of Paris. He prowled about the footways night after night, dreaming of colossal still-life subjects, paintings of an extraordinary character. He had even started on one, having got his friend Marjolin and that jade Cadine to pose for him; but it was hard work to paint those confounded vegetables and fruit and fish and meat—they were all so beautiful! Florent listened to the artist's enthusiastic talk with a void and hunger-aching stomach. It did not seem to occur to Claude that all those things were intended to be eaten. Their charm for him lay in their colour. Suddenly, however, he ceased speaking and, with a gesture that was habitual to him, tightened the long red sash which he wore under his green-stained coat.

And then with a sly expression he resumed:

'Besides, I breakfast here, through my eyes, at any rate, and that's better than getting nothing at all. Sometimes, when I've forgotten to dine on the previous day, I treat myself to a perfect fit of indigestion in the morning by watching the carts arrive here laden with all sorts of good things. On such mornings as those I love my vegetables more than ever. Ah! the exasperating part, the rank injustice of it all, is that those rascally Philistines really eat these things!'

Then he went on to tell Florent of a supper to which a friend had treated him at Baratte's on a day of affluence. They had partaken of oysters, fish, and game. But Baratte's had sadly fallen, and all the carnival life of the old Marché des Innocents was now buried. In place thereof they had those huge central markets, that colossus of ironwork, that new and wonderful town. Fools might say what they liked; it was the embodiment of the spirit of the times. Florent, however, could not at first make out whether he was condemning the picturesqueness of Baratte's or its good cheer.

But Claude next began to inveigh against romanticism. He preferred his piles of vegetables, he said, to the rags of the middle ages; and he ended by reproaching himself with guilty weakness in making an etching of the Rue Pirouette. All those grimy old places ought to be levelled to the ground,

he declared, and modern houses ought to be built in their stead.

'There!' he exclaimed, coming to a halt, 'look at the corner of the footway yonder! Isn't that a picture ready-made, ever so much more human and natural than all their confounded consumptive daubs?'

Along the covered way women were now selling hot soup and coffee. At one corner of the foot-pavement a large circle of customers clustered round a vendor of cabbage soup. The bright tin caldron, full of broth, was steaming over a little low stove, through the holes of which came the pale glow of the embers. From a napkin-lined basket the woman took some thin slices of bread and dropped them into yellow cups; then with a ladle she filled the cups with the liquor. Around her were saleswomen neatly dressed, market-gardeners in blouses, porters with coats soiled by the loads they had carried, poor ragged vagabonds—in fact, all the early hungry ones of the markets, eating, and scalding their mouths, and drawing back their chins to avoid soiling them with the drippings from their spoons. The delighted artist blinked, and sought a point of view so as to get a good *ensemble* of the picture. That cabbage soup, however, exhaled a very strong odour. Florent, for his part, turned his head away, distressed by the sight of the full cups which the customers emptied in silence, glancing around them the while like suspicious animals. As the woman began serving a fresh customer, Claude himself was affected by the odorous steam of the soup, which was wafted full in his face.

He again tightened his sash, half amused and half annoyed. Then resuming his walk, and alluding to the punch paid for by Alexandre, he said to Florent in a low voice:

'It's very odd, but have you ever noticed that although a man can always find somebody to treat him to something to drink, he can never find a soul who will stand him anything to eat?'

The dawn was now rising. The houses on the Boulevard de Sébastopol at the end of the Rue de la Cossonnerie were still black; but above the sharp line of their slate roofs a patch of pale blue sky, circumscribed by the arch-pieces of the covered way, showed like a gleaming half-moon. Claude, who had been bending over some grated openings on a level with the ground, through which a glimpse could be obtained of deep cellars where gaslights glimmered, now glanced up into the

air between the lofty pillars, as though scanning the dark roofs which fringed the clear sky. Then he halted again, with his eyes fixed on one of the light iron ladders which connect the superposed market roofs and give access from one to the other. Florent asked him what he was seeking there.

'I'm looking for that scamp of a Marjolin,' replied the artist. 'He's sure to be in some guttering up there, unless, indeed, he's been spending the night in the poultry cellars. I want him to give me a sitting.'

Then he went on to relate how a market saleswoman had found his friend Marjolin one morning in a pile of cabbages, and how Marjolin had grown up in all liberty on the surrounding footways. When an attempt had been made to send him to school he had fallen ill, and it had been necessary to bring him back to the markets. He knew every nook and corner of them, and loved them with a filial affection, leading the agile life of a squirrel in that forest of ironwork. He and Cadine, the hussy whom Mother Chantemesse had picked up one night in the old Market of the Innocents, made a pretty couple—he, a splendid foolish fellow, as glowing as a Rubens, with a ruddy down on his skin which attracted the sunlight; and she, slight and sly, with a comical phiz under her tangle of black curly hair.

Whilst talking Claude quickened his steps, and soon brought his companion back to Saint Eustache again. Florent, whose legs were once more giving way, dropped upon a bench near the omnibus office. The morning air was freshening. At the far end of the Rue Rambuteau rosy gleams were streaking the milky sky, which higher up was slashed by broad grey rifts. Such was the sweet balsamic scent of this dawn, that Florent for a moment fancied himself in the open country, on the brow of a hill. But behind the bench Claude pointed out to him the many aromatic herbs and bulbs on sale. All along the footway skirting the tripe-market there were, so to say, fields of thyme and lavender, garlic and shallots; and round the young plane-trees on the pavement the vendors had twined long branches of laurel, forming trophies of greenery. The strong scent of the laurel leaves prevailed over every other odour.

At present the luminous dial of Saint Eustache was paling as a night-light does when surprised by the dawn. The gas-jets in the wine-shops in the neighbouring streets went out one by one, like stars extinguished by the brightness.

And Florent gazed at the vast markets now gradually emerging from the gloom, from the dreamland in which he had beheld them, stretching out their ranges of open palaces. Greenish-grey in hue, they looked more solid now, and even more colossal with their prodigious masting of columns upholding an endless expanse of roofs. They rose up in geometrically shaped masses; and when all the inner lights had been extinguished and the square uniform buildings were steeped in the rising dawn, they seemed typical of some gigantic modern machine, some engine, some caldron for the supply of a whole people, some colossal belly, bolted and riveted, built up of wood and glass and iron, and endowed with all the elegance and power of some mechanical motive appliance working there with flaring furnaces, and wild, bewildering revolutions of wheels.

Claude, however, had enthusiastically sprung on to the bench, and stood upon it. He compelled his companion to admire the effect of the dawn rising over the vegetables. There was a perfect sea of these extending between the two clusters of pavilions from Saint Eustache to the Rue des Halles. And in the two open spaces at either end the flood of greenery rose to even greater height, and quite submerged the pavements. The dawn appeared slowly, softly grey in hue, and spreading a light water-colour tint over everything. These surging piles akin to hurrying waves, this river of verdure rushing along the roadway like an autumn torrent, assumed delicate shadowy tints—tender violet, blush-rose, and greeny yellow, all the soft, light hues which at sunrise make the sky look like a canopy of shot silk. And by degrees, as the fires of dawn rose higher and higher at the far end of the Rue Rambuteau, the mass of vegetation grew brighter and brighter, emerging more and more distinctly from the bluey gloom that clung to the ground. Salad herbs, cabbage-lettuce, endive, and succory, with rich soil still clinging to their roots, exposed their swelling hearts; bundles of spinach, bundles of sorrel, clusters of artichokes, piles of peas and beans, mounds of cos-lettuce, tied round with straws, sounded every note in the whole gamut of greenery, from the sheeny lacquer-like green of the pods to the deep-toned green of the foliage; a continuous gamut with ascending and descending scales which died away in the variegated tones of the heads of celery and bundles of leeks. But the highest and most sonorous notes still came from the patches of bright carrots and snowy

turnips, strewn in prodigious quantities all along the markets and lighting them up with the medley of their two colours.

At the crossway in the Rue des Halles cabbages were piled up in mountains; there were white ones, hard and compact as metal balls, curly savoys, whose great leaves made them look like basins of green bronze, and red cabbages, which the dawn seemed to transform into superb masses of bloom with the hue of wine-lees, splotched with dark purple and carmine. At the other side of the markets, at the crossway near Saint Eustache, the end of the Rue Rambuteau was blocked by a barricade of orange-hued pumpkins, sprawling with swelling bellies in two superposed rows. And here and there gleamed the glistening ruddy brown of a hamper of onions, the blood-red crimson of a heap of tomatoes, the quiet yellow of a display of marrows, and the sombre violet of the fruit of the egg-plant; while numerous fat black radishes still left patches of gloom amidst the quivering brilliance of the general awakening.

Claude clapped his hands at the sight. He declared that those 'blackguard vegetables' were wild, mad, sublime! He stoutly maintained that they were not yet dead, but, gathered on the previous evening, waited for the morning sun to bid him good-bye from the flag-stones of the market. He could observe their vitality, he declared, see their leaves stir and open as though their roots were yet firmly and warmly embedded in well-manured soil. And here, in the markets, he added, he heard the death-rattle of all the kitchen-gardens of the environs of Paris.

A crowd of white caps, loose black jackets, and blue blouses was swarming in the narrow paths between the various piles. The big baskets of the market-porters passed along slowly, above the heads of the throng. Retail dealers, costermongers, and greengrocers were making their purchases in haste. Corporals and nuns clustered round the mountains of cabbages, and college cooks prowled about inquisitively, on the look-out for good bargains. The unloading was still going on; heavy tumbrels, discharging their contents as though these were so many paving-stones, added more and more waves to the sea of greenery which was now beating against the opposite footways. And from the far end of the Rue du Pont Neuf fresh rows of carts were still and ever arriving.

'What a fine sight it is!' exclaimed Claude in an ecstasy of enthusiasm.

Florent was suffering keenly. He fancied that all this was some supernatural temptation, and, unwilling to look at the markets any longer, turned towards Saint Eustache, a side view of which he obtained from the spot where he now stood. With its roses, and broad arched windows, its bell-turret, and roofs of slate, it looked as though painted in sepia against the blue of the sky. He fixed his eyes at last on the sombre depths of the Rue Montorgueil, where fragments of gaudy sign-boards showed conspicuously, and on the corner of the Rue Montmartre, where there were balconies gleaming with letters of gold. And when he again glanced at the cross-roads, his gaze was solicited by other sign-boards, on which such inscriptions as 'Druggist and Chemist,' 'Flour and Grain' appeared in big red and black capital letters upon faded backgrounds. Near these corners, houses with narrow windows were now awakening, setting amidst the newness and airiness of the Rue du Pont Neuf a few of the yellow ancient façades of olden Paris. Standing at the empty windows of the great drapery shop at the corner of the Rue Rambuteau a number of spruce-looking counter-jumpers in their shirt sleeves, with snowy-white wristbands and tight-fitting pantaloons, were 'dressing' their goods. Farther away, in the windows of the severe-looking, barrack-like Guillot establishment, biscuits in gilt wrappers and fancy cakes on glass stands were tastefully set out. All the shops were now open; and workmen in white blouses, with tools under their arms, were hurrying along the road.

Claude had not yet got down from the bench. He was standing on tiptoe in order to see the farther down the streets. Suddenly, in the midst of the crowd which he overlooked, he caught sight of a fair head with long wavy locks, followed by a little black one covered with curly tumbled hair.

'Hallo, Marjolin! Hallo, Cadine!' he shouted; and then, as his voice was drowned by the general uproar, he jumped to the ground and started off. But all at once, recollecting that he had left Florent behind him, he hastily came back. 'I live at the end of the Impasse des Bourdonnais,' he said rapidly. 'My name's written in chalk on the door, Claude Lantier. Come and see the etching of the Rue Pirouette.'

Then he vanished. He was quite ignorant of Florent's name, and, after favouring him with his views on art, parted from him as he had met him, at the roadside.

Florent was now alone, and at first this pleased him. Ever since Madame François had picked him up in the Avenue de Neuilly he had been coming and going in a state of pain-fraught somnolence which had quite prevented him from forming any definite ideas of his surroundings. Now at last he was at liberty to do what he liked, and he tried to shake himself free from that intolerable vision of teeming food by which he was pursued. But his head still felt empty and dizzy, and all that he could find within him was a kind of vague fear. The day was now growing quite bright, and he could be distinctly seen. He looked down at his wretched shabby coat and trousers. He buttoned the first, dusted the latter, and strove to make a bit of a toilet, fearing lest those black rags of his should proclaim aloud whence he had come. He was seated in the middle of the bench, by the side of some wandering vagabonds who had settled themselves there while waiting for the sunrise. The neighbourhood of the markets is a favourite spot with vagrants in the small hours of the morning. However, two constables, still in night uniform, with cloaks and *képis*, paced up and down the footway side by side, their hands resting behind their backs; and every time they passed the bench they glanced at the game which they scented there. Florent felt sure that they recognised him, and were consulting together about arresting him. At this thought his anguish of mind became extreme. He felt a wild desire to get up and run away; but he did not dare to do so, and was quite at a loss as to how he might take himself off. The repeated glances of the constables, their cold, deliberate scrutiny caused him the keenest torture. At length he rose from the bench, making a great effort to restrain himself from rushing off as quickly as his long legs could carry him; and succeeded in walking quietly away, though his shoulders quivered in the fear he felt of suddenly feeling the rough hands of the constables clutching at his collar from behind.

He had now only one thought, one desire, which was to get away from the markets as quickly as possible. He would wait and make his investigations later on, when the footways should be clear. The three streets which met here—the Rue Montmartre, Rue Montorgueil, and Rue Turbigo—filled him with uneasiness. They were blocked by vehicles of all kinds, and their footways were crowded with vegetables. Florent went straight along as far as the Rue Pierre Lescot, but there the cress and the potato markets seemed to him

insuperable obstacles. So he resolved to take the Rue Rambuteau. On reaching the Boulevard de Sébastopol, however, he came across such a block of vans and carts and waggonettes that he turned back and proceeded along the Rue Saint Denis. Then he got amongst the vegetables once more. Retail dealers had just set up their stalls, formed of planks resting on tall hampers; and the deluge of cabbages and carrots and turnips began all over again. The markets were overflowing. Florent tried to make his escape from this pursuing flood which ever overtook him in his flight. He tried the Rue de la Cossonnerie, the Rue Berger, the Square des Innocents, the Rue de la Ferronnerie, and the Rue des Halles. And at last he came to a standstill, quite discouraged and scared at finding himself unable to escape from the infernal circle of vegetables, which now seemed to dance around him, twining clinging verdure about his legs.

The everlasting stream of carts and horses stretched away as far as the Rue de Rivoli and the Place de l'Hôtel de Ville. Huge vans were carrying away supplies for all the greengrocers and fruiterers of an entire district; *chars-à-bancs* were starting for the suburbs with straining, groaning sides. In the Rue du Pont Neuf Florent got completely bewildered. He stumbled upon a crowd of hand-carts, in which numerous costermongers were arranging their purchases. Amongst them he recognised Lacaille, who went off along the Rue Saint Honoré, pushing a barrow of carrots and cauliflowers before him. Florent followed him, in the hope that he would guide him out of the mob. The pavement was now quite slippery, although the weather was dry, and the litter of artichoke stalks, turnip tops, and leaves of all kinds made walking somewhat dangerous. Florent stumbled at almost every step. He lost sight of Lacaille in the Rue Vauvilliers, and on approaching the corn-market he again found the streets barricaded with vehicles. Then he made no further attempt to struggle; he was once more in the clutch of the markets, and their stream of life bore him back. Slowly retracing his steps, he presently found himself by Saint Eustache again.

He now heard the loud continuous rumbling of the waggons that were setting out from the markets. Paris was doling out the daily food of its two million inhabitants. These markets were like some huge central organ beating with giant force, and sending the blood of life through every

vein of the city. The uproar was akin to that of colossal jaws—a mighty sound to which each phase of the provisioning contributed, from the whip-cracking of the larger retail dealers as they started off for the district markets to the dragging pit-a-pat of the old shoes worn by the poor women who hawked their lettuces in baskets from door to door.

Florent turned into a covered way on the left, intersecting the group of four pavilions whose deep silent gloom he had remarked during the night. He hoped that he might there find a refuge, discover some corner in which he could hide himself. But these pavilions were now as busy, as lively as the others. Florent walked on to the end of the street. Drays were driving up at a quick trot, crowding the market with cages full of live poultry, and square hampers in which dead birds were stowed in deep layers. On the other side of the way were other drays from which porters were removing freshly killed calves, wrapped in canvas, and laid at full length in baskets, whence only the four bleeding stumps of their legs protruded. There were also whole sheep, and sides and quarters of beef. Butchers in long white aprons marked the meat with a stamp, carried it off, weighed it, and hung it up on hooks in the auction-room. Florent, with his face close to the grating, stood gazing at the rows of hanging carcasses, at the ruddy sheep and oxen and paler calves, all streaked with yellow fat and sinews, and with bellies yawning open. Then he passed along the sidewalk where the tripe-market was held, amidst the pallid calves' feet and heads, the rolled tripe neatly packed in boxes, the brains delicately set out in flat baskets, the sanguineous livers, and purplish kidneys. He checked his steps in front of some long two-wheeled carts, covered with round awnings, and containing sides of pork hung on each side of the vehicle over a bed of straw. Seen from the back end, the interiors of the carts looked like recesses of some tabernacle, like some taper-lighted chapel, such was the glow of all the bare flesh they contained. And on the beds of straw were lines of tin cans, full of the blood that had trickled from the pigs. Thereupon Florent was attacked by a sort of rage. The insipid odour of the meat, the pungent smell of the tripe exasperated him. He made his way out of the covered road, preferring to return once more to the footwalk of the Rue du Pont Neuf.

He was enduring perfect agony. The shiver of early morning came upon him; his teeth chattered, and he was

afraid of falling to the ground and finding himself unable to rise again. He looked about, but could see no vacant place on any bench. Had he found one he would have dropped asleep there, even at the risk of being awakened by the police. Then, as giddiness nearly blinded him, he leaned for support against a tree, with his eyes closed and his ears ringing. The raw carrot, which he had swallowed almost without chewing, was torturing his stomach, and the glass of punch which he had drunk seemed to have intoxicated him. He was indeed intoxicated with misery, weariness, and hunger. Again he felt a burning fire in the pit of the stomach, to which he every now and then carried his hands, as though he were trying to stop up a hole through which all his life was oozing away. As he stood there he fancied that the foot-pavement rocked beneath him; and thinking that he might perhaps lessen his sufferings by walking, he went straight on through the vegetables again. He lost himself among them. He went along a narrow footway, turned down another, was forced to retrace his steps, bungled in doing so, and once more found himself amidst piles of greenery. Some heaps were so high that people seemed to be walking between walls of bundles and bunches. Only their heads slightly overtopped these ramparts, and passed along showing whitely or blackly according to the colour of their hats or caps; whilst the huge swinging baskets, carried aloft on a level with the greenery, looked like osier boats floating on a stagnant, mossy lake.

Florent stumbled against a thousand obstacles—against porters taking up their burdens, and saleswomen disputing in rough tones. He slipped over the thick bed of waste leaves and stumps which covered the footway, and was almost suffocated by the powerful odour of crushed verdure. At last he halted in a sort of confused stupor, and surrendered to the pushing of some and the insults of others; and then he became a mere waif, a piece of wreckage tossed about on the surface of that surging sea.

He was fast losing all self-respect, and would willingly have begged. The recollection of his foolish pride during the night exasperated him. If he had accepted Madame François's charity, if he had not felt such idiotic fear of Claude, he would not now have been stranded there groaning in the midst of those cabbages. And he was especially angry with himself for not having questioned the artist when they were in the

Rue Pirouette. Now, alas! he was alone and deserted, liable to die in the streets like a homeless dog.

For the last time he raised his eyes and looked at the markets. At present they were glittering in the sun. A broad ray was pouring through the covered road from the far end, cleaving the massy pavilions with an arcade of light, whilst fiery beams rained down upon the far expanse of roofs. The huge iron framework grew less distinct, assumed a bluey hue, became nothing but a shadowy silhouette outlined against the flaming flare of the sunrise. But up above a pane of glass took fire, drops of light trickled down the broad sloping zinc plates to the gutterings; and then, below, a tumultuous city appeared amidst a haze of dancing golden dust. The general awakening had spread, from the first start of the market-gardeners snoring in their cloaks, to the brisk rolling of the food-laden railway drays. And the whole city was opening its iron gates, the footways were humming, the pavilions roaring with life. Shouts and cries of all kinds rent the air; it was as though the strain, which Florent had heard gathering force in the gloom ever since four in the morning, had now attained its fullest volume. To the right and left, on all sides indeed, the sharp cries accompanying the auction sales sounded shrilly like flutes amidst the sonorous bass roar of the crowd. It was the fish, the butter, the poultry, and the meat being sold.

The pealing of bells passed through the air, imparting a quiver to the buzzing of the opening markets. Around Florent the sun was setting the vegetables aflame. He no longer perceived any of those soft water-colour tints which had predominated in the pale light of early morning. The swelling hearts of the lettuces were now gleaming brightly, the scales of greenery showed forth with wondrous vigour, the carrots glowed blood-red, the turnips shone as if incandescent in the triumphant radiance of the sun.

On Florent's left some waggons were discharging fresh loads of cabbages. He turned his eyes, and away in the distance saw carts yet streaming out of the Rue Turbigo. The tide was still and ever rising. He had felt it about his ankles, then on a level with his stomach, and now it was threatening to drown him altogether. Blinded and submerged, his ears buzzing, his stomach overpowered by all that he had seen, he asked for mercy; and wild grief took possession of him at the thought of dying there of starvation in the very

heart of glutted Paris, amidst the effulgent awakening of her markets. Big hot tears started from his eyes.

Walking on, he had now reached one of the larger alleys. Two women, one short and old, the other tall and withered, passed him, talking together as they made their way towards the pavilions.

'So you've come to do your marketing, Mademoiselle Saget?' said the tall withered woman.

'Well, yes, Madame Lecœur, if you can give it such a name as marketing. I'm a lone woman, you know, and live on next to nothing. I should have liked a small cauliflower, but everything is so dear. How is butter selling to-day?'

'At thirty-four sous. I have some which is first-rate. Will you come and look at it?'

'Well, I don't know if I shall want any to-day; I've still a little lard left.'

Making a supreme effort, Florent followed these two women. He recollected having heard Claude name the old one —Mademoiselle Saget—when they were in the Rue Pirouette; and he made up his mind to question her when she should have parted from her tall withered acquaintance.

'And how's your niece?' Mademoiselle Saget now asked.

'Oh, La Sarriette does as she likes,' Madame Lecœur replied in a bitter tone. 'She's chosen to set up for herself and her affairs no longer concern me. When her lovers have beggared her, she needn't come to me for any bread.'

'And you were so good to her, too! She ought to do well this year; fruit is yielding big profits. And your brother-in-law, how is he?'

'Oh, he——'

Madame Lecœur bit her lips, and seemed disinclined to say anything more.

'Still the same as ever, I suppose?' continued Mademoiselle Saget. 'He's a very worthy man. Still, I once heard it said that he spent his money in such a way that——'

'But does anyone know how he spends his money?' interrupted Madame Lecœur, with much asperity. 'He's a miserly niggard, a scurvy fellow, that's what I say! Do you know, mademoiselle, he'd see me die of starvation rather than lend me five francs! He knows quite well that there's nothing to be made out of butter this season, any more than out of cheese and eggs; whereas he can sell as much poultry as ever he chooses. But not once, I assure you, not once has he

offered to help me. I am too proud, as you know, to accept any assistance from him; still it would have pleased me to have had it offered.'

'Ah, by the way, there he is, your brother-in-law!' suddenly exclaimed Mademoiselle Saget, lowering her voice.

The two women turned and gazed at a man who was crossing the road to enter the covered way close by.

'I'm in a hurry,' murmured Madame Lecœur. 'I left my stall without anyone to look after it; and, besides, I don't want to speak to him.'

However, Florent also had mechanically turned round and glanced at the individual referred to. This was a short, squarely-built man, with a cheery look and grey, close-cut brush-like hair. Under each arm he was carrying a fat goose, whose head hung down and flapped against his legs. And then all at once Florent made a gesture of delight. Forgetting his fatigue, he ran after the man, and, overtaking him, tapped him on the shoulder.

'Gavard!' he exclaimed.

The other raised his head and stared with surprise at Florent's tall black figure, which he did not at first recognise. Then all at once: 'What! is it you?' he cried, as if overcome with amazement. 'Is it really you?'

He all but let his geese fall, and seemed unable to master his surprise. On catching sight, however, of his sister-in-law and Mademoiselle Saget, who were watching the meeting at a distance, he began to walk on again.

'Come along; don't let us stop here,' he said. 'There are too many eyes and tongues about.'

When they were in the covered way they began to chat. Florent related how he had gone to the Rue Pirouette, at which Gavard seemed much amused and laughed heartily. Then he told Florent that his brother Quenu had moved from that street and had reopened his pork-shop close by, in the Rue Rambuteau, just in front of the markets. And afterwards he was again highly amused to hear that Florent had been wandering about all that morning with Claude Lantier, an odd kind of fish, who, strangely enough, said he, was Madame Quenu's nephew. Thus chatting, Gavard was on the point of taking Florent straight to the pork-shop, but, on hearing that he had returned to France with false papers, he suddenly assumed all sorts of solemn and mysterious airs, and insisted upon walking some fifteen paces in front of him,

to avoid attracting attention. After passing through the poultry pavilion, where he hung his geese up in his stall, he began to cross the Rue Rambuteau, still followed by Florent; and then, halting in the middle of the road, he glanced significantly towards a large and well-appointed pork-shop.

The sun was obliquely enfilading the Rue Rambuteau, lighting up the fronts of the houses, in the midst of which the Rue Pirouette formed a dark gap. At the other end the great pile of Saint Eustache glittered brightly in the sunlight like some huge reliquary. And right through the crowd, from the distant crossway, an army of street-sweepers was advancing in file down the road, the brooms swishing rhythmically, while scavengers provided with forks pitched the collected refuse into tumbrels, which at intervals of a score of paces halted with a noise like the clattering of broken pots. However, all Florent's attention was concentrated on the pork-shop, open and radiant in the rising sun.

It stood very near the corner of the Rue Pirouette and provided quite a feast for the eyes. Its aspect was bright and smiling, touches of brilliant colour showing conspicuously amidst all the snowy marble. The sign-board, on which the name of QUENU-GRADELLE glittered in fat gilt letters encircled by leaves and branches painted on a soft-hued background, was protected by a sheet of glass. On two panels, one on each side of the shop-front, and both, like the board above, covered with glass, were paintings representing various chubby little cupids playing amidst boars' heads, pork chops, and strings of sausages; and these latter still-life subjects, embellished with scrolls and bows, had been painted in such soft tones that the uncooked pork which they represented had the pinkiness of raspberry jam. Within this pleasing framework arose the window display, arranged upon a bed of fine blue-paper shavings. Here and there fern-leaves, tastefully disposed, changed the plates which they encircled into bouquets fringed with foliage. There was a wealth of rich, luscious, melting things. Down below, quite close to the window, jars of preserved sausage-meat were interspersed with pots of mustard. Above these were some small, plump, boned hams, golden with their dressings of toasted bread-crumbs, and adorned at the knuckles with green rosettes. Next came the larger dishes, some containing preserved Strasburg tongues, enclosed in bladders coloured a bright red and varnished, so that they looked quite

sanguineous beside the pale sausages and trotters; then there were black-puddings coiled like harmless snakes, healthy-looking chitterlings piled up two by two; Lyons sausages in little silver copes that made them look like choristers; hot pies, with little banner-like tickets stuck in them; big hams, and great glazed joints of veal and pork, whose jelly was as limpid as sugar-candy. In the rear were other dishes and earthen pans in which meat, minced and sliced, slumbered beneath lakes of melted fat. And betwixt the various plates and dishes, jars and bottles of sauce, cullis, stock and preserved truffles, pans of *foie gras* and boxes of sardines and tunny-fish were strewn over the bed of paper shavings. A box of creamy cheeses, and one of edible snails, the apertures of whose shells were dressed with butter and parsley, had been placed carelessly at either corner. Finally, from a bar overhead strings of sausages and saveloys of various sizes hung down symmetrically like cords and tassels; while in the rear fragments of intestinal membranes showed like lace-work, like some *guipure* of white flesh. And on the highest tier in this sanctuary of gluttony, amidst the membranes and between two bouquets of purple gladioli, the window-stand was crowned by a small square aquarium, ornamented with rock-work, and containing a couple of gold-fish, which were continually swimming round it.

Florent's whole body thrilled at the sight. Then he perceived a woman standing in the sunlight at the door of the shop. With her prosperous, happy look in the midst of all those inviting things she added to the cheery aspect of the place. She was a fine woman and quite blocked the doorway. Still, she was not over-stout, but simply buxom, with the full ripeness of her thirty years. She had only just risen, yet her glossy hair was already brushed smooth and arranged in little flat bands over her temples, giving her an appearance of extreme neatness. She had the fine skin, the pinky-white complexion common to those whose life is spent in an atmosphere of raw meat and fat. There was a touch of gravity about her demeanour, her movements were calm and slow; what mirth or pleasure she felt she expressed by her eyes, her lips retaining all their seriousness. A collar of starched linen encircled her neck, white sleevelets reached to her elbows, and a white apron fell even over the tips of her shoes, so that you saw but little of her black cashmere dress, which clung tightly to her well-rounded shoulders and swelling bosom. The sun

rays poured hotly upon all the whiteness she displayed. However, although her bluish-black hair, her rosy face, and bright sleeves and apron were steeped in the glow of light, she never once blinked, but enjoyed her morning bath of sunshine with blissful tranquillity, her soft eyes smiling the while at the flow and riot of the markets. She had the appearance of a very worthy woman.

'That is your brother's wife, your sister-in-law, Lisa,' Gavard said to Florent.

He had saluted her with a slight inclination of the head. Then he darted along the house passage, continuing to take the most minute precautions, and unwilling to let Florent enter the premises through the shop, though there was no one there. It was evident that he felt great pleasure in dabbling in what he considered to be a compromising business.

'Wait here,' he said, 'while I go to see whether your brother is alone. You can come in when I clap my hands.'

Thereupon he opened a door at the end of the passage. But as soon as Florent heard his brother's voice behind it, he sprang inside at a bound. Quenu, who was much attached to him, threw his arms round his neck, and they kissed each other like children.

'Ah! dash it all! Is it really you, my dear fellow?' stammered the pork-butcher. 'I never expected to see you again. I felt sure you were dead! Why, only yesterday I was saying to Lisa, "That poor fellow, Florent!"'

However, he stopped short, and, popping his head into the shop, called out, 'Lisa! Lisa!' Then turning towards a little girl who had crept into a corner, he added, 'Pauline, go and find your mother.'

The little one did not stir, however. She was an extremely fine child, five years of age, with a plump chubby face, bearing a strong resemblance to that of the pork-butcher's wife. In her arms she was holding a huge yellow cat, which had cheerfully surrendered itself to her embrace, with its legs dangling downwards; and she now squeezed it tightly with her little arms, as if she were afraid that yonder shabby-looking gentleman might rob her of it.

Lisa, however, leisurely made her appearance.

'Here is my brother Florent!' exclaimed Quenu.

Lisa addressed him as 'Monsieur,' and gave him a kindly welcome. She scanned him quietly from head to foot, without evincing any disagreeable surprise. Merely a faint pout

appeared for a moment on her lips. Then, standing by, she began to smile at her husband's demonstrations of affection. Quenu, however, at last recovered his calmness, and noticing Florent's fleshless, poverty-stricken appearance, exclaimed: 'Ah! my poor fellow, you haven't improved in your looks since you were over yonder. For my part, I've grown fat; but what would you have!'

He had indeed grown fat, too fat for his thirty years. He seemed to be bursting through his shirt and apron, through all the snowy-white linen in which he was swathed like a huge doll. With advancing years his clean-shaven face had become elongated, assuming a faint resemblance to the snout of one of those pigs amidst whose flesh his hands worked and lived the whole day through. Florent scarcely recognised him. He had now seated himself, and his glance turned from his brother to handsome Lisa and little Pauline. They were all brimful of health, squarely built, sleek, in prime condition; and in their turn they looked at Florent with the uneasy astonishment which corpulent people feel at the sight of a scraggy person. The very cat, whose skin was distended by fat, dilated its yellow eyes and scrutinised him with an air of distrust.

'You'll wait till we have breakfast, won't you?' asked Quenu. 'We have it early, at ten o'clock.'

A penetrating odour of cookery pervaded the place; and Florent looked back upon the terrible night which he had just spent, his arrival amongst the vegetables, his agony in the midst of the markets, the endless avalanches of food from which he had just escaped. And then in a low tone and with a gentle smile he responded:

'No; I'm really very hungry, you see.'

CHAPTER II

FLORENT had just begun to study law in Paris when his mother died. She lived at Le Vigan, in the department of the Gard, and had taken for her second husband one Quenu, a native of Yvetot in Normandy, whom some sub-prefect had transplanted to the south and then forgotten there. He had remained in employment at the sub-prefecture, finding the country charming, the wine good, and the women

very amiable. Three years after his marriage he had been carried off by a bad attack of indigestion, leaving as sole legacy to his wife a sturdy boy who resembled him. It was only with very great difficulty that the widow could pay the college fees of Florent, her elder son, the issue of her first marriage. He was a very gentle youth, devoted to his studies, and constantly won the chief prizes at school. It was upon him that his mother lavished all her affection and based all her hopes. Perhaps, in bestowing so much love on this slim pale youth, she was giving evidence of her preference for her first husband, a tender-hearted, caressing Provençal, who had loved her devotedly. Quenu, whose good-humour and amiability had at first attracted her, had perhaps displayed too much self-satisfaction, and shown too plainly that he looked upon himself as the main source of happiness. At all events she formed the opinion that her younger son—and in southern families younger sons are still often sacrificed—would never do any good; so she contented herself with sending him to a school kept by a neighbouring old maid, where the lad learned nothing but how to idle his time away. The two brothers grew up far apart from each other, as though they were strangers.

When Florent arrived at Le Vigan his mother was already buried. She had insisted upon having her illness concealed from him till the very last moment, for fear of disturbing his studies. Thus he found little Quenu, who was then twelve years old, sitting and sobbing alone on a table in the middle of the kitchen. A furniture dealer, a neighbour, gave him particulars of his mother's last hours. She had reached the end of her resources, had killed herself by the hard work which she had undertaken to earn sufficient money that her elder son might continue his legal studies. To her modest trade in ribbons, the profits of which were but small, she had been obliged to add other occupations, which kept her up very late at night. Her one idea of seeing Florent established as an advocate, holding a good position in the town, had gradually caused her to become hard and miserly, without pity for either herself or others. Little Quenu was allowed to wander about in ragged breeches, and in blouses from which the sleeves were falling away. He never dared to serve himself at table, but waited till he received his allowance of bread from his mother's hands. She gave herself equally thin slices, and it was to the effects of this regimen that

she had succumbed, in deep despair at having failed to accomplish her self-allotted task.

This story made a most painful impression upon Florent's tender nature, and his sobs wellnigh choked him. He took his little step-brother in his arms, held him to his breast, and kissed him as though to restore to him the love of which he had unwittingly deprived him. Then he looked at the lad's gaping shoes, torn sleeves, and dirty hands, at all the manifest signs of wretchedness and neglect. And he told him that he would take him away, and that they would both live happily together. The next day, when he began to inquire into affairs, he felt afraid that he would not be able to keep sufficient money to pay for the journey back to Paris. However, he was determined to leave Le Vigan at any cost. He was fortunately able to sell the little ribbon business, and this enabled him to discharge his mother's debts, for despite her strictness in money matters she had gradually run up bills. Then, as there was nothing left, his mother's neighbour, the furniture dealer, offered him five hundred francs for her chattels and stock of linen. It was a very good bargain for the dealer, but the young man thanked him with tears in his eyes. He bought his brother some new clothes, and took him away that same evening.

On his return to Paris he gave up all thought of continuing to attend the Law School, and postponed every ambitious project. He obtained a few pupils, and established himself with little Quenu in the Rue Royer Collard, at the corner of the Rue Saint Jacques, in a big room which he furnished with two iron bedsteads, a wardrobe, a table, and four chairs. He now had a child to look after, and this assumed paternity was very pleasing to him. During the earlier days he attempted to give the lad some lessons when he returned home in the evening, but Quenu was an unwilling pupil. He was dull of understanding, and refused to learn, bursting into tears and regretfully recalling the time when his mother had allowed him to run wild in the streets. Florent thereupon stopped his lessons in despair, and to console the lad promised him a holiday of indefinite length. As an excuse for his own weakness he repeated that he had not brought his brother to Paris to distress him. To see him grow up in happiness became his chief desire. He quite worshipped the boy, was charmed with his merry laughter, and felt infinite joy in seeing him about him, healthy and

vigorous, and without a care. Florent for his part remained very slim and lean in his threadbare black coat, and his face began to turn yellow amidst all the drudgery and worry of teaching; but Quenu grew up plump and merry, a little dense, indeed, and scarce able to read or write, but endowed with high spirits which nothing could ruffle, and which filled the big gloomy room in the Rue Royer Collard with gaiety.

Years, meantime, passed by. Florent, who had inherited all his mother's spirit of devotion, kept Quenu at home as though he were a big, idle girl. He did not even suffer him to perform any petty domestic duties, but always went to buy the provisions himself, and attended to the cooking and other necessary matters. This kept him, he said, from indulging in his own bad thoughts. He was given to gloominess, and fancied that he was disposed to evil. When he returned home in the evening, splashed with mud, and his head bowed by the annoyances to which other people's children had subjected him, his heart melted beneath the embrace of the sturdy lad whom he found spinning his top on the tiled flooring of the big room. Quenu laughed at his brother's clumsiness in making omelettes, and at the serious fashion in which he prepared the soup-beef and vegetables. When the lamp was extinguished, and Florent lay in bed, he sometimes gave way to feelings of sadness. He longed to resume his legal studies, and strove to map out his duties in such wise as to secure time to follow the programme of the faculty. He succeeded in doing this, and was then perfectly happy. But a slight attack of fever, which confined him to his room for a week, made such a hole in his purse, and caused him so much alarm, that he abandoned all idea of completing his studies. The boy was now getting a big fellow, and Florent took a post as teacher in a school in the Rue de l'Estrapade, at a salary of eighteen hundred francs per annum. This seemed like a fortune to him. By dint of economy he hoped to be able to amass a sum of money which would set Quenu going in the world. When the lad reached his eighteenth year Florent still treated him as though he were a daughter for whom a dowry must be provided.

However, during his brother's brief illness Quenu himself had made certain reflections. One morning he proclaimed his desire to work, saying that he was now old enough to earn his own living. Florent was deeply touched at this. Just opposite, on the other side of the street, lived a working

watchmaker whom Quenu, through the curtainless window, could see leaning over a little table, manipulating all sorts of delicate things, and patiently gazing at them through a magnifying glass all day long. The lad was much attracted by the sight, and declared that he had a taste for watch-making. At the end of a fortnight, however, he became restless, and began to cry like a child of ten, complaining that the work was too complicated, and that he would never be able to understand all the silly little things that enter into the construction of a watch.

His next whim was to be a locksmith; but this calling he found too fatiguing. In a couple of years he tried more than ten different trades. Florent opined that he acted rightly, that it was wrong to take up a calling one did not like. However, Quenu's fine eagerness to work for his living strained the resources of the little establishment very seriously. Since he had begun flitting from one workshop to another there had been a constant succession of fresh expenses; money had gone in new clothes, in meals taken away from home, and in the payment of footings among fellow-workmen. Florent's salary of eighteen hundred francs was no longer sufficient, and he was obliged to take a couple of pupils in the evenings. For eight years he had continued to wear the same old coat.

However, the two brothers had made a friend. One side of the house in which they lived overlooked the Rue Saint Jacques, where there was a large poultry-roasting establishment[1] kept by a worthy man called Gavard, whose wife was dying from consumption amidst an atmosphere redolent of plump fowls. When Florent returned home too late to cook a scrap of meat, he was in the habit of laying out a dozen sous

[1] These *rôtisseries*, now all but extinct, were at one time a particular feature of the Parisian provision trade. I can myself recollect several akin to the one described by M. Zola. I suspect that they largely owed their origin to the form and dimensions of the ordinary Parisian kitchen stove, which did not enable people to roast poultry at home in a convenient way. In the old French *cuisine*, moreover, roast joints of meat were virtually unknown; roasting was almost entirely confined to chickens, geese, turkeys, pheasants, &c.; and among the middle classes people largely bought their poultry already cooked of the *rôtisseur*, or else confided it to him for the purpose of roasting, in the same way as our poorer classes still send their joints to the baker's. Roasting was also long looked upon in France as a very delicate art. Brillat-Savarin, in his famous *Physiologie du Goût*, lays down the dictum that 'A man may become a cook, but is born a *rôtisseur*.'—*Trans.*

or so on a small portion of turkey or goose at this shop. Such days as these were feast-days. Gavard in time grew interested in his tall, scraggy customer, learned his history, and invited Quenu into his shop. Before long the young fellow was constantly to be found there. As soon as his brother left the house he came downstairs and installed himself at the rear of the roasting-shop, quite enraptured with the four huge spits which turned with a gentle sound in front of the tall bright flames.

The broad copper bands of the fireplace glistened brightly, the poultry steamed, the fat bubbled melodiously in the dripping-pan, and the spits seemed to talk amongst themselves and to address kindly words to Quenu, who, with a long ladle, devoutly basted the golden breasts of the fat geese and turkeys. He would stay there for hours, quite crimson in the dancing glow of the flames, and laughing vaguely, with a somewhat stupid expression, at the birds roasting in front of him. Indeed, he did not awake from this kind of trance until the geese and turkeys were unspitted. They were placed on dishes, the spits emerged from their carcases smoking hot, and a rich gravy flowed from either end and filled the shop with a penetrating odour. Then the lad, who, standing up, had eagerly followed every phase of the dishing, would clap his hands and begin to talk to the birds, telling them that they were very nice, and would be eaten up, and that the cats would have nothing but their bones. And he would give a start of delight whenever Gavard handed him a slice of bread, which he forthwith put into the dripping-pan that it might soak and toast there for half-an-hour.

It was in this shop, no doubt, that Quenu's love of cookery took its birth. Later on, when he had tried all sorts of crafts, he returned, as though driven by fate, to the spits and the poultry and the savoury gravy which induces one to lick one's fingers. At first he was afraid of vexing his brother, who was a small eater and spoke of good fare with the disdain of a man who is ignorant of it; but afterwards, on seeing that Florent listened to him when he explained the preparation of some very elaborate dish, he confessed his desires and presently found a situation at a large restaurant. From that time forward the life of the two brothers was settled. They continued to live in the room in the Rue Royer Collard, whither they returned every evening; the one glowing and radiant from his hot fire, the other with the depressed coun-

tenance of a shabby, impecunious teacher. Florent still wore his old black coat, as he sat absorbed in correcting his pupils' exercises; while Quenu, to put himself more at ease, donned his white apron, cap, and jacket, and, flitting about in front of the stove, amused himself by baking some dainty in the oven. Sometimes they smiled at seeing themselves thus attired, the one all in black, the other all in white. These different garbs, one bright and the other sombre, seemed to make the big room half gay and half mournful. Never, however, was there so much harmony in a household marked by such dissimilarity. Though the elder brother grew thinner and thinner, consumed by the ardent temperament which he had inherited from his Provençal father, and the younger one waxed fatter and fatter, like a true son of Normandy, they loved each other in the brotherhood they derived from their mother—a mother who had been all devotion.

They had a relation in Paris, a brother of their mother's, one Gradelle, who was in business as a pork-butcher in the Rue Pirouette, near the central markets. He was a fat, hard-hearted, miserly fellow, and received his nephews as though they were starving paupers the first time they paid him a visit. They seldom went to see him afterwards. On his name̊day Quenu would take him a bunch of flowers, and receive a half-franc piece in return for it. Florent's proud and sensitive nature suffered keenly when Gradelle scrutinised his shabby clothes with the anxious, suspicious glance of a miser apprehending a request for a dinner, or the loan of a five-franc piece. One day, however, it occurred to Florent in all artlessness to ask his uncle to change a hundred-franc note for him, and after this the pork-butcher showed less alarm at sight of the lads, as he called them. Still, their friendship got no further than these infrequent visits.

These years were like a long, sweet, sad dream to Florent. As they passed he tasted to the full all the bitter joys of self-sacrifice. At home, in the big room, life was all love and tenderness; but out in the world, amidst the humiliations inflicted on him by his pupils, and the rough jostling of the streets, he felt himself yielding to wicked thoughts. His slain ambitions embittered him. It was long before he could bring himself to bow to his fate, and accept with equanimity the painful lot of a poor, plain, commonplace man. At last, to guard against the temptations of wickedness, he plunged into ideal goodness, and sought refuge in a self-created sphere

of absolute truth and justice. It was then that he became a republican, entering into the republican idea even as heart-broken girls enter a convent. And not finding a republic where sufficient peace and kindliness prevailed to lull his troubles to sleep, he created one for himself. He took no pleasure in books. All the blackened paper amidst which he lived spoke of evil-smelling class-rooms, of pellets of paper chewed by unruly schoolboys, of long, profitless hours of torture. Besides, books only suggested to him a spirit of mutiny and pride, whereas it was of peace and oblivion that he felt most need. To lull and soothe himself with ideal imaginings, to dream that he was perfectly happy, and that all the world would likewise become so, to erect in his brain the republican city in which he would fain have lived, such now became his recreation, the task, again and again renewed, of all his leisure hours. He no longer read any books beyond those which his duties compelled him to peruse ; he preferred to tramp along the Rue Saint Jacques as far as the outer boulevards, occasionally going yet a greater distance and returning by the Barrière d'Italie ; and all along the road, with his eyes on the Quartier Mouffetard spread out at his feet, he would devise reforms of great moral and humanitarian scope, such as he thought would change that city of suffering into an abode of bliss. During the turmoil of February 1848, when Paris was stained with blood, he became quite heart-broken, and rushed from one to another of the public clubs demanding that the blood which had been shed should find atonement in ' the fraternal embrace of all republicans through-out the world.' He became one of those enthusiastic orators who preached revolution as a new religion, full of gentleness and salvation. The terrible days of December 1851, the days of the Coup d'Etat, were required to wean him from his doctrines of universal love. He was then without arms; allowed himself to be captured like a sheep, and was treated as though he were a wolf. He awoke from his sermon on universal brotherhood to find himself starving on the cold stones of a casemate at Bicêtre.

Quenu, then two-and-twenty, was distracted with anguish when his brother did not return home. On the following day he went to seek his corpse at the cemetery of Montmartre, where the bodies of those shot down on the boulevards had been laid out in a line and covered with straw, from beneath which only their ghastly heads projected. However, Quenu's

courage failed him, he was blinded by his tears, and had to pass twice along the line of corpses before acquiring the certainty that Florent's was not among them. At last, at the end of a long and wretched week, he learned at the Préfecture of Police that his brother was a prisoner. He was not allowed to see him, and when he pressed the matter the police threatened to arrest him also. Then he hastened off to his uncle Gradelle, whom he looked upon as a person of importance, hoping that he might be able to enlist his influence in Florent's behalf. But Gradelle waxed wrathful, declared that Florent deserved his fate, that he ought to have known better than to have mixed himself up with those rascally republicans. And he even added that Florent was destined to turn out badly, that it was written on his face.

Quenu wept copiously and remained there, almost choked by his sobs. His uncle, a little ashamed of his harshness, and feeling that he ought to do something for him, offered to receive him into his house. He wanted an assistant, and knew that his nephew was a good cook. Quenu was so much alarmed by the mere thought of going back to live alone in the big room in the Rue Royer Collard, that then and there he accepted Gradelle's offer. That same night he slept in his uncle's house, in a dark hole of a garret just under the roof, where there was scarcely space for him to lie at full length. However, he was less wretched there than he would have been opposite his brother's empty couch.

He succeeded at length in obtaining permission to see Florent; but on his return from Bicêtre he was obliged to take to his bed. For nearly three weeks he lay fever-stricken, in a stupefied, comatose state. Gradelle meantime called down all sorts of maledictions on his republican nephew; and one morning, when he heard of Florent's departure for Cayenne, he went upstairs, tapped Quenu on the hands, awoke him, and bluntly told him the news, thereby bringing about such a reaction that on the following day the young man was up and about again. His grief wore itself out, and his soft flabby flesh seemed to absorb his tears. A month later he laughed again, and then grew vexed and unhappy with himself for having been merry; but his natural light-heartedness soon gained the mastery, and he laughed afresh in unconscious happiness.

He now learned his uncle's business, from which he derived even more enjoyment than from cookery. Gradelle

told him, however, that he must not neglect his pots and pans, that it was rare to find a pork-butcher who was also a good cook, and that he had been lucky in serving in a restaurant before coming to the shop. Gradelle, moreover, made full use of his nephew's acquirements, employed him to cook the dinners sent out to certain customers, and placed all the broiling, and the preparation of pork chops garnished with gherkins in his special charge. As the young man was of real service to him, he grew fond of him after his own fashion, and would nip his plump arms when he was in a good humour. Gradelle had sold the scanty furniture of the room in the Rue Royer Collard and retained possession of the proceeds—some forty francs or so—in order, said he, to prevent that foolish lad, Quenu, from making ducks and drakes of the cash. After a time, however, he allowed his nephew six francs a month as pocket-money.

Quenu now became quite happy, in spite of the emptiness of his purse and the harshness with which he was occasionally treated. He liked to have life doled out to him; Florent had treated him too much like an indolent girl. Moreover, he had made a friend at his uncle's. Gradelle, when his wife died, had been obliged to engage a girl to attend to the shop, and had taken care to choose a healthy and attractive one, knowing that a good-looking girl would set off his viands and help to tempt custom. Amongst his acquaintances was a widow, living in the Rue Cuvier, near the Jardin des Plantes, whose deceased husband had been postmaster at Plassans, the seat of a sub-prefecture in the south of France. This lady, who lived in a very modest fashion on a small annuity, had brought with her from Plassans a plump, pretty child, whom she treated as her own daughter. Lisa, as the young one was called, attended upon her with much placidity and serenity of disposition. Somewhat seriously inclined, she looked quite beautiful when she smiled. Indeed, her great charm came from the exquisite manner in which she allowed this infrequent smile of hers to escape her. Her eyes then became most caressing, and her habitual gravity imparted inestimable value to these sudden, seductive flashes. The old lady had often said that one of Lisa's smiles would suffice to lure her to perdition.

When the widow died she left all her savings, amounting to some ten thousand francs, to her adopted daughter. For a week Lisa lived alone in the Rue Cuvier; it was there that

Gradelle came in search of her. He had become acquainted with her by often seeing her with her mistress when the latter called on him in the Rue Pirouette; and at the funeral she had struck him as having grown so handsome and sturdy that he had followed the hearse all the way to the cemetery, though he had not intended to do so. As the coffin was being lowered into the grave, he reflected what a splendid girl she would be for the counter of a pork-butcher's shop. He thought the matter over, and finally resolved to offer her thirty francs a month, with board and lodging. When he made this proposal to her, Lisa asked for twenty-four hours to consider it. Then she arrived one morning with a little bundle of clothes, and her ten thousand francs concealed in the bosom of her dress. A month later the whole place seemed to belong to her; she enslaved Gradelle, Quenu, and even the smallest kitchen-boy. For his part, Quenu would have cut off his fingers to please her. When she happened to smile, he remained rooted to the floor, laughing with delight as he gazed at her.

Lisa was the eldest daughter of the Macquarts of Plassans, and her father was still alive.[1] But she said that he was abroad, and never wrote to him. Sometimes she just dropped a hint that her mother, now deceased, had been a hard worker, and that she took after her. She worked, indeed, very assiduously. However, she sometimes added that the worthy woman had slaved herself to death in striving to support her family. Then she would speak of the respective duties of husband and wife in such a practical though modest fashion as to enchant Quenu. He assured her that he fully shared her ideas. These were that everyone, man or woman, ought to work for his or her living, that everyone was charged with the duty of achieving personal happiness, that great harm was done by encouraging habits of idleness, and that the presence of so much misery in the world was greatly due to sloth. This theory of hers was a sweeping condemnation of drunkenness, of all the legendary loafing ways of her father Macquart. But, though she did not know it, there was much of Macquart's nature in herself. She was merely a steady, sensible Macquart with a logical desire for comfort, having grasped the truth of the proverb that as you make your bed so you lie on it. To sleep in blissful warmth there is no

[1] See M. Zola's novel, *The Fortune of the Rougons.—Trans.*

better plan than to prepare oneself a soft and downy couch; and to the preparation of such a couch she gave all her time and all her thoughts. When no more than six years old she had consented to remain quietly on her chair the whole day through on condition that she should be rewarded with a cake in the evening.

At Gradelle's establishment Lisa went on leading the calm, methodical life which her exquisite smiles illumined. She had not accepted the pork-butcher's offer at random. She reckoned upon finding a guardian in him; with the keen scent of those who are born lucky she perhaps foresaw that the gloomy shop in the Rue Pirouette would bring her the comfortable future she dreamed of—a life of healthy enjoyment, and work without fatigue, each hour of which would bring its own reward. She attended to her counter with the quiet earnestness with which she had waited upon the postmaster's widow; and the cleanliness of her aprons soon became proverbial in the neighbourhood. Uncle Gradelle was so charmed with this pretty girl that sometimes, as he was stringing his sausages, he would say to Quenu: 'Upon my word, if I weren't turned sixty, I think I should be foolish enough to marry her. A wife like she'd make is worth her weight in gold to a shopkeeper, my lad.'

Quenu himself was growing still fonder of her, though he laughed merrily one day when a neighbour accused him of being in love with Lisa. He was not worried with love-sickness. The two were very good friends, however. In the evening they went up to their bedrooms together. Lisa slept in a little chamber adjoining the dark hole which the young man occupied. She had made this room of hers quite bright by hanging it with muslin curtains. The pair would stand together for a moment on the landing, holding their candles in their hands, and chatting as they unlocked their doors. Then, as they closed them, they said in friendly tones:

'Good night, Mademoiselle Lisa.'

'Good night, Monsieur Quenu.'

As Quenu undressed himself he listened to Lisa making her own preparations. The partition between the two rooms was very thin. 'There, she is drawing her curtains now,' he would say to himself; 'what can she be doing, I wonder, in front of her chest of drawers? Ah! she's sitting down now and taking off her shoes. Now she's blown her candle out.

Well, good night. I must get to sleep'; and at times, when he heard her bed creak as she got into it, he would say to himself with a smile, 'Dash it all! Mademoiselle Lisa is no feather.' This idea seemed to amuse him, and presently he would fall asleep thinking about the hams and salt pork that he had to prepare the next morning.

This state of affairs went on for a year without causing Lisa a single blush or Quenu a moment's embarrassment. When the girl came into the kitchen in the morning at the busiest moment of the day's work, they grasped hands over the dishes of sausage-meat. Sometimes she helped him, holding the skins with her plump fingers while he filled them with meat and fat. Sometimes, too, with the tips of their tongues they just tasted the raw sausage-meat, to see if it was properly seasoned. She was able to give Quenu some useful hints, for she knew of many favourite southern recipes, with which he experimented with much success. He was often aware that she was standing behind his shoulder, prying into the pans. If he wanted a spoon or a dish, she would hand it to him. The heat of the fire would bring their blood to their skins; still, nothing in the world would have induced the young man to cease stirring the fatty *bouillis* which were thickening over the fire while the girl stood gravely by him, discussing the amount of boiling that was necessary. In the afternoon, when the shop lacked customers, they quietly chatted together for hours at a time. Lisa sat behind the counter, leaning back, and knitting in an easy, regular fashion; while Quenu installed himself on a big oak block, dangling his legs and tapping his heels against the wood. They got on wonderfully well together, discussing all sorts of subjects, generally cookery, and then Uncle Gradelle and the neighbours. Lisa also amused the young man with stories, just as though he were a child. She knew some very pretty ones—some miraculous legends, full of lambs and little angels, which she narrated in a piping voice, with all her wonted seriousness. If a customer happened to come in, she saved herself the trouble of moving by asking Quenu to get the required pot of lard or box of snails. And at eleven o'clock they went slowly up to bed as on the previous night. As they closed their doors, they calmly repeated the words:

'Good night, Mademoiselle Lisa.'

'Good night, Monsieur Quenu.'

One morning Uncle Gradelle was struck dead by apoplexy

while preparing a galantine. He fell forward, with his face against the chopping-block. Lisa did not lose her self-possession. She remarked that the dead man could not be left lying in the middle of the kitchen, and had the body removed into a little back room where Gradelle had slept. Then she arranged with the assistants what should be said. It must be given out that the master had died in his bed; otherwise the whole district would be disgusted, and the shop would lose its customers. Quenu helped to carry the dead man away, feeling quite confused, and astonished at being unable to shed any tears. Presently, however, he and Lisa cried together. Quenu and his brother Florent were the sole heirs. The gossips of the neighbourhood credited old Gradelle with the possession of a considerable fortune. However, not a single crown could be discovered. Lisa seemed very restless and uneasy. Quenu noticed how pensive she became, how she kept on looking around her from morning till night, as though she had lost something. At last she decided to have a thorough cleaning of the premises, declaring that people were beginning to talk, that the story of the old man's death had got about, and that it was necessary they should make a great show of cleanliness. One afternoon, after remaining in the cellar for a couple of hours, whither she herself had gone to wash the salting-tubs, she came up again, carrying something in her apron. Quenu was just then cutting up a pig's fry. She waited till he had finished, talking awhile in an easy, indifferent fashion. But there was an unusual glitter in her eyes, and she smiled her most charming smile as she told him that she wanted to speak to him. She led the way upstairs with seeming difficulty, impeded by what she had in her apron, which was strained almost to bursting.

By the time she reached the third floor she found herself short of breath, and for a moment was obliged to lean against the balustrade. Quenu, much astonished, followed her into her bedroom without saying a word. It was the first time she had ever invited him to enter it. She closed the door, and letting go the corners of her apron, which her stiffened fingers could no longer hold up, she allowed a stream of gold and silver coins to flow gently upon her bed. She had discovered Uncle Gradelle's treasure at the bottom of a salting-tub. The heap of money made a deep depression in the softy downy bed.

Lisa and Quenu evinced a quiet delight. They sat down

on the edge of the bed, Lisa at the head and Quenu at the foot, on either side of the heap of coins, and they counted the money out upon the counterpane, so as to avoid making any noise. There were forty thousand francs in gold, and three thousand francs in silver, whilst in a tin box they found bank-notes to the value of forty-two thousand francs. It took them two hours to count up the treasure. Quenu's hands trembled slightly, and it was Lisa who did most of the work.

They arranged the gold on the pillow in little heaps, leaving the silver in the hollow depression of the counterpane. When they had ascertained the total amount—eighty-five thousand francs, to them an enormous sum—they began to chat. And their conversation naturally turned upon their future, and they spoke of their marriage, although there had never been any previous mention of love between them. But this heap of money seemed to loosen their tongues. They had gradually seated themselves further back on the bed, leaning against the wall, beneath the white muslin curtains; and as they talked together, their hands, playing with the heap of silver between them, met, and remained linked amidst the pile of five-franc pieces. Twilight surprised them still sitting there together. Then, for the first time, Lisa blushed at finding the young man by her side. For a few moments, indeed, although not a thought of evil had come to them, they felt much embarrassed. Then Lisa went to get her own ten thousand francs. Quenu wanted her to put them with his uncle's savings. He mixed the two sums together, saying with a laugh that the money must be married also. Then it was agreed that Lisa should keep the hoard in her chest of drawers. When she had locked it up they both quietly went downstairs. They were now practically husband and wife.

The wedding took place during the following month. The neighbours considered the match a very natural one, and in every way suitable. They had vaguely heard the story of the treasure, and Lisa's honesty was the subject of endless eulogy. After all, said the gossips, she might well have kept the money herself, and not have spoken a word to Quenu about it; if she had spoken, it was out of pure honesty, for no one had seen her find the hoard. She well deserved, they added, that Quenu should make her his wife. That Quenu, by the way, was a lucky fellow; he wasn't a beauty himself,

yet he had secured a beautiful wife, who had disinterred a fortune for him. Some even went so far as to whisper that Lisa was a simpleton for having acted as she had done; but the young woman only smiled when people speaking to her vaguely alluded to all these things. She and her husband lived on as previously, in happy placidity and quiet affection. She still assisted him as before, their hands still met amidst the sausage-meat, she still glanced over his shoulder into the pots and pans, and still nothing but the great fire in the kitchen brought the blood to their cheeks.

However, Lisa was a woman of practical common-sense, and speedily saw the folly of allowing eighty-five thousand francs to lie idle in a chest of drawers. Quenu would have willingly stowed them away again at the bottom of the salting-tub until he had gained as much more, when they could have retired from business and have gone to live at Suresnes, a suburb to which both were partial. Lisa, however, had other ambitions. The Rue Pirouette did not accord with her ideas of cleanliness, her craving for fresh air, light, and healthy life. The shop where Uncle Gradelle had accumulated his fortune, sou by sou, was a long, dark place, one of those suspicious-looking pork-butchers' shops of the old quarters of the city, where the well-worn flagstones retain a strong odour of meat in spite of constant washings. Now the young woman longed for one of those bright modern shops, ornamented like a drawing-room, and fringing the footway of some broad street with windows of crystalline transparence. She was not actuated by any petty ambition to play the fine lady behind a stylish counter, but clearly realised that commerce in its latest development needed elegant surroundings. Quenu showed much alarm the first time his wife suggested that they ought to move and spend some of their money in decorating a new shop. However, Lisa only shrugged her shoulders and smiled at finding him so timorous.

One evening, when night was falling and the shop had grown dark, Quenu and Lisa overheard a woman of the neighbourhood talking to a friend outside their door.

'No, indeed! I've given up dealing with them,' said she. 'I wouldn't buy a bit of black-pudding from them now on any account. They had a dead man in their kitchen, you know.'

Quenu wept with vexation. The story of Gradelle's death

in the kitchen was clearly getting about; and his nephew began to blush before his customers when he saw them sniffing his wares too closely. So, of his own accord, he spoke to his wife of her proposal to take a new shop. Lisa, without saying anything, had already been looking out for other premises, and had found some, admirably situated, only a few yards away, in the Rue Rambuteau. The immediate neighbourhood of the central markets, which were being opened just opposite, would triple their business, and make their shop known all over Paris.

Quenu allowed himself to be drawn into a lavish expenditure of money; he laid out over thirty thousand francs in marble, glass, and gilding. Lisa spent hours with the workmen, giving her views about the slightest details. When she was at last installed behind the counter, customers arrived in a perfect procession, merely for the sake of examining the shop. The inside walls were lined from top to bottom with white marble. The ceiling was covered with a huge square mirror, framed by a broad gilded cornice, richly ornamented, whilst from the centre hung a crystal chandelier with four branches. And behind the counter, and on the left, and at the far end of the shop were other mirrors, fitted between the marble panels and looking like doors opening into an infinite series of brightly lighted halls, where all sorts of appetising edibles were displayed. The huge counter on the right hand was considered a very fine piece of work. At intervals along the front were lozenge-shaped panels of pinky marble. The flooring was of tiles, alternately white and pink, with a deep red fretting as border. The whole neighbourhood was proud of the shop, and no one again thought of referring to the kitchen in the Rue Pirouette, where a man had died. For quite a month women stopped short on the footway to look at Lisa between the saveloys and bladders in the window. Her white and pink flesh excited as much admiration as the marbles. She seemed to be the soul, the living light, the healthy, sturdy idol of the pork trade; and thenceforth one and all baptised her 'Lisa the beauty.'

To the right of the shop was the dining-room, a neat-looking apartment containing a sideboard, a table, and several cane-seated chairs of light oak. The matting on the floor, the wall-paper of a soft yellow tint, the oil-cloth table-cover, coloured to imitate oak, gave the room a somewhat cold appearance, which was relieved only by the glitter of a brass

hanging-lamp, suspended from the ceiling, and spreading its big shade of transparent porcelain over the table. One of the dining-room doors opened into the huge square kitchen, at the end of which was a small paved courtyard, serving for the storage of lumber—tubs, barrels and pans, and all kinds of utensils not in use. To the left of the water-tap, alongside the gutter which carried off the greasy water, stood pots of faded flowers, removed from the shop window, and slowly dying.

Business was excellent. Quenu, who had been much alarmed by the initial outlay, now regarded his wife with something like respect, and told his friends that she had 'a wonderful head.' At the end of five years they had nearly eighty thousand francs invested in the State funds. Lisa would say that they were not ambitious, that they had no desire to pile up money too quickly, or else she would have enabled her husband to gain hundreds and thousands of francs by prompting him to embark in the wholesale pig trade. But they were still young, and had plenty of time before them; besides, they didn't care about a rough, scrambling business, but preferred to work at their ease, and enjoy life, instead of wearing themselves out with endless anxieties.

'For instance,' Lisa would add in her expansive moments, 'I have, you know, a cousin in Paris. I never see him, as the two families have fallen out. He has taken the name of Saccard,[1] on account of certain matters which he wants to be forgotten. Well, this cousin of mine, I'm told, makes millions and millions of francs; but he gets no enjoyment out of life. He's always in a state of feverish excitement, always rushing hither and thither, up to his neck in all sorts of worrying business. Well, it's impossible, isn't it, for such a man to eat his dinner peaceably in the evening? We, at any rate, can take our meals comfortably, and make sure of what we eat, and we are not harassed by worries as he is. The only reason why people should care for money is that money's wanted for one to live. People like comfort; that's natural. But as for making money simply for the sake of making it, and giving yourself far more trouble and anxiety to gain it than you can ever get pleasure from it when it's gained, why, as for me, I'd rather sit still and cross my arms.

[1] See M. Zola's novel, *Money*.

And besides, I should like to see all those millions of my cousin's. I can't say that I altogether believe in them. I caught sight of him the other day in his carriage. He was quite yellow, and looked ever so sly. A man who's making money doesn't have that kind of expression. But it's his business, and not mine. For our part, we prefer to make merely a hundred sous at a time, and to get a hundred sous' worth of enjoyment out of them.'

The household was undoubtedly thriving. A daughter had been born to the young couple during their first year of wedlock, and all three of them looked blooming. The business went on prosperously, without any laborious fatigue, just as Lisa desired. She had carefully kept free of any possible source of trouble or anxiety, and the days went by in an atmosphere of peaceful, unctuous prosperity. Their home was a nook of sensible happiness—a comfortable manger, so to speak, where father, mother, and daughter could grow sleek and fat. It was only Quenu who occasionally felt sad, through thinking of his brother Florent. Up to the year 1856 he had received letters from him at long intervals. Then no more came, and he had learned from a newspaper that three convicts having attempted to escape from the Ile du Diable, had been drowned before they were able to reach the mainland. He had made inquiries at the Préfecture of Police, but had not learnt anything definite; it seemed probable that his brother was dead. However, he did not lose all hope, though months passed without any tidings. Florent, in the meantime, was wandering about Dutch Guiana, and refrained from writing home as he was ever in hope of being able to return to France. Quenu at last began to mourn for him as one mourns for those whom one has been unable to bid farewell. Lisa had never known Florent, but she spoke very kindly whenever she saw her husband give way to his sorrow; and she evinced no impatience when for the hundredth time or so he began to relate stories of his early days, of his life in the big room in the Rue Royer Collard, the thirty-six trades which he had taken up one after another, and the dainties which he had cooked at the stove, dressed all in white, while Florent was dressed all in black. To such talk as this, indeed, she listened placidly, with a complacency which never wearied.

It was into the midst of all this happiness, ripening after careful culture, that Florent dropped one September morning

just as Lisa was taking her matutinal bath of sunshine, and Quenu, with his eyes still heavy with sleep, was lazily applying his fingers to the congealed fat left in the pans from the previous evening. Florent's arrival caused a great commotion. Gavard advised them to conceal the 'outlaw,' as he somewhat pompously called Florent. Lisa, who looked pale, and more serious than was her wont, at last took him to the fifth floor, where she gave him the room belonging to the girl who assisted her in the shop. Quenu had cut some slices of bread and ham, but Florent was scarcely able to eat. He was overcome by dizziness and nausea, and went to bed, where he remained for five days in a state of delirium, the outcome of an attack of brain-fever, which fortunately received energetic treatment. When he recovered consciousness he perceived Lisa sitting by his bedside, silently stirring some cooling drink in a cup. As he tried to thank her, she told him that he must keep perfectly quiet, and that they could talk together later on. At the end of another three days Florent was on his feet again. Then one morning Quenu went up to tell him that Lisa awaited them in her room on the first floor.

Quenu and his wife there occupied a suite of three rooms and a dressing-room. You first passed through an antechamber, containing nothing but chairs, and then a small sitting-room, whose furniture, shrouded in white covers, slumbered in the gloom cast by the Venetian shutters, which were always kept closed so as to prevent the light blue of the upholstery from fading. Then came the bedroom, the only one of the three which was really used. It was very comfortably furnished in mahogany. The bed, bulky and drowsy of aspect in the depths of the damp alcove, was really wonderful, with its four mattresses, its four pillows, its layers of blankets, and its corpulent *édredon*. It was evidently a bed intended for slumber. A mirrored wardrobe, a washstand with drawers, a small central table with a worked cover, and several chairs whose seats were protected by squares of lace, gave the room an aspect of plain but substantial middle-class luxury. On the left-hand wall, on either side of the mantelpiece, which was ornamented with some landscape-painted vases mounted on bronze stands, and a gilt timepiece on which a figure of Gutenberg, also gilt, stood in an attitude of deep thought, hung portraits in oils of Quenu and Lisa, in ornate oval frames. Quenu had a smiling face, while Lisa wore an air

of grave propriety; and both were dressed in black and depicted in flattering fashion, their features idealised, their skins wondrously smooth, their complexions soft and pinky. A carpet, in the Wilton style, with a complicated pattern of roses mingling with stars, concealed the flooring; while in front of the bed was a fluffy mat, made out of long pieces of curly wool, a work of patience at which Lisa herself had toiled while seated behind her counter. But the most striking object of all in the midst of this array of new furniture was a great square, thick-set secrétaire, which had been re-polished in vain, for the cracks and notches in the marble top and the scratches on the old mahogany front, quite black with age, still showed plainly. Lisa had desired to retain this piece of furniture, however, as Uncle Gradelle had used it for more than forty years. It would bring them good luck, she said. Its metal fastenings were truly something terrible, its lock was like that of a prison gate, and it was so heavy that it could scarcely be moved.

When Florent and Quenu entered the room they found Lisa seated at the lowered desk of the secrétaire, writing and jotting down figures in a big, round, and very legible hand. She signed to them not to disturb her, and the two men sat down. Florent looked round the room, and notably at the two portraits, the bed, and the timepiece, with an air of surprise.

'There!' at last exclaimed Lisa, after having carefully verified a whole page of calculations. 'Listen to me now; we have an account to render to you, my dear Florent.'

It was the first time that she had so addressed him. However, taking up the page of figures, she continued: 'Your Uncle Gradelle died without leaving a will. Consequently you and your brother were his sole heirs. We now have to hand your share over to you.'

'But I do not ask you for anything!' exclaimed Florent. 'I don't wish for anything!'

Quenu had apparently been in ignorance of his wife's intentions. He turned rather pale and looked at her with an expression of displeasure. Of course, he certainly loved his brother dearly; but there was no occasion to hurl his uncle's money at him in this way. There would have been plenty of time to go into the matter later on.

'I know very well, my dear Florent,' continued Lisa, 'that you did not come back with the intention of claiming

from us what belongs to you; but business is business, you know, and we had better get things settled at once. Your uncle's savings amounted to eighty-five thousand francs. I have therefore put down forty-two thousand five hundred to your credit. See!'

She showed him the figures on the sheet of paper.

'It is unfortunately not so easy to value the shop, plant, stock-in-trade, and goodwill. I have only been able to put down approximate amounts, but I don't think I have underestimated anything. Well, the total valuation which I have made comes to fifteen thousand three hundred and ten francs; your half of which is seven thousand six hundred and fifty-five francs, so that your share amounts, in all, to fifty thousand one hundred and fifty-five francs. Please verify it for yourself, will you?'

She had called out the figures in a clear, distinct voice, and she now handed the paper to Florent, who was obliged to take it.

'But the old man's business was certainly never worth fifteen thousand francs!' cried Quenu. 'Why, I wouldn't have given ten thousand for it!'

He had ended by getting quite angry with his wife. Really, it was absurd to carry honesty to such a point as that! Had Florent said one word about the business? No, indeed, he had declared that he didn't wish for anything.

'The business was worth fifteen thousand three hundred and ten francs,' Lisa re-asserted, calmly. 'You will agree with me, my dear Florent, that it is quite unnecessary to bring a lawyer into our affairs. It is for us to arrange the division between ourselves, since you have now turned up again. I naturally thought of this as soon as you arrived; and, while you were in bed with the fever, I did my best to draw up this little inventory. It contains, as you see, a fairly complete statement of everything. I have been through our old books, and have called up my memory to help me. Read it aloud, and I will give you any additional information you may want.'

Florent ended by smiling. He was touched by this easy and, as it were, natural display of probity. Placing the sheet of figures on the young woman's knee, he took hold of her hand and said, 'I am very glad, my dear Lisa, to hear that you are prosperous, but I will not take your money. The heritage belongs to you and my brother, who took care of my uncle up

to the last. I don't require anything, and I don't intend to hamper you in carrying on your business.'

Lisa insisted, and even showed some vexation, while Quenu gnawed his thumbs in silence, striving to restrain himself.

'Ah!' resumed Florent with a laugh, 'if Uncle Gradelle could hear you, I think he'd come back and take the money away again. I was never a favourite of his, you know.'

'Well, no,' muttered Quenu, no longer able to keep still, 'he certainly wasn't over fond of you.'

Lisa, however, still pressed the matter. She did not like to have money in her secrétaire that did not belong to her; it would worry her, said she; the thought of it would disturb her peace. Thereupon Florent, still in a joking way, proposed to invest his share in the business. Moreover, said he, he did not intend to refuse their help; he would, no doubt, be unable to find employment all at once; and then, too, he would need a complete outfit, for he was scarcely presentable.

'Of course,' cried Quenu, 'you will board and lodge with us, and we will buy you all that you want. That's understood. You know very well that we are not likely to leave you in the streets, I hope!'

He was quite moved now, and even felt a trifle ashamed of the alarm he had experienced at the thought of having to hand over a large amount of money all at once. He began to joke, and told his brother that he would undertake to fatten him. Florent gently shook his head; while Lisa folded up the sheet of figures and put it away in a drawer of the secrétaire.

'You are wrong,' she said by way of conclusion. 'I have done what I was bound to do. Now it shall be as you wish. But, for my part, I should never have had a moment's peace if I had not put things before you. Bad thoughts would quite upset me.'

They then began to speak of another matter. It would be necessary to give some reason for Florent's presence, and at the same time avoid exciting the suspicion of the police. He told them that in order to return to France he had availed himself of the papers of a poor fellow who had died in his arms at Surinam from yellow fever. By a singular coincidence this young fellow's Christian name was Florent.

Florent Laquerrière, to give him his name in full, had left but

one relation in Paris, a female cousin, and had been informed of her death whilst in America. Nothing would therefore be easier than for Quenu's stepbrother to pass himself off as the man who had died at Surinam. Lisa offered to take upon herself the part of the female cousin. They then agreed to relate that their cousin Florent had returned from abroad, where he had failed in his attempts to make a fortune, and that they, the Quenu-Gradelles, as they were called in the neighbourhood, had received him into their house until he could find suitable employment. When this was all settled, Quenu insisted upon his brother making a thorough inspection of the rooms, and would not spare him the examination of a single stool. Whilst they were in the bare-looking chamber containing nothing but chairs, Lisa pushed open a door, and showing Florent a small dressing-room, told him that the shop-girl should sleep in it, so that he could retain the bedroom on the fifth floor.

In the evening Florent was arrayed in new clothes from head to foot. He had insisted upon again having a black coat and black trousers, much against the advice of Quenu, upon whom black had a depressing effect. No further attempts were made to conceal his presence in the house, and Lisa told the story which had been planned to everyone who cared to hear it. Henceforth Florent spent almost all his time on the premises, lingering on a chair in the kitchen or leaning against the marble-work in the shop. At meal-times Quenu plied him with food, and evinced considerable vexation when he proved such a small eater and left half the contents of his liberally filled plate untouched. Lisa had resumed her old life, evincing a kindly tolerance of her brother-in-law's presence, even in the morning, when he somewhat interfered with the work. Then she would momentarily forget him, and on suddenly perceiving his black form in front of her give a slight start of surprise, followed, however, by one of her sweet smiles, lest he might feel at all hurt. This skinny man's disinterestedness had impressed her, and she regarded him with a feeling akin to respect, mingled with vague fear. Florent for his part only felt that there was great affection around him.

When bed-time came he went upstairs, a little wearied by his lazy day, with the two young men whom Quenu employed as assistants, and who slept in attics adjoining his own. Léon, the apprentice, was barely fifteen years of age. He was a slight, gentle-looking lad, addicted to stealing stray slices of

ham and bits of sausages. These he would conceal under his pillow, eating them during the night without any bread. Several times at about one o'clock in the morning Florent almost fancied that Léon was giving a supper-party; for he heard low whispering followed by a sound of munching jaws and rustling paper. And then a rippling girlish laugh would break faintly on the deep silence of the sleeping house like the soft trilling of a flageolet.

The other assistant, Auguste Landois, came from Troyes. Bloated with unhealthy fat, he had too large a head, and was already bald, although only twenty-eight years of age. As he went upstairs with Florent on the first evening, he told him his story in a confused, garrulous way. He had at first come to Paris merely for the purpose of perfecting himself in the business, intending to return to Troyes, where his cousin, Augustine Landois, was waiting for him, and there setting up for himself as a pork-butcher. He and she had had the same godfather and bore virtually the same Christian name. However, he had grown ambitious; and now hoped to establish himself in business in Paris by the aid of the money left him by his mother, which he had deposited with a notary before leaving Champagne.

Auguste had got so far in his narrative when the fifth floor was reached; however, he still detained Florent, in order to sound the praises of Madame Quenu, who had consented to send for Augustine Landois to replace an assistant who had turned out badly. He himself was now thoroughly acquainted with his part of the business, and his cousin was perfecting herself in shop-management. In a year or eighteen months they would be married, and then they would set up on their own account in some populous corner of Paris, at Plaisance most likely. They were in no great hurry, he added, for the bacon trade was very bad that year. Then he proceeded to tell Florent that he and his cousin had been photographed together at the fair of St. Ouen, and he entered the attic to have another look at the photograph, which Augustine had left on the mantelpiece, in her desire that Madame Quenu's cousin should have a pretty room. Auguste lingered there for a moment, looking quite livid in the dim yellow light of his candle, and casting his eyes around the little chamber which was still full of memorials of the young girl. Next, stepping up to the bed, he asked Florent if it was comfortable. His cousin slept below now, said he, and would be better there in

the winter, for the attics were very cold. Then at last he went off, leaving Florent alone with the bed, and standing in front of the photograph. As shown on the latter Auguste looked like a sort of pale Quenu, and Augustine like an immature Lisa.

Florent, although on friendly terms with the assistants, petted by his brother, and cordially treated by Lisa, presently began to feel very bored. He had tried, but without success, to obtain some pupils; moreover, he purposely avoided the students' quarter for fear of being recognised. Lisa gently suggested to him that he had better try to obtain a situation in some commercial house, where he could take charge of the correspondence and keep the books. She returned to this subject again and again, and at last offered to find a berth for him herself. She was gradually becoming impatient at finding him so often in her way, idle, and not knowing what to do with himself. At first this impatience was merely due to the dislike she felt of people who do nothing but cross their arms and eat, and she had no thought of reproaching him for consuming her substance.

'For my own part,' she would say to him, 'I could never spend the whole day in dreamy lounging. You can't have any appetite for your meals. You ought to tire yourself.'

Gavard, also, was seeking a situation for Florent, but in a very extraordinary and most mysterious fashion. He would have liked to find some employment of a dramatic character, or in which there should be a touch of bitter irony, as was suitable for an outlaw. Gavard was a man who was always in opposition. He had just completed his fiftieth year, and he boasted that he had already passed judgment on four Governments. He still contemptuously shrugged his shoulders at the thought of Charles X., the priests and nobles and other attendant rabble, whom he had helped to sweep away. Louis Philippe, with his bourgeois following, had been an imbecile, and he would tell how the citizen-king had hoarded his coppers in a woollen stocking. As for the Republic of '48, that had been a mere farce, the working classes had deceived him; however, he no longer acknowledged that he had applauded the Coup d'Etat, for he now looked upon Napoleon III. as his personal enemy, a scoundrel who shut himself up with Morny and others to indulge in gluttonous orgies. He was never weary of holding forth

upon this subject. Lowering his voice a little, he would declare that women were brought to the Tuileries in closed carriages every evening, and that he, who was speaking, had one night heard the echoes of the orgies while crossing the Place du Carrousel. It was Gavard's religion to make himself as disagreeable as possible to any existing Government. He would seek to spite it in all sorts of ways, and laugh in secret for several months at the pranks he played. To begin with, he voted for candidates who would worry the Ministers at the Corps Législatif. Then, if he could rob the revenue, or baffle the police, and bring about a row of some kind or other, he strove to give the affair as much of an insurrectionary character as possible. He told a great many lies, too; set himself up as being a very dangerous man; talked as though 'the satellites of the Tuileries' were well acquainted with him and trembled at the sight of him; and asserted that one half of them must be guillotined, and the other half transported, the next time there was 'a flare-up.' His violent political creed found food in boastful, bragging talk of this sort; he displayed all that partiality for a lark and a rumpus which prompts a Parisian shopkeeper to take down his shutters on a day of barricade-fighting to get a good view of the corpses of the slain. When Florent returned from Cayenne, Gavard opined that he had got hold of a splendid chance for some abominable trick, and bestowed much thought upon the question of how he might best vent his spleen on the Emperor and Ministers and everyone in office, down to the very lowest police-constable.

Gavard's manners with Florent were altogether those of a man tasting some forbidden pleasure. He contemplated him with blinking eyes, lowered his voice even when making the most trifling remark, and grasped his hand with all sorts of masonic flummery. He had at last lighted upon something in the way of an adventure; he had a friend who was really compromised, and could, without falsehood, speak of the dangers he incurred. He undoubtedly experienced a secret alarm at the sight of this man who had returned from transportation, and whose fleshlessness testified to the long sufferings he had endured; however, this touch of alarm was delightful, for it increased his notion of his own importance, and convinced him that he was really doing something wonderful in treating a dangerous character as a friend. Florent became a sort of sacred being in his eyes: he swore by him alone, and

had recourse to his name whenever arguments failed him, and he wanted to crush the Government once and for all.

Gavard had lost his wife in the Rue Saint Jacques some months after the Coup d'Etat; however, he had kept on his roasting-shop till 1856. At that time it was reported that he had made large sums of money by going into partnership with a neighbouring grocer who had obtained a contract for supplying dried vegetables to the Crimean expeditionary corps. The truth was, however, that, having sold his shop, he lived on his income for a year without doing anything. He himself did not care to talk about the real origin of his fortune, for to have revealed it would have prevented him from plainly expressing his opinion of the Crimean War, which he referred to as a mere adventurous expedition, 'undertaken simply to consolidate the throne and to fill certain persons' pockets.' At the end of a year he had grown utterly weary of life in his bachelor quarters. As he was in the habit of visiting the Quenu-Gradelles almost daily, he determined to take up his residence nearer to them, and came to live in the Rue de la Cossonnerie. The neighbouring markets, with their noisy uproar and endless chatter, quite fascinated him; and he decided to hire a stall in the poultry pavilion, just for the purpose of amusing himself and occupying his idle hours with all the gossip. Thenceforth he lived amidst ceaseless tittle-tattle, acquainted with every little scandal in the neighbourhood, his head buzzing with the incessant yelping around him. He blissfully tasted a thousand titillating delights, having at last found his true element, and bathing in it, with the voluptuous pleasure of a carp swimming in the sunshine. Florent would sometimes go to see him at his stall. The afternoons were still very warm. All along the narrow alleys sat women plucking poultry. Rays of light streamed in between the awnings, and in the warm atmosphere, in the golden dust of the sunbeams, feathers fluttered hither and thither like dancing snowflakes. A trail of coaxing calls and offers followed Florent as he passed along. 'Can I sell you a fine duck, monsieur?' 'I've some very fine fat chickens here, monsieur; come and see!' 'Monsieur! monsieur, do just buy this pair of pigeons!' Deafened and embarrassed he freed himself from the women, who still went on plucking as they fought for possession of him; and the fine down flew about and well-nigh choked him, like hot smoke reeking with the strong odour

of the poultry. At last, in the middle of the alley, near the water-taps, he found Gavard ranting away in shirt-sleeves, in front of his stall, with his arms crossed over the bib of his blue apron. He reigned there, in a gracious, condescending way, over a group of ten or twelve women. He was the only male dealer in that part of the market. He was so fond of wagging his tongue that he had quarrelled with five or six girls whom he had successively engaged to attend to his stall, and had now made up his mind to sell his goods himself, naïvely explaining that the silly women spent the whole blessed day in gossiping, and that it was beyond his power to manage them. As someone, however, was still necessary to supply his place whenever he absented himself he took in Marjolin, who was prowling about, after attempting in turn all the petty market callings.

Florent sometimes remained for an hour with Gavard, amazed by his ceaseless flow of chatter, and his calm serenity and assurance amid the crowd of petticoats. He would interrupt one woman, pick a quarrel with another ten stalls away, snatch a customer from a third, and make as much noise himself as his hundred and odd garrulous neighbours, whose incessant clamour kept the iron plates of the pavilion vibrating sonorously like so many gongs.

The poultry-dealer's only relations were a sister-in-law and a niece. When his wife died, her eldest sister, Madame Lecœur, who had become a widow about a year previously, had mourned for her in an exaggerated fashion, and gone almost every evening to tender consolation to the bereaved husband. She had doubtless cherished the hope that she might win his affection and fill the yet warm place of the deceased. Gavard, however, abominated lean women; and would, indeed, only stroke such cats and dogs as were very fat; so that Madame Lecœur, who was long and withered, failed in her designs.

With her feelings greatly hurt, furious at the ex-roaster's five-franc pieces eluding her grasp, she nurtured great spite against him. He became the enemy to whom she devoted all her time. When she saw him set up in the markets only a few yards away from the pavilion where she herself sold butter and eggs and cheese, she accused him of doing so simply for the sake of annoying her and bringing her bad luck. From that moment she began to lament, and turned so yellow and melancholy that she indeed ended by losing her customers

and getting into difficulties. She had for a long time kept with her the daughter of one of her sisters, a peasant-woman who had sent her the child and then taken no further trouble about it.

This child grew up in the markets. Her surname was Sarriet, and so she soon became generally known as La Sarriette. At sixteen years of age she had developed into such a charming sly-looking puss that gentlemen came to buy cheeses at her aunt's stall simply for the purpose of ogling her. She did not care for the gentlemen, however; with her dark hair, pale face, and eyes glistening like live embers, her sympathies were with the lower ranks of the people. At last she chose as her lover a young man from Ménilmontant who was employed by her aunt as a porter. At twenty she set up in business as a fruit-dealer with the help of some funds procured no one knew how; and thenceforth Monsieur Jules, as her lover was called, displayed spotless hands, a clean blouse, and a velvet cap; and only came down to the market in the afternoon, in his slippers. They lived together on the third storey of a large house in the Rue Vauvilliers, on the ground floor of which was a disreputable café.

Madame Lecœur's acerbity of temper was brought to a pitch by what she called La Sarriette's ingratitude, and she spoke of the girl in the most violent and abusive language. They broke off all intercourse, the aunt fairly exasperated, and the niece and Monsieur Jules concocting stories about the aunt, which the young man would repeat to the other dealers in the butter pavilion. Gavard found La Sarriette very entertaining, and treated her with great indulgence. Whenever they met he would good-naturedly pat her cheeks.

One afternoon, whilst Florent was sitting in his brother's shop, tired out with the fruitless pilgrimages he had made during the morning in search of work, Marjolin made his appearance there. This big lad, who had the massiveness and gentleness of a Fleming, was a *protégé* of Lisa's. She would say that there was no evil in him; that he was indeed a little bit stupid, but as strong as a horse, and particularly interesting from the fact that nobody knew anything of his parentage. It was she who had got Gavard to employ him.

Lisa was sitting behind the counter, feeling annoyed by the sight of Florent's muddy boots which were soiling the pink and white tiles of the flooring. Twice already had she

risen to scatter sawdust about the shop. However, she smiled at Marjolin as he entered.

'Monsieur Gavard,' began the young man, 'has sent me to ask——'

But all at once he stopped and glanced round; then in a lower voice he resumed: 'He told me to wait till there was no one with you, and then to repeat these words, which he made me learn by heart: "Ask them if there is no danger, and if I can come and talk to them of the matter they know about."'

'Tell Monsieur Gavard that we are expecting him,' replied Lisa, who was quite accustomed to the poultry-dealer's mysterious ways.

Marjolin, however, did not go away; but remained in ecstasy before the handsome mistress of the shop, contemplating her with an expression of fawning humility.

Touched, as it were, by this mute adoration, Lisa spoke to him again.

'Are you comfortable with Monsieur Gavard?' she asked. 'He's not an unkind man, and you ought to try to please him.'

'Yes, Madame Lisa.'

'But you don't behave as you should do, you know. Only yesterday I saw you clambering about the roofs of the market again; and, besides, you are constantly with a lot of disreputable lads and lasses. You ought to remember that you are a man now, and begin to think of the future.'

'Yes, Madame Lisa.'

However, Lisa had to get up to wait upon a lady who came in and wanted a pound of pork chops. She left the counter and went to the block at the far end of the shop. Here, with a long, slender knife, she cut three chops in a loin of pork; and then, raising a small cleaver with her strong hand, dealt three sharp blows which separated the chops from the loin. At each blow she dealt, her black merino dress rose slightly behind her, and the ribs of her stays showed beneath her tightly stretched bodice. She slowly took up the chops and weighed them with an air of gravity, her eyes gleaming and her lips tightly closed.

When the lady had gone, and Lisa perceived Marjolin still full of delight at having seen her deal those three clean, forcible blows with the cleaver, she at once called out to him, 'What! haven't you gone yet?'

He thereupon turned to go, but she detained him for a moment longer.

'Now, don't let me see you again with that hussy Cadine,' she said. 'Oh, it's no use to deny it! I saw you together this morning in the tripe-market, watching men breaking the sheep's heads. I can't understand what attraction a good-looking young fellow like you can find in such a slipshod slattern as Cadine. Now then, go and tell Monsieur Gavard that he had better come at once, while there's no one about.'

Marjolin thereupon went off in confusion, without saying a word.

Handsome Lisa remained standing behind her counter, with her head turned slightly in the direction of her markets, and Florent gazed at her in silence, surprised to see her looking so beautiful. He had never looked at her properly before; indeed, he did not know the right way to look at a woman. He now saw her rising above the viands on the counter. In front of her was an array of white china dishes, containing long Arles and Lyons sausages, slices of which had already been cut off, with tongues and pieces of boiled pork; then a pig's head in a mass of jelly; an open pot of preserved sausage-meat, and a large box of sardines disclosing a pool of oil. On the right and left, upon wooden platters, were mounds of French and Italian brawn, a common French ham, of a pinky hue, and a Yorkshire ham, whose deep red lean showed beneath a broad band of fat. There were other dishes too, round ones and oval ones, containing spiced tongue, truffled galantine, and a boar's head stuffed with pistachio nuts; while close to her, in reach of her hand, stood some yellow earthen pans containing larded veal, *pâté de foie gras*, and hare-pie.

As there were no signs of Gavard's coming, she arranged some fore-end bacon upon a little marble shelf at the end of the counter, put the jars of lard and dripping back into their places, wiped the plates of each pair of scales, and saw to the fire of the heater, which was getting low. Then she turned her head again, and gazed in silence towards the markets. The smell of all the viands ascended around her, she was enveloped, as it were, by the aroma of truffles. She looked beautifully fresh that afternoon. The whiteness of all the dishes was supplemented by that of her sleevelets and apron, above which appeared her plump neck and rosy cheeks, which

recalled the soft tones of the hams and the pallor of all the transparent fat.

As Florent continued to gaze at her he began to feel intimidated, disquieted by her prim, sedate demeanour; and in lieu of openly looking at her he ended by glancing surreptitiously in the mirrors around the shop, in which her back and face and profile could be seen. The mirror on the ceiling, too, reflected the top of her head, with its tightly rolled chignon and the little bands lowered over her temples. There seemed, indeed, to be a perfect crowd of Lisas, with broad shoulders, powerful arms, and round, full bosoms. At last Florent checked his roving eyes, and let them rest on a particularly pleasing side view of the young woman as mirrored between two pieces of pork. From the hooks running along the whole line of mirrors and marbles hung sides of pork and bands of larding fat; and Lisa, with her massive neck, rounded hips, and swelling bosom seen in profile, looked like some waxwork queen in the midst of the dangling fat and meat. However, she bent forward and smiled in a friendly way at the two gold-fish which were ever and ever swimming round the aquarium in the window.

Gavard entered the shop. With an air of great importance he went to fetch Quenu from the kitchen. Then he seated himself upon a small marble-topped table, while Florent remained on his chair and Lisa behind the counter; Quenu meantime leaning his back against a side of pork. And thereupon Gavard announced that he had at last found a situation for Florent. They would be vastly amused when they heard what it was, and the Government would be nicely caught.

But all at once he stopped short, for a passing neighbour, Mademoiselle Saget, having seen such a large party gossiping together at the Quenu-Gradelles', had opened the door and entered the shop. Carrying her everlasting black bag on her arm, dressed in a faded gown and a black ribbonless straw hat, which appropriately cast a shadow over her prying white face, she saluted the men with a slight bow and Lisa with a sharp smile.

She was an acquaintance of the family, and still lived in the house in the Rue Pirouette where she had resided for the last forty years, probably on a small private income; but of that she never spoke. She had, however, one day talked of Cherbourg, mentioning that she had been born there.

Nothing further was ever known of her antecedents. All her conversation was about other people; she could tell the whole story of their daily lives, even to the number of things they sent to be washed each month; and she carried her prying curiosity concerning her neighbours' affairs so far as to listen behind their doors and open their letters. Her tongue was feared from the Rue Saint Denis to the Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and from the Rue Saint Honoré to the Rue Mauconseil. All day long she went ferreting about with her empty bag, pretending that she was marketing, but in reality buying nothing, as her sole purpose was to retail scandal and gossip, and keep herself fully informed of every trifling incident that happened. Indeed, she had turned her brain into an encyclopædia brimful of every possible particular concerning the people of the neighbourhood and their homes.

Quenu had always accused her of having spread the story of his Uncle Gradelle's death on the chopping-block, and had borne her a grudge ever since. She was extremely well posted in the history of Uncle Gradelle and the Quenus, and knew them, she would say, by heart. For the last fortnight, however, Florent's arrival had greatly perplexed her, filled her, indeed, with a perfect fever of curiosity. She became quite ill when she discovered any unforeseen gap in her information. And yet she could have sworn that she had seen that tall lanky fellow somewhere or other before.

She remained standing in front of the counter, examining the dishes one after another, and saying in a shrill voice:

'I hardly know what to have. When the afternoon comes I feel quite famished for my dinner, and then, later on, I don't seem able to fancy anything at all. Have you got a cutlet rolled in bread-crumbs left, Madame Quenu?'

Without waiting for a reply, she removed one of the covers of the heater. It was that of the compartment reserved for the chitterlings, sausages, and black-puddings. However, the chafing-dish was quite cold, and there was nothing left but one stray forgotten sausage.

'Look under the other cover, Mademoiselle Saget,' said Lisa. 'I believe there's a cutlet there.'

'No, it doesn't tempt me,' muttered the little old woman, poking her nose under the other cover, however, all the same. 'I felt rather a fancy for one, but I'm afraid a cutlet

would be rather too heavy in the evening. I'd rather have something, too, that I need not warm.'

While speaking she had turned towards Florent and looked at him; then she looked at Gavard, who was beating a tattoo with his finger-tips on the marble table. She smiled at them, as though inviting them to continue their conversation.

'Wouldn't a little piece of salt pork suit you?' asked Lisa.

'A piece of salt pork? Yes, that might do.'

Thereupon she took up the fork with plated handle, which was lying at the edge of the dish, and began to turn all the pieces of pork about, prodding them, lightly tapping the bones to judge of their thickness, and minutely scrutinising the shreds of pinky meat. And as she turned them over she repeated, 'No, no; it doesn't tempt me.'

'Well, then, have a sheep's tongue, or a bit of brawn, or a slice of larded veal,' suggested Lisa patiently.

Mademoiselle Saget, however, shook her head. She remained there for a few minutes longer, pulling dissatisfied faces over the different dishes; then, seeing that the others were determined to remain silent, and that she would not be able to learn anything, she took herself off.

'No; I felt rather a fancy for a cutlet rolled in bread-crumbs,' she said as she left the shop, 'but the one you have left is too fat. I must come another time.'

Lisa bent forward to watch her through the sausage-skins hanging in the shop-front, and saw her cross the road and enter the fruit-market.

'The old she-goat!' growled Gavard.

Then, as they were now alone again, he began to tell them of the situation he had found for Florent. A friend of his, he said, Monsieur Verlaque, one of the fish-market inspectors, was so ill that he was obliged to take a rest; and that very morning the poor man had told him that he should be very glad to find a substitute who would keep the berth open for him in case he should recover.

'Verlaque, you know, won't last another six months,' added Gavard, 'and Florent will keep the place. It's a splendid idea, isn't it? And it will be such a take-in for the police! The berth is under the Préfecture, you know. What glorious fun to see Florent getting paid by the police, eh?'

He burst into a hearty laugh; the idea struck him as so extremely comical.

'I won't take the place,' Florent bluntly replied. 'I've sworn I'll never accept anything from the Empire, and I would rather die of starvation than serve under the Préfecture. It is quite out of the question, Gavard, quite so!'

Gavard seemed somewhat put out on hearing this. Quenu had lowered his head, while Lisa, turning round, looked keenly at Florent, her neck swollen, her bosom straining her bodice almost to bursting-point. She was just going to open her mouth when La Sarriette entered the shop, and there was another pause in the conversation.

'Dear me!' exclaimed La Sarriette with her soft laugh, 'I'd almost forgotten to get any bacon fat. Please, Madame Quenu, cut me a dozen thin strips—very thin ones, you know; I want them for larding larks. Jules has taken it into his head to eat some larks. Ah! how do you do, uncle?'

She filled the whole shop with her dancing skirts and smiled brightly at everyone. Her face looked fresh and creamy, and on one side her hair was coming down, loosened by the wind which blew through the markets. Gavard grasped her hands, while she with merry impudence resumed: 'I'll bet that you were talking about me just as I came in. Tell me what you were saying, uncle.'

However, Lisa now called to her, 'Just look and tell me if this is thin enough.'

She was cutting the strips of bacon fat with great care on a piece of board in front of her. Then as she wrapped them up she inquired, 'Can I give you anything else?'

'Well, yes,' replied La Sarriette; 'since I'm about it, I think I'll have a pound of lard. I'm awfully fond of fried potatoes; I can make a breakfast off a penn'orth of potatoes and a bunch of radishes. Yes, I'll have a pound of lard, please, Madame Quenu.'

Lisa placed a sheet of stout paper in the pan of the scales. Then she took the lard out of a jar under the shelves with a boxwood spatula, gently adding small quantities to the fatty heap, which began to melt and run slightly. When the plate of the scale fell, she took up the paper, folded it, and rapidly twisted the ends with her finger-tips.

'That makes twenty-four sous,' she said; 'the bacon is

six sous—thirty sous altogether. There's nothing else you want, is there?'

'No,' said La Sarriette, 'nothing.' She paid her money, still laughing and showing her teeth, and staring the men in the face. Her grey skirt was all awry, and her loosely-fastened red neckerchief allowed a little of her white bosom to appear. Before she went away she stepped up to Gavard again, and pretending to threaten him exclaimed: 'So you won't tell me what you were talking about as I came in? I could see you laughing from the street. Oh, you sly fellow! Ah! I sha'n't love you any longer!'

Then she left the shop and ran across the road.

'It was Mademoiselle Saget who sent her here,' remarked handsome Lisa drily.

Then silence fell again for some moments. Gavard was dismayed at Florent's reception of his proposal. Lisa was the first to speak. 'It is wrong of you to refuse the post, Florent,' she said in the most friendly tones. 'You know how difficult it is to find any employment, and you are not in a position to be over-exacting.'

'I have my reasons,' Florent replied.

Lisa shrugged her shoulders. 'Come, now,' said she, 'you really can't be serious, I'm sure. I can understand that you are not in love with the Government, but it would be too absurd to let your opinions prevent you from earning your living. And, besides, my dear fellow, the Emperor isn't at all a bad sort of man. You don't suppose, do you, that he knew you were eating mouldy bread and tainted meat? He can't be everywhere, you know, and you can see for yourself that he hasn't prevented us here from doing pretty well. You are not at all just; indeed you are not.'

Gavard, however, was getting very fidgety. He could not bear to hear people speak well of the Emperor.

'No, no, Madame Quenu,' he interrupted; 'you are going too far. It is a scoundrelly system altogether.'

'Oh, as for you,' exclaimed Lisa vivaciously, 'you'll never rest until you've got yourself plundered and knocked on the head as the result of all your wild talk. Don't let us discuss politics; you would only make me angry. The question is Florent, isn't it? Well, for my part, I say that he ought to accept this inspectorship. Don't you think so too, Quenu?'

Quenu, who had not yet said a word, was very much put out by his wife's sudden appeal.

'It's a good berth,' he replied, without compromising himself.

Then, amidst another interval of awkward silence, Florent resumed: 'I beg you, let us drop the subject. My mind is quite made up. I shall wait.'

'You will wait!' cried Lisa, losing patience.

Two rosy fires had risen to her cheeks. As she stood there, erect, in her white apron, with rounded, swelling hips, it was with difficulty that she restrained herself from breaking out into bitter words. However, the entrance of another person into the shop arrested her anger. The new arrival was Madame Lecœur.

'Can you let me have half a pound of mixed meats at fifty sous the pound?' she asked.

She at first pretended not to notice her brother-in-law; but presently she just nodded her head to him, without speaking. Then she scrutinised the three men from head to foot, doubtless hoping to divine their secret by the manner in which they waited for her to go. She could see that she was putting them out, and the knowledge of this rendered her yet more sour and angular, as she stood there in her limp skirts, with her long, spider-like arms bent and her knotted fingers clasped beneath her apron. Then, as she coughed slightly, Gavard, whom the silence embarrassed, inquired if she had a cold.

She curtly answered in the negative. Her tightly-stretched skin was of a red-brick colour on those parts of her face where her bones protruded, and the dull fire burning in her eyes and scorching their lids testified to some liver complaint nurtured by the querulous jealousy of her disposition. She turned round again towards the counter, and watched each movement made by Lisa as she served her with the distrustful glance of one who is convinced that an attempt will be made to defraud her.

'Don't give me any saveloy,' she exclaimed; 'I don't like it.'

Lisa had taken up a slender knife, and was cutting some thin slices of sausage. She next passed on to the smoked ham and the common ham, cutting delicate slices from each, and bending forward slightly as she did so, with her eyes ever fixed on the knife. Her plump rosy hands, flitting about the viands with light and gentle touches, seemed to have derived suppleness from contact with all the fat.

'You would like some larded veal, wouldn't you?' she asked, bringing a yellow pan towards her.

Madame Lecœur seemed to be thinking the matter over at considerable length; however, she at last said that she would have some. Lisa had now begun to cut into the contents of the pans, from which she removed slices of larded veal and hare *pâté* on the tip of a broad-bladed knife. And she deposited each successive slice on the middle of a sheet of paper placed on the scales.

'Aren't you going to give me some of the boar's head with pistachio nuts?' asked Madame Lecœur in her querulous voice.

Lisa was obliged to add some of the boar's head. But the butter-dealer was getting exacting, and asked for two slices of galantine. She was very fond of it. Lisa, who was already irritated, played impatiently with the handles of the knives, and told her that the galantine was truffled, and that she could only include it in an 'assortment' at three francs the pound. Madame Lecœur, however, still continued to pry into the dishes, trying to find something else to ask for. When the 'assortment' was weighed she made Lisa add some jelly and gherkins to it. The block of jelly, shaped like a Savoy cake, shook on its white china dish beneath the angry violence of Lisa's hand; and as with her finger-tips she took a couple of gherkins from a jar behind the heater, she made the vinegar spurt over the sides.

'Twenty-five sous, isn't it?' Madame Lecœur leisurely inquired.

She fully perceived Lisa's covert irritation, and greatly enjoyed the sight of it, producing her money as slowly as possible, as though, indeed, her silver had got lost amongst the coppers in her pocket. And she glanced askance at Gavard, relishing the embarrassed silence which her presence was prolonging, and vowing that she would not go off, since they were hiding some trickery or other from her. However, Lisa at last put the parcel in her hands, and she was then obliged to take her departure. She went away without saying a word, but darting a searching glance all round the shop.

'It was that Saget who sent her too!' burst out Lisa, as soon as the old woman was gone. 'Is the old wretch going to send the whole market here to try to find out what we talk about? What a prying, malicious set they are! Did anyone ever hear before of crumbed cutlets and 'assortments'

being bought at five o'clock in the afternoon? But then they'd rack themselves with indigestion rather than not find out! Upon my word, though, if La Saget sends anyone else here, you'll see the reception she'll get. I would bundle her out of the shop, even if she were my own sister!'

The three men remained silent in presence of this explosion of anger. Gavard had gone to lean over the brass rail of the window-front, where, seemingly lost in thought, he began playing with one of the cut-glass balusters detached from its wire fastening. Presently, however, he raised his head. 'Well, for my part,' he said, 'I looked upon it all as an excellent joke.'

'Looked upon what as a joke?' asked Lisa, still quivering with indignation.

'The inspectorship.'

She raised her hands, gave a last glance at Florent, and then sat down upon the cushioned bench behind the counter and said nothing further. Gavard, however, began to explain his views at length; the drift of his argument being that it was the Government which would look foolish in the matter, since Florent would be taking its money.

'My dear fellow,' he said complacently, 'those scoundrels all but starved you to death, didn't they? Well, you must make them feed you now. It's a splendid idea; it caught my fancy at once!'

Florent smiled, but still persisted in his refusal. Quenu, in the hope of pleasing his wife, did his best to find some good arguments. Lisa, however, appeared to pay no further attention to them. For the last moment or two she had been looking attentively in the direction of the markets. And all at once she sprang to her feet again, exclaiming, 'Ah! it is La Normande that they are sending to play the spy on us now! Well, so much the worse for La Normande; she shall pay for the others!'

A tall female pushed the shop-door open. It was the handsome fish-girl, Louise Méhudin, generally known as La Normande. She was a bold-looking beauty, with a delicate white skin, and was almost as plump as Lisa, but there was more effrontery in her glance, and her bosom heaved with warmer life. She came into the shop with a light swinging step, her gold chain jingling on her apron, her bare hair arranged in the latest style, and a bow at her throat, a lace bow, which made her one of the most coquettish-looking queens of the

markets. She brought a vague odour of fish with her, and a herring-scale showed like a tiny patch of mother-of-pearl near the little finger of one of her hands. She and Lisa having lived in the same house in the Rue Pirouette, were intimate friends, linked by a touch of rivalry which kept each of them busy with thoughts of the other. In the neighbourhood people spoke of 'the beautiful Norman,' just as they spoke of 'beautiful Lisa.' This brought them into opposition and comparison, and compelled each of them to do her utmost to sustain her reputation for beauty. Lisa from her counter could, by stooping a little, perceive the fish-girl amidst her salmon and turbot in the pavilion opposite; and each kept a watch upon the other. Beautiful Lisa laced herself more tightly in her stays; and the beautiful Norman replied by placing additional rings on her fingers and additional bows on her shoulders. When they met they were very bland and unctuous and profuse in compliments; but all the while their eyes were furtively glancing from under their lowered lids, in the hope of discovering some flaw. They made a point of always dealing with each other, and professed great mutual affection.

'I say,' said La Normande, with her smiling air, 'it's to-morrow evening that you make your black-puddings, isn't it?'

Lisa maintained a cold demeanour. She seldom showed any anger; but when she did it was tenacious, and slow to be appeased. 'Yes,' she replied drily, with the tips of her lips.

'I'm so fond of black-puddings, you know, when they come straight out of the pot,' resumed La Normande. 'I'll come and get some of you to-morrow.'

She was conscious of her rival's unfriendly greeting. However, she glanced at Florent, who seemed to interest her; and then, unwilling to go off without having the last word, she was imprudent enough to add: 'I bought some black-pudding of you the day before yesterday, you know, and it wasn't quite sweet.'

'Not quite sweet!' repeated Lisa, very pale, and her lips quivering.

She might, perhaps, have once more restrained herself, for fear of La Normande imagining that she was overcome by envious spite at the sight of the lace bow; but the girl, not content with playing the spy, proceeded to insult her, and that was beyond endurance. So, leaning forward, with

her hands clenched on the counter, she exclaimed, in a somewhat hoarse voice: 'I say! when you sold me that pair of soles last week, did I come and tell you, before everybody, that they were stinking?'

'Stinking! my soles stinking!' cried the fish-dealer, flushing scarlet.

For a moment they remained silent, choking with anger, but glaring fiercely at each other over the array of dishes. All their honeyed friendship had vanished; a word had sufficed to reveal what sharp teeth there were behind their smiling lips.

'You're a vulgar, low creature!' cried the beautiful Norman. 'You'll never catch me setting foot in here again, I can tell you!'

'Get along with you, get along with you,' exclaimed beautiful Lisa. 'I know quite well whom I've got to deal with!'

The fish-girl went off, hurling behind her a coarse expression which left Lisa quivering. The whole scene had passed so quickly that the three men, overcome with amazement, had not had time to interfere. Lisa soon recovered herself, and was resuming the conversation, without making any allusion to what had just occurred, when the shop-girl, Augustine, returned from an errand on which she had been sent. Lisa thereupon took Gavard aside, and after telling him to say nothing for the present to Monsieur Verlaque, promised that she would undertake to convince her brother-in-law in a couple of days' time at the utmost. Quenu then returned to his kitchen, while Gavard took Florent off with him. And as they were just going into Monsieur Lebigre's to drink a drop of vermouth together he called his attention to three women standing in the covered way between the fish and poultry pavilions.

'They're cackling together!' he said with an envious air.

The markets were growing empty, and Mademoiselle Saget, Madame Lecœur, and La Sarriette alone lingered on the edge of the footway. The old maid was holding forth.

'As I told you before, Madame Lecœur,' said she, 'they've always got your brother-in-law in their shop. You saw him there yourself just now, didn't you?'

'Oh yes, indeed! He was sitting on a table, and seemed quite at home.'

'Well, for my part,' interrupted La Sarriette, 'I heard nothing wrong; and I can't understand why you're making such a fuss.'

Mademoiselle Saget shrugged her shoulders. 'Ah, you're very innocent yet, my dear,' she said. 'Can't you see why the Quenus are always attracting Monsieur Gavard to their place? Well, I'll wager that he'll leave all he has to their little Pauline.'

'You believe that, do you?' cried Madame Lecœur, white with rage. Then, in a mournful voice, as though she had just received some heavy blow, she continued: 'I am alone in the world, and have no one to take my part; he is quite at liberty to do as he pleases. His niece sides with him too—you heard her just now. She has quite forgotten all that she cost me, and wouldn't stir a hand to help me.'

'Indeed, aunt,' exclaimed La Sarriette, 'you are quite wrong there! It's you who've never had anything but unkind words for me.'

They became reconciled on the spot, and kissed one another. The niece promised that she would play no more pranks, and the aunt swore by all she held most sacred that she looked upon La Sarriette as her own daughter. Then Mademoiselle Saget advised them as to the steps they ought to take to prevent Gavard from squandering his money. And they all agreed that the Quenu-Gradelles were very disreputable folks, and required closely watching.

'I don't know what they're up to just now,' said the old maid, 'but there's something suspicious going on, I'm sure. What's your opinion, now, of that fellow Florent, that cousin of Madame Quenu's?'

The three women drew more closely together, and lowered their voices.

'You remember,' said Madame Lecœur, 'that we saw him one morning with his boots all split, and his clothes covered with dust, looking just like a thief who's been up to some roguery. That fellow quite frightens me.'

'Well, he's certainly very thin,' said La Sarriette, 'but he isn't ugly.'

Mademoiselle Saget was reflecting, and she expressed her thoughts aloud. 'I've been trying to find out something about him for the last fortnight, but I can make nothing of it. Monsieur Gavard certainly knows him. I must have

met him myself somewhere before, but I can't remember where.'

She was still ransacking her memory when La Normande swept up to them like a whirlwind. She had just left the pork-shop.

'That big booby Lisa has got nice manners, I must say!' she cried, delighted to be able to relieve herself. 'Fancy her telling me that I sold nothing but stinking fish! But I gave her as good as she deserved, I can tell you! A nice den they keep, with their tainted pig-meat which poisons all their customers!'

'But what had you been saying to her?' asked the old maid, quite frisky with excitement, and delighted to hear that the two women had quarrelled.

'I! I'd said just nothing at all—no, not that! I just went into the shop and told her very civilly that I'd buy some black-puddings to-morrow evening, and then she overwhelmed me with abuse. A dirty hypocrite she is, with her saint-like airs! But she'll pay more dearly for this than she fancies!'

The three women felt that La Normande was not telling them the truth, but this did not prevent them from taking her part with a rush of bad language. They turned towards the Rue Rambuteau with insulting mien, inventing all sorts of stories about the uncleanliness of the cookery at the Quenu's shop, and making the most extraordinary accusations. If the Quenus had been detected selling human flesh the women could not have displayed more violent and threatening anger. The fish-girl was obliged to tell her story three times over.

'And what did the cousin say?' asked Mademoiselle Saget, with wicked intent.

'The cousin!' repeated La Normande, in a shrill voice. 'Do you really believe that he's a cousin? He's some lover or other, I'll wager, the great booby!'

The three others protested against this. Lisa's honourability was an article of faith in the neighbourhood.

'Stuff and nonsense!' retorted La Normande. 'You can never be sure about those smug, sleek hypocrites.'

Mademoiselle Saget nodded her head as if to say that she was not very far from sharing La Normande's opinion. And she softly added: 'Especially as this cousin has sprung from no one knows where; for it's a very doubtful sort of account that the Quenus give of him.'

'Oh, he's the fat woman's sweetheart, I tell you!' re-

affirmed the fish-girl; 'some scamp or vagabond picked up in the streets. It's easy enough to see it.'

'She has given him a complete outfit,' remarked Madame Lecœur. 'He must be costing her a pretty penny.'

'Yes, yes,' muttered the old maid; 'perhaps you are right. I must really get to know something about him.'

Then they all promised to keep one another thoroughly informed of whatever might take place in the Quenu-Gradelle establishment. The butter-dealer pretended that she wished to open her brother-in-law's eyes as to the sort of places he frequented. However, La Normande's anger had by this time toned down, and, a good sort of girl at heart, she went off, weary of having talked so much on the matter.

'I'm sure that La Normande said something or other insolent,' remarked Madame Lecœur knowingly, when the fish-girl had left them. 'It is just her way; and it scarcely becomes a creature like her to talk as she did of Lisa.'

The three women looked at each other and smiled. Then, when Madame Lecœur also had gone off, La Sarriette remarked to Mademoiselle Saget: 'It is foolish of my aunt to worry herself so much about all these affairs. It's that which makes her so thin. Ah! she'd have willingly taken Gavard for a husband if she could only have got him. Yet she used to beat me if ever a young man looked my way.'

Mademoiselle Saget smiled once more. And when she found herself alone, and went back towards the Rue Pirouette, she reflected that those three cackling hussies were not worth a rope to hang them. She was, indeed, a little afraid that she might have been seen with them, and the idea somewhat troubled her, for she realised that it would be bad policy to fall out with the Quenu-Gradelles, who, after all, were well-to-do folks and much esteemed. So she went a little out of her way on purpose to call at Taboureau the baker's, in the Rue Turbigo—the finest baker's shop in the whole neighbourhood. Madame Taboureau was not only an intimate friend of Lisa's, but an accepted authority on every subject. When it was remarked that 'Madame Taboureau had said this,' or 'Madame Taboureau had said that,' there was no more to be urged. So the old maid, calling at the baker's under pretence of inquiring at what time the oven would be hot, as she wished to bring a dish of pears to be baked, took the opportunity to eulogise Lisa, and lavish praise upon the sweetness and excellence of her black-puddings.

Then, well pleased at having prepared this moral *alibi* and delighted at having done what she could to fan the flames of a quarrel without involving herself in it, she briskly returned home, feeling much easier in her mind, but still striving to recall where she had previously seen Madame Quenu's so-called cousin.

That same evening, after dinner, Florent went out and strolled for some time in one of the covered ways of the markets. A fine mist was rising, and a grey sadness, which the gas-lights studded as with yellow tears, hung over the deserted pavilions. For the first time Florent began to feel that he was in the way, and to recognise the unmannerly fashion in which he, thin and artless, had tumbled into this world of fat people; and he frankly admitted to himself that his presence was disturbing the whole neighbourhood, and that he was a source of discomfort to the Quenus—a spurious cousin of far too compromising appearance. These reflections made him very sad; not, indeed, that he had noticed the slightest harshness on the part of his brother or Lisa: it was their very kindness, rather, that was troubling him, and he accused himself of a lack of delicacy in quartering himself upon them. He was beginning to doubt the propriety of his conduct. The recollection of the conversation in the shop during the afternoon caused him a vague disquietude. The odour of the viands on Lisa's counter seemed to penetrate him; he felt himself gliding into nerveless, satiated cowardice. Perhaps he had acted wrongly in refusing the inspectorship offered him. This reflection gave birth to a stormy struggle in his mind, and he was obliged to brace and shake himself before he could recover his wonted rigidity of principles. However, a moist breeze had risen, and was blowing along the covered way, and he regained some degree of calmness and resolution on being obliged to button up his coat. The wind seemingly swept from his clothes all the greasy odour of the pork-shop, which had made him feel so languid.

He was returning home when he met Claude Lantier. The artist, hidden in the folds of his greenish overcoat, spoke in a hollow voice full of suppressed anger. He was in a passion with painting, declared that it was a dog's trade, and swore that he would not take up a brush again as long as he lived. That very afternoon he had thrust his foot through a study which he had been making of the head of that hussy Cadine.

Claude was subject to these outbursts, the fruit of his inability to execute the lasting, living works which he dreamed of. And at such times life became an utter blank to him, and he wandered about the streets, wrapped in the gloomiest thoughts, and waiting for the morning as for a sort of resurrection. He used to say that he felt bright and cheerful in the morning, and horribly miserable in the evening.[1] Each of his days was a long effort ending in disappointment. Florent scarcely recognised in him the careless night-wanderer of the markets. They had already met again at the pork-shop, and Claude, who knew the fugitive's story, had grasped his hand and told him that he was a sterling fellow. It was very seldom, however, that the artist went to the Quenus'.

'Are you still at my aunt's?' he asked. 'I can't imagine how you manage to exist amidst all that cookery. The place reeks with the smell of meat. When I've been there for an hour I feel as though I shouldn't want anything to eat for another three days. I ought not to have gone there this morning; it was that which made me make a mess of my work.'

Then, after he and Florent had taken a few steps in silence, he resumed:

'Ah! the good people! They quite grieve me with their fine health. I had thought of painting their portraits, but I've never been able to succeed with such round faces, in which there is never a bone. Ah! You wouldn't find my aunt Lisa kicking her foot through her pans! I was an idiot to have destroyed Cadine's head! Now that I come to think of it, it wasn't so very bad, perhaps, after all.'

Then they began to talk about Aunt Lisa. Claude said that his mother[2] had not seen anything of her for a long time, and he hinted that the pork-butcher's wife was somewhat ashamed of her sister having married a common working man; moreover, she wasn't at all fond of unfortunate folks. Speaking of himself, he told Florent that a benevolent gentleman had sent him to college, being very pleased with the donkeys and old women that he had managed to draw when only eight years old; but the good soul had died, leaving

[1] Claude Lantier's struggle for fame is fully described in M. Zola's novel, *L'Œuvre* ('His Masterpiece').—*Trans.*

[2] Gervaise, the heroine of the *Assommoir*.

him an income of a thousand francs, which just saved him from perishing of hunger.

'All the same, I would rather have been a working man,' continued Claude. 'Look at the carpenters, for instance. They are very happy folks, the carpenters. They have a table to make, say; well, they make it, and then go off to bed, happy at having finished the table, and perfectly satisfied with themselves. Now I, on the other hand, scarcely get any sleep at nights. All those confounded pictures which I can't finish go flying about my brain. I never get anything finished and done with—never, never!'

His voice almost broke into a sob. Then he attempted to laugh; and afterwards began to swear and pour forth coarse expressions, with the cold rage of one who, endowed with a delicate, sensitive mind, doubts his own powers, and dreams of wallowing in the mire. He ended by squatting down before one of the gratings which admit air into the cellars beneath the markets—cellars where the gas is continually kept burning. And in the depths below he pointed out Marjolin and Cadine tranquilly eating their supper, whilst seated on one of the stone blocks used for killing the poultry. The two young vagabonds had discovered a means of hiding themselves and making themselves at home in the cellars after the doors had been closed.

'What a magnificent animal he is, eh!' exclaimed Claude, with envious admiration, speaking of Marjolin. 'He and Cadine are happy, at all events! All they care for is eating and kissing. They haven't a care in the world. Ah, you do quite right, after all, to remain at the pork-shop; perhaps you'll grow sleek and plump there.'

Then he suddenly went off. Florent climbed up to his garret, disturbed by Claude's nervous restlessness, which revived his own uncertainty. On the morrow, he avoided the pork-shop all the morning, and went for a long walk on the quays. When he returned to lunch, however, he was struck by Lisa's kindliness. Without any undue insistence she again spoke to him about the inspectorship, as of something which was well worth his consideration. As he listened to her, with a full plate in front of him, he was affected, in spite of himself, by the prim comfort of his surroundings. The matting beneath his feet seemed very soft; the gleams of the brass hanging lamp, the soft, yellow tint of the wall-paper, and the bright oak of the furniture filled him with appreciation

of a life spent in comfort, which disturbed his notions of right and wrong. He still, however, had sufficient strength to persist in his refusal, and repeated his reasons; albeit conscious of the bad taste he was showing in thus ostentatiously parading his animosity and obstinacy in such a place. Lisa showed no signs of vexation; on the contrary, she smiled, and the sweetness of her smile embarrassed Florent far more than her suppressed irritation of the previous evening. At dinner the subject was not renewed; they talked solely of the great winter saltings, which would keep the whole staff of the establishment busily employed.

The evenings were growing cold, and as soon as they had dined they retired into the kitchen, where it was very warm. The room was so large, too, that several people could sit comfortably at the square central table, without in any way impeding the work that was going on. Lighted by gas, the walls were coated with white and blue tiles to a height of some five or six feet from the floor. On the left was a great iron stove, in the three apertures of which were set three large round pots, their bottoms black with soot. At the end was a small range, which, fitted with an oven and a smoking-place, served for the broiling; and up above, over the skimming-spoons, ladles, and long-handled forks, were several numbered drawers, containing rasped bread, both fine and coarse, toasted crumbs, spices, cloves, nutmegs, and pepper. On the right, leaning heavily against the wall, was the chopping-block, a huge mass of oak, slashed and scored all over. Attached to it were several appliances, an injecting-pump, a forcing-machine, and a mechanical mincer, which, with their wheels and cranks, imparted to the place an uncanny and mysterious aspect, suggesting some kitchen of the infernal regions.

Then, all round the walls upon shelves, and even under the tables, were iron pots, earthenware pans, dishes, pails, various kinds of tin utensils, a perfect battery of deep copper saucepans, and swelling funnels, racks of knives and choppers, rows of larding-pins and needles—a perfect world of greasy things. In spite of the extreme cleanliness, grease was paramount; it oozed forth from between the blue and white tiles on the wall, glistened on the red tiles of the flooring, gave a greyish glitter to the stove, and polished the edges of the chopping-block with the transparent sheen of varnished oak. And, indeed, amidst the ever-rising steam, the continuous evaporation from the three big pots, in which pork was boiling and melting, there

was not a single nail from ceiling to floor from which grease did not exude.

The Quenu-Gradelles prepared nearly all their stock themselves. All that they procured from outside were the potted meats of celebrated firms, with jars of pickles and preserves, sardines, cheeses, and edible snails. They consequently became very busy after September in filling the cellars which had been emptied during the summer. They continued working even after the shop had been closed for the night. Assisted by Auguste and Léon, Quenu would stuff sausage-skins, prepare hams, melt down lard, and salt the different sorts of bacon. There was a tremendous noise of caldrons and cleavers, and the odour of cooking spread through the whole house. And all this was quite independent of the daily business in fresh pork, *pâté de foie gras*, hare patty, galantine, saveloys, and black-puddings.

That evening, at about eleven o'clock, Quenu, after placing a couple of pots on the fire in order to melt down some lard, began to prepare the black-puddings. Auguste assisted him. At one corner of the square table Lisa and Augustine sat mending linen, whilst opposite to them, on the other side, with his face turned towards the fireplace, was Florent, smiling at little Pauline, who had installed herself on his feet, and wished him to make her spring into the air. Behind Florent, Léon was mincing some sausage-meat on the oak block in a slow, rhythmical fashion.

Auguste first of all went out into the yard to fetch a couple of jug-like cans full of pigs' blood. It was he who stuck the animals in the slaughter-house. He himself would carry away the blood and interior portions of the pigs, leaving the men who scalded the carcasses to bring them home completely dressed in their carts. Quenu asserted that no assistant in all Paris was Auguste's equal as a pig-sticker. The truth was that Auguste was a wonderfully keen judge of the quality of the blood; and the black-pudding proved good every time that he said such would be the case.

'Well, will the black-pudding be good this time?' asked Lisa.

Auguste put down the two cans and slowly answered: 'I believe so, Madame Quenu; yes, I believe so. I tell it at first by the way the blood flows. If it spurts out very gently when I pull out the knife, that's a bad sign, and shows that the blood is poor.'

'But doesn't that depend on how far the knife has been stuck in?' asked Quenu.

A smile came over Auguste's pale face. 'No,' he replied; 'I always let four digits of the blade go in; that's the right measure. But the best sign of all is when the blood runs out and I beat it with my hand when it pours into the pail; it ought to be of a good warmth, and creamy, without being too thick.'

Augustine had put down her needle, and with her eyes raised was now gazing at Auguste. On her ruddy face, crowned by wiry chestnut hair, there was an expression of profound attention. Lisa and even little Pauline were also listening with deep interest.

'Well, I beat it, and beat it, and beat it,' continued the young man, whisking his hand about as though he were whipping cream. 'And then, when I take my hand out and look at it, it ought to be greased, as it were, by the blood and equally coated all over. And if that's the case, anyone can say without fear of mistake that the black-puddings will be good.'

He remained for a moment in an easy attitude, complacently holding his hand in the air. This hand, which spent so much of its time in pails of blood, had brightly gleaming nails, and looked very rosy above his white sleeve. Quenu had nodded his head in approbation, and an interval of silence followed. Léon was still mincing. Pauline, however, after remaining thoughtful for a little while, mounted upon Florent's feet again, and in her clear voice exclaimed: 'I say, cousin, tell me the story of the gentleman who was eaten by the wild beasts!'

It was probably the mention of the pig's blood which had aroused in the child's mind the recollection of 'the gentleman who had been eaten by the wild beasts.' Florent did not at first understand what she referred to, and asked her what gentleman she meant. Lisa began to smile.

'She wants you to tell her,' she said, 'the story of that unfortunate man—you know whom I mean—which you told to Gavard one evening. She must have heard you.'

At this Florent grew very grave. The little girl got up, and taking the big cat in her arms, placed it on his knees, saying that Mouton also would like to hear the story. Mouton, however, leapt on to the table, where, with rounded back, he remained contemplating the tall, scraggy

individual who for the last fortnight had apparently afforded him matter for deep reflection. Pauline meantime began to grow impatient, stamping her feet and insisting on hearing the story.

'Oh, tell her what she wants,' said Lisa, as the child persisted and became quite unbearable; 'she'll leave us in peace then.'

Florent remained silent for a moment longer, with his eyes turned towards the floor. Then slowly raising his head he let his gaze rest first on the two women who were plying their needles, and next on Quenu and Auguste, who were preparing the pot for the black-puddings. The gas was burning quietly, the stove diffused a gentle warmth, and all the grease of the kitchen glistened in an atmosphere of comfort such as attends good digestion.

Then taking little Pauline upon his knee, and smiling a sad smile, Florent addressed himself to the child as follows[1]: —

'Once upon a time there was a poor man who was sent away, a long, long way off, right across the sea. On the ship which carried him were four hundred convicts, and he was thrown among them. He was forced to live for five weeks amidst all those scoundrels, dressed like them in coarse canvas, and feeding at their mess. Foul insects preyed on him, and terrible sweats robbed him of all his strength. The kitchen, the bakehouse, and the engine-room made the orlop deck so terribly hot that ten of the convicts died from it. In the daytime they were sent up in batches of fifty to get a little fresh air from the sea; and as the crew of the ship feared them, a couple of cannons were pointed at the little bit of deck where they took exercise. The poor fellow was very glad indeed when his turn to go up came. His terrible perspiration then abated somewhat; still, he could not eat, and felt very ill. During the night, when he was manacled again, and the rolling of the ship in the rough sea kept knocking him against his companions, he quite broke down, and began to cry, glad to be able to do so without being seen.'

[1] Florent's narrative is not romance, but is based on the statements of several of the innocent victims whom the third Napoleon transported to Cayenne when wading through blood to the power which he so misused.—*Trans.*

Pauline was listening with dilated eyes, and her little hands crossed primly in front of her.

'But this isn't the story of the gentleman who was eaten by the wild beasts,' she interrupted. 'This is quite a different story; isn't it now, cousin?'

'Wait a bit, and you'll see,' replied Florent gently. 'I shall come to the gentleman presently. I'm telling you the whole story from the beginning.'

'Oh, thank you,' murmured the child, with a delighted expression. However, she remained thoughtful, evidently struggling with some great difficulty to which she could find no explanation. At last she spoke.

'But what had the poor man done,' she asked, 'that he was sent away and put in the ship?'

Lisa and Augustine smiled. They were quite charmed with the child's intelligence; and Lisa, without giving the little one a direct reply, took advantage of the opportunity to teach her a lesson by telling her that naughty children were also sent away in boats like that.

'Oh, then,' remarked Pauline judiciously, 'perhaps it served my cousin's poor man quite right if he cried all night long.'

Lisa resumed her sewing, bending over her work. Quenu had not listened. He had been cutting some little rounds of onion over a pot placed on the fire; and almost at once the onions began to crackle, raising a clear shrill chirrup like that of grasshoppers basking in the heat. They gave out a pleasant odour too, and when Quenu plunged his great wooden spoon into the pot the chirruping became yet louder, and the whole kitchen was filled with the penetrating perfume of the onions. Auguste meantime was preparing some bacon fat in a dish, and Léon's chopper fell faster and faster, and every now and then scraped the block so as to gather together the sausage-meat, now almost a paste.

'When they got across the sea,' Florent continued, 'they took the man to an island called the Devil's Island,[1] where he found himself amongst others who had been carried away from their own country. They were all very unhappy. At first they were kept to hard labour, just like convicts. The gendarme who had charge of them counted them three times

[1] The Ile du Diable. This spot was selected as the place of detention of Captain Dreyfus, the French officer convicted in 1894 of having divulged important military documents to foreign powers.—*Trans.*

every day, so as to be sure that none was missing. Later on, they were left free to do as they liked, being merely locked up at night in a big wooden hut, where they slept in hammocks stretched between two bars. At the end of the year they went about barefooted, as their boots were quite worn out, and their clothes had become so ragged that their flesh showed through them. They had built themselves some huts with trunks of trees as a shelter against the sun, which is terribly hot in those parts; but these huts did not shield them against the mosquitoes, which covered them with pimples and swellings during the night. Many of them died, and the others turned quite yellow, so shrunken and wretched, with their long, unkempt beards, that one could not behold them without pity.'

'Auguste, give me the fat,' cried Quenu; and when the apprentice had handed him the dish he let the pieces of bacon-fat slide gently into the pot, and then stirred them with his spoon. A yet denser steam now rose from the fireplace.

'What did they give them to eat?' asked little Pauline, who seemed deeply interested.

'They gave them maggoty rice and foul meat,' answered Florent, whose voice grew lower as he spoke. 'The rice could scarcely be eaten. When the meat was roasted and very well done it was just possible to swallow it; but if it was boiled, it smelt so dreadfully that the men had nausea and stomach-ache.'

'I'd rather have lived upon dry bread,' said the child, after thinking the matter carefully over.

Léon, having finished the mincing, now placed the sausage-meat upon the square table in a dish. Mouton, who had remained seated with his eyes fixed upon Florent, as though filled with amazement by his story, was obliged to retreat a few steps, which he did with a very bad grace. Then he rolled himself up, with his nose close to the sausage-meat, and began to purr.

Lisa was unable to conceal her disgust and amazement. That foul rice, that evil-smelling meat, seemed to her to be scarcely credible abominations, which disgraced those who had eaten them as much as it did those who had provided them; and her calm, handsome face and round neck quivered with vague fear of the man who had lived upon such horrid food.

'No, indeed, it was not a land of delights,' Florent resumed, forgetting all about little Pauline, and fixing his dreamy eyes upon the steaming pot. 'Every day brought fresh annoyances—perpetual grinding tyranny, the violation of every principle of justice, contempt for all human charity, which exasperated the prisoners, and slowly consumed them with a fever of sickly rancour. They lived like wild beasts, with the lash ceaselessly raised over their backs. Those torturers would have liked to kill the poor man—— Oh, no; it can never be forgotten; it is impossible! Such sufferings will some day claim vengeance.'

His voice had fallen, and the pieces of fat hissing merrily in the pot drowned it with the sound of their boiling. Lisa, however, heard him, and was frightened by the implacable expression which had suddenly come over his face; and, recollecting the gentle look which he habitually wore, she judged him to be a hypocrite.

Florent's hollow voice had brought Pauline's interest and delight to the highest pitch, and she fidgeted with pleasure on his knee.

'But the man?' she exclaimed. 'Go on about the man!'

Florent looked at her, and then appeared to remember, and smiled his sad smile again.

'The man,' he continued, 'was weary of remaining on the island, and had but one thought—that of making his escape by crossing the sea and reaching the mainland, whose white coast-line could be seen on the horizon in clear weather. But it was no easy matter to escape. It was necessary that a raft should be built, and as several of the prisoners had already made their escape, all the trees on the island had been felled to prevent the others from obtaining timber. The island was, indeed, so bare and naked, so scorched by the blazing sun, that life in it had become yet more perilous and terrible. However, it occurred to the man and two of his companions to employ the timbers of which their huts were built; and one evening they put out to sea on some rotten beams, which they had fastened together with dry branches. The wind carried them towards the coast. Just as daylight was about to appear, the raft struck on a sand-bank with such violence that the beams were severed from their lashings and carried out to sea. The three poor fellows were almost engulfed in the sand. Two of them sank in it to their waists, while the third disappeared up to his chin,

and his companions were obliged to pull him out. At last they reached a rock, so small that there was scarcely room for them to sit down upon it. When the sun rose they could see the coast in front of them, a bar of grey cliffs stretching all along the horizon. Two, who knew how to swim, determined to reach those cliffs. They preferred to run the risk of being drowned at once to that of slowly starving on the rock. But they promised their companion that they would return for him when they had reached land and had been able to procure a boat.'

'Ah, I know now!' cried little Pauline, clapping her hands with glee. 'It's the story of the gentleman who was eaten by the crabs!'

'They succeeded in reaching the coast,' continued Florent, 'but it was quite deserted; and it was only at the end of four days that they were able to get a boat. When they returned to the rock, they found their companion lying on his back, dead, and half eaten by crabs, which were still swarming over what remained of his body.'[1]

A murmur of disgust escaped Lisa and Augustine, and a horrified grimace passed over the face of Léon, who was preparing the skins for the black-puddings. Quenu stopped in the midst of his work and looked at Auguste, who seemed to have turned faint. Only little Pauline was smiling. In imagination the others could picture those swarming, ravenous crabs crawling all over the kitchen, and mingling gruesome odours with the aroma of the bacon-fat and onions.

'Give me the blood,' cried Quenu, who had not been following the story.

Auguste came up to him with the two cans, from which he slowly poured the blood, while Quenu, as it fell, vigorously stirred the now thickening contents of the pot. When the cans were emptied, Quenu reached up to one of the drawers above the range, and took out some pinches of spice. Then he added a plentiful seasoning of pepper.

'They left him there, didn't they,' Lisa now asked of Florent, 'and returned themselves in safety?'

'As they were going back,' continued Florent, 'the wind changed, and they were driven out into the open sea. A wave carried away one of their oars, and the water swept so

[1] In deference to the easily shocked feelings of the average English reader I have somewhat modified this passage. In the original M. Zola fully describes the awful appearance of the body.—*Trans.*

furiously into the boat that their whole time was taken up in baling it out with their hands. They tossed about in this way in sight of the coast, carried away by squalls and then brought back again by the tide, without a mouthful of bread to eat, for their scanty stock of provisions had been consumed. This went on for three days.'

'Three days!' cried Lisa in stupefaction; 'three days without food!'

'Yes, three days without food. When the east wind at last brought them to shore, one of them was so weak that he lay on the beach the whole day. In the evening he died. His companion had vainly attempted to get him to chew some leaves which he gathered from the trees.'

At this point Augustine broke into a slight laugh. Then, ashamed at having done so and not wishing to be considered heartless, she stammered out in confusion: 'Oh! I wasn't laughing at that. It was Mouton. Do just look at Mouton, madame.'

Then Lisa in her turn began to smile. Mouton, who had been lying all this time with his nose close to the dish of sausage-meat, had probably begun to feel distressed and disgusted by the presence of all this food, for he had risen and was rapidly scratching the table with his paws as though he wanted to bury the dish and its contents. At last, however, turning his back to it and lying down on his side, he stretched himself out, half-closing his eyes and rubbing his head against the table with languid pleasure. Then they all began to compliment Mouton. He never stole anything, they said, and could be safely left with the meat. Pauline related that he licked her fingers and washed her face after dinner without trying to bite her.

However, Lisa now came back to the question as to whether it were possible to live for three days without food. In her opinion it was not. 'No,' she said, 'I can't believe it. No one ever goes three days without food. When people talk of a person dying of hunger, it is a mere expression. They always get something to eat, more or less. It is only the most abandoned wretches, people who are utterly lost——'

She was doubtless going to add, 'vagrant rogues,' but she stopped short and looked at Florent. The scornful pout of her lips and the expression of her bright eyes plainly signified that in her belief only villains made such prolonged fasts.

It seemed to her that a man able to remain without food for three days must necessarily be a very dangerous character. For, indeed, honest folks never placed themselves in such a position.

Florent was now almost stifling. In front of him the stove, into which Léon had just thrown several shovelfuls of coal, was snoring like a lay clerk asleep in the sun; and the heat was very great. Auguste, who had taken charge of the lard melting in the pots, was watching over it in a state of perspiration, and Quenu wiped his brow with his sleeve whilst waiting for the blood to mix. A drowsiness such as follows gross feeding, an atmosphere heavy with indigestion, pervaded the kitchen.

'When the man had buried his comrade in the sand,' Florent continued slowly, 'he walked off alone straight in front of him. Dutch Guiana, in which country he now was, is a land of forests intermingled with rivers and swamps. The man walked on for more than a week without coming across a single human dwelling-place. All around, death seemed to be lurking and lying in wait for him. Though his stomach was racked by hunger, he often did not dare to eat the bright-coloured fruits which hung from the trees; he was afraid to touch the glittering berries, fearing lest they should be poisonous. For whole days he did not see a patch of sky, but tramped on beneath a canopy of branches, amidst a greenish gloom that swarmed with horrible living creatures. Great birds flew over his head with a terrible flapping of wings and sudden strange calls resembling death-groans; apes sprang, wild animals rushed through the thickets around him, bending the saplings and bringing down a rain of leaves, as though a gale were passing. But it was particularly the serpents that turned his blood cold when, stepping upon a matting of moving, withered leaves, he caught sight of their slim heads gliding amidst a horrid maze of roots. In certain nooks, nooks of dank shadow, swarming colonies of reptiles—some black, some yellow, some purple, some striped, some spotted, and some resembling withered reeds—suddenly awakened into life and wriggled away. At such times the man would stop and look about for a stone on which he might take refuge from the soft yielding ground into which his feet sank; and there he would remain for hours, terror-stricken on espying in some open space near

by a boa, who, with tail coiled and head erect, swayed like the trunk of a big tree splotched with gold.

'At night he used to sleep in the trees, alarmed by the slightest rustling of the branches, and fancying that he could hear endless swarms of serpents gliding through the gloom. He almost stifled beneath the interminable expanse of foliage. The gloomy shade reeked with close, oppressive heat, a clammy dankness and pestilential sweat, impregnated with the coarse aroma of scented wood and malodorous flowers.

'And when at last, after a long weary tramp, the man made his way out of the forest and beheld the sky again, he found himself confronted by wide rivers which barred his way. He skirted their banks, keeping a watchful eye on the grey backs of the alligators and the masses of drifting vegetation, and then, when he came to a less suspicious-looking spot, he swam across. And beyond the rivers the forests began again. At other times there were vast prairie-lands, leagues of thick vegetation, in which, at distant intervals, small lakes gleamed bluely. The man then made a wide *détour*, and sounded the ground beneath him before advancing, having but narrowly escaped from being swallowed up and buried beneath one of those smiling plains which he could hear cracking at each step he took. The giant grass, nourished by all the collected humus, concealed pestiferous marshes, depths of liquid mud; and amongst the expanses of verdure spread over the glaucous immensity to the very horizon there were only narrow stretches of firm ground with which the traveller must be acquainted if he would avoid disappearing for ever. One night the man sank down as far as his waist. At each effort he made to extricate himself the mud threatened to rise to his mouth. Then he remained quite still for nearly a couple of hours; and when the moon rose he was fortunately able to catch hold of a branch of a tree above his head. By the time he reached a human dwelling his hands and feet were bruised and bleeding, swollen with poisonous stings. He presented such a pitiable, famished appearance that those who saw him were afraid of him. They tossed him some food fifty yards away from the house, and the master of it kept guard over his door with a loaded gun.'

Florent stopped, his voice choked by emotion, and his eyes gazing blankly before him. For some minutes he had seemed to be speaking to himself alone. Little Pauline, who had grown drowsy, was lying in his arms with her head thrown back,

though striving to keep her wondering eyes open. And Quenu, for his part, appeared to be getting impatient.

'Why, you stupid!' he shouted to Léon, 'don't you know how to hold a skin yet? What do you stand staring at me for? It's the skin you should look at, not me! There, hold it like that, and don't move again!'

With his right hand Léon was raising a long string of sausage-skin, at one end of which a very wide funnel was inserted; while with his left hand he coiled the black-pudding round a metal bowl as fast as Quenu filled the funnel with big spoonfuls of the meat. The latter, black and steaming, flowed through the funnel, gradually inflating the skin, which fell down again, gorged to repletion and curving languidly. As Quenu had removed the pot from the range both he and Léon stood out prominently, he broad visaged, and the lad slender of profile, in the burning glow which cast over their pale faces and white garments a flood of rosy light.

Lisa and Augustine watched the filling of the skin with great interest, Lisa especially; and she in her turn found fault with Léon because he nipped the skin too tightly with his fingers, which caused knots to form, she said. When the skin was quite full, Quenu let it slip gently into a pot of boiling water; and seemed quite easy in his mind again, for now nothing remained but to leave it to boil.

'And the man—go on about the man!' murmured Pauline, opening her eyes, and surprised at no longer hearing the narrative.

Florent rocked her on his knee, and resumed his story in a slow, murmuring voice, suggestive of that of a nurse singing an infant to sleep.

'The man,' he said, 'arrived at a large town. There he was at first taken for an escaped convict, and was kept in prison for several months. Then he was released, and turned his hand to all sorts of work. He kept accounts and taught children to read, and at one time he was even employed as a navvy in making an embankment. He was continually hoping to return to his own country. He had saved the necessary amount of money when he was attacked by yellow fever. Then, believing him to be dead, those about him divided his clothes amongst themselves; so that when he at last recovered he had not even a shirt left. He had to begin all over again. The man was very weak, and was afraid he

might have to remain where he was. But at last he was able to get away, and he returned.'

His voice had sunk lower and lower, and now died away altogether in a final quivering of his lips. The close of the story had lulled little Pauline to sleep, and she was now slumbering with her head on Florent's shoulder. He held her with one arm, and still gently rocked her on his knee. No one seemed to pay any further attention to him, so he remained still and quiet where he was, holding the sleeping child.

Now came the tug of war, as Quenu said. He had to remove the black-puddings from the pot. In order to avoid breaking them or getting them entangled, he coiled them round a thick wooden pin as he drew them out, and then carried them into the yard and hung them on screens, where they quickly dried. Léon helped him, holding up the drooping ends. And as these reeking festoons of black-pudding crossed the kitchen they left behind them a trail of odorous steam, which still further thickened the dense atmosphere.

Auguste, on his side, after giving a hasty glance at the lard moulds, now took the covers off the two pots in which the fat was simmering, and each bursting bubble discharged an acrid vapour into the kitchen. The greasy haze had been gradually rising ever since the beginning of the evening, and now it shrouded the gas and pervaded the whole room, streaming everywhere, and veiling the ruddy whiteness of Quenu and his two assistants. Lisa and Augustine had risen from their seats; and all were panting as though they had eaten too much.

Augustine carried the sleeping Pauline upstairs; and Quenu, who liked to fasten up the kitchen himself, gave Auguste and Léon leave to go to bed, saying that he would fetch the black-pudding himself. The younger apprentice stole off with a very red face, having managed to secrete under his shirt nearly a yard of the pudding, which must have almost scalded him. Then the Quenus and Florent remained alone, in silence. Lisa stood nibbling a little piece of the hot pudding, keeping her pretty lips well apart all the while, for fear of burning them, and gradually the black compound vanished in her rosy mouth.

'Well,' said she, 'La Normande was foolish in behaving so rudely; the black-pudding's excellent to-day.'

However, there was a knock at the passage-door, and

Gavard, who stayed at Monsieur Lebigre's every evening until midnight, came in. He had called for a definite answer about the fish inspectorship.

'You must understand,' he said, 'that Monsieur Verlaque cannot wait any longer; he is too ill. So Florent must make up his mind. I have promised to give a positive answer early to-morrow.'

'Well, Florent accepts,' Lisa quietly remarked, taking another nibble at some black-pudding.

Florent, who had remained in his chair, overcome by a strange feeling of prostration, vainly endeavoured to rise and protest.

'No, no, say nothing,' continued Lisa; 'the matter is quite settled. You have suffered quite enough already, my dear Florent. What you have just been telling us is enough to make one shudder. It is time now for you to settle down. You belong to a respectable family, you received a good education, and it is really not fitting that you should go wandering about the highways like a vagrant. At your age childishness is no longer excusable. You have been foolish; well, all that will be forgotten and forgiven. You will take your place again among those of your own class—the class of respectable folks—and live in future like other people.'

Florent listened in astonishment, quite unable to say a word. Lisa was, doubtless, right. She looked so healthy, so serene, that it was impossible to imagine that she desired anything but what was proper. It was he, with his fleshless body and dark, equivocal-looking countenance, who must be in the wrong, and indulge in unrighteous dreams. He could, indeed, no longer understand why he had hitherto resisted.

Lisa, however, continued to talk to him with an abundant flow of words, as though he were a little boy found in fault and threatened with the police. She assumed, indeed, a most maternal manner, and plied him with the most convincing reasons. And at last, as a final argument, she said:

'Do it for us, Florent. We occupy a fair position in the neighbourhood which obliges us to use a certain amount of circumspection; and, to tell you the truth, between ourselves, I'm afraid that people will begin to talk. This inspectorship will set everything right; you will be somebody; you will even be an honour to us.'

Her manner had become caressingly persuasive, and Florent was penetrated by all the surrounding plenteousness,

all the aroma filling the kitchen, where he fed, as it were, on the nourishment floating in the atmosphere. He sank into blissful meanness, born of all the copious feeding that went on in the sphere of plenty in which he had been living during the last fortnight. He felt, as it were, the titillation of forming fat which spread slowly all over his body. He experienced the languid beatitude of shopkeepers, whose chief concern is to fill their bellies. At this late hour of night, in the warm atmosphere of the kitchen, all his acerbity and determination melted away. That peaceable evening, with the odour of the black-pudding and the lard, and the sight of plump little Pauline slumbering on his knee, had so enervated him that he found himself wishing for a succession of such evenings—endless ones which would make him fat.

However, it was the sight of Mouton that chiefly decided him. Mouton was sound asleep, with his stomach turned upwards, one of his paws resting on his nose, and his tail twisted over his side, as though to keep him warm; and he was slumbering with such an expression of feline happiness that Florent, as he gazed at him, murmured: 'No, it would be too foolish! I accept the berth. Say that I accept it, Gavard.'

Then Lisa finished eating her black-pudding, and wiped her fingers on the edge of her apron. And next she got her brother-in-law's candle ready for him, while Gavard and Quenu congratulated him on his decision. It was always necessary for a man to settle down, said they; the breaknock freaks of politics did not provide one with food. And, meantime, Lisa, standing there with the lighted candle in her hand, looked at him with an expression of satisfaction resting on her handsome face, placid like that of some sacred cow.

CHAPTER III

THREE days later the necessary formalities were gone through, and without demur the police authorities at the Préfecture accepted Florent on Monsieur Verlaque's recommendation as his substitute. Gavard, by the way, had made it a point to accompany them. When he again found himself alone with Florent he kept nudging his ribs with his elbow as they walked along together, and laughed, without saying any-

thing, while winking his eyes in a jeering way. He seemed to find something very ridiculous in the appearance of the police officers whom he met on the Quai de l'Horloge, for, as he passed them, he slightly shrugged his shoulders and made the grimace of a man seeking to restrain himself from laughing in people's faces.

On the following morning Monsieur Verlaque began to initiate the new inspector into the duties of his office. It had been arranged that during the next few days he should make him acquainted with the turbulent sphere which he would have to supervise. Poor Verlaque, as Gavard called him, was a pale little man, swathed in flannels, handkerchiefs, and mufflers. Constantly coughing, he made his way through the cool, moist atmosphere and running waters of the fish-market, on a pair of scraggy legs like those of a sickly child.

When Florent made his appearance on the first morning, at seven o'clock, he felt quite distracted; his eyes were dazed, his head ached with all the noise and riot. Retail dealers were already prowling about the auction pavilion; clerks were arriving with their ledgers, and consigners' agents, with leather bags slung over their shoulders, sat on overturned chairs by the salesmen's desks, waiting to receive their cash. Fish was being unloaded and unpacked not only in the enclosure, but even on the footways. All along the latter were piles of small baskets, an endless arrival of cases and hampers, and sacks of mussels, from which streamlets of water trickled. The auctioneers' assistants, all looking very busy, sprang over the heaps, tore away the straw at the tops of the baskets, emptied the latter, and tossed them aside. They then speedily transferred their contents in lots to huge wickerwork trays, arranging them with a turn of the hand so that they might show to the best advantage. And when the large tray-like baskets were all set out, Florent could almost fancy that a whole shoal of fish had got stranded there, still quivering with life, and gleaming with rosy nacre, scarlet coral, and milky pearl, all the soft, pale, sheeny hues of the ocean.

The deep-lying forests of seaweed, in which the mysterious life of the ocean slumbers, seemed at one haul of the nets to have yielded up all they contained. There were cod, keeling, whiting, flounders, plaice, dabs, and other sorts of common fish of a dingy grey with whitish splotches; there were conger-eels, huge serpent-like creatures, with small black eyes and

muddy, bluish skins, so slimy that they still seemed to be gliding along, yet alive. There were broad flat skate with pale under-sides edged with a soft red, and superb backs bumpy with vertebræ, and marbled down to the tautly-stretched ribs of their fins with splotches of cinnabar, intersected by streaks of the tint of Florentine bronze—a dark medley of colour suggestive of the hues of a toad or some poisonous flower. Then, too, there were hideous dog-fish, with round heads, widely-gaping mouths like those of Chinese idols, and short fins like bats' wings; fit monsters to keep yelping guard over the treasures of the ocean grottoes. And next came the finer fish, displayed singly on the osier trays; salmon that gleamed like chased silver, every scale seemingly outlined by a graving-tool on a polished metal surface; mullet with larger scales and coarser markings; huge turbot and huge brill with firm flesh white like curdled milk; tunny-fish, smooth and glossy, like bags of blackish leather; and rounded bass, with widely-gaping mouths which a soul too large for the body seemed to have rent asunder as it forced its way out amidst the stupefaction of death. And on all sides there were soles, brown and grey, in pairs; sand-eels, slim and stiff, like shavings of pewter; herrings, slightly twisted, with bleeding gills showing on their silver-worked skins; fat dories tinged with just a suspicion of carmine; burnished mackerel with green-streaked backs, and sides gleaming with ever-changing iridescence; and rosy gurnets with white bellies, their heads towards the centre of the baskets and their tails radiating all around, so that they simulated some strange florescence splotched with pearly white and brilliant vermilion. There were rock mullet, too, with delicious flesh, flushed with the pinky tinge peculiar to the Cyprinus family; boxes of whiting with opaline reflections; and baskets of smelts—neat little baskets, pretty as those used for strawberries, and exhaling a strong scent of violets. And meantime the tiny black eyes of the shrimps dotted as with beads of jet their soft-toned mass of pink and grey; and spiny crawfish and lobsters striped with black, all still alive, raised a grating sound as they tried to crawl along with their broken claws.

Florent gave but indifferent attention to Monsieur Verlaque's explanations. A flood of sunshine suddenly streamed through the lofty glass roof of the covered way, lighting up all these precious colours, toned and softened by the waves—the iridescent flesh-tints of the shell-fish, the opal of the

whiting, the pearly nacre of the mackerel, the ruddy gold of the mullets, the plated skins of the herrings, and massive silver of the salmon. It was as though the jewel-cases of some sea-nymph had been emptied there—a mass of fantastical, undreamt-of ornaments, a streaming and heaping of necklaces, monstrous bracelets, gigantic brooches, barbaric gems and jewels, the use of which could not be divined. On the backs of the skate and the dog-fish you saw, as it were, big dull green and purple stones set in dark metal, while the slender forms of the sand-eels and the tails and fins of the smelts displayed all the delicacy of finely wrought silver-work.

And meantime Florent's face was fanned by a fresh breeze, a sharp, salt breeze redolent of the sea. It reminded him of the coasts of Guiana and his voyages. He half fancied that he was gazing at some bay left dry by the receding tide, with the seaweed steaming in the sun, the bare rocks drying, and the beach smelling strongly of the brine. All around him the fish in their perfect freshness exhaled a pleasant perfume, that slightly sharp, irritating perfume which depraves the appetite.

Monsieur Verlaque coughed. The dampness was affecting him, and he wrapped his muffler more closely about his neck.

'Now,' said he, 'we will pass on to the fresh-water fish.'

This was in a pavilion beside the fruit-market, the last one, indeed, in the direction of the Rue Rambuteau. On either side of the space reserved for the auctions were large circular stone basins, divided into separate compartments by iron gratings. Slender streams of water flowed from brass jets shaped like swans' necks; and the compartments were filled with swarming colonies of crawfish, black-backed carp ever on the move, and mazy tangles of eels, incessantly knotting and unknotting themselves. Again was Monsieur Verlaque attacked by an obstinate fit of coughing. The moisture of the atmosphere was more insipid here than amongst the sea-water fish: there was a river-side scent, as of sun-warmed water slumbering on a bed of sand.

A great number of crawfishes had arrived from Germany that morning in cases and hampers, and the market was also crowded with river fish from Holland and England. Several men were unpacking shiny carp from the Rhine, lustrous with ruddy metallic hues, their scales resembling bronzed *cloisonné* enamel; and others were busy with huge pike, the cruel iron-grey brigands

of the waters, who ravenously protruded their savage jaws; or with magnificent dark-hued tench, that looked like so much dull-red copper spotted with verdigris. And amidst these suggestions of copper, iron, and bronze, the gudgeon and perch, the trout, the bleak, and the flat-fish taken in sweep-nets showed brightly white, the steel-blue tints of their backs gradually toning down to the soft transparency of their bellies. However, it was the fat snowy-white barbel that supplied the liveliest brightness in this gigantic collection of still life.

Bags of young carp were being gently emptied into the basins. The fish spun round, then remained motionless for a moment, and at last shot away and disappeared. Little eels were turned out of their hampers in a mass, and fell to the bottom of the compartments like tangled knots of snakes; while the larger ones—those whose bodies were about as thick as a child's arm—raised their heads and slipped of their own accord into the water with the supple motion of serpents gliding into the concealment of a thicket. And meantime the other fish, whose death agony had been lasting all the morning as they lay on the soiled osiers of the basket-trays, slowly expired amidst all the uproar of the auctions, opening their mouths as though to inhale the moisture of the air, with great silent gasps, renewed every few seconds.

However, Monsieur Verlaque brought Florent back to the salt-water fish. He took him all over the place and gave him the minutest particulars about everything. Round the nine salesmen's desks ranged along three sides of the pavilion there was now a dense crowd of surging, swaying heads, above which appeared the clerks, perched upon high chairs and making entries in their ledgers.

'Are all these clerks employed by the salesmen?' asked Florent.

By way of reply Monsieur Verlaque made a *détour* along the outside footway, led him into the enclosure of one of the auctions, and then explained the working of the various departments of the big yellow office, which smelt strongly of fish and was stained all over by drippings and splashings from the hampers. In a little glazed compartment up above, the collector of the municipal dues took note of the prices realised by the different lots of fish. Lower down, seated upon high chairs and with their wrists resting upon

little desks, were two female clerks, who kept account of the business on behalf of the salesmen. At each end of the stone table in front of the office was a crier who brought the basket-trays forward in turn, and in a bawling voice announced what each lot consisted of; while above him the female clerk, pen in hand, waited to register the price at which the lots were knocked down. And outside the enclosure, shut up in another little office of yellow wood, Monsieur Verlaque showed Florent the cashier, a fat old woman, who was ranging coppers and five-franc pieces in piles.

'There is a double control, you see,' said Monsieur Verlaque; 'the control of the Préfecture of the Seine and that of the Préfecture of Police. The latter, which licenses the salesmen, claims to have the right of supervision over them; and the municipality asserts its right to be represented at the transactions as they are subject to taxation.'

He went on expatiating at length in his faint cold voice respecting the rival claims of the two Préfectures. Florent, however, was paying but little heed, his attention being concentrated on a female clerk sitting on one of the high chairs just in front of him. She was a tall, dark woman of thirty, with big black eyes and an easy calmness of manner, and she wrote with outstretched fingers like a girl who had been taught the regulation method of the art.

However, Florent's attention was diverted by the yelping of the crier, who was just offering a magnificent turbot for sale.

'I've a bid of thirty francs! Thirty francs, now; thirty francs!'

He repeated these words in all sorts of keys, running up and down a strange scale of notes full of sudden changes. Hump-backed and with his face twisted askew, and his hair rough and disorderly, he wore a great blue apron with a bib; and with flaming eyes and outstretched arms he cried vociferously: 'Thirty-one! thirty-two! thirty-three! Thirty-three francs fifty centimes! thirty-three fifty!'

Then he paused to take breath, turning the basket-tray and pushing it farther upon the table. The fish-wives bent forward and gently touched the turbot with their finger-tips. Then the crier began again with renewed energy, hurling his figures towards the buyers with a wave of the hand and catching the slightest indication of a fresh bid—the raising of a finger, a twist of the eyebrows, a pouting of the lips, a

wink, and all with such rapidity and such a ceaseless jumble of words that Florent, utterly unable to follow him, felt quite disconcerted when, in a sing-song voice like that of a priest intoning the final words of a versicle, he chanted: 'Forty-two! forty-two! The turbot goes for forty-two francs!'

It was the beautiful Norman who had made the last bid. Florent recognised her as she stood in the line of fish-wives crowding against the iron rails which surrounded the enclosure. The morning was fresh and sharp, and there was a row of tippets above the display of big white aprons, covering the prominent bosoms and stomachs and sturdy shoulders. With high-set chignon set off with curls, and white and dainty skin, the beautiful Norman flaunted her lace bow amidst tangled shocks of hair covered with dirty kerchiefs, red noses eloquent of drink, sneering mouths, and battered faces suggestive of old pots. And she also recognised Madame Quenu's cousin, and was so surprised to see him there that she began gossiping to her neighbours about him.

The uproar of voices had become so great that Monsieur Verlaque renounced all further attempt to explain matters to Florent. On the footway close by, men were calling out the larger fish with prolonged shouts, which sounded as though they came from gigantic speaking-trumpets; and there was one individual who roared 'Mussels! mussels!' in such a hoarse, cracked, clamorous voice that the very roofs of the market shook. Some sacks of mussels were turned upside down, and their contents poured into hampers, while others were emptied with shovels. And there was a ceaseless procession of basket-trays containing skate, soles, mackerel, conger-eels, and salmon, carried backwards and forwards amidst the ever-increasing cackle and pushing of the fish-women as they crowded against the iron rails which creaked with their pressure. The hump-backed crier, now fairly on the job, waved his skinny arms in the air and protruded his jaws. Presently, seemingly lashed into a state of frenzy by the flood of figures that spurted from his lips, he sprang upon a stool, where, with his mouth twisted spasmodically and his hair streaming behind him, he could force nothing more than unintelligible hisses from his parched throat. And in the meantime, up above, the collector of the municipal dues, a little old man, muffled in a collar of imitation astrachan, remained with nothing but his nose showing under his black

velvet skull-cap. And the tall, dark-complexioned female clerk, with eyes shining calmly in her face, which had been slightly reddened by the cold, sat on her high wooden chair, quietly writing, apparently unruffled by the continuous rattle which came from the hunchback below her.

'That fellow Logre is wonderful,' muttered Monsieur Verlaque with a smile. 'He is the best crier in the markets. I believe he could make people buy boot soles in the belief they were fish!'

Then he and Florent went back into the pavilion. As they again passed the spot where the fresh-water fish was being sold by auction, and where the bidding seemed much quieter, Monsieur Verlaque explained that French river fishing was in a bad way.[1] The crier here, a fair, sorry-looking fellow, who scarcely moved his arms, was disposing of some lots of eels and crawfish in a monotonous voice, while the assistants fished fresh supplies out of the stone basins with their short-handled nets.

However, the crowd round the salesmen's desks was still increasing. Monsieur Verlaque played his part as Florent's instructor in the most conscientious manner, clearing the way by means of his elbows, and guiding his successor through the busiest parts. The upper-class retail dealers were there, quietly waiting for some of the finer fish, or loading the porters with their purchases of turbot, tunny, and salmon. The street-hawkers who had clubbed together to buy lots of herrings and small flat-fish were dividing them on the pavement. There were also some people of the smaller middle class, from distant parts of the city, who had come down at four o'clock in the morning to buy a really fresh fish, and had ended by allowing some enormous lot, costing from forty to fifty francs, to be knocked down to them, with the result that they would be obliged to spend the whole day in getting their friends and acquaintances to take the surplus off their hands. Every now and then some violent pushing would force a gap through part of the crowd. A fish-wife, who had got tightly jammed, freed herself, shaking her fists and pouring out a torrent of abuse. Then a compact mass of people again collected, and Florent, almost suffocated, declared

[1] M. Zola refers, of course, to the earlier years of the Second Empire. Under the present republican Government, which has largely fostered fish culture, matters have considerably improved.—*Trans.*

that he had seen quite enough, and understood all that was necessary.

As Monsieur Verlaque was helping him to extricate himself from the crowd, they found themselves face to face with the handsome Norman. She remained stock-still in front of them, and with her queenly air inquired:

'Well, is it quite settled? You are going to desert us, Monsieur Verlaque?'

'Yes, yes,' replied the little man; 'I am going to take a rest in the country, at Clamart. The smell of the fish is bad for me, it seems. Here, this is the gentleman who is going to take my place.'

So speaking he turned round to introduce Florent to her. The handsome Norman almost choked; however, as Florent went off, he fancied he could hear her whisper to her neighbours, with a laugh: 'Well, we shall have some fine fun now, see if we don't!'

The fish-wives had begun to set out their stalls. From all the taps at the corners of the marble slabs water was gushing freely; and there was a rustling sound all round, like the plashing of rain, a streaming of stiff jets of water hissing and spurting. And then, from the lower side of the sloping slabs, great drops fell with a softened murmur, splashing on the flagstones where a maze of tiny streams flowed along here and there, turning holes and depressions into miniature lakes, and afterwards gliding in a thousand rills down the slope towards the Rue Rambuteau. A moist haze ascended, a sort of rainy dust, bringing fresh whiffs of air to Florent's face, whiffs of that salt, pungent sea-breeze which he remembered so well; while in such fish as was already laid out he once more beheld the rosy nacres, gleaming corals, and milky pearls, all the rippling colour and glaucous pallidity of the ocean world.

That first morning left him much in doubt; indeed, he regretted that he had yielded to Lisa's insistence. Ever since his escape from the greasy drowsiness of the kitchen he had been accusing himself of base weakness with such violence that tears had almost risen in his eyes. But he did not dare to go back on his word. He was a little afraid of Lisa, and could see the curl of her lips and the look of mute reproach upon her handsome face. He felt that she was too serious a woman to be trifled with. However, Gavard happily inspired him with a consoling thought. On the evening of the day on

which Monsieur Verlaque had conducted him through the auction sales, Gavard took him aside and told him, with a good deal of hesitation, that 'the poor devil' was not at all well off. And after various remarks about the scoundrelly Government which ground the life out of its servants without allowing them even the means to die in comfort, he ended by hinting that it would be charitable on Florent's part to surrender a part of his salary to the old inspector. Florent welcomed the suggestion with delight. It was only right, he considered, for he looked upon himself simply as Monsieur Verlaque's temporary substitute; and besides, he himself really required nothing, as he boarded and lodged with his brother. Gavard added that he thought if Florent gave up fifty francs out of the hundred and fifty which he would receive monthly, the arrangement would be everything that could be desired; and, lowering his voice, he added that it would not be for long, for the poor fellow was consumptive to his very bones. Finally it was settled that Florent should see Monsieur Verlaque's wife, and arrange matters with her, to avoid any possibility of hurting the old man's feelings.

The thought of this kindly action afforded Florent great relief, and he now accepted his duties with the object of doing good, thus continuing to play the part which he had been fulfilling all his life. However, he made the poultry-dealer promise that he would not speak of the matter to anyone; and as Gavard also felt a vague fear of Lisa, he kept the secret, which was really very meritorious in him.

And now the whole pork-shop seemed happy. Handsome Lisa manifested the greatest friendliness towards her brother-in-law. She took care that he went to bed early, so as to be able to rise in good time; she kept his breakfast hot for him; and she no longer felt ashamed at being seen talking to him on the footway, now that he wore a laced cap. Quenu, quite delighted by all these good signs, sat down to table in the evening between his wife and brother with a lighter heart than ever. They often lingered over dinner till nine o'clock, leaving the shop in Augustine's charge, and indulging in a leisurely digestion interspersed with gossip about the neighbourhood, and the dogmatic opinions of Lisa on political topics; Florent also had to relate how matters had gone in the fish-market that day. He gradually grew less frigid, and began to taste the happiness of a well-regulated existence. There was a well-to-do comfort and trimness about the light

yellowish dining room which had a softening influence upon him as soon as he crossed its threshold. Handsome Lisa's kindly attentions wrapped him, as it were, in cotton-wool; and mutual esteem and concord reigned paramount.

Gavard, however, considered the Quenu-Gradelles' home to be too drowsy. He forgave Lisa her weakness for the Emperor, because, he said, one ought never to discuss politics with women, and beautiful Madame Quenu was, after all, a very worthy person, who managed her business admirably. Nevertheless, he much preferred to spend his evenings at Monsieur Lebigre's, where he met a group of friends who shared his own opinions. Thus when Florent was appointed to the inspectorship of the fish-market, Gavard began to lead him astray, taking him off for hours, and prompting him to lead a bachelor's life now that he had obtained a berth.

Monsieur Lebigre was the proprietor of a very fine establishment, fitted up in the modern luxurious style. Occupying the right-hand corner of the Rue Pirouette, and looking on to the Rue Rambuteau, it formed, with its four small Norwegian pines in green-painted tubs flanking the doorway, a worthy pendant to the big pork-shop of the Quenu-Gradelles. Through the clear glass windows you could see the interior, which was decorated with festoons of foliage, vine branches, and grapes, painted on a soft green ground. The floor was tiled with large black and white squares. At the far end was the yawning cellar entrance, above which rose a spiral staircase hung with red drapery, and leading to the billiard-room on the first floor. The counter or 'bar' on the right looked especially rich, and glittered like polished silver. Its zinc-work, hanging with a broad bulging border over the sub-structure of white and red marble, edged it with a rippling sheet of metal as if it were some high altar laden with embroidery. At one end, over a gas-stove, stood porcelain pots, decorated with circles of brass, and containing punch and hot wine. At the other extremity was a tall and richly sculptured marble fountain, from which a fine stream of water, so steady and continuous that it looked as though it were motionless, flowed into a basin. In the centre, edged on three sides by the sloping zinc surface of the counter, was a second basin for rinsing and cooling purposes, where quart bottles of draught wine, partially empty, reared their greenish necks. Then on the counter, to the right and

left of this central basin, were batches of glasses symmetrically arranged: little glasses for brandy, thick tumblers for draught wine, cup glasses for brandied fruits, glasses for absinthe, glass mugs for beer, and tall goblets, all turned upside down and reflecting the glitter of the counter. On the left, moreover, was a metal urn, serving as a receptacle for gratuities; whilst a similar one on the right bristled with a fan-like arrangement of coffee spoons.

Monsieur Lebigre was generally to be found enthroned behind his counter upon a seat covered with buttoned crimson leather. Within easy reach of his hand were the liqueurs in cut-glass decanters protruding from the compartments of a stand. His round back rested against a huge mirror which completely filled the panel behind him; across it ran two glass shelves supporting an array of jars and bottles. Upon one of them the glass jars of preserved fruits, cherries, plums, and peaches, stood out darkly; while on the other, between symmetrically arranged packets of finger biscuits, were bright flasks of soft green and red and yellow glass, suggesting strange mysterious liqueurs, or floral extracts of exquisite limpidity. Standing on the glass shelf in the white glow of the mirror, these flasks, flashing as if on fire, seemed to be suspended in the air.

To give his premises the appearance of a café, Monsieur Lebigre had placed two small tables of bronzed iron and four chairs against the wall, in front of the counter. A chandelier with five lights and frosted globes hung down from the ceiling. On the left was a round gilt timepiece, above a *tourniquet*[1] fixed to the wall. Then at the far end came the private 'cabinet,' a corner of the shop shut off by a partition glazed with frosted glass of a small square pattern. In the day-time this little room received a dim light from a window that looked on to the Rue Pirouette; and in the evening a gas-jet burnt over the two tables painted to resemble marble. It was there

[1] This is a kind of dial turning on a pivot, and usually enclosed in a brass frame, from which radiate a few small handles or spokes. Round the face of the dial—usually of paper—are various numerals, and between the face and its glass covering is a small marble or wooden ball. The appliance is used in lieu of dice or coins when two or more customers are 'tossing' for drinks. Each in turn sends the dial spinning round, and wins or loses according to the numeral against which the ball rests when the dial stops. As I can find no English name for the appliance, I have thought it best to describe it.—*Trans.*

that Gavard and his political friends met each evening after dinner. They looked upon themselves as being quite at home there, and had prevailed on the landlord to reserve the place for them. When Monsieur Lebigre had closed the door of the glazed partition, they knew themselves to be so safely screened from intrusion that they spoke quite unreservedly of the great 'sweep out' which they were fond of discussing. No unprivileged customer would have dared to enter.

On the first day that Gavard took Florent off he gave him some particulars of Monsieur Lebigre. He was a good fellow, he said, who sometimes came to drink his coffee with them; and, as he had said one day that he had fought in '48, no one felt the least constraint in his presence. He spoke but little, and seemed rather thick-headed. As the gentlemen passed him on their way to the private room they grasped his hand in silence across the glasses and bottles. By his side on the crimson leather seat behind the counter there was generally a fair little woman, whom he had engaged as counter assistant in addition to the white-aproned waiter who attended to the tables and the billiard-room. The young woman's name was Rose, and she seemed a very gentle and submissive being. Gavard, with a wink of his eye, told Florent that he fancied Lebigre had a weakness for her. It was she, by the way, who waited upon the friends in the private room, coming and going, with her happy, humble air, amidst the stormiest political discussions.

Upon the day on which the poultry-dealer took Florent to Lebigre's to present him to his friends, the only person whom the pair found in the little room when they entered it was a man of some fifty years of age, of a mild and thoughtful appearance. He wore a rather shabby-looking hat and a long chestnut-coloured overcoat, and sat, with his chin resting on the ivory knob of a thick cane, in front of a glass mug full of beer. His mouth was so completely concealed by a vigorous growth of beard that his face had a dumb, lipless appearance.

'How are you, Robine?' exclaimed Gavard.

Robine silently thrust out his hand, without making any reply, though his eyes softened into a slight smile of welcome. Then he let his chin drop on to the knob of his cane again, and looked at Florent over his beer. Florent had made Gavard swear to keep his story a secret for fear of some dangerous indiscretion; and he was not displeased to observe

a touch of distrust in the discreet demeanour of the gentleman with the heavy beard. However, he was really mistaken in this, for Robine never talked more than he did now. He was always the first to arrive, just as the clock struck eight; and he always sat in the same corner, never letting go his hold of his cane, and never taking off either his hat or his overcoat. No one had ever seen him without his hat upon his head. He remained there listening to the talk of the others till midnight, taking four hours to empty his mug of beer, and gazing successively at the different speakers as though he heard them with his eyes. When Florent afterwards questioned Gavard about Robine, the poultry-dealer spoke of the latter as though he held him in high esteem. Robine, he asserted, was an extremely clever and able man, and, though he was unable to say exactly where he had given proof of his hostility to the established order of things, he declared that he was one of the most dreaded of the Government's opponents. He lived in the Rue Saint Denis, in rooms to which no one as a rule could gain admission. The poultry-dealer, however, asserted that he himself had once been in them. The wax floors, he said, were protected by strips of green linen; and there were covers over the furniture, and an alabaster timepiece with columns. He had caught a glimpse of the back of a lady, who was just disappearing through one doorway as he was entering by another, and had taken her to be Madame Robine. She appeared to be an old lady of very genteel appearance, with her hair arranged in corkscrew curls; but of this he could not be quite certain. No one knew why they had taken up their abode amidst all the uproar of a business neighbourhood; for the husband did nothing at all, spending his days no one knew how and living on no one knew what, though he made his appearance every evening as though he were tired but delighted with some excursion into the highest regions of politics.

'Well, have you read the speech from the throne?' asked Gavard, taking up a newspaper that was lying on the table.

Robine shrugged his shoulders. Just at that moment, however, the door of the glazed partition clattered noisily, and a hunchback made his appearance. Florent at once recognised the deformed crier of the fish-market, though his hands were now washed and he was neatly dressed, with his

neck encircled by a great red muffler, one end of which hung down over his hump like the skirt of a Venetian cloak.

'Ah, here's Logre!' exclaimed the poultry-dealer. 'Now we shall hear what he thinks about the speech from the throne.'

Logre, however, was apparently furious. To begin with he almost broke the pegs off in hanging up his hat and muffler. Then he threw himself violently into a chair, and brought his fist down on the table, while tossing away the newspaper.

'Do you think I read their fearful lies?' he cried.

Then he gave vent to the anger raging within him. 'Did ever anyone hear,' he cried, 'of masters making such fools of their people? For two whole hours I've been waiting for my pay! There were ten of us in the office kicking our heels there. Then at last Monsieur Manoury arrived in a cab. Where he had come from I don't know, and don't care, but I'm quite sure it wasn't any respectable place. Those salesmen are all a parcel of thieves and libertines! And then, too, the hog actually gave me all my money in small change!'

Robine expressed his sympathy with Logre by a slight movement of his eyelids. But suddenly the hunchback bethought him of a victim upon whom to pour out his wrath. 'Rose! Rose!' he cried, stretching his head out of the little room.

The young woman quickly responded to the call, trembling all over.

'Well,' shouted Logre, 'what do you stand staring at me like that for? Much good that'll do! You saw me come in, didn't you? Why haven't you brought me my glass of black coffee, then?'

Gavard ordered two similar glasses, and Rose made all haste to bring what was required, while Logre glared sternly at the glasses and little sugar trays as if studying them. When he had taken a drink he seemed to grow somewhat calmer.

'But it's Charvet who must be getting bored,' he said presently. 'He is waiting outside on the pavement for Clémence.'

Charvet, however, now made his appearance, followed by Clémence. He was a tall, scraggy young man, carefully shaved, with a skinny nose and thin lips. He lived in the Rue Vavin, behind the Luxembourg, and called himself a

professor. In politics he was a disciple of Hébert.[1] He wore his hair very long, and the collar and lapels of his threadbare frock-coat were broadly turned back. Affecting the manner and speech of a member of the National Convention, he would pour out such a flood of bitter words and make such a haughty display of pedantic learning that he generally crushed his adversaries. Gavard was afraid of him, though he would not confess it; still, in Charvet's absence he would say that he really went too far. Robine, for his part, expressed approval of everything with his eyes. Logre sometimes opposed Charvet on the question of salaries; but the other was really the autocrat of the coterie, having the greatest fund of information and the most overbearing manner. For more than ten years he and Clémence had lived together as man and wife, in accordance with a previously arranged contract, the terms of which were strictly observed by both parties to it. Florent looked at the young woman with some little surprise, but at last he recollected where he had previously seen her. This was at the fish auction. She was, indeed, none other than the tall dark female clerk whom he had observed writing with outstretched fingers, after the manner of one who had been carefully instructed in the art of holding a pen.

Rose made her appearance at the heels of the two newcomers. Without saying a word she placed a mug of beer before Charvet and a tray before Clémence, who in a leisurely way began to compound a glass of 'grog,' pouring some hot water over a slice of lemon, which she crushed with her spoon, and glancing carefully at the decanter as she poured out some rum, so as not to add more of it than a small liqueur glass could contain.

Gavard now presented Florent to the company, but more especially to Charvet. He introduced them to one another as professors, and very able men, who would be sure to get on well together. But it was probable that he had already been guilty of some indiscretion, for all the men at once shook hands with a tight and somewhat masonic squeeze of each other's fingers. Charvet, for his part, showed himself almost amiable; and whether he and the others knew anything of

[1] Hébert, as the reader will remember, was the furious demagogue with the foul tongue and poisoned pen who edited the *Père Duchesne* at the time of the first French Revolution. We had a revival of his politics and his journal in Paris during the Commune of 1871.—*Trans.*

Florent's antecedents, they at all events indulged in no embarrassing allusions.

'Did Manoury pay you in small change?' Logre asked Clémence.

She answered affirmatively, and produced a roll of francs and another of two-franc pieces, and unwrapped them. Charvet watched her, and his eyes followed the rolls as she replaced them in her pocket, after counting their contents and satisfying herself that they were correct.

'We have our accounts to settle,' he said in a low voice.

'Yes, we'll settle up to-night,' the young woman replied. 'But we are about even, I should think. I've breakfasted with you four times, haven't I? But I lent you a hundred sous last week, you know.'

Florent, surprised at hearing this, discreetly turned his head away. Then Clémence slipped the last roll of silver into her pocket, drank a little of her grog, and, leaning against the glazed partition, quietly settled herself down to listen to the men talking politics. Gavard had taken up the newspaper again, and, in tones which he strove to render comic, was reading out some passages of the speech from the throne which had been delivered that morning at the opening of the Chambers. Charvet made fine sport of the official phraseology; there was not a single line of it which he did not tear to pieces. One sentence afforded especial amusement to them all. It was this: 'We are confident, gentlemen, that, leaning on your lights[1] and the conservative sentiments of the country, we shall succeed in increasing the national prosperity day by day.'

Logre rose up and repeated this sentence, and by speaking through his nose succeeded fairly well in mimicking the Emperor's drawling voice.

'It's lovely, that prosperity of his; why, everyone's dying of hunger!' said Charvet.

'Trade is shocking,' asserted Gavard.

'And what in the name of goodness is the meaning of anybody "leaning on lights"?' continued Clémence, who prided herself upon literary culture.

Robine himself even allowed a faint laugh to escape from

[1] In the sense of illumination of mind. It has been necessary to give a literal translation of this phrase to enable the reader to realise the point of subsequent witticisms in which Clémence and Gavard indulge.—*Trans.*

the depths of his beard. The discussion began to grow warm. The party fell foul of the Corps Législatif, and spoke of it with great severity. Logre did not cease ranting, and Florent found him the same as when he cried the fish at the auctions —protruding his jaws and hurling his words forward with a wave of the arm, whilst retaining the crouching attitude of a snarling dog. Indeed, he talked politics in just the same furious manner as he offered a tray full of soles for sale.

Charvet, on the other hand, became quieter and colder amidst the smoke of the pipes and the fumes of the gas which were now filling the little den; and his voice assumed a dry incisive tone, sharp like a guillotine blade, while Robine gently wagged his head without once removing his chin from the ivory knob of his cane. However, some remark of Gavard's led the conversation to the subject of women.

'Woman,' declared Charvet drily, 'is the equal of man; and, that being so, she ought not to inconvenience him in the management of his life. Marriage is a partnership, in which everything should be halved. Isn't that so, Clémence?'

'Clearly so,' replied the young woman, leaning back with her head against the wall and gazing into the air.

However, Florent now saw Lacaille, the costermonger, and Alexandre, the porter, Claude Lantier's friend, come into the little room. In the past these two had long remained at the other table in the sanctum; they did not belong to the same class as the others. By the help of politics, however, their chairs had drawn nearer, and they had ended by forming part of the circle. Charvet, in whose eyes they represented 'the people,' did his best to indoctrinate them with his advanced political theories, while Gavard played the part of the shopkeeper free from all social prejudices by clinking glasses with them. Alexandre was a cheerful, good-humoured giant, with the manner of a big merry lad. Lacaille, on the other hand, was embittered; his hair was already grizzling; and, bent and wearied by his ceaseless perambulations through the streets of Paris, he would at times glance loweringly at the placid figure of Robine, and his sound boots and heavy coat.

That evening both Lacaille and Alexandre called for a liqueur glass of brandy, and then the conversation was renewed with increased warmth and excitement, the party being now quite complete. A little later, while the door of the cabinet was left ajar, Florent caught sight of Made-

moiselle Saget standing in front of the counter. She had taken a bottle from under her apron, and was watching Rose as the latter poured into it a large measureful of black-currant syrup and a smaller one of brandy. Then the bottle disappeared under the apron again, and Mademoiselle Saget, with her hands out of sight, remained talking in the bright glow of the counter, face to face with the big mirror, in which the flasks and bottles of liqueurs were reflected like rows of Venetian lanterns. In the evening all the metal and glass of the establishment helped to illuminate it with wonderful brilliancy. The old maid, standing there in her black skirts, looked almost like some big strange insect amidst all the crude brightness. Florent noticed that she was trying to inveigle Rose into a conversation, and shrewdly suspected that she had caught sight of him through the half-open doorway. Since he had been on duty at the markets he had met her at almost every step, loitering in one or another of the covered ways, and generally in the company of Madame Lecœur and La Sarriette. He had noticed also that the three women stealthily examined him, and seemed lost in amazement at seeing him installed in the position of inspector. That evening, however, Rose was no doubt loth to enter into conversation with the old maid, for the latter at last turned round, apparently with the intention of approaching Monsieur Lebigre, who was playing piquet with a customer at one of the bronzed tables. Creeping quietly along, Mademoiselle Saget had at last managed to instal herself beside the partition of the cabinet, when she was observed by Gavard, who detested her.

'Shut the door, Florent!' he cried unceremoniously. 'We can't even be by ourselves, it seems!'

When midnight came and Lacaille went away he exchanged a few whispered words with Monsieur Lebigre, and as the latter shook hands with him he slipped four five-franc pieces into his palm, without anyone noticing it. 'That'll make twenty-two francs that you'll have to pay to-morrow, remember,' he whispered in his ear. 'The person who lends the money won't do it for less in future. Don't forget, too, that you owe three days' truck hire. You must pay everything off.'

Then Monsieur Lebigre wished the friends good night. He was very sleepy and should sleep well, he said, with a yawn which revealed his big teeth, while Rose gazed at him

with an air of submissive humility. However, he gave her a push, and told her to go and turn out the gas in the little room.

On reaching the pavement, Gavard stumbled and nearly fell. And being in a humorous vein, he thereupon exclaimed: 'Confound it all! At any rate, I don't seem to be leaning on anybody's lights.'

This remark seemed to amuse the others, and the party broke up. A little later Florent returned to Lebigre's, and indeed he became quite attached to the 'cabinet,' finding a seductive charm in Robine's contemplative silence, Logre's fiery outbursts, and Charvet's cool venom. When he went home, he did not at once retire to bed. He had grown very fond of his attic, that girlish bedroom, where Augustine had left scraps of ribbon, souvenirs, and other feminine trifles lying about. There still remained some hair-pins on the mantelpiece, with gilt cardboard boxes of buttons and lozenges, cut-out pictures, and empty pomade pots that retained an odour of jasmine. Then there were some reels of thread, needles, and a missal lying by the side of a soiled Dream-book in the drawer of the rickety deal table. A white summer-dress with yellow spots hung forgotten from a nail; while upon the board which served as a toilet-table a big stain behind the water-jug showed where a bottle of bandoline had been overturned. The little chamber, with its narrow iron bed, its two rush-bottomed chairs, and its faded grey wall-paper, was instinct with innocent simplicity. The plain white curtains, the childishness suggested by the cardboard boxes and the Dream-book, and the clumsy coquetry which had stained the walls, all charmed Florent and brought him back to dreams of youth. He would have preferred not to have known that plain, wiry-haired Augustine, but to have been able to imagine that he was occupying the room of a sister, some bright sweet girl of whose budding womanhood every trifle around him spoke.

Yet another pleasure which he took was to lean out of the garret window at night-time. In front of it was a narrow ledge of roof, enclosed by an iron railing, and forming a sort of balcony, on which Augustine had grown a pomegranate in a box. Since the nights had turned cold, Florent had brought the pomegranate indoors and kept it by the foot of his bed till morning. He would linger for a few minutes by the open window, inhaling deep draughts of the sharp

fresh air which was wafted up from the Seine, over the house-tops of the Rue de Rivoli. Below him the roofs of the markets spread confusedly in a grey expanse, like slumbering lakes on whose surface the furtive reflection of a pane of glass gleamed every now and then like a silvery ripple. Farther away the roofs of the meat and poultry pavilions lay in deeper gloom, and became mere masses of shadow barring the horizon. Florent delighted in the great stretch of open sky in front of him, in that spreading expanse of the markets which amidst all the narrow city streets brought him a dim vision of some strip of sea-coast, of the still grey waters of a bay scarce quivering from the roll of the distant billows. He used to lose himself in dreams as he stood there; each night he conjured up the vision of some fresh coast-line. To return in mind to the eight years of despair which he had spent away from France rendered him both very sad and very happy. Then at last, shivering all over, he would close the window. Often, as he stood in front of the fireplace taking off his collar, the photograph of Auguste and Augustine would fill him with a vague disquietude. They seemed to be watching him as they stood there, hand in hand, smiling faintly.

Florent's first few weeks at the fish-market were very painful to him. The Méhudins treated him with open hostility, which infected the whole market with a spirit of opposition. The beautiful Norman intended to revenge herself on the handsome Lisa, and the latter's cousin seemed a victim ready to hand.

The Méhudins came from Rouen. Louise's mother still related how she had first arrived in Paris with a basket of eels. She had ever afterwards remained in the fish trade. She had married a man employed in the Octroi service, who had died leaving her with two little girls. It was she who by her full figure and glowing freshness had won for herself in earlier days the nickname of 'the beautiful Norman,' which her eldest daughter had inherited. Now five-and-sixty years of age, Madame Méhudin had become flabby and shapeless, and the damp air of the fish-market had rendered her voice rough and hoarse, and given a bluish tinge to her skin. Sedentary life had made her extremely bulky, and her head was thrown backwards by the exuberance of her bosom. She had never been willing to renounce the fashions of her younger days, but still wore the flowered gown, the yellow kerchief, and

turban-like head-gear of the classic fish-wife, besides retaining the latter's loud voice and rapidity of gesture as she stood with her hands on her hips, shouting out the whole abusive vocabulary of her calling.

She looked back regretfully to the old Marché des Innocents, which the new central markets had supplanted. She would talk of the ancient rights of the market 'ladies,' and mingle stories of fisticuffs exchanged with the police with reminiscences of the visits she had paid to Court in the time of Charles X. and Louis Philippe, dressed in silk, and carrying a bouquet of flowers in her hand. Old Mother Méhudin, as she was now generally called, had for a long time been the banner-bearer of the Sisterhood of the Virgin at St. Leu. She would relate that in the processions in the church there she had worn a dress and cap of tulle trimmed with satin ribbons, whilst holding aloft in her puffy fingers the gilded staff of the richly-fringed silk standard on which the figure of the Holy Mother was embroidered.

According to the gossip of the neighbourhood, the old woman had made a fairly substantial fortune, though the only signs of it were the massive gold ornaments with which she loaded her neck and arms and bosom on important occasions. Her two daughters got on badly together as they grew up. The younger one, Claire, an idle, fair-complexioned girl, complained of the ill-treatment which she received from her sister Louise, protesting, in her languid voice, that she could never submit to be the other's servant. As they would certainly have ended by coming to blows, their mother separated them. She gave her stall in the fish-market to Louise, while Claire, whom the smell of the skate and the herrings affected in the lungs, installed herself among the fresh-water fish. And from that time the old mother, although she pretended to have retired from business altogether, would flit from one stall to the other, still interfering in the selling of the fish, and causing her daughters continual annoyance by the foul insolence with which she would at times speak to customers.[1]

Claire was a fantastical creature, very gentle in her manner, and yet continually at loggerheads with others. People said that she invariably followed her own whimsical

[1] The Paris fish-wives, even to-day, are notorious for the filth of their language.—*Trans.*

inclinations. In spite of her dreamy, girlish face she was imbued with a nature of silent firmness, a spirit of independence which prompted her to live apart; she never took things as other people did, but would one day evince perfect fairness, and the next day arrant injustice. She would sometimes throw the market into confusion by suddenly increasing or lowering the prices at her stall, without anyone being able to guess her reason for doing so. She herself would refuse to explain her motive. By the time she reached her thirtieth year, her delicate physique and fine skin, which the water of the tanks seemed to keep continually fresh and soft, her small, faintly-marked face and lissom limbs would probably become heavy, coarse, and flabby, till she would look like some faded saint that had stepped from a stained-glass window into the degrading sphere of the markets. At twenty-two, however, Claire, in the midst of her carp and eels, was, to use Claude Lantier's expression, a Murillo. A Murillo, that is, whose hair was often in disorder, who wore heavy shoes and clumsily cut dresses, which left her without any figure. But she was free from all coquetry, and she assumed an air of scornful contempt when Louise, displaying her bows and ribbons, chaffed her about her clumsily knotted neckerchiefs. Moreover, she was virtuous; it was said that the son of a rich shopkeeper in the neighbourhood had gone abroad in despair at having failed to induce her to listen to his suit.

Louise, the beautiful Norman, was of a different nature. She had been engaged to be married to a clerk in the corn-market; but a sack of flour falling upon the young man had broken his back and killed him. Not very long afterwards Louise had given birth to a boy. In the Méhudins' circle of acquaintance she was looked upon as a widow; and the old fish-wife in conversation would occasionally refer to the time when her son-in-law was alive.

The Méhudins were a power in the markets. When Monsieur Verlaque had finished instructing Florent in his new duties, he advised him to conciliate certain of the stall-holders, if he wished his life to be endurable; and he even carried his sympathy so far as to put him in possession of the little secrets of the office, such as the various little breaches of rule that it was necessary to wink at, and those at which he would have to feign stern displeasure; and also the circumstances under which he might accept a small present. A market inspector is at once a constable and a magistrate; he

has to maintain proper order and cleanliness, and settle in a conciliatory spirit all disputes between buyers and sellers. Florent, who was of a weak disposition, put on an artificial sternness when he was obliged to exercise his authority, and generally over-acted his part. Moreover, his gloomy, pariah-like face and bitterness of spirit, the result of long suffering, were against him.

The beautiful Norman's idea was to involve him in some quarrel or other. She had sworn that he would not keep his berth a fortnight. 'That fat Lisa's much mistaken,' said she one morning on meeting Madame Lecœur, 'if she thinks that she's going to put people over us. We don't want such ugly wretches here. That sweetheart of hers is a perfect fright!'

After the auctions, when Florent commenced his round of inspection, strolling slowly through the dripping alleys, he could plainly see the beautiful Norman watching him with an impudent smile on her face. Her stall, which was in the second row on the left, near the fresh-water fish department, faced the Rue Rambuteau. She would turn round, however, and never take her eyes off her victim whilst making fun of him with her neighbours. And when he passed in front of her, slowly examining the slabs, she feigned hilarious merriment, slapped her fish with her hand, and turned her jets of water on at full stream, flooding the pathway. Nevertheless Florent remained perfectly calm.

At last, one morning as was bound to happen, war broke out. As Florent reached La Normande's stall that day an unbearable stench assailed his nostrils. On the marble slab, in addition to part of a magnificent salmon, showing its soft roseate flesh, there lay some turbots of creamy whiteness, a few conger eels pierced with black pins to mark their divisions, several pairs of soles, and some bass and red mullet—in fact, quite a display of fresh fish. But in the midst of it, amongst all these fish whose eyes still gleamed and whose gills were of a bright crimson, there lay a huge skate of a ruddy tinge, splotched with dark stains—superb, indeed, with all its strange colourings. Unfortunately, it was rotten; its tail was falling off and the ribs of its fins were breaking through the skin.

'You must throw that skate away,' said Florent as he came up.

The beautiful Norman broke into a slight laugh. Florent raised his eyes and saw her standing before him, with her back against the bronze lamp-post which lighted the stalls in

her division. She had mounted upon a box to keep her feet out of the damp, and appeared very tall as he glanced at her. She looked also handsomer than usual, with her hair arranged in little curls, her sly face slightly bent, her lips compressed, and her hands showing somewhat too rosily against her big white apron. Florent had never before seen her decked with so much jewellery. She had long pendants in her ears, a chain round her neck, a brooch in her dress body, and quite a collection of rings on two fingers of her left hand and one of her right.

As she still continued to look slyly at Florent, without making any reply, the latter continued: 'Do you hear? You must remove that skate.'

He had not yet noticed the presence of old Madame Méhudin, who sat all of a heap on a chair in a corner. She now got up, however, and, with her fists resting on the marble slab, insolently exclaimed: 'Dear me! And why is she to throw her skate away? You won't pay her for it, I'll bet!'

Florent immediately understood the position. The women at the other stalls began to titter, and he felt that he was surrounded by covert rebellion, which a word might cause to blaze forth. He therefore restrained himself, and in person drew the refuse-pail from under the stall and dropped the skate into it. Old Madame Méhudin had already stuck her hands on her hips, while the beautiful Norman, who had not spoken a word, burst into another malicious laugh as Florent strode sternly away amidst a chorus of jeers, which he pretended not to hear.

Each day now some new trick was played upon him, and he was obliged to walk through the market alleys as warily as though he were in a hostile country. He was splashed with water from the sponges employed to cleanse the slabs; he stumbled and almost fell over slippery refuse intentionally spread in his way; and even the porters contrived to run their baskets against the nape of his neck. One day, moreover, when two of the fish-wives were quarrelling, and he hastened up to prevent them from coming to blows, he was obliged to duck in order to escape being slapped on either cheek by a shower of little dabs which passed over his head. There was a general outburst of laughter on this occasion, and Florent always believed that the two fish-wives were in league with the Méhudins. However, his old-time experiences as a teacher had endowed him with angelic patience, and he was

able to maintain a magisterial coolness of manner even when anger was hotly rising within him, and his whole being quivered with a sense of humiliation. Still, the young scamps of the Rue de l'Estrapade had never manifested the savagery of these fish-wives, the cruel tenacity of these huge females, whose massive figures heaved and shook with a giant-like joy whenever he fell into any trap. They stared him out of countenance with their red faces; and in the coarse tones of their voices and the impudent gestures of their hands he could read volumes of filthy abuse levelled at himself. Gavard would have been quite in his element amidst all these petticoats, and would have freely cuffed them all round; but Florent, who had always been afraid of women, gradually felt overwhelmed as by a sort of nightmare in which giant women, buxom beyond all imagination, danced threateningly around him, shouting at him in hoarse voices and brandishing bare arms, as massive as any prize-fighter's.

Amongst this horde of females, however, Florent had one friend. Claire unhesitatingly declared that the new inspector was a very good fellow. When he passed in front of her, pursued by the coarse abuse of the others, she gave him a pleasant smile, sitting nonchalantly behind her stall, with unruly errant locks of pale hair straying over her neck and her brow, and the bodice of her dress pinned all askew. He also often saw her dipping her hands into her tanks, transferring the fish from one compartment to another, and amusing herself by turning on the brass taps, shaped like little dolphins with open mouths, from which the water poured in streamlets. Amidst the rustling sound of the water she had some of the quivering grace of a girl who has just been bathing and has hurriedly slipped on her clothes.

One morning she was particularly amiable. She called the inspector to her to show him a huge eel which had been the wonder of the market when exhibited at the auction. She opened the grating, which she had previously closed over the basin in whose depths the eel seemed to be lying sound asleep.

'Wait a moment,' she said, 'and I'll show it to you.'

Then she gently slipped her bare arm into the water; it was not a very plump arm, and its veins showed softly blue beneath its satiny skin. As soon as the eel felt her touch, it rapidly twisted round, and seemed to fill the narrow trough with its glistening greenish coils. And directly it had settled

down to rest again Claire once more stirred it with her finger-tips.

'It is an enormous creature,' Florent felt bound to say. 'I have rarely seen such a fine one.'

Claire thereupon confessed to him that she had at first been frightened of eels; but now she had learned how to tighten her grip so that they could not slip away. From another compartment she took a smaller one, which began to wriggle both with head and tail, as she held it about the middle in her closed fist. This made her laugh. She let it go, then seized another and another, scouring the basin and stirring up the whole heap of snaky-looking creatures with her slim fingers.

Afterwards she began to speak of the slackness of trade. The hawkers on the foot-pavement of the covered way did the regular saleswomen a great deal of injury, she said. Meantime her bare arm, which she had not wiped, was glistening and dripping with water. Big drops trickled from each finger.

'Oh,' she exclaimed suddenly, 'I must show you my carp, too!'

She now removed another grating, and, using both hands, lifted out a large carp, which began to flap its tail and gasp. It was too big to be held conveniently, so she sought another one. This was smaller, and she could hold it with one hand, but the latter was forced slightly open by the panting of the sides each time that the fish gasped. To amuse herself it occurred to Claire to pop the tip of her thumb into the carp's mouth whilst it was dilated. 'It won't bite,' said she with her gentle laugh; 'it's not spiteful. No more are the crawfishes; I'm not the least afraid of them.'

She plunged her arm into the water again, and from a compartment full of a confused crawling mass brought up a crawfish that had caught her little finger in its claws. She gave the creature a shake, but it no doubt gripped her too tightly, for she turned very red, and snapped off its claw with a quick, angry gesture, though still continuing to smile.

'By the way,' she continued quickly, to conceal her emotion, 'I wouldn't trust myself with a pike; he'd cut off my fingers like a knife.'

She thereupon showed him some big pike arranged in order of size upon clean scoured shelves, beside some bronze-hued tench and little heaps of gudgeon. Her hands were

now quite slimy with handling the carp, and as she stood there in the dampness rising from the tanks, she held them outstretched over the dripping fish on the stall. She seemed enveloped by an odour of spawn, that heavy scent which rises from among the reeds and water-lilies when the fish, languid in the sunlight, discharge their eggs. Then she wiped her hands on her apron, still smiling the placid smile of a girl who knew nothing of passion in that quivering atmosphere of the frigid loves of the river.

The kindliness which Claire showed to Florent was but a slight consolation to him. By stopping to talk to the girl he only drew upon himself still coarser jeers from the other stall-keepers. Claire shrugged her shoulders, and said that her mother was an old jade, and her sister a worthless creature. The injustice of the market-folk towards the new inspector filled her with indignation. The war between them, however, grew more bitter every day. Florent had serious thoughts of resigning his post; indeed, he would not have retained it for another twenty-four hours if he had not been afraid that Lisa might imagine him to be a coward. He was frightened of what she might say and what she might think. She was naturally well aware of the great contest which was going on between the fish-wives and their inspector; for the whole echoing market resounded with it, and the entire neighbourhood discussed each fresh incident with endless comments.

'Ah, well,' Lisa would often say in the evening, after dinner, 'I'd soon bring them to reason if I had anything to do with them! Why, they are a lot of dirty jades that I wouldn't touch with the tip of my finger! That Normande is the lowest of the low! I'd soon crush her, that I would! You should really use your authority, Florent. You are wrong to behave as you do. Put your foot down, and they'll all come to their senses very quickly, you'll see.'

A terrible climax was presently reached. One morning the servant of Madame Taboureau, the baker, came to the market to buy a brill; and the beautiful Norman, having noticed her lingering near her stall for several minutes, began to make overtures to her in a coaxing way: 'Come and see me; I'll suit you,' she said. 'Would you like a pair of soles, or a fine turbot?'

Then as the servant at last came up, and sniffed at a brill with that dissatisfied pout which buyers assume in the hope

of getting what they want at a lower price, La Normande continued:

'Just feel the weight of that, now,' and so saying she laid the brill, wrapped in a sheet of thick yellow paper, on the woman's open palm.

The servant, a mournful little woman from Auvergne, felt the weight of the brill, and examined its gills, still pouting, and saying not a word.

'And how much do you want for it?' she asked presently, in a reluctant tone.

'Fifteen francs,' replied La Normande.

At this the servant hastily laid the brill on the stall again, and seemed anxious to hurry away, but the other detained her. 'Wait a moment,' said she. 'What do you offer?'

'No, no, I can't take it. It is much too dear.'

'Come, now, make me an offer.'

'Well, will you take eight francs?'

Old Madame Méhudin, who was there, suddenly seemed to wake up, and broke out into a contemptuous laugh. Did people think that she and her daughter stole the fish they sold? 'Eight francs for a brill of that size!' she exclaimed. 'You'll be wanting one for nothing next, to use as a cooling plaster!'

Meantime La Normande turned her head away, as though greatly offended. However, the servant came back twice and offered nine francs; and finally she increased her bid to ten.

'All right, come on, give me your money!' cried the fish-girl, seeing that the woman was now really going away.

The servant took her stand in front of the stall and entered into a friendly gossip with old Madame Méhudin. Madame Tabourcau, she said, was so exacting! She had got some people coming to dinner that evening, some cousins from Blois, a notary and his wife. Madame Tabourcau's family, she added, was a very respectable one, and she herself, although only a baker, had received an excellent education.

'You'll clean it nicely for me, won't you?' added the woman, pausing in her chatter.

With a jerk of her finger La Normande had removed the fish's entrails and tossed them into a pail. Then she slipped a corner of her apron under its gills to wipe away a few grains of sand. 'There, my dear,' she said, putting the fish into the servant's basket, 'you'll come back to thank me.'

Certainly the servant did come back a quarter of an hour afterwards, but it was with a flushed, red face. She had been crying, and her little body was trembling all over with anger. Tossing the brill on to the marble slab, she pointed to a broad gash in its belly that reached the bone. Then a flood of broken words burst from her throat, which was still contracted by sobbing: 'Madame Taboureau won't have it. She says she couldn't put it on her table. She told me, too, that I was an idiot, and let myself be cheated by anyone. You can see for yourself that the fish is spoilt. I never thought of turning it round; I quite trusted you. Give me my ten francs back.'

'You should look at what you buy,' the handsome Norman calmly observed.

And then, as the servant was just raising her voice again, old Madame Méhudin got up. 'Just you shut up!' she cried. 'We're not going to take back a fish that's been knocking about in other people's houses. How do we know that you didn't let it fall and damage it yourself?'

'I! I damage it!' The little servant was choking with indignation. 'Ah! you're a couple of thieves!' she cried, sobbing bitterly. 'Yes, a couple of thieves! Madame Taboureau herself told me so!'

Matters then became uproarious. Boiling over with rage and brandishing their fists, both mother and daughter fairly exploded; while the poor little servant, quite bewildered by their voices, the one hoarse and the other shrill, which belaboured her with insults as though they were battledores and she a shuttlecock, sobbed on more bitterly than ever.

'Be off with you! Your Madame Taboureau would like to be half as fresh as that fish is! She'd like us to sew it up for her, no doubt!'

'A whole fish for ten francs! What'll she want next!'

Then came coarse words and foul accusations. Had the servant been the most worthless of her sex she could not have been more bitterly upbraided.

Florent, whom the market-keeper had gone to fetch, made his appearance when the quarrel was at its hottest. The whole pavilion seemed to be in a state of insurrection. The fish-wives, who manifest the keenest jealousy of each other when the sale of a penny herring is in question, display a united front when a quarrel arises with a buyer. They sang the popular old ditty, 'The baker's wife has heaps of crowns, which cost her precious little'; they stamped their feet, and

goaded the Méhudins as though the latter were dogs which they were urging on to bite and devour. And there were even some, having stalls at the other end of the alley, who rushed up wildly, as though they meant to spring at the chignon of the poor little woman, she meantime being quite submerged by the flood of insulting abuse poured upon her.

'Return mademoiselle her ten francs,' said Florent sternly, when he had learned what had taken place.

But old Madame Méhudin had her blood up. 'As for you, my little man,' quoth she, 'go to blazes! Here, that's how I'll return the ten francs!'

As she spoke, she flung the brill with all her force at the head of Madame Taboureau's servant, who received it full in the face. The blood spurted from her nose, and the brill, after adhering for a moment to her cheeks, fell to the ground and burst with a flop like that of a wet clout. This brutal act threw Florent into a fury. The beautiful Norman felt frightened and recoiled, as he cried out: 'I suspend you for a week, and I will have your licence withdrawn. You hear me?'

Then, as the other fish-wives were still jeering behind him, he turned round with such a threatening air that they quailed like wild beasts mastered by the tamer, and tried to assume an expression of innocence. When the Méhudins had returned the ten francs, Florent peremptorily ordered them to cease selling at once. The old woman was choking with rage, while the daughter kept silent, but turned very white. She, the beautiful Norman, to be driven out of her stall!

Claire said in her quiet voice that it served her mother and sister right, a remark which nearly resulted in the two girls tearing each other's hair out that evening when they returned home to the Rue Pirouette. However, when the Méhudins came back to the market at the week's end, they remained very quiet, reserved, and curt of speech, though full of a cold-blooded wrath. Moreover, they found the pavilion quite calm and restored to order again. From that day forward the beautiful Norman must have harboured the thought of some terrible vengeance. She felt that she really had Lisa to thank for what had happened. She had met her, the day after the battle, carrying her head so high, that she had sworn she would make her pay dearly for her glance of triumph. She held interminable confabulations with Mademoiselle Saget, Madame Lecœur, and La Sarriette, in quiet corners of the market; however, all their

chatter about the shameless conduct which they slanderously ascribed to Lisa and her cousin, and about the hairs which they declared were found in Quenu's chitterlings, brought La Normande little consolation. She was trying to think of some very malicious plan of vengeance, which would strike her rival to the heart.

Her child was growing up in the fish-market in all freedom and neglect. When but three years old the youngster had been brought there, and day by day remained squatting on some rag amidst the fish. He would fall asleep beside the big tunnies as though he were one of them, and awake among the mackerel and whiting. The little rascal smelt of fish as strongly as though he were some big fish's offspring. For a long time his favourite pastime, whenever his mother's back was turned, was to build walls and houses of herrings; and he would also play at soldiers on the marble slab, arranging the red gurnets in confronting lines, pushing them against each other, and battering their heads, while imitating the sound of drum and trumpet with his lips; after which he would throw them all into a heap again, and exclaim that they were dead. When he grew older he would prowl about his aunt Claire's stall to get hold of the bladders of the carp and pike which she gutted. He placed them on the ground and made them burst, an amusement which afforded him vast delight. When he was seven he rushed about the alleys, crawled under the stalls, ferreted amongst the zinc bound fish-boxes, and became the spoiled pet of all the women. Whenever they showed him something fresh which pleased him, he would clasp his hands and exclaim in ecstasy, 'Oh, isn't it stunning!' *Muche* was the exact word which he used; *muche* being the equivalent of 'stunning' in the lingo of the markets; and he used the expression so often that it clung to him as a nickname. He became known all over the place as 'Muche.' It was Muche here, there, and everywhere; no one called him anything else. He was to be met with in every nook; in out-of-the-way corners of the offices in the auction pavilion; among the piles of oyster baskets, and betwixt the buckets where the refuse was thrown. With a pinky fairness of skin, he was like a young barbel frisking and gliding about in deep water. He was as fond of running, streaming water as any young fry. He was ever dabbling in the pools in the alleys. He wetted himself with the drippings from the tables, and when no one was looking often

slyly turned on the taps, rejoicing in the bursting gush of water. But it was especially beside the fountains near the cellar steps that his mother went to seek him in the evening, and she would bring him thence with his hands quite blue, and his shoes, and even his pockets, full of water.

At seven years old Muche was as pretty as an angel, and as coarse in his manners as any carter. He had curly chestnut hair, beautiful soft eyes, and an innocent-looking mouth which gave vent to language that even a gendarme would have hesitated to use. Brought up amidst all the ribaldry and profanity of the markets, he had the whole vocabulary of the place on the tip of his tongue. With his hands on his hips he often mimicked Grandmother Méhudin in her anger, and at these times the coarsest and vilest expressions would stream from his lips in a voice of crystalline purity that might have belonged to some little chorister chanting the *Ave Maria*. He would even try to assume a hoarse roughness of tone, seek to degrade and taint that exquisite freshness of childhood which made him resemble a *bambino* on the Madonna's knees. The fish-wives laughed at him till they cried; and he, encouraged, could scarcely say a couple of words without rapping out an oath. But in spite of all this he still remained charming, understanding nothing of the dirt amidst which he lived, kept in vigorous health by the fresh breezes and sharp odours of the fish-market, and reciting his vocabulary of coarse indecencies with as pure a face as though he were saying his prayers.

The winter was approaching, and Muche seemed very sensitive to the cold. As soon as the chilly weather set in he manifested a strong predilection for the inspector's office. This was situated in the left-hand corner of the pavilion, on the side of the Rue Rambuteau. The furniture consisted of a table, a stack of drawers, an easy-chair, two other chairs, and a stove. It was this stove which attracted Muche. Florent quite worshipped children, and when he saw the little fellow, with his dripping legs, gazing wistfully through the window, he made him come inside. His first conversation with the lad caused him profound amazement. Muche sat down in front of the stove, and in his quiet voice exclaimed: 'I'll just toast my toes, do you see? It's d——d cold this morning.' Then he broke into a rippling laugh, and added: 'Aunt Claire looks awfully blue this morning. Is it true, sir, that you are sweet on her?'

Amazed though he was, Florent felt quite interested in the odd little fellow. The handsome Norman retained her surly bearing, but allowed her son to frequent the inspector's office without a word of objection. Florent consequently concluded that he had the mother's permission to receive the boy, and every afternoon he asked him in; by degrees forming the idea of turning him into a steady, respectable young fellow. He could almost fancy that his brother Quenu had grown little again, and that they were both in the big room in the Rue Royer-Collard once more. The life which his self-sacrificing nature pictured to him as perfect happiness was a life spent with some young being who would never grow up, whom he could go on teaching for ever, and in whose innocence he might still love his fellow-men. On the third day of his acquaintance with Muche he brought an alphabet to the office, and the lad delighted him by the intelligence he manifested. He learned his letters with all the sharp precocity which marks the Parisian street arab, and derived great amusement from the woodcuts illustrating the alphabet.

He found opportunities, too, for plenty of fine fun in the little office, where the stove still remained the chief attraction and a source of endless enjoyment. At first he cooked potatoes and chestnuts at it, but presently these seemed insipid, and he thereupon stole some gudgeons from his aunt Claire, roasted them one by one, suspended from a string in front of the glowing fire, and then devoured them with gusto, though he had no bread. One day he even brought a carp with him; but it was impossible to roast it sufficiently, and it made such a smell in the office that both window and door had to be thrown open. Sometimes, when the odour of all these culinary operations became too strong, Florent would throw the fish into the street, but as a rule he only laughed. By the end of a couple of months Muche was able to read fairly well, and his copy-books did him credit.

Meantime, every evening the lad wearied his mother with his talk about his good friend Florent. His good friend Florent had drawn him pictures of trees and of men in huts, said he. His good friend Florent waved his arm and said that men would be far better if they all knew how to read. And at last La Normande heard so much about Florent that she seemed to be almost intimate with this man against whom she harboured so much rancour. One day she shut Muche

up at home to prevent him from going to the inspector's, but he cried so bitterly that she gave him his liberty again on the following morning. There was very little determination about her, in spite of her broad shoulders and bold looks. When the lad told her how nice and warm he had been in the office, and came back to her with his clothes quite dry, she felt a sort of vague gratitude, a pleasure in knowing that he had found a shelter-place where he could sit with his feet in front of a fire. Later on, she was quite touched when he read her some words from a scrap of soiled newspaper wrapped round a slice of conger-eel. By degrees, indeed, she began to think, though without admitting it, that Florent could not really be a bad sort of fellow. She felt respect for his knowledge, mingled with an increasing curiosity to see more of him and learn something of his life. Then, all at once, she found an excuse for gratifying this inquisitiveness. She would use it as a means of vengeance. It would be fine fun to make friends with Florent and embroil him with that great fat Lisa.

'Does your good friend Florent ever speak to you about me?' she asked Muche one morning as she was dressing him.

'Oh, no,' replied the boy. 'We enjoy ourselves.'

'Well, you can tell him that I've quite forgiven him, and that I'm much obliged to him for having taught you to read.'

Thenceforward the child was entrusted with some message every day. He went backwards and forwards from his mother to the inspector, and from the inspector to his mother, charged with kindly words and questions and answers, which he repeated mechanically without knowing their meaning. He might, indeed, have been safely trusted with the most compromising communications. However, the beautiful Norman felt afraid of appearing timid, and so one day she herself went to the inspector's office and sat down on the second chair, while Muche was having his writing lesson. She proved very suave and complimentary, and Florent was by far the more embarrassed of the two. They only spoke of the lad; and when Florent expressed a fear that he might not be able to continue the lessons in the office, La Normande invited him to come to their home in the evening. She spoke also of payment; but at this he blushed, and said that he certainly would not come if any mention were made of money. Thereupon the young woman determined in her own mind that she would recompense him with presents of choice fish.

Peace was thus made between them; the beautiful Norman

even took Florent under her protection. Apart from this, however, the whole market was becoming reconciled to the new inspector, the fish-wives arriving at the conclusion that he was really a better fellow than Monsieur Verlaque, notwithstanding his strange eyes. It was only old Madame Méhudin who still shrugged her shoulders, full of rancour as she was against the 'long lanky-guts,' as she contemptuously called him. And then, too, a strange thing happened. One morning, when Florent stopped with a smile before Claire's tanks, the girl dropped an eel which she was holding and angrily turned her back upon him, her cheeks quite swollen and reddened by temper. The inspector was so much astonished that he spoke to La Normande about it.

'Oh, never mind her,' said the young woman; 'she's cracked. She makes a point of always differing from everybody else. She only behaved like that to annoy me.'

La Normande was now triumphant—she strutted about her stall, and became more coquettish than ever, arranging her hair in the most elaborate manner. Meeting the handsome Lisa one day she returned her look of scorn, and even burst out laughing in her face. The certainty she felt of driving the mistress of the pork-shop to despair by winning her cousin from her endowed her with a gay, sonorous laugh, which rolled up from her chest and rippled her white plump neck. She now had the whim of dressing Muche very showily in a little Highland costume and velvet bonnet. The lad had never previously worn anything but a tattered blouse. It unfortunately happened, however, that just about this time he again became very fond of the water. The ice had melted and the weather was mild, so he gave his Scotch jacket a bath, turning the fountain tap on at full flow and letting the water pour down his arm from his elbow to his hand. He called this 'playing at gutters.' Then a little later, when his mother came up and caught him, she found him with two other young scamps watching a couple of little fishes swimming about in his velvet cap, which he had filled with water.

For nearly eight months Florent lived in the markets, feeling continual drowsiness. After his seven years of suffering he had lighted upon such calm quietude, such unbroken regularity of life, that he was scarcely conscious of existing. He gave himself up to this jog-trot peacefulness with a dazed sort of feeling, continually experiencing surprise at finding

himself each morning in the same armchair in the little office. This office with its bare hut-like appearance had a charm for him. He here found a quiet and secluded refuge amidst that ceaseless roar of the markets which made him dream of some surging sea spreading around him, and isolating him from the world Gradually, however, a vague nervousness began to prey upon him; he became discontented, accused himself of faults which he could not define, and began to rebel against the emptiness which he experienced more and more acutely in mind and body. Then, too, the evil smells of the fish-market brought him nausea. By degrees he became unhinged, his vague boredom developing into restless, nervous excitement.

All his days were precisely alike, spent among the same sounds and the same odours. In the mornings the noisy buzzing of the auction-sales resounded in his ears like a distant echo of bells; and sometimes, when there was a delay in the arrival of the fish, the auctions continued till very late. Upon these occasions he remained in the pavilion till noon, disturbed at every moment by quarrels and disputes, which he endeavoured to settle with scrupulous justice. Hours elapsed before he could get free of some miserable matter or other which was exciting the market. He paced up and down amidst the crush and uproar of the sales, slowly perambulating the alleys and occasionally stopping in front of the stalls which fringed the Rue Rambuteau, and where lay rosy heaps of prawns and baskets of boiled lobsters with tails tied backwards, while live ones were gradually dying as they sprawled over the marble slabs. And then he would watch gentlemen in silk hats and black gloves bargaining with the fish-wives, and finally going off with boiled lobsters wrapped in paper in the pockets of their frock-coats.[1] Farther away, at the temporary stalls, where the commoner sorts of fish were sold, he would recognise the bareheaded women of the neighbourhood, who always came at the same hour to make their purchases.

At times he took an interest in some well-dressed lady trailing her lace petticoats over the damp stones, and escorted by a servant in a white apron; and he would follow her at a little distance on noticing how the fish-wives shrugged their

[1] The little fish-basket for the use of customers, so familiar in London, is not known in Paris.—*Trans.*

shoulders at sight of her air of disgust. The medley of hampers and baskets and bags, the crowd of skirts flitting along the damp alleys, occupied his attention until lunch-time. He took a delight in the dripping water and the fresh breeze as he passed from the acrid smell of the shell-fish to the pungent odour of the salted fish. It was always with the latter that he brought his official round of inspection to a close. The cases of red herrings, the Nantes sardines on their layers of leaves, and the rolled cod, exposed for sale under the eyes of stout, faded fish-wives, brought him thoughts of a voyage necessitating a vast supply of salted provisions.

In the afternoon the markets became quieter, grew drowsy; and Florent then shut himself up in his office, made out his reports, and enjoyed the happiest hours of his day. If he happened to go out and cross the fish-market, he found it almost deserted. There was no longer the crushing and pushing and uproar of ten o'clock in the morning. The fish-wives, seated behind their stalls, leant back knitting, while a few belated purchasers prowled about casting sidelong glances at the remaining fish, with the thoughtful eyes and compressed lips of women closely calculating the price of their dinner. At last the twilight fell, there was a noise of boxes being moved, and the fish was laid for the night on beds of ice; and then, after witnessing the closing of the gates, Florent went off, seemingly carrying the fish-market along with him in his clothes and his beard and his hair.

For the first few months this penetrating odour caused him no great discomfort. The winter was a severe one, the frosts converted the alleys into slippery mirrors, and the fountains and marble slabs were fringed with a lacework of ice. In the mornings it was necessary to place little braziers underneath the taps before a drop of water could be drawn. The frozen fish had twisted tails; and, dull of hue and hard to the touch like unpolished metal, gave out a ringing sound akin to that of pale cast-iron when it snaps. Until February the pavilion presented a most mournful appearance: it was deserted, and wrapped in a bristling shroud of ice. But with March came a thaw, with mild weather and fogs and rain. Then the fish became soft again, and unpleasant odours mingled with the smell of the mud wafted from the neighbouring streets. These odours were as yet vague, tempered by the moisture which clung to the ground. But in the

blazing June afternoons a reeking stench arose, and the atmosphere became heavy with a pestilential haze. The upper windows were then opened, and huge blinds of grey canvas were drawn beneath the burning sky. Nevertheless, a fiery rain seemed to be pouring down, heating the market as though it were a big stove, and there was not a breath of air to waft away the noxious emanations from the fish. A visible steam went up from all the stalls.

The masses of food amongst which Florent lived now began to cause him the greatest discomfort. The disgust with which the pork-shop had filled him came back in a still more intolerable fashion. He almost sickened as he passed these masses of fish, which, despite all the water lavished upon them, turned bad under a sudden whiff of hot air. Even when he shut himself up in his office his discomfort continued, for the abominable odour forced its way through the chinks in the woodwork of the window and door. When the sky was grey and leaden, the little room remained quite dark; and then the day was like a long twilight in the depths of some fœtid marsh. He was often attacked by fits of nervous excitement, and felt a craving desire to walk; and he would then descend into the cellars by the broad staircase opening in the middle of the pavilion. In the pent-up air down below, in the dim light of the occasional gas-jets, he once more found the refreshing coolness diffused by pure cold water. He would stand in front of the big tank where the reserve stock of live fish was kept, and listen to the ceaseless murmur of the four streamlets of water falling from the four corners of the central urn, and then spreading into a broad stream and gliding beneath the locked gratings of the basins with a gentle and continuous flow. This subterranean spring, this stream murmuring in the gloom, had a tranquillising effect upon him. Of an evening, too, he delighted in the fine sunsets which threw the delicate lacework of the market buildings blackly against the red glow of the heavens. The dancing dust of the last sun rays streamed through every opening, through every chink of the Venetian shutters, and the whole was like some luminous transparency on which the slender shafts of the columns, the elegant curves of the girders, and the geometrical tracery of the roofs were minutely outlined. Florent feasted his eyes on this mighty diagram washed in with Indian ink on phosphorescent vellum, and his mind reverted to his old fancy of a colossal machine with wheels

and levers and beams espied in the crimson glow of the fires blazing beneath its boilers. At each consecutive hour of the day the changing play of the light—from the bluish haze of early morning and the black shadows of noon to the flaring of the sinking sun and the paling of its fires in the ashy grey of the twilight—revealed the markets under a new aspect; but on the flaming evenings, when the foul smells arose and forced their way across the broad yellow beams like hot puffs of steam, Florent again experienced discomfort, and his dream changed, and he imagined himself in some gigantic knacker's boiling-house where the fat of a whole people was being melted down.

The coarseness of the market people, whose words and gestures seemed to be infected with the evil smell of the place, also made him suffer. He was very tolerant, and showed no mock modesty; still, these impudent women often embarrassed him. Madame François, whom he had again met, was the only one with whom he felt at ease. She showed such pleasure on learning he had found a berth and was comfortable and out of worry, as she put it, that he was quite touched. The laughter of Lisa, the handsome Norman, and the others disquieted him; but of Madame François he would willingly have made a confidante. She never laughed mockingly at him; when she did laugh, it was like a woman rejoicing at another's happiness. She was a brave, plucky creature, too; hers was a hard business in winter, during the frosts, and the rainy weather was still more trying. On some mornings Florent saw her arrive in a pouring deluge which had been slowly, coldly falling ever since the previous night. Between Nanterre and Paris the wheels of her cart had sunk up to the axles in mud, and Balthazar was caked with mire to his belly. His mistress would pity him and sympathise with him as she wiped him down with some old aprons.

'The poor creatures are very sensitive,' said she; 'a mere nothing gives them a cold. Ah, my poor old Balthazar! I really thought that we had tumbled into the Seine as we crossed the Neuilly bridge, the rain came down in such a deluge!'

While Balthazar was housed in the inn stable his mistress remained in the pouring rain to sell her vegetables. The footway was transformed into a lake of liquid mud. The cabbages, carrots, and turnips were pelted by the grey water,

quite drowned by the muddy torrent that rushed along the pavement. There was no longer any of that glorious greenery so apparent on bright mornings. The market-gardeners, cowering in their heavy cloaks beneath the downpour, swore at the municipality which, after due inquiry, had declared that rain was in no way injurious to vegetables, and that there was accordingly no necessity to erect any shelters.

Those rainy mornings greatly worried Florent, who thought about Madame François. He always managed to slip away and get a word with her. But he never found her at all low-spirited. She shook herself like a poodle, saying that she was quite used to such weather, and was not made of sugar, to melt away beneath a few drops of rain. However, he made her seek refuge for a few minutes in one of the covered ways, and frequently even took her to Monsieur Lebigre's, where they had some hot wine together. While she with her peaceful face beamed on him in all friendliness, he felt quite delighted with the healthy odour of the fields which she brought into the midst of the foul market atmosphere. She exhaled a scent of earth, hay, fresh air, and open skies.

'You must come to Nanterre, my lad,' she said to him, 'and look at my kitchen garden. I have put borders of thyme everywhere. How bad your villainous Paris does smell!'

Then she went off, dripping. Florent, on his side, felt quite re-invigorated when he parted from her. He tried, too, the effect of work upon the nervous depression from which he suffered. He was a man of a very methodical temperament, and sometimes carried out his plans for the allotment of his time with a strictness that bordered on mania. He shut himself up two evenings a week in order to write an exhaustive work on Cayenne. His modest bedroom was excellently adapted, he thought, to calm his mind and incline him to work. He lighted his fire, saw that the pomegranate at the foot of the bed was looking all right, and then seated himself at the little table, and remained working till midnight. He had pushed the missal and Dream-book back in the drawer, which was now filling with notes, memoranda, manuscripts of all kinds. The work on Cayenne made but slow progress, however, as it was constantly being interrupted by other projects, plans for enormous undertakings which he sketched out in a few words. He successively drafted an out-

line of a complete reform of the administrative system of the markets, a scheme for transforming the city dues, levied on produce as it entered Paris, into taxes levied upon the sales, a new system of victualling the poorer neighbourhoods, and, lastly, a somewhat vague socialist enactment for the storing in common warehouses of all the provisions brought to the markets, and the ensuring of a minimum daily supply to each household in Paris. As he sat there, with his head bent over his table, and his mind absorbed in thoughts of all these weighty matters, his gloomy figure cast a great black shadow on the soft peacefulness of the garret. Sometimes a chaffinch which he had picked up one snowy day in the market would mistake the lamplight for the day, and break the silence, which only the scratching of Florent's pen on his paper disturbed, by a cry.

Florent was fated to revert to politics. He had suffered too much through them not to make them the dearest occupation of his life. Under other conditions he might have become a good provincial schoolmaster, happy in the peaceful life of some little town. But he had been treated as though he were a wolf, and felt as though he had been marked out by exile for some great combative task. His nervous discomfort was the outcome of his long reveries at Cayenne, the brooding bitterness he had felt at his unmerited sufferings, and the vows he had secretly sworn to avenge humanity and justice—the former scouted with a whip, and the latter trodden under foot. Those colossal markets and their teeming odoriferous masses of food had hastened the crisis. To Florent they appeared symbolical of some glutted, digesting beast, of Paris, wallowing in its fat and silently upholding the Empire. He seemed to be encircled by swelling forms and sleek, fat faces, which ever and ever protested against his own martyrlike scragginess and sallow, discontented visage. To him the markets were like the stomach of the shopkeeping classes, the stomach of all the folks of average rectitude puffing itself out, rejoicing, glistening in the sunshine, and declaring that everything was for the best, since peaceable people had never before grown so beautifully fat. As these thoughts passed through his mind Florent clenched his fists, and felt ready for a struggle, more irritated now by the thought of his exile than he had been when he first returned to France. Hatred resumed entire possession of him. He often let his pen drop and became absorbed in dreams. The dying fire

cast a bright glow upon his face; the lamp burned smokily, and the chaffinch fell asleep again on one leg, with its head tucked under its wing.

Sometimes Auguste, on coming upstairs at eleven o'clock and seeing the light shining under the door, would knock, before going to bed. Florent admitted him with some impatience. The assistant sat down in front of the fire, speaking but little, and never saying why he had come. His eyes would all the time remain fixed upon the photograph of himself and Augustine in their Sunday finery. Florent came to the conclusion that the young man took a pleasure in visiting the room for the simple reason that it had been occupied by his sweetheart; and one evening he asked him with a smile if he had guessed rightly.

'Well, perhaps it is so,' replied Auguste, very much surprised at the discovery which he himself now made of the reasons which actuated him. 'I'd really never thought of that before. I came to see you without knowing why. But if I were to tell Augustine, how she'd laugh!'

Whenever he showed himself at all loquacious, his one eternal theme was the pork-shop which he was going to set up with Augustine at Plaisance. He seemed so perfectly assured of arranging his life in accordance with his desires, that Florent grew to feel a sort of respect for him, mingled with irritation. After all, the young fellow was very resolute and energetic, in spite of his seeming stupidity. He made straight for the goal he had in view, and would doubtless reach it in perfect assurance and happiness. On the evenings of these visits from the apprentice, Florent could not settle down to work again; he went off to bed in a discontented mood, and did not recover his equilibrium till the thought passed through his mind, 'Why, that Auguste is a perfect animal!'

Every month he went to Clamart to see Monsieur Verlaque. These visits were almost a delight to him. The poor man still lingered on, to the great astonishment of Gavard, who had not expected him to last for more than six months. Every time that Florent went to see him Verlaque would declare that he was feeling better, and was most anxious to resume his work again. But the days glided by, and he had serious relapses. Florent would sit by his bedside, chat about the fish-market, and do what he could to enliven him. He deposited on the pedestal table the fifty francs which he

surrendered to him each month; and the old inspector, though the payment had been agreed upon, invariably protested, and seemed disinclined to take the money. Then they would begin to speak of something else, and the coins remained lying on the table. When Florent went away, Madame Verlaque always accompanied him to the street-door. She was a gentle little woman, of a very tearful disposition. Her one topic of conversation was the expense necessitated by her husband's illness, the costliness of chicken-broth, butcher's meat, Bordeaux wine, medicine, and doctors' fees. Her doleful conversation greatly embarrassed Florent, and on the first few occasions he did not understand the drift of it. But at last, as the poor woman seemed always in a state of tears, and kept saying how happy and comfortable they had been when they had enjoyed the full salary of eighteen hundred francs a year, he timidly offered to make her a private allowance, to be kept secret from her husband. This offer, however, she declined, inconsistently declaring that the fifty francs were sufficient. But in the course of the month she frequently wrote to Florent, calling him their saviour. Her handwriting was small and fine, yet she would contrive to fill three pages of letter-paper with humble, flowing sentences entreating the loan of ten francs; and this she at last did so regularly that wellnigh the whole of Florent's hundred and fifty francs found its way to the Verlaques. The husband was probably unaware of it; however, the wife gratefully kissed Florent's hands. This charity afforded him the greatest pleasure, and he concealed it as though it were some forbidden selfish indulgence.

'That rascal Verlaque is making a fool of you,' Gavard would sometimes say. 'He's coddling himself up finely now that you are doing the work and paying him an income.'

At last one day Florent replied:

'Oh, we've arranged matters together. I'm only to give him twenty-five francs a month in future.'

As a matter of fact, Florent had but little need of money. The Quenus continued to provide him with board and lodging; and the few francs which he kept by him sufficed to pay for the refreshment he took in the evening at Monsieur Lebigre's. His life had gradually assumed all the regularity of clockwork. He worked in his bedroom, continued to teach little Muche twice a week from eight to nine o'clock, devoted an evening to Lisa, to avoid offending her, and spent the rest

of his spare time in the little 'cabinet' with Gavard and his friends.

When he went to the Méhudins' there was a touch of tutorial stiffness in his gentle demeanour. He was pleased with the old house in the Rue Pirouette. On the ground floor he passed through the faint odours pervading the premises of the purveyor of cooked vegetables. Big pans of boiled spinach and sorrel stood cooling in the little back-yard. Then he ascended the winding staircase, greasy and dark, with worn and bulging steps which sloped in a disquieting manner. The Méhudins occupied the whole of the second floor. Even when they had attained to comfortable circumstances the old mother had always declined to move into fresh quarters, despite all the supplications of her daughters, who dreamt of living in a new house in a fine broad street. But on this point the old woman was not to be moved; she had lived there, she said, and meant to die there. She contented herself, moreover, with a dark little closet, leaving the larger rooms to Claire and La Normande. The latter, with the authority of the elder born, had taken possession of the room that overlooked the street; it was the best and largest of the suite. Claire was so much annoyed at her sister's action in the matter that she refused to occupy the adjoining room, whose window overlooked the yard, and obstinately insisted on sleeping on the other side of the landing, in a sort of garret, which she did not even have whitewashed. However, she had her own key, and so was independent; directly anything happened to displease her she locked herself up in her own quarters.

As a rule, when Florent arrived the Méhudins were just finishing their dinner. Muche sprang to his neck, and for a moment the young man remained seated with the lad chattering between his legs. Then, when the oilcloth cover had been wiped, the lesson began on a corner of the table. The beautiful Norman gave Florent a cordial welcome. She generally began to knit or mend some linen, and would draw her chair up to the table and work by the light of the same lamp as the others; and she frequently put down her needle to listen to the lesson, which filled her with surprise. She soon began to feel warm esteem for this man who seemed so clever, who, in speaking to the little one, showed himself as gentle as a woman, and manifested angelic patience in again and again repeating the same instructions. She no longer

considered him at all plain, but even felt somewhat jealous of beautiful Lisa. And then she drew her chair still nearer, and gazed at Florent with an embarrassing smile.

'But you are jogging my elbow, mother, and I can't write,' Muche exclaimed angrily. 'There! see what a blot you've made me make! Get further away, do!'

La Normande now gradually began to say a good many unpleasant things about beautiful Lisa. She pretended that the latter concealed her real age, that she laced her stays so tightly that she nearly suffocated herself, and that if she came down of a morning looking so trim and neat, without a single hair out of place, it must be because she looked perfectly hideous when in dishabille. Then La Normande would raise her arm a little, and say that there was no need for her to wear any stays to cramp and deform her figure. At these times the lessons would be interrupted, and Muche gazed with interest at his mother as she raised her arms. Florent listened to her, and even laughed, thinking to himself that women were very odd creatures. The rivalry between the beautiful Norman and beautiful Lisa amused him.

Muche, however, managed to finish his page of writing. Florent, who was a good penman, set him copies in large hand and round hand on slips of paper. The words he chose were very long and took up the whole line, and he evinced a marked partiality for such expressions as 'tyrannically,' 'liberticide,' 'unconstitutional,' and 'revolutionary.' At times also he made the boy copy such sentences as these: 'The day of justice will surely come'; 'The suffering of the just man is the condemnation of the oppressor'; 'When the hour strikes, the guilty shall fall.' In preparing these copy slips he was, indeed, influenced by the ideas which haunted his brain; he would for the time become quite oblivious of Muche, the beautiful Norman, and all his surroundings. The lad would have copied Rousseau's 'Contrat Social' had he been told to do so; and thus, drawing each letter in turn, he filled page after page with lines of 'tyrannically' and 'unconstitutional.'

As long as the tutor remained there, old Madame Méhudin kept fidgeting round the table, muttering to herself. She still harboured terrible rancour against Florent; and asserted that it was folly to make the lad work in that way at a time when children ought to be in bed. She would certainly have turned that 'spindle-shanks' out of the house, if the beautiful Norman, after a stormy scene, had not bluntly told her that

she would go to live elsewhere if she were not allowed to receive whom she chose. However, the pair began quarrelling again on the subject every evening.

'You may say what you like,' exclaimed the old woman; 'but he's got treacherous eyes. And, besides, I'm always suspicious of those skinny people. A skinny man's capable of anything. I've never come across a decent one yet. That one's as flat as a board. And he's got such an ugly face, too! Though I'm sixty-five and more, I'd precious soon send him about his business if he came a-courting of me!'

She said this because she had a shrewd idea of how matters were likely to turn out. And then she went on to speak in laudatory terms of Monsieur Lebigre, who, indeed, paid the greatest attention to the beautiful Norman. Apart from the handsome dowry which he imagined she would bring with her, he considered that she would be a magnificent acquisition to his counter. The old woman never missed an opportunity to sound his praises; there was no lankiness, at any rate, about him, said she; he was stout and strong, with a pair of calves which would have done honour even to one of the Emperor's footmen.

However, La Normande shrugged her shoulders and snappishly replied: 'What do I care whether he's stout or not? I don't want him or anybody. And besides, I shall do as I please.'

Then, if the old woman became too pointed in her remarks, the other added: 'It's no business of yours, and, besides, it isn't true. Hold your tongue and don't worry me.' And thereupon she would go off into her room, banging the door behind her. Florent, however, had a yet more bitter enemy than Madame Méhudin in the house. As soon as ever he arrived there, Claire would get up without a word, take a candle, and go off to her own room on the other side of the landing; and she could be heard locking her door in a burst of sullen anger. One evening when her sister asked the tutor to dinner, she prepared her own food on the landing and ate it in her bedroom; and now and again she secluded herself so closely that nothing was seen of her for a week at a time. She usually retained her appearance of soft lissomness, but periodically had a fit of iron rigidity, when her eyes blazed from under her pale tawny locks like those of a distrustful wild animal. Old Mother Méhudin, fancying that she might relieve herself in her company, only made her furious by

speaking to her of Florent; and thereupon the old woman, in her exasperation, told everyone that she would have gone off and left her daughters to themselves had she not been afraid of their devouring each other if they remained alone together.

As Florent went away one evening, he passed in front of Claire's door, which was standing wide open. He saw the girl look at him, and turn very red. Her hostile demeanour annoyed him; and it was only the timidity which he felt in the presence of women that restrained him from seeking an explanation of her conduct. On this particular evening he would certainly have addressed her if he had not detected Mademoiselle Saget's pale face peering over the balustrade of the upper landing. So he went his way, but had not taken a dozen steps before Claire's door was closed behind him with such violence as to shake the whole staircase. It was after this that Mademoiselle Saget, eager to propagate slander, went about repeating everywhere that Madame Quenu's cousin was 'carrying on' most dreadfully with both the Méhudin girls.

Florent, however, gave very little thought to these two handsome young women. His usual manner towards them was that of a man who has but little success with the sex. Certainly he had come to entertain a feeling of genuine friendship for La Normande, who really displayed a very good heart when her impetuous temper did not run away with her. But he never went any further than this. Moreover, the queenly proportions of her robust figure filled him with a kind of alarm; and of an evening, whenever she drew her chair up to the lamp and bent forward as though to look at Muche's copy-book, he drew in his own sharp bony elbows and shrunken shoulders as if realising what a pitiful specimen of humanity he was by the side of that buxom, hardy creature so full of the life of ripe womanhood. Moreover, there was another reason why he recoiled from her. The smells of the markets distressed him; on finishing his duties of an evening he would have liked to escape from the fishy odour amidst which his days were spent; but, alas! beautiful though La Normande was, this odour seemed to adhere to her silky skin. She had tried every sort of aromatic oil, and bathed freely; but as soon as the freshening influence of the bath was over her blood again impregnated her skin with the faint odour of salmon, the musky perfume of

smelts, and the pungent scent of herrings and skate. Her skirts, too, as she moved about, exhaled these fishy smells, and she walked as though amidst an atmosphere redolent of slimy seaweed. With her tall, goddess-like figure, her purity of form, and transparency of complexion she resembled some lovely antique marble that had rolled about in the depths of the sea and had been brought to land in some fisherman's net.

Mademoiselle Saget, however, swore by all her gods that Florent was the young woman's lover. According to her account, indeed, he courted both the sisters. She had quarrelled with the beautiful Norman about a ten-sou dab; and ever since this falling-out she had manifested warm friendship for handsome Lisa. By this means she hoped the sooner to arrive at a solution of what she called the Quenus' mystery. Florent still continued to elude her curiosity, and she told her friends that she felt like a body without a soul, though she was careful not to reveal what was troubling her so grievously. A young girl infatuated with a hopeless passion could not have been in more distress than this terrible old woman at finding herself unable to solve the mystery of the Quenus' cousin. She was constantly playing the spy on Florent, following him about, and watching him, in a burning rage at her failure to satisfy her rampant curiosity. Now that he had begun to visit the Méhudins she was for ever haunting the stairs and landings. She soon discovered that handsome Lisa was much annoyed at Florent visiting 'those women,' and accordingly she called at the pork-shop every morning with a budget of information. She went in shrivelled and shrunk by the frosty air, and, resting her hands on the heating-pan to warm them, remained in front of the counter buying nothing, but repeating in her shrill voice: 'He was with them again yesterday; he seems to live there now. I heard La Normande call him "my dear" on the staircase.'

She indulged like this in all sorts of lies in order to remain in the shop and continue warming her hands for a little longer. On the morning after the evening when she had heard Claire close her door behind Florent, she spun out her story for a good half-hour, inventing all sorts of mendacious and abominable particulars.

Lisa, who had assumed a look of contemptuous scorn, said but little, simply encouraging Mademoiselle Saget's gossip by her silence. At last, however, she interrupted her. 'No, no,'

she said; 'I can't really listen to all that. Is it possible that there can be such women?'

Thereupon Mademoiselle Saget told Lisa that unfortunately all women were not so well conducted as herself. And then she pretended to find all sorts of excuses for Florent: it wasn't his fault; he was no doubt a bachelor; these women had very likely inveigled him in their snares. In this way she hinted questions without openly asking them. But Lisa preserved silence with respect to her cousin, merely shrugging her shoulders and compressing her lips. When Mademoiselle Saget at last went away, the mistress of the shop glanced with disgust at the cover of the heating-pan, the glistening metal of which had been tarnished by the impression of the old woman's little hands.

'Augustine,' she cried, 'bring a duster, and wipe the cover of the heating-pan. It's quite filthy!'

The rivalry between the beautiful Lisa and the beautiful Norman now became formidable. The beautiful Norman flattered herself that she had carried a lover off from her enemy; and the beautiful Lisa was indignant with the hussy who, by luring the sly cousin to her home, would surely end by compromising them all. The natural temperament of each woman manifested itself in the hostilities which ensued. The one remained calm and scornful, like a lady who holds up her skirts to keep them from being soiled by the mud; while the other, much less subject to shame, displayed insolent gaiety and swaggered along the footways with the airs of a duellist seeking a cause of quarrel. Each of their skirmishes would be the talk of the fish-market for the whole day. When the beautiful Norman saw the beautiful Lisa standing at the door of her shop, she would go out of her way in order to pass her, and brush against her with her apron; and then the angry glances of the two rivals crossed like rapiers, with the rapid flash and thrust of pointed steel. When the beautiful Lisa, on the other hand, went to the fish-market, she assumed an expression of disgust on approaching the beautiful Norman's stall. And then she proceeded to purchase some big fish—a turbot or a salmon—of a neighbouring dealer, spreading her money out on the marble slab as she did so, for she had noticed that this seemed to have a painful effect upon the 'hussy,' who ceased laughing at the sight. To hear the two rivals speak, anyone would have supposed that the fish and pork they sold were quite unfit for

food. However, their principal engagements took place when the beautiful Norman was seated at her stall and the beautiful Lisa at her counter, and they glowered blackly at each other across the Rue Rambuteau. They sat in state in their big white aprons, decked out with showy toilets and jewels, and the battle between them would commence early in the morning.

'Hallo, the fat woman's got up!' the beautiful Norman would exclaim. 'She ties herself up as tightly as her sausages! Ah, she's got Saturday's collar on again, and she's still wearing that poplin dress!'

At the same moment, on the opposite side of the street, beautiful Lisa was saying to her shop-girl: 'Just look at that creature staring at us over yonder, Augustine! She's getting quite deformed by the life she leads. Do you see her earrings? She's wearing those big drops of hers, isn't she? It makes one feel ashamed to see a girl like that with brilliants.'

All complaisance, Augustine echoed her mistress's words.

When either of them was able to display a new ornament it was like scoring a victory—the other one almost choked with spleen. Every day they would scrutinise and count each other's customers, and manifest the greatest annoyance if they thought that the 'big thing over the way' was doing the better business. Then they spied out what each had for lunch. Each knew what the other ate, and even watched to see how she digested it. In the afternoon, while the one sat amidst her cooked meats and the other amidst her fish, they posed and gave themselves airs, as though they were queens of beauty. It was then that the victory of the day was decided. The beautiful Norman embroidered, selecting the most delicate and difficult work, and this aroused Lisa's exasperation.

'Ah!' she said, speaking of her rival, 'she had far better mend her boy's stockings. He's running about quite barefooted. Just look at that fine lady, with her red hands stinking of fish!'

For her part, Lisa usually knitted.

'She's still at that same sock,' La Normande would say, as she watched her. 'She eats so much that she goes to sleep over her work. I pity her poor husband if he's waiting for those socks to keep his feet warm!'

They would sit glowering at each other with this implacable hostility until evening, taking note of every customer,

and displaying such keen eyesight that they detected the smallest details of each other's dress and person when other women declared that they could see nothing at such a distance. Mademoiselle Saget expressed the highest admiration for Madame Quenu's wonderful sight when she one day detected a scratch on the fish-girl's left cheek. With eyes like those, said the old maid, one might even see through a door. However, the victory often remained undecided when night fell; sometimes one or other of the rivals was temporarily crushed, but she took her revenge on the morrow. Several people of the neighbourhood actually laid wagers on these contests, some backing the beautiful Lisa and others the beautiful Norman.

At last they ended by forbidding their children to speak to one another. Pauline and Muche had formerly been good friends, notwithstanding the girl's stiff petticoats and lady-like demeanour, and the lad's tattered appearance, coarse language, and rough manners. They had at times played together at horses on the broad footway in front of the fish-market, Pauline always being the horse and Muche the driver. One day, however, when the boy came in all simplicity to seek his playmate, Lisa turned him out of the house, declaring that he was a dirty little street arab.

'One can't tell what may happen with children who have been so shockingly brought up,' she observed.

'Yes, indeed; you are quite right,' replied Mademoiselle Saget, who happened to be present.

When Muche, who was barely seven years old, came in tears to his mother to tell her of what had happened, La Normande broke out into a terrible passion. At the first moment she felt a strong inclination to rush over to the Quenu-Gradelles' and smash everything in their shop. But eventually she contented herself with giving Muche a whipping.

'If ever I catch you going there again,' she cried, boiling over with anger, 'you'll get it hot from me, I can tell you!'

Florent, however, was the real victim of the two women. It was he, in truth, who had set them by the ears, and it was on his account that they were fighting each other. Ever since he had appeared upon the scene things had been going from bad to worse. He compromised and disturbed and embittered all these people, who had previously lived in such sleek peace and harmony. The beautiful Norman felt

inclined to claw him when he lingered too long with the Quenus, and it was chiefly from an impulse of hostile rivalry that she desired to win him to herself. The beautiful Lisa, on her side, maintained a cold judicial bearing, and although extremely annoyed, forced herself to silence whenever she saw Florent leaving the pork-shop to go to the Rue Pirouette.

Still, there was now much less cordiality than formerly round the Quenus' dinner-table in the evening. The clean, prim dining-room seemed to have assumed an aspect of chilling severity. Florent divined a reproach, a sort of condemnation in the bright oak, the polished lamp, and the new matting. He scarcely dared to eat for fear of letting crumbs fall on the floor or soiling his plate. There was a guileless simplicity about him which prevented him from seeing how the land really lay. He still praised Lisa's affectionate kindliness on all sides; and outwardly, indeed, she did continue to treat him with all gentleness.

'It is very strange,' she said to him one day with a smile, as though she were joking; 'although you don't eat at all badly now, you don't get fatter. Your food doesn't seem to do you any good.'

At this Quenu laughed aloud, and tapping his brother's stomach, protested that the whole contents of the porkshop might pass through it without depositing a layer of fat as thick as a two-sou-piece. However, Lisa's insistence on this particular subject was instinct with that same suspicious dislike for fleshless men which Madame Méhudin manifested more outspokenly; and behind it all there was likewise a veiled allusion to the disorderly life which she imagined Florent was leading. She never, however, spoke a word to him about La Normande. Quenu had attempted a joke on the subject one evening, but Lisa had received it so icily that the good man had not ventured to refer to the matter again. They would remain seated at table for a few moments after dessert, and Florent, who had noticed his sister-in-law's vexation if ever he went off too soon, tried to find something to talk about. On these occasions Lisa would be near him, and certainly he did not suffer in her presence from that fishy smell which assailed him when he was in the company of La Normande. The mistress of the pork-shop, on the contrary, exhaled an odour of fat and rich meats. Moreover, not a thrill of life stirred her tight-fitting bodice; she was all massiveness and all sedateness. Gavard once said

to Florent in confidence that Madame Quenu was no doubt handsome, but that for his own part he did not admire such armour-plated women.

Lisa avoided talking to Quenu of Florent. She habitually prided herself on her patience, and considered, too, that it would not be proper to cause any unpleasantness between the brothers, unless some peremptory reason for her interference should arise. As she said, she could put up with a good deal, but, of course, she must not be tried too far. She had now reached the period of courteous tolerance, wearing an expressionless face, affecting perfect indifference and strict politeness, and carefully avoiding everything which might seem to hint that Florent was boarding and lodging with them without their receiving the slightest payment from him. Not, indeed, that she would have accepted any payment from him, she was above all that; still he might, at any rate, she thought, have lunched away from the house.

'We never seem to be alone now,' she remarked to Quenu one day. 'If there is anything we want to say to one another we have to wait till we go upstairs at night.'

And then, one night when they were in bed, she said to him: 'Your brother earns a hundred and fifty francs a month, doesn't he? Well, it's strange he can't put a trifle by to buy himself some more linen. I've been obliged to give him three more of your old shirts.'

'Oh, that doesn't matter,' Quenu replied. 'Florent's not hard to please; and we must let him keep his money for himself.'

'Oh, yes, of course,' said Lisa, without pressing the matter further. 'I didn't mention it for that reason. Whether he spends his money well or ill, it isn't our business.'

In her own mind she felt quite sure that he wasted his salary at the Méhudins'.

Only on one occasion did she break through her habitual calmness of demeanour, the quiet reserve which was the result of both natural temperament and preconceived design. The beautiful Norman had made Florent a present of a magnificent salmon. Feeling very much embarrassed with the fish, and not daring to refuse it, he brought it to Lisa.

'You can make a pasty of it,' he said ingenuously.

Lisa looked at him sternly with whitening lips. Then, striving to restrain her anger, she exclaimed: 'Do you think

that we are short of food? Thank God, we've got quite enough to eat here! Take it back!'

'Well, at any rate, cook it for me,' replied Florent, amazed by her anger; 'I'll eat it myself.'

At this she burst out furiously.

'The house isn't an inn! Tell those who gave you the fish to cook it for you! I won't have my pans tainted and infected! Take it back again! Do you hear?'

If he had not gone away with it, she would certainly have seized it and hurled it into the street. Florent took it to Monsieur Lebigre's, where Rose was ordered to make a pasty of it; and one evening the pasty was eaten in the little 'cabinet,' Gavard, who was present, 'standing' some oysters for the occasion. Florent now gradually came more and more frequently to Monsieur Lebigre's, till at last he was constantly to be met in the little private room. He there found an atmosphere of heated excitement in which his political feverishness could pulsate freely. At times, now, when he shut himself up in his garret to work, the quiet simplicity of the little room irritated him, his theoretical search for liberty proved quite insufficient, and it became necessary that he should go downstairs, sally out, and seek satisfaction in the trenchant axioms of Charvet and the wild outbursts of Logre. During the first few evenings the clamour and chatter had made him feel ill at ease; he was then still quite conscious of their utter emptiness, but he felt a need of drowning his thoughts, of goading himself on to some extreme resolution which might calm his mental disquietude. The atmosphere of the little room, reeking with the odour of spirits and warm with tobacco smoke, intoxicated him and filled him with peculiar beatitude, prompting a kind of self-surrender which made him willing to acquiesce in the wildest ideas. He grew attached to those he met there, and looked for them and awaited their coming with a pleasure which increased with habit. Robine's mild, bearded countenance, Clémence's serious profile, Charvet's fleshless pallor, Logre's hump, Gavard, Alexandre, and Lacaille, all entered into his life, and assumed a larger and larger place in it. He took quite a sensual enjoyment in these meetings. When his fingers closed round the brass knob on the door of the little cabinet it seemed to be animated with life, to warm him, and turn of its own accord. Had he grasped the supple wrist of a woman he could not have felt a more thrilling emotion.

To tell the truth, very serious things took place in that little room. One evening, Logre, after indulging in wilder outbursts than usual, banged his fist upon the table, declaring that if they were men they would make a clean sweep of the Government. And he added that it was necessary they should come to an understanding without further delay, if they desired to be fully prepared when the time for action arrived. Then they all bent their heads together, discussed the matter in lower tones, and decided to form a little 'group,' which should be ready for whatever might happen. From that day forward Gavard flattered himself that he was a member of a secret society, and was engaged in a conspiracy. The little circle received no new members, but Logre promised to put it into communication with other associations with which he was acquainted; and then, as soon as they held all Paris in their grasp, they would rise and make the Tuileries' people dance. A series of endless discussions, renewed during several months, then began—discussions on questions of organisation, on questions of ways and means, on questions of strategy, and of the form of the future Government. As soon as Rose had brought Clémence's grog, Charvet's and Robine's beer, the coffee for Logre, Gavard, and Florent, and the liqueur glasses of brandy for Lacaille and Alexandre, the door of the cabinet was carefully fastened, and the debate began.

Charvet and Florent were naturally those whose utterances were listened to with the greatest attention. Gavard had not been able to keep his tongue from wagging, but had gradually related the whole story of Cayenne; and Florent found himself surrounded by a halo of martyrdom. His words were received as though they were the expression of indisputable dogmas. One evening, however, the poultry-dealer, vexed at hearing his friend, who happened to be absent, attacked, exclaimed: 'Don't say anything against Florent; he's been to Cayenne!'

Charvet was rather annoyed by the advantage which this circumstance gave to Florent. 'Cayenne, Cayenne,' he muttered between his teeth. 'Ah, well, they were not so badly off there, after all!'

Then he attempted to prove that exile was a mere nothing, and that real suffering consisted in remaining in one's oppressed country, gagged in presence of triumphant despotism. And besides, he urged, it wasn't his fault that he

hadn't been arrested on the Second of December. Next, however, he hinted that those who had allowed themselves to be captured were imbeciles. His secret jealousy made him a systematic opponent of Florent; and the general discussions always ended in a duel between these two, who, while their companions listened in silence, would speak against one another for hours at a time, without either of them allowing that he was beaten.

One of the favourite subjects of discussion was that of the reorganisation of the country which would have to be effected on the morrow of their victory.

'We are the conquerors, are we not?' began Gavard.

And, triumph being taken for granted, everyone offered his opinion. There were two rival parties. Charvet, who was a disciple of Hébert, was supported by Logre and Robine; while Florent, who was always absorbed in humanitarian dreams, and called himself a Socialist, was backed by Alexandre and Lacaille. As for Gavard, he felt no repugnance for violent action; but, as he was often twitted about his fortune with no end of sarcastic witticisms which annoyed him, he declared himself a Communist.

'We must make a clean sweep of everything,' Charvet would curtly say, as though he were delivering a blow with a cleaver. 'The trunk is rotten, and it must come down.'

'Yes! yes!' cried Logre, standing up that he might look taller, and making the partition shake with the excited motion of his hump. 'Everything will be levelled to the ground; take my word for it. After that we shall see what to do.'

Robine signified approval by wagging his beard. His silence seemed instinct with delight whenever violent revolutionary propositions were made. His eyes assumed a soft ecstatic expression at the mention of the guillotine. He half closed them, as though he could see the machine, and was filled with pleasant emotion at the sight; and next he would gently rub his chin against the knob of his stick, with a subdued purr of satisfaction.

'All the same,' said Florent, in whose voice a vague touch of sadness lingered, 'if you cut down the tree it will be necessary to preserve some seed. For my part, I think that the tree ought to be preserved, so that we may graft new life on it. The political revolution, you know, has already taken place; to-day we have got to think of the labourer, the working man. Our movement must be altogether a social

one. I defy you to reject the claims of the people. They are weary of waiting, and are determined to have their share of happiness.'

These words aroused Alexandre's enthusiasm. With a beaming, radiant face he declared that this was quite true, that the people were weary of waiting.

'And we will have our share,' added Lacaille, with a more menacing expression. 'All the revolutions that have taken place have been for the good of the middle classes. We've had quite enough of that sort of thing, and the next one shall be for our benefit.'

From this moment disagreement set in. Gavard offered to make a division of his property, but Logre declined, asserting that he cared nothing for money. Then Charvet gradually overcame the tumult, till at last he alone was heard speaking.

'The selfishness of the different classes does more than anything else to uphold tyranny,' said he. 'It is wrong of the people to display egotism. If they assist us they shall have their share. But why should I fight for the working man if the working man won't fight for me? Moreover, that is not the question at present. Ten years of revolutionary dictatorship will be necessary to accustom a nation like France to the fitting enjoyment of liberty.'

'All the more so as the working man is not ripe for it, and requires to be directed,' said Clémence bluntly.

She but seldom spoke. This tall, serious-looking girl, alone among so many men, listened to all the political chatter with a learnedly critical air. She leaned back against the partition, and every now and then sipped her grog whilst gazing at the speakers with frowning brows or inflated nostrils, thus silently signifying her approval or disapproval, and making it quite clear that she held decided opinions upon the most complicated matters. At times she would roll a cigarette, and puff slender whiffs of smoke from the corners of her mouth, whilst lending increased attention to what was being debated. It was as though she were presiding over the discussion, and would award the prize to the victor when it was finished. She certainly considered that it became her, as a woman, to display some reserve in her opinions, and to remain calm whilst the men grew more and more excited. Now and then, however, in the heat of the debate, she would let a word or a phrase escape her and 'clench the matter' even for Charvet himself,

as Gavard said. In her heart she believed herself the superior of all these fellows. The only one of them for whom she felt any respect was Robine, and she would thoughtfully contemplate his silent bearing.

Neither Florent nor any of the others paid any special attention to Clémence. They treated her just as though she were a man, shaking hands with her so roughly as almost to dislocate her arms. One evening Florent witnessed the periodical settlement of accounts between her and Charvet. She had just received her pay, and Charvet wanted to borrow ten francs from her; but she first of all insisted that they must reckon up how matters stood between them. They lived together in a voluntary partnership, each having complete control of his or her earnings, and strictly paying his or her expenses. By so doing, said they, they were under no obligations to one another, but retained entire freedom. Rent, food, washing, and amusements, were all noted down and added up. That evening, when the accounts had been verified, Clémence proved to Charvet that he already owed her five francs. Then she handed him the other ten which he wished to borrow, and exclaimed: 'Recollect that you now owe me fifteen. I shall expect you to repay me on the fifth, when you get paid for teaching little Léhudier.'

When Rose was summoned to receive payment for the 'drinks,' each produced the few coppers required to discharge his or her liability. Charvet laughingly called Clémence an aristocrat because she drank grog. She wanted to humiliate him, said he, and make him feel that he earned less than she did, which, as it happened, was the fact. Beneath his laugh, however, there was a feeling of bitterness that the girl should be better circumstanced than himself, for, in spite of his theory of the equality of the sexes, this lowered him.

Although the discussions in the little room had virtually no result, they served to exercise the speakers' lungs. A tremendous hubbub proceeded from the sanctum, and the panes of frosted glass vibrated like drum-skins. Sometimes the uproar became so great that Rose, while languidly serving some blouse-wearing customer in the shop, would turn her head uneasily.

'Why, they're surely fighting together in there,' the customer would say, as he put his glass down on the zinc-covered counter, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand.

'Oh, there's no fear of that,' Monsieur Lebigre tranquilly replied. 'It's only some gentlemen talking together.'

Monsieur Lebigre, indeed, although very strict with his other customers, allowed the politicians to shout as loudly as they pleased, and never made the least remark on the subject. He would sit for hours together on the bench behind the counter, with his big head lolling drowsily against the mirror, whilst he watched Rose uncorking the bottles and giving a wipe here and there with her duster. And in spite of the somniferous effects of the wine-fumes and the warm streaming gaslight, he would keep his ears open to the sounds proceeding from the little room. At times, when the voices grew noisier than usual, he got up from his seat and went to lean against the partition; and occasionally he even pushed the door open, and went inside and sat down there for a few minutes, giving Gavard a friendly slap on the thigh. And then he would nod approval of everything that was said. The poultry-dealer asserted that although friend Lebigre hadn't the stuff of an orator in him, they might safely reckon on him when the 'shindy' came.

One morning, however, at the markets, when a tremendous row broke out between Rose and one of the fish-wives, through the former accidentally knocking over a basket of herrings, Florent heard Rose's employer spoken of as a 'dirty spy' in the pay of the police. And after he had succeeded in restoring peace, all sorts of stories about Monsieur Lebigre were poured into his ears. Yes, the wine-seller was in the pay of the police, the fish-wives said; all the neighbourhood knew it. Before Mademoiselle Saget had begun to deal with him she had once met him entering the Préfecture to make his report. It was asserted, too, that he was a money-monger, a usurer, and lent petty sums by the day to costermongers, and let out barrows to them, exacting a scandalous rate of interest in return. Florent was greatly disturbed by all this, and felt it his duty to repeat it that evening to his fellow-politicians. The latter, however, only shrugged their shoulders, and laughed at his uneasiness.

'Poor Florent!' Charvet exclaimed sarcastically; 'he imagines that the whole police force is on his track, just because he happens to have been sent to Cayenne!'

Gavard gave his word of honour that Lebigre was perfectly staunch and true, while Logre, for his part, manifested extreme irritation. He fumed and declared that it would be quite impossible for them to get on if everyone was to be accused of being a police-spy; for his own part, he would rather stay at home,

and have nothing more to do with politics. Why, hadn't people even dared to say that he, Logre himself, who had fought in '48 and '51, and had twice narrowly escaped transportation, was a spy as well? As he shouted this out, he thrust his jaws forward, and glared at the others as though he would have liked to ram the conviction that he had nothing to do with the police down their throats. At the sight of his furious glances his companions made gestures of protestation. However, Lacaille, on hearing Monsieur Lebigre accused of usury, silently lowered his head.

The incident was forgotten in the discussions which ensued. Since Logre had suggested a conspiracy, Monsieur Lebigre had grasped the hands of the frequenters of the little room with more vigour than ever. Their custom, to tell the truth, was of but small value to him, for they never ordered more than one 'drink' apiece. They drained the last drops just as they rose to leave, having been careful to allow a little to remain in their glasses, even during their most heated arguments. In this wise the one 'shout' lasted throughout the evening. They shivered as they turned out into the cold dampness of the night, and for a moment or two remained standing on the footway with dazzled eyes and buzzing ears, as though surprised by the dark silence of the street. Rose, meanwhile, fastened the shutters behind them. Then, quite exhausted, at a loss for another word, they shook hands, separated, and went their different ways, still mentally continuing the discussion of the evening, and regretting that they could not ram their particular theories down each other's throats. Robine walked away, with his bent back bobbing up and down, in the direction of the Rue Rambuteau; whilst Charvet and Clémence went off through the markets on their return to the Luxembourg quarter, their heels sounding on the flag-stones in military fashion, whilst they still discussed some question of politics or philosophy, walking along side by side, but never arm-in-arm.

The conspiracy ripened very slowly. At the commencement of the summer the plotters had got no further than agreeing that it was necessary a stroke should be attempted. Florent, who had at first looked upon the whole business with a kind of distrust, had now, however, come to believe in the possibility of a revolutionary movement. He took up the matter seriously; making notes, and preparing plans in writing, while the others still did nothing but talk. For

his part, he began to concentrate his whole life in the one persistent idea which made his brain throb night after night; and this to such a degree that he at last took his brother Quenu with him to Monsieur Lebigre's, as though such a course were quite natural. Certainly he had no thought of doing anything improper. He still looked upon Quenu as in some degree his pupil, and may even have considered it his duty to start him on the proper path. Quenu was an absolute novice in politics, but after spending five or six evenings in the little room he found himself quite in accord with the others. When Lisa was not present he manifested much docility, a sort of respect for his brother's opinions. But the greatest charm of the affair for him was really the mild dissipation of leaving his shop and shutting himself up in the little room where the others shouted so loudly, and where Clémence's presence, in his opinion, gave a tinge of rakishness and romance to the proceedings. He now made all haste with his chitterlings in order that he might get away as early as possible, anxious to lose not a single word of the discussions, which seemed to him to be very brilliant, though he was not always able to follow them. The beautiful Lisa did not fail to notice his hurry to be gone, but as yet she refrained from saying anything. When Florent took him off, she simply went to the door-step, and watched them enter Monsieur Lebigre's, her face paling somewhat, and a severe expression coming into her eyes.

One evening, as Mademoiselle Saget was peering out of her garret casement, she recognised Quenu's shadow on the frosted glass of the 'cabinet' window facing the Rue Pirouette. She had found her casement an excellent post of observation, as it overlooked that milky transparency, on which the gaslight threw silhouettes of the politicians, with noses suddenly appearing and disappearing, gaping jaws abruptly springing into sight and then vanishing, and huge arms, apparently destitute of bodies, waving hither and thither. This extraordinary jumble of detached limbs, these silent but frantic profiles, bore witness to the heated discussions that went on in the little room, and kept the old maid peering from behind her muslin curtains until the transparency turned black. She shrewdly suspected some 'bit of trickery,' as she phrased it. By continual watching she had come to recognise the different shadows by their hands and hair and clothes. As she gazed upon the chaos of clenched

fists, angry heads, and swaying shoulders, which seemed to have become detached from their trunks and to roll about one atop of the other, she would exclaim unhesitatingly, 'Ah, there's that big booby of a cousin; there's that miserly old Gavard; and there's the hunchback; and there's that maypole of a Clémence!' Then, when the action of the shadow-play became more pronounced, and they all seemed to have lost control over themselves, she felt an irresistible impulse to go downstairs to try to find out what was happening. Thus she now made a point of buying her black-currant syrup at nights, pretending that she felt out-of-sorts in the morning, and was obliged to take a sip as soon as ever she was out of bed. On the evening when she noticed Quenu's massive head shadowed on the transparency in close proximity to Charvet's fist, she made her appearance at Monsieur Lebigre's in a breathless condition. To gain more time, she made Rose rinse out her little bottle for her; however, she was about to return to her room when she heard the pork-butcher exclaim with a sort of childish candour:

'No, indeed, we'll stand it no longer! We'll make a clean sweep of all those humbugging Deputies and Ministers! Yes, we'll send the whole lot packing.'

Eight o'clock had scarcely struck on the following morning when Mademoiselle Saget was already at the pork-shop. She found Madame Lecœur and La Sarriette there, dipping their noses into the heating-pan, and buying hot sausages for breakfast. As the old maid had managed to draw them into her quarrel with La Normande with respect to the ten-sou dab, they had at once made friends again with Lisa, and they now had nothing but contempt for the handsome fish-girl, and assailed her and her sister as good-for-nothing hussies, whose only aim was to fleece men of their money. This opinion had been inspired by the assertions of Mademoiselle Saget, who had declared to Madame Lecœur that Florent had induced one of the two girls to coquette with Gavard, and that the four of them had indulged in the wildest dissipation at Barratte's—of course, at the poultry-dealer's expense. From the effects of this impudent story Madame Lecœur had not yet recovered; she wore a doleful appearance, and her eyes were quite yellow with spleen.

That morning, however, it was for Madame Quenu that the old maid had a shock in store. She looked round the counter, and then in her most gentle voice remarked:

'I saw Monsieur Quenu last night. They seem to enjoy themselves immensely in that little room at Lebigre's, if one may judge from the noise they make.'

Lisa had turned her head towards the street, listening very attentively, but apparently unwilling to show it. The old maid paused, hoping that one of the others would question her; and then, in a lower tone, she added: 'They had a woman with them. Oh, I don't mean Monsieur Quenu, of course! I didn't say that; I don't know——'

'It must be Clémence,' interrupted La Sarriette; 'a big scraggy creature who gives herself all sorts of airs just because she went to boarding school. She lives with a threadbare usher. I've seen them together; they always look as though they were taking each other off to the police-station.'

'Oh, yes; I know,' replied the old maid, who, indeed, knew everything about Charvet and Clémence, and whose only purpose was to alarm Lisa.

The mistress of the pork-shop, however, never flinched. She seemed to be absorbed in watching something of great interest in the market yonder. Accordingly the old maid had recourse to stronger measures. 'I think,' said she, addressing herself to Madame Lecœur, 'that you ought to advise your brother-in-law to be careful. Last night they were shouting out the most shocking things in that little room. Men really seem to lose their heads over politics. If anyone had heard them, it might have been a very serious matter for them.'

'Oh! Gavard will go his own way,' sighed Madame Lecœur. 'It only wanted this to fill my cup. I shall die of anxiety, I am sure, if he ever gets arrested.'

As she spoke, a gleam shot from her dim eyes. La Sarriette, however, laughed and wagged her little face, bright with the freshness of the morning air.

'You should hear what Jules says of those who speak against the Empire,' she remarked. 'They ought all to be thrown into the Seine, he told me; for it seems there isn't a single respectable person amongst them.'

'Oh! there's no harm done, of course, so long as only people like myself hear their foolish talk,' resumed Mademoiselle Saget. 'I'd rather cut my hand off, you know, than make mischief. Last night now, for instance, Monsieur Quenu was saying——'

She again paused. Lisa had started slightly.

'Monsieur Quenu was saying that the Ministers and Deputies and all who are in power ought to be shot.'

At this Lisa turned sharply, her face quite white and her hands clenched beneath her apron.

'Quenu said that?' she curtly asked.

'Yes, indeed, and several other similar things that I can't recollect now. I heard him myself. But don't distress yourself like that, Madame Quenu. You know very well that I sha'n't breathe a word. I'm quite old enough to know what might harm a man if it came out. Oh, no; it will go no further.'

Lisa had recovered her equanimity. She took a pride in the happy peacefulness of her home; she would not acknowledge that there had ever been the slightest difference between herself and her husband. And so now she shrugged her shoulders and said with a smile: 'Oh, it's all a pack of foolish nonsense.'

When the three others were in the street together they agreed that handsome Lisa had pulled a very doleful face; and they were unanimously of opinion that the mysterious goings-on of the cousin, the Méhudins, Gavard, and the Quenus would end in trouble. Madame Lecœur inquired what was done to the people who got arrested 'for politics,' but on this point Mademoiselle Saget could not enlighten her; she only knew that they were never seen again—no, never. And this induced La Sarriette to suggest that perhaps they were thrown into the Seine, as Jules had said they ought to be.

Lisa avoided all reference to the subject at breakfast and dinner that day; and even in the evening, when Florent and Quenu went off together to Monsieur Lebigre's, there was no unwonted severity in her glance. On that particular evening, however, the question of framing a constitution for the future came under discussion, and it was one o'clock in the morning before the politicians could tear themselves away from the little room. The shutters had already been fastened, and they were obliged to leave by a small door, passing out one at a time with bent backs. Quenu returned home with an uneasy conscience. He opened the three or four doors on his way to bed as gently as possible, walking on tip-toe and stretching out his hands as he passed through the sitting-room, to avoid a collision with any of the furniture. The whole house seemed to be asleep. When he reached the bedroom, he

was annoyed to find that Lisa had not extinguished the candle, which was burning with a tall, mournful flame in the midst of the deep silence. As Quenu took off his shoes, and put them down in a corner, the time-piece struck half-past one with such a clear, ringing sound that he turned in alarm, almost frightened to move, and gazing with an expression of angry reproach at the shining gilded Gutenberg standing there, with his finger on a book. Lisa's head was buried in her pillow, and Quenu could only see her back; but he divined that she was merely feigning sleep, and her conduct in turning her back upon him was so instinct with reproach that he felt sorely ill at ease. At last he slipped beneath the bed-clothes, blew out the candle, and lay perfectly still. He could have sworn that his wife was awake, though she did not speak to him; and presently he fell asleep, feeling intensely miserable, and lacking the courage to say good night.

He slept till late, and when he awoke he found himself sprawling in the middle of the bed with the cider-down quilt up to his chin, whilst Lisa sat in front of the secrétaire, arranging some papers. His slumber had been so heavy that he had not heard her rise. However, he now took courage, and spoke to her from the depths of the alcove: 'Why didn't you wake me? What are you doing there?'

'I'm sorting the papers in these drawers,' she replied in her usual tone of voice.

Quenu felt relieved. But Lisa added: 'One never knows what may happen. If the police were to come——'

'What! the police?'

'Yes, indeed, the police; for you're mixing yourself up with politics now.'

At this Quenu sat up in bed, quite dazed and confounded by such a violent and unexpected attack.

'I mix myself up with politics! I mix myself up with politics!' he repeated. 'It's no concern of the police. I've nothing to do with any compromising matters.'

'No,' replied Lisa, shrugging her shoulders; 'you merely talk about shooting everybody.'

'I! I!'

'Yes. And you bawl it out in a public-house! Mademoiselle Saget heard you. All the neighbourhood knows by this time that you are a Red Republican!'

Quenu fell back in bed again. He was not perfectly awake as yet. Lisa's words resounded in his ears as though he

already heard the heavy tramp of gendarmes at the bedroom door. He looked at her as she sat there, with her hair already arranged, her figure tightly imprisoned in her stays, her whole appearance the same as it was on any other morning; and he felt more astonished than ever that she should be so neat and prim under such extraordinary circumstances.

'I leave you absolutely free, you know,' she continued, as she went on arranging the papers. 'I don't want to wear the breeches, as the saying goes. You are the master, and you are at liberty to endanger your position, compromise our credit, and ruin our business.'

Then, as Quenu tried to protest, she silenced him with a gesture. 'No, no; don't say anything,' she continued. 'This is no quarrel, and I am not even asking an explanation from you. But if you had consulted me, and we had talked the matter over together, I might have intervened. Ah! it's a great mistake to imagine that women understand nothing about politics. Shall I tell you what my politics are?'

She had risen from her seat whilst speaking, and was now walking to and fro between the bed and the window, wiping as she went some specks of dust from the bright mahogany of the mirrored wardrobe and the dressing-table.

'My politics are the politics of honest folks,' said she. 'I'm grateful to the Government when business is prosperous, when I can eat my meals in peace and comfort, and can sleep at nights without being awakened by the firing of guns. There were pretty times in '48, were there not? You remember our uncle Gradelle, the worthy man, showing us his books for that year? He lost more than six thousand francs. Now that we have got the Empire, however, everything prospers. We sell our goods readily enough. You can't deny it. Well, then, what is it that you want? How will you be better off when you have shot everybody?'

She took her stand in front of the little night-table, crossed her arms over her breast, and fixed her eyes upon Quenu, who had shuffled himself beneath the bed-clothes, almost out of sight. He attempted to explain what it was that his friends wanted, but he got quite confused in his endeavours to summarise Florent's and Charvet's political and social systems; and could only talk about the disregard shown to principles, the accession of the democracy to power, and the regeneration of society, in such a strange tangled way that Lisa shrugged her shoulders, quite unable to under-

stand him. At last, however, he extricated himself from his difficulties by declaring that the Empire was the reign of licentiousness, swindling finance, and highway robbery. And, recalling an expression of Logre's, he added: 'We are the prey of a band of adventurers, who are pillaging, violating, and assassinating France. We'll have no more of them.'

Lisa, however, still shrugged her shoulders.

'Well, and is that all you have got to say?' she asked with perfect coolness. 'What has all that got to do with me? Even supposing it were true, what then? Have I ever advised you to practise dishonest courses? Have I ever prompted you to dishonour your acceptances, or cheat your customers, or pile up money by fraudulent practices? Really, you'll end by making me quite angry! We are honest folks, and we don't pillage or assassinate anybody. That's quite sufficient. What other folks do is no concern of ours. If they choose to be rogues it's their affair.'

She looked quite majestic and triumphant; and again pacing the room, drawing herself up to her full height, she resumed: 'A pretty notion it is that people are to let their business go to rack and ruin just to please those who are penniless. For my part, I'm in favour of making hay while the sun shines, and supporting a Government which promotes trade. If it does do dishonourable things, I prefer to know nothing about them. I know that I myself commit none, and that no one in the neighbourhood can point a finger at me. It's only fools who go tilting at windmills. At the time of the last elections, you remember, Gavard said that the Emperor's candidate had been bankrupt, and was mixed up in all sorts of scandalous matters. Well, perhaps that was true, I don't deny it; but all the same, you acted wisely in voting for him, for all that was not in question; you were not asked to lend the man any money or to transact any business with him, but merely to show the Government that you were pleased with the prosperity of the pork trade.'

At this moment Quenu called to mind a sentence of Charvet's, asserting that 'the bloated *bourgeois*, the sleek shopkeepers, who backed up that Government of universal gormandising, ought to be hurled into the sewers before all others, for it was owing to them and their gluttonous egotism that tyranny had succeeded in mastering and preying upon the nation.' He was trying to complete this piece of eloquence when Lisa, carried off by her indignation, cut him short.

'Don't talk such stuff! My conscience doesn't reproach me with anything. I don't owe a copper to anybody; I'm not mixed up in any dishonest business; I buy and sell good sound stuff; and I charge no more than others do. What you say may perhaps apply to people like our cousins, the Saccards. They pretend to be even ignorant that I am in Paris; but I am prouder than they are, and I don't care a rap for their millions. It's said that Saccard speculates in condemned buildings, and cheats and robs everybody. I'm not surprised to hear it, for he was always that way inclined. He loves money just for the sake of wallowing in it, and then tossing it out of his windows, like the imbecile he is. I can understand people attacking men of his stamp, who pile up excessive fortunes. For my part, if you care to know it, I have but a bad opinion of Saccard. But we—we who live so quietly and peaceably, who will need at least fifteen years to put by sufficient money to make ourselves comfortably independent, we who have no reason to meddle in politics, and whose only aim is to bring up our daughter respectably, and to see that our business prospers—why you must be joking to talk such stuff about us. We are honest folks!'

She came and sat down on the edge of the bed. Quenu was already much shaken in his opinions.

'Listen to me, now,' she resumed in a more serious voice. 'You surely don't want to see your own shop pillaged, your cellar emptied, and your money taken from you? If these men who meet at Monsieur Lebigre's should prove triumphant, do you think that you would then lie as comfortably in your bed as you do now? And on going down into the kitchen, do you imagine that you would set about making your galantines as peacefully as you will presently? No, no, indeed! So why do you talk about overthrowing a Government which protects you, and enables you to put money by? You have a wife and a daughter, and your first duty is towards them. You would be in fault if you imperilled their happiness. It is only those who have neither home nor hearth, who have nothing to lose, who want to be shooting people. Surely you don't want to pull the chestnuts out of the fire for *them!* So stay quietly at home, you foolish fellow, sleep comfortably, eat well, make money, keep an easy conscience, and leave France to free herself of the Empire if the Empire annoys her. France can get on very well without *you.*'

She laughed her bright melodious laugh as she finished;

and Quenu was now altogether convinced. Yes, she was right, after all; and she looked so charming, he thought, as she sat there on the edge of the bed, so trim, although it was so early, so bright, and so fresh in the dazzling whiteness of her linen. As he listened to her his eyes fell on their portraits hanging on either side of the fireplace. Yes, they were certainly honest folks; they had such a respectable, well-to-do air in their black clothes and their gilded frames! The bedroom, too, looked as though it belonged to people of some account in the world. The lace squares seemed to give a dignified appearance to the chairs; and the carpet, the curtains, and the vases decorated with painted landscapes—all spoke of their exertions to get on in the world and their taste for comfort. Thereupon he plunged yet further beneath the eider-down quilt, which kept him in a state of pleasant warmth. He began to feel that he had risked losing all these things at Monsieur Lebigre's—his huge bed, his cosy room, and his business, on which his thoughts now dwelt with tender remorse. And from Lisa, from the furniture, from all his cosy surroundings, he derived a sense of comfort which thrilled him with a delightful, overpowering charm.

'You foolish fellow!' said his wife, seeing that he was now quite conquered. 'A pretty business it was that you'd embarked upon; but you'd have had to reckon with Pauline and me, I can tell you! And now don't bother your head any more about the Government. To begin with, all Governments are alike, and if we didn't have this one, we should have another. A Government is necessary. But the one thing is to be able to live on, to spend one's savings in peace and comfort when one grows old, and to know that one has gained one's means honestly.'

Quenu nodded his head in acquiescence, and tried to commence a justification of his conduct.

'It was Gavard——,' he began.

But Lisa's face again assumed a serious expression, and she interrupted him sharply.

'No, it was not Gavard. I know very well who it was; and it would be a great deal better if he would look after his own safety before compromising that of others.'

'Is it Florent you mean?' Quenu timidly inquired after a pause.

Lisa did not immediately reply. She got up and went back to the secrétaire, as if trying to restrain herself.

'Yes, it is Florent,' she said presently, in incisive tones. 'You know how patient I am. I would bear almost anything rather than come between you and your brother. The tie of relationship is a sacred thing. But the cup is filled to overflowing now. Since your brother came here things have been constantly getting worse and worse. But no, I won't say anything more; it is better that I shouldn't.'

There was another pause. Then, as her husband gazed up at the ceiling with an air of embarrassment, she continued, with increased violence:

'Really, he seems to ignore all that we have done for him. We have put ourselves to great inconvenience for his sake; we have given him Augustine's bedroom, and the poor girl sleeps without a murmur in a stuffy little closet where she can scarcely breathe. We board and lodge him and give him every attention—but no, he takes it all quite as a matter of course. He is earning money, but what he does with it nobody knows; or, rather, one knows only too well.'

'But there's his share of the inheritance, you know,' Quenu ventured to say, pained at hearing his brother attacked.

Lisa suddenly stiffened herself as though she were stunned, and her anger vanished.

'Yes, you are right; there is his share of the inheritance. Here is the statement of it, in this drawer. But he refused to take it; you remember, you were present, and heard him. That only proves that he is a brainless, worthless fellow. If he had had an idea in his head, he would have made something out of that money by now. For my own part, I should be very glad to get rid of it; it would be a relief to us. I have told him so twice, but he won't listen to me. You ought to persuade him to take it. Talk to him about it, will you?'

Quenu growled something in reply; and Lisa refrained from pressing the point further, being of opinion that she had done all that could be expected of her.

'He is not like other men,' she resumed. 'He's not a comfortable sort of person to have in the house. I shouldn't have said this if we hadn't got talking on the subject. I don't busy myself about his conduct, though it's setting the whole neighbourhood gossiping about us. Let him eat and sleep here, and put us about, if he likes; we can get over that; but what I won't tolerate is that he should involve us in his politics. If he tries to lead you off again, or compromises us in the least degree, I shall turn him out of the house

without the least hesitation. I warn you, and now you understand!'

Florent was doomed. Lisa was making a great effort to restrain herself, to prevent the animosity which had long been rankling in her heart from flowing forth. But Florent and his ways jarred against her every instinct; he wounded her, frightened her, and made her quite miserable.

'A man who has had such a discreditable career,' she murmured, 'who has never been able to get a roof of his own over his head! I can very well understand his partiality for bullets! He can go and stand in their way if he chooses; but let him leave honest folks to their families! And then, he isn't pleasant to have about one! He reeks of fish in the evening at dinner! It prevents me from eating. He himself never lets a mouthful go past him, though it's little better he seems to be for it all! He can't even grow decently stout, the wretched fellow, to such a degree do his bad instincts prey on him!'

She had stepped up to the window whilst speaking, and now saw Florent crossing the Rue Rambuteau on his way to the fish-market. There was a very large arrival of fish that morning; the tray-like baskets were covered with rippling silver, and the auction-rooms roared with the hubbub of their sales. Lisa kept her eyes on the bony shoulders of her brother-in-law as he made his way into the pungent smells of the market, stooping beneath the sickening sensation which they brought him; and the glance with which she followed his steps was that of a woman bent on combat and resolved to be victorious.

When she turned round again, Quenu was getting up. As he sat on the edge of the bed in his night-shirt, still warm from the pleasant heat of the eider-down quilt and with his feet resting on the soft fluffy rug below him, he looked quite pale, quite distressed at the misunderstanding between his wife and his brother. Lisa, however, gave him one of her sweetest smiles, and he felt deeply touched when she handed him his socks.

CHAPTER IV

MARJOLIN had been found in a heap of cabbages at the Market of the Innocents. He was sleeping under the shelter of a large white-hearted one, a broad leaf of which concealed his rosy childish face. It was never known what poverty-stricken mother had laid him there. When he was found he was already a fine little fellow of two or three years of age, very plump and merry, but so backward and dense that he could scarcely stammer a few words, and only seemed able to smile. When one of the vegetable saleswomen found him lying under the big white cabbage she raised such a loud cry of surprise that her neighbours rushed up to see what was the matter, while the youngster, still in petticoats, and wrapped in a scrap of old blanket, held out his arms towards her. He could not tell who his mother was, but opened his eyes in wide astonishment as he squeezed against the shoulder of a stout tripe-dealer who eventually took him up. The whole market busied itself about him throughout the day. He soon recovered confidence, ate slices of bread and butter, and smiled at all the women. The stout tripe-dealer kept him for a time, then a neighbour took him; and a month later a third woman gave him shelter. When they asked him where his mother was, he waved his little hand with a pretty gesture which embraced all the women present. He became the adopted child of the place, always clinging to the skirts of one or another of the women, and always finding a corner of a bed and a share of a meal somewhere. Somehow, too, he managed to find clothes, and he even had a copper or two at the bottom of his ragged pockets. It was a buxom, ruddy girl dealing in medicinal herbs who gave him the name of Marjolin,[1] though no one knew why.

When Marjolin was nearly four years of age, old Mother Chantemesse also happened to find a child, a little girl, lying on the footway of the Rue Saint Denis, near the corner of the market. Judging by the little one's size, she seemed to be a couple of years old, but she could already chatter like a magpie, murdering her words in an incessant childish babble. Old Mother Chantemesse after a time gathered that her name was Cadine, and that on the previous evening her

[1] Literally 'Marjoram.'

mother had left her sitting on a doorstep, with instructions to wait till she returned. The child had fallen asleep there, and did not cry. She related that she was beaten at home; and she gladly followed Mother Chantemesse, seemingly quite enchanted with that huge square, where there were so many people and such piles of vegetables. Mother Chantemesse, a retail dealer by trade, was a crusty but very worthy woman, approaching her sixtieth year. She was extremely fond of children, and had lost three boys of her own when they were mere babies. She came to the opinion that the chit she had found 'was far too wide awake to kick the bucket,' and so she adopted her.

One evening, however, as she was going off home with her right hand clasping Cadine's, Marjolin came up and unceremoniously caught hold of her left hand.

'Nay, my lad,' said the old woman, stopping, 'the place is filled. Have you left your big Thérèse, then? What a fickle little gadabout you are!'

The boy gazed at her with his smiling eyes, without letting go of her hand. He looked so pretty with his curly hair that she could not resist him. 'Well, come along, then, you little scamp,' said she; 'I'll put you to bed as well.'

Thus she made her appearance in the Rue au Lard, where she lived, with a child clinging to either hand. Marjolin made himself quite at home there. When the two children proved too noisy the old woman cuffed them, delighted to shout and worry herself, and wash the youngsters, and pack them away beneath the blankets. She had fixed them up a little bed in an old costermonger's barrow, the wheels and shafts of which had disappeared. It was like a big cradle, a trifle hard, but retaining a strong scent of the vegetables which it had long kept fresh and cool beneath a covering of damp cloths. And there, when four years old, Cadine and Marjolin slept locked in each other's arms.

They grew up together, and were always to be seen with their arms about one another's waist. At night time old Mother Chantemesse heard them prattling softly. Cadine's clear treble went chattering on for hours together, while Marjolin listened with occasional expressions of astonishment vented in a deeper tone. The girl was a mischievous young creature, and concocted all sorts of stories to frighten her companion; telling him, for instance, that she had one night seen a man, dressed all in white, looking at them and putting

out a great red tongue, at the foot of the bed. Marjolin quite perspired with terror, and anxiously asked for further particulars; but the girl would then begin to jeer at him, and end by calling him a big donkey. At other times they were not so peaceably disposed, but kicked each other beneath the blankets. Cadine would pull up her legs, and try to restrain her laughter as Marjolin missed his aim, and sent his feet banging against the wall. When this happened, old Madame Chantemesse was obliged to get up to put the bed-clothes straight again; and, by way of sending the children to sleep, she would administer a box on the ear to both of them. For a long time their bed was a sort of playground. They carried their toys into it, and munched stolen carrots and turnips as they lay side by side. Every morning their adopted mother was amazed at the strange things she found in the bed-pebbles, leaves, apple cores, and dolls made out of scraps of rags. When the very cold weather came, she went off to her work, leaving them sleeping there, Cadine's black mop mingling with Marjolin's sunny curls, and their mouths so near together that they looked as though they were keeping each other warm with their breath.

The room in the Rue au Lard was a big, dilapidated garret, with a single window, the panes of which were dimmed by the rain. The children would play at hide-and-seek in the tall walnut wardrobe and underneath Mother Chantemesse's colossal bed. There were also two or three tables in the room, and they crawled under these on all-fours. They found the place a very charming playground, on account of the dim light and the vegetables scattered about in the dark corners. The street itself, too, narrow and very quiet, with a broad arcade opening into the Rue de la Lingerie, provided them with plenty of entertainment. The door of the house was by the side of the arcade; it was a low door and could only be opened half-way owing to the near proximity of the greasy corkscrew staircase. The house, which had a projecting pent roof and bulging front, dark with damp, and displaying greenish drain-sinks near the windows of each floor, also served as a big toy for the young couple. They spent their mornings below in throwing stones up into the drain-sinks, and the stones thereupon fell down the pipes with a very merry clatter. In thus amusing themselves, however, they managed to break a couple of windows, and filled the drains with stones, so that Mother Chantemesse, who had

lived in the house for three-and-forty years, narrowly escaped being turned out of it.

Cadine and Marjolin then directed their attention to the vans and drays and tumbrels which were drawn up in the quiet street. They clambered on to the wheels, swung from the dangling chains, and larked about amongst the piles of boxes and hampers. Here also were the back premises of the commission agents of the Rue de la Poterie—huge, gloomy warehouses, each day filled and emptied afresh, and affording a constant succession of delightful hiding-places, where the youngsters buried themselves amidst the scent of dried fruits, oranges, and fresh apples. When they got tired of playing in this way, they went off to join old Madame Chantemesse at the Market of the Innocents. They arrived there arm-in-arm, laughing gaily as they crossed the streets with never the slightest fear of being run over by the endless vehicles. They knew the pavement well, and plunged their little legs knee-deep in the vegetable refuse without ever slipping. They jeered merrily at any porter in heavy boots who, in stepping over an artichoke-stem, fell sprawling full-length upon the ground. They were the rosy-cheeked familiar spirits of those greasy streets. They were to be seen everywhere.

On rainy days they walked gravely beneath the shelter of a ragged old umbrella, with which Mother Chantemesse had protected her stock-in-trade for twenty years, and sticking it up in a corner of the market they called it their house. On sunny days they romped to such a degree that when evening came they were almost too tired to move. They bathed their feet in the fountains, dammed up the gutters, or hid themselves beneath piles of vegetables, and remained there prattling to each other just as they did in bed at night. People passing some huge mountain of cos or cabbage lettuces often heard a muffled sound of chatter coming from it. And when the green-stuff was removed, the two children would be discovered lying side by side on their couch of verdure, their eyes glistening uneasily like those of birds discovered in the depth of a thicket. As time went on, Cadine could not get along without Marjolin, and Marjolin began to cry when he lost Cadine. If they happened to get separated, they sought one another behind the petticoats of every stallkeeper in the markets, amongst the boxes and

under the cabbages. It was, indeed, chiefly under the cabbages that they grew up and learned to love each other.

Marjolin was nearly eight years old, and Cadine six, when old Madame Chantemesse began to reproach them for their idleness. She told them that she would interest them in her business, and pay them a sou a day to assist her in paring her vegetables. During the first few days the children displayed eager zeal; they squatted down on either side of the big flat basket with little knives in their hands, and worked away energetically. Mother Chantemesse made a speciality of pared vegetables; on her stall, covered with a strip of damp black lining, were little lots of potatoes, turnips, carrots, and white onions, arranged in pyramids of four —three at the base and one at the apex, all quite ready to be popped into the pans of dilatory housewives. She also had bundles duly stringed in readiness for the soup-pot—four leeks, three carrots, a parsnip, two turnips, and a couple of sprigs of celery. Then there were finely-cut vegetables for julienne soup laid out on squares of paper, cabbages cut into quarters, and little heaps of tomatoes and slices of pumpkin which gleamed like red stars and golden crescents amidst the pale hues of the other vegetables. Cadine evinced much more dexterity than Marjolin, although she was younger. The peelings of the potatoes she pared were so thin that you could see through them; she tied up the bundles for the soup-pot so artistically that they looked like bouquets; and she had a way of making the little heaps she set up, though they contained but three carrots or turnips, look like very big ones. The passers-by would stop and smile when she called out in her shrill childish voice: 'Madame! madame! come and try me! Each little pile for two sous.'

She had her regular customers, and her little piles and bundles were widely known. Old Mother Chantemesse, seated between the two children, would indulge in a silent laugh which made her bosom rise almost to her chin, at seeing them working away so seriously. She paid them their daily sous most faithfully. But they soon began to weary of t[illegible] little heaps and bundles; they were growing up, and be[illegible] to dream of some more lucrative business. Marjolin rem[illegible] very childish for his years, and this irritated Cadine. He had no more brains than a cabbage, she often said. And it was, indeed, quite useless for her to devise any plan for him to make money; he never earned any. He could not even

go an errand satisfactorily. The girl, on the other hand, was very shrewd. When but eight years old she obtained employment from one of those women who sit on a bench in the neighbourhood of the markets provided with a basket of lemons, and employ a troop of children to go about selling them. Carrying the lemons in her hands and offering them at two for three sous, Cadine thrust them under every woman's nose, and ran after every passer-by. Her hands empty, she hastened back for a fresh supply. She was paid two sous for every dozen lemons that she sold, and on good days she could earn some five or six sous. During the following year she hawked caps at nine sous apiece, which proved a more profitable business; only she had to keep a sharp look-out, as street trading of this kind is forbidden unless one be licensed. However, she scented a policeman at a distance of a hundred yards; and the caps forthwith disappeared under her skirts, whilst she began to munch an apple with an air of guileless innocence. Then she took to selling pastry, cakes, cherry-tarts, gingerbread, and thick yellow maize biscuits on wicker trays. Marjolin, however, ate up nearly the whole of her stock-in-trade. At last, when she was eleven years old, she succeeded in realising a grand idea which had long been worrying her. In a couple of months she put by four francs, bought a small *hotte*,[1] and then set up as a dealer in birds' food.

It was a big affair. She got up early in the morning and purchased her stock of groundsel, millet, and bird-cake from the wholesale dealers. Then she set out on her day's work, crossing the river, and perambulating the Latin Quarter from the Rue Saint Jacques to the Rue Dauphine, and even to the Luxembourg. Marjolin used to accompany her, but she would not let him carry the basket. He was only fit to call out, she said; and so, in his thick, drawling voice, he would raise the cry, 'Chickweed for the little birds!'

Then Cadine herself, with her flute-like voice, would start on a strange scale of notes ending in a clear, protracted alto, 'Chickweed for the little birds!'

They each took one side of the road, and looked up in the air as they walked along. In those days Marjolin wore a big scarlet waistcoat which hung down to his knees; it had belonged to the defunct Monsieur Chantemesse, who had been

[1] A basket carried on the back.—*Trans.*

a cab-driver. Cadine for her part wore a white and blue check gown, made out of an old tartan of Madame Chantemesse's. All the canaries in the garrets of the Latin Quarter knew them; and, as they passed along, repeating their cry, each echoing the other's voice, every cage poured out a song.

Cadine sold water-cress, too. 'Two sous a bunch! two sous a bunch!' And Marjolin went into the shops to offer it for sale. 'Fine water-cress! health for the body! fine fresh water-cress!'

However, the new central markets had just been erected, and the girl would stand gazing in ecstacy at the avenue of flower-stalls which runs through the fruit pavilion. Here on either hand, from end to end, big clumps of flowers bloom as in the borders of a garden-walk. It is a perfect harvest, sweet with perfume, a double hedge of blossoms, between which the girls of the neighbourhood love to walk, smiling the while, though almost stifled by the heavy perfume. And on the top tiers of the stalls are artificial flowers, with paper leaves, in which dew-drops are simulated by drops of gum; and memorial wreaths of black and white beads rippling with bluish reflections. Cadine's rosy nostrils would dilate with feline sensuality; she would linger as long as possible in that sweet freshness, and carry as much of the perfume away with her as she could. When her hair bobbed under Marjolin's nose he would remark that it smelt of pinks. She said that she had given over using pomatum; that it was quite sufficient for her to stroll through the flower-walk in order to scent her hair. Next she began to intrigue and scheme with such success that she was engaged by one of the stallkeepers. And then Marjolin declared that she smelt sweet from head to foot. She lived in the midst of roses, lilacs, wall-flowers, and lilies of the valley; and Marjolin would playfully smell at her skirts, feign a momentary hesitation, and then exclaim, 'Ah, that's lily of the valley!' Next he would sniff at her waist and bodice: 'Ah, that's wall-flowers!' And at her sleeves and wrists: 'Ah, that's lilac!' And at her neck, and her cheeks and lips: 'Ah, but that's roses!' he would cry. Cadine used to laugh at him, and call him a 'silly stupid,' and tell him to get away, because he was tickling her with the tip of his nose. As she spoke her breath smelt of jasmine. She was verily a bouquet, full of warmth and life.

She now got up at four o'clock every morning to assist

her mistress in her purchases. Each day they bought armfuls of flowers from the suburban florists, with bundles of moss, and bundles of fern fronds and periwinkle leaves to garnish the bouquets. Cadine would gaze with amazement at the diamonds and Valenciennes worn by the daughters of the great gardeners of Montreuil, who came to the markets amidst their roses.

On the saints' days of popular observance, such as Saint Mary's, Saint Peter's, and Saint Joseph's days, the sale of flowers began at two o'clock. More than a hundred thousand francs' worth of cut flowers would be sold on the footways, and some of the retail dealers would make as much as two hundred francs in a few hours. On days like those only Cadine's curly locks peered over the mounds of pansies, mignonette, and marguerites. She was quite drowned and lost in the flood of flowers. Then she would spend all her time in mounting bouquets on bits of rush. In a few weeks she acquired considerable skilfulness in her business, and manifested no little originality. Her bouquets did not always please everybody, however. Sometimes they made one smile, sometimes they alarmed the eyes. Red predominated in them, mottled with violent tints of blue, yellow, and violet of a barbaric charm. On the mornings when she pinched Marjolin, and teased him till she made him cry, she made up fierce-looking bouquets, suggestive of her own bad temper, bouquets with strong rough scents and glaring irritating colours. On other days, however, when she was softened by some thrill of joy or sorrow, her bouquets would assume a tone of silvery grey, very soft and subdued, and delicately perfumed.

Then, too, she would set roses, as sanguineous as open hearts, in lakes of snow-white pinks; arrange bunches of tawny iris that shot up in tufts of flame from foliage that seemed scared by the brilliance of the flowers; work elaborate designs, as complicated as those of Smyrna rugs, adding flower to flower, as on a canvas; and prepare rippling fanlike bouquets spreading out with all the delicacy of lace. Here was a cluster of flowers of delicious purity, there a fat nosegay, whatever one might dream of for the hand of a marchioness or a fish-wife; all the charming quaint fancies, in short, which the brain of a sharp-witted child of twelve, budding into womanhood, could devise.

There were only two flowers for which Cadine retained

respect; white lilac, which by the bundle of eight or ten sprays cost from fifteen to twenty francs in the winter time; and camellias, which were still more costly, and arrived in boxes of a dozen, lying on beds of moss, and covered with cotton wool. She handled these as delicately as though they were jewels, holding her breath for fear of dimming their lustre, and fastening their short stems to sprigs of cane with the tenderest care. She spoke of them with serious reverence. She told Marjolin one day that a speckless white camellia was a very rare and exceptionally lovely thing, and, as she was making him admire one, he exclaimed: 'Yes; it's pretty; but I prefer your neck, you know. It's much more soft and transparent than the camellia, and there are some little blue and pink veins just like the pencillings on a flower.' Then, drawing near and sniffing, he murmured: 'Ah! you smell of orange-blossom to-day.'

Cadine was self-willed, and did not get on well in the position of a servant, so she ended by setting up in business on her own account. As she was only thirteen at the time, and could not hope for a big trade and a stall in the flower avenue, she took to selling one-sou bunches of violets pricked into a bed of moss in an osier tray which she carried hanging from her neck. All day long she wandered about the markets and their precincts with her little bit of hanging garden. She loved this continual stroll, which relieved the numbness of her limbs after long hours spent, with bent knees, on a low chair, making bouquets. She fastened her violets together with marvellous deftness as she walked along. She counted out six or eight flowers, according to the season, doubled a sprig of cane in half, added a leaf, twisted some damp thread round the whole, and broke off the thread with her strong young teeth. The little bunches seemed to spring spontaneously from the layer of moss, so rapidly did she stick them into it.

Along the footways, amidst the jostling of the street traffic, her nimble fingers were ever flowering though she gave them not a glance, but boldly scanned the shops and passers-by. Sometimes she would rest in a doorway for a moment; and alongside the gutters, greasy with kitchen slops, she set, as it were, a patch of spring-time, a suggestion of green woods and purple blossoms. Her flowers still betokened her frame of mind, her fits of bad temper and her thrills of tenderness. Sometimes they bristled and glowered with anger amidst their

crumpled leaves; at other times they spoke only of love and peacefulness as they smiled in their prim collars. As Cadine passed along, she left a sweet perfume behind her; Marjolin followed her devoutly. From head to foot she now exhaled but one scent, and the lad repeated that she was herself a violet, a great big violet.

'Do you remember the day when we went to Romainville together?' he would say; 'Romainville, where there are so many violets. The scent was just the same. Oh! don't change again—you smell too sweetly.'

And she did not change again. This was her last trade. Still, she often neglected her osier tray to go rambling about the neighbourhood. The building of the central markets—as yet incomplete—provided both children with endless opportunities for amusement. They made their way into the midst of the work-yards through some gap or other between the planks; they descended into the foundations, and climbed up to the cast-iron pillars. Every nook, every piece of the framework witnessed their games and quarrels; the pavilions grew up under the touch of their little hands. From all this arose the affection which they felt for the great markets, and which the latter seemed to return. They were on familiar terms with that gigantic pile, old friends as they were, who had seen each pin and bolt put into place. They felt no fear of the huge monster; but slapped it with their childish hands, treated it like a good friend, a chum whose presence brought no constraint. And the markets seemed to smile at these two light-hearted children, whose love was the song, the idyll of their immensity.

Cadine alone now slept at Mother Chantemesse's. The old woman had packed Marjolin off to a neighbour's. This made the two children very unhappy. Still, they contrived to spend much of their time together. In the daytime they would hide themselves away in the warehouses of the Rue au Lard, behind piles of apples and cases of oranges; and in the evening they would dive into the cellars beneath the poultry-market, and secrete themselves among the huge hampers of feathers which stood near the blocks where the poultry was killed. They were quite alone there, amidst the strong smell of the poultry, and with never a sound but the sudden crowing of some rooster to break upon their babble and their laughter. The feathers amidst which they found themselves were of all sorts—turkey's feathers, long and black; goose quills,

white and flexible; the downy plumage of ducks, soft like cotton wool; and the ruddy and mottled feathers of fowls, which at the faintest breath flew up in a cloud like a swarm of flies buzzing in the sun. And then in winter-time there was the purple plumage of the pheasants, the ashen grey of the larks, the splotched silk of the partridges, quails, and thrushes. And all these feathers freshly plucked were still warm and odoriferous, seemingly endowed with life. The spot was as cosy as a nest; at times a quiver as of flapping wings sped by, and Marjolin and Cadine, nestling amidst all the plumage, often imagined that they were being carried aloft by one of those huge birds with outspread pinions that one hears of in the fairy tales.

As time went on their childish affection took the inevitable turn. Veritable offsprings of Nature, knowing naught of social conventions and restraints, they loved one another in all innocence and guilelessness. They mated even as the birds of the air mate, even as youth and maid mated in primeval times, because such is Nature's law. At sixteen Cadine was a dusky town gipsy, greedy and sensual, whilst Marjolin, now eighteen, was a tall, strapping fellow, as handsome a youth as could be met, but still with his mental faculties quite undeveloped. He had lived, indeed, a mere animal life, which had strengthened his frame, but left his intellect in a rudimentary state.

When old Madame Chantemesse realised the turn that things were taking she wrathfully upbraided Cadine and struck out vigorously at her with her broom. But the hussy only laughed and dodged the blows, and then hied off to her lover. And gradually the markets became their home, their manger, their aviary, where they lived and loved amidst the meat, the butter, the vegetables, and the feathers.

They discovered another little paradise in the pavilion where butter, eggs, and cheese were sold wholesale. Enormous walls of empty baskets were here piled up every morning, and amidst these Cadine and Marjolin burrowed and hollowed out a dark lair for themselves. A mere partition of osier-work separated them from the market crowd, whose loud voices rang out all around them. They often shook with laughter when people, without the least suspicion of their presence, stopped to talk together a few yards away from them. On these occasions they would contrive peep-holes, and spy through them; and when cherries were in season Cadine tossed the stones in the faces of all the

old women who passed along—a pastime which amused them the more as the startled old crones could never make out whence the hail of cherry-stones had come. They also prowled about the depths of the cellars, knowing every gloomy corner of them, and contriving to get through the most carefully locked gates. One of their favourite amusements was to visit the track of the subterranean railway, which had been laid under the markets, and which those who planned the latter had intended to connect with the different goods' stations of Paris. Sections of this railway were laid beneath each of the covered ways, between the cellars of each pavilion; the work, indeed, was in such an advanced state that turn-tables had been put into position at all the points of intersection, and were in readiness for use. After much examination, Cadine and Marjolin had at last succeeded in discovering a loose plank in the hoarding which enclosed the track, and they had managed to convert it into a door, by which they could easily gain access to the line. There they were quite shut off from the world, though they could hear the continuous rumbling of the street traffic over their heads.

The line stretched through deserted vaults, here and there illumined by a glimmer of light filtering through iron gratings, while in certain dark corners gas-jets were burning. And Cadine and Marjolin rambled about as in the secret recesses of some castle of their own, secure from all interruption, and rejoicing in the buzzy silence, the murky glimmer, and subterranean secrecy, which imparted a touch of melodrama to their experiences. All sorts of smells were wafted through the hoarding from the neighbouring cellars; the musty smell of vegetables, the pungency of fish, the overpowering stench of cheese, and the warm reek of poultry.

At other times, on clear nights and fine dawns, they would climb on to the roofs, ascending thither by the steep staircases of the turrets at the angles of the pavilions. Up above they found fields of leads, endless promenades and squares, a stretch of undulating country which belonged to them. They rambled round the square roofs of the pavilions, followed the course of the long roofs of the covered ways, climbed and descended the slopes, and lost themselves in endless perambulations of discovery. And when they grew tired of the lower levels they ascended still higher, venturing

up the iron ladders, on which Cadine's skirts flapped like flags. Then they ran along the second tier of roofs beneath the open heavens. There was nothing save the stars above them. All sorts of sounds rose up from the echoing markets, a clattering and rumbling, a vague roar as of a distant tempest heard at night-time. At that height the morning breeze swept away the evil smells, the foul breath of the awaking markets. They would kiss one another at the edge of the gutterings like sparrows frisking on the house-tops. The rising fires of the sun illumined their faces with a ruddy glow. Cadine laughed with pleasure at being so high up in the air, and her neck shone with iridescent tints like a dove's; while Marjolin bent down to look at the streets still wrapped in gloom, with his hands clutching hold of the leads like the feet of a wood-pigeon. When they descended to earth again, joyful from their excursion in the fresh air, they would remark to one another that they were coming back from the country.

It was in the tripe-market that they had made the acquaintance of Claude Lantier. They went there every day, impelled thereto by an animal taste for blood, the cruel instinct of urchins who find amusement in the sight of severed heads. A ruddy stream flowed along the gutters round the pavilion; they dipped the tips of their shoes in it, and dammed it up with leaves, so as to form large pools of blood. They took a strong interest in the arrival of the loads of offal in carts which always smelt offensively, despite all the drenchings of water they got; they watched the unloading of the bundles of sheep's trotters, which were piled up on the ground like filthy paving-stones, of the huge stiffened tongues, bleeding at their torn roots, and of the massive bell-shaped bullocks' hearts. But the spectacle which, above all others, made them quiver with delight was that of the big dripping hampers, full of sheep's heads, with greasy horns and black muzzles, and strips of woolly skin dangling from bleeding flesh. The sight of these conjured up in their minds the idea of some guillotine casting into the baskets the heads of countless victims.

They followed the baskets into the depths of the cellar, watching them glide down the rails laid over the steps, and listening to the rasping noise which the casters of these osier waggons made in their descent. Down below there was a scene of exquisite horror. They entered into a charnel-house atmosphere, and walked along through murky puddles,

amidst which every now and then purple eyes seem to be glistening. At times the soles of their boots stuck to the ground, at others they splashed through the horrible mire, anxious and yet delighted. The gas-jets burned low, like blinking, bloodshot eyes. Near the water-taps, in the pale light falling through the gratings, they came upon the blocks; and there they remained in rapture watching the tripe-men, who, in aprons stiffened by gory splashings, broke the sheep's heads one after another with a blow of their mallets. They lingered there for hours, waiting till all the baskets were empty, fascinated by the crackling of the bones, unable to tear themselves away till all was over. Sometimes an attendant passed behind them, cleansing the cellar with a hose; floods of water rushed out with a sluice-like roar, but although the violence of the discharge actually ate away the surface of the flagstones, it was powerless to remove the ruddy stains and stench of blood.

Cadine and Marjolin were sure of meeting Claude between four and five in the afternoon at the wholesale auction of the bullocks' lights. He was always there amidst the tripe-dealers' carts backed up against the kerb-stones and the blue-bloused, white-aproned men who jostled him and deafened his ears by their loud bids. But he never felt their elbows; he stood in a sort of ecstatic trance before the huge hanging lights, and often told Cadine and Marjolin that there was no finer sight to be seen. The lights were of a soft rosy hue, gradually deepening and turning at the lower edges to a rich carmine; and Claude compared them to watered satin, finding no other term to describe the soft silkiness of those flowing lengths of flesh which drooped in broad folds like ballet dancers' skirts. He thought, too, of gauze and lace allowing a glimpse of pinky skin; and when a ray of sunshine fell upon the lights and girdled them with gold an expression of languorous rapture came into his eyes, and he felt happier than if he had been privileged to contemplate the Greek goddesses in their sovereign nudity, or the chatelaines of romance in their brocaded robes.

The artist became a great friend of the two young scapegraces. He loved beautiful animals, and such undoubtedly they were. For a long time he dreamt of a colossal picture which should represent the loves of Cadine and Marjolin in the central markets, amidst the vegetables, the fish, and the meat. He would have depicted them seated on some couch

of food, their arms circling each other's waists, and their lips exchanging an idyllic kiss. In this conception he saw a manifesto proclaiming the positivism of art—modern art, experimental and materialistic. And it seemed to him also that it would be a smart satire on the school which wishes every painting to embody an 'idea,' a slap for the old traditions and all they represented. But during a couple of years he began study after study without succeeding in giving the particular 'note' he desired. In this way he spoilt fifteen canvases. His failure filled him with rancour; however, he continued to associate with his two models from a sort of hopeless love for his abortive picture. When he met them prowling about in the afternoon, he often scoured the neighbourhood with them, strolling around with his hands in his pockets, and deeply interested in the life of the streets.

They all three trudged along together, dragging their heels over the footways and monopolising their whole breadth so as to force others to step down into the road. With their noses in the air they sniffed in the odours of Paris, and could have recognised every corner blindfold by the spirituous emanations of the wine-shops, the hot puffs that came from the bakehouses and confectioners', and the musty odours wafted from the fruiterers'. They would make the circuit of the whole district. They delighted in passing through the rotunda of the corn-market, that huge massive stone cage where sacks of flour were piled up on every side, and where their footsteps echoed in the silence of the resonant roof. They were fond, too, of the little narrow streets in the neighbourhood, which had become as deserted, as black, and as mournful as though they formed part of an abandoned city. These were the Rue Babille, the Rue Sauval, the Rue des Deux Ecus, and the Rue de Viarmes, this last pallid from its proximity to the millers' stores, and at four o'clock lively by reason of the corn exchange held there. It was generally from this point that they started on their round. They made their way slowly along the Rue Vauvilliers, glancing as they went at the windows of the low eating-houses, and thus reaching the miserably narrow Rue des Prouvaires, where Claude blinked his eyes as he saw one of the covered ways of the market, at the far end of which, framed round by this huge iron nave, appeared a side entrance of St. Eustache with its rose and its tiers of arched windows. And then, with an air of defiance, he would remark that all

the middle ages and the Renaissance put together were less mighty than the central markets. Afterwards, as they paced the broad new streets, the Rue du Pont Neuf and the Rue des Halles, he explained modern life with its wide footways, its lofty houses, and its luxurious shops, to the two urchins. He predicted, too, the advent of new and truly original art, whose approach he could divine, and despair filled him that its revelation should seemingly be beyond his own powers.

Cadine and Marjolin, however, preferred the provincial quietness of the Rue des Bourdonnais, where one can play at marbles without fear of being run over. The girl perked her head affectedly as she passed the wholesale glove and hosiery stores, at each door of which bareheaded assistants, with their pens stuck in their ears, stood watching her with a weary gaze. And she and her lover had yet a stronger preference for such bits of olden Paris as still existed: the Rue de la Poterie and the Rue de la Lingerie, with their butter and egg and cheese dealers; the Rue de la Ferronerie and the Rue de l'Aiguillerie (the beautiful streets of far-away times), with their dark narrow shops; and especially the Rue Courtalon, a dank, dirty by-way running from the Place Sainte Opportune to the Rue Saint Denis, and intersected by foul-smelling alleys where they had romped in their younger days. In the Rue Saint Denis they entered into the land of dainties; and they smiled upon the dried apples, the 'Spanishwood,' the prunes, and the sugar-candy in the windows of the grocers and druggists. Their ramblings always set them dreaming of a feast of good things, and inspired them with a desire to glut themselves on the contents of the windows. To them the district seemed like some huge table, always laid with an everlasting dessert into which they longed to plunge their fingers.

They devoted but a moment to visiting the other blocks of tumble-down old houses, the Rue Pirouette, the Rue de Mondétour, the Rue de la Petite Truanderie, and the Rue de la Grande Truanderie, for they took little interest in the shops of the dealers in edible snails, cooked vegetables, tripe, and drink. In the Rue de la Grande Truanderie, however, there was a soap factory, an oasis of sweetness in the midst of all the foul odours, and Marjolin was fond of standing outside it till some one happened to enter or come out, so that the perfume which swept through the doorway might blow full in his face. Then with all speed they returned to

the Rue Pierre Lescot and the Rue Rambuteau. Cadine was extremely fond of salted provisions; she stood in admiration before the bundles of red-herrings, the barrels of anchovies and capers, and the little casks of gherkins and olives, standing on end with wooden spoons inside them. The smell of the vinegar titillated her throat; the pungent odour of the rolled cod, smoked salmon, bacon and ham, and the sharp acidity of the baskets of lemons, made her mouth water longingly. She was also fond of feasting her eyes on the boxes of sardines piled up in metallic columns amidst the cases and sacks. In the Rue Montorgueil and the Rue Montmartre were other tempting-looking groceries and restaurants, from whose basements appetising odours were wafted, with glorious shows of game and poultry, and preserved-provision shops, which last displayed beside their doors open kegs overflowing with yellow sour-krout suggestive of old lace-work. Then they lingered in the Rue Coquillière, inhaling the odour of truffles from the premises of a notable dealer in comestibles, which threw so strong a perfume into the street that Cadine and Marjolin closed their eyes and imagined they were swallowing all kinds of delicious things. These perfumes, however, distressed Claude. They made him realise the emptiness of his stomach, he said; and, leaving the 'two animals' to feast on the odour of the truffles—the most penetrating odour to be found in all the neighbourhood—he went off again to the corn-market by way of the Rue Oblin, studying on his road the old women who sold green-stuff in the doorways and the displays of cheap pottery spread out on the foot-pavements.

Such were their rambles in common; but when Cadine set out alone with her bunches of violets she often went farther afield, making it a point to visit certain shops for which she had a particular partiality. She had an especial weakness for the Tabourcau bakery establishment, one of the windows of which was exclusively devoted to pastry. She would follow the Rue Turbigo and retrace her steps a dozen times in order to pass again and again before the almond cakes, the *savarins*, the St. Honoré tarts, the fruit tarts, and the various dishes containing bunlike *babas* redolent of rum, *éclairs* combining the finger biscuit with chocolate, and *choux à la crème*, little rounds of pastry overflowing with whipped white of egg. The glass jars full of dry biscuits, macaroons, and *madeleines* also made her mouth water; and the bright

shop with its big mirrors, its marble slabs, its gilding, its bread-bins of ornamental ironwork, and its second window in which long glistening loaves were displayed slantwise, with one end resting on a crystal shelf whilst above they were upheld by a brass rod, was so warm and odoriferous of baked dough that her features expanded with pleasure when, yielding to temptation, she went in to buy a *brioche* for two sous.

Another shop, one in front of the Square des Innocents, also filled her with gluttonous inquisitiveness, a fever of longing desire. This shop made a specialty of forcemeat pasties. In addition to the ordinary ones there were pasties of pike and pasties of truffled *foie gras*; and the girl would gaze yearningly at them, saying to herself that she would really have to eat one some day.

Cadine also had her moments of vanity and coquetry. When these fits were on her, she bought herself in imagination some of the magnificent dresses displayed in the windows of the 'Fabriques de France' which made the Pointe Saint Eustache gaudy with their pieces of bright stuff hanging from the first floor to the footway and flapping in the breeze. Somewhat incommoded by the flat basket hanging before her, amidst the crowd of market-women in dirty aprons gazing at future Sunday dresses, the girl would feel the woollens, flannels, and cottons to test the texture and suppleness of the material; and she would promise herself a gown of bright-coloured flannelling, flowered print, or scarlet poplin. Sometimes even from amongst the pieces draped and set off to advantage by the window-dressers she would choose some soft sky-blue or apple-green silk, and dream of wearing it with pink ribbons. In the evenings she would dazzle herself with the displays in the windows of the big jewellers in the Rue Montmartre. That terrible street deafened her with its ceaseless flow of vehicles, and the streaming crowd never ceased to jostle her; still she did not stir, but remained feasting her eyes on the blazing splendour set out in the light of the reflecting lamps which hung outside the windows. On one side all was white with the bright glitter of silver: watches in rows, chains hanging, spoons and forks laid crossways, cups, snuff-boxes, napkin-rings, and combs arranged on shelves. The silver thimbles, dotting a porcelain stand covered with a glass shade, had an especial attraction for her. Then on the other side the windows glistened with the tawny glow of gold. A cascade of long pendant chains descended from above, rippling with

ruddy gleams; small ladies' watches, with the backs of their cases displayed, sparkled like fallen stars; wedding rings clustered round slender rods; bracelets, brooches, and other costly ornaments glittered on the black velvet linings of their cases; jewelled rings set their stands aglow with blue, green, yellow, and violet flamelets; while on every tier of the shelves superposed rows of ear-rings and crosses and lockets hung against the crystal like the rich fringes of altar-cloths. The glow of this gold illumined the street half-way across with a sun-like radiance. And Cadine, as she gazed at it, almost fancied that she was in presence of something holy, or on the threshold of the Emperor's treasure chamber. She would for a long time scrutinise all this show of gaudy jewellery, adapted to the taste of the fish-wives, and carefully read the large figures on the tickets affixed to each article; and eventually she would select for herself a pair of ear-rings—pear-shaped drops of imitation coral hanging from golden roses.

One morning Claude caught her standing in ecstasy before a hair-dresser's window in the Rue Saint Honoré. She was gazing at the display of hair with an expression of intense envy. High up in the window was a streaming cascade of long manes, soft wisps, loose tresses, frizzy falls, undulating comb-curls, a perfect cataract of silky and bristling hair, real and artificial, now in coils of a flaming red, now in thick black crops, now in pale golden locks, and even in snowy white ones for the coquette of sixty. In cardboard boxes down below were cleverly arranged fringes, curling side-ringlets, and carefully combed chignons glossy with pomade. And amidst this framework, in a sort of shrine beneath the ravelled ends of the hanging locks, there revolved the bust of a woman, arrayed in a wrapper of cherry-coloured satin fastened between the breasts with a brass brooch. The figure wore a lofty bridal coiffure picked out with sprigs of orange-blossom, and smiled with a dollish smile. Its eyes were pale blue; its eyebrows were very stiff and of exaggerated length; and its waxen cheeks and shoulders bore evident traces of the heat and smoke of the gas. Cadine waited till the revolving figure again displayed its smiling face, and as its profile showed more distinctly and it slowly went round from left to right she felt perfectly happy. Claude, however, was indignant, and, shaking Cadine, he asked her what she was doing in front of 'that abomination, that corpse-like hussy picked up at the Morgue!'

He flew into a temper with the 'dummy's' cadaverous face and shoulders, that disfigurement of the beautiful, and remarked that artists painted nothing but that unreal type of woman nowadays. Cadine, however, remained unconvinced by his oratory, and considered the lady extremely beautiful. Then, resisting the attempts of the artist to drag her away by the arm, and scratching her black mop in vexation, she pointed to an enormous ruddy tail, severed from the quarters of some vigorous mare, and told him she would have liked to have a crop of hair like that.

During the long rambles when Claude, Cadine, and Marjolin prowled about the neighbourhood of the markets, they saw the iron ribs of the giant building at the end of every street. Wherever they turned they caught sudden glimpses of it; the horizon was always bounded by it; merely the aspect under which it was seen varied. Claude was perpetually turning round, and particularly in the Rue Montmartre, after passing the church. From that point the markets, seen obliquely in the distance, filled him with enthusiasm. A huge arcade, a giant, gaping gateway, was open before him; then came the crowding pavilions with their lower and upper roofs, their countless Venetian shutters and endless blinds, a vision, as it were, of superposed houses and palaces; a Babylon of metal, of Hindoo delicacy of workmanship, intersected by hanging terraces, aërial galleries, and flying bridges poised over space. The trio always returned to this city round which they strolled, unable to stray more than a hundred yards away. They came back to it during the hot afternoons when the Venetian shutters were closed and the blinds lowered. In the covered ways all seemed to be asleep, the ashy greyness was streaked by yellow bars of sunlight falling through the high windows. Only a subdued murmur broke the silence; the steps of a few hurrying passers-by resounded on the footways; whilst the badge-wearing porters sat in rows on the stone ledges at the corners of the pavilions, taking off their boots and nursing their aching feet. The quietude was that of a colossus at rest, interrupted at times by some cock-crow rising from the cellars below.

Claude, Cadine, and Marjolin then often went to see the empty hampers piled upon the drays, which came to fetch them every afternoon so that they might be sent back to the consignors. There were mountains of them, labelled with black letters and figures, in front of the salesmen's warehouses

in the Rue Berger. The porters arranged them symmetrically, tier by tier, on the vehicles. When the pile rose, however, to the height of a first floor, the porter who stood below balancing the next batch of hampers had to make a spring in order to toss them up to his mate, who was perched aloft with arms extended. Claude, who delighted in feats of strength and dexterity, would stand for hours watching the flight of these masses of osier, and would burst into a hearty laugh whenever too vigorous a toss sent them flying over the pile into the roadway beyond. He was fond, too, of the footways of the Rue Rambuteau and the Rue du Pont Neuf, near the fruit-market, where the retail dealers congregated. The sight of the vegetables displayed in the open air, on trestle-tables covered with damp black rags, was full of charm for him. At four in the afternoon the whole of this nook of greenery was aglow with sunshine; and Claude wandered between the stalls, inspecting the bright-coloured heads of the saleswomen with keen artistic relish. The younger ones, with their hair in nets, had already lost all freshness of complexion through the rough life they led; while the older ones were bent and shrivelled, with wrinkled, flaring faces showing under the yellow kerchiefs bound round their heads. Cadine and Marjolin refused to accompany him hither, as they could perceive old Mother Chantemesse shaking her fist at them, in her anger at seeing them prowling about together. He joined them again, however, on the opposite footway, where he found a splendid subject for a picture in the stallkeepers squatting under their huge umbrellas of faded red, blue, and violet, which, mounted upon poles, filled the whole market-side with bumps, and showed conspicuously against the fiery glow of the sinking sun, whose rays faded amidst the carrots and the turnips. One tattered harridan, a century old, was sheltering three spare-looking lettuces beneath an umbrella of pink silk, shockingly split and stained.

Cadine and Marjolin had struck up an acquaintance with Léon, Quenu's apprentice, one day when he was taking a pie to a house in the neighbourhood. They saw him cautiously raise the lid of his pan in a secluded corner of the Rue de Mondétour, and delicately take out a ball of forcemeat. They smiled at the sight, which give them a very high opinion of Léon. And the idea came to Cadine that she might at last satisfy one of her most ardent longings. Indeed, the very next time that she met the lad with his basket she made her-

self very agreeable, and induced him to offer her a forcemeat ball. But, although she laughed and licked her fingers, she experienced some disappointment. The forcemeat did not prove nearly so nice as she had anticipated. On the other hand, the lad, with his sly, greedy phiz and his white garments, which made him look like a girl going to her first communion, somewhat took her fancy.

She invited him to a monster lunch which she gave amongst the hampers in the auction-room at the butter-market. The three of them—herself, Marjolin, and Léon—completely secluded themselves from the world within four walls of osier. The feast was laid out on a large flat basket. There were pears, nuts, cream-cheese, shrimps, fried potatoes, and radishes. The cheese came from a fruiterer's in the Rue de la Cossonnerie, and was a present; and a 'frier' of the Rue de la Grande Truanderie had given Cadine credit for two sous' worth of potatoes. The rest of the feast, the pears, the nuts, the shrimps, and the radishes, had been pilfered from different parts of the market. It was a delicious treat; and Léon, desirous of returning the hospitality, gave a supper in his bedroom at one o'clock in the morning. The bill of fare included cold black-pudding, slices of polony, a piece of salt pork, some gherkins, and some goose-fat. The Quenu-Gradelles' shop had provided everything. And matters did not stop there. Dainty suppers alternated with delicate luncheons, and invitation followed invitation. Three times a week there were banquets, either amidst the hampers or in Léon's garret, where Florent, on the nights when he lay awake, could hear a stifled sound of munching and rippling laughter until day began to break.

The loves of Cadine and Marjolin now took another turn. The youth played the gallant, and just as another might entertain his *innamorata* at a champagne supper *en tête à tête* in a private room, he led Cadine into some quiet corner of the market cellars to munch apples or sprigs of celery. One day he stole a red-herring, which they devoured with immense enjoyment on the roof of the fish-market beside the guttering. There was not a single shady nook in the whole place where they did not indulge in secret feasts. The district, with its rows of open shops full of fruit and cakes and preserves, was no longer a closed paradise, in front of which they prowled with greedy, covetous appetites. As they passed the shops they now extended their hands and pilfered a prune a

few cherries, or a bit of cod. They also provisioned themselves at the markets, keeping a sharp look-out as they made their way between the stalls, picking up everything that fell, and often assisting the fall by a push of their shoulders.

In spite, however, of all this marauding, some terrible scores had to be run up with the 'frier' of the Rue de la Grande Truanderie. This 'frier,' whose shanty leaned against a tumble-down house, and was propped up by heavy joists, green with moss, made a display of boiled mussels lying in large earthenware bowls filled to the brim with clear water; of dishes of little yellow dabs stiffened by too thick a coating of paste; of squares of tripe simmering in a pan; and of grilled herrings, black and charred, and so hard that if you tapped them they sounded like wood. On certain weeks Cadine owed the frier as much as twenty sous, a crushing debt, which required the sale of an incalculable number of bunches of violets, for she could count upon no assistance from Marjolin. Moreover, she was bound to return Léon's hospitalities; and she even felt some little shame at never being able to offer him a scrap of meat. He himself had now taken to purloining entire hams. As a rule, he stowed everything away under his shirt; and at night when he reached his bedroom he drew from his bosom hunks of polony, slices of *pâté de foie gras*, and bundles of pork rind. They had to do without bread, and there was nothing to drink; but no matter. One night Marjolin saw Léon kiss Cadine between two mouthfuls; however, he only laughed. He could have smashed the little fellow with a blow from his fist, but he felt no jealousy in respect of Cadine. He treated her simply as a comrade with whom he had chummed for years.

Claude never participated in these feasts. Having caught Cadine one day stealing a beet-root from a little hamper lined with hay, he had pulled her ears and given her a sound rating. These thieving propensities made her perfect as a ne'er-do-well. However, in spite of himself, he could not help feeling a sort of admiration for these sensual, pilfering, greedy creatures, who preyed upon everything that lay about, feasting off the crumbs that fell from the giant's table.

At last Marjolin nominally took service under Gavard, happy in having nothing to do except to listen to his master's flow of talk, while Cadine still continued to sell violets, quite accustomed by this time to old Mother Chantemesse's scoldings. They were still the same children as ever, giving

way to their instincts and appetites without the slightest shame—they were the growth of the slimy pavements of the market district, where, even in fine weather, the mud remains black and sticky. However, as Cadine walked along the footways, mechanically twisting her bunches of violets, she was sometimes disturbed by disquieting reveries; and Marjolin, too, suffered from an uneasiness which he could not explain. He would occasionally leave the girl and miss some ramble or feast in order to go and gaze at Madame Quenu through the windows of the pork-shop. She was so handsome and plump and round that it did him good to look at her. As he stood gazing at her, he felt full and satisfied, as though he had just eaten or drunk something extremely nice. And when he went off, a sort of hunger and thirst to see her again suddenly came upon him. This had been going on for a couple of months. At first he had looked at her with the respectful glance which he bestowed upon the shop-fronts of the grocers and provision dealers; but subsequently, when he and Cadine had taken to general pilfering, he began to regard her smooth cheeks much as he regarded the barrels of olives and boxes of dried apples.

For some time past Marjolin had seen handsome Lisa every day, in the morning. She would pass Gavard's stall, and stop for a moment or two to chat with the poultry-dealer. She now did her marketing herself, so that she might be cheated as little as possible, she said. The truth, however, was that she wished to make Gavard speak out. In the pork-shop he was always distrustful, but at his stall he chatted and talked with the utmost freedom. Now, Lisa had made up her mind to ascertain from him exactly what took place in the little room at Monsieur Lebigre's; for she had no great confidence in her secret police-officer, Mademoiselle Saget. In a short time she learnt from the incorrigible chatterbox a lot of vague details which very much alarmed her. Two days after her explanation with Quenu she returned home from the market looking very pale. She beckoned to her husband to follow her into the dining-room, and having carefully closed the door she said to him: 'Is your brother determined to send us to the scaffold, then? Why did you conceal from me what you knew?'

Quenu declared that he knew nothing. He even swore a great oath that he had not returned to Monsieur Lebigre's, and would never go there again.

'You will do well not to do so,' replied Lisa, shrugging her shoulders, 'unless you want to get yourself into a serious scrape. Florent is up to some evil trick, I'm certain of it! I have just learned quite sufficient to show me where he is going. He's going back to Cayenne, do you hear?'

Then, after a pause, she continued in calmer tones: 'Oh, the unhappy man! He had everything here that he could wish for. He might have redeemed his character; he had nothing but good examples before him. But no, it is in his blood! He will come to a violent end with his politics! I insist upon there being an end to all this! You hear me, Quenu? I gave you due warning long ago!'

She spoke the last words very incisively. Quenu bent his head, as if awaiting sentence.

'To begin with,' continued Lisa, 'he shall cease to take his meals here. It will be quite sufficient if we give him a bed. He is earning money; let him feed himself.'

Quenu seemed on the point of protesting, but his wife silenced him by adding energetically:

'Make your choice between him and me. If he remains here, I swear to you that I will go away, and take my daughter with me. Do you want me to tell you the whole truth about him? He is a man capable of anything; he has come here to bring discord into our household. But I will set things right, you may depend on it. You have your choice between him and me; you hear me?'

Then, leaving her husband in silent consternation, she returned to the shop, where she served a customer with her usual affable smile. The fact was that, having artfully inveigled Gavard into a political discussion, the poultry-dealer had told her that she would soon see how the land lay, that they were going to make a clean sweep of everything, and that two determined men like her brother-in-law and himself would suffice to set the fire blazing. This was the evil trick of which she had spoken to Quenu, some conspiracy to which Gavard was always making mysterious allusions with a sniggering grin from which he seemingly desired a great deal to be inferred. And in imagination Lisa already saw the gendarmes invading the pork-shop, gagging herself, her husband, and Pauline, and casting them into some underground dungeon.

In the evening, at dinner, she evinced an icy frigidity. She made no offers to serve Florent, but several times re-

marked: 'It's very strange what an amount of bread we've got through lately.'

Florent at last understood. He felt that he was being treated like a poor relation who is gradually turned out of doors. For the last two months Lisa had dressed him in Quenu's old trousers and coats; and, as he was as thin as his brother was fat, these ragged garments had a most extraordinary appearance upon him. She also turned her oldest linen over to him: pocket-handkerchiefs that had been darned a score of times, ragged towels, sheets which were only fit to be cut up into dusters and dish-cloths, and worn-out shirts, distended by Quenu's corpulent figure, and so short that they would have served Florent as under-vests. Moreover, he no longer found around him the same good-natured kindliness as in the earlier days. The whole household seemed to shrug its shoulders after the example set by handsome Lisa. Auguste and Augustine turned their backs upon him, and little Pauline, with the cruel frankness of childhood, let fall some bitter remarks about the stains on his coat and the holes in his shirt. However, during the last days he suffered most at table. He scarcely dared to eat, as he saw the mother and daughter fix their gaze upon him whenever he cut himself a piece of bread. Quenu meantime peered into his plate, to avoid having to take any part in what went on.

That which most tortured Florent was his inability to invent a reason for leaving the house. During a week he kept on revolving in his mind a sentence expressing his resolve to take his meals elsewhere, but could not bring himself to utter it. Indeed, this man of tender nature lived in such a world of illusions that he feared he might hurt his brother and sister-in-law by ceasing to lunch and dine with them. It had taken him over two months to detect Lisa's latent hostility; and even now he was sometimes inclined to think that he must be mistaken, and that she was in reality kindly disposed towards him. Unselfishness with him extended to forgetfulness of his requirements; it was no longer a virtue, but utter indifference to self, an absolute obliteration of personality. Even when he recognised that he was being gradually turned out of the house, his mind never for a moment dwelt upon his share in old Gradelle's fortune, or upon the accounts which Lisa had offered him. He had already planned out his expenditure for the future; reckoning that with what Madame Verlaque still allowed him to retain of his salary, and the

thirty francs a month which a pupil, obtained through La Normande, paid him, he would be able to spend eighteen sous on his breakfast and twenty-six sous on his dinner. This, he thought, would be ample. And so, at last, taking as his excuse the lessons which he was giving his new pupil, he emboldened himself one morning to pretend that it would be impossible for him in future to come to the house at meal-times. He blushed as he gave utterance to this laboriously constructed lie, which had given him so much trouble, and continued apologetically:

'You mustn't be offended; the boy only has those hours free. I can easily get something to eat, you know; and I will come and have a chat with you in the evenings.'

Beautiful Lisa maintained her icy reserve, and this increased Florent's feeling of trouble. In order to have no cause for self-reproach she had been unwilling to send him about his business, preferring to wait till he should weary of the situation and go of his own accord. Now he was going, and it was a good riddance; and she studiously refrained from all show of kindliness for fear it might induce him to remain. Quenu, however, showed some signs of emotion, and exclaimed: 'Don't think of putting yourself about; take your meals elsewhere by all means, if it is more convenient. It isn't we who are turning you away; you'll at all events dine with us sometimes on Sundays, eh?'

Florent hurried off. His heart was very heavy. When he had gone, the beautiful Lisa did not venture to reproach her husband for his weakness in giving that invitation for Sundays. She had conquered, and again breathed freely amongst the light oak of her dining-room, where she would have liked to burn some sugar to drive away the odour of perverse leanness which seemed to linger about. Moreover, she continued to remain on the defensive; and at the end of another week she felt more alarmed than ever. She only occasionally saw Florent in the evenings, and began to have all sorts of dreadful thoughts, imagining that her brother-in-law was constructing some infernal machine upstairs in Augustine's bedroom, or else making signals which would result in barricades covering the whole neighbourhood. Gavard, who had become gloomy, merely nodded or shook his head when she spoke to him, and left his stall for days together in Marjolin's charge. The beautiful Lisa, however, determined that she would get to the bottom of affairs. She knew that Florent had obtained a day's

leave, and intended to spend it with Claude Lantier, at Madame François's, at Nanterre. As he would start in the morning, and remain away till night, she conceived the idea of inviting Gavard to dinner. He would be sure to talk freely, at table, she thought. But throughout the morning she was unable to meet the poultry-dealer, and so in the afternoon she went back again to the markets.

Marjolin was in the stall alone. He used to drowse there for hours, recouping himself from the fatigue of his long rambles. He generally sat upon one chair with his legs resting upon another, and his head leaning against a little dresser. In the winter-time he took a keen delight in lolling there and contemplating the display of game; the bucks hanging head downwards, with their fore-legs broken and twisted round their necks; the larks festooning the stall like garlands; the big ruddy hares, the mottled partridges, the water-fowl of a bronze-grey hue, the Russian black cocks and hazel hens, which arrived in a packing of oat straw and charcoal;[1] and the pheasants, the magnificent pheasants, with their scarlet hoods, their stomachers of green satin, their mantles of embossed gold, and their flaming tails, that trailed like the trains of court robes. All this show of plumage reminded Marjolin of his rambles in the cellars with Cadine amongst the hampers of feathers.

That afternoon the beautiful Lisa found Marjolin in the midst of the poultry. It was warm, and whiffs of hot air passed along the narrow alleys of the pavilion. She was obliged to stoop before she could see him stretched out inside the stall, below the bare flesh of the birds. From the hooked bar up above hung fat geese, the hooks sticking in the bleeding wounds of their long stiffened necks, while their huge bodies bulged out, glowing ruddily beneath their fine down, and, with their snowy tails and wings, suggesting nudity encompassed by fine linen. And also hanging from the bar, with ears thrown back and feet parted as though they were bent on some vigorous leap, were grey rabbits whose turned-up tails gleamed whitely, whilst their heads, with sharp teeth and dim eyes, laughed with the grin of death. On the counter of the stall plucked fowls showed their strained fleshy breasts; pigeons, crowded on osier trays, displayed the soft bare skin

[1] The baskets in which these are sent to Paris are identical with those which in many provinces of Russia serve the *moujiks* as cradles for their infants.—*Trans.*

of innocents; ducks, with skin of rougher texture, exhibited their webbed feet; and three magnificent turkeys, speckled with blue dots, like freshly-shaven chins, slumbered on their backs amidst the black fans of their expanded tails. On plates near by were giblets, livers, gizzards, necks, feet, and wings; while an oval dish contained a skinned and gutted rabbit, with its four legs wide apart, its head bleeding, and its kidneys showing through its gashed belly. A streamlet of dark blood, after trickling along its back to its tail, had fallen drop by drop, staining the whiteness of the dish. Marjolin had not even taken the trouble to wipe the block, near which the rabbit's feet were still lying. He reclined there with his eyes half-closed, encompassed by other piles of dead poultry which crowded the shelves of the stall, poultry in paper wrappers like bouquets, rows upon rows of protuberant breasts and bent legs showing confusedly. And amidst all this mass of food, the young fellow's big, fair figure, the flesh of his cheeks, hands, and powerful neck covered with ruddy down seemed as soft as that of the magnificent turkeys, and as plump as the breasts of the fat geese.

When he caught sight of Lisa, he at once sprang up, blushing at having been caught sprawling in this way. He always seemed very nervous and ill at ease in Madame Quenu's presence; and when she asked him if Monsieur Gavard was there, he stammered out: 'No, I don't think so. He was here a little while ago, but he went away again.'

Lisa looked at him, smiling; she had a great liking for him. But feeling something warm brush against her hand, which was hanging by her side, she raised a little shriek. Some live rabbits were thrusting their noses out of a box under the counter of the stall, and sniffing at her skirts.

'Oh,' she exclaimed with a laugh, 'it's your rabbits that are tickling me.'

Then she stooped and attempted to stroke a white rabbit, which darted in alarm into a corner of the box.

'Will Monsieur Gavard be back soon, do you think?' she asked, as she again rose erect.

Marjolin once more replied that he did not know; then in a hesitating way he continued: 'He's very likely gone down into the cellars. He told me, I think, that he was going there.'

'Well, I think I'll wait for him, then,' replied Lisa. 'Could you let him know that I am here? or I might go

down to him, perhaps. Yes, that's a good idea; I've been intending to go and have a look at the cellars for these last five years. You'll take me down, won't you, and explain things to me ?'

Marjolin blushed crimson, and, hurrying out of the stall, walked on in front of her, leaving the poultry to look after itself. 'Of course I will,' said he. 'I'll do anything you wish, Madame Lisa.'

When they got down below, the beautiful Lisa felt quite suffocated by the dank atmosphere of the cellar. She stood on the bottom step, and raised her eyes to look at the vaulted roofing of red and white bricks arching slightly between the iron ribs upheld by small columns. What made her hesitate more than the gloominess of the place was a warm, penetrating odour, the exhalations of large numbers of living creatures, which irritated her nostrils and throat.

'What a nasty smell!' she exclaimed. 'It must be very unhealthy down here.'

'It never does me any harm,' replied Marjolin in astonishment. 'There's nothing unpleasant about the smell when you've got accustomed to it; and it's very warm and cosy down here in the winter-time.'

As Lisa followed him, however, she declared that the strong scent of the poultry quite turned her stomach, and that she would certainly not be able to eat a fowl for the next two months. All around her, the store-rooms, the small cabins where the stallkeepers keep their live stock, formed regular streets, intersecting each other at right angles. There were only a few scattered gas-lights, and the little alleys seemed wrapped in sleep like the lanes of a village where the inhabitants have all gone to bed. Marjolin made Lisa feel the close-meshed wiring, stretched on a framework of cast iron; and as she made her way along one of the little streets she amused herself by reading the names of the different tenants, which were inscribed on blue labels.

'Monsieur Gavard's place is quite at the far end,' said the young man, still walking on.

They turned to the left, and found themselves in a sort of blind alley, a dark, gloomy spot where not a ray of light penetrated. Gavard was not there.

'Oh, it makes no difference,' said Marjolin. 'I can show you our birds just the same. I have a key of the store-room.'

Lisa followed him into the darkness.

'You don't suppose that I can see your birds in this black oven, do you?' she asked, laughing.

Marjolin did not reply at once; but presently he stammered out that there was always a candle in the store-room. He was fumbling about the lock, and seemed quite unable to find the keyhole. As Lisa came up to help him, she felt a hot breath on her neck; and when the young man had at last succeeded in opening the door and lighted the candle, she saw that he was trembling.

'You silly fellow!' she exclaimed, 'to get yourself into such a state just because a door won't open! Why, you're no better than a girl, in spite of your big fists!'

She stepped inside the store-room. Gavard had rented two compartments, which he had thrown into one by removing the partition between them. In the dirt on the floor wallowed the larger birds—the geese, turkeys, and ducks—while up above, on tiers of shelves, were boxes with barred fronts containing fowls and rabbits. The grating of the store-room was so coated with dust and cobwebs that it looked as though covered with grey blinds. The woodwork down below was rotting, and covered with filth. Lisa, however, not wishing to vex Marjolin, refrained from any further expression of disgust. She pushed her fingers between the bars of the boxes, and began to lament the fate of the unhappy fowls, which were so closely huddled together and could not even stand upright. Then she stroked a duck with a broken leg which was squatting in a corner, and the young man told her that it would be killed that very evening, for fear lest it should die during the night.

'But what do they do for food?' asked Lisa.

Thereupon he explained to her that poultry would not eat in the dark, and that it was necessary to light a candle and wait there till they had finished their meal.

'It amuses me to watch them,' he continued; 'I often stay here with a light for hours together. You should see how they peck away; and when I hide the flame of the candle with my hand they all stand stock-still with their necks in the air, just as though the sun had set. It is against the rules to leave a lighted candle here and go away. One of the dealers, old Mother Palette—you know her, don't you?—nearly burned the whole place down the other day. A fowl

must have knocked the candle over into the straw while she was away.'

'A pretty thing, isn't it,' said Lisa, 'for fowls to insist upon having the chandeliers lighted up every time they take a meal?'

This idea made her laugh. Then she came out of the store-room, wiping her feet, and holding up her skirts to keep them from the filth. Marjolin blew out the candle and locked the door. Lisa felt rather nervous at finding herself in the dark again with this big young fellow, and so she hastened on in front.

'I'm glad I came, all the same,' she presently said, as he rejoined her. 'There is a great deal more under these markets than I ever imagined. But I must make haste now and get home again. They'll wonder what has become of me at the shop. If Monsieur Gavard comes back, tell him that I want to speak to him immediately.'

'I expect he's in the killing-room,' said Marjolin. 'We'll go and see, if you like.'

Lisa made no reply. She felt oppressed by the close atmosphere which warmed her face. She was quite flushed, and her bodice, generally so still and lifeless, began to heave. Moreover, the sound of Marjolin's hurrying steps behind her filled her with an uneasy feeling. At last she stepped aside, and let him go on in front. The lanes of this underground village were still fast asleep. Lisa noticed that her companion was taking the longest way. When they came out in front of the railway track he told her that he had wished to show it to her; and they stood for a moment or two looking through the chinks in the hoarding of heavy beams. Then Marjolin proposed to take her on to the line; but she refused, saying that it was not worth while, as she could see things well enough where she was.

As they returned to the poultry cellars they found old Madame Palette in front of her store-room, removing the cords of a large square hamper, in which a furious fluttering of wings and scraping of feet could be heard. As she unfastened the last knot the lid suddenly flew open, as though shot up by a spring, and some big geese thrust out their heads and necks. Then, in wild alarm, they sprang from their prison and rushed away, craning their necks, and filling the dark cellars with a frightful noise of hissing and clattering of beaks. Lisa could not help laughing, in spite of the

lamentations of the old woman, who swore like a carter as she caught hold of two of the absconding birds and dragged them back by the neck. Marjolin, meantime, set off in pursuit of a third. They could hear him running along the narrow alleys, hunting for the runaway, and delighting in the chase. Then, far off in the distance, they heard the sounds of a struggle, and presently Marjolin came back again, bringing the goose with him. Mother Palette, a sallow-faced old woman, took it in her arms and clasped it for a moment to her bosom, in the classic attitude of Leda.

'Well, well, I'm sure I don't know what I should have done if you hadn't been here,' said she. 'The other day I had a regular fight with one of the brutes; but I had my knife with me, and I cut its throat.'

Marjolin was quite out of breath. When they reached the stone blocks where the poultry were killed, and where the gas burnt more brightly, Lisa could see that he was perspiring, and had bold, glistening eyes. She thought he looked very handsome like that, with his broad shoulders, big flushed face, and fair curly hair, and she looked at him so complacently, with that air of admiration which women feel they may safely express for quite young lads, that he relapsed into timid bashfulness again.

'Well, Monsieur Gavard isn't here, you see,' she said. 'You've only made me waste my time.'

Marjolin, however, began rapidly explaining the killing of the poultry to her. Five huge stone slabs stretched out in the direction of the Rue Rambuteau under the yellow light of the gas-jets. A woman was killing fowls at one end; and this led him to tell Lisa that the birds were plucked almost before they were dead, the operation thus being much easier. Then he wanted her to feel the feathers which were lying in heaps on the stone slabs; and told her that they were sorted and sold for as much as nine sous the pound, according to their quality. To satisfy him, she was also obliged to plunge her hand into the big hampers full of down. Then he turned the water-taps, of which there was one by every pillar. There was no end to the particulars he gave. The blood, he said, streamed along the stone blocks, and collected into pools on the paved floor, which attendants sluiced with water every two hours, removing the more recent stains with coarse brushes.

When Lisa stooped over the drain which carries away the

swillings, Marjolin found a fresh text for talk. On rainy days, said he, the water sometimes rose through this orifice and flooded the place. It had once risen a foot high; and they had been obliged to transport all the poultry to the other end of the cellar, which is on a higher level. He laughed as he recalled the wild flutter of the terrified creatures. However, he had now finished, and it seemed as though there remained nothing else for him to show, when all at once he bethought himself of the ventilator. Thereupon he took Lisa off to the far end of the cellar, and told her to look up; and inside one of the turrets at the corner angles of the pavilion she observed a sort of escape-pipe, by which the foul atmosphere of the store-rooms ascended into space.

Here, in this corner, reeking with abominable odours, Marjolin's nostrils quivered, and his breath came and went violently. His long stroll with Lisa in these cellars, full of warm animal perfumes, had gradually intoxicated him.

She had again turned towards him. 'Well,' said she, 'it was very kind of you to show me all this, and when you come to the shop I will give you something.'

Whilst speaking she took hold of his soft chin, as she often did, without recognising that he was no longer a child; and perhaps she allowed her hand to linger there a little longer than was her wont. At all events, Marjolin, usually so bashful, was thrilled by the caress, and all at once he impetuously sprang forward, clasped Lisa by the shoulders, and pressed his lips to her soft cheeks. She raised no cry, but turned very pale at this sudden attack, which showed her how imprudent she had been. And then, freeing herself from the embrace, she raised her arm, as she had seen men do in slaughter-houses, clenched her comely fist, and knocked Marjolin down with a single blow, planted straight between his eyes; and as he fell his head came into collision with one of the stone slabs, and was split open. Just at that moment the hoarse and prolonged crowing of a cock sounded through the gloom.

Handsome Lisa, however, remained perfectly cool. Her lips were tightly compressed, and her bosom had recovered its wonted immobility. Up above she could hear the heavy rumbling of the markets, and through the vent-holes alongside the Rue Rambuteau the noise of the street traffic made its way into the oppressive silence of the cellar. Lisa

reflected that her own strong arm had saved her; and then, fearing lest some one should come and find her there, she hastened off, without giving a glance at Marjolin. As she climbed the steps, after passing through the grated entrance of the cellars, the daylight brought her great relief.

She returned to the shop, quite calm, and only looking a little pale.

'You've been a long time,' Quenu said to her.

'I can't find Gavard. I have looked for him everywhere,' she quietly replied. 'We shall have to eat our leg of mutton without him.'

Then she filled the lard pot, which she noticed was empty; and cut some pork chops for her friend Madame Taboureau, who had sent her little servant for them. The blows which she dealt with her cleaver reminded her of Marjolin. She felt that she had nothing to reproach herself with. She had acted like an honest woman. She was not going to disturb her peace of mind; she was too happy to do anything to compromise herself. However, she glanced at Quenu, whose neck was coarse and ruddy, and whose shaven chin looked as rough as knotted wood; whereas Marjolin's chin and neck resembled rosy satin. But then she must not think of him any more, for he was no longer a child. She regretted it, and could not help thinking that children grew up much too quickly.

A slight flush came back to her cheeks, and Quenu considered that she looked wonderfully blooming. He came and sat down beside her at the counter for a moment or two. 'You ought to go out oftener,' said he; 'it does you good. We'll go to the theatre together one of these nights, if you like; to the Gaîté, eh? Madame Tamboureau has been to see the piece they are playing there, and she declares it's splendid.'

Lisa smiled, and said they would see about it, and then once more she took herself off. Quenu thought that it was too good of her to take so much trouble in running about after that brute Gavard. In point of fact, however, she had simply gone upstairs to Florent's bedroom, the key of which was hanging from a nail in the kitchen. She hoped to find out something or other by an inspection of this room, since the poultry-dealer had failed her. She went slowly round it, examining the bed, the mantelpiece, and every corner. The window with the little balcony was open, and the budding

pomegranate was steeped in the golden beams of the setting sun. The room looked to her as though Augustine had never left it—had slept there only the night before. There seemed to be nothing masculine about the place. She was quite surprised, for she had expected to find some suspicious-looking chests, and coffers with strong locks. She went to feel Augustine's summer gown, which was still hanging against the wall. Then she sat down at the table, and began to read an unfinished page of manuscript, in which the word 'revolution' occurred twice. This alarmed her, and she opened the drawer, which she saw was full of papers. But her sense of honour awoke within her in presence of the secret which the rickety deal table so badly guarded. She remained bending over the papers, trying to understand them without touching them, in a state of great emotion, when the shrill song of the chaffinch, on whose cage streamed a ray of sunshine, made her start. She closed the drawer. It was a base thing that she had contemplated, she thought.

Then, as she lingered by the window, reflecting that she ought to go and ask counsel of Abbé Roustan, who was a very sensible man, she saw a crowd of people round a stretcher in the market square below. The night was falling, still she distinctly recognised Cadine weeping in the midst of the crowd; while Florent and Claude, whose boots were white with dust, stood together talking earnestly at the edge of the footway. She hurried downstairs again, surprised to see them back so soon, and scarcely had she reached her counter when Mademoiselle Saget entered the shop.

'They have just found that scamp of a Marjolin in the cellar, with his head split open,' exclaimed the old maid. 'Won't you come to see him, Madame Quenu?'

Lisa crossed the road to look at him. The young fellow was lying on his back on the stretcher, looking very pale. His eyes were closed, and a stiff wisp of his fair hair was clotted with blood. The bystanders, however, declared that there was no serious harm done, and, besides, the scamp had only himself to blame, for he was always playing all sorts of wild pranks in the cellars. It was generally supposed that he had been trying to jump over one of the stone blocks—one of his favourite amusements—and had fallen with his head against the slab.

'I dare say that hussy there gave him a shove,' remarked

Mademoiselle Saget, pointing to Cadine, who was weeping. 'They are always larking together.'

Meantime the fresh air had restored Marjolin to consciousness, and he opened his eyes in wide astonishment. He looked round at everybody, and then, observing Lisa bending over him, he gently smiled at her with an expression of mingled humility and affection. He seemed to have forgotten all that had happened. Lisa, feeling relieved, said that he ought to be taken to the hospital at once, and promised to go and see him there, and take him some oranges and biscuits. However, Marjolin's head had fallen back, and when the stretcher was carried away Cadine followed it, with her flat basket slung round her neck, and her hot tears rolling down upon the bunches of violets in their mossy bed. She certainly had no thoughts for the flowers that she was thus scalding with her bitter grief.

As Lisa went back to her shop, she heard Claude say, as he shook hands with Florent and parted from him: 'Ah! the confounded young scamp! He's quite spoiled my day for me! Still, we had a very enjoyable time, didn't we?'

Claude and Florent had returned both worried and happy, bringing with them the pleasant freshness of the country air. Madame François had disposed of all her vegetables that morning before daylight; and they had all three gone to the Golden Compasses, in the Rue Montorgueil, to get the cart. Here, in the middle of Paris, they found a foretaste of the country. Behind the Restaurant Philippe, with its frontage of gilt woodwork rising to the first floor, there was a yard like that of a farm, dirty, teeming with life, reeking with the odour of manure and straw. Bands of fowls were pecking at the soft ground. Sheds and staircases and galleries of greeny wood clung to the old houses around, and at the far end, in a shanty of big beams, was Balthazar, harnessed to the cart, and eating the oats in his nosebag. He went down the Rue Montorgueil at a slow trot, seemingly well pleased to return to Nanterre so soon. However, he was not going home without a load. Madame François had a contract with the company which undertook the scavenging of the markets, and twice a week she carried off with her a load of leaves, forked up from the mass of refuse which littered the square. It made excellent manure. In a few minutes the cart was filled to overflowing. Claude and Florent stretched themselves out on the deep bed of greenery;

Madame François grasped her reins, and Balthazar went off at his slow, steady pace, his head somewhat bent by reason of there being so many passengers to pull along.

This excursion had been talked of for a long time past. Madame François laughed cheerily. She was partial to the two men, and promised them such an *omelette au lard* as had never been eaten, said she, in 'that villainous Paris.' Florent and Claude revelled in the thought of this day of lounging idleness which as yet had scarcely begun to dawn. Nanterre seemed to be some distant paradise into which they would presently enter.

'Are you quite comfortable?' Madame François asked as the cart turned into the Rue du Pont Neuf.

Claude declared that their couch was as soft as a bridal bed. Lying on their backs, with their hands crossed under their heads, both men were looking up at the pale sky from which the stars were vanishing. All along the Rue de Rivoli they kept unbroken silence, waiting till they should have got clear of the houses, and listening to the worthy woman as she chattered to Balthazar: 'Take your time, old man,' she said to him in kindly tones. 'We're in no hurry; we shall be sure to get there at last.'

On reaching the Champs Elysées, when the artist saw nothing but tree-tops on either side of him, and the great green mass of the Tuileries gardens in the distance, he woke up, as it were, and began to talk. When the cart had passed the end of the Rue du Roule he had caught a glimpse of the side entrance of Saint Eustache under the giant roofing of one of the market covered-ways. He was constantly referring to this view of the church, and tried to give it a symbolical meaning.

'It's an odd mixture,' he said, 'that bit of a church framed round by an avenue of cast iron. The one will kill the other; the iron will slay the stone, and the time is not very far off. Do you believe in chance, Florent? For my part, I don't think that it was any mere chance of position that set a rose-window of Saint Eustache right in the middle of the central markets. No; there's a whole manifesto in it. It is modern art, realism, naturalism—whatever you like to call it—that has grown up and dominates ancient art. Don't you agree with me?'

Then, as Florent still kept silence, Claude continued: 'Besides, that church is a piece of bastard architecture, made

up of the dying gasp of the middle ages, and the first stammering of the Renaissance. Have you noticed what sort of churches are built nowadays? They resemble all kinds of things—libraries, observatories, pigeon-cotes, barracks; and surely no one can imagine that the Deity dwells in such places. The pious old builders are all dead and gone; and it would be better to cease erecting those hideous carcasses of stone, in which we have no belief to enshrine. Since the beginning of the century there has only been one large original pile of buildings erected in Paris—a pile in accordance with modern developments—and that's the central markets. You hear me, Florent? Ah! they are a fine bit of building, though they but faintly indicate what we shall see in the twentieth century! And so, you see, Saint Eustache is done for! It stands there with its rose-windows, deserted by worshippers, while the markets spread out by its side and teem with noisy life. Yes! that's how I understand it all, my friend.'

'Ah! Monsieur Claude,' said Madame François, laughing, 'the woman who cut your tongue-string certainly earned her money. Look at Balthazar laying his ears back to listen to you. Come, come, get along, Balthazar!'

The cart was slowly making its way up the incline. At this early hour of the morning the avenue, with its double lines of iron chairs on either pathway, and its lawns, dotted with flower-beds and clumps of shrubbery, stretching away under the blue shadows of the trees, was quite deserted; however, at the Rond-Point a lady and gentleman on horseback passed the cart at a gentle trot. Florent, who had made himself a pillow with a bundle of cabbage-leaves, was still gazing at the sky, in which a far-stretching rosy glow was appearing. Every now and then he would close his eyes, the better to enjoy the fresh breeze of the morning as it fanned his face. He was so happy to escape from the markets, and travel on through the pure air, that he remained speechless, and did not even listen to what was being said around him.

'And then, too, what fine jokers are those fellows who imprison art in a toy-box!' resumed Claude, after a pause. 'They are always repeating the same idiotic words: "You can't create art out of science," says one; "Mechanical appliances kill poetry," says another; and a pack of fools wail over the fate of the flowers, as though anybody wished the flowers any harm! I'm sick of all such twaddle; I

should like to answer all that snivelling with some work of open defiance. I should take a pleasure in shocking those good people. Shall I tell you what was the finest thing I ever produced since I first began to work, and the one which I recall with the greatest pleasure? It's quite a story. When I was at my Aunt Lisa's on Christmas Eve last year that idiot of an Auguste, the assistant, was setting out the shop-window. Well, he quite irritated me by the weak, spiritless way in which he arranged the display; and at last I requested him to take himself off, saying that I would group the things myself in a proper manner. You see, I had plenty of bright colours to work with—the red of the tongues, the yellow of the hams, the blue of the paper shavings, the rosy pink of the things that had been cut into, the green of the sprigs of heath, and the black of the black-puddings—ah! a magnificent black, which I have never managed to produce on my palette. And naturally the *crépine*, the small sausages, the chitterlings, and the crumbed trotters provided me with delicate greys and browns. I produced a perfect work of art. I took the dishes, the plates, the pans, and the jars, and arranged the different colours; and I devised a wonderful picture of still life, with subtle scales of tints leading up to brilliant flashes of colour. The red tongues seemed to thrust themselves out like greedy flames, and the black-puddings, surrounded by pale sausages, suggested a dark night fraught with terrible indigestion. I had produced, you see, a picture symbolical of the gluttony of Christmas Eve, when people meet and sup—the midnight feasting, the ravenous gorging of stomachs void and faint after all the singing of hymns.[1] At the top of everything a huge turkey exhibited its white breast, marbled blackly by the truffles showing through its skin. It was something barbaric and superb, suggesting a paunch amidst a halo of glory; but there was such a cutting, sarcastic touch about it all that people crowded to the window, alarmed by the fierce flare of the shop-front. When my aunt Lisa came back from the kitchen she was quite frightened, and thought I'd set the fat in the shop on fire; and she considered the appearance of the turkey so indelicate that she turned me out of the place while Auguste re-arranged the window after his own idiotic fashion. Such brutes will

[1] An allusion to the 'midnight mass' usually celebrated in Roman Catholic churches on Christmas Eve.—*Trans.*

never understand the language of a red splotch by the side of a grey one. Ah, well! that was my masterpiece. I have never done anything better.'

He relapsed into silence, smiling and dwelling with gratification on this reminiscence. The cart had now reached the Arc de Triomphe, and strong currents of air swept from the avenues across the expanse of open ground. Florent sat up, and inhaled with zest the first odours of grass wafted from the fortifications. He turned his back on Paris, anxious to behold the country in the distance. At the corner of the Rue de Longchamp, Madame François pointed out to him the spot where she had picked him up. This rendered him thoughtful, and he gazed at her as she sat there, so healthy-looking and serene, with her arms slightly extended so as to grasp the reins. She looked even handsomer than Lisa, with her neckerchief tied over her head, her robust glow of health, and her brusque, kindly air. When she gave a slight cluck with her tongue, Balthazar pricked up his ears and rattled down the road at a quicker pace.

On arriving at Nanterre, the cart turned to the left into a narrow lane, skirted some blank walls, and finally came to a standstill at the end of a sort of blind alley. It was the end of the world, Madame François used to say. The load of vegetable leaves now had to be discharged. Claude and Florent would not hear of the journeyman gardener, who was planting lettuces, leaving his work, but armed themselves with pitchforks and proceeded to toss the leaves into the manure pit. This occupation afforded them much amusement. Claude had quite a liking for manure, since it symbolises the world and its life. The strippings and parings of the vegetables, the scourings of the markets, the refuse that fell from that colossal table, remained full of life, and returned to the spot where the vegetables had previously sprouted, to warm and nourish fresh generations of cabbages, turnips, and carrots. They rose again in fertile crops, and once more went to spread themselves out upon the market square. Paris rotted everything, and returned everything to the soil, which never wearied of repairing the ravages of death.

'Ah!' exclaimed Claude, as he plied his fork for the last time, 'here's a cabbage-stalk that I'm sure I recognise. It has grown up at least half a score of times in that corner yonder by the apricot tree.'

This remark made Florent laugh. But he soon became grave again, and strolled slowly through the kitchen garden, while Claude made a sketch of the stable, and Madame François got breakfast ready. The kitchen garden was a long strip of ground, divided in the middle by a narrow path; it rose slightly, and at the top end, on raising the head, you could perceive the low barracks of Mont Valérien. Green hedges separated it from other plots of land, and these lofty walls of hawthorn fringed the horizon with a curtain of greenery in such wise that of all the surrounding country Mont Valérien alone seemed to rise inquisitively on tip-toe in order to peer into Madame François's close. Great peacefulness came from the country-side which could not be seen. Along the kitchen garden, between the four hedges, the May sun shone with a languid heat, a silence disturbed only by the buzzing of insects, a somnolence suggestive of painless parturition. Every now and then a faint cracking sound, a soft sigh, made one fancy that one could hear the vegetables sprout into being. The patches of spinach and sorrel, the borders of radishes, carrots, and turnips, the beds of potatoes and cabbages, spread out in even regularity, displaying their dark leaf-mould between their tufts of greenery. Farther away, the trenched lettuces, onions, leeks, and celery, planted by line in long straight rows, looked like soldiers on parade; while the peas and beans were beginning to twine their slender tendrils round a forest of sticks, which, when June came, they would transform into a thick and verdant wood. There was not a weed to be seen. The garden resembled two parallel strips of carpet of a geometrical pattern of green on a reddish ground, which were carefully swept every morning. Borders of thyme grew like greyish fringe along each side of the pathway.

Florent paced backwards and forwards amidst the perfume of the thyme, which the sun was warming. He felt profoundly happy in the peacefulness and cleanliness of the garden. For nearly a year past he had only seen vegetables bruised and crushed by the jolting of market-carts; vegetables torn up on the previous evening, and still bleeding. He rejoiced to find them at home, in peace in the dark mould, and sound in every part. The cabbages had a bulky, prosperous appearance; the carrots looked bright and gay; and the lettuces lounged in line with an air of careless indolence. And as he looked at them all, the markets which he had left

behind him that morning seemed to him like a vast mortuary, an abode of death, where only corpses could be found, a charnel-house reeking with foul smells and putrefaction. He slackened his steps, and rested in that kitchen-garden, as after a long perambulation amidst deafening noises and repulsive odours. The uproar and the sickening humidity of the fish-market had departed from him; and he felt as though he were being born anew in the pure fresh air. Claude was right, he thought. The markets were a sphere of death. The soil was the life, the eternal cradle, the health of the world.

'The omelet's ready!' suddenly cried Madame François.

When they were all three seated round the table in the kitchen, with the door thrown open to the sunshine, they ate their breakfast with such light-hearted gaiety that Madame François looked at Florent in amazement, repeating between each mouthful: 'You're quite altered. You're ten years younger. It is that villainous Paris which makes you seem so gloomy. You've got a little sunshine in your eyes now. Ah! those big towns do one's health no good, you ought to come and live here.'

Claude laughed, and retorted that Paris was a glorious place. He stuck up for it and all that belonged to it, even to its gutters; though at the same time retaining a keen affection for the country.

In the afternoon Madame François and Florent found themselves alone at the end of the garden, in a corner planted with a few fruit trees. Seated on the ground, they talked somewhat seriously together. The good woman advised Florent with an affectionate and quite maternal kindness. She asked him endless questions about his life, and his intentions for the future, and begged him to remember that he might always count upon her, if ever he thought that she could in the slightest degree contribute to his happiness. Florent was deeply touched. No woman had ever spoken to him in that way before. Madame François seemed to him like some healthy, robust plant that had grown up with the vegetables in the leaf-mould of the garden; while the Lisas, the Normans, and other pretty women of the markets appeared to him like flesh of doubtful freshness decked out for exhibition. He here enjoyed several hours of perfect well-being, delivered from all that reek of food which sickened him in the markets, and reviving to new life amidst the fertile atmosphere of the

country, like that cabbage stalk which Claude declared he had seen sprout up more than half a score of times.

The two men took leave of Madame François at about five o'clock. They had decided to walk back to Paris; and the market-gardener accompanied them into the lane. As she bade good-bye to Florent, she kept his hand in her own for a moment, and said gently: 'If ever anything happens to trouble you, remember to come to me.'

For a quarter of an hour Florent walked on without speaking, already getting gloomy again, and reflecting that he was leaving health behind him. The road to Courbevoie was white with dust. However, both men were fond of long walks and the ringing of stout boots on the hard ground. Little clouds of dust rose up behind their heels at every step, while the rays of the sinking sun darted obliquely over the avenue, lengthening their shadows in such wise that their heads reached the other side of the road, and journeyed along the opposite footway.

Claude, swinging his arms, and taking long, regular strides, complacently watched these two shadows, whilst enjoying the rhythmical cadence of his steps, which he accentuated by a motion of his shoulders. Presently, however, as though just awaking from a dream, he exclaimed: 'Do you know the "Battle of the Fat and the Thin"?'

Florent, surprised by the question, replied in the negative; and thereupon Claude waxed enthusiastic, talking of that series of prints in very eulogical fashion. He mentioned certain incidents: the Fat, so swollen that they almost burst, preparing their evening debauch, while the Thin, bent double by fasting, looked in from the street with the appearance of envious laths; and then, again, the Fat, with hanging cheeks, driving off one of the Thin, who had been audacious enough to introduce himself into their midst in lowly humility, and who looked like a ninepin amongst a population of balls.

In these designs Claude detected the entire drama of human life, and he ended by classifying men into Fat and Thin, two hostile groups, one of which devours the other, and grows fat and sleek and enjoys itself.

'Cain,' said he, 'was certainly one of the Fat, and Abel one of the Thin. Ever since that first murder, there have been rampant appetites which have drained the life-blood of the small eaters. It's a continual preying of the

stronger upon the weaker; each swallowing his neighbour, and then getting swallowed in his turn. Beware of the Fat, my friend.'

He relapsed into silence for a moment, still watching their two shadows, which the setting sun elongated more than ever. Then he murmured: 'You see, we belong to the Thin—you and I. Those who are no more corpulent than we are don't take up much room in the sunlight, eh?'

Florent glanced at the two shadows, and smiled. But Claude waxed angry, and exclaimed: 'You make a mistake if you think it a laughing matter. For my own part, I greatly suffer from being one of the Thin. If I were one of the Fat, I could paint at my ease; I should have a fine studio, and sell my pictures for their weight in gold. But, instead of that, I'm one of the Thin; and I have to grind my life out in producing things which simply make the Fat ones shrug their shoulders. I shall die of it all in the end, I'm sure of it, with my skin clinging to my bones, and so flattened that they will be able to bury me between two leaves of a book. And you, too, you are one of the Thin, a wonderful one; the very king of the Thin, in fact! Do you remember your quarrel with the fish-wives? It was magnificent; all those colossal bosoms flying at your scraggy breast! Oh! they were simply acting from natural instinct; they were pursuing one of the Thin just as cats pursue a mouse. The Fat, you know, have an instinctive hatred of the Thin, to such an extent that they must needs drive the latter from their sight, either by means of their teeth or their feet. And that is why, if I were in your place, I should take my precautions. The Quenus belong to the Fat, and so do the Méhudins; indeed, you have none but Fat ones around you. I should feel uneasy under such circumstances.'

'And what about Gavard, and Mademoiselle Saget, and your friend Marjolin?' asked Florent, still smiling.

'Oh, if you like, I will classify all our acquaintances for you,' replied Claude. 'I've had their heads in a portfolio in my studio for a long time past, with memoranda of the order to which they belong. It's really a complete chapter in natural history. Gavard is one of the Fat, but of the kind which pretends to belong to the Thin. The variety is by no means uncommon. Mademoiselle Saget and Madame Lecœur belong to the Thin, but to a variety which is much to be feared—the Thin ones whom envy drives to despair, and who are capable of anything in their craving to fatten themselves.

My friend Marjolin, little Cadine, and La Sarriette are three Fat ones, still innocent, however, and having nothing but the guileless hunger of youth. I may remark that the Fat, so long as they've not grown old, are charming creatures. Monsieur Lebigre is one of the Fat—don't you think so? As for your political friends, Charvet, Clémence, Logre, and Lacaille, they mostly belong to the Thin. I only except that big animal Alexandre, and that prodigy Robine, who has caused me a vast amount of annoyance.'

The artist continued to talk in this strain from the Pont de Neuilly to the Arc de Triomphe. He returned to some of those whom he had already mentioned, and completed their portraits with a few characteristic touches. Logre, he said, was one of the Thin whose belly had been placed between his shoulders. Beautiful Lisa was all stomach, and the beautiful Norman all bosom. Mademoiselle Saget, in her earlier life, must have certainly lost some opportunity to fatten herself, for she detested the Fat, while, at the same time, she despised the Thin. As for Gavard, he was compromising his position as one of the Fat, and would end by becoming as flat as a bug.

'And what about Madame François?' Florent asked.

Claude seemed much embarrassed by this question. He cast about for an answer, and at last stammered:

'Madame François, Madame François—well, no, I really don't know; I never thought about classifying her. But she's a dear good soul, and that's quite sufficient. She's neither one of the Fat nor one of the Thin!'

They both laughed. They were now in front of the Arc de Triomphe. The sun, over by the hills of Suresnes, was so low on the horizon that their colossal shadows streaked the whiteness of the great structure even above the huge groups of statuary, like strokes made with a piece of charcoal. This increased Claude's merriment, he waved his arms and bent his body; and then, as he started on his way again, he said: 'Did you notice—just as the sun set our two heads shot up to the sky!'

But Florent no longer smiled. Paris was grasping him again, that Paris which now frightened him so much, after having cost him so many tears at Cayenne. When he reached the markets night was falling, and there was a suffocating smell. He bent his head as he once more returned to the nightmare of endless food, whilst preserving the sweet yet sad recollection of that day of bright health odorous with the perfume of thyme.

CHAPTER V

At about four o'clock on the afternoon of the following day Lisa betook herself to Saint Eustache. For the short walk across the square she had arrayed herself very seriously in a black silk gown and thick woollen shawl. The handsome Norman, who, from her stall in the fish-market, watched her till she vanished into the church porch, was quite amazed.

'Hallo! so the fat thing's gone in for priests now, has she?' she exclaimed, with a sneer. 'Well, a little holy water may do her good!'

She was mistaken in her surmises, however, for Lisa was not a devotee. She did not observe the ordinances of the Church, but said that she did her best to lead an honest life, and that this was all that was necessary. At the same time, however, she disliked to hear religion spoken ill of, and often silenced Gavard, who delighted in scandalous stories of priests and their doings. Talk of that sort seemed to her altogether improper. Everyone, in her opinion, should be allowed to believe as they pleased, and every scruple should be respected. Besides, the majority of the clergy were most estimable men. She knew Abbé Roustan, of Saint Eustache—a distinguished priest, a man of shrewd sense, and one, she thought, whose friendship might be safely relied upon. And she would wind up by explaining that religion was absolutely necessary for the people; she looked upon it as a sort of police force that helped to maintain order, and without which no government would be possible. When Gavard went too far on this subject and asserted that the priests ought to be turned into the streets and have their shops shut up, Lisa shrugged her shoulders and replied: 'A great deal of good that would do! Why, before a month was over the people would be murdering one another in the streets, and you would be compelled to invent another God. That was just what happened in '93. You know very well that I'm not given to mixing with the priests, but for all that I say that they are necessary, as we couldn't do without them.'

And so when Lisa happened to enter a church she always manifested the utmost decorum. She had bought a handsome missal, which she never opened, for use when she was invited to a funeral or a wedding. She knelt and rose at the

proper times, and made a point of conducting herself with all propriety. She assumed, indeed, what she considered a sort of official demeanour, such as all well-to-do folks, tradespeople, and house-owners ought to observe with regard to religion.

As she entered Saint Eustache that afternoon she let the double doors, covered with green baize, faded and worn by the frequent touch of pious hands, close gently behind her. Then she dipped her fingers in the holy water and crossed herself in the correct fashion. And afterwards, with hushed footsteps, she made her way to the chapel of Saint Agnes, where two kneeling women with their faces buried in their hands were waiting, whilst the blue skirts of a third protruded from the confessional. Lisa seemed rather put out by the sight of these women, and, addressing a verger who happened to pass along, wearing a black skull-cap and dragging his feet over the slabs, she inquired: 'Is this Monsieur l'Abbé Roustan's day for hearing confessions?'

The verger replied that his reverence had only two more penitents waiting, and that they would not detain him long, so that if Lisa would take a chair her turn would speedily come. She thanked him, without telling him that she had not come to confess; and, making up her mind to wait, she began to pace the church, going as far as the chief entrance, whence she gazed at the lofty, severe, bare nave stretching between the brightly coloured aisles. Raising her head a little, she examined the high altar, which she considered too plain, having no taste for the cold grandeur of stonework, but preferring the gilding and gaudy colouring of the side chapels. Those on the side of the Rue du Jour looked greyish in the light which filtered through their dusty windows, but on the side of the markets the sunset was lighting up the stained glass with lovely tints, limpid greens and yellows in particular, which reminded Lisa of the bottles of liqueurs in front of Monsieur Lebigre's mirror. She came back by this side, which seemed to be warmed by the glow of light, and took a passing interest in the reliquaries, altar ornaments, and paintings steeped in prismatic reflections. The church was empty, quivering with the silence that fell from its vaulted roofing. Here and there a woman's dress showed like a dark splotch amidst the vague yellow of the chairs; and a low buzzing came from the closed confessionals. As Lisa again passed the chapel of Saint Agnes she saw the blue dress still kneeling at Abbé Roustan's feet.

'Why, if I'd wanted to confess I could have said everything in ten seconds,' she thought, proud of her irreproachable integrity.

Then she went on to the end of the church. Behind the high altar, in the gloom of a double row of pillars, is the chapel of the Blessed Virgin, damp and dark and silent. The dim stained windows only show the flowing crimson and violet robes of saints, which blaze like flames of mystic love in the solemn, silent adoration of the darkness. It is a weird, mysterious spot, like some crepuscular nook of paradise solely illumined by the gleaming stars of two tapers. The four brass lamps hanging from the roof remain unlighted, and are but faintly seen; on espying them you think of the golden censers which the angels swing before the throne of Mary. And kneeling on the chairs between the pillars there are always women surrendering themselves languorously to the dim spot's voluptuous charm.

Lisa stood and gazed tranquilly around her. She did not feel the least emotion, but considered that it was a mistake not to light the lamps. Their brightness would have given the place a more cheerful look. The gloom even struck her as savouring of impropriety. Her face was warmed by the flames of some candles burning in a candelabrum by her side, and an old woman armed with a big knife was scraping off the wax which had trickled down and congealed into pale tears. And amidst the quivering silence, the mute ecstasy of adoration prevailing in the chapel, Lisa could distinctly hear the rumbling of the vehicles turning out of the Rue Montmartre, behind the scarlet and purple saints on the windows, whilst in the distance the markets roared without a moment's pause.

Just as Lisa was leaving the chapel, she saw the younger of the Méhudins, Claire, the dealer in fresh-water fish, come in. The girl lighted a taper at the candelabrum, and then went to kneel behind a pillar, her knees pressed upon the hard stones, and her face so pale beneath her loose fair hair that she seemed a corpse. And believing herself to be securely screened from observation, she gave way to violent emotion, and wept hot tears with a passionate outpouring of prayer which bent her like a rushing wind. Lisa looked on in amazement, for the Méhudins were not known to be particularly pious; indeed, Claire was accustomed to speak of religion and priests in such terms as to horrify one.

'What's the meaning of this, I wonder?' pondered Lisa, as she again made her way to the chapel of St. Agnes. 'The hussy must have been poisoning some one or other.'

Abbé Roustan was at last coming out of his confessional. He was a handsome man, of some forty years of age, with a smiling, kindly air. When he recognised Madame Quenu he grasped her hand, called her 'dear lady,' and conducted her to the vestry, where, taking off his surplice, he told her that he would be entirely at her service in a moment. They returned, the priest in his cassock, bareheaded, and Lisa strutting along in her shawl, and paced up and down in front of the side-chapels adjacent to the Rue du Jour. They conversed together in low tones. The sunlight was departing from the stained windows, the church was growing dark, and the retreating footsteps of the last worshippers sounded but faintly over the flagstones.

Lisa explained her doubts and scruples to Abbé Roustan. There had never been any question of religion between them; she never confessed, but merely consulted him in cases of difficulty, because he was shrewd and discreet, and she preferred him, as she sometimes said, to shady business men redolent of the galleys. The abbé, on his side, manifested inexhaustible complaisance. He looked up points of law for her in the Code, pointed out profitable investments, resolved her moral difficulties with great tact, recommended tradespeople to her, invariably having an answer ready however diverse and complicated her requirements might be. And he supplied all this help in a natural matter-of-fact way, without ever introducing the Deity into his talk, or seeking to obtain any advantage either for himself or the cause of religion. A word of thanks and a smile sufficed him. He seemed glad to have an opportunity of obliging that handsome Madame Quenu, of whom his housekeeper often spoke to him in terms of praise, as of a woman who was highly respected in the neighbourhood.

Their consultation that afternoon was of a peculiarly delicate nature. Lisa was anxious to know what steps she might legitimately take, as a woman of honour, with respect to her brother-in-law. Had she a right to keep a watch upon him, and to do what she could to prevent him from compromising her husband, her daughter, and herself? And then how far might she go in circumstances of pressing danger? She did not bluntly put these questions to the abbé, but asked them with such skilful circumlocutions that he was able to discuss

the matter without entering into personalities. He brought forward arguments on both sides of the question, but the conclusion he came to was that a person of integrity was entitled, indeed bound, to prevent evil, and was justified in using whatever means might be necessary to ensure the triumph of that which was right and proper.

'That is my opinion, dear lady,' he said in conclusion. 'The question of means is always a very grave one. It is a snare in which souls of average virtue often become entangled. But I know your scrupulous conscience. Deliberate carefully over each step you think of taking, and if it contains nothing repugnant to you, go on boldly. Pure natures have the marvellous gift of purifying all that they touch.'

Then, changing his tone of voice, he continued: 'Pray give my kind regards to Monsieur Quenu. I'll come in to kiss my dear little Pauline some time when I'm passing. And now good-bye, dear lady; remember that I'm always at your service.'

Thereupon he returned to the vestry. Lisa, on her way out, was curious to see if Claire was still praying, but the girl had gone back to her eels and carp; and in front of the Lady-chapel, which was already shrouded in darkness, there was now but a litter of chairs overturned by the ardent vehemence of the women who had knelt there.

When handsome Lisa again crossed the square, La Normande, who had been watching for her exit from the church, recognised her in the twilight by the rotundity of her skirts.

'Good gracious!' she exclaimed, 'she's been more than an hour in there! When the priests set about cleansing her of her sins, the choir-boys have to form in line to pass the buckets of filth and empty them in the street!'

The next morning Lisa went straight up to Florent's bedroom and settled herself there with perfect equanimity. She felt certain that she would not be disturbed, and, moreover, she had made up her mind to tell a falsehood and say that she had come to see if the linen was clean, should Florent by any chance return. Whilst in the shop, however, she had observed him busily engaged in the fish-market. Seating herself in front of the little table, she pulled out the drawer, placed it upon her knees, and began to examine its contents, taking the greatest care to restore them to their original positions.

First of all she came upon the opening chapters of the

work on Cayenne; then upon the drafts of Florent's various plans and projects, his schemes for converting the Octroi duties into taxes upon sales, for reforming the administrative system of the markets, and all the others. These pages of small writing, which she set herself to read, bored her extremely, and she was about to restore the drawer to its place, feeling convinced that Florent concealed the proofs of his wicked designs elsewhere, and already contemplating a searching visitation of his mattress, when she discovered a photograph of La Normande in an envelope. The impression was rather dark. La Normande was standing up with her right arm resting on a broken column. Decked out with all her jewels, and attired in a new silk dress, the fish-girl was smiling impudently, and Lisa, at the sight, forgot all about her brother-in-law, her fears, and the purpose for which she had come into the room. She became quite absorbed in her examination of the portrait, as often happens when one woman scrutinises the photograph of another at her ease, without fear of being seen. Never before had she had so favourable an opportunity to study her rival. She scrutinised her hair, her nose, her mouth; held the photograph at a distance, and then brought it closer again. And, finally, with compressed lips, she read on the back of it, in a big, ugly scrawl: 'Louise, to her friend Florent.' This quite scandalised her; to her mind it was a confession, and she felt a strong impulse to take possession of the photograph, and keep it as a weapon against her enemy. However, she slowly replaced it in the envelope on coming to the conclusion that this course would be wrong, and reflecting that she would always know where to find it should she want it again.

Then, as she again began turning over the loose sheets of paper, it occurred to her to look at the back end of the drawer, where Florent had relegated Augustine's needles and thread; and there, between the missal and the Dream-book, she discovered what she sought, some extremely compromising memoranda, simply screened from observation by a wrapper of grey paper.

That idea of an insurrection, of the overthrow of the Empire by means of an armed rising, which Logre had one evening propounded at Monsieur Lebigre's, had slowly ripened in Florent's feverish brain. He soon grew to see a duty, a mission in it. Therein undoubtedly lay the task to which his escape from Cayenne and his return to Paris pre-

destined him. Believing in a call to avenge his leanness upon the city which wallowed in food while the upholders of right and equity were racked by hunger in exile, he took upon himself the duties of a justiciary, and dreamt of rising up, even in the midst of those markets, to sweep away the reign of gluttony and drunkenness. In a sensitive nature like his, this idea quickly took root. Everything about him assumed exaggerated proportions, the wildest fancies possessed him. He imagined that the markets had been conscious of his arrival, and had seized hold of him that they might enervate him and poison him with their stenches. Then, too, Lisa wanted to cast a spell over him, and for two or three days at a time he would avoid her, as though she were some dissolving agency which would destroy all his power of will should he approach too closely. However, these paroxysms of puerile fear, these wild surgings of his rebellious brain, always ended in thrills of the gentlest tenderness, with yearnings to love and be loved, which he concealed with a boyish shame.

It was more especially in the evening that his mind became blurred by all his wild imaginings. Depressed by his day's work, but shunning sleep from a covert fear—the fear of the annihilation it brought with it—he would remain later than ever at Monsieur Lebigre's, or at the Méhudins'; and on his return home he still refrained from going to bed, and sat up writing and preparing for the great insurrection. By slow degrees he devised a complete system of organisation. He divided Paris into twenty sections, one for each arrondissement. Each section would have a chief, a sort of general, under whose orders there were to be twenty lieutenants commanding twenty companies of affiliated associates. Every week, among the chiefs, there would be a consultation, which was to be held in a different place each time; and, the better to ensure secrecy and discretion, the associates would only come in contact with their respective lieutenants, these alone communicating with the chiefs of the sections. It also occurred to Florent that it would be as well that the companies of associates should believe themselves charged with imaginary missions, as a means of putting the police upon a wrong scent.

As for the employment of the insurrectionary forces, that would be all simplicity. It would, of course, be necessary to wait till the companies were quite complete, and then advantage would be taken of the first public commotion. They

would doubtless only have a certain number of guns used for sporting purposes in their possession, so they would commence by seizing the police-stations and guard-houses, disarming the police, the Gardes de Paris, the firemen, and the soldiers of the line; resorting to violence as little as possible, and inviting the men to make common cause with the people. Afterwards they would march upon the Corps Législatif, and thence proceed to the Hôtel de Ville. This plan, to which Florent returned night after night, as though it were some dramatic *scenario* which relieved his over-excited nervous system, was as yet simply jotted down on scraps of paper, full of erasures, which showed how the writer had felt his way, and revealed each successive phase of his scientific yet puerile conception. When Lisa had glanced through the notes, without understanding some of them, she remained there trembling with fear; afraid to touch them further lest they should explode in her hands like live shells.

A last memorandum frightened her more than any of the others. It was a half-sheet of paper on which Florent had sketched the distinguishing insignia which the chiefs and the lieutenants were to wear. By the side of these were rough drawings of the standards which the different companies were to carry; and notes in pencil even described what colours the banners should assume. The chiefs were to wear red scarves, and the lieutenants red armlets.

To Lisa this seemed like an immediate realisation of the rising; she saw all the men with their red badges marching past the pork-shop, firing bullets into her mirrors and marble, and carrying off sausages and chitterlings from the window. The infamous projects of her brother-in-law were surely directed against herself—against her own happiness. She closed the drawer and looked round the room, reflecting that it was she herself who had provided this man with a home—that he slept between her sheets and used her furniture. And she was especially exasperated at his keeping his abominable infernal machine in that little deal table which she herself had used at Uncle Gradelle's before her marriage—a perfectly innocent, rickety little table.

For a while she stood thinking what she should do. In the first place, it was useless to say anything to Quenu. For a moment it occurred to her to provoke an explanation with Florent, but she dismissed that idea, fearing lest he would only go and perpetrate his crime elsewhere, and maliciously

make a point of compromising them. Then gradually growing somewhat calmer, she came to the conclusion that her best plan would be to keep a careful watch over her brother-in-law. It would be time enough to take further steps at the first sign of danger. She already had quite sufficient evidence to send him back to the galleys.

On returning to the shop again, she found Augustine in a state of great excitement. Little Pauline had disappeared more than half an hour before, and to Lisa's anxious questions the young woman could only reply: 'I don't know where she can have got to, madame. She was on the pavement there with a little boy. I was watching them, and then I had to cut some ham for a gentleman, and I never saw them again.'

'I'll wager it was Muche!' cried Lisa. 'Ah, the young scoundrel!'

It was, indeed, Muche who had enticed Pauline away. The little girl, who was wearing a new blue-striped frock that day for the first time, had been anxious to exhibit it, and had accordingly taken her stand outside the shop, manifesting great propriety of bearing, and compressing her lips with the grave expression of a little woman of six who is afraid of soiling her clothes. Her short and stiffly-starched petticoats stood out like the skirts of a ballet girl, allowing a full view of her tightly-stretched white stockings and little sky-blue boots. Her pinafore, which hung low about her neck, was finished off at the shoulders with an edging of embroidery, below which appeared her pretty little arms, bare and rosy. She had small turquoise rings in her ears, a cross at her neck, a blue velvet ribbon in her well-brushed hair; and she displayed all her mother's plumpness and softness—the gracefulness, indeed, of a new doll.

Muche had caught sight of her from the market, where he was amusing himself by dropping little dead fishes into the gutter, following them along the kerb as the water carried them away, and declaring that they were swimming. However, the sight of Pauline standing in front of the shop and looking so smart and pretty made him cross over to her, capless as he was, with his blouse ragged, his trousers slipping down, and his whole appearance suggestive of a seven-year-old street-arab. His mother had certainly forbidden him to play any more with 'that fat booby of a girl who was stuffed by her parents till she almost burst'; so he stood hesitating for a moment, but at last came up to Pauline, and wanted to feel

her pretty striped frock. The little girl, who had at first felt flattered, then put on a prim air and stepped back, exclaiming in a tone of displeasure: 'Leave me alone. Mother says I'm not to have anything to do with you.'

This brought a laugh to the lips of Muche, who was a wily, enterprising young scamp.

'What a little flat you are!' he retorted. 'What does it matter what your mother says? Let's go and play at shoving each other, eh?'

He doubtless nourished some wicked idea of dirtying the neat little girl; but she, on seeing him prepare to give her a push in the back, retreated as though about to return inside the shop. Muche thereupon adopted a flattering tone like a born cajoler.

'You silly! I didn't mean it,' said he. 'How nice you look like that! Is that little cross your mother's?'

Pauline perked herself up, and replied that it was her own, whereupon Muche gently led her to the corner of the Rue Pirouette, touching her skirts the while and expressing his astonishment at their wonderful stiffness. All this pleased the little girl immensely. She had been very much vexed at not receiving any notice while she was exhibiting herself outside the shop. However, in spite of all Muche's blandishments, she still refused to leave the footway.

'You stupid fatty!' thereupon exclaimed the youngster, relapsing into coarseness. 'I'll squat you down in the gutter if you don't look out, Miss Fine-airs!'

The girl was dreadfully alarmed. Muche had caught hold of her by the hand; but, recognising his mistake in policy, he again put on a wheedling air, and began to fumble in his pocket.

'I've got a sou,' said he.

The sight of the coin had a soothing effect upon Pauline. The boy held up the sou with the tips of his fingers, and the temptation to follow it proved so great that the girl at last stepped down into the roadway. Muche's diplomacy was eminently successful.

'What do you like best?' he asked.

Pauline gave no immediate answer. She could not make up her mind; there were so many things that she liked. Muche, however, ran over a whole list of dainties—liquorice, molasses, gum-balls, and powdered sugar. The powdered sugar made the girl ponder. One dipped one's fingers into it

and sucked them; it was very nice. For a while she gravely considered the matter. Then, at last making up her mind, she said:

'No, I like the mixed screws the best.'

Muche thereupon took hold of her arm, and she unresistingly allowed him to lead her away. They crossed the Rue Rambuteau, followed the broad footway skirting the markets, and went as far as a grocer's shop in the Rue de la Cossonnerie which was celebrated for its mixed screws. These mixed screws are small screws of paper in which grocers put up all sorts of damaged odds and ends, broken sugar-plums, fragments of crystallised chestnuts—all the doubtful residuum of their jars of sweets. Muche showed himself very gallant, allowed Pauline to choose the screw—a blue one—paid his sou, and did not attempt to dispossess her of the sweets. Outside, on the footway, she emptied the miscellaneous collection of scraps into both pockets of her pinafore; and they were such little pockets that they were quite filled. Then in delight she began to munch the fragments one by one, wetting her fingers to catch the fine sugary dust, with such effect that she melted the scraps of sweets, and the pockets of her pinafore soon showed two brownish stains. Muche laughed slily to himself. He had his arm about the girl's waist, and rumpled her frock at his ease whilst leading her round the corner of the Rue Pierre Lescot, in the direction of the Place des Innocents.

'You'll come and play now, won't you?' he asked. 'That's nice what you've got in your pockets, ain't it? You see that I didn't want to do you any harm, you big silly!'

Thereupon he plunged his own fingers into her pockets, and they entered the square together. To this spot, no doubt, he had all along intended to lure his victim. He did the honours of the square as though it were his own private property, and indeed it was a favourite haunt of his, where he often larked about for whole afternoons. Pauline had never before strayed so far from home, and would have wept like an abducted damsel had it not been that her pockets were full of sweets. The fountain in the middle of the flowered lawn was sending sheets of water down its tiers of basins, whilst, between the pilasters above, Jean Goujon's nymphs, looking very white beside the dingy grey stonework, inclined their urns and displayed their nude graces in the grimy air of the Saint Denis quarter. The two children walked round the fountain, watching the water fall into the basins, and taking an interest

in the grass, with thoughts, no doubt, of crossing the central lawn, or gliding into the clumps of holly and rhododendrons that bordered the railings of the square. Little Mucho, however, who had now effectually rumpled the back of the pretty frock, said, with his sly smile:

'Let's play at throwing sand at each other, eh?'

Pauline had no will of her own left; and they began to throw the sand at each other, keeping their eyes closed meanwhile. The sand made its way in at the neck of the girl's low bodice, and trickled down into her stockings and boots. Mucho was delighted to see the white pinafore become quite yellow. But he doubtless considered that it was still far too clean.

'Let's go and plant trees, shall we?' he exclaimed suddenly. 'I know how to make such pretty gardens.'

'Really, gardens!' murmured Pauline full of admiration.

Then, as the keeper of the square happened to be absent, Mucho told her to make some holes in one of the borders; and dropping on her knees in the middle of the soft mould, and leaning forward till she lay at full length on her stomach, she dug her pretty little arms into the ground. He, meantime, began to hunt for scraps of wood, and broke off branches. These were the garden-trees which he planted in the holes that Pauline made. He invariably complained, however, that the holes were not deep enough, and rated the girl as though she were an idle workman and he an indignant master. When she at last got up, she was black from head to foot. Her hair was full of mould, her face was smeared with it, she looked such a sight with her arms as black as a coalheaver's that Mucho clapped his hands with glee, and exclaimed: 'Now we must water the trees. They won't grow, you know, if we don't water them.'

That was the finishing stroke. They went outside the square, scooped the gutter-water up in the palms of their hands, and then ran back to pour it over the bits of wood. On the way, Pauline, who was so fat that she couldn't run properly, let the water trickle between her fingers on to her frock, so that by the time of her sixth journey she looked as if she had been rolled in the gutter. Mucho chuckled with delight on beholding her dreadful condition. He made her sit down beside him under a rhododendron near the garden they had made, and told her that the trees were already beginning to grow. He had taken hold of her hand and called her his little wife.

'You're not sorry now that you came, are you,' he asked, 'instead of mooning about on the pavement, where there was nothing to do? I know all sorts of fun we can have in the streets; you must come with me again. You will, won't you? But you mustn't say anything to your mother, mind. If you say a word to her, I'll pull your hair the next time I come past your shop.'

Pauline consented to everything; and then, as a last attention, Muche filled both pockets of her pinafore with mould. However, all the sweets were finished, and the girl began to get uneasy, and ceased playing. Muche thereupon started pinching her, and she burst into tears, sobbing that she wanted to go away. But at this the lad only grinned, and played the bully, threatening that he would not take her home at all. Then she grew terribly alarmed, and sobbed and gasped like a maiden in the power of a libertine. Muche would certainly have ended by punching her in order to stop her row, had not a shrill voice, the voice of Mademoiselle Saget, exclaimed, close by: 'Why, I declare it's Pauline! Leave her alone, you wicked young scoundrel!'

Then the old maid took the girl by the hand, with endless expressions of amazement at the pitiful condition of her clothes. Muche showed no alarm, but followed them, chuckling to himself, and declaring that it was Pauline who had wanted to come with him, and had tumbled down.

Mademoiselle Saget was a regular frequenter of the Square des Innocents. Every afternoon she would spend a good hour there to keep herself well posted in the gossip of the common people. On either side there is a long crescent of benches placed end to end; and on these the poor folks who stifle in the hovels of the neighbouring narrow streets assemble in crowds. There are withered, chilly-looking old women in tumbled caps, and young ones in loose jackets and carelessly fastened skirts, with bare heads and tired, faded faces, eloquent of the wretchedness of their lives. There are some men also: tidy old buffers, porters in greasy jackets, and equivocal-looking individuals in black silk hats, while the foot-path is overrun by a swarm of youngsters dragging toy carts without wheels about, filling pails with sand, and screaming and fighting; a dreadful crew, with ragged clothes and dirty noses, teeming in the sunshine like vermin.

Mademoiselle Saget was so slight and thin that she always managed to insinuate herself into a place on one of the

benches. She listened to what was being said, and started a conversation with her neighbour, some sallow-faced working-man's wife, who sat mending linen, from time to time producing handkerchiefs and stockings riddled with holes from a little basket patched up with string. Moreover, Mademoiselle Saget had plenty of acquaintances here. Amidst the excruciating squalling of the children, and the ceaseless rumble of the traffic in the Rue Saint Denis, she took part in no end of gossip, everlasting tales about the tradesmen of the neighbourhood, the grocers, the butchers, and the bakers, enough, indeed, to fill the columns of a local paper, and the whole envenomed by refusals of credit and covert envy, such as is always harboured by the poor. From these wretched creatures she also obtained the most disgusting revelations, the gossip of low lodging-houses and doorkeepers' black-holes, all the filthy scandal of the neighbourhood, which tickled her inquisitive appetite like hot spice.

As she sat with her face turned towards the markets, she had immediately in front of her the square and its three blocks of houses, into the windows of which her eyes tried to pry. She seemed to gradually rise and traverse the successive floors right up to the garret skylights. She stared at the curtains; based an entire drama on the appearance of a head between two shutters; and, by simply gazing at the façades, ended by knowing the history of all the dwellers in these houses. The Baratte Restaurant, with its wine-shop, its gilt wrought-iron *marquise*, forming a sort of terrace whence peeped the foliage of a few plants in flower-pots, and its four low storeys, all painted and decorated, had an especial interest for her. She gazed at its yellow columns standing out against a background of tender blue, at the whole of its imitation temple-front daubed on the façade of a decrepit, tumble-down house, crowned at the summit by a parapet of painted zinc. Behind the red-striped window-blinds she espied visions of nice little lunches, delicate suppers, and uproarious, unlimited orgies. And she did not hesitate to invent lies about the place. It was there, she declared, that Florent came to gorge with those two hussies, the Méhudins, on whom he lavished his money.

However, Pauline cried yet louder than before when the old maid took hold of her hand. Mademoiselle Saget at first led her towards the gate of the square; but before she got

there she seemed to change her mind; for she sat down at the end of a bench and tried to pacify the child.

'Come, now, give over crying, or the policeman will lock you up,' she said to Pauline. 'I'll take you home safely. You know me, don't you? I'm a good friend. Come, come, let me see how prettily you can smile.'

The child, however, was choking with sobs and wanted to go away. Mademoiselle Saget thereupon quietly allowed her to continue weeping, reserving further remarks till she should have finished. The poor little creature was shivering all over; her petticoats and stockings were wet through, and as she wiped her tears away with her dirty hands she plastered the whole of her face with earth to the very tips of her ears. When at last she became a little calmer the old maid resumed in a caressing tone: 'Your mamma isn't unkind, is she? She's very fond of you, isn't she?'

'Oh, yes, indeed,' replied Pauline, still sobbing.

'And your papa, he's good to you, too, isn't he? He doesn't flog you, or quarrel with your mother, does he? What do they talk about when they go to bed?'

'Oh, I don't know. I'm asleep then.'

'Do they talk about your cousin Florent?'

'I don't know.'

Mademoiselle Saget thereupon assumed a severe expression, and got up as if about to go away.

'I'm afraid you are a little story-teller,' she said. 'Don't you know that it's very wicked to tell stories? I shall go away and leave you, if you tell me lies, and then Muche will come back and pinch you.'

Pauline began to cry again at the threat of being abandoned. 'Be quiet, be quiet, you wicked little imp!' cried the old maid shaking her. 'There, there, now, I won't go away. I'll buy you a stick of barley-sugar; yes, a stick of barley-sugar! So you don't love your cousin Florent, eh?'

'No, mamma says he isn't good.'

'Ah, then, so you see your mother does say something.'

'One night when I was in bed with Mouton—I sleep with Mouton sometimes, you know—I heard her say to father, "Your brother has only escaped from the galleys to take us all back with him there."'

Mademoiselle Saget gave vent to a faint cry, and sprang to her feet, quivering all over. A ray of light had just broken

upon her. Then without a word she caught hold of Pauline's hand and made her run till they reached the pork-shop, her lips meanwhile compressed by an inward smile, and her eyes glistening with keen delight. At the corner of the Rue Pirouette, Muche, who had so far followed them, amused at seeing the girl running along in her muddy stockings, prudently disappeared.

Lisa was now in a state of terrible alarm; and when she saw her daughter so bedraggled and limp, her consternation was such that she turned the child round and round, without even thinking of beating her.

'She has been with little Muche,' said the old maid, in her malicious voice. 'I took her away at once, and I've brought her home. I found them together in the square. I don't know what they've been up to; but that young vagabond is capable of anything.'

Lisa could not find a word to say; and she did not know where to take hold of her daughter, so great was her disgust at the sight of the child's muddy boots, soiled stockings, torn skirts, and filthy face and hands. The blue velvet ribbon, the earrings, and the necklet were all concealed beneath a crust of mud. But what put the finishing touch to Lisa's exasperation was the discovery of the two pockets filled with mould. She stooped and emptied them, regardless of the pink and white flooring of the shop. And as she dragged Pauline away, she could only gasp: 'Come along, you filthy thing!'

Quite enlivened by this scene, Mademoiselle Saget now hurriedly made her way across the Rue Rambuteau. Her little feet scarcely touched the ground; her joy seemed to carry her along like a breeze which fanned her with a caressing touch. She had at last found out what she had so much wanted to know! For nearly a year she had been consumed by curiosity, and now at a single stroke she had gained complete power over Florent! This was unhoped-for contentment, positive salvation, for she felt that Florent would have brought her to the tomb had she failed much longer in satisfying her curiosity about him. At present she was complete mistress of the whole neighbourhood of the markets. There was no longer any gap in her information. She could have narrated the secret history of every street, shop by shop. And thus, as she entered the fruit-market, she fairly gasped with delight, in a perfect transport of pleasure.

'Hallo, Mademoiselle Saget,' cried La Sarriette from her stall, 'what are you smiling to yourself like that about? Have you won the grand prize in the lottery?'

'No, no. Ah, my dear, if you only knew!'

Standing there amidst her fruit, La Sarriette, in her picturesque disarray, looked charming. Frizzy hair fell over her brow like vine branches. Her bare arms and neck, indeed all the rosy flesh she showed, bloomed with the freshness of peach and cherry. She had playfully hung some cherries on her ears, black cherries which dangled against her cheeks when she stooped, shaking with merry laughter. She was eating currants, and her merriment arose from the way in which she was smearing her face with them. Her lips were bright red, glistening with the juice of the fruit, as though they had been painted and perfumed with some seraglio face-paint. A perfume of plum exhaled from her gown, while from the kerchief carelessly fastened across her breast came an odour of strawberries.

Fruits of all kinds were piled around her in her narrow stall. On the shelves at the back were rows of melons, so-called 'cantaloups' swarming with wart-like knots, 'maraîchers' whose skin was covered with grey lace-like netting, and 'culs-de-singe' displaying smooth bare bumps. In front was an array of choice fruits, carefully arranged in baskets, and showing like smooth round cheeks seeking to hide themselves, or glimpses of sweet childish faces, half veiled by leaves. Especially was this the case with the peaches, the blushing peaches of Montreuil, with skin as delicate and clear as that of northern maidens, and the yellow, sun-burnt peaches from the south, brown like the damsels of Provence. The apricots, on their beds of moss, gleamed with the hue of amber or with that sunset glow which so warmly colours the necks of brunettes at the nape, just under the little wavy curls which fall below the chignon. The cherries, ranged one by one, resembled the short lips of smiling Chinese girls; the Montmorencies suggested the dumpy mouths of buxom women; the English ones were longer and graver-looking; the common black ones seemed as though they had been bruised and crushed by kisses; while the white-hearts, with their patches of rose and white, appeared to smile with mingled merriment and vexation. Then piles of apples and pears, built up with architectural symmetry, often in pyramids, displayed the ruddy glow of