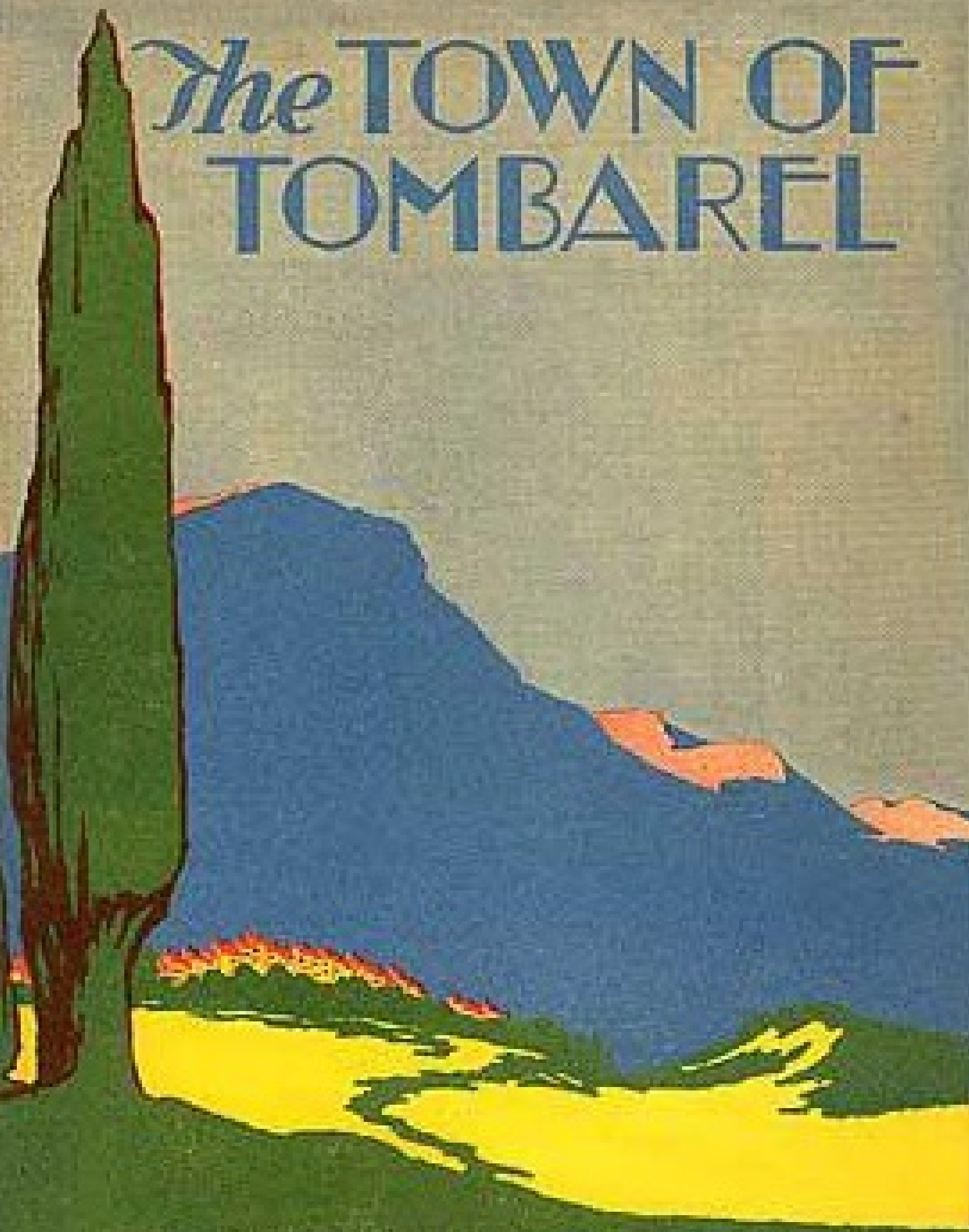

WILLIAM J. LOCKE

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THE TOWN OF TOMBAREL

by

WILLIAM JOHN LOCKE

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I

A SPARTAN OF THE HILLS

MY acquaintance with Monsieur Alcide Tombarel was formed in a very pleasant way; for Bacchus at his most innocent and most charming brought us together.

No one who lives in any part of wine-growing France can despise the little wines of the country—the little wines, like the children of the soil, that pine away and die if transplanted far from their own district, that laugh out their butterfly life for a season or two, and then perish from premature old age. In the south especially they are part and parcel of the sunshine of the midday meal. Now, such a wine, pale gold, full, with a faint perfume of hyacinth and a touch of the flavour of flint to give it character, did I drink at the table of my friend, General Duhamel, who has a villa of the modern stucco world in the Mont Boron quarter of Nice, super-imposed on a cellar of Paradise. He was good enough to give me the address of the vine-grower; for thus do the wise buy their little wines of the country—not in commonplace bottles from pettifogging wine merchants, but in casks filled from generous tuns in the vineyards themselves.

“If you go to Creille, a little town away back in the mountains”—he waved an indicating hand—“and ask for Monsieur Tombarel, and mention my name, no doubt he’ll let you have some.”

You see, there is a certain amount of polite ceremonial in the matter. You don’t buy wine in the offhand way in which you buy ducks. The most grizzled and stringy-necked old peasant with an acre of vines offers, and demands at the same time, what for a better term one might call the courtesy of the grape. An old inhabitant of the Azure Coast, I was familiar with the observances. Wherefore I thanked my host gratefully—for one doesn’t give away one’s pet vineyard to all and sundry—and a few days afterwards I journeyed through many devious and precipitous paths through the mountains to the tiny little town of Creille which stood perched, or rather piled somewhat ridiculously, on the top of a hill set sentinel-wise in the wild sweep of a gorge.

From declivitous desolation I found myself suddenly pulled up in a gay little cobble-stoned square. On the left was l’Hôtel du Commerce, with a rusty, moth-eaten, sun-eaten, time-eaten car standing before the closed doors. There

were a few funny little shops with women sitting on the thresholds. Across the way, two or three vague, swarthy, shirt-sleeved men sat at little tables outside the Café Pogomas. To this apparently quivering centre of the life of Creille did I, leaving my car, address my inquiring footsteps. I approached the swarthy men who were drinking the greyest of grey wine from *demi-setiers*—tiny, squat tumblers holding about a gill—and raised my hat.

"Pardon, Messieurs"—they responded courteously—"can you direct me to the house of Monsieur Tombarel?"

One of them began, when another interrupted him:

"*Tiens.* Here is Marius."

"The *patron*," the first explained.

And there issued from the interior of the café, the landlord, Marius Pogomas himself. He was a heavy-browed, powerfully built man, with an extraordinarily deep furrow running horizontally across his forehead. The closely cut hair on his bullet head seemed scarcely more of a crop than that on his two or three days' unshaven fat cheeks. His glance was kind, yet singularly commanding. He wore a fairly clean white suit and *espadrilles*—rope-soled, canvas shoes—and a coarse blue shirt destitute of collar.

"*Monsieur . . . ?*" he questioned.

I repeated my inquiry.

"*Ah*," said he, "*Monsieur le Maire.*"

Thus I learned that Monsieur Tombarel was Mayor of Creille. I explained that it was not in his official quality of Mayor, but as a private *viticulteur* that I desired to visit Monsieur Tombarel.

"You wish to buy wine, Monsieur?"

"Of course," said I.

He gave me to understand, with a flicker of fingers to lips, that I had come to the right market. But, he added, with a warning hand and a deepening of his furrow, Monsieur le Maire was very jealous of his wine, and wouldn't sell it to the first comer. He seemed quite sorry for me, a foreigner, for though I speak French as well as most people, I can't help looking an uncompromising Englishman. I explained that I had an appointment with him, arranged by telegram, and that I bore the introduction of General Duhamel.

He threw out his arms. That was a different matter altogether. General Duhamel. He was of the country. An old Chasseur Alpin. "I who speak to you, Marius Pogomas, served under him when he was simple captain. I'll have you shown the way at once," said he.

He turned towards the interior of the café and bawled out something in the

unintelligible Franco-Italian Provençal patois of the mountains, and presently an indiscriminate sort of boy of thirteen or so appeared. The infant, said Pogomas, would guide me to the house of Monsieur Tombarel.

He led me through the tortuous main street of an amazing mediæval town, smelling cold and sour. Once the rows of houses on each side with their narrow stone staircases yawning on the pavement were broken by an open space. On three sides of it ran fifteenth-century arcading, and a low building with an eighteenth-century façade, pediment and all—the Mairie—nearly filled up the fourth. In the middle was an agreeably carved well-head surmounted by wrought iron. The main occupation of the inhabitants here and in the streets seemed to be to sit about and think.

Fifty yards farther on brought us to waste land by the mountain-side. My boy conductor bade me turn to the right, for a quarter of a kilometre off was the vineyard of Monsieur le Maire. But, curious as to the view, I walked straight on and found myself standing on a tongue of rock projecting far out into the wild semi-circular valley and commanding an unfathomable abyss. All around for miles were the rolling slopes either thick with pines or terraced out bleakly for vine and olive, with here and there a red roof showing, and, in the far distance, the crumbling yellow of another little craggy town. But, on the sheer sides of this monstrous wedge whereon I stood, no vegetation could grow. Compared with it the Tarpeian Rock was a gentle hillock. I seemed to stand poised in the centre of the world. The small boy drew a half-consumed cigarette from his breeches pocket and, lighting it, smoked in patient leisure during my foolish contemplation.

In an untidy rustic garden in front of a long, two-storied, pink-washed dwelling, I met one of the surprises of my life. Instead of a kindly peasant proprietor, I saw a most courteous gentleman. It was obvious that he had attired himself in ceremonious raiment, in order to greet with dignity the friend of General Duhamel. But, no matter how he might have been dressed, the man of the world betrayed himself by his smile and by the manner of his outstretched hand.

He wore a hat, a Provençal hat, a soft, black felt hat with a prodigiously high crown and a prodigious brim. Beneath it a mean little clean-shaven face would have been lost. To set it off a full beard was essential. And the full beard did Monsieur Tombarel wear—a white moustache with the ends curling upwards in a suggestion of truculence, and a white, stiff beard trimmed to a point. Below the back of the brim swept a majestic white mane. His black jacket was buttoned at the throat. Such was the poet Mistral of my imaginings.

Necessity compelled a wide black silk cravat tied in a floppy bow.

After preliminary courtesies he conducted me to a large shed behind the house, in whose vast coolness were ranged many formidable hogsheads of wine. A smiling, coarse-aproned man with rolled-up sleeves brought a tray with a myriad little tumblers. The hogsheads were tapped. For the next half-hour the glasses were filled with wines red and rosy and golden. The afternoon sun crept in and set them all aflame.

"Monsieur Fontenay," said my host—for what else could I call him?—when I had made my choice, "I am rejoiced to see you can discriminate between the lavish bounty of the gods and their more subtle gifts."

He whispered a word to the cellarer, bowed me out, and led me to the ragged garden where were set a table and chairs beneath a sprawling cedar.

"I will now ask you to do me the pleasure of drinking with me a glass of wine, of which, alas, I have only a few bottles left."

Did I not say that Bacchus at his simplest and most delightful brought us together?

Then of course, painter-wise, I fell in love with the picturesque old gentleman, and begged him to sit to me for his portrait. I explained, so that he should not think himself at the mercy of an amateur:

"I am a member of the Royal Academy which, in England, you know, more or less corresponds with the Institut—the Académie des Beaux-Arts."

He smiled. "Of course. Your President, for the first time in your history, is a distinguished architect."

I gasped. How many well-fed Britons in any sumptuous dining-saloon could tell you off-hand the name of the President of the Royal Academy? And here, in this neglected corner of the world, was a fantastically attired, Mistral-looking old vine-grower who knew all about it.

"It is very simple," he said, with a smile. "I am interested in all those things. In my youth I went from here, where I was born, to Paris to study art. I tried painting, sculpture, architecture. I was good for nothing. I drifted into land-surveying which I detested. At last, after many years, I found that God had decreed it my vocation to come back here and plant my cabbages or my vines. You behold another Cincinnatus. But the unconquered country—the land of Art—is always the country of my dreams. . . . For my portrait, if my old Provençal head—*ma tête de vieux Provençal*—can interest you, I am at your entire disposition."

If what I set out to tell you had not essentially to do with Pogomas, the landlord of the café, I could talk about Monsieur Tombarel, the baffled artist,

all day long. But all the foregoing is merely to explain, in a reasonable manner, how I gained admission to the innermost secrets of the God-and-man-forgotten little town of Creille.

I painted Monsieur Tombarel's portrait, and it was my privilege to win his friendship.

Now we come to the point of the story.

Creille, like every other town, wished to erect a war monument. It took a long time after the war was over for the necessary money to dribble in. The Mayor put his foot down on rubbish. Better nothing than a cheap monstrosity which would make the town ridiculous in the eyes of the world. And the inhabitants of Creille, realizing that the eyes of the world were upon them, submitted meekly to the Mayor.

At last a patriotic sculptor of the Midi, whose aunt had come from Creille—so integral and potent is the Family in French psychology—undertook the work for a modest fee, and presented a design to the Conseil Municipal. My friend Tombarel was good enough to show me the *maquette* or model in clay, and ask my confidential advice. I walked round it as it stood on the long walnut table of the council room of the Mairie, and bestowed on it my enthusiastic admiration. It was new, strong, exciting. On the indication of a rock above the plinth stood, at the end of a leap, a Chasseur Alpin with his trumpet to his lips, sounding the charge, while at the foot of the rock sagged the dead body of a comrade, the trumpet drooping from his hand. But there was something diabolical in the nervous strength of the living man, the very dare-devil spirit of the *diables bleus*, the proud name of the Alpine regiments to which all the dead of Creille had belonged.

"It is magnificent," said I. "And where are you going to put it?"

"We are divided," said the Mayor, with a sigh. "There are politics even here. The Radicals choose the new Place Georges Clemenceau, and the Republicans, with whom I am in sympathy, the venerable old Place de la Mairie, outside these windows."

"Hm!" said I. In either spot the vivid young god of battle would be out of place. Then I had an inspiration.

"*Mon cher ami*," I cried, with a thrill, "there is only one site in Creille for the trumpeter. On the very end of the Pointe de l'Abîme. Imagine it!"

He sent his great hat scudding along the polished table.

"*Mon Dieu!* To say that no one ever thought of it!"

He wrung my hand, he hugged my shoulder. The artist in him imagined it, and tears stood in his eyes. They would have the trumpeter midway between

heaven and earth, ready, when France was in danger, to awaken the echoes of the mountains and summon again to arms the descendants of those that had died. Perhaps he was a bit flamboyant, my friend Tombarel, and went somewhat beyond the original psychology of my idea. But that was all to the good, for, a week or so later, he wrote me to the effect that the Conseil Municipal had sunk their political differences and unanimously voted for the Pointe de l'Abîme. Pogomas, an anti-clerical ironist, but otherwise the salt of the earth, had even gone so far as to declare that Creille would be the only place in the world where there would be a trumpeter always prepared to acknowledge the Last Trump.

Some months afterwards I received an invitation to be present at the unveiling of the memorial. In the interim, though I had not visited Creille, I had seen something of Monsieur Tombarel, who now and then drove in to Cannes in a recently acquired little 5-h.p. yellow car, in which he gave the impression of a majestic Noah navigating a child's model of the Ark. In cold weather he always wore an ample black cloak, fastened at the neck by great metal cockle-shell clasps. After his third appearance on the Croisette, they gave him the red ribbon of the Legion of Honour. They couldn't help it. Whether he really came to Cannes on business errands as he declared, or for the purpose of entering his old unconquered kingdom—my studio—and breathing again its captivating atmosphere of turpentine and paint and artistic effort, and talking with some one who knew the difference between a groin and a volute, I am not prepared to say. At any rate, I enjoyed the visits vastly, regarding the old man's friendship as a peculiar privilege. Incidentally I was kept posted as to the progress of the memorial.

It was a day in early June, a dry day of intense blue and gold, the air clear almost to pain, so that mountains and valleys held no mystery. On turning the bend of the gorge some miles away, I caught sight of the white figure of the draped statue commanding the mighty amphitheatre. Its startling impressiveness exceeded my imagination, and caught my breath.

I left the car at the entrance to the Place Georges Clemenceau, as I had done on the occasion of my first visit. But, for the first time, I beheld the square as a centre of excited life. A policeman, astounding revelation of the potentiality of Creille, waved me to a glittering park of cars. Flags, flying and draped, flaunted all over the place. Tables set before the Hôtel du Commerce, and on the terrace of the Café Pogomas, were thronged with thirsty holiday-makers. Small blue masses, sections of different regiments of Chasseurs Alpins, each with draped colours, and another blue mass, a Chasseur band with glittering trumpets, formed a close and clear background. The Creille Municipal Band, perspiring but determined, sweltered, with their weird

instruments, on the sunny side of the square. In the middle were grouped an official yet motley throng, the Municipal Councillors and the Mayors of neighbouring villages, the latter gleaming iridescent in the tricolour sash girt around their portly waists. Some were in the sacred black which their grandfathers before them had worn at funerals; others, perhaps the Radicals deplored by Tombarel, in the broad straw-hatted ease of their Sunday suits. In front stood some elegant gentlemen, one of whom, as I learned later, was the Sous-Préfet, and another a smiling Bishop (recognizable by the ring on his plump finger) in a cassock adorned with a string of decorations; another, a General dazzling all over with medals and crosses and gold lace.

The last, evidently my immediate predecessor, was being greeted ceremoniously by Tombarel, tricolour-sashed, patriarchally magnificent, sweeping his wonderful hat, and bowing as only those who preserve the tradition of courtly days know how to bow.

I approached, in my old Major’s khaki, with its string of perfectly dud ribbons, which, though uncomfortably tight, I thought, with a vague idea of international politeness, I might justifiably wear. Tombarel received me as if I had been a Field-Marshal, and presented me to the notables. Everyone was exceedingly pleasant. I shook hands all round with the Municipal Council, all friends of mine, for, during my painting of the Mayor, was I not free of Creille? Besides, was I not responsible for this selection which any imbecile could have made, of the site for their Trumpeter? Marius Pogomas, the *adjoint* or Deputy-Mayor, nearly broke my hand in fervent welcome. Had he not run somewhat to fat in his late fifties, he could any day have taken his place as the strong man at a fair. I was struck by the fact, however, that unlike the others, he did not smile as he greeted me. The curious line across his forehead seemed to have grown deeper, and his dark eyes were hard and intense. He wore some kind of grey alpaca and his collarless shirt was open at the neck.

I was introduced to the stranger Mayors and the quintessence of garlic.

The procession was formed. First the trumpeters of the Chasseurs Alpins, then the detachments, then the Municipal Band, then Monsieur le Maire and the General and other notables, and the rest of the population behind. At a short word of command, up went the trumpets, gyrating dizzyingly in the air, to be caught with swaggering perfection, and within a second’s infinitesimal fraction, to be applied to lips and sound the march.

We progressed through the warm, cobble-paved streets, all gaily flagged, through the mouldering old Place de la Mairie, to the open ground before the mighty wedge of cliff. Then we halted, and the non-military of us broke our ranks. The Municipal Band had their few minutes of glorious life wheezing out the “Madelon.” Perspiring Municipal Councillors, with tricolour favours,

showed us to our places on the platform at the base of the tongue on the tip of which, jutting out into immensity, stood the draped statue. I noticed that the two sides of the triangular spit were protected by a business-like iron rail.

Soon the population crowded round, leaving but a little space between the platform and the statue guarded by a sergeant of the Chasseurs Alpins. I noticed that nearly all the women were in black. The June afternoon sun blazed pitilessly. On the opposite side of the immense gorge, Heaven knows how far away in the clear, dry light, I saw a red-shirted man toiling on a little terraced yellow patch of vines.

There were the usual orations from Sous-Préfet, Bishop, General, Mayor. . . . Many of the black-robed women wept bitterly.

Then came the moment for the *adjoint*, Marius Pogomas, to read the death-roll of the heroes whose names were inscribed in letters of gold on the plinth of the monument.

He began, in a silence as hurtful to the senses as the unmitigated clarity of the light. The commonplace stout official became an impersonal Angel of Doom. He began:

> “*Abadie—Joseph Marie: mort sur le champ d’honneur, 1917.*”
>
> “*Angelotti—Ferdinand: mort de ses blessures, 1916. . . .*”
>
> “*Berdelon—Étienne: mort glorieusement à Riamont, 1917. . . .*”

And so on, down the heart-rending catalogue. And the announcement of every name was followed by some queer sob of a woman and the dash of hands across a man’s eyes. For, you see, there were some hundred and fifty of the dead from this remote tiny town, boys in the flower of their youth, and men in the vigour of their manhood, and all were inter-allied one with the other. The emotional strain made aliens like the General, the Bishop, the Sous-Préfet and myself, grip our knees and set our mouths and teeth tight. . . .

Pogomas—you see him with his cropped bullet head, his creased brow, his clean-shaven fat face, his collarless shirt—went on:

> “*Pizzo—Jean Mario: mort sur le champ d’honneur, 1916.*”

Unaware of what it meant, I was conscious of a tensity of the atmosphere. It seemed as though the assembled township leaned forward to hear the next name. I saw Pogomas pass his hand across his throat. He paused dreadfully.

> “*Poratti—Gabriel. . . .*”

There was a gasp from the multitude to which he paid no heed. The Municipal Councillor seated next to me, Monsieur Guiol, proprietor of the shop of Creille—“Aux Arcades de Creille”—threw up his hands and brought them down heavily on his thighs.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“He has omitted the name of his son. I don’t understand.”

I suggested, in a whisper, for the tale of dead was still being told, that the omission was natural. The father feared a breakdown.

“*Oui—mais*. . . . After all, the poor boy died gloriously. A hero of Riamont. He redeemed everything.”

The catalogue ended. Pogomas sat down heavy-browed, in his place, a few chairs beyond me, and I saw that with a motion of his hands he forbade his neighbours to question him.

The rest of the ceremonial gave me the impression of anti-climax. There was a fanfare of trumpets. The colours of the four or five regiments of Chasseurs were spread slantwise across the open space. The General pulled the rope, and unveiled the vivid white trumpeter in his eternal appeal to the sons of the mountains. The Municipal Band played the “Marseillaise.”

All was over.

Tombarel had asked me to remain after the Captains and the Kings had departed, and dine with him, if I could conform to the old French fashion of a half-past six dinner, and I had, of course, accepted. The meal, served under the cedar in the ragged garden, was like my host’s courtesy, simple and exquisite. Crayfish from the mountain streams, salad from his own patch, baby lamb from God knows where, and a couple of old, fantastic wines. At the beginning of dinner I had questioned him idly as to the omission by Pogomas of his son’s name, and he had replied with polite evasiveness. But later, over coffee and an ancient marc de Bourgogne, the brandy of Burgundy, which had the perfume of all Arcady, he referred to the incident and, under gentle pressure, relaxed.

“*C’est toute une histoire*”—quite a story—said he, “and if you like I will tell it you. But, you will understand, *mon cher*, it is between four ears. If it were told in Creille there would be catastrophe. . . . Listen.” He took one of my Turkish cigarettes, of which he was childishly fond, with a host’s apologies. “I am ashamed to have nothing of the kind to offer you—I abuse your kindness. *Eh bien*, it is like this.”

I had to go back, it appeared, some years before the war, and see Marius Pogomas and his wife—a woman of beauty and character, of full-sized personality in every way. Both were of the most honourable families of Creille. He had inherited the café from his father, to whose father it had

belonged. She was a Garbarino, a family now extinct. “Curiously extinct,” said Tombarel, after a pause. There was also a son, Dominique, and a cousin of Madame Pogomas, César Garbarino, Dominique’s contemporary, who lived with his widowed mother.

“They had a little farm—*tenez, là-bas*,” said Tombarel, waving a hand. “After her death, Guiol bought it.”

Now, although brought up in all the Christian virtues and other traditions of Creille, Dominique and César seemed bent, from their earliest years, on evil courses. Dominique was heavily built, like his father, and slouched oaf-wise; César Garbarino seems to have been small and dark and rat-faced and shifty. Not a nice couple. The schoolmaster confessed that he could teach them nothing; the curé could not but regard them as lost lambs; and the town generally held them in wholesome detestation. When César was about sixteen, Madame Garbarino died. The farm very heavily mortgaged—she had been but a drabbled, incapable woman: what could one expect from an *étrangère* who came from the plains near Cannes?—César’s heritage amounted to little or nothing. The farm bought by Guiol, and César became an inmate of the Pogomas household.

Thinking over the story as told me by Tombarel in the exquisitely chosen French of a cultivated man, whose daily language is *patois*, I see that Dominique Pogomas was by far the weaker of the two ne’er-do-weels. Also, I have an idea that Pogomas did not go the right way to work with his son. He fortified an indulgent nature with Solomonic ideas. Very likely, with unsparing rod, he thrashed out all the lingering good in Dominique. Anyhow, the boy was a trial to his parents. His friends were the disreputables of the place. Brought into the café to learn the business, he played the Idle Apprentice according to all classical canons. He was slack, he broke glasses, he forgot the reckonings of his riff-raff friends, he committed the unpardonable crime of the publican, and swigged from the bottles of stock. Then eventually honest labourers in other people’s vines and olives, wood-cutters, road-workers—“*des pauvres gens, enfin*,” came to Pogomas, and said that, if they saw Dominique hanging around their daughters, they would shoot him.

Of César, apprenticed to Artru, wheelwright, bicycle repairer and *garagiste*, there was much the same tale.

At last arose great scandal. Burglars had entered Monsieur Guiol’s shop in the Place de la Mairie—“Aux Arcades de Creille”—and had robbed the till. Nothing was proved, but the two young rascals were more than suspected. Marise Zublena, the girl, perhaps, of least account in Creille, came out a few days later with a flashing brooch. When challenged she stated that a fine gentleman from Nice in a grand automobile had given it to her. As fine

gentlemen in grand automobiles are town-arresting phenomena in Creille, and as none such had been observed of late, her story was received with a measure of incredulity.

"What my good friend Pogomas suffered at that time," said Tombarel, "I cannot tell you. He would come to me, as he has always done since, with all his troubles—and that is why what I'm telling you is not speculation on my part, but facts, sometimes burning hot, as you will see, from his own lips. And he is a man—although I deplore his politics—but if everybody had the same ideas it would be a world of rabbits and not of human beings—he is, *enfin*, a man of the highest integrity, of kindness, charity, delicacy of feeling—his wife adored him—and to see him suffer, as he has suffered—ah, my dear friend, it has been heart-rending."

Then, all sorts of things seem to have happened in a heap. César Garbarino staggered home one night with a knife wound in his neck. He gave a muddled account of the matter. But it was observed that the girl, Zublena, hung around the café and discoursed with Dominique when his parents were not looking. After this, César, with the craving for wider horizons, fled the town. Where he went to, no one knows. The war-net eventually caught him, an undesirable young man, in Belgium. But this is anticipating.

Dominique, in normal course, was called up for his military service. For a few months Marius Pogomas and his wife felt relief from daily scandal and agonizing responsibility. The poor lady must have died of reaction. The doctor, who lived in a more important hill-town, some kilometres off, gave all sorts of scientific reasons for her death.

"But what does it matter?" said Tombarel, with a sweep of the hand. "She was dead. Our good, broken-hearted Pogomas was left alone. He sent naturally for Dominique. Impossible for him to come. Refusal from the military authorities; Dominique was in prison at St. Raphael. You see, *mon ami*, you who know so well the things that we, *nous autres Français*, hold sacred, what a shame and disgrace it was for Pogomas to walk alone, without his son, behind his wife's coffin. '*Why?*' asked everybody, and everybody guessed. And when Guiol, a good friend, came up with inquiries, Marius said: 'Don't mention that name again. He is no longer my son.' "

After that, Marius Pogomas, the great St. Bernard dog of a man, who was born to sweetness and happiness and across whose brow misery had already dug a deep furrow, made a great pilgrimage from Creille to St. Raphael, and learned from the Commandant of the regiment his son's disgraceful record.

Then the war broke out. All was upheaval. Dominique, like most sweepings of the military prisons, was sent off with his regiment. The net

caught César Garbarino, of Creille, in Belgium, and the unerring schedule of military France placed him once again by the side of Dominique Pogomas. Now, the war changed many values. The sacredness of the country's defence was regarded as a purge of every defender's offences. Pogomas signified to Dominique that his paternal heart was reopened. But Dominique's responses were unsatisfactory. To him the war was less a sacred duty than a nightmare of discomfort and injustice. He whined for money to save him from cold and starvation. When the time came for leave, unjust military authorities stopped it. Again, Pogomas took the journey to the depot. His sinking heart was not uplifted by the news that his son was a *mauvais soldat*; and a bad soldier to the French minds is synonymous with the scum of the earth. Of César Garbarino, Pogomas heard nothing and cared less. He grew morose, untidy, sat brooding in a corner of the café while an elderly woman ministered to the wants of the few customers, mostly decrepit, who were left in Creille.

At last, after a couple of years, came news, private and public, of glorious tragedy. News of the heroic stand of a battalion of Chasseurs Alpins against overwhelming numbers in which all had perished save the wounded, who were taken prisoners. And among the dead were a score of the sons of Creille, including Dominique Pogomas. It was a tremendous episode, classic in its magnificent heroism. The names of those who perished therein could only be received with bareheaded reverence. Such Death, even more than War itself, blotted out all the sins of the warriors.

"*Mon vieux camarade,*" said Tombarel, when the news came, "now your soul can have repose. *Finis coronat opus.* The end is the crown of the work, and there must have been something divine in the work to merit an end like that."

And in such terms, though doubtless less elaborate, did the simple elders of Creille condole with Marius Pogomas. Whereupon Pogomas took heart of grace, and ceased to brood and walked about with his head up and looked everyone proudly in the face, whereas heretofore he had been a bowed-headed and furtive man, and, as it were, signed with some enthusiasm a new lease of life.

"You, who have been through it, my dear Fontenay," said Tombarel, sweeping his beautifully pointed white beard, "know what it means. The Heroes of Riamont. The Heroes of Thermopylæ. Your Charge of the Light Brigade. All that is legendary. And Dominique Pogomas was registered as one of the Heroes of Riamont. What more was to be said? It was the apotheosis of Dominique."

The years went by. The war was over. The curious human adjustment of things was effected in the tiny town of Creille as in all the rest of the quivering

world. As in Paris, London, Berlin, New York, Brussels, Rome—all the palpitating centres of the gigantic cataclysm—so in Creille, the devouring monster of war was laid at rest, and men concerned themselves with the petty hopes and anxieties of everyday existence.

Yet memories and loyalties and pride lingered in men's minds. Every hamlet in France must have its monument to the dead. And so must Creille. It was at the beginning of this corporate impulse in the little town, if you will remember, that I first made acquaintance with Monsieur le Maire, my venerable friend, Tombarel.

"We come now to close quarters," said he, a hospitable hand refilling my glass with the old perfumed marc de Bourgogne. "What I'm going to tell you is really extraordinary."

Twilight had crept upon us. In the Midi, even in June, the days are short. A full moon, hidden behind the shoulder of a mountain, heralded by its glow an immediate bursting into the serene firmament. The gnarled cedar branches cast vague shadows over the little white table, and the old world poet's face of Alcide Tombarel.

"If a man smitten by adversity, widowed of the wife whom he worshipped, bereaved of his only son, once a sore thorn in the flesh, could be called happy, that man was Marius Pogomas. From the inception of the idea of the monument he was the soul of the movement. Of course he wanted it to be placed in the Place Georges Clemenceau. All that is politics. Besides, it would have been in front of his café—a little advertisement. Human beings are human, *mon pauvre ami*, and the Frenchman, whether of the mountains or the plains, likes to see the little *sous* coming in, without having spent anything to attract them. It's natural. I am saying nothing ill of Pogomas. On the contrary, as I tell you, he is a great soul. A little proof. When you suggested the Pointe de l'Abîme, he was the first to say: 'We will carry the proposal unanimously.' "

I agreed with all the Mayor's encomiums. From my first encounter I had always found Pogomas the most courteous of men, and whenever I passed the time of day with him in his café, over a tiny glass offered for manners' sake, a shrewd companion with sweet and mellow philosophy of life.

"You forget," said he once, "you people of the great world below, that we in the mountains have a bird's-eye view of the things that happen—and perhaps we see them in better perspective."

As a man of parts, I take off my hat to Marius Pogomas.

Well. . . .

Lorries and workmen and sculptor at last burst into Creille. Wasps in a

bee-hive could not have created greater commotion. The town clustered round the tongue of cliff during the scientific process of the statue's erection. All crowded round to see the name, carved and gilded on the plinth, of husband or father or son or brother or betrothed. Marius Pogomas spent most of his time there, interested less in the white trumpeter speeding his call down the gorge than in the glittering name of his son, Dominique. For on the proud Roll of Honour, already drafted, to be kept for ever in the archives of Creille, there was the mention:

> "*Pogomas—Dominique Honoré: mort glorieusement à Riamont, 1917.*"

You see, Riamont eclipsed all other heroic fields of honour.

"*Ah, voilà.* You see the moon," said Tombarel, as it sailed out from behind the shoulder of the mountain into immensity. "Well, it was only a month ago, the last full moon like this, that the thing happened." He lit one of my cigarettes. "*Tiens, c'est exquis.* Oriental tobacco always gives me ideas. Don't you find it so?"

"It doesn't give me the faintest idea of what happened under last month's full moon," I laughed.

"I was saying . . . ? Ah, yes." He made a humorous gesture. "Forgive an old hedonist. Under last month's full moon Marius Pogomas stood by the statue, and put his fingers down the lists of gilded names until he came to that of his son Dominique. In fact it was much later than now. All Creille was in bed. He was alone with the monument. 'Dominique Honoré Pogomas.' That was all he could see. Twenty years of pain were transfigured into glorious consolation."

He paused and went on with the story.

The full moonlight fell upon the Pointe and cast the shadow of the Trumpeter over the Gorge. Peace descended on the soul of Marius Pogomas. Presently, with a sigh, he turned and was met by a sneaking figure a yard or two away from him; a thin rat of a man, with hungry eyes. Pogomas challenged.

"What are you doing here?"

The man came forward.

"You don't recognize me, *mon oncle*?"

Marius started back and swore.

"It is you? César?"

It was. It was César Garbarino, returning to Creille for the first time since

he ran away, long before the war.

"You don't seem glad to see me, *mon oncle*!"

"I have no reason to be glad," said Marius. "Especially at this hour of the night. If you wanted to see me, why didn't you come to the café? It's idiotic to spring out of the ground *comme ça*, like a ghost."

César explained that he had only just arrived, having journeyed from Nice on foot, save for an occasional lift on a lorry, and, having seen his uncle leave the closed café, had followed him. The more Marius scanned his nephew, the less he liked him. The vicious boy had developed into the town type most detested by the proud and honourable men of the mountains. His face, his attitude, his talk, his poor swagger of attire, were those of the Apache.

"And now you have me, what do you want?"

"First a bed. I am of the family, I suppose. You would not like me to be found sleeping on the bench outside the café."

"You shall have the bed," said Marius. "But it's not only for a bed you have come after all these years."

The young man laughed. He always knew his uncle to be a man of intelligence. No. He had come to restore his fallen fortunes with his uncle's kind assistance. First there was the matter of the heritage, his mother's farm.

"Heritage? Farm? But you are crazy! Maître Landois told me he had settled with you at the beginning of the war, as soon as they took you by the neck and dragged you out of Belgium."

César snapped his fingers. He cared not a damn for lawyers. They were all thieves. He had been robbed, as a boy, when he knew nothing. Now he had come for his heritage.

Marius shrugged his vast shoulders. "You have come for the moon"—he flung up a hand—"take it!"

"That's what I'm going to do, *mon oncle*."

"Eh?" Marius started. "Repeat that."

"I have come for the money that Guiol paid for the farm."

Marius laughed. "How are you going to get it?"

César pointed to the plinth of the monument.

"*Violà*," said he.

Marius, like most mountain-folk, was a man of slow and deliberate thought. The gesture put him on a wrong track.

"*Tiens!* That reminds me," he said. "You were of the Battalion of Riamont. Why is your name not there? Explain that."

“Explain? Why, naturally, ‘*Je ne suis pas foutu comme les autres.*’ I’m alive, I am.”

“Why?” asked Marius.

“I suppose there was a *bon Dieu*, all the same, who looked after his little César. I was wounded. I had a Boche bullet through here. I could show you”—he pointed to his shoulder—“and I was taken prisoner with twenty others. I was prisoner till the end of the war. They talk about the heroes of Riamont. But, *nom de Dieu*! I was one of them, and now I who live would be starving, unless I made my own little war, *à moi*, on Society, while Society puts up monuments to these dead rabbits.”

He spat towards the plinth.

Marius took him by the collar and shook him.

“Silence!” he thundered, and then called him by every opprobrious name he could think of. At last he cast him off. “Go,” said he. “Sleep where you will. But not in my house.”

“If you say so,” replied César, wriggling into comfort of attire. “Only to-morrow all Creille shall know how Dominique Honoré Pogomas—*mort glorieusement pour la patrie*—isn’t that the way they call it?—really met his death.” He edged away from Marius. “And everyone will believe me, because they know the character of our good Dominique. When one stabs a comrade from the back—do you remember when I came home that night with the knife-wound? Well, it was Dominique—one is capable of anything. I, I said nothing. You grant me that. I didn’t want to make ill blood.”

Marius stood over him, shaking with the terror of a ghastly surmise, on that moon-beat platform hanging in the centre of space.

“Tell me. I don’t understand.”

“I speak the truth, for I saw it with my own eyes.”

And he told the dismal and circumstantial story. For two days there had been attack and counter-attack, before the final German avalanche finished all. And during a French attack, when the line of poor devils was two hundred yards ahead, Monsieur Dominique Honoré Pogomas, the hero, was found skulking behind a rock rifling the pockets of a dead Boche.

The officer who found him shot him dead on the spot.

There was a silence as cold and merciless as the moon.

Pogomas at last broke it.

“And you? Why weren’t you in the attack two hundred yards ahead?”

“I was orderly of the officer who was bringing up some troops of the

second line.”

Pogomas staggered back like a drunken man, and sat on the step of the plinth, burying his head in his hands.

The story was true. All that he had known of Dominique convinced him that it was true. He felt the awful agony of death in life. The torture of all the shame and all the dishonours that make life a bestial parody of existence.

César Garbarino lit a cigarette. Marius, at last looking up, became conscious of the spirals of grey smoke mounting into the still air. He rose ponderously.

“You say that you will spread this infamy over Creille unless I pay you money. That is blackmail.”

“As you like,” said the Apache imperturbably.

“My God, it shall be as I like,” cried Marius, and with a sudden irresistible gesture, he picked the man up, and threw him into the abyss.

“One single action. Like that,” said Tombarel, with illustrative pantomime. “Phuitt! He is a colossus. Just as easy as for us to hurl away this wine bottle.”

“Good God!” said I, and I wiped the perspiration from my forehead. “But ——” I added, when I had recovered my wits, “how do you know all this that you have been telling me so vividly?”—for what I have written down is but a poor adumbration of a masterpiece of nervous and imaginative prose—“how do you know it?”

“As I said before . . . from his own lips. He came straight here, found me, as we are sitting now, smoking a last pipe before going to bed, and gave himself up to justice.”

“What did you do?”

“*Mon Dieu!* Had not enough justice been done already? I told him to go home without calling on the Commissary of Police, who would be peacefully sleeping and would be annoyed at being disturbed at that time of night. He took my advice. Outside politics, Marius is as gentle as a lamb.”

It took me a moment or two to attune the Anglo-Saxon in me to the Latin psychology. Tombarel really believed that the man who had thrown a fellow-creature into eternity was as gentle as a lamb! And in his way he was right.

“They found the body a day or two afterwards. Of course it was an accident. As the dead man’s chief possessions were a vicious little Browning and a nasty knife, Creille regarded it as a lucky accident. . . . It’s droll that the only good César Garbarino did should have been posthumous. To prevent less fortunate accidents in the future, the Conseil Municipal put up the iron railing which otherwise would not have occurred to anybody.”

A light breeze had arisen, and played on the thin patch that crowned Tombarel’s mane of white hair. He reached for the vast hat on the ground beside him.

“*Eh bien*,” said he, “it has been a long story which I hope you have not found wearisome; but I think it explains why Marius Pogomas passed over his son’s name.” He sighed deeply. “My poor Marius!”

II

ROSES

If this is a mixed-up sort of story, it is because I must tell it in a roundabout way. There is a certain amount of coincidence in it; but, were it not for coincidence, there could be no drama of life. For its accuracy of detail I have mainly the word of my friend, Tombarel, Mayor of Creille. There is also the potential voucher of Brother Sylvain, of the Cistercian Monastery on the Island of St. Honorat, which lies in the Bay of Cannes, hidden behind the Island of Ste. Marguerite, where the Man in the Iron Mask languished for so many years in his bastioned cell.

I exhibited Tombarel's portrait in the Royal Academy—I am, as I have told you, an Associate of that whatever-you-like-to-call-it body—and sold it; for painters have to live, just like plumbers and politicians and bookmakers and other such toilers, whose right to a comfortable existence not even a Bolshevik would dispute. But I made a replica, which Tombarel presented to the Mairie of Creille where it hangs in a sixteenth-century council chamber, in the sixteenth-century town hall; forming one side of the grey-arcaded square, cobble-paved, with a well-head in the middle of it, which I have often found to be the most untroubled spot on earth. This gift won me the real intimacy of Tombarel.

He was an inexhaustible mine of Provençal legends; he knew—God knows how, for he had long since retired from his dreadful trade, and had settled down for good and all in his mountain vineyard—the intimate history of what we might call the country-side, but what is really the mysterious hinterland of the Department of the Alpes Maritimes, which is as remote from the fringe of the Riviera as Greenland is from India's coral strand.

We met sometimes in my villa at Cannes overlooking the sea, or beneath the straggling cedar in front of his funny pink Provençal farmhouse, and now and then half-way. Once I asked him to lunch with me at a sunny restaurant on the tip of Cap Ferrat, over a tureen of *bouillabaisse* and a bottle of little white wine of Bellet.

It was then that our talk drifted to St. Honorat.

"The monastery is full of the most interesting people," said he. "There is one, a full-fledged Father—not a lay brother—who was once a *camelot* on the

Paris boulevards—a half-starved good-for-nothing who sold little toy dogs and blown-out cocks that squeaked on the pavement.” He told me a story of considerable interest, but it has nothing to do with the one I want to tell.

“Perhaps the most singular man in the monastery,” Tombarel went on, “is the Frère Sylvain. He is—I don’t know—although nominally a good Catholic I am not conversant with hierophant gradations”—the southerner in Tombarel loved now and then to mouth sonorous phrases—“at some half-way stage in his training to become a Father. He will vouch for the truth of my story. In fact, it is his history that I am going to relate.”

“But,” said I, “the Cistercians of St. Honorat are a silent order.”

He waved an ineffectual, artistic hand.

“They have their dispensations. Besides, the *frères converses* have not taken their vows of silence. I, Tombarel, can arrange. Don’t be afraid . . . What was I saying?” Interruptions sometimes disconcerted him. “Ah! First I must tell you the history of a painter.”

“But what has Frère Sylvain to do with a painter?” I interrupted again.

His forefinger touched a bushy eyebrow.

“Ah! That’s what you are going to see, my dear Fontenay. Frère Sylvain had a great deal to do with it. *Voilà* . . . You must throw your mind back over twenty years. There was a young man studying art in Paris.”

One hand, stretched out across the table set by the open window in the glass-walled restaurant, commanded my attention. The other swept his moustache and white pointed beard. I have never met so great a master of the spoken narrative as Tombarel.

“*Tiens*,” said he with a knitting of noble brows above dark eyes. “He must be now about your age. You are of the Beaux-Arts—like him. His name was Patignon—Jules Patignon.”

I clapped my head in my hands. The name beat foolishly at it.

“He was in Marien’s studio.”

“So was I. Good Lord,” I cried, “I remember him! Of course. Do you know, my dear Tombarel, that I’m prepared to accept anything extraordinary you may say about Patignon.”

I hadn’t thought of him for some years. Jules Patignon, indeed, was my contemporary. A brilliant fellow. His surety of line made me sick with envy. Then, somehow, he went to the devil. One day, years ago, when, silly war accidents compelling me to live in a fog-free climate, I had established myself on my sunny Mediterranean crag, Jules Patignon turned up, down and out, incredibly dirty, abject in disrepair and self-disrespect. He pitched a piteous

tale. He had a glib tongue, thickened, as it were, by alcohol. He told me, I think, that he had been sketching in Tunis, that six months' work had been burned in a fire which consumed his mud hut on the edge of the desert, and that now his resources were exhausted to such a pitch that he could not afford the necessary outfit of artist's materials wherewith to start afresh. I lent him a thousand francs and he vanished into eternity.

Well, that is coincidence number one. From my memory I could check all that Tombarel told me of his early brilliance and of his later decay. I had seen him in his decay—a shuffling, shifty, long, bony man with beastly bits of hair all over his face. A man with the clothes of a scarecrow. A man with hungry, wolfish eyes.

According to Tombarel he had been born in New York, the son of a French father and an Irish mother, Patignon *père* being an obscure cook in a small hotel, and his mother, a little drab of a servant. This was news to me. In my day art students never worried themselves about one another's antecedents or social position. They were pleasant human beings or they were not. I remember that I counted Patignon among the less pleasant. We met chiefly at Marien's studio, where he lived an apparently decent life—I don't think I ever met him outside the studio—and astounded us by his wild brilliance. During the long interval between the end of my student life in Paris and his sudden apparition in Cannes, I doubt whether I had ever concerned myself with the possibility of his existence. He was but a shape of the past, scarcely an acquaintance; still less, a friend. Half my lifetime had passed between our meetings.

Tombarel's evocation of Patignon reminded me that I had noticed a curious nick out of the top of his left car, surrounded by a pale scar. Well, nearly every man who went through the war has a nick or two somewhere about him, so I thought no more about it; but from Tombarel's account it appeared that the nick in Patignon's ear was a factor in the story.

It was the result of a duel long before the war, when Patignon was young and well-favoured, and viewed with gaiety the flowery path through the world that lay before him. Even at Marien's, where every latitude in attire was indulgently tolerated, he dressed himself with a certain spruceness. Perhaps the only conversation with him during those far-off days which I can recall, was on this topic of personal appearance.

"To be a successful portrait painter," said he, "one must have the air of one accustomed to move in the salons of the wealthy, and one can't attain it without cultivating the habit of wearing a clean collar and nicely polished shoes."

From every point of view I naturally agreed with him.

He carried out his programme, learned, by much assiduity, how to comport himself in drawing-rooms, won gold medals and things, exhibited at the Salon, and sprang, as it were, with one bound to the middle rungs of our heart-breaking ladder. His was the rare case of genius being favoured by the gods.

As I have just said, I never really liked the fellow. I found him plausible, untrustworthy and unsympathetic. That was why, in spite of a certain charm, I did not cultivate his society. Once he borrowed a hundred francs from me, pleading dire necessity. A hundred francs, in those days, were worth their weight in four golden sovereigns, and I had very few sovereigns to scatter abroad. I learned afterwards that he had spent it all in a night's squalid debauch. He never repaid me. I only mention this incident by way of throwing a side-light on the man who, in the course of twenty years, degenerated from the brilliant painter, frequenting the salons of the wealthy, into the filthy outcast to whom I had given alms.

The duel? Well, a woman was in it.

"*Comme toujours,*" declared Tombarel, the venerable bachelor. Only when one says "woman," one thinks of maturity, arts of seduction; a woman in practically the physiological sense of the word. Here, however, it was a young girl, as charming and fresh a young girl as it ever was Tombarel's lot to know. He himself—"*Moi qui parle*"—you can see the shrug, with uplifted hands, which finished the sentence. . . . How could a poor land surveyor, even then drifting into the bitter wisdom of middle age, sigh for the unattainable? What was the good of the prickly old thistle sighing for the rosebud, especially when he had first seen the rosebud fresh in her nurse's arms? But rosebud she was. I must remember that. He kissed his finger-tips. An Englishman, knowing the ordinary French young girl of five and twenty years ago, is peculiarly unimpressed when an old Frenchman kisses his finger-tips and calls her a rosebud. I suppose it is a matter of ideals.

At any rate, Rosalie Dufour was a rosebud, especially—according to Tombarel—when she dressed in green. A charming girl, perfectly brought up, the daughter of Alfonse Dufour, who made a fortune out of tinning sardines. "If you haven't eaten the delicate 'Sardines Dufour' you haven't lived," said Tombarel. Personally, I must be in a state of nonexistence, as it has never struck me to look for the publisher's imprint on my sardine; but that is by the way.

Now, it fell out that Jules Patignon had so far penetrated into opulent circles that he was commissioned by Monsieur Alfonse Dufour to paint the portrait of Mademoiselle Rosalie. The portrait, a masterpiece—so said

Tombarel—was scarcely finished when painter and sitter found themselves vehemently in love. How they managed to convey the fact to each other, Heaven only knows, seeing that Madame Dufour sat dragon-wise behind the easel during all the sittings. But, seemingly, love laughs at dragons as it does at locksmiths. The pair arranged surreptitious meetings, thrilling in their danger; the most perilous in the gardens of the Dufours' house at Passy.

Now Patignon's *état civil*, which in France is the sacred declaration of birth, parentage, family status and personal history, was not calculated to allure the millionaire of the "Sardines Dufour." "Father: *chef de cuisine*. Mother: domestic servant." He dared not confess it even to Rosalie. As for his fortune, it was to be made—in oil, it is true, but by strokes of the brush. Monsieur Dufour only thought of oil as a commercial proposition in terms of sardines. A demand in marriage would have turned the amiable patrons of the arts into ravening beasts of the jungle. They would have torn him limb from limb.

It was while the enamoured pair, lost in each other's arms in an obscure nook of the rose-scented and moonlit garden, were discussing romantic and unfilial possibilities, that André Dufour, Rosalie's much older brother, discovered them. There was a dramatic scene. André likened Patignon to the least pleasing of creatures, and carried off a half-demented Rosalie. The next day Patignon, with a couple of friends as witnesses, sought out André Dufour at a café and smote him across the face.

Hence the duel. Dufour, the aggrieved, had the choice of weapons. Being short and squat, and recognizing that he had no swordsman's chance against the long Patignon with his octopus reach, he chose pistols. The result was that Dufour nicked a bit out of Patignon's ear, and Patignon missed Dufour altogether. Honour being technically satisfied, the duelling party broke up. Patignon went home to tend his damaged ear, and André Dufour returned to join the family conclave, in which it was decided to re-immure Rosalie, aged eighteen, in the Belgian convent whence, after completing her education, she had but lately emerged. Now, love cannot laugh at strictly instructed convents. Rosalie and Patignon were irremediably parted.

If you think that frustrated passion was the cause of Patignon's downfall, I fear you are mistaken. In my own mind there is no doubt that he had a young man's clean and honest love for Rosalie. Indeed, it is the only good thing I've heard about him. But he was a man in whose heart clean and honest love was easily fouled by baser appetites, and obscured by unregulated ambitions. He was not well parented. This we must remember. His father, the cook, for some criminal offence, had no longer civil rights in France; once he landed on French soil he would have been clapped into jail. His mother was a drunken Irish-woman. He had owed his start in life to a benevolent American who,

having by chance discovered the boy’s talent, had financed his education and by a chance, this time unhappy, had died before he could enjoy the fruits of his benevolence.

Thus it seems to me that Patignon was a man, to use a painter’s jargon, without values. He was like a picture without the proportion and correlation of tones. He could weep over a dewdrop, paint you a strident portrait, talk politely at an afternoon reception, and get filthily drunk in some disgusting lupanar, all in the space of twenty-four hours. Most of us, by training, have a set of fixed principles by which we guide our moral lives. This is mere platitude. If I were a metaphysician I could, without doubt, state what is in my mind with more complicated opacity. But the ordinary man must have his own standards of conduct. If he departs from them, he does it either deliberately, knowing the consequences, or yielding to irresistible temptation. In either case he returns, none too happy, to his standards. Now Patignon differed from the ordinary man. He had no principles. He had no standards. What to the ordinary man is a more or less clearly defined consciousness, was to him chaos.

He lost his touch, his triumphant sureness of stroke; he claimed advances on commissions which he never executed. His crapulous atavism got him by the throat. The clean collar of his young schedule of ambition dwindled into an unclean rag. He besotted himself with cheap absinthe. He did every abominable thing that a brilliant portrait painter ought not to do. At last a bogus cheque landed him in prison. The war turned him out into the dreadful *Bataillons d’Afrique*, the Battalions of Discipline. He had not long been demobilized when he came to me.

From me he seems to have gone to seek out Tombarel, whom he had known in the far-off days. Indeed, he stayed at Creille as Tombarel’s guest. His cook father was a Marseillais and the Midi was in his blood, and its call sounded in his ears. He had actually equipped himself with the painter’s paraphernalia, and had tried to work.

“The results were horrible, my dear Fontenay,” said Tombarel. “When he was something, he was a portrait painter—a figure painter—he had the classical line.” Tombarel swept the painter’s curved thumb—he loved the gesture as though it proved his admission into the Freemasonry of the craft. “But a *pleinairiste*—no, especially in our sunshine. You have to paint sunshine, which only one man in a generation can do. Even your Constable, with his divine sense of values, what would he have done here? Nothing. He would have fabricated *croûtes* of absurdity like my poor Patignon. It takes a Claude Monet. Also one cannot drink a litre of brandy a day, to say nothing of another litre of fantastic varieties of alcohols at the Café Pogomas, and paint pictures. If there’s one man in the world who must be serious, it is the

artist. . . . And then he became the scandal of the town. Ah, *mon Dieu*! Luckily my old hair was already white and couldn't grow whiter."

He must have led his protector, the Mayor of Creille, a devil of a dance. Then, his thousand francs exhausted, his score with the good Marius Pogomas unsettled, he disappeared from Creille. The days between this flight and his reappearance in the world of men must have been spent like those of a wolf outcast by the pack, in the byways of the mountains.

We come again to a definite picture of him.

Between Cannes and Grasse this gaunt tatterdemalion, with eyes now bloodshot, struck a vicinal road, and presently came to a pair of iron gates with a gilt coronet woven into the scrollwork, opening on a broad gravel path which, after a few yards, diverged in two directions. These arms, each bordered by broad flower-beds, embraced a plantation of mimosa and palm and acacia in milk-white blossom, with an undergrowth of laurel. A lodge beside the gates seemed deserted. The path to the left lay in deep, cool shade; and there were flowers, broad bands of them in the riot of May. They wound like rivers of splendour as far as his eye could reach. Begonias, cinerarias of all the purples, and along the garden walls an orgy of wisteria and convolvulus. And each bed was edged with deep turquoise grass.

The midday sun beat down on Patignon's head. The cool walk to the left was like an oasis to a desert wanderer. He gave a glance at the shuttered windows of the lodge, and stole into the shade of the garden. He had been living in the aridness of the mountains of eastern Provence, among olives and stony vineyards and pines, all austere things, and suddenly, as though guided by God, he had come upon this glimpse of Paradise. He walked a little distance and threw himself prone on the soft grass and inhaled the fragrance of the garden with open mouth and nostrils. His painter's eyes feasted on the colour.

He had wandered from Creille in the vague direction of Marseilles, where animal instinct rather than hope suggested he might find a means of livelihood. At Creille he had provided himself with an immense sausage—he was an old campaigner—wherewith he could satisfy his hunger. He had slept on the crisp warm beds beneath the pine woods. Water for his thirst he could obtain at any cottage, or from any mountain stream. Once a day his few remaining francs had assured him a draught of wine at some remote *estaminet*.

But he was tired and sun-stricken and foot-sore, and he lay for an hour, fouling with his weight the delicate turquoise grass, quivering with the consciousness of one who, transformed by witchcraft into a wild beast,

gradually recovers a human form. The artistic sense that, during his strange life, had led him into a thousand paradoxes of conduct, at last aroused him from his languor. He must explore further this garden of enchanted loveliness. He stood, stretched himself and followed the winding path.

At last a break in the central plantation showed him the red-tiled roof, the green-shuttered windows of the top story of the château. One window was open, and a faint spiral of smoke curled from a chimney. He barely noticed this, for his eyes, at the turn of the path, were compelled to a garden of roses—the last roses of the southern spring. They grew dwarf with all the charm of scientific disregard of mingled varieties. Old and new blended in breathless discords and harmonies, from the black crimson of the Victor Hugo to the buttercup purity of the Golden Chalice. The ground was strewn with petals as for a fairy wedding.

Now, you must not dismiss Patignon as a vagabond sentimentalist. If you do, I'm done. There was less sloppy sentiment about Patignon than about any man with whose history I've been acquainted. But Patignon was a painter, and a painter is a queerly gifted creature who can't help being affected by beauty when beauty gets up and parades herself naked before him. It was not the sentimentalist but the instinctive lover of beauty that impelled him, he knew not why, to step into the rose-bed, and with the clasp-knife which he had lately employed in the careful slicing of his sausage, to cut, at long stem, the only half-opened perfect bloom—a dreamy pink Caroline Testout—that remained.

He picked his way back to the path, rose in hand. A man, springing from he knew not where, confronted him.

"*Qu'est-ce que vous faites là?*"

He was a gross man—a square-headed, sanguine-complexioned man. Patignon, who knew his France, put him down as a Norman. He wore an ultra-English golfing costume.

"What are you doing there?" he repeated.

"You see," said Patignon. "I have only picked a rose."

"Give it back. *Fous le camp*. Get out!" cried the angry proprietor, and he made a grab at the flower in Patignon's hand.

Thus arose as idiotic an altercation between two sane men as has ever brought about tragical consequences. The red-faced Norman accused the dilapidated Patignon, not without reason, of entering his grounds with felonious intent. Patignon protested his innocence. What kind of a thief was it who, entering the grounds of a house, prefaced his villainy by stealing a rose? The lord of the château lost his head. He was determined to dispossess the thief of his booty. During a hand-to-hand struggle the gaunt and bony Patignon

swung his adversary staggering back among the flower-beds, and sprang forward to complete his victory.

The other scrambled to his feet, and from his hip pocket drew a small automatic pistol. He was too late. Patignon gripped his wrist with one hand, wrenched away the pistol with the other and, holding it in his clenched fist, butt downwards, brought it down with all his force on the man's head.

He dropped on the gravel path like a pole-axed bullock and lay sprawling on his back. Patignon looked at him for a few moments, rather bewildered. He had had no desire to kill the man. He felt himself the most aggrieved of mortals, pursued by divine injustice. His plucking of the rose was, perhaps, the most exquisitely innocent action of his life. Well, if it was murder, so much the worse. It was the affair of *le bon Dieu*, and not of him, Jules Patignon.

The man lay with his coat lapels wide open. From the inside breast pocket peeped the top edge of a note-case. Patignon peered cautiously around. There was not even a butterfly for witness. He stooped and plucked out the note-case. It was filled with notes. He thrust it into his pocket. From the waistcoat he drew watch and chain. A diamond ring glittered on the man's finger. Why leave it? He drew himself up on his knees. That was done, finished, irrevocable. He had stolen note-case, watch and chain and diamond ring. What was the good of half measures? He went systematically through the pockets of the gross and unconscious man. He brought out an Eldorado—ten packets of thousand-franc notes, each tied up by a slim elastic band, and a jeweller's case from the side pocket, which, on a hasty glance, proved to contain a blinding dazzle of emeralds.

He bent down over his victim. His skull might be cracked—but he was not yet dead. Patignon had seen a good deal of death during his time with the Battalion of Discipline. . . . He rose to his feet. Well, it served the fool right.

A woman's sharp cry, and the just captured flash of a white dress, broke any philosophic musings. He turned and fled at racing speed along the path and through the iron gates into the road; and plunged again, as soon as he could, into the hills.

Patignon worked his way, unmolested by justice, to Cannes, whence he travelled third-class to Marseilles. It was only when he found himself safe behind the locked door of a bedroom in a mean hotel by the quays that he dared bring into light the proceeds of his robbery. There were five distinct items. A gold watch and chain; a diamond ring; a well-stuffed note-case; a separate hoard of a hundred thousand francs; and an emerald bracelet whose

wonder made his head reel.

On the dismal bed he spread out the contents of the note-case, which proved to be a kind of autobiographical museum. They gave him interesting information; both explicit and implicit. His unsought victim was the Marquis de la Crozière. He classified the documents with a grim smile. Admission cards to the casinos of Monte Carlo, Nice and Cannes, and a neatly kept memorandum of losses and gains, led him to the inference that the Marquis de la Crozière was a gambler for high stakes. As no man walks about with a hundred thousand francs by way of casual pocket-money, he surmised that the Marquis de la Crozière had drawn that sum out of a bank that morning in view of the afternoon or evening play.

Of what sort or kind, legitimate or otherwise, was the *châtelaine* of the estate on which he had trespassed, he had at first no notion, though of such a one the cry and the flicker of white dress proclaimed the existence. At any rate, the emerald bracelet was not destined for the wrist of a Marquise de la Crozière, because there lay a violently perfumed letter with a Nice heading from one who, signing herself "Zozo," was indubitably the intended recipient of the jewels. A newspaper cutting clinched the matter of the *châtelaine*. It recorded the statistics of a pigeon-shooting match at Monte Carlo in which the Marquis de la Crozière was the winner, and a dinner given in celebration of the victory by the Marquis and the Marquise de la Crozière.

An unpleasant letter, written in the familiar second person singular, dunned for the repayment of a sixty thousand franc loan. Examination of the gambling memorandum showed a considerable balance of gain. The inner rim of the diamond ring bore the inscription: "*Souviens-toi toujours de notre amour. R. à C.*" This was obviously a present from his wife, his own name, as indicated by his visiting-card, being Camille.

The more Patignon pondered over these revelations, the less compunction did he feel in having cracked the skull and rifled the pockets of the Marquis Camille de la Crozière. In his person he had shown himself an unsympathetic and truculent fellow. His record was that of an entirely unworthy member of society. He was dissipating a fortune in the gambling saloons of the Riviera; he turned a deaf ear to a poor, hard-up devil to whom he owed a large sum of money; in order to keep some vulgar little courtesan called Zozo in a good temper, he had wasted an angel's ransom on an emerald bracelet; and there was a Marquise de la Crozière, personified by a cry and a flutter of white, whom he was treating abominably.

Patignon, contemplating the proceeds of his crime, glowed more and more with the sense of public duty accomplished. He had diverted wealth from corrupt channels leading to the cesspools of gambling-hells and the bottomless

purses of the Daughters of the Horse-Leech, into the pure stream that might set working once more that great man Jules Patignon.

He slept that night the placid sleep of the man whose mind is conscious of right.

Of the ins and outs of Patignon's existence for the next few months, Tombarel could give me meagre account. One factor, however, is certain. The author of the outrage on the Marquis de la Crozière, without taking peculiar pains, eluded the search of the police.

We have now to attune our minds, as Tombarel put it, to the conception of Patignon as a gentleman of fortune. For in this guise did he reappear meteorically, not in the salons, it is true, but in the resorts of the wealthy. In August, a week's baccarat at Deauville brought him a couple of million francs. He vanished with his winnings. During that week of publicity I have learned, not only from Tombarel but from the frequenters of that paradise of vanity, that he lived the life of a solitary and sober sphinx. He emerged from the social darkness, the immaculate, point-device imitation man of the world of his boyhood's dreams. But no little lady disturbed the austere tenor of his way. He sat alone at his meals and drank the most modest and light of wines.

"We must think of him," said Tombarel—"we must get inside his soul if we can and think of him as a man driven for those few following months of autumn and winter, not by any emotion akin to remorse, not by any lashes of conscience, but by one terrifying desire—the desire to keep himself from the mud in which he had wallowed for twenty years. *La boue, il en avait soupé.* He had been fed up with mud.

"He was possessed by the fixed idea to assure himself for the rest of his days against misery and cold and degradation and starvation. What he did, where he went, how he lived I don't know. It doesn't matter. . . . The following January we see him in Monte Carlo."

"A sweet, limpid place, totally free of mud," said I.

"You shall hear," said Tombarel. The long, inefficient fingers of the barren artist swept over his white mane of hair.

Patignon turned up, then, in Monte Carlo, tall, gaunt, clean-shaven, scrupulously trim, carrying himself reservedly with a distinguished air. Again the austerely sober man of loneliness. He sat solitary, day after day, at the *trente-et-quarante* table.

"To save my life, my dear Tombarel," said I, "I can't see where this new rigid morality of his comes in."

“*Attendez*,” said Tombarel. “I tell you because I know. He had amassed a fortune of five million four hundred thousand francs. He had resolved to turn the odd four hundred thousand into one million and nothing more, or to lose them and nothing more. After that, never a stake for the rest of his life. You can take that as gospel; for I speak of things that I know.”

It appears that after a fortnight’s ups and downs of fortune, Patignon drew in the last winnings that brought him up to the six-million total.

He rose, thrusting the notes and counters into his pockets, when he found himself face to face with a woman who, as some queer sense told him, had been standing behind his chair and watching him for a long time. She was so close that in the act of rising he almost brushed her dress. A word of apology was succeeded by the shock of mutual recognition.

“Mademoiselle!”

“*C’est vous?*”

“Yes, it is I, Jules Patignon. It’s a long time, Mademoiselle . . .”

Her lips moved in a smile. “Madame.”

“Alas,” said he; “I dared not guess it.”

They stood embarrassed. She waved ever so slightly a disdainful hand.

“You find pleasure in this game?”

“It is my last coup,” said he.

“For to-day?”

“For all my life. Yes, it’s true; why should I tell you if it weren’t?”

“Yet you have not lost.”

“On the contrary, I have won. A modest fortune. That is why I draw my pin from the game. I can retire now, and live in peace until I die.”

Unconsciously they had backed away into the free space between two thronged tables. He said: “You haven’t changed. Or, if you have, it is for the better.”

She laughed, coloured under the admiration in his eyes. “I’m getting an old woman.”

“Bah! You are not yet forty. If anyone should know your age, Madame, it should be I.”

She sighed. “It seems so long ago.”

“To me,” said he, “but yesterday. Can’t we sit and talk somewhere for five minutes?”

“Willingly.”

He led her into the long bar, to a small table at the far end away from the bar itself.

"Yes. It seems but yesterday. In a night you have bloomed from a girl into a beautiful woman."

The tribute was socially justifiable, seeing that the last time he had seen her—although it was twenty years before—she had been snatched literally from his arms. It was justified, too, by her present beauty. The rosebud of Tombarel's sentimental ecstasy had developed into the rose at its prime of womanhood. She was tall, with the utmost roundness of delicate figure that the folly of the present day allowed. Her dainty features had the colouring of dark rose. To the girlish languor of her dark-brown eyes was added a glint of irony. Her lips, the only pure lips the man had ever kissed in the whole of his existence, held the same childish appeal.

She smiled. "I'm glad you think so. But you? What has become of you during all these years?"

He looked at her with knitted brow. "*Ma foi.* You ought to know. It was in all the newspapers. Scandal enough."

She laid a quick touch on his arm. "Yes, yes. But that was long ago. Since then?"

"I went through the war—like everybody else. After that I occupied myself with the making of a little fortune; that's all."

"And your painting?"

"Lost." He smiled wryly. "Art is a mistress to whom one must be faithful. I've not been faithful, and she has deserted me."

"It's a pity," she said.

He acknowledged her sympathy with a shrug and a gesture. "One does what one can—or rather, what is permitted by the high gods of eternal irony."

He was conscious since they had sat down, even before they had sat down, of some strange preoccupation at the back of her eyes which, as though fascinated, strayed perpetually from his. She soon simplified his growing perplexity.

"Pardon, Monsieur Patignon, for an indiscretion. But your ear—was that the war?"

He laughed. "It is my happiness that it wasn't. It was a scar received in your service. The famous duel with your brother, André."

"Yes, he told me afterwards," she said with a shiver. "He said that you had the whole ear torn away—then modified the story."

“I bear no malice,” said Patignon. “And the good André?”

The good André was dead. At Verdun. Her parents, too, were dead. She was alone.

“But your husband?”

“Yes, I have a husband,” said Rosalie, without enthusiasm of possession.

In his turn he said: “It’s a pity.”

In hers she sketched a shrug—a gesture.

“All this time we’ve been talking,” said he, “and I don’t know your name.”

“My husband,” she replied, “is the Marquis de la Crozière.”

The shock was so unexpected that all the twenty years’ training in the sudden vicissitudes of life availed him nothing. He gasped open-mouthed, felt his hair crinkle on his skull, and could not repress a foolish cry:

“What?”

“The Marquis de la Crozière. Did you know him?”

He gathered his wandering wits. “Why, no.”

“Then why are you so surprised?”

“The Marquis de la Crozière belongs to the old *noblesse*—an historic name,” said he, bolting up the first avenue to hand.

“And it astonishes you that Rosalie Dufour, of the ‘Sardines Dufour,’ should now be the Marquise de la Crozière?”

“*Mais non.* No prince of blood royal could be worthy of you.”

“*Merci*,” she said, with a little twist of her lips; and he was then aware of a hard questioning in her brown eyes. “We lived till lately in the Château Paradou, near Grasse. It was a beautiful garden. Have you ever seen the garden of the Château Paradou, Monsieur?”

“I’ve never heard the name of the Château Paradou in my life,” he replied.

“It is strange,” she said in a low voice, “but in the summer I saw in the garden a man with an ear like that—I have called him since by Edmond About’s title, ‘*L’Homme à l’Oreille Cassée*.’ He was a dreadful man—hairy and fierce and ragged. Do you know, Patignon, that you very much resemble that man? It was that man with the broken ear I was watching at the *trente-et-quarante* table.”

Taking his courage and his face in both hands, he bent across the table confronting her.

“And if it were I—what then?”

She sat motionless. “It would be a strange coincidence. You, the great

painter whom I loved as a young girl, to be a common assassin—a robber of my husband."

He shifted his position, and mechanically drained one of the glasses containing the conventionally ordered drinks, which neither had thought of tasting.

"*Eh bien*, Madame la Marquise, it was I. A robber, yes; if a famished wolf can be called a robber. But an assassin—no. Monsieur le Marquis threatened me with an automatic. I acted in self-defence. I tore it from his hand and brought down the butt on his head. Besides, he did not die. At the time I read *Le Petit Marseillais* with some interest."

That palace of all the greeds and all the iniquities and all the despairs of the world, which is the gambling-hell of Monte Carlo, has rarely housed a pair united—or divided—by so unimaginable a story.

Rosalie de la Crozière sat fixed in her attitude. Even then the artist in the man noted the exquisite curves of arms and neck and bosom.

"And you are not ashamed to confess it?"

"No," said he. "I buried shame a hundred years ago; and its ghost doesn't arise to haunt me now. I am what I am." He drew a cigarette from his case and lighted it. "You have my confession. It is in your power to denounce me. Do what you will."

Her shoulders moved slightly. "It is too late. There would be no object . . ."

"Thanks," said he dryly. "But may I put a question?" He looked deep into her steadfast eyes. "You arrived on the scene. I heard a cry and caught sight of your white dress. You noticed my ear. Why didn't you give my description to the police—*L'Homme à l'Oreille Cassée*? I should have been taken before I could get to Marseilles. Why didn't you?"

"Because—because I saw more than the broken ear. The figure was familiar after all these years. I had a horrible dread that the man might be you . . ." She passed her hands over her eyes and rose quickly. "I think we've talked enough. Accompany me to the door of the bar. I have some friends in the rooms."

Just past the threshold of the Salle Privée, she turned.

"*Adieu.*"

He bowed gravely.

"*Adieu*," said he.

"And that," said Tombarel, "is the beginning of my story."

“The beginning?” I cried. “What do you mean by the beginning?”

“If you are such a purist in language,” said he, “let us call it the preface to my story. We began by a reference to the monastery on the Island of St. Honorat. I said I would tell you the story of Frère Sylvain.”

“But you’ve told it to me, *mon ami,*” said I. “All that matters. After Patignon parted from Madame Rosalie he gave up the world and went into religion, and is now the pious Frère Sylvain.”

It is the only time I have ever seen my venerable friend completely bewildered.

“*Qu’est-ce que vous chantez là?*” he gasped. For him to derogate so far from his exquisitely polished French to ask me slangily what was I drivelling about, was evidence of loss of balance. “*Patignon, Frère Sylvain? Jamais de la vie!*”

“Then where does Frère Sylvain come in?”

“But, *mon Dieu*, haven’t you understood? It is the Marquis de la Crozière who is Frère Sylvain.”

“Oh!” said I, bewildered in my turn. “The devil he is!”

“Of course. Who else?” cried Tombarel with a triumphant gesture. “I had to tell you the story of Patignon in order to explain Camille de la Crozière. Don’t you see? Without Patignon he wouldn’t have received the blow on his head which fractured his skull, and he wouldn’t have entered into religion. It is so remarkable, the linking together of human destinies; the fatality, one might say, of Greek tragedy. Here was a man who treated his wife like the last of scoundrels, converted to the service of the *bon Dieu* by the old perfect lover of his wife acting the part of the blind agent of Nemesis. I find that extraordinary!”

Tombarel would have been disappointed by the exhibition of my entire lack of enthusiasm. To disappoint Tombarel when his eyes were alight and his delicate hands flashing all around his white leonine head would have been an outrage. I had to assume an appearance of absorbed interest.

“Extraordinary! And he didn’t know who his assailant was?”

“Of course not. Neither did Patignon know whom he was assassinating. That is the point of it. *Merci, mon ami—mais merci, oui*—the smallest drop.” He pushed his glass to the *maître d’hôtel* who, I am sure, came forward with the old bottle as a last ruse for getting rid of us, as we were the last customers left in the sunny restaurant.

“What was I saying? Ah! yes. The conversion of Camille de la Crozière. It’s a case of subtle psychology. Camille—I have known him from infancy—is

of the old aristocracy—*pur sang*. The pure blood of the Crusaders runs in his veins. You see here the influences of heredity—the heredity of idea.

"When he recovered from his concussion, he began to think very seriously. The blow dealt a little to the right or left would have killed him. He was spared by a miracle. Although a bad man, he had always been a devout Catholic. That happens sometimes. He already had undergone spasmodic periods of remorse. Now his religion got him tight!" Tombarel clenched his hands in a strangle-hold.

"The *bon Dieu*, he was convinced, had something to do with it—in fact, the *bon Dieu* had everything to do with it. He reviewed his life. How had he treated the poor Rosalie Dufour whom he had married for her money? All the sardines, *huile extra fine*, of the Dufour factory, had slipped through his pockets. He had been a sinner and an execrable husband. Why had God spared him? That is the interesting question."

Tombarel stretched out his hand across the table and tapped my arm. "Because he had committed the greatest sin. Remember, it's his psychology I'm talking about. He had refused a human being the small charity of a rose. If he had said to the vagabond, 'Take two, take three—and Heaven speed you on your path,' the man would have thanked him humbly and gone away. It was the rose itself, plucked by Patignon, that drove him into religion. It's droll, isn't it?"

I acquiesced. Anything was possible for a man who was a throwback to the Crusaders. No doubt many of his ancestors, after weltering in innocent gore, had exchanged their blood-drenched raiment for the hair shirt of the monk. From what I had heard of the Marquis de la Crozière, he appeared to be of the same type as the overbearing, singularly unpleasant, yet superstitious baron of the Middle Ages.

We smoked a while in silence, Tombarel the epicure leaving me time to enjoy the flavour of his narrative. At last, after polite commendation, I came tactfully to the subject of my very real interest.

"And Rosalie?"

"She was only too happy to get free of him with the remnant of her fortune."

"And Patignon?"

"Patignon? You wish to hear more about Patignon? . . . Yes, perhaps you are right. After all, what I have told you is more the story of Patignon than of Frère Sylvain . . . Patignon? Yes. I know all about him."

"Tell me," said I.

“I have a theory of life, my friend, which has stood me in good stead many times when I thought myself plunged in the depths of the black treachery of mankind—and it is this: that if you dig deep enough into the vilest soul of man, you will find one streak of sweetness. If a man discovers it for himself and follows it, he wins salvation. That one sweet streak was in Patignon—the young man’s pure love for Rosalie. . . . He and Rosalie are married.”

I jumped. “How on earth——?”

“They went to America. It seems he could claim American citizenship. *Enfin.* What do we know? There are places in America where you can buy a divorce for two sous and get married for nothing. Don’t ask me.” To a Frenchman like Tombarel, any foreign country is a barbaric waste where anything can happen. “All I know is that they are married, and perfectly happy.”

“But, good heavens!” I cried—I must confess to a sense of shock, of upheaval. “She, the flower of all the innocences, and he the poison-plant of all the vices!”

“Rhetorically, very good,” said he.

I disregarded his ironical interruption and went on: “Why, it’s monstrous! He stripped her own husband of a small fortune.”

“It didn’t belong to her husband,” said Tombarel. “It belonged to her. How could he restore it more honourably than by marrying her?”

“Go on,” said I. Sometimes the Latin view of morals is beyond me.

“There’s nothing more to say. Apparently my little Rosalie had loved her Patignon all her life—who can dive into the complexities of a woman’s heart? Certainly not an old bachelor like me. Once I tried to solve the enigma of woman. I almost lost my reason. . . . That’s another matter. . . . Yes, there they are in a pretty farmhouse near Roquebrune where, though they need not do so, they cultivate roses for the market. . . . You see, the rose was the symbol of his happiness. He explained it all, at length, only the other day.”

“You still see him?” I asked.

“Why, yes. They are great friends of mine. Would you like to meet them?”

“I don’t know,” said I. “Patignon sticks in my gizzard. I don’t see how he deserves all this.”

“It is the English Puritan that speaks,” said Tombarel, putting on his vast black felt hat. “Because a man has once been wicked, why should he always be wicked? Haven’t poets worn themselves to the bone trying to prove the purifying influences of a woman’s love? Besides, my dear friend, who are you and I to probe the recesses of a man’s soul and judge whether he deserves or

doesn’t deserve what God has thought fit to mete out to him? I, Tombarel, have done things—and I am the Mayor of Creille, and I have the *Légion d’honneur*, and the very great privilege of your affection.”

He doffed his hat in the most courtly of bows, insisting that I should precede him out of the restaurant.

III

MADELEINE OF CREILLE

"My dear Fontenay," said Tombarel, outstretching apologetic arms, "you know that my cellar and my house and everything that I have is at your disposal; but I will not sell you wine that is not worth drinking."

I had journeyed to the little mountain town of Creille on my original errand, to buy a stock of his little golden wine, and this was how I was met. Last year's vintage, as everybody knew, was a failure; this year's was good, but it must remain some time in cask; the last of the two-year-old wine he had sold at great profit to a Nice hotel.

"Why didn't you tell me? I would have saved for you all that you wanted!"

Never was there such a misfortune. He slung his great Provençal hat on the table underneath the straggling cedar, thrust his fingers through his white mane of hair, and tugged at his pointed beard. Moved by these signs of extreme agitation in my excellent friend, I bade him be of good cheer. My cellar having run dry through my own slackness, I must pay the penalty of drinking alien and inferior wine for the next few months.

"That you shall not do," said Tombarel. "My neighbour, Capenas, has some of that vintage left. It is not so good as mine—a question of the sun—it isn't everybody that can have a *côte rotie* in the mountains when there is so much shade at the critical period of the year. But it is good enough. He is keeping it for the Hôtel des Etrangers, and hoping for a good price, but I'll make him understand reason. . . ."

I said that the price was a matter of no particular concern (for these little wines are pathetically inexpensive), and I would not for the world try to beat down the excellent Père Capenas.

Tombarel laid a hand on my shoulder.

"My dear friend, I know all these people like my pocket. I am one of them. Also I am the Mayor of Creille, and it is my business to see that justice is done everywhere. *Fiat justitia!*"

He raised a hand to heaven in a noble attitude. I knew him so intimately that to have doubted his sincerity would have been an insult.

"Come," said Tombarel, "we shall arrange that in two minutes."

He shouted for Angélique, his elderly servant (an inspired cook, by the way), who brought him his ample cloak with metal cockle-shell clasps at the neck, and, having thrown it over him and clapped on his enormous black felt hat, he bade me follow.

We transacted our business with Père Capenas satisfactorily. He was a fat, weather-beaten peasant in the middle seventies, with what looked like a week's stubble of growth of thin grey hair on bald head and fat cheeks and chin; myriad-lined; shrewd-eyed, shrewd-tongued, voluble in the *patois* of the mountains, but constrained in his French when he spoke to me. He wore a coarse, collarless shirt and a pair of canvas trousers, and bare feet stuck into shapeless rope-soled shoes, and his courtesy was as perfect as that of the great Provençal gentleman, Alcide Tombarel himself.

His daughter-in-law, Madame Capenas, a thin, battered woman of fifty, brought the conventional tray of little squat tumblers for the tasting of the wine.

"And now," said Tombarel, after the bargain was settled, "how is the good Louis?"

The woman pointed to a little lean man sitting on a rude bench in the sun, in front of the long ramshackle house from which the pink-coloured plaster was peeling in great patches, and talked long to Tombarel in the mountain dialect. Now and then Tombarel gave me a rapid translation, from which I gathered that Louis Capenas had been shot through one lung in the first year of the war, and had been, ever since, a hopeless invalid. He did what he could, poor fellow, but there were days. . . . *Ah! mon Dieu!* . . . Apparently this was one of the days. . . .

Led by Tombarel, we passed from the broken-down shed where Père Capenas stored his great hogsheads of wine, through a patch of olives, and arrived at the front of the *mas*, which is the Provençal name for a small farm dwelling. Tombarel shook hands with the sick man, introduced me as a painter, a lover of France, and his dearest friend. I sat beside him on the bench while the three others drew aside and talked their *patois*, and found him a pleasant though melancholy companion. He spoke the rich French of Marseilles. As I, too, had been touched in the lung by a German bullet, the original cause of my settlement in this land of sunshine, we had common ground of talk. He was immensely proud of the fact that he had been promoted to the rank of sub-lieutenant just before being knocked out, and therefore had been eligible to receive the red ribbon of the *Légion d'honneur* which decorated his dirty old coat.

"But, although it helps morally, Monsieur, pride doesn't keep a man alive.

If it weren't for my wife and my father and my daughter—especially my daughter . . . *Ah! la voilà—Madeleine!*"

At that moment there stepped out of the door of the *mas* perhaps the most beautiful young woman I have ever beheld, holding in both hands a great tin vessel which probably contained house refuse. On seeing us she put the pan down at a convenient corner, and advanced to meet Tombarel—evidently her friend. I repeat that she was amazingly beautiful: swarthy, wide-browed, dark-eyed, calmly kind like an Andrea del Sarto Madonna. She was attired in a soiled, villainous rag of a semi-fashionable dress, such as one could buy at any cheap emporium in France. It didn't fit, but she wore it with a curious air of distinction, and it could not hide the superb and slender lines of her body. Her legs were bare, her feet thrust into *espadrilles*. Her hair, strange phenomenon in a peasant girl of these remote mountains, was neatly cropped.

"Monsieur," said the invalid by way of introduction, "is a friend of Monsieur Tombarel, and has come to buy wine."

I rose, lifted my hat, took the delicate soft hand that she offered. . . .

"*Enchanté, Mademoiselle. . . .*"

"You were talking to my father about the war. I heard you. It is he who must be enchanted."

She spoke in the voice of an angel, a Parisian angel, soft and low and alluring, without any kind of provincial accent. So might have spoken any lady in any drawing-room.

Tombarel, on the sight of her, left the stocky ancient, her grandfather, and her wrinkled, coarse-attired mother, and swept her in greeting the most courtly of bows. His hat was even bigger than that of a courtier of Charles II.

"*Ma petite Madeleine*," said he. "I didn't know that you were in Creille."

"I arrived two days ago, Monsieur Tombarel."

"*Et ça va toujours bien?*"

"Perfectly," she laughed. "Madame is kindness itself. Whenever she can spare me, she lets me come home to my dear ones." She passed a caressing hand over her father's hair. "It's my only happiness."

Louis Capenas, in the most natural way, gave me the solution of a possible little mystery. Madeleine was lady's maid to a charming woman, a Madame de Saules, one of the old *noblesse*. . . . Tombarel, like a courtly old Frenchman, never insensible to female beauty, took the damsel aside, and her father discoursed modestly for a few moments on her filial merits.

Then came a young man on the scene, an ordinary young man, attired not as a peasant, but sloppily town-wise. I recognized him as Ferdinand Guiol, the

son and heir of the proprietor of the one important shop of the tiny town—“Aux Arcades de Creille.”

You see, ever since I had suggested to the Mayor, my friend Tombarel, the setting of the town War Memorial on the point of land jutting out on the mountain gorge, I had been made free, as it were, of the unsophisticated place. All the Municipal Council were my good friends. I inquired after the health of their wives and families. Now and then, if caught on the way by one of them, I was offered a glass at the Café Pogomas, where mine host would often join us. A painter by trade, I made many sketches in Creille. . . .

Thus it was that I recognized young Ferdinand Guiol, who, in the most obvious way in the world, had come acourting the attractive daughter of Louis Capenas. She turned from Tombarel and greeted him with a smile and an ironical twist of her lips. He was peculiarly polite to the invalid, to Madame Capenas, and the sturdy old grandsire. Then, after the eternal fashion of love-stricken and embarrassed youth, he mopped his forehead, although it was an early afternoon in November.

Tombarel and I took our leave, and strolled up the ragged mountain path towards his own domain, which, according to the custom of the country, was a *domaine*, literally so called.

“Another romance in Creille,” said I.

Tombarel shrugged his shoulders as one in dubiety.

“She is pretty enough to damn the whole calendar of saints.”

I laughed in agreement.

“I’d give anything to paint her.”

“Prudence, *jeune homme,*” counselled Tombarel.

I laughed again. “If,” said I, “I had fallen in love with all the pretty women I’ve painted during the last thirty years, I should be now in a lunatic asylum.”

Well, as far as I was concerned, I thought that was the end of the matter. But it wasn’t. Chance dragged me into a drama which, in my own roundabout way, I want to describe.

At the time, however, I did nothing but carry away a memory picture of a queer scene. The front of a dilapidated long-lying little *mas*, untidily furnished forth with barrels for wine and water, rakes, planks, broken stools, gnarled olive trees, a tethered goat or so, a few fowls, and a nondescript dog on the dusty ground, hunting for fleas. A group of humans: Tombarel, majestic reproduction of the poet Mistral, the thin, dark consumptive hunched up on his wooden bench, the weather-beaten elderly woman in her print gown, the squat, ancient peasant in his collarless shirt and canvas trousers, the very ordinary

young man in imitation urban raiment, and the Andrea del Sarto girl with her absurdly shingled head, and her short, skimpy soiled dress, and her assured air of amused tolerance. Naturally, it was the girl in whom my main interest had been centred. Yet she was hardly a girl in the sense of rosebud fragrance. She was a woman of about six and twenty, in the fullness of her beauty. To her family she spoke the mountain *patois*; to Tombarel, the French of civilization. . . . I pondered over the assimilative faculty of woman. The lady's maid had based herself on the lady, her mistress, and had obviously found and applied the secret of the great lady's charm.

Well, as it does not behove a respectable English widower of fifty to think of French lady's maids, no matter how beautiful, or no matter how they may appeal to his painter's pure desires, I put her and the Capenas family out of my head for a long time.

It was early afternoon in late April. I was sitting on the terrace of the Savoy Hôtel at Nice, with a disregarded drink by my side, the price of my comfortable seat, idly watching the sparse passers-by on the Promenade des Anglais, and the vivid sea of the Bay of Angels. It was half-past two. The town was in a state of post-prandial lethargy and seclusion. I had driven over in the morning to lunch with an American, whose portrait I was painting. An unexpected early engagement had summoned my host forth at two-fifteen, and here was I, stranded until four o'clock when I had an appointment with my oculist. I was bored, wondering how I should fill in the time. It's a difficult matter for a man to provide himself with reasonable occupation for an hour and a half at a peculiar unsocial hour of the day in a town to which he doesn't belong.

I was cursing American sitters who began business too early, and French oculists who began consultations too late, when the sight of a little yellow car, surmounted by a vast hat and a white beard advancing eastwards, caused me to leap from my chair. I was just in time to outspread my arms and attract the attention of Tombarel. He signed readiness to pause, parked his little old-fashioned five horse-power car on the opposite side of the way, crossed the road, and sank into a chair by my side. He cast his hat on another chair.

"*Ouf! Mon Dieu*," said he, and all sorts of other things not peculiarly coherent.

"What's the matter, *cher ami*?" I asked.

"The matter? The matter is that I am exhausted. I have been travelling backwards and forwards to Paris in crowded trains. I have just arrived. Ah! this P.L.M.—I can see the Directors sitting up all night, like Torturers under the Inquisition, devising means to add a new torment for travellers. I know not

what dire offence our poor France has committed in the eyes of the *bon Dieu*, but He has punished us by decreeing the Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée Railway. It is the worst railway in the world. There is a better railway from Teheran to Khartoum."

Naturally I agreed with him. What dweller on the Côte d'Azur wouldn't? But it was on the tip of my tongue to ask what was wrong with the Blue Train which had arrived at Nice two or three hours before. Then I reflected that, to French gentlemen of moderate means, Blue Trains were media of travel as remote from their ways of life as steam-yachts. Tombarel had probably passed the night in a corner of a first-class carriage with five other fellow-passengers. . . .

"Have you had lunch?" I asked.

Yes, he had eaten at Toulon. *En deux pas et trois mouvements.* But he was thirsty. He ordered from the waiter a vermouth-cassis—to my mind, as I care not for blackcurrant syrup, a filthy and non-restorative beverage.

"It was on account of that young Guiol, Ferdinand—you know him?—that I went to Paris."

He deplored the responsibilities of a man whom circumstance had forced to combine mayoral with patriarchal functions. As he had married most of the inhabitants of Creille, stood godfather to their children, and manifested an absurd interest in their doings, he was regarded rather as a father of the town than as an official of the French Republic. Would the Lord Mayor of London take a tiring journey to Penzance and back, just because a young citizen of no account had got into trouble? No, of course he wouldn't. But he, Tombarel, Mayor of Creille, was at the beck and call of every ne'er-do-weel in the place. It was a dog's life. He swigged down half his sticky drink, wiped his white moustache, and leaned back with an air of relief, like a giant refreshed with wine. He pulled out a crumpled telegram from his pocket-book, and threw it across the table.

"What do you think of that?"

I read: "*In maximo periculo. Veni in auxilio. Silentium veteribus.*"

Which, being translated into the vulgar tongue, is: "In greatest danger. Come to my help and don't tell my old people."

"Why Latin?" I asked, in some amazement, for the young man in a tiny general store in a remote country village is usually not conversant with the dead languages.

"He was going into the priesthood and had a seminary education. He found he had no vocation, so threw it over. Very likely Madeleine Capenas had something to do with it. . . . Anyhow—you see—he telegraphed in Latin. And

why? Because the messages that depart and arrive in the *Postes & Telegraphes* at Creille become everybody's property in two hours."

"And was young Guiol *in maximo periculo*?" I asked.

"*Mon Dieu*, yes. He is here, now, in Nice, in charge of my good friend, Doctor Isnard. I brought him with me."

"What's it all about?" I asked.

He told me. He told me backwards and forwards, as is the way of Tombarel, in picturesque narration. But I had better set down his story here, in some sort of logical sequence.

Of course Madeleine Capenas was the central figure of the tale, and to understand it we must go back a few years. We must also consider the hierarchy of Creille, the little town of two thousand inhabitants, standing remote on a hilltop in the middle of the wild Maritime Alps. Tombarel, gentleman, man of culture, ex-land-surveyor, and landed proprietor, was the acknowledged grand seigneur of the place. Next to him ranked the old Doctor Baradou, who also possessed a small farm. Then, officially, came the curé, the Abbé Cabassol, grizzled and rusty, a son of the soil. After this more or less official trio ranked, far above all the citizens, Octave Guiol, proprietor of the emporium in the little arcaded Place de la Mairie, known as "Aux Arcades de Creille." He was a man of unimpeachable honourability. He gave excellent value for the citizen's money. When a woman, buying a dress length, challenged him as to price with the tale that her sister had bought the same material in Nice for fifty centimes a metre less, he would say:

"Wait a month or two and see what Madame Visteron says of the cheap stuff she buys in Nice. All this came from Lyons, where everything is solid."

And, sure enough, the shoddy material of the great cheap Nice shop always proved unsatisfactory and incomparable with the slightly dearer products offered by Octave Guiol. Yes, he was a rich man, as wealth goes in the hidden spots of France. He had also bought a few farms and vineyards both in Creille and round about. He could very well afford to send his son to a good school and the best seminary in Nice.

Now we have to look at the other end of the social scale.

Old Capenas inherited from his father the tiniest little long broken-down farmhouse and a few acres of ground. Père Capenas was a joiner and carpenter. His son, Louis, followed his father's trade. He married the daughter of an undistinguished jobbing gardener from Roquebrune. The elder Madame Capenas having died years ago, Louis and his wife took charge of the *mas*, the business, and Père Capenas. They were *braves gens*, honest and thrifty folk, and increased, almost metre by metre, their landed possessions. The child,

Madeleine, was born. She was brought up in the dust and wind and sunshine, among fowls and olives and vines, and sent forth, in her tender years, barefooted, with a crooked stick, to herd the family goats on the mountain side. Until she went to Paris as a young woman, she had never tasted cow's milk. . . . "*Ah! le bon lait de chèvre,*" she would say when she returned to Creille.

Now, between Madeleine Capenas and Ferdinand Guiol, son of the wealthy tradesman, was fixed the gulf that lay between the beggar maid Cophetua and the King.

It was only during the war, when they were children in their teens, when Louis Capenas had been discharged and began his long calvary at home, that they met; the wild, full-breasted, semi-Italian beauty of sixteen, and the shy intellectual boy of the same age. How and when and where they met mattered little. Creille is a miniature place, but the mountain sides provide an infinity of lovers' paths. To parents their meetings were scrupulously unconfessed. All this pristine love-making took place during a summer holiday of Ferdinand.

As I am only telling you the tale as it was told to me, I must skip some years, or, at best, give only facts of certain happenings. Père Capenas, becoming old and infirm, retired from his carpenter's trade. His wine and olive business flourishing, he consulted Monsieur le Maire—nobody in Creille seemed to do anything without bringing Tombarel into it—and at last invested fifty francs capital in the printing and the expedition to those on the coast interested in wine of cards, bearing the legend:

SILVESTRE CAPENAS
(Ancien Menuisier)
Viticole.
Vins en gros et en détail.
Mas Lou Vilboin,
Creille, A.M.

by which he proclaimed that he, Silvestre Capenas, vineyard owner, but lately a joiner, was prepared to sell wine to anybody, wholesale or retail.

But in spite of this brave flourish, life grew very hard for Père Capenas, and the lung-stricken and helpless Louis and his hard-working wife, and for the resplendent girl, Madeleine.

In order to contribute a few francs per week to the family budget, Madeleine went as waitress to the Hôtel du Commerce, the only hotel in the town, on the Place Georges Clemenceau, which, as you may remember, is

opposite the café kept by my friend, Monsieur Pogomas.

The goddess came from the machine, in the form of an American lady, a Mrs. Van Oost, who, in a reckless trip through the Riviera Hinterland, stopped for lunch at the Hôtel du Commerce.

The why and wherefore of all this is obscure. All I know is that the impressionable Madame Van Oost, estimating it a crime against humanity that such beauty and charm should be left to wither in a mountain fastness, carried her off, more or less then and there, as a personal maid, at a salary which, to the Capenas family, seemed fantastic.

This was when the girl was seventeen.

Thence onwards there was a monthly flow of money into the Capenas coffers. She stayed with Mrs. Van Oost, travelling with her over Europe and America until there came a breach. But, even then, when she wrote to say that she had entered the service of Madame de Saules, the subsidy continued. Indeed, the subsidy gradually increased. The Capenas family blessed the name of Madeleine.

Once a year at least she returned, more and more developed in her insolent beauty, yet less and less conscious of it; more and more eager to help *ses trois vieux*—her three old people—on their way. And always she appeared among them in peasant dress, with the peasant girl's modern modification of attire, which she had always worn. And when her father, Louis, would protest, she would laugh.

"You are good, my daughter, to leave Paris and all its delights, to come and bury yourself in this outpost of the world."

"But Paris! There is no air in Paris. Here I fill my lungs. Here I fill my heart. In Paris there are no chickens, no *père et mère*, and no *grandpère* Capenas, and no mountains and no goats. I can't live without the goats which I used to drive with a stick when I was little."

And the longer Madeleine remained in the service of Madame de Saules, the more often did she make her sudden appearances at Creille.

Now the devil of it was that her visits so often coincided with those of young Ferdinand Guiol, seminarist, supposed, by his elected vocation, to have prematurely and hermetically sealed a heart against the temptation of feminine charms. Madeleine Capenas became too much for Ferdinand Guiol. Too much, in fact, for his religious vocation. He threw, according to the old French saying, his priest's robe to the nettles. The good Octave Guiol, unaware of the particular, but aware of the general, saw things with a Frenchman's wisdom, and, absolving him from the sacerdotal career, took him into his own business. After all, he was the only son; and it was his mother, unreasonably devout,

who had destined him for the Church. Octave Guiol chuckled gleefully, yet quietly, as every man does who scores a victory over a masterful wife. Ferdinand was sent to Lyons to learn the mysteries of haberdashery.

It was in after years that the complications came about. Ferdinand declared to his parents that he could not live without Madeleine Capenas. His parents, though perfectly well informed, demanded further information concerning the Capenas family. Poor peasants, grandfather, sire, and mother, stricken with poverty, without a centime of dowry for the girl. It was impossible. As well talk of the *fille* Graubinat, the last of drabs of the town.

But Ferdinand Guiol had fallen irrevocably in love with Madeleine Capenas, and that, as far as he was concerned, was the end of the matter. The other end of the matter, however, was that Madeleine greeted him always with her luminous, ironical eyes, and would have nothing whatever to do with him.

There arose a feud between the Guiol and Capenas families. The prosperous drapers accused the daughter of peasants, who could bring but a derisory dowry, of entrapping by siren arts their innocent and unsophisticated son. They withdrew their custom from Père Capenas, who hitherto had supplied them with wine. Père Capenas forbade his household to deal with the Guiol establishment. This had its drawbacks, as nothing, from a needle to a pair of *espadrilles,* could be bought in the town save at the "Arcades de Creille."

Tombarel, consulted by both parties, was both bored and worried to the limit of human endurance. To the Guiols he said:

"But why this making of ill blood? It isn't as though they were dying for each other. You see very well that Madeleine Capenas will have none of him."

Which, naturally, brought down a maternal storm on Tombarel's head.

And why not? Did the once barefooted goose-and goat-herd think herself too good for their son? Just because she lived as a servant in Paris, could she put on airs? Oh, no! She should be overwhelmed with the honour that Ferdinand was conferring. And Monsieur Tombarel must mark that Ferdinand was approaching her *pour le bon motif*. Nothing less than marriage. . . . If it had been otherwise, it would have been none of their business, provided it didn't jump to their eyes. Youth was youth. *Que voulez-vous?* But this was serious. It was mad, besotted, delirious, on the part of Ferdinand, but there it was.

"And there it has to be," replied Tombarel. "The Capenas family are peasants, but they are *braves gens*. They are as scrupulous on the point of honour as we others"—gracefully he included himself with the Guiols. "They are jealous of the chastity of their women-folk, like all mountain peoples.

Pardon me, Madame Guiol, but the question of an amourette, or whatever you like to call it, could never have arisen.”

“She has cut herself off from the mountains. Who knows what she does in Paris with that face and figure?”

Tombarel felt inclined—so he told me—to retort that such beauty would be wasted on a wretched little recalcitrant seminarist like Ferdinand. But he forbore. As Mayor and Patriarch of Creille, he must soothe the fever of human passions.

“After all,” said he, “the girl is not often here. Ferdinand is young. He will recover. Find out some eligible *jeune fille* in Nice among your acquaintance, and arrange a marriage with her parents, and he will be as gentle as a lamb.”

Here then was the Capenas point of view. Père Capenas couldn’t imagine a more advantageous marriage for Madeleine. He had few ideas beyond the circumvallation of the little hill-town, and Ferdinand Guiol was the richest young man within his horizon. If it came to question of dowry, he had his *bas de laine*, which would astonish a good many people.

“I don’t tell that to everybody, Monsieur Tombarel. But you are the repository of many secrets.” There were many sous, garnered one by one in his figurative woollen stocking. “Even gold,” he whispered in Tombarel’s ear. “But hush!”

“If you can bring a dowry to the Guiols, what’s all the fuss about?” asked Tombarel.

The fuss seemed to be that Madeleine was obdurate. She was the best daughter that ever was, but she stood there a Sainte Nitouche, and made mock of Providence.

“I wash my hands of the whole affair,” said Tombarel at last. “Arrange things as it pleases you.”

Now Madeleine came to Creille at varying intervals, mostly unexpected, some three or four times a year. On the moment of arrival, she threw off the lady’s maid, and, whatever airs she had assumed in Paris, became the peasant girl who, in her childhood, had run barefoot after goats and geese with a stick in her hand. She took direction of the squalid little house, cooked the simple meals, relieved her mother in attendance on the dying Louis, and did what turn she could among the olives and vines, so as to aid the septuagenarian grandfather.

“She is a wonderful girl,” said Tombarel to me in the course of his story. “Devoted. Paris and all the haunts of fashion to which she was called are dropped like a garment. She becomes literally, the *fille de paysan*. And that, as far as I could see, without any thought behind. No hint of playing a game.

Listen, my friend. They are my nearest neighbours. I'm not quite so old as Père Capenas, but we were boys together. . . . I married Louis and his wife. So I knew Madeleine before she was born. . . . These people are of the old mountain stock. It is the fashion of you English, solely on account of our lying novelists and dramatists who for generations have had nothing better to do than to blacken our character—you English—well, not you, *mon ami*, because you understand us—but the majority of your compatriots think that we are a nation of low morals, that every husband asserts a right to every man's wife, and every man's wife is a prey to any man who presents himself. That's all lies, my friend. In Paris, as in every Babylon in the world's history, there is a social scum. In the Bible there's something about neighing after one's neighbour's wife. It's older than Babylon. But France is moral. The bourgeoisie is stupidly moral. Our mountains are not only moral, but fiercely chaste. It's the primary instinct of self-preservation. . . . I'll talk to you a lot of philosophy about it one of these days. . . . What was I saying? *Eh bien, oui*. . . . The *famille* Capenas. I know them, and I know their pride. So I knew Madeleine."

Her family regarded her as an angel fallen down from heaven. As her wages increased, so did her remittances to the family coffers. In spite of Père Capenas' boasted hoard, they would have felt a great pinch of poverty had it not been for Madeleine.

There was a little scene, last year, which Tombarel described to me.

He had wandered down the rocky path that led to the Capenas domain, on wine-growing affairs, and had found them in full *vendange*, crushing the newly-picked grapes. Even Père Capenas was modern enough to use a wooden grape-presser—the treading of the grapes being a matter of his youth—but the marks of the beautiful toil were on them all.

Madeleine, always on leave for the *vendange* from an indulgent mistress, stood before him ravishingly lovely as a Bacchante, with hands and arms stained wine-red above her elbows, and smears of wine on her cheeks and brow. Her flimsy, low-cut cotton frock was stained, and so, from touching hands, were her neck and bosom.

"*Mais tu es ravissante comme ça, mon enfant*," cried Tombarel.

She laughed, showing teeth which flashed singularly white against the brown sunburn, and the wine smears on her face.

"If I please Monsieur le Maire, I am more than content."

Tombarel took the purple-stained squat, semi-shaven Père Capenas aside, to arrange the business on which he had come—help in his own grape-picking. For in these idyllic, primitive countries, everybody helps everybody else. My

people pick for you on such-and-such days; your people pick for me on such-and-such other days. On no two vineyards do the days of perfect growth synchronize. So it is all a matter of friendly arrangement.

There they were, gathered together in the half-broken-down shed, once the work-room of Silvestre Capenas, joiner and carpenter, and now a scene of lusty winemaking. At the back of the shed stood a row of vast hogsheads, the sides four feet in diameter. In the middle was a splendid confusion of grapes piled high in baskets and on barrows, of busy humans dyed in dark red juice to their armpits, of grapes poured in to the great *pressoir*, worked by a man at each end of the lever of the screw, of mounds of pressed skins thrown aside for a second pressing. There was the continual squirt of red juice, and the tap of the pressing-vat into the crude wooden receptacle which, when filled, was passed into the vats; and the air reeked with the acrid, joyous smell of the must.

“Monsieur Tombarel,” said Père Capenas, when their arrangements were concluded, “I am not happy. Why should Madeleine not marry Ferdinand Guiol? Monsieur Guiol was my best customer, and he no longer buys my wine. It is a great grief to me. Listen, Monsieur le Maire, couldn’t you go with a proposition to Monsieur Guiol? Madeleine is not a peasant girl without education.”

He looked around cautiously, and tapped Tombarel on the shoulder and whispered: “She plays the piano. *Voilà . . . Eh bien*, I give a dowry of thirty thousand francs, and I sign a paper—Louis and Celestine, her mother, agree—that the marriage shall be in *communauté de biens*, so that he will have equal rights in the *domaine* when Louis and I are dead.”

“But there is always Madeleine herself,” Tombarel objected.

“You will talk to her, too, Monsieur le Maire. Surely it is better for her to marry a rich man, in her own country, than some rascally *valet de chambre* of Paris. Ah!”—he sighed—“it all keeps me from sleeping.”

So Tombarel took the wine-stained Bacchante into the fresh air, and talked to her persuasively.

“Isn’t this better than Paris?”

“*Mon Dieu*, yes.” She looked at her hands and arms and smelt them. “*Oui, c’est moi, ça.*”

“Then why not?” urged Tombarel.

They were sitting on the rude bench where I had first seen the invalid Louis. She leaned forward, her elbow on her knees, her dyed hands against her cheeks, and stared away across the shadows of the gorge opposite, cast by the mild October sun. A strange sadness and weariness crept into her eyes.

“Well, perhaps. I don’t say yes. I don’t say no. Let them try to arrange things and I will see.”

Tombarel went to the Guiols and broke down much of their opposition. That evening Ferdinand and Madeleine sat together in the moonlight on the Pointe de l’Abîme, where the War Memorial trumpeter gleams white, leaning forward over the abyss in the eagerness of his eternal call.

Soon afterwards she returned to Paris; came back at the New Year for a few days. There was a kind of an engagement; for she demanded a year in which to make her final decision. The elder Guiols, hoping for the worst, assented; the Capenas family and Ferdinand also assented, hoping for the best. Young Guiol certainly was a devout lover.

We come now to the Latin telegram which had summoned Tombarel, the Patriarch, to Paris.

Tombarel went to the hotel mentioned by Ferdinand, in a street off the Boulevard Sebastopol, where his father had often stayed, and in a smelly room had found a semi-lunatic young man. And the young man had a disastrous story to tell.

For the first time in his life he had taken his father’s place on the yearly business visit to Paris, whereby the flourishing “Arcades de Creille” was kept up to date. He had looked around the great shops, visited wholesale firms and given his orders, and the affairs of the “Arcades de Creille” being settled for the day, had given himself up to the bewilderment of the city. Only one thing was lacking—the sight of Madeleine. She must go to Biarritz with her mistress—so she had written—the day before his announced arrival. It was desolating, but life without patches of desolation would be a purposeless thing, devoid of interest or desire. There were also many things in Paris to console the passionate pilgrim, if he took the trouble to look for them. Madeleine’s letters always were flavoured with a spice of literary epigram; she wrote the hand of a lady of high cultivation, and, of course, used her mistress’s heavy and expensive stationery.

Ferdinand sighed, but surrendered to the inevitable. For two nights he wandered abroad in search of adventure. As he went to the Comédie Française and the Opera, he was scarcely successful. But he walked back to the hotel of the Boulevard Sebastopol with throbbing pulses. The broad thoroughfares of Paris, to say nothing of minor streets, being haunted with manifold dangers, he had been provided by his father with the old family six-barreled revolver, and counselled to carry it always in his hip-pocket. It was both illegal and

uncomfortable, but it enabled Ferdinand to hold his head high amid unsuspected perils.

Now it chanced that one Hippolite Dubois, a dashing young man with whom he had business relations, undertook one evening to show him Paris as it ought to be viewed. Not only was Ferdinand Guiol a good customer worth encouragement, but it is in human nature for the sophisticated townsman to delight in dazzling his provincial brother. They dined in the Rue Royale. They went to a naughty little show in a naughty little theatre, and thence to a famous cabaret in Montmartre, where a couple of pretty ladies, friends of Dubois, soon established themselves at the table. Ferdinand had never drunk so much champagne in his life; he was proudly conscious too of his ready-made first dinner-jacket suit—he called it “un smoking”—which Dubois had prescribed as the only wear for such an evening. A beastly set of negroes made beastly noises on beastly instruments. On the glass floor couples gyrated to the intoxicating rhythm. Ferdinand, though he knew little about the art, caught up one of the pretty ladies and mingled with the swaying mob. Suddenly he was conscious of having bumped into the table next the dancing floor, and heard a man’s angry, expostulating voice. He stopped and saw that his clumsy impact had upset a bottle of champagne.

He was about to apologize, but the awkward words stuck in a dry throat. He could only stare. For, fronting him across the table, sat Madeleine Capenas.

It was a Madeleine such as he had never dreamed of in wildest dreams. A Madeleine as exquisitely gowned as any rich American or Englishwoman in the stuffy and glaring haunt. She wore pearls. She wore diamonds. On her pink-tipped fingers were rings, diamonds and emeralds. On the back of her chair behind her hung a chinchilla coat.

He gasped out: “*Madeleine, c’est toi!*”

She regarded him stonily, and turned to one of her two men companions.

“Alfred, what does this gentleman want?”

The man rose, and said in English: “Yes, what the devil are you getting at?”

A *maître d’hôtel* sprang up beside the table. The pretty lady took matters in her own hands.

“We have spilled the champagne of *ces messieurs*. Of course we pay. *Combien?*” And then, to Ferdinand, when the price was mentioned: “Give two hundred francs to the *maître d’hôtel*, and all is arranged.” Like a hypnotized man, Ferdinand drew the notes from his pocket-book. He was still staring at Madeleine.

“But, Madeleine, I am Ferdinand Guiol.”

She shrugged her bare shoulders.

"*Je ne vous connais pas, Monsieur.*"

"You'd better take him away; he seems to be drunk," said the English-speaking man in bad French.

"*Viens, mon ami,*" said the pretty lady, and led the flabbergasted youth to Dubois' table.

Of course he had drunk far too much champagne. But he was sober enough to know that no mistake had been possible. He repeated two or three times over:

"But when I tell you she comes from my own town, and she is Madeleine Capenas, my fiancée."

The pretty lady laughed. She appealed to Dubois, and her friend.

"But tell Monsieur who she is."

And all three told him at once. She was the most successful and wealthy *demi-mondaine* in Paris. Kings and princes and millionaire bootleggers and ambassadors were at her feet. Had he never heard of Floria de Saules?

"Saules—Saules?" . . . Ferdinand clapped hands to a confused head. "But that is her mistress. She is *femme de chambre* to Madame de Saules."

The pretty lady pointed: "*Celle-là une femme de chambre!*" And all broke into disconcerting laughter.

"Who would believe it?" cried Tombarel, at this point of his story, bringing down his hand on the marble table. "Only one who has lived a long time in this amazing world where everything is possible."

Even I had heard of the famous Floria. Perhaps three or four *hetæræ* in a generation, through their beauty and personality, make for themselves a strange semi-social status; and Floria de Saules was one of them. She had a gift of supremacy which, in the social world of all ages, has ever been a romantic condonation. She ranked with Aspasia and Phryne and Diane de Poictiers and Ninon de l'Enclos, and the Du Barry, and such-like, whose mention causes no hand to be lifted to the most puritanical ears.

And I, without knowing it, had seen with my own eyes La Belle Floria—such was her general appellation—carrying house refuse in a tin vessel. . . .

Tombarel's voice aroused me from bewilderment.

Poor Ferdinand, of course, had never heard of Floria. How should he, in his little shop in the heart of the Alpes Maritimes? But he knew that the glittering

woman was Madeleine Capenas. . . . He could stay no longer in the clashing, flashing, torturing cabaret. He made some kind of leave-taking, sought hat and coat, and found himself in the cold air outside.

And, in the cold, his semi-drunken brain concentrated itself on one idea. He must have speech with Madeleine, no matter at what cost. Her fame, such as it was, mattered nothing to him, since, for appreciation of it, he had not the worldly equipment. But his soul was racked with the horror of her profession. His old seminarist training made him picture her as the scarlet woman, abhorrent to mankind. His instincts as mere man revolted at outrage. He had spent his life in the worship of the Divinity of Hell.

He lurked about in the shadows on the opposite side of the way. There was a ceaseless stream of arrivals and departures. Automobiles drew up in the glare of the entrance. From or into them stepped the monotonous succession of men in evening dress and fair women who were merely a phantasmagoria of furs and cloaks and long silk-stockinged legs.

At last Madeleine appeared in the doorway, attended by two men. A car drew up. She entered it while the two men stood bareheaded in respectful leave-taking. The car moved away. He drew a long breath. At any rate she was alone.

His brain worked with amazing swiftness. He jumped into a taxi, gave the address of Madame de Saules, and promised the driver insane money if he would drive at the reckless speed of one to whom immediate arrival is a question of life and death.

“Was that quick enough?” asked the driver when he drew up at the indicated number in the Avenue off the Champs Elysées.

To a sober man it would have been a journey in some nightmare racing-car; but Ferdinand, an insignificant little figure below the electric standard, rubbed confused eyes.

“I’ve gained my hundred francs,” said the man.

Ferdinand drew the note from his case. French sense of thrift had faded from his mind in face of the compelling idea.

“*Merci, mon prince,*” said the driver.

Ferdinand waited. He had sense enough to know that no private car would have traversed Paris at that ghastly speed. She was alone. At this hour of the night she must come home. It was beyond reason to imagine her going elsewhere. He waited.

He argued right. Presently the car drove up. The chauffeur jumped from the seat, took off his cap—Ferdinand almost laughed at the idea of everybody

baring their heads before Madeleine Capenas—helped her out, and rang the bell of the stately house. She turned and dismissed him. Ferdinand heard her say: “To-morrow at eleven.” And the chauffeur: “*Bien, Madame*.” The chauffeur swung back into his seat. The door was opened. Ferdinand darted from the shadow and stood beside her.

“*C’est moi!*”

She drew herself up for a moment, rigid. Then she said:

“So I see. Come up with me and we can talk.”

The lift took them up into an apartment of luxury such as Ferdinand Guiol had never conceived possible as existing in human habitation. There seemed to be endless rooms of endless statuary and pictures and wondrous furniture and cushions and curtains and shaded lights.

Now, what talk took place between them I can’t tell you. I am only repeating what I can remember of what Tombarel gathered from the terrified ravings of the lunatic young man.

In all human probability the conversation could be summarized in a final speech of the lady:

“This is what I am. This is my life. What have you to say to it? To make peace at Creille I took a year to decide whether I should marry you. The year is not yet up. You have no rights over me. . . .”

And he: “You have basely deceived me and my family and your family and all the honest folk in Creille.”

Whereupon he called her by many bad names, and, drawing from his hip-pocket the old revolver, fired.

She screamed and fell. He stood over her for a minute, dazed, and then, all of a sudden, most torturingly sober. Panic seized him. He dropped the revolver, fled like a hare through the flat-door, down the stairs and into the quiet, moonlit avenue. . . . He had a vague memory, when he talked to Tombarel, of walking all night to the hotel off the Boulevard Sebastopol.

“And there I found him,” said Tombarel, “a shivering wreck, in bed. He had not even dared look at the newspaper to see whether the murder was reported.”

“I’ve seen nothing in the papers,” said I.

“Nor I,” said Tombarel. “As soon as I heard what had happened, I left the crazy Ferdinand and went to the apartment of Madame de Saules. Now, see what is droll in this story, my friend. The door was opened by a man-servant—

a *larbin* of the old school, yellow waistcoat with buttons, white side whiskers, the manners of an ambassador."

He narrated the dialogue.

"It is here, Madame de Saules?"

"*Mais oui*, Monsieur."

"Could I see her?"

"Your name, Monsieur?"

Tombarel gave him his card. He also announced himself, Monsieur Alcide Tombarel, Mayor of Creille.

The butler said: "Mais, Monsieur, Madame is always at Biarritz."

"And her maid?"

"Naturally with Madame."

"Could you tell me where Madame is staying at Biarritz?"

"All communications addressed here will be immediately forwarded to Madame."

There was nothing more to be said. The old family man-servant was verity incarnate. Tombarel went away.

"That's how it is," said Tombarel. "Is the young Ferdinand mad, or isn't he?"

"Where is he now?"

"As I told you, in the clinic of my friend, Doctor Isnard, where he will remain until I can see things more clearly. I go now to Creille, where I will make vague explanations. They will believe me. That is the only comfort of my official position. I am a slave, at the beck and call of everyone. It's a dog's life. But, after all, if I say that so and so is so, they must believe that so and so *is* so. Otherwise they must choose another mayor. And"—he flicked his fingers at me—"as long as I'm alive I'm the only Mayor of Creille . . . but I'm more nearly dead now than I've ever been in my life."

He leaned back, very pinched and white and old. Two nights in a crowded railway carriage, and a day and a half's concern with a scared young murderer or madman, had been more than even Tombarel's old toughness could stand. I ordered him some brandy, which revived him a little. But I saw that he was not fit to drive his little yellow car over the mountains to Creille.

"Listen," said I. "I'll take you in my car to Creille, and my chauffeur can bring yours along too."

At first he wouldn't hear of so preposterous a suggestion. He had all kinds of pride, had Tombarel. Eventually he consented. When I pulled up at his door,

he was fast asleep.

That I should stand at his threshold and depart without accepting some token of hospitality was impossible. He professed himself fully rested, made me enter the long low-ceilinged sitting-room with its austere polished Provençal furniture and sent Angélique, the old servant, for adequate refreshment. We sat down to the ancient pale golden “marc de Bourgogne” which he shared with none but me. In fact, his order had been: “*Le vieux marc de Monsieur*.”

“The devil of it is,” said he, after a while, “that I must see the Guiols, and make up some story to account for Ferdinand.”

“That will do to-morrow morning,” said I. “One thing is certain. If the famous Floria de Saules was murdered two or three nights ago, every paper in Paris would have nothing else on its pages.”

“I think he’s mad,” said Tombarel.

It was dusk, and here in the Midi the twilight deepens very rapidly. Angélique came in to switch on lights and draw curtains. There was a ring at the front-door bell.

“*Oh, mon Dieu! Cela commence déjà*,” cried the harassed Mayor of Creille. “Show them in.”

And a minute or two afterwards Angélique showed in Madeleine Capenas in an old print dress, with a black shawl slipping back from her head over her shoulders, and her arm in a sling. She regarded me, somewhat taken aback, but inclined her head in recognition.

“I beg your pardon, Monsieur le Maire, but I heard your car and thought you were alone.”

“I am on the point of departure, Mademoiselle,” said I. “I must get back to Cannes.”

The Mayor of Creille glanced at her arm, met her lustrous and fearless eyes, and turned to me.

“You will do me the pleasure of remaining, Monsieur.”

All the Presidency of the Republic of which he was but the tiniest fractional part spoke with indisputable authority.

“You have come to say, Madeleine . . . ?”

“Something quite unimportant, Monsieur le Maire. I’ll come back to-morrow morning.”

“It is about your arm, doubtless, *mon enfant*? What has happened?”

“I found a little revolver in my mistress’s drawer, and it looked dirty so I

thought I would clean it. I didn't know it was loaded, and ping! I got it in my arm. *Voilà!*"

"You had no quarrel, by chance, with *le petit* Ferdinand Guiol?"

She advanced a step or two tragically across the room to where we were standing.

"Then you know?"

"Mademoiselle Floria de Saules," said Tombarel, with a courtesy so grave that only a glint of irony was perceptible, "will you do me the honour to be seated?"

He advanced a chair. She crumpled down into it. "I'm at your mercy," she said in a low voice.

He patted her shoulder.

"My little Madeleine. I am your friend."

I was feeling exceedingly uncomfortable. Again I declared the necessity of my immediate return to Cannes.

Said Tombarel: "It is very desirable that there should be an honourable witness to the conversation between Madeleine and myself." He told her rapidly of our intimacy and his confidences.

"I see no reason, but I don't object," said Madeleine. "After all, perhaps Mr. Fontenay may not judge me as *la dernière des créatures*, which, after all, is something."

"I was summoned to Paris by Ferdinand. He told me his story. He was afraid he had killed you. Tell me yours." So Tombarel.

She sketched the events of the night very simply, confirming young Guiol. A doctor summoned at once had extracted the bullet, and done all that was necessary. . . . Naturally she had told Ferdinand she was in Biarritz. Also naturally, when the *maître d'hôtel* saw the card of the Mayor of Creille, he repeated his orders; the orders of years among her servants. Nobody from Creille was to be admitted. When she learned that the Mayor had called, had asked not only for Madame but for the *femme de chambre*, she thought of some happening remote from the craziness of Ferdinand.

"It was one of my old people ill or dead," she cried. "What else could I do? I came straight to Nice by the Blue Train. I changed at the little hotel where I always transform myself from La Belle Floria to Madeleine Capenas, and I found my dear ones all well, except my father, who happened to have one of his bad fits—but nothing serious. That's why I came to see you, Monsieur le Maire."

You see, travelling in luxury, she had two or three hours' start of

Tombarel.

At last she rose, and stood, her head thrown back, superb in tragic beauty.

"I must go. My father is ill. I must care for him. But what is going to happen? I am what I am, Messieurs. My beauty, my weakness, my disillusionment, my anger, my ambition, my love of the beautiful things of life, my opportunity, put me in my position. I'm proud of it. I don't care how many stones all the good people of the world throw at me. It's my choice. And with men I am honest. No man living can say I have wronged him. . . . I love my wealth and my luxury. I love the education I have received. I love music and painting and books and the talk of clever men and to feel my fingers on the pulses of life. And I have all that. I, Madeleine Capenas, the barefooted *gosse* of Creille who herded goats! And I've paid for it little more than many women of society who have married three or four husbands. . . . For I have loved . . . *oui, Messieurs . . . je ne me suis pas froidement vendue*! I have lived. I am living. I have everything the earth can offer me. Except for calamities sent by God, I shall never know poverty, although I am not thirty yet. But my heart is torn in two. Sometimes I ask myself: 'What is your true life? Paris and all that it means, or this little mountain top of Creille?' For my brain, my intelligence, my spiritual life, there is only Paris. But in my blood are our olives and our vines. And there are *grandpère, père et mère*—the three who are in my blood too. I love them passionately. The roots of my life are ineradicably fixed in that little *mas* of ours. All that calls me. . . ." She swept a superb gesture with her free arm. . . . "You, Monsieur Tombarel, have you ever doubted my devotion?"

"No, my child," said Tombarel, "but with your fortune . . ."

"Ah!" she cried, indignant. "It is not like you, Monsieur Tombarel, to talk of such foolishness! I've strained the possibilities of what a *femme de chambre* of an indulgent mistress could give them. If they suspected that there was—let us call it—the wages of dishonour behind it, would they have accepted my money? No. You know very well they wouldn't. They would have wiped me out of their lives and would have starved. Three people, look you, all old—one my father, sick and helpless, living on the poor little patch of vine and olive! Now they are happy, without any cares . . . they don't dream of a life of greater comfort. Am I right or am I wrong, Monsieur Tombarel?"

"You are perfectly right, my child," he said.

"And it's not a masquerade, when I come to Creille, and live like them. It is because my blood and my happiness call me. You believe that too?"

"I believe it," said Tombarel.

"And now, what is going to happen when that little imbecile, Ferdinand, returns?"

“Ah!” said Tombarel, with outspread arms.

“You can tell him from me, Monsieur Tombarel, that if he says a word in Creille to destroy the happiness of my three down there—it is I, Madeleine Capenas, who will shoot him like a dog.”

Tombarel put his hand on her head in a patriarchal way.

“If there’s any killing to be done, it is I who will do it. Leave things to me, and have no fear.”

But Fate had taken things out of Tombarel’s hands for the moment; for the scrunch of brakes broke the stillness outside the little house.

“Who can that be?” he asked, startled, and went out to see.

We heard voices through the open front door. A man shouted, needlessly loud:

“No, my good Tombarel. This young man has confessed everything. I’m not going to risk my reputation by being accessory after the fact of murder. So I return him to you.”

“But he’s mad—fit to be tied,” exclaimed Tombarel. “And, in any case, come in. *Toi aussi, Ferdinand*.”

The girl’s eyes and mine met in a common flash of thought. Swiftly she threw the shawl around her, covering her left sling-hung arm, and stood with her back to the wall by the entrance door ironically defiant.

A stout little man, the Nice doctor, entered in indignant hurry, followed by Tombarel leading a pallid and crazy-looking youth.

“My friend, Monsieur Fontenay—Doctor Isnard.”

We exchanged bows. Immediately afterwards, Ferdinand caught sight of Madeleine, and staggered backwards like one who sees a ghost.

“Madeleine!”

“*Eh bien*—what’s the matter?”

“It’s as I say, Doctor,” said Tombarel. “*Ce pauvre garçon, il est fou à lier*. A lesion of the brain. This is the young person whom he had the illusion of murdering in Paris.”

Madeleine put a hand to a bewildered forehead—I have always wondered at the Latin wit, but never so much as then—and assumed an air of perplexity.

“What are you talking about?”

All the shivering young man could do was to retort by another question.

“But—what are you doing here?”

“*Moi?* I had a telegram at Biarritz to say my father was very ill. I travelled

all night. *Il crache du sang.* I just came to borrow some linen and little comforts from Monsieur le Maire."

"And you—with your story of meeting a lady in Paris, and killing her with revolver shots!" cried Tombarel with vehement gestures. "What does it all mean, save that you are mad? And I who speak"—he thumped his breast, so as to impress on his hearers that no one else but he was talking—"who went myself to the house of Madame de Saules, only to learn that Madame and her *femme de chambre*, Madeleine here, were always at Biarritz. . . . What have you to say to it?"

"But, again, what is it all about?" asked Madeleine. "*Je n'y comprends rien du tout!*"

Tombarel sketched the situation in his vivid way. Fat little Doctor Isnard, very much bored, lit a cigarette. He seemed still annoyed with Tombarel for having saddled him with Ferdinand. Madeleine listened with varying shades of perplexity and indignation. At last she confronted the miserable Ferdinand.

"I, a *cocotte*! I, living in a great house with statues and automobiles! I, killed in a gilded drawing-room by a little nothing-at-all like you! But you're mad! And to drag Monsieur le Maire to Paris and back to tell him this cock-and-bull story. . . . Ah, no! . . . Never again. You go drinking champagne in Paris with *filles de brasserie*, and you see some one who resembles me . . . and I don't know what happens. . . . No, no, *mon petit*. It's finished between us. Go and tell your dear parents what you please. . . . You can also tell them that I am *fiancée* to the chauffeur of Madame, and we're going to be married next month."

Ferdinand could only look from her to Tombarel and gape through the wall into bewildering space. Tombarel gripped him on the shoulder, and twisted him so as to get him face to face. There was a deadly, fascinating glitter in the old man's eyes.

"Young man, go home and reflect on the evils of drink and bad company. This time I pass your conduct by. But the next time I shall be merciless. And—listen well—if you breathe a word, even to your parents, of your hallucinations, I, in my quality of the Maire of Creille, and Doctor Isnard will certify you as hopelessly insane, and you'll end your days in a mad-house. And now"—he conducted him to the door in his large way—"good night."

"Ouf!" said Madeleine, when he had disappeared. But her gesture of relief uncovered her wounded arm.

"What's that, Mademoiselle?" Isnard asked quickly.

"A horse-fly bit me at Biarritz, Monsieur. It's swollen and rather painful."

Tombarel dismissed her.

"Ask Angélique for all you want, *ma petite Madeleine*. And convey all my sympathy and friendship to your family."

He held the door open for her. She passed out, with a little salutation.

"*Bonsoir, Messieurs.*"

The fat doctor looked at his watch. Good Lord! he must get back to Nice. There was an important case . . .

"But, tell me, Tombarel. . . . You don't give a man like me all this trouble for nothing. There's more to the affair than meets the eye."

"Precisely."

"Did the young man really shoot any woman in Paris?"

"I leave you to guess," said Tombarel.

When we were alone, Tombarel insisted on my dining with him. He summoned Angélique. Yes, there were soup and *écrevisses* (the delectable crayfish of the mountain streams) and a *pâté de foie gras*, and cheese and a salad—but if Monsieur Fontenay was dining she could easily kill a chicken. I banned the slaughter. What more delicious meal than the one sketched out could man desire, even in Paradise? But Angélique went out discontented. She had her own singular way of cooking a freshly killed chicken. . . .

"All's well that ends well," said Tombarel, passing his hand over his white mane.

"I hope it *has* ended well," said I. "But what if young Guiol talks?"

"He may talk when I am dead, but not before," said Tombarel.

We lit cigarettes. My special Turkish, which I import from Cairo, are Tombarel's passion, and he apologizes every time he smokes one. There was a few moments' silence. I was still under the spell of the fantastic bit of drama I had just witnessed.

At last I said:

"My dear friend, I've lived among you Latins for many years, and I love you; but my Anglo-Saxon mind will never be attuned to your notions of morality and truth. Somehow you've presented me with Madeleine Capenas, alias La Belle Floria, of world-wide notoriety, as a sort of heroine; you have put the fear of hell into the mind of a perfectly straight although unimportant young man who loved her, and in order to do so you and Madeleine have lied like the very devil."

Tombarel pondered a moment, and, before speaking, waved his delicate fingers.

"Morals"—he flickered the things away—"are man-made canons of

conduct; like a country's laws, which every one breaks when it's safe to do so. But Truth . . . Truth is the divine, far-reaching vision of the human soul. And, as far as my poor Latin intelligence can interpret that vision, it is Truth that has come from my lips this evening."

"But, supposing," I urged, "that Ferdinand Guiol had the character to defy you, and the insanity bluff that you've put up, what would happen then?"

"He knows very well," said Tombarel with a smile. "I would kill him, not only without hesitation, but with the greatest pleasure. We are mountain folk, my friend."

IV

A LADY PARAMOUNT

“Monsieur Tombarel on the telephone, Monsieur.”

“I’m coming, François.”

I left my painting—it was not very important, a bit of background to a portrait—and went down to the telephone.

“*C’est vous, cher ami?*”

I assured Tombarel that no other than his dear friend was listening.

He shattered the telephonic system of Cannes with tumultuous eloquence. I gathered that he desired to see me; so I bade him, with curt English urbanity, come round as soon as he liked.

He came. I received him in the drawing-room of my villa, whence nothing but sea and sky is visible. The windows were open on to the terrace. A mild breeze softened a heavy noon in May.

“*Mon Dieu*,” said Tombarel, looking around, “what a change a twist round a corner can make! Here one can breathe. I’ve been suffocating in an *avocat’s* office since ten o’clock this morning. But there’s going to be a storm. Those clouds there . . .”

He passed his hand over his white mane, loosened his low Byronic collar, and fluttered his floppy black cravat. François, my man, who had shown him in, lingered by the door.

“Monsieur Tombarel is staying for lunch?”

“Why, of course, *imbécile*,” I laughed.

Tombarel protested. He had only come in for a cigarette and an apéritif and a few moments’ repose. But I countered his protests, so that he threw up his delicate hand and yielded.

“*Mon vieux*,” said he, “I wish I could change places with Mussolini. He has too soft a time, *ce bonhomme-là*. If he wants worry and trouble, let him become Mayor of Creille. That would teach him. . . .”

He continued in his somewhat indefinite strain until the entry of François with cocktails produced the familiar diversion. The old Provençal gentleman abhorred, on principle, such alcoholic mixtures; in the unregenerate human that

was my friend Tombarel lurked a secret passion for a dry Martini tempered with one of his Southern olives. I handed him a box of Turkish cigarettes.

“As always, I am abusing your kindness.” He inhaled a puff. Ah! the cigarettes were good! He sipped his cocktail.

“And that?” I asked.

He smiled roguishly as he passed his hand over his moustache and short, pointed beard.

“*Pas mal!*”

“And why do you want to change places with Mussolini?” I asked.

“*Ah, mon Dieu!*” It was a long story—of no interest—only upsetting to that harassed representative of the Republic, the Mayor of Creille. He rose, crossed the room to the balcony, and surveyed the western sweep of sunlit sea and the range of the Estérels, dreaming in its haze of ever-varying blues, and drew a deep breath. He turned.

“There’s beauty in the world, all the same.”

I agreed with so self-evident a proposition. Suddenly he paused dramatically and smote his forehead.

“But, now I remember, I once took you to see the Château d’Ecrabouilles.”

“Did you?”

“*Mais si!* Madame de Castelin . . . I introduced you.”

“Of course!”

I lost myself in apologies. It was the name that, for a moment, had slipped from my memory. I recalled to him the details of our visit with some minuteness, so as to soothe any possible ruffling of his Provençal pride. Delighted by my impressions, he amplified them in his eager Southern way; and we were in the full tide of reminiscence when François entered, announcing that luncheon was served.

He had evoked the memory of an incident over three years old. It was scarcely worth the name of an incident, for nothing had happened.

In the early days of my acquaintance with Tombarel—in fact, while I was painting his portrait—he had mentioned the Château d’Ecrabouilles, hard by, as a building classified by the Government as a *monument historique*, and as coming within the area of the Commune of Creille. I had vaguely heard of this Château crowning a minute deserted village in the wildnesses of the hills. I had not realized that it was part of Creille.

“For an artist, Monsieur Fontenay,” Tombarel had said—in those days I was not “*cher ami*” or “*mon vieux*” or “*mon petit*,” or such-like flowers of intimate address which friendship brought into later blossoms—“the place is well worth a visit.”

Wherefore, on an appointed day, we visited the Château d’Ecrabouilles.

It was situated on a hillock behind the little perky mountain-top town of Creille. You went down a valley and came up to an unexpected conglomeration of dusty ruins, and surmounting them rose an imposing building which clustered around a tall square tower, one of the countless towers of the coast, built, in the desperate old days, as watch-towers and fortresses against the Saracens.

As the car panted up the slope through the crumbling remains of what was once a village, towards the trim, semi-mediæval habitation, and halted before a pair of wrought-iron gates, I noted that its situation was as romantic as one could imagine. For, far away, through rift upon rift of hill, was an open view of the sea; and the ancient watch-tower commanded the view through the league-long rift. . . . When the flash of the galley-oars was sighted on the horizon, the tower became the refuge and the stronghold of the village.

“It was all ruins,” said Tombarel, “until Madame la Marquise de Castelin restored it twenty years ago.”

The Château was an obvious restoration. The old tower had been crowned with a kind of Chinese hat, beneath which its stern machicolations tried their best to look grim. Through the iron gates I saw a courtyard crazily paved, with a seventeenth-century Italian well-head in the middle. In front were a series of rounded arches and romanesque pillars screening a cloister. Above them rose a perfectly comfortable two-story house built in dull grey stone, with leaden-paned lattice windows. The old tower seemed to say: “Do forgive me—it isn’t my fault!”

A spruce lodge-keeper opened the gates at our summons on an elaborate iron-work bell-pull, and accompanied us to the front door in the immediately opposite cloister.

On the pressure of an electric button, there appeared the most exquisitely attired man-servant I have ever seen. He was dressed in white clothes too spotless for an assumption of more than ten minutes. It was no vulgar barman’s kit. He wore a full dress-suit of white; to be definite—swallow-tailed white linen coat, white waistcoat, white tie, white trousers, white shoes. He had, as far as my dazed vision could within an instant appreciate, silvery white hair, and a white vandyke moustache and beard; and the only colour about him proclaimed itself startlingly in a swarthy Italian face and luminous dark eyes.

“*Bonjour*, Mario,” said Tombarel carelessly.

“*Bonjour*, Monsieur le Maire,” said Mario.

Like a Seneschal of old—major-domo, *maître d’hôtel*, butler, are terms too derogatory wherein to express this imposing white-raimented official—he ushered us, in courtly fashion, through the apartments and staircases of a confusing house.

The hall, though it was a day in early June, was dark and mysterious, and shaded electric lamps faintly illuminated Moorish arches and divans and little mother-of-pearl inlaid tables, and a mosaic floor, in the centre of which a tiny fountain played into a bronze basin. The walls were hung with old Persian rugs.

We mounted to a loggia, on which, apparently, several rooms had their exits. It faced the marvellous rift in the hills. A fantastically distant triangle of blue, of a deeper tone than the sky, one recognized as the Mediterranean. It was a marble loggia, furnished with costly simplicity. There were three cool and lovely, blue and yellow Della Robbia plaques. . . .

The white-vested Seneschal motioned us to chairs and disappeared. Presently appeared a tall and gracious woman, apparently in the middle forties. She was fair, and had blue eyes, and wore what it is the mode to call a “period” gown of flowered silk cut low at the neck, with panniers and with skirts down to her ankles. She greeted Tombarel as an old friend. I was introduced to the Marquise de Castelin. As the object of my visit was to make the acquaintance not of Madame la Marquise, but of the Château d’Ecrabouilles, we shortly made the tour of the house under her pleasant guidance. Some parts of the building were old and interesting: others new, and as disconcerting as the entrance courtyard; the whole was an ingenious *pastiche* of all the centuries. Madame de Castelin, too, as she moved and talked in this environment, which one felt to be passionately her own, was charmingly artificial. The great lady in her proclaimed itself through every word and gesture. Yet, while looking at you when she spoke, with her well-bred frankness, she seemed to be looking through you at something beyond you, at something she hoped to see, but could never find. She conveyed a queer impression of unreality.

In the course of our visit, I learned the skeleton facts of her history and that of the Château. Her father, Counsellor of the American Embassy in Paris, had married a French girl of the old nobility. He had died when she was quite young, so that to all intents and purposes she was a Frenchwoman in speech and by training. It gave me a little shock to hear of her American parentage—for we had spoken French all the time; and when, after the disclosure, she addressed an occasional remark to me in English, she spoke the pretty, though

perfect, English of the foreigner. It was only then, however, that I realized that the restless American blood could alone be responsible for the restoration of the Château. Scarcely a pure Frenchwoman would have bothered her head with it; yet bothering, she would have bothered it towards a totally different creation.

Of the history of the Château d'Ecrabouilles, I have but a vague remembrance. It had belonged to the Castelin family for generations. The townlet had been annihilated centuries ago by earthquake and fire. The Château itself had been destroyed during the Revolution. The Marquis de Castelin, whom she married, and who had a very comfortable family Château in the Limousin and a great house in Paris, regarded this ruined tower of his in the far-off corner of Provence as a joke. The young Marquise de Castelin regarded it with eyes more romantic. Wealth on either side enabled her to turn the ruin into a human habitation. On the western slope she had laid out a terraced Italian garden.

While we were being conducted round this, we heard a cry:

"*Maman, où es-tu?*"

And a moment afterwards a girl clad in the most modern scantiness ran upon us. She paused at the obviously unexpected sight of visitors, and murmured a "*pardon*" or so, and then:

"*Mais, c'est Monsieur Tombarel!*"

She upbraided him for neglect. It was years and years since she had seen him. How, protested Tombarel, could an old provincial Mayor keep track of Paris butterflies? The encounter was pretty.

"My daughter," said Madame de Castelin. I remembered, afterwards, the absence of maternal pride in the introduction. She might have presented me to the merest acquaintance. The girl, about eighteen, had laughing charm and was as dark as her mother was fair. She glowed gipsy-like in Southern swarthiness. She had the grace of the tendril of a vine, and her voice was musical.

"One doesn't become a butterfly until one gets out of the cocoon of the convent," she said. "And, you know, I've only just escaped."

This, as I say, was pretty, but not peculiarly interesting. The tour of the property was completed at our emergence into the courtyard with the crazy pavement. I declined an invitation unmistakably perfunctory to re-enter the house and have tea, and we drove off after polite leave-takings. It struck me as rather odd, however, that, considering her courteous reception, she did not express the stereotyped, vague civility of hoping to see me again, should I happen to find myself in the neighbourhood. For, remember, I was not a casual artist, touring from the wilds of Chelsea, or the jungle of the Melbury Road,

but—I may say so without bumptious vanity—a painter well known to her by repute, and a dweller on the coast of unquestionable social standing.

“Queer woman,” said Tombarel, very possibly divining my thoughts. “I have known her for over twenty years. She is the Châtelaine d’Ecrabouilles, and, as the Mayor of Creille, I have had many official relations with her; yet for twenty years I have not eaten the smallest little dry biscuit in her house.”

“Why?” I asked.

He shrugged hugely, throwing up both arms.

“*Mystère!* Let us call her eccentric.”

“But she doesn’t live there all alone without seeing anybody?”

“Of course not. She is *grande dame*. She has a big house in Paris where she entertains royally. Now and again she fills the Château here with guests. You saw the garage—room for twenty cars. Her guests go to Monte Carlo, Nice, Cannes, to amuse themselves. They are all French. Never English or American. Perhaps you are the only Anglo-Saxon who has ever been inside these gates.”

Well—I thanked Tombarel for gaining for me the privilege of admission; and, as the Château itself—although the old tower was classed as a historic monument, and although the house was a palace of all the luxuries—conveyed a lesser sense of artistic homogeneousness than the copy of a Loire château set up by a millionaire on the outskirts of Dollarville, Ill., and as the Châtelaine seemed perfectly glad to get rid of me, I dismissed both the faked castle and the artificial Lady Paramount thereof from my mind. I doubt whether, during my subsequent three years’ friendship with Tombarel, there was ever a further reference between us either to place or to lady.

But now Tombarel, before lunch, had revived these three-year-old memories. After all, they recalled something of the picturesque. I wondered why they had lain hidden in the dark of my mind. The sham castle starting from a genuine eleventh-century anti-Saracenic tower, which commanded the triangle of sea—the band of horizon on which any day might gleam the flash of dreadful Moorish oars—and ending up with a drawing-room of all the Empires, ought to have made permanent appeal to my imagination. So ought, surely, the white-vested Seneschal, Mario, with his astonishing white vandyke beard and moustache; and the slender, corn-haired, unreal lady in her panniered silk dress; and the glowing Southern girl, her daughter. But it required Tombarel’s magic wand to revive all these dead impressions.

“Yes, yes,” said I, as we went into the dining-room, “I remember it all perfectly.”

We sat down to table. François handed the first dish.

“*Mais, dites donc*,” cried Tombarel, with uplifted hand. “What’s this? *Pilaff Fruits de Mer?* . . . Sybarite, Lucullus, Vitellius, you were going to eat this all by yourself? . . .”

“There’s only cold meat and salad to follow,” said I.

“Death itself can follow, for all I care,” he cried, helping himself.

For a pilaff of sea-fruits is a succulent dish, composed of rice and as many fruits of the sea as you can imagine—shrimps and prawns and mussels and *oursins* and shreds of *langouste*, with a freshening, perhaps, of crayfish from the mountain streams, and specks of truffle and pimento, all drenched and held together by a subtle sauce, and served within a circle of little red crabs by way of decoration.

François, who appreciated the tastes of Monsieur Tombarel, had opened a bottle of old Sauterne.

“*Mon cher*, you spoil me irremediably,” said Tombarel.

My cook, thinking that I couldn’t possibly exist during the day on the scrag end of a ham and *disjecta membra* of chicken which furnished forth the cold course of the banquet, had presented us with this sea-fruit dish, the speciality of the house, to the great joy of Tombarel. He forgot his troubles. He no longer envied the unruffled existence of Mussolini. When at last his plate was taken away and he had wiped his moustache, he said:

“There is only one thing a guest can do, and that is to ask to have the honour of congratulating your chef.”

“My dear friend,” said I, “I have no chef, only a humble cook, whose name is Victorine.”

“All the more reason,” said he.

Whereupon Victorine was summoned, and appeared, hot, fat, flushing, half-scared, and Tombarel rose and, napkin in left hand, and right hand outstretched, paid her his compliment than which none more flowery or obsequious could have been addressed to a princess. She retired overwhelmed.

“To great artists tribute is due,” said Tombarel with a flourish.

It was only the accident of the presaged thunder-storm keeping Tombarel a prisoner in the Villa d’Estérel most of the afternoon that brought out of him the story of his present official worries. He was all for going back to Creille in his little yellow Citroën in the pouring rain. I had to explain to him that if his car drove into Creille with a dead man at the wheel, his municipal council would rightly call me an assassin, and to present him with a freshly opened box of the cigarettes he loved, which I placed, with a box of matches, by his side, in order to prevail on the courteous old man to stay.

“By the way,” said I, when we had settled ourselves in the studio, which seemed to be cosier than the drawing-room with its outlook on leaden sea and cloud enlivened only by the angry lightning flashes, “before lunch you were talking of Madame de Castelin.”

His serene features clouded.

“Don’t talk of her. She and all the rest of them have put me into a pretty mess (*dans de jolis draps*). That’s why I’m here—to consult my old friend, Maître Dupleix, about my legal position as Maire de Creille. . . . Ah! It’s a dog’s life.”

He rose and walked about and presently he sat down again.

“It’s like this,” said he.

And this, somewhat re-arranged, is what Tombarel told me.

When the new Marquise de Castelin descended, three and twenty years ago, with a husband, an architect, and an army of workmen, on the Château d’Ecrabouilles, she was the daintiest and most fragile corn-flower of a girl that the country-side had ever seen. Every one, including a much younger Tombarel, was at her feet. The Marquis and herself were a gallant pair. They were in love; they were happy; they belonged to the end of a fairy tale. Like a fairy castle rose the new Château on the ruins of the old. To the inhabitants of Creille, accustomed to changes that took at least half a century to effect themselves, this sudden metamorphosis of ruin into palace within eighteen months seemed the work of magic. When the roof was completed and the flags went up, not only were the workmen regaled, but the town of Creille ate and drank and danced for a couple of days at Madame de Castelin’s expense; and never had there been such a *festa* before or since in the memory of man.

As soon as the place became habitable, Madame, loyal to Creille, chose most of her servants from the town. For their characters she could do no better than consult Monsieur le Curé and Tombarel. Of course, high officials like the chef, the *maître d’hôtel*, Madame’s personal maid, Monsieur’s valet, and the head gardener, were beyond the resources of Creille. Just as one couldn’t have expected Creille to provide a *chef d’orchestre*, or a librarian, or a curator of the picture gallery. But all the *valetaille* came from the little town. And among them were one Mario Zarena, *valet de chambre*, and the prettiest girl in Creille, always “*La Reine des Fêtes*”—Jacquetta Durois—who entered Madame’s service as sewing-maid.

Now, it has to be said that Mario was a handsome fellow, with an engaging manner. He was about thirty at the time, and had led the adventurous life in the

hotels of Nice, and, as single man-servant, in one or two villas. He had ambitions. As second in command under the majestic major-domo imbued from birth with the traditions of the Quartier Saint Germain in general and the Castelin family in particular, he saw his opportunity of becoming the perfect *maître d'hôtel* in a princely house. The perquisites of such a post were enormous. He had visions of merchants of wine, coal, tapestries, sanitary appliances, and such household furnishings as did not come within the predatory province of chef, valet, personal maid, and gardener, encircling him on bended knees, with bags of gold preferred in beseeching hands. Mario, the model *valet de chambre*, quickly won the esteem of his employers.

Now Jacquetta, the sewing-maid, was of a different type altogether. She was gentle and unambitious and beautiful. Tombarel's sentimental description of her, I must admit, was rather sickly. Anyhow, you must realize the flowering of a pretty girl transplanted from an unimaginable dark bedroom in a sour little street, and a poky corner in the tiny shop of Monsieur Guiol, which had not, in those days, developed into the magnificent emporium known as "Aux Arcades de Creille," into a fair chamber, amid lavender-scented linen and dainty fabrics, and the sweet and radiant atmosphere created all around her by the Châtelaine d'Ecrabouilles. Jacquetta, dark-eyed, docile, and possessor of the neatest figure in the world, soon attracted the attention of Madame de Castelin; so that, when Madame's personal maid left for some reason or other, Jacquetta took her place. And Madame loved Jacquetta like a sister, and Jacquetta adored Madame la Marquise. Thus a couple of years passed to the happiness of everybody.

"We come now," said Tombarel, "to the incredible part of the story. But it's true, all the same. Otherwise I shouldn't be trembling as to what Monsieur le Procureur de la République will do to me when he gets to learn what has happened."

Well, the incredible was a coincidence in motherhood. The Châtelaine was preparing to add to the line of the Castelins when, to her dismay, she discovered that, *pari passu*, her loved Jacquetta was in the same condition. The weeping maid confessed her guilty passion for the handsome Mario.

"Madame sent for me," said Tombarel, "Monsieur le Marquis being away on business in Paris. What was to be done? Mario must marry Jacquetta out of hand. 'But Madame,' I cried, 'this scoundrel of a Mario has a wife in Vence. They were married before me five years ago, and she isn't dead yet.' "

" 'He must leave the house at once,' said Madame. And it was I who told him to pack his box and disappear from Creille."

Tombarel's dark eyes glowed, and he pointed the dramatic finger of a

patriarch expelling an unwilling member from the congregation.

Monsieur le Marquis came post-haste. He was for casting Jacquetta out also. But Madame would not hear of it. On the contrary, as the time of the two women approached they grew very near to each other. Never did girl-mother expect to pay less penalty than Jacquetta. Madame de Castelin, perhaps ever so little unbalanced, insisted on the same care being taken of Jacquetta as of herself. Raoul de Castelin, worshipping his wife and by her worshipped, had nothing to say in the matter. The maid was installed in the next room to the mistress. . . .

To this day Tombarel is at a loss to account for the desperate illness of both women. Was it damp in the walls of the new wing of the Château where they lay? Or faulty sanitation? Or——? He could apply no other alternative. But they were both at the point of death. It was the worst November known in the Midi. Tempests and rains and floods hampered trains and brought sides of mountains down on the main road from Nice, so that Creille and the Château d'Ecrabouilles were cut off for a fortnight from the outside world, and neither the families of Monsieur and Madame, nor the great doctor from Paris could arrive in time. There was only the old Doctor Carabousel of Creille, long since dead.

Raoul de Castelin, at his wits' end, summoned Tombarel to keep him company.

I must condense into the merest statement of fact Tombarel's vivid and detailed account of the happenings of one last night of howling tempest. When thunder and lightning and hail and everything dreadful centre themselves on a building on top of a hill in the middle of a mountain range, the racket is that of hell, and the terror inspired that of the Destroying Angel. On that night two children were born, one dead, one living, and of the two mothers only one survived.

Three men stood ashen-faced in the corridor outside the adjoining rooms, Raoul de Castelin, Dr. Carabousel, and Tombarel.

"Why not? Who is to know?" said Raoul de Castelin. "When she recovers consciousness and finds a dead child, she'll die. If she finds a living child, she may recover."

And so, with the help of the nurse, or village midwife, sworn to secrecy, the living child of the dead Jacquetta replaced the dead baby of the yet living Marquise de Castelin. In consequence of which, all four of them, including the Officier de l'État Civil, the Mayor of Creille, august representative of the State, committed the unpardonable crime of making false entries—a death and a birth—in the sacred registers of the French Republic!

“You see,” said Tombarel, “that, as I said, I am *dans de beaux draps*! And that isn’t all!”

Said I, somewhat confused by his picturesque narrative:

“Then the young lady I saw three years ago . . . ?”

Tombarel threw up his arms.

“Naturally. She is the daughter of Jacquetta and that rascal of a Mario, the *maître d’hôtel* you saw when I took you to visit the Château.”

“But,” said I, “I don’t quite understand. Does the blonde Madame de Castelin believe that the dark little girl is her daughter?”

“If you interrupt me like this, *cher ami*” said Tombarel, lighting a cigarette, “how can I get on with my story?” He threw away the match. “She came back to life and found the baby. That ought to be enough for any woman. And she had a husband who adored her; unfortunately he died two years afterwards—killed in a motor accident. Ah! Twenty years isn’t such a long time as it seems. . . . People broke their necks in automobiles, just as they do to-day. If it had not been an automobile, it would have been a horse—he was that kind of a man. . . . Madame de Castelin never quite recovered from the shock. She is a little eccentric, even now, as doubtless you observed.”

He paused, and lit another cigarette. “This story I am telling you,” he suddenly remarked, “is not one of mad gaiety.”

I made polite reply that it was very interesting to me who had had the privilege of meeting Madame de Castelin.

“There are so many deaths in it,” said Tombarel, “that you may find it morbid. The next death was that of the old Dr. Carabousel. And, soon after, Madame Zarena.”

“Who?” I asked.

“The wife of Mario. I told his name. Mario Zarena. . . . She died in Vence, where he had rejoined her, and had lived the model life of the good husband and perfect little inn-keeper. . . . Then one day he came to me. ‘Monsieur Tombarel, my heart is broken. I can’t carry on the *auberge* at Vence without my good Zénobie. It seems that all I love die. *La pauvre petite Jacquetta*. . . . I want to retire from the world. Do you think Madame la Marquise would take me back into her service? She, too, has greatly suffered.’ Save for his fault with Jacquetta, he had lived an irreproachable life. I said: ‘Go yourself to Madame la Marquise, and for your character you can count on me.’ And behold, in a day or two he comes to me again, saying that he is installed as *maître d’hôtel* in the Château d’Ecrabouilles. . . . And then arose a situation which, for many years, I did not understand at all. . . . I’ll try to explain to

you.”

All I can do is to trace the main path of Tombarel’s explanation through the luxuriant overgrowth of picturesque and imaginative detail.

Mario came to Madame de Castelin, penitent and suffering. He had loved Jacquetta who, be it said, had never thrown herself on the mercy of Madame as the victim of a base seducer; she had declared her love, passionate, loyal and devoted for the *beau Mario*, to the very end. That perhaps was the great bond between the two women. Madame herself had loved romantically. In her case, wealth, position and what not had commanded the sanction of Church and Society. But there was Jacquetta, by accident cut off from such sanction. All the more reason for the great-hearted lady to take Jacquetta to her bosom. . . . And, afterwards, when the romantic lover and she herself stood face to face, each having passed through furnaces, it is not contrary to the working of human impulses that she should have forgiven Mario and set him in a position as head of her household in the Château d’Ecrabouilles.

You see, the man touched depths. Her own recovery had been long retarded by the tidings she had, of necessity, received of the joint deaths of the beautiful companion mother, and of the child that had been the subject of so much exquisite communion between them.

That’s the only way in which Tombarel—and I interpreting—could read the situation.

Now there comes into the story the opening bud of what was to be the splendid Southern flower, Mademoiselle Sidonie de Castelin. She was a child of three when Mario returned to the Château, the idol not only of Madame but of the household. A beautiful, fatherless child in a mountain castle would appeal to the most frost-bitten imagination. Mario fell into an atmosphere of adoration. That he should bow down and worship was but natural; had he not done so, Madame would have suspected him of unregenerate blackheartedness and cast him forth into the outer darkness whence he came. You see, the stars in their courses warred, from the beginning, against Madame de Castelin. Mario was a man of peculiar suavity of manner and force of character. He appreciated shades. An early established friendship between Sidonie and himself gradually transformed itself into a mutual devotion subtly defined on the part of Mario by the impassable barriers between servant and mistress. It was Mario who, with the astuteness of a diplomatist accredited by a suspect government to the Vatican, set aside the faded English governess and constituted himself governor of the simple pleasures and garden-walks of the child. In the meanwhile, the house ran like an exquisite machine. Madame had

but to issue an order or express a desire, and the thing was done. In those early years of her widowhood she made many eccentric additions to the Château. Mario, Admirable Crichton, was her responsible clerk of works. Thus, as the years went on, Mario's influence grew into a vital force, while Madame de Castelin lost colour and power and personality—and became the woman of my remembrance, who looked through you as she spoke at vague things happening far, far beyond. If you are to believe Tombarel, she looked through Sidonie in the same fashion.

You must not, however, imagine a disconsolate widow living desolate with her rosebud daughter on the top of a mountain crag. Paris saw her for a few months of the year, and, as during her brief married life, she had a short winter season of hospitality when she entertained personages of the great world at the Château d'Ecrabouilles. Mario made himself Master of all such Ceremonies.

"It was to impress himself, *ce sacré bonhomme*." said Tombarel, "upon the guests, and show that he was not the common *maître d'hôtel* into whose hands one could slip a hundred-franc note, that he dared to grow the little pointed beard and moustache. Did you ever see a butler in your life with a beard and moustache like an ambassador? He invented it, *le sale type*, to give himself importance! There were many other ways of making money than accepting *pourboires*."

Mario, then, became a personage—a Chamberlain, a Comptroller of the Household, an administrator of careless wealth; yet Admirable Crichton all the same, and ever the devoted slave of Mademoiselle Sidonie de Castelin.

During the war the Château became a convalescent home. Sidonie was slipped into a convent. Madame flitted through the place, unreal yet efficient. Mario, *réformé* after six months' warfare, thanks to Madame's insistence on the precarious condition of his heart, came back to the Convalescent Home as its responsible head.

The war over, everything went on much as it had done before. The depreciation of her husband's fortune caused Madame de Castelin no great anxiety. Her own American fortune stood solid.

Again I interrupted Tombarel. This general sketch of affairs was growing unusually tedious. I wanted to know what all the fuss was about. One can be interested in ancient history up to a point. . . . The point to which he seemed to have reached was my meeting with Madame and Mademoiselle de Castelin and the apparent villain of the piece, Mario, three years before.

"Listen," said Tombarel oracularly.

Sidonie had grown into a very beautiful young woman, and many gallants, scions of impoverished noble houses of France, came a-wooing. More dowagers still, living on great names and little else besides, in crumbling Châteaux all over France, came a-match-making. Again I must remind you that Madame de Castelin had identified herself with the old French aristocracy, and, as far as admission to the Château d’Ecrabouilles and still further the bestowal of her daughter in marriage was concerned, had flung forth the wordless advertisement that no English, American, Italian, Greek or Argentine need apply. But Sidonie, for reasons known to her own heart, found to her taste none of the pretendants to her hand and fortune. Her mother frowned and sighed. Outwardly she had kept in touch with the modern world, but inwardly her development had been arrested on the day of her husband’s death. Sidonie was a girl of modern growth, nutured, God knows how, on the spirit of feminine freedom. She had lived with her mother in a curiously remote intimacy.

“*Mais, dis donc, maman,*” she would say. “This Gaston de Feuillères. I don’t know him. I’ve only seen him once, and he struck me as the most more than perfect imbecile that the *bon Dieu* ever made when He was tired. I, spend the rest of my life with a *type* like that, and be the mother of his half-witted children—for how could they be else than half-witted? Oh, no! The good days of Madame de Maintenon are passed. Let me choose for myself!”

Sidonie was a girl of varied accomplishment and charm; also of considerable Southern fervour. It was the fervour, unsuspected by the brain and chilled by the cold mist of memories of Madame de Castelin, that led to catastrophe.

“The most idiotic solvent of human mysteries—being one-sided,” said Tombarel, “is the phrase: ‘*Cherchez la femme*.’ It gives one to understand that no affairs are important save those which concern the male sex. But the affairs of women, *mon Dieu*, are equally important in this stew, this vast casserole of male and female existence. In the puzzle of a woman’s life, you must seek for the only clue—a man. *Mon Dieu!* Didn’t your great Shakespeare say it: ‘If a cat must after kind, So must gentle Rosalind’!”

I acquiesced, with the mental reservation that Shakespeare wrote it, but could not possibly have said it in the weird pronunciation of my remarkable friend, Tombarel.

And in the most peculiarly literal sense of the word the accomplished Mademoiselle Sidonie de Castelin went after kind in the person of one Angelo Zarena, nephew of Mario, and as far as I could gather from Tombarel, a perfectly gallant and fascinating young man. The war had made him. The war had raised him from the humble *poilu* to the rank of captain; it had covered his

breast, when he wore uniform, with the military medal, the *Croix de Guerre* with all kinds of palms, and the cross of *Officier de la Légion d'honneur*.

Angelo was really a devil of a fellow. But in his efforts to maintain himself in the rank to which he had attained, he had fallen on evil days. Mario, Lord Paramount of Ecrabouilles, informed the dreamy Châtelaine who, though hearing and seeing and smelling in the present, lived in some far-away past, that she needed an *intendant*, or steward, or bailiff, or secretary—no matter what. Then the penniless hero was installed in the Château at a substantial salary.

"You may imagine," said Tombarel, "that the good Mario no longer lived in the servants' hall. He had his own suite of apartments. He ate in his own *petit salon*, and the chef brought him up the menu, just as he did to Madame la Marquise. Thus you see uncle and nephew beautifully lodged and cared for. . . . And, mind you, all this time, the devoted friendship between Mario and Sidonie continued. She stood between Mario and Madame, whenever Madame revolted against Mario's autocracy. . . . 'But, Maman, what do you know about it? The good Mario is devoted to us.' . . . And so on, and so forth."

So the handsome and romantic Angelo took up his abode in the Château, and Sidonie fell incontinently in love with him. He with her.

"And—*voilà*," said Tombarel. "One fine day—flight, elopement. Mademoiselle de Castelin, the bearer of one of the greatest names in France, the heiress of American millions, goes off, *sans tambour ni trompette*, with the soldier of fortune, Angelo Zarena. Can you understand that?"

"Why, yes," I answered modestly. "The call of the blood. He was her own cousin."

Tombarel threw himself back in his chair and his jaw fell.

"I never thought an Englishman could comprehend that!" Perhaps the greatest barrier between us and the Latin races is their preconceived idea of our psychological obtuseness.

"*Eh bien!*" said he, with a gesture of admission. . . . "You will all the more appreciate what follows."

It was a maid who, rushing into Madame's bedroom at seven o'clock in the morning, had given her the startling news that Mademoiselle's bed had not been slept in, that hurried packing had obviously taken place, and that neither she nor the *beau sabreur* of an Angelo Zarena were to be found within the precincts of the Château. The whole staff were overwhelmed by consternation, most of all Monsieur Mario, who desired, at Madame's pleasure, the

instructions of Madame la Marquise.

Madame de Castelin rose from her bed with the air of a *ci-devant* awakened to take her place in the tumbrils of the Revolution. With the assistance of the maid, garrulous and shaking with excitement, she made a careful toilette, and entered her boudoir.

“Send Monsieur Mario to me.”

Mario appeared, attired in a neat lounge suit—it was only later in the morning that he changed into the white linen of his predilection—and looking, with his sleek, well-trimmed silvery hair and white pointed beard and well-cut dark face, as handsome a man of fifty as one could hope to meet on a May morning.

“It is true, Mario?”

“Yes, Madame.”

“What have you to say about it?”

She stood unemotional, cold-eyed, accusing.

“I know as much about it as Madame la Marquise.”

“Where are they?”

“How should I know, Madame?” asked Mario.

“You will telephone at once to Monsieur Tombarel and the Commissaire de Police.”

“I think, Madame, it would be better to see Monsieur le Maire, and obtain his advice respecting the police.”

Mario went to a telephone in a corner of the room and summoned Tombarel on behalf of Madame. It never occurs to a Frenchman that human beings are not up and doing in the comparatively small hours of the morning. Monsieur le Maire would come at once.

“You knew that this was going on between Mademoiselle and——?” She waved a disdainful hand.

“I permit myself,” said Mario, with a bow, “to recall to Madame la Marquise that I have loved Mademoiselle all these years like my own daughter. I will go further and say that, if I were her father, I would entrust her, in all confidence, to my nephew Angelo, who is a remarkably fine fellow.”

Thus far Tombarel was able to repeat a coherent hearsay account of the conversation. When, half an hour afterwards, he was shown into the room, he found Madame de Castelin sitting in a straight-backed Empire chair, a drawn-faced ghost of a woman, and Mario comfortably sprawling on a divan with his back to the wall. Mario sprang up, as soon as Tombarel entered.

“My old friend,” said Madame de Castelin, in a toneless voice, “I have sent for you at a time of great crisis.”

Tombarel looked from one to the other. A slant of morning sunshine cleft the polished floor between them.

“Indeed, Madame . . .”

“Monsieur Mario Zarena has done me the honour of asking me to marry him.”

Tombarel turned on the serving man.

“*Toi, Mario? Tu es fou!*”

“I’m not in the habit of being addressed as ‘*tu,*’ Monsieur le Maire.”

“You’ll have to get used to it if you go on talking to me,” cried Tombarel, still using the familiar and, in this case, contemptuous second person singular. “And you, Madame la Marquise?”

Madame de Castelin made an ineffectual gesture with her thin hands.

“Sidonie ran away last night with Angelo.”

“Angelo?”

“My nephew,” said Mario.

“*Mon Dieu!*” cried Tombarel, plumping down upon a seat.

It was not fair to land a man in a situation so fantastic at that hour of the morning. And, instead of Madame storming in furious indignation, there she sat with haggard face below the mass of dyed corn-coloured hair, a bloodless and emotionless being.

“Permit me, Monsieur le Maire,” said Mario in his suavest manner. “Allow me to explain. It is true that Mademoiselle de Castelin has run away with Capitaine Angelo Zarena—I deplore it. But it is an accomplished fact. My nephew must marry her as soon as possible. Madame will not give her consent, and consent is necessary, seeing that Mademoiselle is not yet quite twenty-one. Then I have to tell Madame la Marquise, reluctantly, that it is I who will give the consent, seeing that Mademoiselle Sidonie is my daughter . . . and of my poor Jacquetta who died in this Château so many years ago.”

“What abominations are you talking?” cried Tombarel, springing up.

“You know even more about it than I do, Monsieur le Maire,” said Mario. “Do you suppose such things can happen without people talking? Do you suppose that jackdaw of a nurse—*sage-femme*—whatever she was—a relation of my wife—would hold her tongue? You are innocent in the ways of this wicked world, Monsieur Tombarel.”

“He had the insolence to say that to me—me—who have studied human nature in its elemental conditions for nearly seventy years! It was the last insolence.”

So spake Tombarel, melodramatically acting the scene in my studio.

Tombarel turned to the Marquise.

“Again, Madame, what have you to say to this folly, this conspiracy?”

She passed a weary hand across her brow.

“I don’t know. I am all overwhelmed. Listen. . . .” She beckoned him to approach, and waved Mario away. She whispered. “I am not surprised. I never had the feeling for Sidonie that a mother should have for her child. Then there was something that Raoul told me . . . I forget what. . . .” Her blue eyes looked through him into inchoate immensities. “ ‘I was content with a daughter, but I was not content with a changeling.’ That was what it must have been . . . I did not know. But I felt it. . . .”

“One minute. . . .”

Tombarel, flaming, went to the door and flung it open and gave a sharp command to the serving-man:

“*Hors d’ici!*”

“I retire for the moment,” said the imperturbable Mario.

Tombarel went on his knees by the side of Madame de Castelin.

“*Ma très chère amie,* tell me all that this scoundrel has said to you.”

It appeared to be the prettiest stroke of blackmail, matured for many patient years, that one could imagine. The vulgar side of it reduced my old friend to despair. Look at the crude facts. Mario had known from the beginning of Raoul de Castelin’s desperate yet foolish substitution. He had gained the child’s affection. He had planted his irreproachable nephew in the Château. He had counted on the call of the blood, and things had happened as he had planned.

Then he came forward. Mademoiselle was his child. He could prove it. He could prove in a Court of Law that the wealthy heiress, Mademoiselle Sidonie de Castelin, was the love-child of himself and a peasant girl of Creille. This proof would create a scandal throughout the noble families of France, with whom the house of Castelin was inextricably allied. It would also involve Monsieur Tombarel, Maire de Creille, in most unpleasant complications. The solution was simple: a formal price of silence. Let Madame de Castelin go through the ceremony of marriage with him, the faithful steward of her estates

for many years, under that one of the three marriage settlement laws of France—the system of community of property; give her consent to the union of Mademoiselle with the gallant Capitaine Zarena, Officer of the Legion of Honour, accept him as her son-in-law, and happiness all round would be the result.

Tombarel vociferated and attitudinized majestically; he sent off the semi-inanimate Châtelaine of Ecrabouilles to friends in Paris; but he was eaten up with fear of the silver-haired and bearded saturnine Mario. It is only just to say that he was as much concerned for Madame de Castelin as for himself.

But to me there seemed a side to the matter less vulgar and infinitely tragic. I can only convey my feelings either in a few or in multitudinous words. There was this woman, romantically Latin, with a strain of restless American blood, loving and beloved, widowed in an instant; left with nothing but a child resembling neither her husband nor herself; feeling in her soul's core no outpouring of instinctive maternal love for her; haunted through all the artificial years, which she devoted to vain pursuits, by some unknown terror, some insoluble mystery . . . always groping with her dead blue eyes, through every human being with whom she came in contact, towards something that might be clear in the infinite distance beyond. . . . This aspect of things haunted me long afterwards.

The storm was over. Tombarel rose. It was high time for him to get back to Creille.

"So you see, *mon pauvre ami*, what a desperate mess we're in, Madame de Castelin and I. She is willing to give her consent, in spite of herself, to this dreadful *mésalliance*. But that is not enough for the villainous Mario. He must marry her, and become Seigneur d'Ecrabouilles. Otherwise scandal, and the end of poor Alcide Tombarel, Maire de Creille, who has falsified the registers of the Republic."

"But the eminent *Maître* whom you consulted—what does he say?"

"What do lawyers ever say that can ease a soul in pain?" said Tombarel dramatically.

He swept his white mane and beard, and smiled.

"I've wearied you to death, my dear Fontenay, with my insignificant troubles. A thousand thanks. . . ."

He was all bows and courtesies all down the stairs until he drove off in his little yellow car.

A week afterwards I opened the *Eclaireur*, the faithful accompaniment of my morning coffee, and there, on the first page, was an arresting head-line. *Drame d’Amour à Nice*, and before my dazed eyes swam the dreadful reproduction of an unmistakable portrait of Mario Zarena. And there was his name beneath it.

The printed facts were startling in their explicit commonplace. The noise of quarrelling and eventually of revolver shots had disturbed the neighbours of a flat in a good quarter of the town. Alarmed, they rang the bell, and, getting no answer, summoned the police. The police found Monsieur Mario Zarena, the well-known *intendant* of the Château d’Ecrabouilles, stone dead, and the tenant of the flat, a Madame Behague, semi-conscious with a revolver wound in her body. Madame Behague, transported to the hospital, recovered so far as to confess that she had killed Mario Zarena and had attempted suicide. After that, she had collapsed and died.

That was all. Apparently the tragedy had occurred late at night, just in time for the news to be rushed through to the *Eclaireur de Nice*.

It was none of my business, but having nothing to do that afternoon I drove out to Creille to see my old friend, Tombarel. Murders and suicides and sudden deaths, if one knows any one of the dramatic protagonists, have a way of flashing scarlet across the gentle sky of ordinary life.

I found Tombarel sitting peacefully beneath the straggling cedar in front of his house, reading a book and smoking a long Italian cigar. He put the book face downwards on the bench and came to me, as usual with outstretched, welcoming arms.

“My dear friend, what a joyous surprise!”

“Not at all,” said I. “Have you heard the news?”

“In the *Eclaireur*? Of course. I’ve been occupied with the matter all this morning. Ah!” said he, with an ample gesture. “What a relief! Now I can breathe again. And so can my dear friend, Madame de Castelin.”

“I suppose it does simplify things,” said I.

“Simplify? Why, it solves them. Come and sit down and let me tell you about it.”

So I sat down, and listened to Tombarel.

“You know what nightmares this rascal of a Mario had caused me? There was a moment when I felt he had me—like that—in the hollow of his hand.” It was not only a figure of speech, but a figure of action, Tombarel’s long fingers

picturing the inescapable claws of a demon. "*Eh bien!* I said to myself that there must be some way out for us. Then I thought . . ." He tapped his broad forehead to indicate subtle processes of the brain. "A fellow like Mario Zarena doesn't live for eighteen years in a mountain Château like an anchorite, a celibate. . . . There is some woman somewhere, secret in his life. He wants to marry this poor afflicted lady. Aha! we shall see; we shall find out something about this good Monsieur Mario. It was easy for me to do so. The police of the Department of the Alpes Maritimes will tell me anything. I tracked down his little *ménage* in Nice with the unfortunate Madame Behague. . . . I didn't quite know what good it would do; but in his fixed idea of compelling Madame de Castelin to marry him it would cause him much annoyance if I interfered and proclaimed this *liaison*. It was only to put stumbling-blocks in his way—you understand. It is our nature in the Midi to *embêter*, to provide all the trouble we can think of for the people we dislike. . . . Incidentally I learned other things of our friend Mario and the *dea ex machina* that Madame Behague turned out to be. I learned that she was a woman of the most violent temper. I made it my business to visit her, and I told her things I judged it useful for her to know. I left her with more than a suspicion that things would not be comfortable for Mario. . . . *Voilà, c'est tout.*" He smiled at me. "Like this everybody is satisfied. Madame must give her consent to the marriage. She is safe from scandal, and I am no longer in danger of losing my position as the Mayor of Creille. I have always found that the *bon Dieu*, with just a little suggestion"—his eyes twinkled—"has His own way of arranging things. . . ."

He beamed with an air of complete satisfaction. The double tragedy seemed to arouse in him no emotion of horror or pity. A danger was eliminated, presumably by the Act of God, from his little world. Both the lady and himself were free from menace. That was all. He could now smoke his cigar and enjoy, in peace of mind, his comfortable leisure.

He turned and picked up his book. "By the way, my dear friend, you know that I am trying in my old age to improve my English, and *justement* I have come on a passage which is not clear to me. Have the kindness to explain."

He pointed to a sentence. The book was *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

But yet, I am wondering what those expressionless blue eyes of Madame de Castelin are still seeking in the infinite distance.

V

THE FAMOUS MAX CADOL

I HAD made a few purchases at the Artists' Materials shop in the Rue des Belges and had turned towards the Croisette, when a familiar sight gladdened my eyes. It was an old yellow five horse-power Citroën surmounted and dominated by the vast hat, flowing cloak and white pointed beard of Tombarel. The sight was pleasantly familiar. But what gave the familiar sight additional interest was the presence of a passenger who bulged out at the other side of the car. As soon as he saw me, Tombarel raised both hands in greeting, while the docile car went on, nearly slaughtering a boy on a bicycle, until, by a trick of legerdemain, and with a nerve-racking scrunch of brakes and gears and everything that can discompose an automobile, it drew up dead beside me.

He took off his hat, I took off mine, the stranger took off his. We exchanged handshakes.

"*Cher ami*, it does one good to see you. May I present Monsieur Max Cadol—Monsieur Fontenay—the illustrious English painter—he who painted my portrait which hangs in the Mairie of Creille."

Monsieur Max Cadol and I professed enchantment at the introduction. I had seen him before. Where? That good-humoured, yet ironical, large sallow face, illuminated by small, piercing eyes which glittered like black diamonds, —his features were as well known to me as those of Briand or Clemenceau or Yvonne Printemps.

"The famous Max Cadol," said Tombarel, "needs no description. You have seen him a hundred times on the stage."

"Of course I have," said I. A hundred times was Provençal exaggeration. But I had certainly seen him half a dozen times in the little Paris theatres where one laughs oneself sick at topsy-turvy naughtiness. Of course. The famous Max Cadol. His name now was as familiar in my ears as any household word. That jolly satirical face had smiled at one for years from every advertisement column in Paris. . . .

"Monsieur Cadol," said I, "I am indebted to you for many care-free hours."

"Monsieur," said he, "I accept the tribute, although I am the most serious of men."

“Bah!” said Tombarel. “Don’t believe him. A Marseillais, son of a Marseillais whose name was actually Marius, serious? Ah, no!”

Tombarel beamed radiantly. He clapped Cadol on the shoulder and shook him affectionately. He was evidently highly delighted at parading the eminent comedian before me.

“It is I who know him. I knew him at his mother’s breast. Am I not his godfather?”

“It is true, Monsieur,” said Cadol apologetically. “And that is why I am what I am.”

“*Farceur!*” cried Tombarel.

“In the meanwhile, *cher ami*, what are you doing in Cannes?” I asked.

They had come to meet Madame Cadol, who had been staying with friends. They were to take her back in the afternoon to Creille, where Cadol had been visiting Tombarel. Delicacy forbade my inquiring how Madame Cadol with probable luggage could be fitted into the already overburdened two-seater.

Until the afternoon, I asked, what were they going to do?

“He is taking me to lunch at the Ambassadeurs. I am the last of the old Frenchmen who loves to eat beautifully in discreet quiet; but he is a modern. He insists on orchestras that drag your stomach away from your food and on asparagus at a hundred francs a stick. He has *la folie des grandeurs*.”

At being accused of megalomania, Monsieur Max Cadol laughed indulgently.

“*Tiens, tiens,*” said he, “if one can’t eat beautifully at the Ambassadeurs of Cannes, where else in the town could he suggest? Where can discreet peace be found that is not combined with execrable nourishment?”

I caught an appealing glance from Tombarel. I knew the old man disliked the gorgeous palaces devoted to the feeding of cosmopolitan opulence. He dressed like an old Provençal gentleman: lapel-less jacket fastened at the neck, a bit of white dog-collar showing above it, and a great foulard bow-tie, blue with white spots, almost hiding the waistcoat opening. People looked and pointed at him in crowded haunts of fashion. Tombarel hated to be looked and pointed at.

Curbing a prolix tendency, I may say that I persuaded both of them to lunch at my villa. There my old friend would have his discreet quiet and eat, if not beautifully, at least with satisfaction. My cook adores Tombarel, ever since the day when, insisting on having her summoned to the dining-room, he congratulated her, with flowery encomium, on a dish that had peculiarly taken

his fancy. If there were not sufficient material in the house, or if necessary viands were not procurable by telephone, she would have cut the most delicate noisettes from her own plump and well-cared-for body in order to furnish forth a repast worthy of Monsieur Tombarel.

My invitation was founded on gastronomic rock. Tombarel declared that he was always abusing my hospitality. I countered by saying that it was I who abused his at Creille. At last he consented, assuring his *petit filleul*, his little godson, the fleshy, forty-year-old famous comedian, that the noblest work of God was the cook of one who combined within himself the soul of an Englishman and the palate of a Frenchman.

We spent the merriest couple of hours. Tombarel told tales of Marius Cadol, his contemporary at the Beaux-Arts, a pure-blooded son of Marseilles, who made the joy of the studios and the Quartier Latin.

A handsome type, with a full black beard, stiff as a hedgehog's prickles, cut fan-wise; a beard of the Cannebière. A man of magnificent exaggerations. It was he, declared Tombarel, who was the hero of the great Marius story about the sheep.

Now you must bear in mind the fact that "Marius" is the generic name for the Marseillais, just as "Pat" is for the Irishman—and countless are his traditional adventures. I asked for the sheep story.

"It's like this," said Tombarel. "Marius and a friend were in a railway carriage. They passed by a meadow on which grazed a vast flock of sheep.

" 'I wonder how many sheep there are,' said the friend.

"Marius looks out of the window. 'Two thousand seven hundred and sixty-three.'

" 'But how can you tell that?'

" 'It's very simple,' replied Marius. 'I counted the legs and divided by four.' "

A wonderful fellow, Marius Cadol, master of the *galéjade*; which is the special Provençal word for a joke with a swagger. And a fine painter. "*Tiens*," said Tombarel. "That little bit of a market place in the South which I have in my dining-room at Creille, which you admire so much—that is a Cadol." I had forgotten the name of the artist; but I remembered the picture all aglow with golden melons and red tomatoes and bold fresh green leeks and the burning duskiness of the market-woman in her striped apron and scarlet shawl, and the quiver of sunlight through pure dry air.

“A great artist, Monsieur,” I cried to his son.

My tone of conviction pleased him.

“Claude Monet was his master and his god,” said he. “If he had lived—who knows? But, alas, it was not to be.”

Then I remembered Tombarel telling me, long ago, of the obscure genius who had painted the picture. How he had died young, his hand clutching at the skirts of Fame, and Fortune elusively awaiting him, even farther off, just beyond his grasp.

“But what a man!” cried Tombarel. “A masterpiece of the Supreme Artist. Listen, I will tell you a true story. It was a model. She had sat for him. One day she was knocked down by an omnibus. You may think it funny in these days of automobiles that anybody could have been run over by an omnibus, with an umbrella over the driver’s head, and three jogging horses; but such things did happen. She was maimed for life. As a model no more chance. Marius knew nothing about it until weeks afterwards when she appeared in his studio—he had just installed himself in a studio of his own—not what you princes of art, my dear Fontenay, call a studio—but a barn——”

“Pardon, my friend,” said I. “Am I not also of the Beaux-Arts, and haven’t I passed through all that . . . ?”

I had. My God! How I had shivered in that first Montparnasse studio of mine in wintry Paris, when my blue fingers could scarcely feel the brush!

Tombarel made his apologetic acknowledgment—in his grand manner—and resumed his story.

There was the limping model with a rickety baby in her arms, born prematurely in hospital. She told her story.

“What I say is true,” said Tombarel, “because I was there.”

The child, asked Marius Cadol; whose was it? She heaved the traditional *Quien sabe*? shoulders. At any rate Marius had no share in the paternity.

“But, my poor girl, why do you come to me?” he asked.

“Because you have a brave heart and come from the Midi like myself, and all the others from the North.”

“It is they who are the rich ones. They manufacture steam engines and nails and armatures for women’s corsets in the North. Have you ever heard of anyone in the South possessed of money? This is all I have in the world.”

He pulled out a few silver coins. She began to cry. He rose.

“Oh, my God! Don’t do that. Women’s tears scald me like lava from Vesuvius. Here, take this to Père Laroque in the Rue Bonaparte and get what

you can."

He slipped from an easel a finished picture which he had, with ambitious hopes, destined for the *salon*. It was all he could give.

"That picture now is in New York," said Tombarel. "It passed through many hands, until an American dealer gave a hundred thousand francs for it, just before the war. . . . He was a man like that, of extravagant generosities, was Marius Cadol, the father of this good-for-nothing here."

"I have been equally fortunate in my choice of god-fathers," said Max Cadol politely.

"*Mon Dieu!*" cried Tombarel, in high good humour. "If only I had been fortunate in my choice of godsons. Unhappily godsons are thrust upon one by one's friends. A poor innocent—a kilogram or two of flesh with rudimentary features engendered by those we love. 'You will be godfather, my old and trusted friend, to this miracle that Fifine and I have worked between us. You are the only man in the world to whom we would confide this sacred responsibility.' And the old and trusted friend is imbecile enough to be flattered. I, godfather to a miraculous infant? He is overwhelmed by the honour. He consents. And then he lays up for himself enough worries to kill all the Directors of Foundling Asylums in the civilized world. Especially if he happens to be the Mayor of Creille. Ah, *bon Dieu*!" He sipped his liqueur brandy—lunch was over and we were sitting on the terrace—"*C'est parfait.* My dear Max, do you regret—what shall I call it?—the baroque, the rococo, of the Restaurant des Ambassadeurs of the Casino of Cannes?"

Max Cadol made appropriate rejoinder. If he had not adequately expressed his appreciation of my hospitality, it was the fault of his godfather who had been talking all the time.

"*Je te donne la parole, petit vaurien,*" said Tombarel.

He gave the little ne'er-do-weel—fifteen stone of obvious prosperity—his turn.

"I haven't my cue," laughed the actor. "I can't gag at a second's notice. Meanwhile Monsieur Fontenay will allow a parched Parisian to drink in his fill of all that."

He waved a hand to the cobalt blue of the Mediterranean that lay flat before us. My house is perched on a hill, and behind it is the old Rue de Fréjus, now called the Rue Georges Clemenceau, and perpendicularly behind it is the coast road leading to the Estérels. Outside the drawing-room window is the tiny rocky terrace where we sat, commanding the sea and sky and the near islands, Ste. Marguerite and St. Honorat on the left and the long ever-changing Estérel hills on the right melting down into a vanishing-point far away in the

thin aquamarine haze. It was a still April afternoon; one of the days which we inhabitants of the Côte d'Azur call specifically "a blue day." One of the days whose unspeakable gold and azure beauty gives you an ache in the heart.

"It is true," said Max Cadol, to whom I was clumsily expressing myself. "It is regret. It is beauty more than one can bear. It is the nostalgia of immortality."

"He would impress you with the idea that he is a poet and a philosopher," said Tombarel, sweeping his pointed white beard, "but I know him better."

"A man is never a hero to his godfather," said Max Cadol.

"Especially if he happens to be Mayor of Creille," said Tombarel, repeating himself. "If you only knew what I have suffered at the hands of this poet and philosopher and hero."

Cadol lit a cigar. Its blue smoke toned in with the blue of the sky. There was a span of silence.

Presently, with a glint of his dark eyes and a gesture, Cadol drew my attention to the old man, drowsing in his long cane chair. We laughed and drew our seats to the precipitous edge of the terrace. It was only then, while Tombarel slept, that I began to realize the Southern fascination of Max Cadol. Like his father, subject of Tombarel's panegyric, he was a son of Marseilles, born and bred. If he had talked through lunch as he talked now, he would have wiped out my dear old friend. But he had done nothing of the kind. I loved him for his beautiful self-effacement before Tombarel. Here was a man, an artist to his marrow, vibrating to that marrow with imaginative, inconsequential yet delightful truths, who, with a great courtesy, an urbane self-restraint, had suffered genially his eclipse by the septuagenarian Tombarel; an old man, who, although a certain magic in him made them live, had after all evoked, for our entertainment, only the ghosts of the past.

Perhaps we English don't sufficiently appreciate the root principle of French life—the Latin root principle of the *gens familiæ*. Max Cadol's family had all gone to glory. But the spiritual branch, his godfather, remained, to his Romano-Gallic mind, sacrosanct.

Tombarel, however, asleep in the long cane chair, Max Cadol burgeoned into delicious exuberance. He had the born comedian's face of india-rubber which could be contorted into any expression he pleased. He too, it became evident, was a master of the *galéjade*. He recounted some of the malicious pranks in which he delighted. There was one, for instance, in which he took his revenge on a conceited and insolent fellow-actor, one Perodot, in a play. They had an important scene together in which Perodot, at his instigation, was supposed to get drunk on glass after glass of brandy. As on the stage the world

over, the liquid was either weak coffee or coloured water. But one night Cadol caused a bottle of real brandy to be set before him.

“He took the first glass,” said Cadol, with appropriate gesture, “as usual, and poured it down his throat. He choked, he spluttered, he coughed, the tears rolled down his cheeks. I thumped his back. I gagged. ‘*Ah, non, mon petit*, you’ll not make me believe that this is the first time you have drunk cognac. Look at your nose. Once it was red with good wine; now it is blue with alcohol.’ The audience thought it was part of the play and roared with laughter. And there he was, below his breath belching at me all the pretty words his concierge of a mother had taught him as a child. *Un sale type, celui-là*. He recovered. I went on with my part. So did he. I poured out another glass of brandy. He drank it—but this time carefully. There was a bit of dialogue, and another drink—and so on. It was ‘business.’ He couldn’t escape. I made him drink the whole decanter. It was essential to the play that he should drink it, because somebody else had to come in and find the decanter empty. His drunken scene was a *succès fou*. It’s unbelievable how drunk he was. His drunkenness was beyond the art of the most inspired actor. He clawed for support at invisible chairs, he pushed a table half across the stage, he clung to a bird-cage belonging to my innocent daughter who kept canaries, and pulled it down and fell on his face when he tried to pick it up. I had to help him to his feet and push him off at the wings, and his ‘*Cochon! cochon!*’ as he disappeared convulsed the audience. A minute or two afterwards, the curtain of the second act fell. For the first time in his life an audience called for Perodot. But Perodot was far beyond the call of glory. If life is not ironical, Monsieur Fontenay, it has no meaning.”

With such innocent discourse did the famous Max Cadol entertain me, until my venerable friend, Tombarel, woke up. Cadol looked at his watch, and sprang to his feet. He must be going. Tombarel too. The Cadols were his guests—or so I imagined. Cadol addressed his godfather.

“If you think Francine is going back now to Creille, you’re mistaken. I must meet her at the Casino. If there are no *chemin-de-fer* tables yet, she will play *boule*. Ah, *mon Dieu*! that dear little woman is costing me a fortune. Last year at Aix-les-Bains, she won a hundred thousand francs.”

“Then how does she cost you——?” asked Tombarel, perplexed.

“Because, when I keep her company, like a good husband, I lose twice as much as she wins.”

“How are you getting to Creille?” I asked, still curious as to the carrying

capacity of the diminutive two-seater.

Tombarel explained with a great gesture of his delicate hands. “These idols of the populace, they have gigantic limousines of a thousand horse-power.”

“A poor little rickety Voisin, Monsieur, which I gave to my wife a hundred years ago.”

“Painted red. It flies through the air like an insolent flamingo. You must have noticed it on the Croisette,” said Tombarel.

I had noticed it, as I was following my guests in a horse cab, on our luncheon-ward way. A devil of a flaunting up-to-date car. And in it I had observed a remarkably attractive and tastefully dressed woman. So that was Madame Cadol.

“The laws of hospitality,” said I to Tombarel, “don’t seem to compel you back to Creille, whereas they counsel me to keep you here for a while.”

He acknowledged the profundity of my suggestion. Cadol took his leave in a *fioritura* of thanks and compliments. I must do him the great honour of meeting his wife. In a day or two they would be staying in Cannes, at the Carlton. The visit to Creille was twofold in its purpose: first, that he should see something of his beloved godfather; secondly, that Madame Cadol should pay her duty to her father and mother.

At the latter announcement I gaped. I knew all the inhabitants of the tiny, God-forgotten mountain town of Creille. Who on earth could be the parents of the pretty and luxurious lady of whom I had caught a glimpse?

I put the question to Tombarel, as soon as we had seen Max Cadol drive off in the great red touring-car, beside which Tombarel’s yellow five horse-power Citroën dwindled to the size of a row-boat abeam of the *Olympic*.

“Madame Cadol?” said he. “Why, she is the daughter of our friend Guiol.”

Guiol, as you know, was the owner of the vast emporium on the wizened Place de la Mairie, known for kilometres around as the “Arcades de Creille,” where one could buy anything from a sheet of fancy notepaper and envelope to a ball-dress of pink satin trimmed with white lace.

“Guiol?” I cried. “I never heard of a daughter. A son, yes. Ferdinand. I know all about him.”

“The scope of human knowledge, my friend,” said Tombarel serenely, “is so illimitable that there is no conceivable ignorance which is inexcusable. Can you tell me off-hand how many square miles there are in the Republic of Ecuador? Can you trace the descent of Prince Lichtenburg-Fürstein of Germany? Can you tell me the maiden name of the grandmother of the Monsieur le Préfet des Alpes Maritimes? No. Then why worry about your

ignorance of the fact that Guiol had a daughter?”

I assured him that the revelation would not cause me a sleepless night, and invited him upstairs, for this little talk had taken place in the hall. Like prudent inhabitants of the Coast, we stayed indoors, in the drawing-room, whence we could see the beauties of the sea and sky and defy the Puckish impishness of the descending sun.

“Yes. It’s true,” said Tombarel. “Francine Cadol is the daughter of Guiol. It seems to me that I have never ceased marrying that young woman. What it is to be Mayor of Creille! You think it is a tiny speck of nothing at all in a world vibrating with your Londons and Parises and New Yorks and Chicagos. . . . But all the same, it is a little conglomeration of human souls, each as important to itself—and to the *bon Dieu*—as that of Mussolini, Mademoiselle Mistinguett and the Queen of England. There are the same cosmic forces at work in my little kingdom of a thousand souls as in the vast social organization of an Empire. And it is because an infinitesimal burg, hidden from man in the multitudinous bosom of the Alpes Maritimes, like Creille, has its life apart from the vast social organization, that I, *le bon vieux père* Tombarel, Mayor of Creille, have my responsibilities. We are too far from the law to invoke it with any comfort or satisfaction. They come to me who know no more of law than your boot. I tell them this, that or the other and they go away satisfied. *Mon Dieu!* If Monsieur le Préfet knew what I had done, as Mayor of Creille, either he would die of bureaucratic shock, or I should be a convict in Devil’s Island. I have to keep these thousand rebellious souls in order. *Mon cher ami*, believe me—it’s a dog’s life!”

There was something real in his envisagement of his microscopic realm. You must remember that Tombarel was not quite the ordinary Mayor of an insignificant townlet. He was rooted in the soil. He had the tremendous prestige of aristocratic birth. He had his own flamboyant yet keen personality. He was not so much the official Mayor, but the patriarch, the all-deciding god of that simple community of human souls. Although he cursed his responsibilities in fantastic terms, his responsibilities weighed on him heavily.

“You were talking,” said I, “of Guiol’s daughter.”

“It is true,” said Tombarel. “She was a very pretty girl in those days.”

“What days?”

“Before the war. The Thing happened in the January of 1914. The great Thing. But events had naturally been preparing themselves some months before. Francine, as I say, was very pretty. She had light bronze hair and gold glints in her dark brown eyes and a skin fairer than that of Monsieur and Madame Guiol. And a good girl too. Her parents saw to it that their children

had all the clammy bourgeois virtues. So when young Dominique Lemoineau came all gloved and frizzed to ask for the hand of Francine, and Guiol called her in and presented the suitor as one who had been accepted, she said: '*Oui, Papa,*' and to Dominique, with a blush: '*Vous me flattez beaucoup, Monsieur.*' And as far as one could see, everything went well."

Now it happened, Tombarel went on to say, that young Maximilien Cadol had been sternly, wholly and finally rejected not only by Guiol, but by Madame Guiol as well. Max was an actor, a *cabotin*, a member, as far as the French linen-draper's point of view can be expressed in English, of a troupe of strolling mummers. He wasn't even a *sociétaire* of the Comédie Française; not even a leading actor in a great Paris theatre. He was playing an unimportant part in a touring company. Guiol regarded the highly skilled artists who are sent round by the Tournées Baret as scallywags despised and rejected by the capital.

It was in vain that Tombarel pressed the young man's suit. To call the son of the great painter, Marius Cadol, a gentleman, a man of honour, furthermore his own godson, a *sale cabotin* was to insult him, Tombarel. Guiol yielded an inch or two of ground. He had no desire to insult Monsieur le Maire, although possibly, in his heart, he wished the mistral would take the old aristocrat unawares and kill him, so that he could reign in his stead. There was always a great gulf fixed between Guiol and Tombarel; not only the picturesque expanse of cobblestones with its fifteenth-century well-head in the middle of the Place de la Mairie, that lay between his shop "Aux Arcades de Creille" and the Mairie, but that between the bourgeois and the member of the old nobility. Tombarel and the peasant vine-grower, Père Capenas, were close friends, united by all kinds of queer bonds of atavistic sympathy. Guiol could be friends with neither! . . . But, of course, he must not insult the Mayor. Like that rascal of a Habbakuk re-immortalized by Voltaire, Tombarel was capable of anything. Guiol was secretly afraid of him. Tombarel could twist up his moustaches and stick out his beard with a Henri Quatre swagger on occasion, and look very fierce indeed.

So Guiol changed his ground. What income had the charming godson of Monsieur le Maire? As Monsieur Maximilien Cadol drew a hundred francs a week for the duration only of his sporadic engagements, he could be regarded, in a prospective father-in-law's eyes, as having no income at all. Guiol could not give a dowry to his daughter in order that she should marry even the most excellently parented and highly vouched-for gentleman with no visible means of support.

Tombarel had to yield.

"*Mon enfant,*" he had said to Max, then a slender, sallow, india-rubber-

faced young man, “I’ve done my best. But the *sacré bonhomme* has reason on his side. You can’t live on air. You’re not a chameleon.”

“You think so? It changes colour—imitates, doesn’t it? Here is Guiol.”

The young actor suddenly dwarfed his figure, puffed out his checks, twisted up his nose, touched his hair, glared out of his eyes, made his mouth like that of a fish, and wheezed out:

“But it is impossible I tell you. Impossible.”

“*Mais c’est Guiol tout craché!*” cried Tombarel in delighted amazement. “You have a beautiful future,” said he, with enthusiasm. “Why didn’t you exhibit your divine gift to Guiol?”

Max Cadol sighed. “If I were a tragedian, do you think I could have impressed him by declaiming Racine?”

Well, Max was definitely discarded as a suitor for the hand of Francine. That is historical fact.

You may want to know, as I did—Tombarel’s narrations, although picturesque beyond my powers of reproduction, were invariably discursive—how Max Cadol became acquainted with Mademoiselle Francine Guiol.

“*Mais, mon vieux*,” said Tombarel in reply to my question, somewhat wearily, for he resented trivial interruption, “was he not the son of my dearest friend? Was he not my godson? When hard times pressed him and he desired the health-giving air of the mountains, what more natural than that he should instal himself under my roof, the only home he had in the world? His room was always then ready for him, as it is to this day. And Creille is not like Paris or New York, where two human units can walk for a hundred years without meeting each other. It is very simple, how Max met Francine.”

“And did she, in your old poet’s phrase, return his flame?”

“You want to know too much,” replied Tombarel, blowing a cloud of cigarette smoke. “How do you suppose I am acquainted with the repressed sexual emotions of the well-brought-up daughters of linen-drapers?”

That was a poser. “Anyhow,” said I, “Max Cadol was dismissed and, as far as Mademoiselle Francine was concerned, disintegrated.”

“Now you tread the ground of common sense,” said Tombarel. “He was.”

On the heels, apparently, of Max Cadol, came Dominique Lemoineau.

Now Lemoineau, closely connected with Guiol by the business bonds of linen-drapery, was a young man of unquestionable substance, the Managing Director under the more managing directorship of an aged mother—he being

the only child of a flabbergasted elderliness—of the truly great shop of Lemoineau et Cie in the Avenue de la Gare in Nice. Lemoineau et Cie were financially interested in the "Arcades de Creille." Guiol, in moments of expansion at the café, let it be understood that the "Arcades de Creille" had a subsidiary branch in Nice, which he permitted to trade under the style of Lemoineau et Compagnie.

Anyhow, there is no difficulty in seeing how Dominique Lemoineau became acquainted with Francine Guiol. They had known each other for years. The Nice firm kept a personal eye on its interests in Creille. Neither is there any bar to one's imagining how it came to pass that the impeccable young Managing Director of Lemoineau et Cie fell in love with the bronze-haired Francine Guiol of the Venetian skin and dark brown eyes irradiated by golden glints.

I had only caught a glimpse of a curiously arresting lady, and that glimpse, supplemented by Tombarel's picture of her youth, convinced me that any young man who, at first sight, did not offer her his heart, lungs, liver and whatever money-bags he possessed, was but a creature with the temperament of a hunk of protoplasm.

This old devil of a Tombarel, with his gestures and his laughing eyes and his glowing mastery of words, would have made the Ancient Mariner look like the silliest ass of a story-teller that ever bored mankind.

"What was he like, our young friend Dominique Lemoineau?" I asked.

"*Comme tous les moineaux de la terre!*" said Tombarel.

Now, *moineau* being a sparrow, I conceived a wrong impression of the young Managing Director, who resembled all the sparrows of the earth.

On further inquiry, I learned that you could see a hundred of his counterparts during half an hour's stroll through the real Nice unfrequented by English and Americans. Before the war there would be half a dozen of them, any day, at the old Café de la Régence, at the corner of the Avenue de la Gare and the Place Masséna. When Tombarel got down to personal détail, I learned that he was a wise, indefinitely featured young man, wearing thin silky black hair wherever hair would grow on a human face, and dark-tinted spectacles. Sitting at the café he would push his hat towards the back of his head so as to show a high, intellectual forehead. He had his vanities, had Dominique Lemoineau. He was in the habit of wearing grey lisle-thread gloves so as to hide podgy yet stringy hands. The gloves were of correct yellow dog-skin when he made his demand in marriage.

I must confess that what worried me in the course of Tombarel's story was the reconciliation of the physical presentation of the girl Francine of the vivid

colouring with the “*Oui, Papa*,” and “*Oui, Monsieur*,” of the flabby, characterless little bourgeoise who accepted Dominique. It had been my experience, both as a man of the world and as a portrait painter by profession, that young women of Venetian Titianesque colouring don’t say “*Mamma*” and “*Papa*” like blonde-haired dolls whom you squeeze in the middle; or if they say it, there’s a devil of a lot inside them that remains unsaid. On the other hand, cheap convent training in abysmal ignorance, immutable tradition, the inexorable law of Family, the barbed-wire restrictions of a French provincial household, would be enough to reduce to pulp sans volition and initiative a reincarnation of Astarte.

At this period of the story, I had to accept Francine as a nebulous human being conceivable only by an intellectual effort;—and so, I am afraid, must you. Whatever tumults of rebellion may have raged within her bosom, she presented an unruffled countenance to the world. She exchanged tepid letters with her school-friends of the convent, and to such as didn’t know him described her fiancé as a very nice, good-looking young man with a beautiful black beard and a beautiful position in Nice.

“*C’est un jeune homme sérieux*,” she wrote. And when in French you call anybody serious, you mean that he attends to his job and doesn’t play the fool. Lemoineau would devote the same scrupulousness to his duties as a husband as he did to his duties as a responsible man of business. The prospect held no glamour. But joy had played little part in her life. Convent merriment, after all, was insipid; of domestic joviality she had had no experience; and she took it for granted that Dominique, when he came a-courting to Creille, should politely leave his gaiety, as he did his umbrella, in the hall. The remote bourgeoisie of France are still governed by traditions long since thrown to the winds by Paris. As a general rule, Francine only saw Dominique in the presence of one of her parents, when he was on his best behaviour. On the rare occasions when they were alone together his behaviour was of his extra special best.

“*Un triste raseur*,” sighed Tombarel. A dull dog, said he, with his soul enveloped in metres and metres of flannelette. As you will have perceived, Tombarel was prejudiced against linen-drapers. And his prejudice grew all the stronger when, Max Cadol having obtained a Paris engagement, and leaped suddenly into fame and fortune, he again approached Monsieur Guiol, and was rebuffed by the accomplished fact of the engagement.

The wedding was fixed for a date in the middle of January. The period preceding it was one of feverish activity. Madame Lemoineau found a little

apartment of five rooms—*salle de bains, ma chère! Tout ce qu'il y a de confort moderne!*—in the Rue Rossini, where there was always sun between nine and ten in the morning; and, aided by an aged Cousin Hortense who, since Madame Lemoineau's widowhood, had shared in the responsibilities of Dominique's upbringing, she had furnished it exquisitely in walnut. The *salon* suite, upholstered in broad-striped red and gold satin, the broad-striped red and gold curtains, and a blue and pink carpet, guaranteed to be of old Persian design, gave the room an air of fantastic and luxurious beauty.

Meanwhile, Guiol did his best. The wholesale house with whom he dealt offered generous discount in the matter of household linen, and Cristophe & Co. of Paris quoted him special prices for silver plate. Madame Guiol worked miracles in the economic provision of dainty underwear for the bride. They did things well, Madame Lemoineau and the Guiols. After all, they hadn't respectively an only son and an only daughter to marry every day of the week.

The day came. With it came a dozen or so straggling males, some aunts and cousins of the Lemoineau family and about as many of the kinsfolk of the Guiols. The new Hôtel du Commerce at the entrance of Creille, on the drop in the mountain road, was full. A stray commercial traveller, desirous of placing orders for a line of scented soap, had to sleep on the billiard table of the Café Pogomas opposite, where all the population had gathered to discuss the wedding; for it was a wonderful day in Creille. Every woman woke up that morning to the exciting realization that Mademoiselle Francine Guiol was to be married. They whipped their sluggish menfolk into a semblance of enthusiasm. Mademoiselle Francine was not only a Creilloise, born and bred, like themselves, but, by her beauty and wealth, the undisputed princess of Creille.

You see, then, the whole of the crazily built narrow-streeted, cobble paved, wind-swept, sun-glorified, sour-smelling town all agog with excitement from early morning. The crumbling Place de la Mairie, with its arcaded sides draped in tricolour, was thronged. The fire brigade turned up in their helmets. The municipal band, with their weird tin wind instruments and their fifes and their drums, took up their position in a corner of the square. The shutters were up on Guiol's vast emporium beneath the arcades. All eyes were fixed on the windows above, behind which the Guiol family had their domestic being.

Opposite the emporium the grey old Mairie dreamed in the morning's sunshine. The policeman of Creille, a *sergent de ville*—in more spacious and infinitely regretted days his predecessor had been a gendarme with a devil of a cocked hat and sabre—kept a clear passage-way from shop to Mairie. There was excitement when Tombarel, in evening dress, girt with tricolour sash, and accompanied by the Conseil Municipal, in heterogeneous attire—their

susceptibilities would have suffered if Tombarel, *sieur* de Creille, had played the democratic zany and derogated from his ceremonial dignity—marched into the venerable building. There was more excitement when an automobile drove up to the doors of the Mairie, whence issued the bridegroom, also in evening dress, and Madame Lemoineau, in lavender silk and lace of a fashion that might have been inaugurated by a housemaid of the Empress Eugénie, and Cousin Hortense in some sort of unremarkable subfusc raiment.

A few moments afterwards the bridal procession crossed the little square. Guiol, obese, swallow-coated, silk-hatted; the bride, conventionally bridal in white, veiled and orange-blossomed; Madame Guiol, in magenta velvet.

"*Mon Dieu!*" lamented Tombarel. "You see what it is to be Mayor of Creille. I, with the soul of an artist, an old student of the Beaux-Arts, to have to link myself up with the intimate affairs of a woman who attires herself in magenta velvet!"

The correct young man of the expressionless face, rendered more expressionless by his tinted spectacles and the silky hairiness that confused his features, was duly married, according to the laws of the Republic, by Tombarel, Mayor of Creille. Documents were signed. Tombarel reduced his speechifying to a minimum, knowing that he must deliver an official allocution at the banquet, after the religious ceremony.

For the religious ceremony all was prepared in the quaint Romanesque Church, just as you leave the Place de la Mairie by the twenty-yards' long Rue de Paradis. It overlooked the precipitous valley, not far from the jutting headland where, in after time, was to stand the marble trumpeter calling to the wild echoes of the gorge.

There, in the crowded little church, its nave roof supported on ninth-century columns and rounded, childishly moulded arches, its aisles Gothic, its choir grotesquely late seventeenth-century baroque, were the peculiar twain united before the face of the Almighty.

In French sociology one has to recognize this somewhat humorous fact. The French Republic doesn't officially recognize the authority of the Almighty, and the Almighty, naturally, doesn't care a hang for the *République Française*. So, if you want to be married in France, you've got to be married twice.

Francine and Dominique, therefore, issued from the church, man and wife, in the eyes both of God and man. As they re-emerged into the Place de la Mairie, the municipal band, in raucous though artistic harmony, played the

Wedding March. Some vehicles stood by the corner of the Rue de Paradis; a car lined with orange blossoms, just arrived from Nice, into which the happy pair were ushered; the car which had brought the bridegroom now available for Madame Lemoineau, Cousin Hortense and Monsieur and Madame Guiol; a couple of ramshackle victorias, the stock-in-trade of the local livery stables, for the mayor and the curé and the best man and the two bridesmaids; and the dilapidated omnibus of the Hôtel du Commerce for all who could get into it. The rest of the guests went on foot. In the above order did the procession start, preceded by the municipal band and the fire brigade in their helmets; and so did they proceed through the tortuous streets to the modern square at the town's very entrance, in which the Hôtel du Commerce is situated. For, in the *salle à manger* of the Hôtel du Commerce was the wedding banquet spread, the Guiol residence above their vast emporium affording no accommodation for the entertainment of thirty hungry people.

The meal resembled a million other such wedding meals the world over. Perhaps the bride was paler and more subdued than the average young woman with her foot on the first step of the great adventure. So much so that her mother, in a whisper loud enough to be heard by Tombarel, said:

"What is the matter? Toothache again? Did I not tell you last week to go to the dentist?"

"Yes, mama, it has begun again," replied Francine.

But the rest of the company took the inward bliss of the young couple for granted. Guiol, not a man to be accused of meanness, had provided succulent fare. The gay sunshine streamed through the carefully shut windows, soon obscured by the steam of viands, and lit up two rows of faces beaming above napkins tucked into their shirt-collars or bodice openings. There was *bouillabaisse*, miracle of prodigality in the mountains so far from the sea, the home of the essential fish; there was *aïoli*, scenting the heavy air with the delight of garlic; there was a *cassoulet* of Toulouse, a rich brown stew of goose and pork and white beans which the host of the Hôtel du Commerce had ordered from far Castelnaudary itself. No one minded a greasy chin. Wine flowed: wine of the mountains in earthen pitchers, good Bordeaux, a round of Corton with the *cassoulet*, a sweet champagne for dessert. Even the bride, who scarcely touched anything, sweltered in the genial air.

And then the speeches. Tombarel was eloquent. That sweet flower of the mountains, whom he had first known as the tiny tip of a green leaf sprouting from the soil, had been plucked by the dweller in the great cities. Let him wear it . . . et cetera, et cetera. You can imagine him declaiming his epithalamium, with the orator's gusto, but with a loathing in his heart of the obese Guiol, of the magenta velvet-clad and freely perspiring Madame Guiol, and of the

complacent self-possessed young bridegroom who stroked his thin silky beard with ineffectual fingers.

Tongues wagged. The air was redolent of rich food and resonant with Southern voices and laughter. Some wag dived under the table, according to old tradition, to possess himself of the bride's garter. Francine drew back her chair impatiently. "I don't wear any." Whereupon the crestfallen wag emerged to the whole-hearted jeering of the company. But her veil was seized and torn to bits, so that a fragment remained in everyone's possession.

It was a beautiful wedding. But beautiful weddings must end, especially in the treacherous dusk of a winter's day in the South. The party broke up. Some went forth in quest of fresh air and the hooded *diligence* that would at some vague hour take them to Nice. Others remained to talk and finish up the brandy, and the calvados and the old marc of Burgundy that the lavish Guiol had provided as liqueurs. Madame Guiol took Francine to a room where a new fur coat and last maternal emotions awaited her. Dominique, after embracing Madame Lemoineau to whose moist face tears only added an extra glistening and his Aunt Hortense, slipped away too. His best man, perfectly well amused by a Madame Dubois, who had married into the Lemoineau family and was delegated to represent her husband, detained by business in Angoulême, did not notice his departure.

A while later, Guiol appeared at the door of the *salle à manger*.

"Messieurs et Mesdames, the happy couple are on the point of departure."

All rose and trooped through the narrow passage leading to the entrance of the hotel. For once regardless of sunset chill they formed a hedge about the waiting orange-blossomed car. The *demoiselles d'honneur* hurriedly distributed bags of confetti.

"It is fortunate," said Tombarel, holding in his hand the minimum ceremonial quantity, "that they are going straight to their new home in Nice, and will be saved from embarrassment."

You see there was no projected departure for a honeymoon among Italian lakes, Norwegian fiords, or enthralling joys of Paris; the romantic dreams of the Lemoineaux of France are too often chilled by the most practical of considerations. Madame Lemoineau had been firm. Where could the honeymoon be spent to more advantage than in their new, beautiful flat in the Rue Rossini? Mariette, sister of Rosine, the time-honoured *bonne-à-tout-faire* of Madame Lemoineau, would be awaiting them with open and ample arms.

They arrived. Tombarel saw Dominique awaiting her at the foot of the stairs. She, fur-coated over her bridal dress; he with an open black overcoat and a black soft felt hat.

“My heart was stone,” said Tombarel in the course of his narrative. “She looked like Iphigenia about to be sacrificed. If silent curses could kill, Guiol would never have made his little fortune during the war.”

Dominique Lemoineau took his bride by the arm and rushed under the shower of confetti into the bridal car. They drove off amid cheers.

It was all over.

“I left then,” said Tombarel, “sick at heart. My beautiful Venetian Francine! And that *gringalet*! He always had wet hands. Ah, *mon Dieu*. You talk about tragedies!”

He helped himself to a cigarette, lit it and blew a cloud of smoke. “I went home, thankful to have got away from that bourgeois assembly, that negation of beauty and nobility and the essential clean passions of our mother, the soil. I said to Angélique: ‘Get me some kind of a *tisane*, camomile, verbena, no matter what. I want a clean taste in my mouth.’ And as soon as Angélique brought in the cup, whom should she announce but Monsieur Guiol.”

Tombarel informed Angélique that he was fed up with Guiol; with everything cosmic that the name of Guiol could suggest.

“Monsieur Guiol desires to speak to Monsieur le Maire. It is most urgent.”

The Mayor must see everybody.

“*Faites entrer*,” said he.

“And this little Silenus of a linen-draper bursts in to me,” said Tombarel, “with all the suppressed thunderbolts of Jupiter. You will hear.”

I heard. This, more or less, was the conversation.

“Monsieur le Maire, you have committed an infamy.”

“I don’t understand, Monsieur Guiol.”

You can see Tombarel withering the fat and rubicund man.

“You soon will. You saw, everybody saw my son-in-law, Dominique Lemoineau, drive off with my daughter.”

“*Parfaitement*” said Tombarel.

“Then how did it happen that a quarter of an hour ago Dominique Lemoineau was found gagged and bound hand and foot in an upstairs room at the Hôtel du Commerce?”

Tombarel regarded him incredulously.

“You say . . . *mon brave* Guiol?”

“What I say. Dominique had booked a room in the attics—for his *petites affaires*—one must wash one’s hands and do one’s hair before going away with one’s bride. *C’est naturel.* He enters the room. Two brigands seize him.

They put a bag over his head, so that he cannot see them. They tie him up. Underneath the bag they put a gag into his mouth. They lock the door on the outside and they leave him there."

"My dear Guiol," said Tombarel, bewildered by this fantastic happening, "what you are telling me now belongs to the realm of fairy tales. I am struck all of a heap. And, by the way—where does my infamy come in?"

"You know very well who did the trick."

"Monsieur Guiol," said Tombarel, "I was born in this house, as was my father before me. There is no man living who would dispute the fact that I am a gentleman and a man of honour. I am as amazed as you are by this incredible occurrence."

"I believe you, Monsieur le Maire."

He had to. The Provençal and the Scot have much in common on the point of honour. No one can fret them with impunity. Guiol grovelled.

"All the same," said he, "the little Antonelli, the young waiter at the Hôtel du Commerce, thought that a red-headed and red-bearded man who said he was one of the wedding party and took a room at the hotel bore a singular resemblance to your godson, Monsieur Max Cadol."

"N—— de D—— de N—— de D—— de N—— de D——!" cried Tombarel, to the stupefaction of Guiol, who had never deemed it possible for Monsieur Alcide Tombarel, Mayor of Creille, to express himself in such terms of unbridled blasphemy. "And it was that scoundrel of a Max in a black beard who ran off with Francine? N—— de D—— de N—— de D——! *Mais quelle farce!—quelle galéjade de Marseillais!* . . . !"

He rocked in Homeric laughter.

"And my daughter? You tell me she wasn't in the conspiracy?"

"Monsieur Guiol," said Tombarel, with one of his perfect gestures, "haven't I told you that I know nothing at all of the matter?"

"Now, listen," said Tombarel. "We must follow the bride."

The most astonished young woman in the world was Francine, when she realized that the car, in all its horrible repellency of orange blossoms and new husband, was going, not westwards towards the dreadful and dreaded flat in Nice, but eastwards. They flashed through Monte Carlo.

"But I thought we were going to Nice," she said.

"My mother made her arrangements. I made mine. We go for a holiday to Italy. Does that please you?"

He put an arm around her waist. She shrank into her corner.

"Not yet," she pleaded.

She did not reply at once to his question, being too miserable to care. One place with Dominique was as bad as another. At any rate, she reflected, a moment later, there would be people to look at in the hotels in Italy, whereas there would be only Dominique to look at across the dinner table in Nice. On the whole, she was dejectedly glad; glad too, that, contrary to her mother's wishes, she had insisted on taking her trousseau and other personal effects with her on the car. If the luggage had been sent beforehand to Nice by cart, Dominique's Italian scheme might have been spoiled.

"Perhaps it is better for us to go to Italy," she said at last tonelessly.

"May I smoke a cigarette?" he asked.

She eagerly gave permission. Far better that he should smoke than talk. It was not her girlish dream of a honeymoon journey . . . but one can't have everything in this world.

When they passed through the Customs at the frontier, she remained in the car, having silently handed over her keys. In the idyllic days before the war people could go into one another's countries without the worry of passports. The chauffeur from the Nice garage had crossed the frontier a hundred times and was furnished with the necessary documents. From the car windows, among the lights gleaming in the darkness, she saw her first *carabiniere* in cocked hat, tightly buttoned swallow-tailed coat and swaggering sword, and she liked him. Italy would, at least, be picturesque.

At the hotel in Bordighera they were expected. She almost admired Dominique's cold and crafty negation of his mother's authority. After he had registered at the desk, they were shown up to their room. He merely looked in. She would desire to change, as soon as the luggage was brought up. They would dine at seven-thirty. She must remember that Italian time was an hour in advance of French time. With singular delicacy he left her. While she busied herself with her wardrobe and her toilette she began to wonder whether she had misjudged the unpleasant being who was her husband. . . . He had kissed her twice that day. She had shrunk from the pressure of the silky moustache and beard. She shrugged her shoulders. She would have to put up with it. Her mother and a million other girls had done so before her. Perhaps it would be all right. One never knows. He had been very kind to spare her a *crise de nerfs* during the journey.

She was already dressed and waiting when a knock came at the door, and on her word of response, Dominique entered. He took off his soft black hat and bowed.

“*Tu es ravissante,*” said he.

Some unprecedented throb in his voice brought the colour into her cheeks. He moved towards the *cabinet de toilette*.

“May I?”

“Oh, *bien sur*.”

He disappeared. If only he would abandon that long thin silky beard and those eternal tinted glasses and would dry his hands! She sat before the mirror and began to use the burnisher from a cheap manicure case, one of her wedding presents.

The dressing-room door opened. A voice rang cheerily through the room.

“*Carissima di mio cuore, enfin seuls.*”

She sprang to her feet and confronted Max Cadol, young, elegant, clean-shaven, the lights of all the devils of happiness dancing in his dark eyes.

“You?” she staggered back. Asked the obvious questions. “You here? What are you doing in my room? *Je vous prie de vous en aller.*” She went, indignantly to the bell-push. “It is infamous. I will call my husband.”

“Your husband? Who is that?”

“Dominique Lemoineau.”

“But it is I, the fond Dominique Lemoineau, who drove away with you from the Hôtel du Commerce, among the blessings and confetti of our families. Look,” said he.

And he drew from the pocket of his dinner jacket which had replaced the wedding tail-coat, a horrible hairy thing, wig and full beard, and threw it at her feet.

She fainted.

She came to in the arms of the man she had despairingly loved. She lay there deliciously until such time as propriety counselled denunciation.

Cadol lit a cigarette and let her denunciate.

“But whom did I really marry, you or Dominique?” she asked at last.

“Aha!” cried Cadol, “that’s my secret. At any rate, you are here, in Italy, with me, inscribed in the register as Madame Max Cadol.”

“What a scandal!” said poor Francine.

“There are more scandals made in Heaven than marriages, I assure you,” said he. “Would anyone believe that you didn’t run away with me, of your own free will?”

“Blackmail. I am well caught.”

“More than well.”

He proved it by taking her into his arms and kissing her as she had never imagined anybody, man or woman, could kiss. She tingled from toes to hair. She hadn’t Venetian colouring for nothing, the little hussy, as Tombarel remarked.

When he released her, she swayed aside, dazed, and put her hands before her eyes.

“Let me think.”

“As much as you like,” said Max Cadol.

She thought, wandering about the room with hands up to a crazy head. At last she halted before him, and snapped her fingers with a German gesture.

“Zut! Let us go and dine.”

“That’s the whole story,” said Tombarel, who, in his inimitable way, had made this last bedroom-scene dance before my eyes. “Of course he had bribed the chauffeur, and he was helped by his friend, Raoul de Salere, the maddest young man in France. But that is how he got Francine.”

“I don’t think that it’s quite the whole story, my dear friend,” said I. “As far as you have gone, I find it stimulating but peculiarly immoral. There must have been the devil to pay in Creille. What happened to the sinners?”

“They were in Italy, Belgium. . . . Max got ah engagement in Brussels. You can’t get an extradition order for the offence of tying a man up without hurting him or robbing him and leaving him in a room. *De minimis non curat lex*. Max and Francine were as happy as any pair of barbarous infidels. But I, Mayor of Creille! *Mon Dieu*, what I suffered! I, Alcide de Tombarel, was summoned to appear before the Préfet des Alpes Maritimes. If I had not convinced him of my innocence, I would have struck him on the cheek, and, as between gentlemen, there would have been nothing for it but a duel. Only common sense spared the life of Monsieur le Préfet,” said Tombarel, with a twist of his moustache.

“And then?” I asked.

“And then? Well—then the war. Poor Dominique Lemoineau, always the *petit poilu* with his black beard, was killed in the first October. It is not right nowadays to despise these little bourgeois measurers of flannel with wet hands who died like heroes. *Requiescant in pace*—and in the reverent memory of their country. . . .”

He was silent for a moment or two. He went on:

“Max went through the war. He was wounded twice. He has every decoration you can think of. Francine went on the stage and made a success. At the end of the war, I had to go to Guiol.

“ ‘My good friend’—he wasn’t my good friend, but no matter—‘this convulsion of the world has changed all human values. There must be a reconciliation.’ There was. And so it came to pass that I, as Mayor of Creille, had to re-marry Francine. We had precisely the same ceremonies as we had five years before. *Plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose.* The only difference was that nobody was clever enough to impersonate Max Cadol.”

VI

THE MAYORALITY OF CREILLE

Monsieur Tombarel was dying and prayed Monsieur Fontenay to visit him before he passed away.

On receipt of this message, I abandoned my day’s painting, and started off.

Now lest you fear that I should harrow you by the tragic story of the demise of my dear friend Alcide Tombarel, Mayor of Creille, I must tell you at once that Tombarel was not dying at all. He thought he was; which, from his point of view, was all that mattered. But during my journey on that December morning through the winding, sunlit slopes of the Alpes Maritimes behind Nice, I suffered pangs of sincere sorrow. We had now been close friends for some years. Tombarel and his little mountain affairs occupied a definite place in my life. He was my link between the cosmopolitan crowd with which my long residence in Cannes and my profession as a portrait painter forced me to associate, and the simple mountain folk of this land of Provence, land of stern wind and sunshine, which has always tugged at my heart. Tombarel was getting on in years—past seventy—but yet, when last I had seen him, a man of rude health and vigour. Tombarel dying! As well say that the slopes covered with their dark olive trees heavy with fruit were withering into decay.

When we turned the corner of the gorge and there burst upon my view the old, earth-coloured town pinnacled on its hill, with the white marble trumpeter of the War Memorial standing on his jut of rock that over-hung the abyss and sending his message down the valley, the tears came into my eyes. For you must remember that it was I who, coming as a stranger to Creille some years before, on a wine-seeking errand, and then falling so much in love with the picturesque old-world gentleman, its Mayor, as to paint his portrait, suggested the site of this monument. I painted a replica of Tombarel’s portrait which I presented to the town; wherefore I was made with municipal ceremony an Honorary Citizen of Creille. Tombarel was my friend, the tiny townlet at the back of beyond, a spot idiotically dear. The thought of severance of such ties was heart-rending.

Just as I drew up in front of the low red Provençal house, the door opened and an aged nun emerged, her eyes on the ground, rosary at her waist, and a sacred locket or something on a chain, swinging wide of her shrunken chest.

She got into a dusty shandrydan of a closed horse carriage and drove off.

My spirits sank still lower. The visit of so holy and austere a person could only signify that my friend was *in extremis*. I turned my head and found Angélique, Tombarel's elderly servant, in the doorway.

"*Ah, Monsieur, quel malheur!*"

What was the nature of the illness of Monsieur le Maire? I asked. It was a *congestion*. She wiped the tears from her eyes with the back of her gnarled hand. What kind of a congestion? She didn't know. The doctor said it was a congestion. *Ah, le pauvre homme!*

"Can I see him?"

Why, of course I could see him. He was anxiously awaiting me. Would I follow? Monsieur knew the lower part of the house, of course, but not the sleeping apartment of Monsieur le Maire. I cast a backward glance to the straggling cedar beneath which I had so often listened, at lunch or dinner, to Tombarel's fascinating talk, and, with a deep sigh, followed the old woman up the narrow and winding stair.

In a great room flooded by the December sunshine, with windows looking out over the mountains on the other side of the valley, I saw Tombarel, sitting up in bed, reading the *Eclaireur de Nice*. It was a spotless room, furnished in chaste comfort. Tombarel's white night-shirt was open at the neck, showing a glimpse of his muscular chest when he raised his leonine head and white pointed beard. He took off his gold spectacles as I entered and held out both hands.

"*Mon cher ami!* How good of you to come at a moment's summons! That's a friend."

"But," said I, rather taken aback by this robust welcome, "I thought you were at the point of death."

"That's true," said he. "I am."

As I had never seen a dying man so alert, I naturally asked from what malady he was dying.

"*Une congestion*"—he put his hands about his middle—"*C'est très grave. . . .*"

He went into details. Evidently he was having a bad time. The doctor from Nice said it was a congestion, a magic word explaining to the unscientific in the Midi the greatest number of unpleasant bodily afflictions.

"He says it's a congestion of the liver, the spleen, the pancreas, the God knows what, and was for taking me off to his *clinique* to keep me under observation, with nurses and all the ante-funereal pomps. But no. Not for

Tombarel. The old lion of the mountains dies in his mountains. Nice! *J'en ai soupé.*" He declared himself fed up with Nice. "I never pass through that town," he continued, "without thinking of the horrible years I passed there in the disgusting practice of land-surveying. And I an artist. No, my friend, here I am and here I remain."

Angélique entered bearing a bowl of soup and retired after delivering it into his hands. As I was still standing I could look down into its contents. On its surface floated a quarter of an inch of oil.

"*Soupe aux légumes*," said Tombarel in answer to my mute inquiry.

"Angélique must be off her head," said I, "to give you such unskimmed stuff. That layer of oil," I explained.

"The oil? But that's prescribed, *mon ami*. It is to grease the stomach."

And Tombarel put the bowl to his lips and drank off at a draught the oleaginous mixture which, on an Anglo-Saxon stomach, would have had far direr effects than those of harmless lubrication. He wiped his white moustache with the napkin accompanying the bowl.

"I do that to please the doctor and Angélique. It is not a congestion of the liver, lungs, kidneys, spleen, pancreas from which I am dying. It is something far more serious, and I can't tell the good doctor. That's why I sent for you—to ask your advice. I am a lonely old man, without any ties in the world, and you're an Englishman with no prejudices, and my dear friend. I can confide in you." He paused. "But sit down near me. Draw that chair." I obeyed him. He stretched out a long forefinger and held me with his dark eyes. "I believe I am dying of arsenical poisoning."

With a "Good God!" I held up horrified hands.

"That's absurd!"

"By no means. Listen."

Again he described the unhappy symptoms of his illness, which, as far as my casual knowledge of criminology went, seemed to correspond with those in the recorded cases of murder by arsenic.

"But who would want to poison you, my poor Tombarel?"

He wagged his finger. "There are people who think I have lived too long and desire themselves to be Mayor of Creille."

After considerable talk I pinned him down to a name. It was Monsieur Guiol, his *adjoint*, or deputy; Guiol, next to Tombarel, the most respected man in the town; Guiol, the proprietor of the one general store, "Aux Arcades de Creille." Guiol had been peculiarly friendly of late, especially since Tombarel had first proclaimed himself to be slightly indisposed—a little bilious attack,

nothing at all—and had not taken his chair at a meeting of the Municipal Council. Guiol had sent him some grapes, partridges, cheeses . . . all sorts of delicacies. Guiol had a reputation for such generosity. Some years before he had comforted Tombarel during an attack of influenza. They were old friends and colleagues. But ever since the day that Tombarel had put the fear of God into the soul of his son, Ferdinand Guiol, over some affair connected with Madeleine Capenas, Tombarel had been conscious of a dull, lurking enmity. And Guiol had openly declared his intentions of becoming Mayor of Creille. "I am going," he had said, with malignant wit, "to be *Tombeur de Tombarel*."

Suddenly Tombarel grew white, the horrible white of an old man.

"*Oh, que je souffre!*"

Would I summon Angélique?

I did what he bade me and wandered about the ragged garden and stared at the gleaming trumpeter down below on his rock commanding the gorge.

Presently Angélique came to me. The poor man was very ill and weak. He was in a syncope. Meanwhile he had given orders for my lunch. She had already prepared it; and he had prescribed a bottle of Château-Laffitte 1878 which he had been saving for some great occasion in his old age; but now that he would never live to drink it, there was no one—so ran his message—more qualified to appreciate it than myself. Whereupon Angélique, already holding the dusty and venerable bottle, placed it in the sun to warm.

"It comes from the sun," said Angélique, obviously parroting Tombarel, "and it has lain in cold darkness for nearly half a century and it needs the sun to warm its old blood."

"You are a poet, Angélique," said I.

What warmth and poetry, I thought mournfully, would be gone from my life if Tombarel were to die! But somehow I felt that Tombarel wouldn't die. The white-maned and white-bearded patriarch with bright dark eyes, sitting up and gesticulating in his fine artistic way, was no more dying than I was. As for the hideously respectable linen-draper, Guiol, sending him poisoned meats, that was absurd. So comforting myself with these reflections, I sat down to such a meal as not all the millionaire chefs of all the millionaire hotels and restaurants of the Côte d'Azur could provide.

"Listen, my friend," I said an hour or two later, when I was again admitted to his bedroom. "May I speak plainly? It isn't your stomach that is dislocated, it's your brain. Our good Guiol——"

“If you would offer me one of your excellent cigarettes . . .” said Tombarel.

I sprang forward with open case.

“Now I see you’re getting better,” said I.

“Not at all. Since I am to die, I don’t see why I should deny myself a last solace.”

“In that case, why not the Château-Laffitte?” I asked.

“That would have killed me outright,” replied Tombarel, inhaling a great whiff of smoke. “I mean to live as long as possible, so as to torture that animal Guiol.”

We argued the point of Guiol’s animal fiendishness for some time. Perhaps I half convinced him, for, after a while, he retired, as it were, to a second line of defence.

“*Eh bien*,” said he, “I shall not be the first one to be poisoned through a man’s insensate ambition.”

“What ambition?” I asked.

He threw up his white-clad arms—the sleeves of his night-shirt were neatly buttoned at his wrists.

“Why, to become Mayor of Creille.”

He spoke as though it were a question of usurping the throne of an Empire.

“Who was the man?” I asked.

“Its a long story. It happened long ago. *Mon Dieu, que je souffre!* Would you mind pouring me out a dose of that medicine?”

He pointed to a small bottle on the *table de nuit*. It was chlorodyne, time-honoured remedy for familiar and troublesome, yet not fatal maladies.

“Ah! That does me good. . . . Yes, that poisoning affair was a long time ago, when I was young. I was young once, my dear Fontenay, and my hair was as black as the raven’s wing—that is a *cliché*, I know, but I’m too ill and old to invent new similes—and I was a very pretty fellow. I don’t deny I had my little successes. . . .”

I looked at him with portrait painter’s eye, and tried to translate him back through many decades. Yes, he must have been a remarkably “pretty fellow.”

“I’ve often wondered,” said I, rather diffidently, “why you have remained a bachelor.”

His eyes flashed. “Do you want to know? It’s all mixed up with the poisoning affair—the mad ambition of the man who wanted to become Mayor of Creille. I’ll tell you.”

I suggested that, in his present weak condition, the effort might overtax his strength. He literally waved aside my objections. He would tell to me, as a man and a friend, what he had never told to a human being. If, after or during the narrative, I found him *in articulo mortis*, I might bring round the good curé, the Abbé Cabassol, for confession and absolution.

"May I take another cigarette? I abuse your generosity. But it's for the last time. Well, listen."

As usual, I can only tell Tombarel's story in a half-and-half sort of way. Now and then the echoes of his resonant voice haunt me, and my own narrative power seems inadequate to convey his picturesque phrasing, and I must have recourse to a pale transcript of his remembered words.

It was a long time ago, anyhow. Tombarel under thirty, yet already having succeeded to his inheritance, his father's land-surveying practice in Nice and the comfortable *mas* with vineyard and olive lands in Creille. Creille is remote even now, in the days of motors, from the tourist track; but forty years ago it must have been as remote and as God-forgotten a spot as existed on the face of this planet. Once a week a ramshackle, hooded *diligence* transported travellers from the town to Nice and from Nice to the town. A seventeenth-century journey between London and York was scarcely more perilous or more lengthy; and besides, between London and York there were no roads on which, if you slithered, you slithered down into an abysm of death. If you were too proud or too pressed to take the diligence, you travelled by cart and carriole drawn by ox, ass, mule or horse. Yet Creille, on the sun-kissed top of its hill, had ever been a light-hearted and happy place.

In those days it was ruled by a rude but able Mayor, one César Balignon. He had a *quincaillerie*, or tin-ware shop, which afterwards was bought up by Guiol and incorporated in his colossal establishment—"Aux Arcades de Creille."

"You see," said Tombarel, "how things chain themselves together."

Balignon was a lank, thin, swarthy, bearded man who had fought in the war of 1870 and retained the wide scar of a sabre cut across his face. He was republican of the extreme right. *La patrie avant tout.* Under his benign reign, Creille was undisturbed by the far-off squeals of political factions. It was a little Paradise, said Tombarel.

Into this Paradise there crept (according to Tombarel) a serpent, a well-to-do silk merchant from Lyons, a certain Camille Monniot, a widower with the most delectable of daughters. Her name was Solange, but her father and all her

intimates called her Froisette.

"*C'était ce petit nom-là*—it was that funny little invented name," cried Tombarel, "that first put it into my head to go mad. It was like her in a way—expressive. Her dull parents couldn't have connected the two things together. Look. *Froissée*—that means crushed, crumpled, doesn't it? Well then, in her twenty years, she seemed daintily crushed and crumpled. She was slender, and her clothes, thin silk and chiffon, fell into all kinds of enchanting irregularities of careless material. And her face was as though the *bon Dieu*, had taken it between His hands and crumpled it into the form of a laughing flower. A little mutinous nose, dancing eyes; and, when she smiled, everything smiled, from the dimple on her chin, the twist of the corner of her lips, the little wrinkled contour of her cheek-bones—to say nothing of the eyes of a radiant soul—right up to the sweet little lines of her forehead. *Ah, mon vieux*," sighed Tombarel, "only once in a lifetime does one meet with such an incarnation of the vividness, the laughter, the sweet and basic significance of life. . . . You think I'm an old dotard. But no. Old memories of the soul remain hard and fixed. . . . They called her Froisette, God knows why—but to me she was always—though I never called her so—Froissette, with a double 's'—one whom God had taken and moulded into the infinite rippling of a gentle waterfall."

You must take Tombarel's description of her for what it's worth. I never saw the lady, a cross between a God-crumpled flower and a waterfall, of forty years ago. All that concerns us is that he fell head-long, madly in love with her. When this happened, Monsieur Camille Monniot had not yet come to Creille. He had a small villa on Mont Boron at Nice, to which he and his daughter could repair when the fatigues of silk-merchanting in Lyons became over-exhausting. A humdrum matter of business, of social or family relations, had led to young Tombarel's acquaintance with the Monniots. He had been bidden to dull dinner-parties at which he had presented himself correctly attired in close buttoned frock-coat and wearing bright yellow dog-skin gloves which he didn't draw off until seated at table. He had little chance of private conversation with Mademoiselle Solange, alias Froisette; but his eyes spoke ballades and hers supplied the refrain. Young people had to get along as best they could, in those days, when every young woman was supposed to be an innocent lamb, and every young man, even surrounded by a bodyguard of respectable family, was, by the nature of things, a ravening wolf. Yet he managed his courtship in the way of his generation. When she handed him his cup of after-dinner coffee, his little finger would touch the tip of her little finger which she would not switch back in shocked embarrassment, and he knew that she felt the same delicious thrill that shivered through his being. On

rare occasions, at formal balls—and French formal balls among the bourgeoisie of the eighteen-eighties were ceremonies of dismal and funereal state—they waltzed once or twice together during the evening. A jury of matrons could have passed unshocked through the arch between their two bodies. An armoured palisade of corset saved his gloved hand clasping her waist from outrageous pressure on the tender form beneath. Yet there was enough of her nearness to intoxicate the young Tombarel. The scent of her hair was in his nostrils, her breath was on his cheek, and now and then the eyes in the rosy ripple of a face smiled into his. And there were whispers.

"You look adorable to-night, Mademoiselle."

"You think so?"

"I know it. Am I not blessed with the sense of sight?"

"I am most pleased that you find me passable."

"I said 'adorable,' Mademoiselle."

If he had said more, at this stage of his infatuation, he would have been outraging his sense of the eternal proprieties. This sense was ingrained. Tombarel came of an ancient stock. His great-great-grandfather had wide lands in Gascony, whence he had migrated to Provence, and had the title of Vidame and called himself, with every kind of justification, de Tombarel. But Tombarel's father, land surveyor in Nice, had dropped the particle of nobility, and Tombarel had never worried his head about it. All this to impress on you the fact that even as a young man, raven-haired, lofty-browed, idiotically costumed according to French middle-class convention, he was the same great gentleman as the one who, at the point of death, had ordered for my entertainment the last bottle of the greatest wine in his cellar. The instinct of generations of breeding dictated his attitude towards Froisette.

You may say it was tepid love-making. But, as each age has its manners, at any rate it was effectual. Tombarel and Froisette were blissfully happy, without having exchanged a single thought on what might constitute a good time, or their friends, or the contemporary neo-drama, or the limitation of the family.

Now comes in Monsieur Camille Monniot. Monniot was a thick-set, low-browed citizen of Lyons. He had a square head surmounted by a thatch of upstanding shoe-brush black hair. He had a moustache curling upwards to points that almost reached his eyes. He had a habit, horrid according to Tombarel and to me also, of being shaved only twice a week, so that for most of his life he presented to the world a face smirched with black stubble. He had shaggy eyebrows and the little reddish-brown eyes of a ferret. His hands were pudgy and hairy.

Even at this point of the story I guessed that Tombarel never liked the man.

"But how could such a one," said I, "engender so exquisite a Naiad of a daughter?"

"There's an old Greek tale," said Tombarel, led for the moment off the track, "which I read a hundred years ago when I was doing my rhetoric in the Lycée. A man of pronounced ugliness boasted in an assembly that his mother had been the loveliest woman in the world. To which a sophist replied: 'It was your father then who was the less beautiful?' "

I smiled my acknowledgment of the point of the story. Tombarel passed his hand through his white mane and rebuked me courteously for my interruption.

To continue. Camille Monniot was not a sympathetic fellow. He was purse-proud. He loved his ease. Like most Lyonnais of his type, he devoted himself to succulent eating. His daughter had insensibly grown to be a barrier between him and the petty world of household cares. He saw no reason why Froisette shouldn't minister to his material comforts till the end of time. He dismissed all aspirants to her hand with a short-fingered gesture.

Young Tombarel was in despair. Only once a month could he set eyes on Froisette. Then came the opportunity. Nice was too commercial, too much like Lyons to suit the retiring silk merchant. He craved the sweet solitude of the mountains, where he could build a retreat for his old age.

There was a site, said Alcide Tombarel aglow, within the commune of Creille, on a bit of rising ground just outside the town, which he could purchase for Monsieur Monniot for two sous.

And that is how Camille Monniot came to Creille, Tombarel surveyed the land, busied himself with architect and contractors, and thus, in the twinkle of an eye, arose the Castello Miramare, the mountain home of Monsieur Camille Monniot of Lyons.

"I saw to that," said Tombarel, stretching out his white-clad arm at me. "You may have found me now, old dying Provençal that I am, a bit impulsive. But when I was young, *mon Dieu*!"—he swung the arm and laughed the laugh of anyone but a dying man—"I worked miracles of lightning energy."

Monniot and his daughter, it appears, were dazzled by the swiftness of his creation of their mountain home. There came halcyon days. Tombarel claims to have invented the modern week-end. During the dull week he practised his profession at Nice. On Saturdays he repaired to look after his property in Creille. Perhaps, he admitted, he absented himself more than was right from his office. He was never in love with his profession. In his case, said he, it was the profession of an *artiste manqué*—an artist who had failed. Had he not gone through the Beaux-Arts in Paris? He flickered the long ineffectual fingers of

the artist who can feel but cannot execute.

Well, there they were, the three of them at Creille. It would be idiotic to suppose that in their intimate association during the building of the Castello Miramare, Tombarel and Froisette did not find many unconventional opportunities of talks heart to heart. The devil of it was that Froisette had no dragon of a mother, not even a gorgon of an aunt, and Tombarel was a happy orphan. They told their love. They kissed and did all sorts of silly things. But the bullet-headed shoe-brush haired little beast of a Camille Monniot stood between them, inspiring them with the fear of some strange and unimaginable bourgeois god!

Again, I must remind you, we are talking of France of forty years ago. The Code Civil gave a chance parent—every father is a chance parent—absolute control over his unmarried children till they reached a green old age. It was perilous business to get married in France, forty years ago, without parental consent. The church might unite and bless them; but the law would curse them and their offspring and the *état civil* of everybody would be a hopeless muddle.

Luckily, they were in no violent hurry. Friosette was only nineteen, and, loving each other idealistically, they were happy enough to await whatever happy turn might be taken by Fortune’s tide. For instance, said Tombarel:

“*Ce cochon de* Monniot was bull-necked; he had folds of fat at the back of his collar; he stuffed himself with fat food, Lyons sausages, truffled ducks, *côtelettes de veau Rossignol* in which the slab of Périgord *foie gras* must be twice as thick as the veal. And he despised our exquisite little wines of the country. He must drink his two bottles of heavy Burgundy a day. Apoplexy must surely get him. At least, when one is young, one is buoyed up with hope.”

Now, this hectoring, egotistic sensualist had not long installed himself on the outskirts of Creille, before he began to make himself objectionable. By some means or the other—bribery and corruption, said Tombarel—and mind you, for all their history I have only Tombarel’s word, and he disliked the man for excellent reasons—he secured a seat on the Municipal Council. There he came into immediate conflict with César Balignon, the lank village Abraham Lincoln of a Mayor. He belonged to the political Extreme Left and had Radico-Socialistic ideas of improving the land. He wanted to install a new-fangled drainage system.

“*Imbécile!*” cried Tombarel. “Not to know that if he once began to disturb the sacred filth of centuries, the whole community would have perished like flies!”

He wanted to run the Council with the pernickety precision that governed the Board meetings of his wretched Lyons *Société Anonyme* of Silk. He did

worse. His malignant cunning prompted him to pay for the re-leading of the roof of the little old church, which for generations had leaked comfortably on worshippers during the mountain rains. He advanced money to Guiol's father for the extension of his modest little draper's ten-foot-square shop under the arcades of the Place de la Mairie. Left to himself, he would have pulled down the three or four hundred years old façade and erected a new gewgaw building. It was Tombarel who, working in secret, frustrated his vandalistic scheme. In those days he knew young architects who were still in the ateliers of illustrious masters. The word was passed from Aspirant to Master, from Master to the Ministry of Fine Arts, from the Ministry of Fine Arts, peremptorily, to the Prefect of the Alpes Maritimes, who forbade the removal of a stone from the frontage of the Place de la Mairie.

"It was all very difficult," said Tombarel, "seeing that I loved Froisette. . . . Ah! *mon cher, figurez-vous*——"

The night-shirted and leonine patriarch, a worldly Ezekiel (I have often wondered what the hoary, white-bearded prophets, major and minor, were like when they were five and twenty) wandered off into a rhapsodic idyll of early love. Stolen meetings on May nights, in the dark little valley between the crest of Creille and the lower eminence of the Castello Miramare. The moon sailing the heavens. The near mountain slopes on the other side of the gorge chequered black and silver in the moonlight. The scent of lilac and wistaria and magnolia on the heavy air.

"If my father found me here, he would kill me."

"Not he."

"He would send me to a convent."

"Bah! Lose his precious housekeeper and be at the mercy of a cook and a *valet de chambre. Jamais de la vie.*"

"He would kill you, Alcide."

"It would take a hundred fathers to kill Alcide Tombarel."

So he boasted in his young strength, and Froisette thought him magnificent, as indeed he was. At any rate Tombarel said so, and he ought to know.

"Ah!" sighed Tombarel. "I was a fine specimen of manhood in those days, with the chest of a bull and muscles like iron. I could have picked Monniot up by his rolls of fat with one hand and swung him about like a *panier à salade*."

All the time, of course, he was a welcome though formal visitor at the Castello Miramare. Once Monsieur Monniot, over coffee and cigars on the loggia, took the young man into his Machiavellian confidence. He was getting

on in years. He must provide for his daughter's future. She would have to marry, alas! But whom? He anticipated a cry from Tombarel, by adding quickly: "I am a wealthy man. I am ambitious. She must make a great marriage. Her dowry will be five hundred thousand francs."

Tombarel jumped out of his skin. "*Mon Dieu!*"

The other held out his fat hand. "But the man she marries must produce at least an equivalent amount. It is not Camille Monniot who is going to keep his daughter's husband in idleness."

"That is a great sum," said Tombarel.

In those far-off days, when a hundred francs was four pounds sterling, half a million francs meant twenty thousand pounds. Alcide hadn't half a million centimes. He felt as though he were a worm crushed beneath the heel of this colossal millionaire. Abjectly he reported the conversation to Froisette.

"*C'est de la blague*," she replied.

Bluff or not, it impressed Tombarel and inhibited a growing determination to put on his yellow gloves and pay a visit of ceremony to demand in marriage the hand of Mademoiselle Solange Monniot.

It was about the time that Monniot began to talk to Tombarel and his supporters, most of them bribed protégés, of the inefficiency of the tinsmith Balignon, Mayor of Creille. This ignorant peasant, a reactionary of the Second Empire, was a stumbling-block in the path of Progress. He was two hundred years behind the times; antediluvian. It made him sick to sit at the meetings of the Municipal Council and suffer the dictatorship of so dense-brained an animal. Now, if he, Camille Monniot, were Mayor of Creille . . .

That was the beginning of it all. As the days went by, Tombarel gathered not only from Monniot himself, but from the confidences of Froisette, that this had become an *idée fixe*, an overmastering passion, in the brain of Camille Monniot. Henceforward he appeared to devote his life to the eventual overthrow of César Balignon.

"I don't know what's the matter with him," said Froisette, during one of the stolen meetings. "He no longer thinks of his food, and, even yesterday, he drank wine from a bottle which even I, who only drink a thimbleful, knew to be corked."

Tombarel received the news without dismay. The sooner the good man could be certified as a lunatic, the better.

To me one of the endearing qualities of the essentially Latin Tombarel is his lusty yet childlike cynicism.

It was the Fête of Saint Go-Go. Many of the towns in Provence celebrate an apocryphal saint whose origin is lost in the ironic symbolism of the Middle Ages. Cannes goes wild every summer over the Feast of Saint Jin-Jin. It is the perennial jest of every parish priest, taking part in ceremonial proceedings, to say that, while honouring the saint, he has caused the Vatican archives to be searched in vain for any record of the holy man's existence. Saint Go-Go and Saint Jin-Jin are as Gothic as the gargoyles on churches, and sprang from the same human impulse.

It was the feast, then, of Saint Go-Go, which, as all the world knows, is celebrated in July. There is no fear of rain to mar festivities. It was such a Fête Saint Go-Go as Creille had never seen. Old Guiol—father of the suspected poisoner of my friend, Tombarel—had sent to Paris for a vast stock of tricolour flags and, financed by the astute Monniot, was able to sell them at four sous apiece to the populace. The tortuous, cool and smelly streets of Creille were ablaze with red, white and blue. The arcaded Place de la Mairie, with the venerable Town Hall straggling along one side, was a blaze of glory. There would be illuminations and a display of fireworks in the evening. The astute Monniot again. Anticipation of their new wonders gave added zest to the town's joyousness.

Nobody worked except a few flabby waiters, hired from Nice, who strove to maintain the service at the little café. It was the Fête Saint Go-Go, and no one thought of celebrating it otherwise than after the manner of their ancestors' costumes that they wore: men mostly in white, short-jacketed with red sashes girt around their waists and swaggering under the floppy beret such as survives as the head-dress of the Chasseurs Alpins; the women gay in striped skirts and colourful cross-bodices and dainty frilled caps.

Young Alcide Tombarel, through ancestry the grand seigneur of Creille, put on his heirloom of a black velvet knee-breeches suit, jacket short and open showing silk shirt with Byronic collar, tied in front by crimson strings; a gallant to make any maiden's heart beat, even though she were not already in love with him.

Thus attired, he attended Monsieur Camille Monniot, Conseiller Municipal, and Mademoiselle Solange Monniot on the Councillor's municipal functions. There was a place of honour allotted to him on the platform in front of the Town Hall.

"But why?" asked Monniot.

"My prescriptive right," replied Tombarel carelessly.

Podgy little Monniot, to impress the town with a sense of his appreciation of the occasion's solemnity, wore full evening dress. Froisette, with the aid of

a friendly female soul, had run up an enchanting Provençal costume.

There were speeches from Balignon the Mayor, imposing in his grandfather's inordinately tall silk hat and tightly buttoned blue frock coat and his tricolour sash, from the curé, from Monsieur Camille Monniot, to the massed picturesque populace in the little arcaded square. There was retirement into the Town Hall, where the Mayor offered the traditional *vermouth d'honneur*. Then, when the Conseil Municipal reappeared on the platform, came the traditional dancing around the Place de la Mairie; dancing of the Farandole to the melancholy yet curiously inspiring music of the bands; long drums beaten only on one end and shrill fifes. The July sun blazed down on the baking square; but no one heeded. The circles of the Farandole pursued their monotonous yet joyous course.

Camille Monniot, resplendent in evening dress, with a vivid green silk handkerchief spread from waistcoat opening half-way up his shirt, looked benignly on, as though he were the author and originator of the festivities. He patted gaunt Mayor Balignon on the shoulder.

"*Mon cher ami*, why don't we get a good band from Lyons?"

"Because, Monsieur, this is Provence and not the Lyonnais."

It was at that moment that Tombarel caught in Monniot's little red eyes a gleam of hate like the hate of hell.

Froisette, excited, delight in every rosebud crumple of her adorable face, stood by Tombarel's side.

"Monsieur," said he, with ceremonious doffing of black velvet beret, "it is the Fête Saint Go-Go when all things are permitted—But it is only courtesy to ask you if you will deign to permit——"

Monniot had to permit. Tombarel led Froisette down into the whirling square.

Picture him, young, dark, raven-haired, with a raven beard scrupulously trimmed, as handsome as you please, black-velveted, swaggering down the two or three rough wooden stairs, holding by her finger-tips the dear and dainty maiden of his heart.

Hand in hand they joined the circle of the Farandole and danced till they were tired. It was really a dance of courtesy by way of ending the morning's ceremonial. In the afternoon there would be the great bowls competition in which all the neighbouring townlets took part; bowls, so please you, not as we understand the game, but as still played all over the Midi, played with unbiased wooden balls on rough beaten earth. And they would dance again, to the tune of any old sou-collecting band, waltzes and polkas and weird country dances; and there would be much feasting and drinking of inordinate quantities of wine

and beer; and much rough love-making. And so it would continue till the late evening, when all the revellers of the place would follow the elfin music of the fifes and drums in one last mad saraband.

"You like my people?" asked Tombarel, with the air of a young reigning prince.

"I adore them," laughed Froisette, with her hands on a panting breast.

"I have an idea," said he. "Leave me to it. Don't be afraid."

He led her gallantly up the wooden steps to the platform where the Mayor and Corporation were solemnly awaiting the end of the morning's proceedings. He bowed low to Mademoiselle Solange Monniot and, beret in hand, addressed her father *coram publico*.

"Monsieur Monniot," said he, "as I mentioned before, this Fête of Saint Go-Go, in our country, is a day of special privilege. I profit by it to demand from you the hand of your daughter Mademoiselle Solange in marriage. I may say that I have her full permission to take this step."

Monniot looked around him in his ferrety way and met the eyes of the whole Conseil Municipal. His fat face grew congested with conflicting emotions. To acquiesce gracefully would mean the surrender of his paternal rights and his proclaimed ambitions. Wherefore he loathed the elegant young man. On the other hand, to play the heavy father and spurn the suitor in public would be to incur the obloquy of the town. Until to-day he had not realized the significance of Tombarel. Hitherto he had regarded him as a respectable young Nice land-surveyor of no great account, and the owner of a few poverty-stricken *hectares* of vine and olive and a ramshackle farmhouse in Creille. To-day he saw him, velvet clad, going, as I have said, like a prince among his own people. He addressed the unbending Mayor carelessly as "*mon cher* Balignon," and always Balignon bowed deferentially to Monsieur Tombarel. Tombarel rose like a star above Monniot's limited horizon. Tombarel, whom he had hitherto patronized as a pleasant but poor young fellow, was the most important man in Creille. Tombarel, with a three-hundred years' clear ancestry behind him, was the last surviving *gentilhomme* of the commune. No neo-radical ideas could dislodge him from his position.

The eyes of the Conseil Municipal were upon Camille Monniot, those of the Mayor peculiarly stern. The fantastically high silk hat of another epoch added an eerie authority to his lank, rugged figure. Froisette, scared for the first time in her life, gripped Tombarel's velvet sleeve. Monniot had to say something. He said:

"*Mon cher Monsieur*, I don't conceal from you that you take me by surprise; also that you do me a great honour. Will you do me the pleasure of

lunching with me, so that we can discuss the matter in private?”

Tombarel in florid phrase conveyed to all the fact that he was Monsieur Monniot’s most devoted servant to command. Everybody was satisfied.

Tombarel lunched at the Castello Miramare. Froisette, opposite him, shimmered in quivering ecstasy. You have Tombarel’s word for it. The précis, in diplomatic language, of the after conversation between Tombarel and Monniot consists in the latter’s pronouncement.

“I have my reasons for desiring to be Mayor of Creille. I see for myself that in Creille you are all-powerful. On the day that I am Mayor of Creille, you shall marry my daughter.”

Tombarel went away rather more muddle-brained than heavy-hearted. How the devil was he to work the deposition of the excellent Balignon who had dandled him, a curly-haired infant, on his knees? To say nothing of politics. There, Tombarel and Balignon stood shoulder to shoulder: Tombarel, representative of the old *haute noblesse*; Balignon, stalwart soldier of the Second Empire, whose grandfather had perished at Waterloo.

He tore his hair. He perspired freely in the airless gloom of a July night under the kindly sheltering cypresses, as he discussed the matter with Froisette.

“What can I do? Your father is mad. Let us go away. Let us fly together. Let us go to England, Greece, Brazil, although I don’t know the barbarous languages they talk there. Anyhow, you and I can talk together in our beautiful tongue.”

She laughed. I wish I were old enough to have known her. Tombarel said she was the incarnation of the goddess of delicate laughter.

“*Ne te foule pas la rate, chéri.*”

Now when a well-bred young woman of forty years ago could tell a young man, in the second person singular, not to dislocate his spleen, it means that she was his for the taking.

“Don’t worry, my beloved. Don’t go about like the dismal hero in the old opera—I saw it once in Lyons—English—*La Fiancée de Lammermoor*—Ravenswood—*n’est-ce-pas?* You are somewhat like him at the present moment.”

She put forward a proposition suggested by her father. Wouldn’t Balignon retire on acceptance of a pleasant sum of money?

“My best beloved angel,” groaned Tombarel, “if I made such a suggestion to Balignon, he would put his tricolour sash around him and banish me from the commune. We have a fierce pride, we people of the mountains.”

She flung her arms about him. “That’s why I love you,” she cried.

Well, naturally, that was the end of any sense in that particular conversation.

Tombarel went about his week-day duties in Nice, surveying land with lamentable inaccuracy, and spending ineffectual Sunday hours with Balignon, the tinsmith, in vain endeavour to find some weak spot in his armour. But the more they talked, the more in sympathy with Balignon and his ideals did he become.

The news of his demand in marriage had flown from the instant of utterance all through the little town. The news of a definite engagement had not been announced. Tombarel found himself in an embarrassing position. To questions he answered:

"*Ça va très bien.* But family affairs—lawyers—all the complications . . ." And once he lied with diabolic inspiration, "No one knows—but she is a Protestant. I'm a Catholic. The dispensation of the Pope is necessary. And that's a long affair."

Partly to gain time and save his young and handsome face.

"But, Alcide *chéri*, what is all this I hear?" asked Froisette. "I'm no more a Protestant than you. It's true that my father is anti-clerical and forbids my going to mass or confession——"

"So much the better," said Tombarel. "*Laisse-moi faire.*"

Froisette, her heart in Tombarel's hand, would have done whatever Tombarel listed.

"Why the blazes didn't you carry her off and tell the universe to be damned?" I asked.

"Because, *mon ami*," the night-shirt clad Tombarel replied with an uplifted hand, "because," said he, "I happened to be a gentleman of the old régime and Froisette was not another man's wife—in which case there wouldn't have been any question of boot and saddle—but the most sacred and innocent flower of maidenhood."

I sat rebuked, having to attune myself to the fine moral values of a France of forty years ago.

The days went on. The mania of Monniot to become Mayor of Creille grew in intensity. Tombarel pressed his suit to no avail. The answer remained the same: "The day I am Mayor of Creille, you shall marry my daughter."

“But if your daughter is married, or at least publicly betrothed to Alcide Tombarel, your chances will be all the greater.”

Monniot waved away the subtle suggestion. The Lyonnais mind is even more crafty than the Provençal. He worked underground, advanced moneys to needy landowners in the commune on generous terms. Outwardly, as far as manifestations of respect were concerned, the Creillois treated him as a benefactor. But Tombarel knew that not one of them would vote for him at the next municipal election.

Fate ordained that, very early in the New Year, Balignon should fall on evil days. He had a son, a good and dutiful son, who, seeking wider horizons, had set up for himself as a *quincaillier* in Paris. A wicked partner robbed him of his all, so that he was about to become bankrupt. César Balignon, to save his son, handed over his own little fortune! Creditors pressed César Balignon, Mayor of Creille.

“But what is this I hear, my dear Balignon?” Monniot asked one day. “Why not have a word with me? Everything can be so easily arranged.”

“You are very generous, Monsieur Monniot,” said Balignon.

“We are all brothers in Creille. Come and lunch with me to-morrow.”

The harassed Balignon accepted. To-morrow was a Sunday—one of the blessed Sundays when Tombarel, escaped from Nice, was privileged, as a probationary betrothed, to take his midday meal at the Castello Miramare. He always arrived half an hour too early, his excuse being always the same. “It seems, Monsieur Monniot, to be impossible for me to remember whether you lunch at noon or half-past.”

On this particular day the gaunt and worried Mayor arrived at the same hour as Tombarel. This, however, was by arrangement. While Tombarel and Froisette talked in the clear sweet sunshine on the loggia, the two elders were closeted in the dimness of Monniot’s private room near by.

Presently the door opened. Both appeared on the threshold.

“That is your last word, Balignon?”

“My last word, Monsieur,” said the iron-faced Mayor of Creille, looking very stern.

“We’ll arrange this otherwise,” said Monniot, with an air of false geniality, and Tombarel noted that his little ferret’s eyes gleamed blood-red. “You’ll take an *apéritif*, Balignon?”

“*Volontiers*,” said Balignon stiffly.

“*Mon enfant*,” said Monniot to his daughter, “will you fetch some of our old absinthe?”

In these modern days it's almost impossible to realize that, once upon a time, the most delicious beverage devised for man by a large-hearted Devil ran through France in the same full stream as whisky runs through Scotland.

Froisette departed on her errand. The three men on the loggia overlooking the olive-and pine-clad slopes on the further side of the gorge talked of indifferent things. But to anyone far less sensitive than Tombarel it was obvious that host and guest had passed through a fiery furnace of a conversation. To Tombarel, it was obvious that Monniot had offered to buy the Mayoralty of Creille from Balignon and had met with a patriot's indignant refusal. While thanking God that he hadn't acted on Froisette's light-hearted suggestion, he passed an uncomfortable quarter of an hour. He didn't like the look of Monniot, with his congested face and blood-red little eyes.

Froisette, fresh as the warm January morning, appeared on the terrace with silver tray on which was the bottle and three glasses and sugar and flat spoons and carafe of water. In those days it was the function of the daughter of the house, not of the servants, to attend to such things. She set the tray on a little japanned table. She set the chairs—three chairs.

"It is I, my dear Balignon, who know how to prepare an absinthe *à la mode de Lyon*. It takes time. Froisette, will you show Monsieur le Maire and Monsieur Tombarel our roses?"

He waved them away. To prepare three glasses of absinthe perfectly, pouring water over the lumps of sugar that sat on the flat perforated spoons, drop by drop, so that the mixture is perfectly curdled, does indeed take time. The trio passed down the loggia steps into the terraced rose-garden.

"But listen!" cried Tombarel to me, with a great gesture. "This is the point of all the rubbish I have been uttering. At the corner of the steps I turned—I know not why—God sends messages now and then to men—and I saw Monniot slip a phial from his waistcoat pocket and pour the contents into one of the glasses. What do you think of that, *hein*? Luckily I discover I have left behind my yellow packet of Maryland cigarettes. Again an arrangement of the *bon Dieu*. I retrace my steps. I keep my eye on the glass. Monniot suspects nothing. But that glass had a little tiny chip on the rim. I retrieve my cigarettes. I do not join the two in the rose-garden. I stand, appalled, at the bottom of the stone steps. Imagine what I have witnessed! The contents of a little phial, the size of one's finger, poured into the strong, aromatic absinthe. What to do? *Ah, mon vieux!*"

The sweat stood on his brow after all the years. He wiped it with an impatient hand.

The voice of Monniot summoned them. They mounted the stairs to the loggia. The three opalescent glasses stood in front of the three chairs.

"*Mon cher ami,*" said Monniot to Balignon, indicating a chair, "will you be so kind as to be seated?"

And before the seat of Balignon was the glass with the tiny chip.

Froisette, *jeune fille,* having no concern with men over their *apéritif,* went into the house on her domestic duties.

"It was then," exclaimed Tombarel, in his vivid way, all flashing eyes and tragic gestures, "that I had the God-sent inspiration of a lifetime. I looked into the blue above the mountains on the other side of the gorge and I rose to my feet with a sudden cry. 'Look! Look! An eagle!'—'Where?' 'There.' I pointed . . ."

If ever a man saw an eagle in azure ether where never eagles soared it was Tombarel in bed stretching out his arm and staring into space.

"I pointed. 'There! There!' They both rose. Advanced a few paces towards the balustrade. In a lightning movement I changed the two glasses. Monniot had the chipped glass before his chair."

The two men turned after a while. They saw no eagle against the exquisite purity of the blue January sky. They laughed at Tombarel. He made apologies. Eagles had been seen in the Midi. . . . But it must have been a trick of vision.

Monniot raised his glass.

"To your health, Monsieur le Maire." He drank. "It's good, isn't it?"

Monsieur Balignon sipped. "It is perfect," he replied politely.

"Our little conversation this morning must be forgotten," said Monniot. "All I ask is to be the good friend of this beloved town of Creille—the town of my adoption. . . . *Oh, mon Dieu! Oh, mon Dieu,'* " He clapped his hands before his eyes, rose from his chair, nearly upsetting the table, staggered back a pace or two and fell flat.

Whatever was the poison from the phial he would have administered to Balignon, it killed him on the spot. When they rushed to him, he was dead.

"Dead as a shot rabbit," said Tombarel, on a soft intonation.

"And it was you who killed him," said I, rather stupidly, after an interval, in which I strove to adjust moral and dramatic values.

"What else could I have done? Let the brave Balignon, with the scar across his face from a German sabre, be murdered in cold blood? Never in a life!"

"But you might have found fault with the absinthe, thrown the stuff away, even if you didn't want to denounce Monniot," said I.

Tombarel lay back weakly on his pillow and replied wearily:

"My good Fontenay, when one is young, or even when one is old, one can't think of everything at once. Balignon was saved and his would-be murderer was hoisted, as it were, with his own petard."

The suddenness of the climax of his narrative bewildered me. I wanted to know what the police and the law and the Code Napoléon had to say about the death of Camille Monniot. It appeared that, in that palmy era of France, no official worried himself extravagantly. The local physician smiled with satisfaction at the fulfilment of his prophecy that one of these days Monsieur Camille Monniot would die of apoplexy. So, of an unquestioned apoplexy did Camille Monniot die.

"*Eh bien, mon cher ami,*" said Tombarel, after Angélique had revived him with a glass of his precious old 1840 brandy, a glass of which I naturally had to drink in his company, "you see that I'm not such an old fool when I say that the Mayoralty of Creille has been a matter of life and death."

"Still," said I, "our friend Guiol——"

"I have been reflecting all the time you have been here," said Tombarel. "I was wrong. He has not the man's strength of character that is requisite to kill another man. He is a poor woolly sheep. I dismiss him."

He made a gesture of dismissal, as though Guiol were the least to be considered of God's creatures.

"In fact," said he cheerfully, "a lonely old man with many responsibilities may be pardoned for little divagations of the brain."

The short December sunshine had long since faded. Angélique had drawn the curtains and brought in the lamp. Tombarel loomed fantastic in the shadows under his canopied bed. There was a silence. At last said I:

"But . . . if I'm not indiscreet—Mademoiselle Monniot—Froisette?"

He spread his arms straight, like one crucified, and looked up at me from his pillow.

"Didn't I begin by telling you why I have remained a bachelor? How could I marry a girl whose father I had killed? It was tragic. It rent my soul for many years. It rent hers. *Mon Dieu!* When one loves there must be nothing hidden. I told her. She went into a convent. I saw her this morning. I thought I was going to die—and I sent for her."

I stared at him. The aged, shrivelled and shrunken nun whom I had seen, head bowed, her sacred locket dangling wide of her body, was the goddess of a girl whose cheeks God had once taken between His hands and crumpled into rose petals or the laughing little waterfalls of the mountains.

VII

WHEN THE CIRCUS CAME TO CREILLE

TOMBAREL had fitted up a bathroom in his house at Creille, and I was staying with him. You must not imagine that I had declined Tombarel's hospitality heretofore on the mere grounds of his having no bathroom. It was the other way about. The new possession of it had put the idea of inviting me into his head. For Tombarel had come into money—a couple of hundred thousand francs—inheriting it from an aunt even more venerable than himself, who lived in the Limousin. He regarded himself as fabulously rich.

"And the first thing I did with my wealth, my dear friend," said he, "was to fulfil the dream of my life and instal a *salle de bain* in my house, with a furnace and central heating and all the luxury of a palace-hotel. You must come and see it. I have spared no expense. Angélique is afraid of it. She says it is much too splendid to wash in. She wants to put images of saints all about it and turn it into a chapel. The poor woman! She has never seen a *salle de bain* before in her life—just think of it!"

I thought of it, as Tombarel in his picturesque way elaborated the theme of turning a completely equipped modern bathroom into a chapel. . . . Yes, I must come and see it. There were nickel taps; there was a nickel hot-water rail for towels; there was a marble floor.

Now it happened that, at the time of his fervid announcement, I was somewhat run down. It was nearing the end of the season. I had painted, for profit, a good many uninteresting people, and I had done little for my own pleasure. Cannes was chock-full of the cosmopolitan horde with whom I had been forced to eat and drink more than was good for a hard-working painter; and the March weather was execrable. I must go away, said I, for a change. And then came the invitation. What greater change and rest for an overdriven man could there be than the pure mountain air, far away from the super-exciting sea and the mephitic atmosphere of casinos and hotel dining-rooms, and the nerve-racking babel of tongues? The more he talked the more did he grow convinced that Creille was the only place that could restore me to health. And then there was the *salle de bain*. It was written that I should come.

So I went gladly to stay with Tombarel, perfect and courtly host; and from the peace of the mountains, Angélique's simple yet subtly prepared food and

Tombarel's talk, to say nothing of the wonderful bathroom (which needed only a chair to sit upon and a bath-mat whereon to set wet feet, to be the most splendiferous bathroom on earth—though I didn't tell Tombarel so), I derived inestimable benefit. I decided that when I should no longer have to paint ugly people for a living, I would build a little house on top of a Maritime Alp (with a chair and mat in bathroom) and live there for the rest of my days.

Of course you will remember that I had been familiar for some years with the tiny town which, from far off, looked like a queer-shaped wasps' nest perched on a peak in the middle of a gorge; that I had met many of its notables, and, thanks to Tombarel, knew more than they suspected of their personal histories. But not till now had I dwelt among them as a fellow-citizen, seeing them daily and gleaning knowledge of things that had escaped casual observation. For instance:

To enter Creille one must take the path that branches off the main road above and lands you declivitously into the Place Georges Clemenceau with the perky Hôtel du Commerce on your left and the Café Pogomas on your right. I had always been on friendly terms with Marius Pogomas, the proprietor, and had often sat with him over a glass, surveying the little sun-baked square, until I could have sworn I could record every object within sight. But I had missed the *Débit de Tabac*, the Government-controlled little tobacco-shop away at the corner of the Grande Rue, the main thoroughfare of the town. I had passed it in the car on my way to and from Tombarel many times without noticing it. But one day, early in my visit, wandering on foot and bent on water-colour distraction, I came upon it, a neat little shop with packets of tobacco and cigarettes and pipes and pictorial advertisements in the window, and newspapers on a wire file running up one jamb of the door. Realizing that my stock of postage stamps was running low, I entered. At the first glance the place seemed to be deserted. But in an instant there rose from behind the counter, like an Aphrodite rising from a dingy sea, a fair-haired, blue-eyed girl of sixteen, very goodly to look upon. Now, you may go through the Italian end of Provence many days without seeing among the people any individual of what is now called the Nordic type. The sight of this girl was, therefore, arresting.

"*Monsieur désire——?*" she asked, with a smile.

Monsieur desired some one-franc-fifty stamps for foreign postage. She looked in her drawer. The book of stamps contained only one of one-franc-fifty denomination.

"There are more," she said, "but they are locked up and *maman* has the key. I will call her."

Her mother appeared in answer to the summons from the interior of the house. She was the most amazingly Southern mother of a Nordic child you can imagine. She was as swarthy as Cleopatra and almost as good-looking. A woman of brown buxomness, surely under forty. She had bold gipsy eyes and a smiling mouth and the white, even teeth of a child. She was dressed with expensive simplicity in a one-piece frock, more or less in the mode of the day. A bright Chinese shawl was thrown over her shoulders, for it was chilly. A string of pearls, which I could have sworn were real, hung round her neck, and on a finger of her plump right hand she wore an emerald ring. Imitation, of course. I took it for granted. She smiled at me engagingly, and explained that she was not often asked for one-franc-fifty stamps. The inhabitants of Creille had few relations with foreign countries. At the post-office there was an inexhaustible supply. But she thought she had some. She would look. She flashed me a glance of encouragement and turned, key in hand, to a lock-up place. Sure enough she had a little stock of twelve. I handed her a note which she passed to the fair-haired girl.

“Elva, give change to Monsieur.”

Elva! Was ever such a name heard before in Provence?

While the girl was fumbling in the till, with the worried brow of the young calculator, her mother said:

“You are the great painter who is staying with Monsieur le Maire?”

“I am staying with Monsieur le Maire, it is true,” said I modestly.

She threw up a well-shaped chin and laughed.

“All Creille knows you, Monsieur. Did you not paint the portrait of Monsieur Tombarel that hangs in the Mairie? And did you not choose the site for the Monument de la Guerre? Are you not an honorary citizen of Creille?”

“Madame,” said I, “you overwhelm me. How did you know?”

“Everything is known in Creille the moment it happens—often before,” she said. “Worse luck!”

I laughed, received my change from the fair-haired girl, and bowed myself out.

I sat at dinner that evening with Tombarel and the Abbé Cabassol, the curé of the funny little patchwork church just behind the Place de la Mairie. Monsieur l’Abbé Cabassol was gaunt and grizzled; one of those men who seem to shave every other day, and whom you are destined to meet always on the day that has intervened. He had a habit of rubbing his cheeks softly, as

though he loved to hear them rasp. His complexion was as rusty as his old cassock, and his hands were knotted from good honest digging in his presbytery garden. But he had a merry roguish eye and an expert knowledge of the ways of this wicked world that would have bewildered a confidence trickster. And with it all, said Tombarel, a heart of gold. At home he lived like an anchorite; abroad, say at Tombarel's table, he saw no shame in feasting with the relish of an alderman. He was a man of some education, conversant with current politics and the French classics, and loved a good story, especially when it was flavoured with an epicure's touch of the Rabelaisian. Although he and Tombarel were old cronies, this was the first time I had met him in anything like social intimacy, and, in a short while, I felt myself to be a crony too. We talked wine and wisdom.

We had had soup—*a petite marmite*; we had eaten trout caught that afternoon by one of Tombarel's myrmidons in the stream a couple of miles away, and it had been accompanied by delicate white wine from Tombarel's own vineyard. Angélique brought in a great coarse dish on which a chicken lay amid rice and pimento and the gracious perfume of hot Ambrosia.

"*Poulet Henri Quatre, Messieurs.*"

The *poulet*, Angélique and the three Messieurs were thus consecrated into an indissoluble quintette. The *bon Dieu* had brought the five of us together.

"And here is some old Jurançon to drink with it," said Tombarel, lifting a bottle from the table. "It is strange how the wine and the dish should harmonize, for, as you know, it is the wine with which Henri Quatre was baptized in Pau." The curé raised a hand in smiling protest. "Legend," said he.

"It is of 1913," said Tombarel.

"The year," said the curé, "in which the circus came to Creille."

Tombarel seemed in no way to share my mute astonishment at this curious relation of dates. The year before the war, yes; the year of the cornet (had there been one) certainly; but the year of the circus . . . Tombarel nodded gravely, as he poured out the wine.

"Yes. It's so."

"Is the coming of a circus to Creille such an extraordinary event?" I asked, when we had helped ourselves to the *poulet Henri Quatre*, careful to be guided by Angélique's finger pointing at items of the dish that must not go unheeded.

"*Mais oui, cher Monsieur,*" cried the curé. "We in Creille are outside the whirl of opera tours and theatrical tours and tennis tournaments and tourists clamouring for casinos and hotels with *confort moderne*,"—by which he meant almost elementary sanitation,—"and racing bicyclists who pedal through France *à grandes étapes*, and also circuses. We, on the top of this little

mountain, in the middle of the wild Alps, are forgotten by man, and would perish of decay were it not that God remembers us at every second.”

“Yes. That is true,” repeated Tombarel, who was a pious man.

I asked, as was natural, what induced this one and only circus to come to Creille. They both raised helpless elbows and hands. Apparently they didn’t know, or had forgotten. Anyhow, one day in the year of Grace 1913, a circus had descended that declivitous side road on to Creille, and had applied to the Municipality for permission to pitch their tents in the immediate and ideal open space of the Place Georges Clemenceau. It would have been folly to ban this miraculous visitation. Money poured into the town from all the surrounding villages. Guiol of the “Arcades de Creille” made a little fortune out of the sale of white thread stockings and coloured handkerchiefs rushed up feverishly from the great stores of Nice, and Marius Pogomas had to engage many hands in order to cope with the conglomerate thirst at his café tables. It was a great week, commemorated in scarlet letters in the memories of Creille.

That was all very well. “But,” said I, “there must have been something more than the mere fact of the coming of the circus to have made so profound an impression on the mind of Monsieur le Curé.”

Tombarel looked at the curé and the curé looked at Tombarel.

“That’s true,” said the latter once more. “In fact, there’s quite a story —*toute une histoire*—” one of the classic phrases which had prefaced so many of his queer tales.

“I thought so,” said I. “Tell me.”

Tombarel again exchanged glances with the curé, who held up his glass of Jurançon, the colour of dark topaz, to the light. He shrugged.

“Why not?”

Tombarel began. The curé interrupted. Tombarel argued. The curé, after a few hasty mouthfuls of *haricots verts*, continued the narrative, until Tombarel swept him aside. So between the two of them I got a fair idea of what had happened when the circus came to Creille in the year of Grace 1913.

The circus was pitched in the Place Georges Clemenceau. It was the Place des Alpes in those pre-war days. The old War Tiger has impressed his personality on every townlet in France. Is not the hilly bit of Cannes where my villa is situated—part of the Route Nationale No. 97—now called the Rue Georges Clemenceau, once the Rue de Fréjus? This, however, is a digression. The circus was pitched. That is the main fact. A poor little circus, it appears. A little tent of nothing at all, with canvas enclosure at the back, half a dozen horse-drawn vans and two wheezy, ramshackle motor-lorries which, when fully loaded, could scarcely keep up with the horses. It was called the Cirque

Médrino; doubtless in the pathetic hope that the nebulous mind of the provincial would confuse it with the great Cirque Médrano of Paris.

"No, no, *mon cher* Cabassol," cried Tombarel. "Let us begin at the beginning. The beginning is La Zublena."

"Tell me," said I, "who or what is La Zublena."

"But I have already told you—it is true, a long time ago—about La Zublena. You don't remember? When those two young rascals, Dominique Pogomas, whose name his father, our good Marius, would not read at the inauguration of the Monument des Morts, and César Garbarino quarrelled over a girl, and César came home with a knife wound in his neck . . . that was La Zublena."

"I remember perfectly," said I. "*Tiens.* Wasn't her first name Marise?"

Tombarel laughed and waved the wine bottle before he refilled my glass.

"It is only artists who are endowed with such a memory."

He repeated what I remembered he had told me years before about the lady. She was the drab, the pariah, the reproach of Creille. When she had appeared bejewelled after the burglary of "Les Arcades de Creille" of which the two youths of tragically ignominious ends were suspected, she had lightly said that a handsome gentleman in a great automobile from Nice had given her the brooch. The town had not believed the particular fact; but as a general statement . . . any gentleman in an automobile from Nice. . . .

"Yes, yes," said the Abbé Cabassol. "She was like that."

She was apparently a wench, a quean, a hussy,—everything a village maiden should not be. Her father was one André Zublena, who worked in the cement factory round the shoulder of the hill. This factory had been erected on the site of the Castello Miramare which Camille Monniot had built many years ago. The Castello had been bedevilled beyond conceivability of human habitation to suit the cement works, and now, in its turn, the factory had been abandoned during the war, and all was waste and desolation. But in 1913 the factory was going full swing. André Zublena, hybrid Italian, was a labourer. A widower, he lived in a horrible broken-down dwelling with his daughter. Now, the proud Creillois abominated the workers in the new-fangled cement works. They were not *du pays*. They were outlanders. They paid their way, of course, spent their money in the town, in order to live—an isolated little town, from time immemorial, derives its existence from the fact of its centrality. It is the market, the exchange, the clearing house of the neighbourhood. Surround it with factories, and what it will lose in simplicity it will gain in wealth. A self evident proposition. But, all the same, the little town proclaims itself entitled socially to turn up its nose at ill-bred new-comers. The workers in the cement

factory were, according to Creille standards, of repulsive ill-breeding. They lived in a nest of insanitary habitations of which Zublena's was the worst and most overcrowded. They drank prodigious quantities of red wine, and as much *marc du pays*—raw distilled spirit from the grape—as they could get. They quarrelled. If they weren't as free with their money as with their knives, the good Creillois would have turned them out on to the barrenest of mountain-sides. But since the money came to the Creillois, and the cement workers only knifed each other, all was well. When Gaspareau, the Commissary of Police, heard of a violent death, he shrugged comfortable shoulders. "Well, there's one the less," said he. I doubt whether this alien inferno included, all told, more than sixty souls; but from the description of my two excited friends, Tombarel, white-maned, bearded (if he hadn't kept the beard cut to a swaggering point, but had left it to grow into beastly plaits and spirals down to his knees, he would have borne a striking resemblance to Michelangelo's Moses), the Abbé Cabassol, haggard, bony and frosty, both with flashing dark eyes and compelling play of hands, it took rank with the quarters seething with iniquity of all the capitals of the globe. It might have been the Suburra of Ancient Rome.

"What has become of this quarter?" I asked; for, having known the town for some years, I had not come across a trace of it.

"It was burnt down during the war, after the Cement Company failed," answered Monsieur le Curé. "The vines of a bounteous Providence now cover its site."

Anyhow, this has nothing to do with 1913, *annus mirabilis,* when the circus came to Creille.

The point my two elderly cronies desired to make was that from the half a dozen horrible little alien hovels on the hill-side, which they magnified into a seething, pullulating, myriad-inhabited suburb, emerged the girl Marise Zublena. She cared not for God, man or woman, said Tombarel.

"Pardon me, my dear friend," said the curé. "She had a blue fear of God. Man was her existence, and she snapped her fingers at woman, with phrases which it would ill become my cassock to quote. But she was devout. That is the only thing that makes her psychology interesting."

"As a man of the world," said Tombarel, with his sly smile which twisted up a corner of his moustache, "you can appreciate the sophistic reticences of Monsieur le Curé."

The Abbé Cabassol threw up his hands. The curé in little French townlets despises the mealy-mouthed.

"*Mais non!* The Truth before every thing. *Elle était garce des garces*"—the

hussy of hussies, in polite English—“But, Monsieur”—he thumped the table and held me with the intensity of his dark eyes—“this infamous witch of a woman who believes in God has been the greatest problem of my life as a priest.”

“Ta, ta!” said Tombarel. “Let us return to our circus!”

“We haven’t got to it yet,” retorted the curé. “It was you who insisted on beginning with La Zublena.”

“*Eh bien, cher ami,*” said Tombarel, turning to me. “There was this famous circus. . . .” And thereupon he plunged into the story proper.

The Cirque Médrino was a success. It might not have appealed to the sensation worn dweller in great capitals, but to those mountain children of nature who gapingly beheld a circus for the first time, the stuffy tent was pervaded with the glamour of fairyland. It gave good value for the money—such a little money, within the capabilities of the slenderest purse; but in those days the purses of Creille were comparatively well filled. There were honest souls who paid their money day after day to lose themselves in the astounding spectacle. The mountain gorges re-echoed with the name of Mademoiselle Fanfretta, *la Reine des Equestriennes*—did not her title appear thus in big print on the bills? She disturbed the slumber of scores of God-fearing men with dreams that should never have been dreamed at all. For, when before eyes that have only beheld the decorously garbed forms of their women-folk generally in attitudes of customary toil, there flashed the vision of the Eternal Feminine—well rounded, too—in fantastic, unimagined guise, tights, spangles, diamonds glittering in her hair, standing poised on one arched foot on the bare glossy back of a galloping horse, dreams of the Orient, of the Far-Away, of the Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon, may be forgiven by the judicious. Mademoiselle Fanfretta filled the minds of the women too. There was also the Ring Master faultlessly apparelled in an unusual form of evening dress. The ends of his moustaches went up to his eyes; a soul-compelling creature. No one dreamed that these two were very careworn, hard-working, humdrum husband and wife, and that the sturdy little boy whom the acrobat, lying on his back, kicked up in the air, was the son of Auguste, the clown, the pathos of whose time-honoured imbecilities shook the tent with elemental laughter. Oh! the Cirque Médrino gave good value for the money, even before the second part of the performance, the great Lion-Act, conducted within a steel cage that was erected by all hands, around the ring, by the world-wide celebrated lion-tamer, Carl Hansen of Copenhagen. Who in the wilds of the Maritime Alps had ever seen a lion? The nearest most of them had ever got to it was the

woodcut in some child's lesson book, or a capricious picture of the beast in some advertisement. But here was a lion, a real live lion! You could not live within a five-mile radius of Creille with any sense of decency unless you had seen the lion. And when the lion stalked into the ring and swept the tiny amphitheatre of swarthy faces with his tired topaz eyes, and roared, possibly through sheer boredom, a thrill went through the assembled humans, and delicious fear gripped their hearts. Children in arms were held up. "*Tiens, voilà le lion.* Now you can say you have seen one. You may never see one again."

Then enters Carl Hansen, in swaggering costume, a cross between that of a Hungarian Hussar of comic opera and a professional skater, whip in hand; and the lion, a poor, old, spiritless, mangy lion, obeys him like a little dog, in spite of protesting and terrific roars, and goes through his tricks, sitting on a stool and jumping over fences, even though one is ablaze with fire. Another thrill. And at last the beast lies down and the vast, fair-haired Hercules of a Dane puts a triumphant foot on him and waves the tricolour extracted from his pocket. Then, all being over, as the phrase goes, bar the shouting, the lion trots off to the horrible little cage in which he perforce must lead his home life, and Auguste comes in with a child's gun and looks about for the lion and takes an unsolicited call and sends the audience home grinning and happy.

All this, of course, from the vivid description of Tombarel, who, as Mayor of Creille, considered it incumbent on him to attend the first performance. And even he went again, as you shall hear.

"And you, Monsieur le Curé," I asked. "Weren't you tempted to throw your frock to momentary nettles and assist at the spectacle?"

"Wait," said he, with a touch of humorous asperity. "It is Monsieur Tombarel who is telling the story."

"But where does La Zublena come in?" I asked.

"Ah!" laughed Tombarel, with a wide gesture. "The impatience of youth!"

I curbed the youthful ardour of my fifty years, and let Tombarel proceed.

Now a circus is a little self-centred nomadic tribe, and generally finds its temporary home on a bit of waste land some distance from the town. It has its own perfectly good reasons for avoiding undue familiarity with the population. Mademoiselle Fanfretta, for instance, has no desire to expose herself in frowsy dressing-gown, frying the family bacon in her caravan, and the lion is not to be stared at by an unpaying multitude. No encouragement is given to the casual visitor. Outside the town privacy is easily maintained; but inside, as at Creille, it was somewhat difficult. All the children of the place, callous to parental scoldings and beatings, clustered like bees around the caravans and fought for peeps through chinks in canvas. This was beneath the dignity of the ordinary

adult, man or woman, who edged away sheepishly when a circus man said politely, "Monsieur (or Madame), this is private." Besides, the adult population had the serious day's work to get through. But there was one person in Creille for whom such hints or prohibitions were ineffectual; and that was Marise Zublena. On her the circus worked an irresistible fascination. She was twenty, in the pride of her gipsy beauty, claiming, as it were, to be her own mistress. When she felt like cooking the midday meal for her elderly drunkard of a father, she did so. When the great world summoned her forth, she obeyed the call and left her father to fend for himself. For years he had tried to beat her into submission; but on his last attempt—so the neighbours said—she had torn the stick from his hands and thrashed him soundly. She had a dreadful reputation, which aided her to keep up a splendid isolation in the precincts of the circus! Curious girlhood escaping from their duties in couples, for a morning moment, in order to spy into the inner workings of this wonderland, would say to each other in baffled annoyance: *"Ah! voilà La Zublena,"* and decorously fade away, while Marise, hands on hips, would watch them off the horizon with a contemptuous smile. On the other hand, the fearful children adored her. They followed her into places behind canvas screens, where unprotected they would not have dared to venture. The statistics of infant castigation during that week in Creille, according to the curé, were incredible.

La Zublena had attended the opening performance. Trust her instinct for that. And the very next morning she began to prowl round the tents and caravans.

First she met the clown, a battered little man in an old shirt, nondescript trousers and a cloth cap.

"*Hé, ma fille,* where are you going?"

"I want to see the lion."

"The lion has gone to Nice to have a tooth stopped. *Ouste, ma petite! On ne passe pas.*"

He spread out both arms, as he might have done a couple of years later at Verdun. Just then came from behind the jealously pegged square of canvas at the back of the tent an unmistakable growl.

"You lie—you and your tooth," said La Zublena.

"That," said the clown, "is a donkey whom we're training to be the lion's understudy in case he can't perform. *Filez.*"

So she filé-d with saucy dignity and stared into caravans and lay prone, with the children, and looked under the edges of the circus tent and was rewarded by the sight of the acrobat rehearsing his act with the little human football. She couldn't see much, the intermediate seating blocking out the

view; but she saw the loins and thighs of the man working vigorously, and the legs and body of the child when he stood on his feet.

Now it happened—and on such unimportant happenings do many million human destinies depend—that one of the members of the circus was a far-off connection by marriage of the Abbé Cabassol. He had written: “Monsieur le Curé, I am So-and-so, and my aunt Virginie and Madame your respected mother were friends, and you once gave me absolution, and I am coming on Saturday to Creille with the Cirque Médrino,” et cetera, et cetera. So the curé, vaguely remembering a decrepit and tiresome lady called Virginie, who poisoned various happy hours of his childhood, but also possessing the kindest of hearts, set out to call on his correspondent. He found him, which is neither here nor there; but what does matter is that he nearly fell over Marise Zublena, as she was lying on her stomach with her eyes glued to the interior of the tent. There came an instant of confusion, during which the girl, her dark skin aflush, scrambled to her feet and faced him. There came the obvious question:

“*Mon enfant*, what are you doing there?”

“It is to see the lion, Monsieur le Curé.”

“What lion?”

“The lion.” She recounted the scene of the previous night. She wanted to see him quite close.

He read her the necessary lecture. Had she no shame? A young woman of her age, neglecting all her sacred duties at eleven o’clock in the morning, in order to lie on her stomach and look under the edge of a tent for lions, like a child of six—it was subversive both of common sense and Christian morality. And, by the way, it was a long time since she had come to confession. He shook his finger warningly at her, and went his way. But most of the day and the next morning Marise Zublena hung around the privacy of the circus-folk, in the obsessing hope of seeing the lion, whose second performance she had enthrallingly witnessed.

And then she came upon the vast blond Dane, Carl Hansen, the lion-tamer.

Carl was a lonely man, a stranger, fallen on evil fortunes, and only recently had he joined the Cirque Médrino. He was at a loose end, with nothing in the world but a decaying lion to love. He appeared before her like a conquering god; she before him like the incarnation of the dusky Southern dream of woman. They talked. He in his halting French. She pleaded:

“Oh, let me see the lion—quite close. You don’t like giving anybody any pleasure?”

How could the poor lone devil resist? He took her to see his lion. A while later, having a splendid Scandinavian thirst, the lion-tamer invited her to cross

the square with him and drink beer at the Café Pogomas. Marius Pogomas came out to their table on the terrace. He glowered at the girl.

“Here you, my girl,” said he, in the *patois* of the mountains, which the Dane could not understand, “you have a pretty insolence to come and sit at my café, where you know you are not wanted.”

He had good reason for disliking La Zublena. Had she not helped in the ruin of his only son, Dominique, not very long before? Dominique who, for her sake—although there were no actual proofs, he knew—had robbed “Les Arcades de Creille,” had stuck a knife into César Garbarino, and now was as bad a soldier as ever did military service.

“I invite you to make yourself scarce,” said he.

La Zublena regarded him with an ironical smile.

“First,” she replied in French, “let me present my friend, Monsieur Hansen, tamer of lions at the circus.”

Pogomas stifled his wrath. He was not afraid of the fair, smiling giant; but commercial prudence told him that an affront put upon Monsieur Carl Hansen would be an offence to the Cirque Médrino. He inclined his head politely. He had already had the pleasure of serving Monsieur. Mechanically he passed his napkin over the japanned iron table.

“*Monsieur désire* . . . ? And your . . . ?” A wave of the hand gave any definition you please to Monsieur’s companion.

The lion-tamer ordered beer, Marise a *petit verre*. This she did with the deliberate intention of shocking Pogomas; for no respectable girl in Creille would ever have dreamed of ordering raw cognac. She also desired to pose as some one remarkable in the eyes of the huge Dane.

“One of these days when I make money,” she said, “I’ll have a real café at Creille, like those in Nice, and teach this old pig of a Pogomas to be humble.”

“You have been in Nice?” asked Hansen.

“Why, naturally!”

She had been there once, and when she came back a day or two afterwards, her father had given her the beating of her life. This was before she discovered that she could beat harder than he.

Such was the beginning of relations between La Zublena and Carl Hansen, tamer of lions. The affair quickly became town property.

That very evening, so did the fates decree, Monsieur le Curé met her again. Passing through the church to prepare for Vespers, he found her kneeling on a chair near the chancel, fingering her beads. The little wretch of a girl!

“What more natural?” interjected Tombarel. “She was thanking the Almighty for letting her see the lion!”

The curé dismissed him for a *farceur*, and went on with his denunciation of La Zublena. There never was such a girl. One never knew when one wouldn’t find her in the church, as devout as an aged dowager of stainless antecedents. And the more wicked she was, the more was she scrupulous of religious observance. . . . She glanced up, as he passed by, with the soulful eyes of a Madonna. He addressed her, in the rough and ready fashion of village curés.

“*Dites donc, ma fille*, what enormities of sin have you been committing?”

“None, Monsieur le Curé. I only felt that I wanted to pray.”

“Pray, then. You may deceive me, though not so very often. But if you think you’re deceiving the *bon Dieu*, you’re making up a nice little fire for yourself in the future.”

Injured innocence breathed: “*Oh, Monsieur le Curé!*” and he strode off.

He ran into her the next afternoon; and this was a more important encounter. On his homeward way, in one of the narrow turnings off the Grande Rue, he came upon an unusual scene of feminine upheaval. The cobble-stoned path between the crazy houses was barred by a dozen frantic, fighting women. He quickly perceived that they were not fighting one another, but that there was one object of their attack in the midst of them—a dishevelled, torn and bleeding girl, who cursed and clawed in desperate self-defence. With brawny arms he cleared a way through, and thundered out:

“What does all this mean?”

In the shocked silence, all drew away from the severely handled Zublena. She rushed to him.

“*Monsieur le Curé!* Save me! These wicked women! I was passing here quite quietly when that one, la Mère Pazzi, insulted me. I answered back, you understand? We came to blows. One doesn’t let oneself be insulted for nothing, *n’est-ce pas*? And then they all came from their houses . . .”

There was the shriek of half a dozen voices. Ah, yes! If he had seen the poor Madame Pazzi, good mother of a family, being torn to pieces by a tigress, Monsieur le Curé would have done the same as they!

“Silence everybody!” he commanded. “Madame Pazzi, why did you insult Marise Zublena?”

They all answered. Madame Pazzi had merely called her by the exact name by which such as she should be designated. And why? He narrowed down the inquiry, and elicited the fact that La Zublena had been discovered being kissed and cuddled by the lion-tamer in a little wood on the outskirts of the town. He

looked around, catching their eyes.

"Nothing but that?"

Apparently there was no more than that. Some children had seen the enamoured pair sitting side by side and had spread the glad tidings through the town.

The Abbé Cabassol knew his flock. He rated the women in their own unpolished tongue. Was there a woman of them all who hadn't been kissed and cuddled by some man before she married her husband? Not one! He bound them over, under dire ecclesiastical penalties, to keep the peace. And then:

"Marise Zublena, you will come with me."

She walked humbly, in her outraged beauty, by his side.

"*Merci, Monsieur le Curé!* You have saved my life."

"I ask myself why," he grumbled.

"Because you have a kind heart, Monsieur le Curé. *Un cœur de petit Jésus*. You understand the temptations of a poor girl situated like me, and you forgive."

"I don't forgive at all," said he. "Only the *bon Dieu* can do that. If you are seeking absolution, you know where to find me."

"*Oui*, Monsieur le Curé," she said demurely. "I will come."

"Good," said he. "And now, go home and wash yourself. You look more like a Woman of the Revolution than a civilized being."

She laughed, and darted off. The Abbé Cabassol went on with a thoughtful brow.

The next morning he found on his early breakfast table an immense bowl of wood-strawberries, fresh as the dew. In answer to his question as to whence they came, his old housekeeper said it was La Zublena who had brought them. To have picked that quantity she must have been in the woods at dawn.

"*Satanée petite fille!*" cried Tombarel in admiration.

The curé gave us to understand that the layman might derive amusement from the spectacle of a girl possessed by Satan, but to an ecclesiastic it was peculiarly and particularly disconcerting.

"And all the time," cried Tombarel, "that she was praying in church and fighting with *megeræ* in my good streets of Creille, and picking wood-strawberries for our *reverendissime* friend, she was living in the caravan of Carl Hansen, the tamer of lions, on the salaried staff of the Cirque Médrino. His assistant had died or fallen ill or deserted—I don't remember—and La Zublena had volunteered to take his place at a derisory wage."

This was so. Which of the two it was who came, saw and overcame, would be a pretty question. For suddenness of mutual attraction, Rosalind's picturesque account of the loves of Oliver and Celia—"there was never anything so sudden but the fight of two rams"—would be the only one adequate. More than this. La Zublena fell in love with the lion as well; and the lion, as far as she could judge, fell in love with La Zublena. She fed him, she raked out his cage, while Carl Hansen sat by on a stool and smoked his pipe. She talked to him as she used to talk to a goat on the hill-side, the only companion of her early childhood, and the lion was perhaps even more companionable.

She declared to her *chéri* (which was Carl) that she was happy. Brutus (which was the lion) knew her and loved her and would eat out of her hand. He would eat out of anybody's hand, poor old Brutus, as a matter of fact; but Carl saw to it that there were iron bars between her hand and the lion's mouth. Carl knew all there was to be known about lions.

Added to the wonder of the passion of the amorous giant and the affection of his four-footed partner was the thrill of appearing before the public of Creille as a member of the Cirque Médrino. In tights and doublet, fished out by Carl from the circus wardrobe, she displayed to her fellow-townsfolk (in her own quite justified estimation) limbs and figure unequalled in Creille. She wore the blond wig of a delicious transformation, and a jockey-cap perched at a devil-may-care angle. The clown who had treated her so rudely, being a friendly soul, instructed her in the art of make-up. In the pink-cheeked radiant blonde, not a soul among the ingenuous audience recognized the despised, rejected, raggle taggle Zublena of Creille.

At the performance she had little to do save swagger around so as to show off the importance of Carl and Brutus. She gave a hand, not too obvious, in the erection of the high steel cage around the ring. Now and again, whip in hand, she admonished the clown during his semblances of inefficiency in his job of anxious fitting of bolts and hooks, to the immense joy of the audience. She set the stools and the barriers on which Brutus should jump. She entered the arena with Carl and bowed, and just before the released Brutus came bounding in—instinctive stretching of legs on the part of the cramped beast—she slipped away and stood on the flat cushioned barricade, with her eyes on man and lion, as though responsible for their performance. For their performance did La Zublena indeed feel herself responsible. No riotous dreams of the potentialities of glorious life had ever approached this in gorgeousness. And not a soul in Creille knew. No one in Creille, she swore, should know until the very end of the last performance, after which she would fade away resplendent into the vague great world where the Cirque Médrino, with Carl and Brutus, lived free

and happy under the generous stars.

And yet, such was the psychology of this Satan-possessed girl, baffling to my friends, that she, all the time of her glory shamelessly and insolently stolen from a whole population, always found opportunity to creep, for a few minutes, into the church, and to leave at the presbytery her offering of fruit or flowers, in spite of blistering reception by the old woman who looked after Monsieur l'Abbé Cabassol. But she was equal to any blistering.

"What concern is it of yours, old——?" Here a full-throated and detailed description of the lady which would have sent the denizens of any conventual institute into huddled and shivering horror, and would have stimulated by its imaginative novelty a platoon of the Foreign Legion. "What is it to do with you that I regard Monsieur le Curé like blessed bread? It is the least I can do to bring him my little tribute."

She would leave the old servant gibbering but obedient.

"*Satanée jeune fille*," repeated Tombarel. "But it is true. In the confusion of her otherwise crystal brain, she looked on him as the rock of her salvation."

"But what," I asked, "was happening to the Père Zublena, cement-worker, while his daughter was living in the lion-tamer's caravan?"

Apparently he was drunk most of the time, and strange to relate, he had found some kind of a female to look after him. He had ceased to concern himself about his daughter. As far as I could gather from my mountain friends, there were three categories of living things—human beings, dumb animals, and alien workers in a cement factory. I couldn't help feeling a sneaking sympathy for La Zublena, who, after all, from the very little I had heard of her, seemed as vibrating a human being as one could wish to meet.

It was the last performance of the only circus that had ever come to Creille. The tent was packed. The management had put what was magniloquently entitled the box of honour at the disposal of Monsieur le Maire. It was in the centre of the ring and boarded off from vulgar touch by rough planks covered with red cotton. Over the broad barrier was draped the tricolour so that all could see that Monsieur le Maire had come in state. There were only four chairs, two in front and two behind. In the former sat Tombarel and Monsieur le Curé; in the latter, Monsieur Guiol, the *maire adjoint*, and Tombarel's friend, Dr. Suzor, who came from the neighbouring townlet of Escarolles. There had been dispute as to seats, the curé desiring to give way to the stranger guest, the guest insisting on Monsieur le Curé taking his official position. All was arranged. The performance began. All went merrily. On his first entrance

the clown stood stock-still with gaping mouth in front of Monsieur le Curé; then he turned tail and scuttled off, to reappear in a silk hat with which he saluted him ceremoniously. The audience, including the good Abbé Cabassol, shrieked with delight. He shook hands with the clown. He was out to enjoy himself. What the clown sacrificed perhaps in broadness of jest unfit for clerical ears, he made up for in intensified comedy of business. Mademoiselle Fanfretta wore a fresh costume of tights and spangles and her untamed horse shone with extra grooming. The circus was going on to Vence, and Monsieur le Maire had promised to write a little word in its favour to his colleague of that town. So it behoved everybody to do his best. Besides, Creille had treated them not as men but as gods, and their artistic temperaments responded. The simple curé laughed and admired and clutched Tombarel's arm. *Mon Dieu!* Did he see that? Was it possible that human beings could do such things with their legs and arms? He mopped his brow with his red handkerchief, exhausted, after the clown's lion act, in which a tiny pony not inartistically camouflaged played the part of lion and chased the clown, his tamer, ignominiously round the ring, and when he fell down, dragged him off by the seat of his baggy trousers.

"*Mais, c'est tordant!*" he cried.

His companions confessed that they, too, suffered from the same twists of mirth. They were all of the Midi, and knew how to be unrestrained with dignity.

There came the interval. Very few went out, for the erection of the great steel cage around the whole circumference of the arena was a fascinating thing to watch.

"Ah, here's a new one," cried the curé, as the blond, red-cheeked jockey-capped girl came in to perform her strictly rehearsed duties.

"That," said Tombarel, "is the lion-tamer's assistant."

"*Belle fille,*" said the curé, blissfully ignorant that, only a few days ago, he had called her a Woman of the Revolution.

She set the simple properties, and, when the cage was fixed, retired as usual and stood on the broad ledge of the circular barrier, once more exultant in the bluff she was playing on Creille. As the performance of Carl and Brutus proceeded, she crept round until she stood shameless, a foot or two away from the Mayoral box and the penetrating eye of Monsieur le Curé, who, she was aware, apart from infrequent confession, knew everything there was to be known about her. It was a thrilling joy to fool Monsieur le Curé.

And then the thing happened. It all seemed to happen in two or three horrible seconds. Something gave way. The section of the cage in front of the

Mayor’s box fell with a thud into the ring. The scared lion bounded and began to run hither and thither. Carl did his best to head him off to his exit. He failed. The tent rang with yells of terror. The beast saw the open space and leaped. But just before he leaped La Zublena, her eyes a glistening horror, had jumped and, throwing herself over the curé, face upwards, protected his body with hers. And the poor brute caught her shoulder with his claw, and ripped the arm down to the wrist.

Carl, following him a fraction of a second too late, dealt him a mighty blow over the head with an iron bar. The lion, half-stunned, turned away. A couple of blank cartridges fired into the lion’s eyes from the pistol which the tamer always carried in his belt, dazed him and he entered the ring submissively and was driven off.

The curé’s three companions extricated him from the mangled body of the outrageously clad and fainting girl. Doctor Suzor took command. The audience, as soon as the lion was safely driven off, clambered down from benches, and would have broken down the trumpery plank barriers had not Tombarel exercised his authority. The circus folk came running across the arena with a stretcher.

“That’s good,” said Doctor Suzor. “Where did you get that?”

It was part of the circus equipment. One never knew when there might be an accident.

They put the girl on the stretcher. Tombarel, the doctor, and the curé accompanied it across the ring. A short command rang out, and the hands lifted up the heavy steel section to keep the populace from following. A dishevelled blond giant met them at the ring exit. He stood over the stretcher, quaking in fear.

“Marise, *ma petite Marise*!”

Said the curé to us, dramatically:

“Marise! I rubbed my eyes. All the time there seemed to be something diabolically familiar about the girl in spite of her fair hair and pink face and—unusual attire. But only then did I realize it was La Zublena. I give you my word, Monsieur, that I, whose profession it had been for many years to stand by death-beds, some of them inconceivably tragic, just fainted—spun round like a top and fell into the sawdust. This child of nothing at all, this blackest of all my sheep, had given her life for mine! *Mon Dieu!*”

He threw up his hands in the widest of gestures.

“But did she die?” I asked stupidly.

“*Mais non!*” cried Tombarel. “It would take herds of lions to kill La Zublena. She is here in Creille at the present moment, since the end of the war. Let me tell you.”

He took up the tale, while the curé, his knotted fingers curiously shaking, filled a comfortable old pipe and poured out half a liqueur glassful of Tombarel’s venerable *marc de Bourgogne*.

They took La Zublena to Nice—thence to Marseilles for Pasteurization. Everybody paid—the Cirque Médrino, Carl Hansen, Tombarel, the curé; and —miracle of miracles, for in peasant France no one pays money without the assurance of personal advantage—the inhabitants of the town came with offerings—sous, francs, even five-franc pieces—to Monsieur le Maire, as contributions towards the fund for the restoration to health of Marise Zublena. The romantic story, for once a true one, had flashed through the town. In the twinkling of an eye she had transformed herself from the despised drab into the heroine. Monsieur le Curé had not realized how greatly he was beloved by his flock. For saving his life La Zublena had established herself in popular esteem as the Jeanne d’Arc of Creille.

Women who, a short while before, wouldn’t have touched her, prayed for her recovery. Men who regarded Père Zublena as the last word in depraved cement-workers, sought him out and fêted him, and, in their enthusiasm, so filled him up with strong liquor that he providentially died. The last obstacle to the canonization of Sainte Zublena was removed. The war broke out. Nothing more was heard of her. But her memory lingered until she was on the point of becoming a legend.

Well, the war came to an end. One day the sainted lady appeared in Creille, accompanied by a little girl. She was expensively dressed in widow’s garb, the veils of which hid her maimed arm. As soon as the conveyance that brought her from Nice had deposited her before the Hôtel du Commerce, and the grinning porter had taken charge of her slender luggage, she was recognized and acclaimed. Her progress through the streets was triumphal. Women scurried out of doors to join the throng. Half the town accompanied her to the house of Monsieur le Maire. Tombarel sent for the curé, who dismissed the populace with his blessing.

When the three were alone she told her artless story. When she recovered from her accident she joined her Carl, and helped him to look after his little girl who had been put out to board in Marseilles. As the poor fellow had an

impossible wife in Denmark whom, apparently, he couldn’t divorce, Carl and she had not been able to marry. “It was not my fault, Monsieur le Curé, was it?” she asked. Naturally the curé shook his head. He wasn’t quite so sure about that. Anyhow, her irregular life lasted but a short time. Brutus never quite recovered from his shock at Creille. His faith in the preordained fixity of human things had gone. He grew soured and bad-tempered and, one day, wiped the unfortunate Carl out of existence. She faced the world at war, with a small child and seven hundred francs. Then she became *marraine de guerre* to a sergeant of Artillery whom, two years afterwards, she married. Truly she had no luck, she lamented; for Étienne Dubosc, foreman in a motor-tyre factory at Clermont Ferrand, and of the most honourable family, died gloriously for his country, leaving her with little beyond indisputable papers vouching for her married estate and her perfect respectability. These papers she showed to the Mayor and the curé. As to her means of livelihood after her husband’s death, she was vague. She had worked to keep herself and the little one.

Tombarel very early on had sent for Angélique and given instructions for the child to be taken away and stuffed with jam.

“And the little one?” he asked. “Does she think you are her mother?”

“*Bien sûr*, Monsieur le Maire.”

The curé called her a *brave fille*, and wiped the corner of his eye with his red handkerchief.

“And what are you going to do now?” asked Tombarel.

She didn’t know. She had her little economies that would last her some time. The Hôtel du Commerce was not very dear, and they would give her a room at a special price. She seemed to have developed into an exceedingly capable woman.

Suddenly Tombarel startled her from her glowing calm by bringing his fist down on the arm of his chair.

“*Mon ami*,” said he to the curé, “I have the inspiration of my life! The late Mère Flammariol’s *Débit de Tabac* is still vacant. I will go to Monsieur le Préfet to-morrow. The patron saint of Creille, and the widow of a heroic sergeant of artillery is well worth a *Débit de Tabac*!”

“*Débit de Tabac?*” I cried. “At the corner of the Grande Rue? Kept by the Cleopatra of Shakespeare and Marguerite of Faust? Let me see—what was the girl’s name?—Elva?”

They both beamed on me. Why, of course. That was La Zublena and the lion-tamer’s daughter. I remembered then how she kept her left side covered with the gay Chinese shawl.

“But how does the lady manage to afford pearl necklaces and emerald rings?” I asked.

Their faces fell. The curé’s more than Tombarel’s.

“My dear fellow,” said the latter, with an ironical smile over the hand which held his pointed beard. “You are treading now on most delicate ground. What our excellent friend here has heard, in the confessional is his secret. But what I’ve heard, outside the confessional, isn’t mine. Once La Zublena, in spite of all her virtues, always La Zublena. Your poet Shakespeare talked of a chartered libertine. La Zublena, under the respectable name of the Widow Dubosc, is the chartered libertine of Creille. She can fish up a pearl necklace from the more worldly regions of this Azure Coast whenever she wants one. In Creille she is Sainte Zublena—a saint *un peu rigolo,* of course. But if you are looking for bad quarters of an hour, you can find them by speaking evil of your Cleopatra at the Café Pogomas.”

“And is she as devout as ever?” I asked.

“Why, yes,” replied the curé, with as helpless a shrug as I have seen convulse a human frame. “She haunts the church. These are not the secrets of the confessional I am telling you. But if I did my duty, I would say: ‘Out of this, Scarlet Woman of Babylon! Come not until you repent.’ But . . .”—I’m afraid he used most unclerical language which, in the interests not only of his cloth, but of his sweet and kindly soul, I must suppress—“but—what would you have? The *satanée* girl saved my life. There could be no purer sacrifice. When I see her beautiful arm hanging limp at her side . . . I am a man, all the same”—he blew his nose violently—“And she is bringing up the child, Elva, like a little angel of the *bon Dieu*.”

I was sorry for the curé. He really found himself in his relations with La Zublena, between the Devil and the Deep Sea.

“What’s going to be the end of it?” I asked.

He drained his glass of the old *marc* of Burgundy and regarded me with a queer smile.

“I am waiting,” said he. “We people of the Church are patient and pertinacious. In another thirty years’ time we shall be leading this erring and lost sheep, like a little lamb, into the Fold.”

VIII

BOUILLABAISSE

If it hadn’t been for *bouillabaisse* most probably Tombarel would never have met Angélique, his faithful servant, and would never have told me this story.

First you must know what *bouillabaisse* is. It is the national dish of the sea coast of Provence; a combined stew and soup of various kinds of fish, flavoured with saffron and garlic. The basis is a coarse kind of gurnet called *rascasse*, which the natives instinctively rendered palatable by disguising it with exotic flavourings. This was the crude beginning of the dish whose wonders Thackeray sang in his famous ballad. Now, any fool can throw odds and ends of fish and a handful of saffron into a pot, just as he or she can roll dough and stick it into an oven; but whereas one hand can create pastry light as an angel’s feather, and another turn out stuff of the consistency of devils’ hoofs, so may one be able only to produce a watery abomination, and another put such love and subtle understanding into the stewpan as to make *bouillabaisse* one of the few delectable viands that weave themselves into a good man’s dreams.

So much, at present (as Izaak Walton might say), for *bouillabaisse*.

It was during my stay with Tombarel at his low-storied pink Provençal *mas* in Creille, that I began to take more than an idle interest in Angélique. Of course I had known her for years, in the way one knows one’s friends’ servants. I had eaten many of her excellent meals and, careful of my manners, had thrown her passing compliments. She had always a smile to greet me; we passed the time of day, and that was all. But when I came to live in the house, we frankly gossiped. You must remember that, in the old France represented by Tombarel and the elders of Creille, the relations between master and servant were more or less Elizabethan in their intimacy, yet marked by jealous observance of indefinable social barriers.

Angélique was elderly, fairly tall, wiry, with a tanned and wrinkled olive face and queer, faded, compassionate blue eyes. She told me more of Tombarel’s funny little idiosyncrasies in a week than I had gathered in a seven years’ friendship. She also gossiped about the curé and Monsieur Guiol and

Marius Pogomas, and all the acquaintances I had made in Creille. And, as she had shrewd wit and a certain feminine provocative disdain, alloyed with pity for my sex, she was good company.

I sat one morning, about half-past ten, under the straggling cedar in front of the house, idly reading the *Eclaireur*, which had just arrived from Nice. It was a morning of enchanting blue. The rains that had driven me from Cannes had ended. A fresh touch in the air told me that, somewhere down below on the coast, the mistral was blowing; but it did not ruffle the leaves on the olive-trees in these sheltered mountains. The vines on the slopes on the other side of the gorge laughed tender green in the sunshine. Far, far away, through many-shouldered gaps of hills, lay a little triangular patch of dim silver which I knew to be the sea. The very air was blue. It was like looking at the world through the most translucent of sapphires.

From the vegetable garden on the hidden slope on to the miniature plateau where I sat emerged Angélique, a lettuce in her hand. She waved it at me.

“For *déjeuner*.”

“Let me see.”

There are exquisite tones of pale primrose and half-perceptible green in the crumpled leaves of the shy heart of a lettuce—just as there are unpaintable tones of pink in the crumpled palms of a baby. I told her this. But the æsthetics of vision did not greatly interest her.

“It is fresh, you see. One might say, still living; not like the things they serve you in grand restaurants which resemble poor flabby cabbage leaves taken from a rubbish heap. It makes all the difference. Besides, it isn’t everybody who knows how to choose in a garden. Gardeners know nothing. How can they?” She smiled. “You will tell me afterwards what you think of my salad.”

I promised. I also said: “Angélique, I have eaten in many restaurants, and in big houses, and I have quite a good cook myself; but there’s something in your cuisine”—I made the gesture of finger-tips that would be intelligible to her—“which I have met nowhere else. How did you learn it in Creille?”

She laughed and dumped the lettuce on my *Eclaireur* which I had put on the rough table by my side.

“But I haven’t lived all my life in Creille, Monsieur Fontenay.” She threw up her hands. That’s why she had laid down the lettuce—so that she could talk without injuring it. “I am not of Creille. *Mon Dieu*, no! I am of St. Laurent-du-Var, near Nice. As for my cooking, I learned it as *fille de cuisine* and then

cuisinière under the great Frédéric. You remember the great Frédéric?—the restaurant 'Aux Fruits de Mer'—just off the Nice flower market. It has gone long ago. Five and twenty years. It was famous. People came from Paris expressly to eat there. You remember?"

"Of course, without doubt," said I.

I didn't. A quarter of a century ago I was living the impecunious life of the young painter in Paris who regarded a three-franc-fifty dinner (wine included) in the Palais Royal as a debauch. What had I to do with Temples of Gastronomy in the Fairyland of the Azure Coast? But profession of ignorance would have hurt Angélique's susceptibility. So might an Englishman be hurt when, referring to Shakespeare in conversation with a casual foreign fellow-traveller in a train, he should be confronted with the question: "Shakespeare? What was his other name?"

"*Sans doute*," said I.

"*Eh bien*, that's where I learned," said Angélique. "And I did not stay in Nice. *Ah! Creille, par exemple!*"

She sniffed contemptuously at Creille.

"You have seen the great world," said I.

She had. Effectively. She knew it from Menton to Cannes. And there was enough worldliness in that stretch of country to satisfy anybody, even in the days long ago when Angélique was young.

"Don't you regret it?" I asked.

She shrugged. "I've seen all that there is to be seen."

I insinuated politely that she had been a pretty girl and a handsome woman. She bridled.

"I don't say no. That was why perhaps I saw so much." She picked up her lettuce, and her eyes twinkled as they met mine.

"I'm afraid, Angélique," said I, "you must have led a devil of a life. One of these days when you haven't salad to prepare for *déjeuner*, you must tell me all about it."

This was very idle badinage. There is no sexagenarian living, male or female, whose vanity is not tickled by the suggestion of a hectic, if not dissolute past. She burst out laughing.

"Tell you all I've seen, Monsieur Fontenay? Never in life! Not you, or Monsieur Tombarel, or Monsieur le Curé. Ah, no!"

She went away chuckling, as though the idea were infinitely comic. I resumed my *Eclaireur*. Ten minutes afterwards Tombarel entered by the

wicket gate and, throwing his vastly brimmed hat on the table, mopped a perspiring brow.

"*Mon Dieu*, it is hot! It is a climb at my age from the Place de la Mairie. And that animal of a Guiol, because he said he had the grippe, would not allow a window in the Council Room to be opened! I wish he would go and make himself warm elsewhere—where his microbes wouldn't be dangerous to his fellow-creatures."

During the course of these reminiscences of Tombarel, I think I have indicated that he had never really loved the linen-draper, Guiol.

"I have a thirst!" he cried. "I must drink something to quench it, or I shall die. It is early for an *apéritif*—but, all the same, my dear friend, you will join me?"

A vague man in an old blouse, one of Tombarel's vineyard hands, passed on some errand from the kitchen garden to the back of the house, and took off his shapeless brigand hat to us. Vague labouring brigands were always passing to and fro. Tombarel hailed him.

"Manuel, you will have the kindness to ask Madame Angélique to serve us with some *porto blanc*."

White port to quench the thirst of a perspiring and dry-throated man! In Tombarel's condition I should have called for beer in a long glass which I should have poured down my throat in an ice-cold, thirst-annihilating flood. But Tombarel was Latin of the Latins. When Angélique brought the wine, he sipped, and said with a great sigh of relief:

"*Ah! cela fait du bien.*"

We chatted a while. He had done his morning's work at the Town Hall: a thankless task for him—a Republican of the Extreme Right by propriety, a royalist at heart, condemned to hold the balance between bourgeois and peasants who didn't know what they wanted, on the one hand, and academic Bolsheviks like our honest friend Marius Pogomas, on the other. Well, after all—a conscience serene with the conviction of justice maintained—what could man want more?

"But, all the same," said he with a sigh, "I sympathize with my ancestors—*émigrés* of the Revolution."

The Abbé Cabassol appeared at the gate, his rusty cassock and rusty, greying, unshaven face catching rusty gleams in the morning sun. He advanced, bareheaded. We rose and greeted him. Had he intruded on a lovers' idyll, he could not have been more politely apologetic. Just a word of business with Monsieur le Maire. They moved away a few yards. It was this and that—whatever it was—said the curé. Tombarel spread his arms wide.

“*Mais parfaitement, mon cher ami*. Do as you think best, and until then, join us in our *apéritif*.”

The curé accepted. Monsieur le Maire was *bien aimable*. And what a day! The morning of an earthly Paradise! Tombarel called to a little scantily clad girl who always seemed to be attached to a goat somewhere under the olive-trees on the left—I must say that the vineyard and the patch of kitchen garden lay on the slope of the gorge on our right.

“Isabelle!”

Another message to Angélique to bring another glass.

“*Bonjour*, Monsieur le Curé.”

“*Bonjour*, Angélique. *Ça va toujours bien?*”

She laughed. “As you can see, Monsieur le Curé.”

She sped kitchenwards.

“*Brave femme*,” said the Abbé Cabassol.

“A stout-hearted woman, in very truth,” agreed Tombarel.

“What would you do without her?” I asked.

Tombarel turned on me. “Without Angélique!” His simple mind had not contemplated the possible catastrophe of bereavement. She was solid, a constitution of iron, good for another twenty years, long after he himself was laid to rest. The mountain air made old bones. Père Capenas, for instance.

“But Père Capenas is mountain born,” said I; “whereas Angélique came from St. Laurent-du-Var.”

Tombarel swept aside my objection. Over twenty years in the mountains would assure longevity to anyone, even were he born in the Sahara.

The curé nodded his head. Yes, it must be more than twenty years since Angélique came to Creille.

“Twenty-six,” said Tombarel.

“For one who has had a good time in her young days, at Nice, Monte Carlo, Heaven knows where,” said I, “Creille must seem rather dull.”

Tombarel stroked his white pointed beard.

“Things are not always dull at Creille, as you ought to know from the many stories I’ve told you. There’s nothing so incredible as not to have happened in this little town.”

“The burglary,” said the curé, by way of instance.

“What was that?” I asked.

“Only an example of the life of tranquillity lived by Angélique.”

I laughed. “Tell me about the burglary.”

Instead of plunging into the story as I had hoped, Tombarel countered by another question.

“What have you and that old scandal-mill of an Angélique been talking about? Has she told you anything of her past history?”

“She gave me to understand,” said I lightly, “that there were passages in it which you knew nothing about, and which Monsieur le Curé would blush to hear!”

Tombarel sat up and looked from me to the Abbé Cabassol.

“Things we don’t know?” he cried in indignation. “Do you hear that? Why, I know Angélique like my pocket, and my friend here like the inside of his breviary. *Ah! elle se fiche de vous, cher maître.*”

On so suave a morning the announcement that a pleasant old woman had pulled my leg awakened no wrath in me. I said idly:

“The only fact I gathered from her was that she had learned to cook in a Nice restaurant with a picturesque name . . . wait . . . yes, ‘Aux Fruits de Mer.’ ”

“That, at least, is true,” said Tombarel. “And she began, as far as I know, at the beginning. Yes. Chez Frédéric.” He turned to the curé. “You remember Frédéric?”

“I? Vaguely. How can you expect a poor seminarist and little *vicaire* in Marseilles to be familiar with your luxurious haunts of gluttony?”

Tombarel took up the bottle. “It wasn’t as luxurious as all that. Otherwise I shouldn’t have eaten there in the days when a franc was really a franc, and took a good deal of earning. Another drop?”

The Abbé Cabassol covered his glass with a protesting hand—a good foot above it.

“*Mais non.* I’m not in the habit . . . ah. . . .”

He was too late, for his glass was refilled to the brim.

“Yes, it’s odd,” said Tombarel, replenishing my glass and his own, “that she should have mentioned Frédéric. It existed long ago. Oh! in the far-off ages of Time. You”—to me—“didn’t know Frédéric either. Only a foreigner now and then introduced by a Niçois ever was seen there. It was in a little side street by the market, and its windows were shielded from the vulgar gaze by poor little red curtains on a rail; and the room had no carpet, and the wooden chairs invited you to get up and rub yourself as soon as you had eaten. No attractions for Messieurs les Touristes who, if they poked their nose inside, would have thought it a *gargote* for cabmen and street-sweepers and others in

whose company—and with perfect right—the rich visitor or the casual tourist does not care to dine. But every day it was filled with the good substantial citizens of Nice. It was not cheap. On the other hand, it was not foolishly expensive. The good citizens of Nice love good cheer, but they count their sous. I, who speak, had to count my sous in those days. 'Aux Fruits de Mer.' Specialities: *Langoustes,* the little *langoustines,* sea crayfish which one calls *petites demoiselles de la Méditerranée, oursins,* mussels cooked in twenty ways, *poulpes*—you know what I mean, *cher ami*?" I did. Octopus, most gracious food. "And, of course, *écrevisses*—though they are not fruits of the sea, but of the mountain streams—and then, the *bouillabaisse*. The *bouillabaisse* of the world. The *bouillabaisse* of Time. The *bouillabaisse* of Eternity. Ah, my friends! There were also dishes more solid. *Aioli*—garlic pounded into the mayonnaise of chicken such as they made at Tarascon, Provence of Provence, where the good Tartarin lived. But we are afraid of good garlic in these degenerate days. They say: '*On pue l'ail,*' and hold their noses. But when everyone smelt of garlic, no one smelt it. Is that not so?"

"*Mais oui,*" said the curé sadly—although his person diffused garlic within a radius of five feet.

"And there were the *cassoulet* of Toulouse," continued Tombarel, "and *tripes Lyonnaises, gras-double Lyonnais*—far better than I have tasted at the Chapon Fin of Lyon. . . . It was the last dying sigh, the soul of the sacrificial ox that one ate then. . . ."

Whereupon he waxed too lyrical for my prosaic memory. Frédéric's must have been a shrine of succulence.

"But, after all," said he at last, "it is Frédéric's *bouillabaisse* that makes him immortal. He must be serving it now to the angels. Do you happen to know, *mon cher curé,* whether there is a convenient, well-stocked sea in Paradise?"

"If a good Christian doesn't find in Paradise all that he desires," replied the Abbé Cabassol, "the Church wouldn't have spent all these centuries in persuading him to go there."

Tombarel turned to me and laughed, and flicked his long fingers towards the curé.

"*Mon Dieu!* Why isn't he a Cardinal?"

We laughed at the little joke. Tombarel went on with his tale of Frédéric the founder, patron, and chef of the Sea Fruit Restaurant—long since defunct—in Nice, where, as a professional man, Tombarel for some years ate his modest midday meal. That's all it really came to. He added a little but not unimportant detail.

Madame Frédéric—she and her husband, the proprietor of the restaurant, must have had a surname, but no one knew it—presided at the desk and made out the bills. She was large and blonde, elaborately coiffured, black bombazine invested, and rigorously corseted. It was as impolite to enter a private house where you were bidden to dinner, without shaking hands with your hostess, as to enter, a familiar, Chez Frédéric, without greeting Madame.

Now Tombarel was a familiar, and although he spent only a few francs a day in the restaurant, he was a client of consideration. He had a way of commanding consideration wherever he went.

So it happened that, entering "Aux Fruits de Mer" one morning, and sweeping his hat to Madame before surrendering it to the waiter who should hang it behind his accustomed chair, Madame beckoned him to the desk. Calamity had stricken the establishment. Monsieur Frédéric, of a health of iron, who had never spent a day in bed in his life, had fallen victim to the prevalent influenza. The *fille de cuisine* was doing the cooking, but what it would be like was known only to the *bon Dieu*. She craved Monsieur Tombarel's indulgence. Monsieur Tombarel replied in his large way that the stomach was not everything in life, and that his heart was with poor Frédéric in his affliction.

"I sat down," said Tombarel. "The waiter came up. What did I want? There was *bouillabaisse* to-day—but . . . I, thinking only of the sufferer upstairs, shivering with fever instead of standing up comfortably roasted before his casseroles, told him to bring me anything. He served me the *bouillabaisse*. But what a *bouillabaisse*! The first spoonful brought me down from the heights of sentimental altruism to an earth of wonderful realities. It was as good as any that Frédéric had set before me. In some respects better. It had a touch as though a sea-nymph had herself distilled all the juices of all the fruits of the sea. The magic of the artist's touch! What is it that makes the wonder of Velasquez? Who can define it? The magical touch. *Voilà* . . . When the waiter had removed empty plate and empty dish and empty tureen, I rose and went up to the *patronne*.

" 'Madame Frédéric,' said I, 'the *fille de cuisine* who prepared that *bouillabaisse* is an artist and a genius. There is nothing that breaks the heart of artists like lack of recognition. Will you, therefore, send for her so that I can convey to her my compliments?' "

I pictured the scene. Tombarel, then upright, black-bearded, bright-eyed, a vast blue and white spotted tie outside his brown velvet jacket buttoned up to the neck, waiting at the service door by the side of the desk. The entrance of the kitchen-maid, hot, dishevelled, blushing, while Tombarel in his Three Musketeers fashion bestowed on her his courtly encomium. The tiny stuffy

restaurant with the fat and greasy citizens of Nice, the corners of their napkins stuck into their shirt collars, looking on in unamazed approval. . . . In this suddenly evoked picture of the past, I lost the coherence of Tombarel's words. I started at a pause, and met the eyes of my venerable friend.

"And that," said he dramatically, "was my first meeting with Angélique."

Hereon inevitably followed the history of Angélique which Tombarel knew "like his pocket." It was grey enough, in its way, like that of any other peasant cook-maid in a little Southern restaurant; but across it swept a scarlet jagged line or so that made it interesting.

Angélique was born at St. Laurent-du-Var, a townlet on the low-lying hills west of Nice. Her father was employed at the pottery works where they made great oil-jars and ornamental tiles. Her mother died when she was very young. That she knew. Otherwise, like Topsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she 'spected she growed. When the Great Potter flicked her father like a superfluous bit of clay from His Wheel, Angélique was taken over by a distant relative, too distant even to be called aunt by courtesy—Madame Frédéric—and put as a stout, useful, unsalaried member of the family into the kitchen of the restaurant "Aux Fruits de Mer." Here, as I have said, she learned to cook, and made the transient acquaintance of Monsieur Tombarel.

Now, even into the close and under-staffed kitchen of a little restaurant in a side street can romance penetrate. It was brought thither by Angélique herself, who had caught it from a plumber who lived close by. He had the reputation of a riotous liver. His family, honest folk, also came from St. Laurent-du-Var, and knew of Angélique and the honourability of her estate. It was time that Lucien should range himself. Angélique, enraptured by the swashbuckling young plumber, dreamed dreams which at first she felt could never come true. The good Madame Frédéric played fairy-godmother and gave her a dowry of a thousand francs, equipped with which she was led first to the Mairie and then to the altar by Lucien Gregorio. Tombarel and one or two of the intimate customers of the "Fruits de Mer" attended the wedding. Tombarel gave her a wedding-present, a brooch—a dear little fish in diamonds with a curly tail.

That was not the end of Angélique's fairy story. The curtains had only dropped on Act I. For though the pair were married, they were by no means destined to live happy for ever after. Far from it.

What really happened to Angélique, the chuckling old woman who, before Tombarel began his story, had left me with the impression that she had flitted like a dragonfly through the palms and mimosas of the Azure Coast, in Acts II,

III, IV and V, would have turned her, had she not been a sane and comprehensible Latin, into God knows what half-witted female dear to the semi-intellectuals who patronize our suburban stage. Whether as some Deirdre on a moonlit bog, or a woman in Nordic mist, or an Anna in an *isba*, letting the samovar boil over while she listened for the phantom footsteps in the snow, she would have been the same tiresome, dreary female, with gaunt white face and haunted eyes who must have made herself an abominable nuisance (like Clytemnestra) to her ordinary acquaintance.

Angélique was in for elemental drama, and she came out of it smiling—just as would have done, and for aught I know did, my mother's old personal maid for thirty years, Somerset born and bred, who, after my mother's death, and more or less on her own death-bed, confessed to me that, unknown to her sainted lady, she had half a dozen sturdy illegitimate children, all doing splendidly. Only last year I got one of them a situation as dental mechanic with my London dentist.

Between Tryphena and Angélique there was little difference beyond those produced by climatic influences, the soft moisture of Somerset on the one hand, and on the other the dry wind of Provence. Had they met and spoken a common language, they would have been sworn sisters. But, put either of them with a Deirdre or a Helda or an Anna, and she would have thought herself in some Cloud-Cuckoo-Land.

Well, this is the story of Angélique. Of details of her married life neither Tombarel nor the curé knew very much. There was a child who died at birth. They hinted that it was Lucien's fault. For Lucien, incidentally a very bad plumber—worse than most—soon confirmed his reputation of being a very bad man. He drank—and a French drunkard, especially one of the Midi, is the worst possible kind of man; he threw away the proceeds of his inefficient plumbing on dismal underground gaming tables and on the fractional upkeep of Babylonic ladies, and beat the once adoring and attractive Angélique ("*dobue comme une caille*"—plump as a partridge, as we have it—said Tombarel) into a mass of hatred and despair.

Then came along a coiffeur, a young and gallant fellow. In real life the hairdresser is a hard-working man, with the ideals and ideas and commonplace anxious motives of any other honest citizen. Louis Périssol was doing well at Monte Carlo. He had no evil yet fascinating reputation. He was solid gold. Gentle as a lamb.

"I will take you from Hell to Heaven," said he.

"Take me," said Angélique, and small blame to her.

And that was the curtain of Act II. In Act III we have the regulation

triangular play in full emotional swing. The errant yet idyllic pair led a life of guilty comfort in Monte Carlo, while the betrayed and deserted husband, Lucien Gregorio, indifferent plumber and inconsiderable human being, worked himself up to the heights of tragic drama. The less he plumbed and the more he drank, the clearer did his image stand before himself as that of a man of saintly honour stabbed to the soul by traitorous hands. This, according to Tombarel, was the description given of him by his advocate at the trial. The wrong that he suffered called for the vindication of that honour; for the vengeance of righteous wrath. So Lucien Gregorio sharpened a beast of a knife, took train to Monte Carlo, and lurked outside Périssol’s shop until the betrayer should appear at the threshold to take the air, and, after the way of young shopkeepers, glance affectionately at the hair-dresser’s display in his window. In the dark of a late January afternoon, Louis Périssol emerged from his shop in accordance with expectation. Whereupon Lucien Gregorio jabbed his knife up to the hilt into his back and ran away. Unfortunately for him, after ten yards, he ran into a couple of Monaco gendarmes who caught him literally red-handed. A passer-by had already stumbled over the body of Louis Périssol, who lay stone-dead.

Cries, clamours and vociferations attracted Angélique from within to the shop-door, where she was confronted with secular tragedy. A curtain for an act in any drama. Nothing would remain but the anti-climax of emotional analysis. So we must come to Act IV.

I am aware I am only giving you what is called the scenario of the tragedy. But it was a very commonplace drama of which the psychological web of motivations must be apparent to everybody. A hairdresser runs off with a plumber’s wife. The plumber kills the hairdresser, and is tried for murder. His advocate pleads as extenuating circumstances the justification of the virtuous and outraged husband. The prosecution extort from witnesses, including the wife, the revelation of the accused Gregorio as the obscene fellow that he was. Mercy based on the tradition of the betrayed husband prevailed. Lucien Gregorio was condemned to ten years’ penal servitude. He faded out of Angélique’s life into New Caledonia.

But neither law nor newspapers nor public seemed to care a hang for the Woman Who Came Between, *videlicet* Angélique. There were so very few people in the world who knew anything at all about her.

Angélique Gregorio—a name in a murder-case, a *crime passionnel*—nothing in it to touch the imagination of any reader of newspapers.

Now it happened that at the time—we are at the beginning of Act IV—Tombarel was winding up his business as a land-surveyor in Nice and

preparing to settle down in his ancestral domain of vines and olives in Creille, of which town he had just been elected Mayor. You may remember from what I have told you that he was a man of artistic tastes, of mildly scholastic habits, of trivial but comfortable fortune augmented by his professional savings, and, above all, of an old-world aristocrat's patriarchal instincts. He loathed his profession of land-surveying into which he had drifted melancholy after having beaten at the Beaux-Arts doors of Architecture in vain. To plot out, with chain measure and theodolite, land on which others should rear proud palaces or red-roofed homes that would dream in the blue air of the South, became an intolerable pursuit. Besides, his professional life was passed in rasping contact with syndicates or individuals with the tin hides of syndicates who thought of nothing except in terms of money: who regarded him, Tombarel, as a mere mechanical measurer; who hadn't the remotest appreciation of the fact that his great-something-grandfather, sent to the scaffold during the Revolution, was a Vidame of Gascony—that it was only personal pride and scorn of Napoleonic, Royalist and Republican snobbery that made him drop from his name the particle of authentic nobility, the "de" of de Tombarel.

He was born in Creille, as were his father and grandfather before him—according to the great migration of French families after the Revolution, in this case from Gascony to Provence. The roots of his being were in Creille. There he had almost feudal rights. As newly appointed Mayor he was confirmed in them. He sold his land-surveying practice.

One day, his head whirling with essential change, he entered the restaurant "Aux Fruits de Mer." He gave, as usual, his cockle-shell clasped cloak and his great soft hat to a dingy servitor, bowed to Madame Frédéric and, on a wild, appealing gesture from the lady, approached the high desk.

She upbraided him. It was long, she said, since she had seen him. He explained his absence. The sordid commercial business of Nice, the new municipal cares of Creille. For a fortnight he had eaten God knew where.

"*Mais enfin*, Monsieur Tombarel," said Madame Frédéric, "you know what has happened?"

No. Tombarel had not heard of any extraordinary happening.

But the great case, of which the papers were full, urged Madame Frédéric. Hadn't he read about it? The murder—a *crime passionnel*—of the Monte Carlo coiffeur, Périssol?

Ah, yes. Tombarel had read about it. But in what way did it concern Madame Frédéric?

Then, of course, the dramatic revelation. The woman in question was

Angélique, to whom Tombarel had given a wedding present of a diamond fish in memory of her *bouillabaisse*, and whose wedding he had attended.

“*Mon Dieu!*” and all kinds of other things, said Tombarel. He had taken little notice of the names. *Tiens! La pauvre petite!* And to think there was a man who could beat and deceive and make existence a hell for a woman who cooked like that! Ten years! Where was Justice in France? Even decapitation would have been a punishment too merciful. And where was poor Angélique?

She was there, in the house, hiding from public shame. Girls of a family of perfect honourability and respectability have no reason to find glory in the scandal of a *crime passionnel*.

“What’s going to become of her?”

Madame Frédéric shrugged in piteous appeal to the Almighty. He alone knew. There was a *sous-chef* now under Frédéric in the kitchen and they couldn’t discharge him even if Angélique would care to resume her old functions. And naturally they couldn’t afford to keep Angélique in idleness except for the week or two that would tide her over her troubles. She must work. But where? What respectable patron would employ her with such a history behind her?

“My friends,” said Tombarel, “I had then one of those inspirations——”

“Which come from the *bon Dieu*,” interjected the curé with uplifted hands.

“You are right. Which come direct from heaven. Here was I on the point of installing myself here, not as a little land-owner making picnic for a day or two at a time, but as Mayor of Creille. I must have an establishment. To throw an inspired cook like that to the unappreciating wolves of a hard world would be flying in the face of Providence. I said: ‘Madame Frédéric, will you tell Angélique that I wish to speak to her?’ She took me into the little dark *salon* at the head of the kitchen stairs where the family ate and lived, and there it was that I interviewed the rag of a young woman that was Angélique.”

I can hear him saying in that stuffy little room:

“Will you cast care and shame behind you, and come into a fairyland where you’re not known, and be the Housekeeper and Maker of Bouillabaisse to the Mayor of Creille?”

She kneels. Tears of gratitude. A convincing curtain for Act IV.

“Yes,” said the Abbé Cabassol. “You never have had to regret it. A fine woman if ever there was one.”

“And a good Catholic, I hope,” said Tombarel, “although she boasts to

Fontenay that she has committed beautiful sins you never heard of."

The curé passed his hand, with a rasping sound, up his half-shaven face, a favourite habit, before waving it in a vague gesture. He smiled.

"I have heard enough to go on with. *C'est une brave femme.*"

"What about the burglary?" I asked.

Tombarel cast an appealing glance at the curé.

"And here am I, exhausting myself in telling him all about it."

I laughed and, as usual, let Tombarel tell his story in his own way. The burglary, it seems, occurred many years after Angélique's installation as Housekeeper to the Mayor of Creille. During those years she commanded the respect of the town. In the market, whither she went, basket on arm, every morning, she was autocratic. She disregarded protests:

"But it is already promised to the Château d'Ecrabouilles."

With calm authority she would seize on whatever delicacy of food was under dispute.

"Monsieur le Maire comes first."

And so, in a selfless, devoted way, she wove Tombarel into the texture of her life. You must remember that Tombarel in great things and small was always a great gentleman. That aspect of him held Angélique to this day in awe. The other aspect of him, that of the helpless loon of a man who hadn't the sense to come indoors out of the rain, she cherished in her heart.

All this was obvious. I merely tell it to you by way of beguiling the interval before the curtain rises on Act V.

"One night," said Tombarel, "I was awakened by what I thought was a pistol-shot."

"The burglar at last," said I.

"Precisely," said he. "I am going to tell you, if you will but listen. Yes, a pistol-shot. . . . Ping! Just like that. Sometimes, on awakening, one's brain works quickly. That day I had been to Nice to collect certain monies that were due to me—a matter of ten thousand francs."

Now, before the war, ten thousand francs was exactly £400. Why Tombarel should have brought home this considerable sum of money instead of paying it into his account at a bank belongs to one of the mysteries of French psychology that we can never understand. I doubt whether there is any millionaire's household in London which could respond to the sudden demand

for four hundred pounds in ordinary currency. When the moratorium struck us, on the outbreak of war, there arose the most grotesque of situations. The richest in the land couldn’t scrape up enough ready cash to pay a cab-fare. Cash was locked up by law in the banks. In France the cash lay comfortably in the traditional woollen stocking.

Tombarel, on this burglarious day before the war, never dreamed of doing otherwise with his ten *mille* notes than bringing them with him to Creille and putting them into the tinpot safe which stood in a corner of his dining-room. That he might be robbed never entered his head. There were black sheep in Creille, it was true, but none were so depraved as to defy the august sacredness of his position and break into his house. Besides, no one on earth, still less in Creille, could have known that ten flimsy notes had passed from the drawer of his *agent d’affaires* at Nice into the inner breast-pocket of his jacket. He dined and slept in peace until. . . .

Ping! Just like that.

In the top drawer of his *table de nuit* there had always lain a loaded revolver.

“But why?” I asked, “since you were so certain that there could be no burglars in Creille?”

“*Mon Dieu!*” said Tombarel, “the advent of burglars is the least of the complications that may arise in this knotted skein of an existence. Besides, like a barometer and an edition of Bossuet which no one looks at, it is part of the installation of a gentleman’s house,” He flickered his hands at me impatiently. “With your permission, my friend, I had a revolver. I heard: *Ping!* Naturally, as I sprang from my bed, my hand sought the drawer. The revolver was not there. The revolver that I had loaded and put there ten years before. It had been there last week. I saw it when I sought the corn-plasters which I keep in the same drawer. . . . The revolver had disappeared. I remembered my ten thousand francs. Had a *bandit* tracked me from Nice and stolen my weapon of defence? But the shot? Who fired it? I drew my curtains in one gesture. It was a moonlight night in June. I thrust my legs into trousers and my feet into *espadrilles*. I rushed down the stairs. The front door was open. The moonlight came in on the floor like a silver spear. That door there.” He pointed to the farmhouse door behind us as we sat beneath the straggling cedar. I could well imagine the spear of moonlight. I had memories of such nights at Creille when the moon rode over the bluff of the Eastern hills.

He went out into the sharp still brilliance, and there was Angélique staring like a witch or a statue, or, at any rate, like a woman transfixed with horror, at a sprawling, huddled-up heap of a man.

“*Tiens*—just there,” said Tombarel, pointing to the edge of level ground on to which Angélique, an hour before, had emerged with her lettuce from the lower slope of the vegetable garden.

There, in the full moonlight, Angélique stood staring at the huddled man. Two things glittered on the ground—the barrel of a revolver and, by the man’s hand, the blade of a knife. Tombarel touched the woman’s shoulder. She flashed round.

“Yes. It is I who did it.”

Human instinct compelled him to the man’s side. He bent down. There was a bullet wound from temple to temple. The man was as dead as a door-nail. Tombarel rose and spread his arms wide.

“*Mais, grand Dieu!* what does this mean?”

“You don’t recognize him?” asked Angélique.

“Eh? Recognize him?” He was an abominable-looking ruffian in ruffian attire. “How should I recognize him?”

“It’s Lucien—Lucien Gregorio. My husband,” said Angélique.

“And you shot him . . . with my revolver?”

“Yes,” said Angélique, and collapsed on the ground.

Tombarel picked her up and carried her into the house, and did what he could to revive her. She was clad in nothing but her coarse nightgown, and her hair streamed about her shoulders. She lay on the prim couch in the dining-room. His eyes flashed across to the safe. The door was open. It was empty. Not only were the ten thousand francs gone, but other bundles of notes and share certificates and bearer bonds. Fancy a highly civilized human being in a land of high civilization keeping a small fortune in bearer bonds in a rotten little safe in a ground-floor dining-room!

He stared aghast. Angélique (*brave femme*, according to the curé), recovering from her fainting fit, rushed across to him tragically.

“Monsieur, it is not I who have robbed you!”

“Seeing that you killed the robber,” said Tombarel dryly, “I don’t suppose you have.”

“*Oh, mon Dieu,*” cried Angélique, her hands to her forehead.

“*Tiens, tiens,*” said Tombarel. “Tell me all about it.”

It was really her husband, Lucien Gregorio, who had been sentenced to ten years in New Caledonia for the murder of Louis Périssol. The ten years had passed.

“Not possible, my poor child,” said Tombarel.

But they had well and duly passed, and Lucien was a free man.

Naturally he had returned to Nice with ten years' brooding vengeance stored up in his heart. Perhaps—who on God's earth can tell?—he had, for all his cruelties and infidelities, this woman *dans la peau*—according to frank French idiom—in his skin, rooted deep in the half god-brute in him. Who can tell? The man was dead. Certainly he had tracked her down—or, rather, up—to Creille. As in all large cities, there was in Nice a well-informed underworld. He had written her a letter announcing his return, and demanding money. She had not replied. He had written again, this time adding vague threats. All the world knew, said he, that the Mayor of Creille was a man of great wealth. If she herself would not provide him with necessary funds there was always the safe of Monsieur le Maire. After all, he was her husband in the eyes of the *bon Dieu*, and was prepared to enforce his rights with considerable unpleasantness for everybody. Whereupon Angélique continued to keep silent, and took the revolver out of her master's drawer.

Tombarel stormed. "Why hadn't she told him of all this?"

She gave him to understand that her disreputable affairs were her affairs, and she would have cut herself into four rather than worry Monsieur.

"And the letters? Where are they?"

She had burned them, she said.

"When women say they have destroyed letters, I never believe them. A woman is capable of many things, but not of that."

She held up her hands and swore by the Virgin and the Saints that she told the truth. Tombarel called her a triple idiot. With the letters in her possession . . .

"After all," he broke off, "I have an idea. You remain here without moving. No, first go and cover yourself up, and then remain here without moving. *Sans bouger une seconde. Tu comprends?*"

When Tombarel spoke like that, Angélique understood. He went out and round the house and crossed a patch of waste in front of the shed where the great barrels of wine were stored; where, as a customer on my first meeting with Tombarel, I had sampled his pretty little country wines. He knocked at a door at the end.

"Arnaud!"

Arnaud was the manager, foreman, head-man, head-gardener of the little estate of vines and olives. He was an elderly mysogynist who slept on a wretched truckle bed in a corner of the barn whose privacy was maintained by a coarse screen sacking. He was used to it; he liked it; liked it all the more

because there was a little fortune cunningly distributed about the inside of the mattress. He was sleeping on gold. What more could a man want?

He came to the door with a sleepy: “*Hé? Quoi? . . . Ah, Monsieur!*”

“Go and summon Monsieur le Commissaire de Police, on the part of Monsieur le Maire, to come at once. An affair of attempted burglary and assassination.”

Arnaud gasped and turned an agonized backward glance at his bed. Tombarel smiled.

“*N’aie pas peur. Le cambrioleur est bien arrangé. Va vite.*”

Such was Tombarel’s authority that the man no longer had fear, being assured that perfect arrangements had been made for the burglar’s safe custody, and, huddling on a garment or two, sped on his errand.

Tombarel went back to the house, looked in through the dining-room door. Angélique, in amorphous yellow wrapper, sat in ghastly obedience to his behest not to budge. He ordained that she should continue not to budge. Armed with an electric torch which he sought in his little library, he went out to the spot where the dead man lay in the still moonlight. He knelt down and searched the man’s clothes with calm thoroughness, and laid out all they held on the ground beside him. There were his ten thousand francs, his other bundles of notes, a bag of gold, his bearer bonds; there, too, were the miscreant’s greasy papers. The former he replaced; the latter he tied up in a bundle made with the lining of the man’s hat which had fallen a foot or two from his head. Then he took the bundle into the house, and hid it in temporary security—to be destroyed at leisure—and went to Angélique, whom he filled with fear of Tombarel, God, and the French Republic.

“If ever woman felt the edge of the guillotine on her neck,” said Tombarel, “it was Angélique that night.”

I, too, shivered in the hot March sunshine.

The Commissaire de Police came round with Arnaud and a gendarme.

“Monsieur le Commissaire,” said Tombarel, “I am sorry to disturb you. But here are the facts. It was but half an hour since—just time to arouse Arnaud here, and send for you—when I was awakened by a strange sound. It was the clank of iron on iron. It was so strange that I started up and listened. Evidently there was some one in the house downstairs. I had just that day

brought back ten thousand francs from Nice, which I had deposited in my safe. Burglars? I reached to the drawer for my revolver and went downstairs. I found my safe open—a man standing with knife in his hand. He rushed past me, threw me aside. I followed him into the open. I said. ‘Halt! or I fire.’ He turned and came at me with the knife, and I fired. He fell. At the shot my housekeeper awoke and rushed out. Beyond that she knows nothing. . . . It is for you, Monsieur le Commissaire, to examine the body which I have not touched. I miss from my safe . . .”

His accurate statement was confirmed by the examination of the dead man’s pockets.

“He has no identification papers,” said the Commissaire.

Tombarel shrugged his shoulders. That had nothing whatever to do with him. He was Monsieur le Commissaire’s prisoner, and at his entire disposal.

As the Commissary of Police shrank from handcuffing the Mayor of Creille, and dragging him to the local dungeon, he begged him politely to hold himself ready for arrest at a moment convenient to everybody, and, saluting, marched away with the dead body of the unknown man in the farm cart provided by Tombarel.

“That’s the history of the burglar,” said Tombarel.

“But what happened afterwards?” I asked.

“There was an inquiry, *bien entendu*. But if a miscreant breaks into your house at dead of night and threatens your life, the law allows you to shoot him. I was only exercising my rights as a French citizen.”

“You would have got into a mess if you had been found out,” said I, “whereas Angélique, if she had confessed, would have been most certainly acquitted.”

“My dear friend,” replied Tombarel, “the wise man with the perfect cook doesn’t allow her to be worried by trivial annoyances of this kind.”

I looked at the curé. The curé looked down his nose and flicked away an imaginary grain of snuff from his black and white bands. What had occurred between Angélique and himself in the confessional was no concern of mine.

Angélique came out of the house, her face wrinkled into smiles, to announce *déjeuner*.

“You join us, of course,” said Tombarel.

The Abbé Cabassol declined protestingly. No, no. He must fly.

“Monsieur le Curé doesn’t often have the chance of eating *bouillabaisse*

like mine," said Angélique.

Tombarel threw up both hands and cried in a loud voice:

"There is *bouillabaisse*?"

"But yes. Fish fresh from Nice this morning, caught at dawn."

"*Allons, Enfants de la Patrie*," chanted Tombarel, and, linking arms with the curé and myself, dragged us into the house. Angélique, triumphant priestess, served us the Olympian food, as though knives and revolvers and violent deaths had never darkened her radiant existence.

I'm sure I was the only one in the room who was morbidly conscious of a queer flavour in the *bouillabaisse*.

IX

A SNOW-FLAKE FROM PICARDY

"WHAT'S going to be the end of it?" said Tombarel, putting down the match with which he had lighted a cigarette. "I don't know. A snow-flake from Picardy wafted across France into our sunshine."

"By the Blue Train," I smiled.

He nodded unhumorously. "It was essential. To get even that accommodation I had to pull strings. Ah! If you only knew! Fortunately I still have some influence with the Government! Otherwise how could I have obtained three places—from Amiens on the *Train Bleu* from Calais, in the middle of January? My old friend Gaspareau said: '*Mais, mon vieux, tu es fou!*' But it's only the madman who gets his way in the end."

This reflection seemed to console him. He smiled in a resigned sort of way and sipped his brandy.

"But think of it. Three places."

I did think of it. It had been a matter of great worry and expense. An old French gentleman of the school of Tombarel doesn't usually travel by luxurious cosmopolitan trains. On the very rare occasions when Tombarel went to Paris, he accomplished the night journey in a corner of a first-class carriage, a hired pillow behind his head, and his hands encased in grey lisle thread gloves to protect them from dirt. Having committed his soul to God, he cynically surrendered his mortal body to the eccentricities of the Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée Railway. Thus he had travelled some time before from Nice to Paris. But the bringing back with him of a snow-flake and some kind of attendant woman was a different matter altogether. Of the latter I have been chary in my designation. She could not be a nurse, seeing that she was to be packed off second-class to Amiens as soon as possible.

You see, this was the situation at the moment. They had arrived in Cannes at 10-45 by the Blue Train. Angélique, driven from Creille in the little yellow Citroën by some nondescript hanger-on of the little town, had met them at the station. They had gone to the modest *clinique* of Tombarel's old friend, Doctor Andrieu, where the necessary arrangements had been made for the snow-flake's reception, and Tombarel had eventually come to me in time for lunch.

"Life isn't gay," sighed Tombarel.

“It has its clouds,” said I.

“At present they are as black as can be. As if it weren’t enough that I should be losing you, without all this trouble coming upon me.”

“I shall be coming back now and then,” said I by way of comfort.

“You say it. But even so, it won’t be the same thing. *Tout passe*, *tout casse*, et cetera.”

“Except our friendship.”

“Naturally. But I am getting old,” said Tombarel.

We were both of us somewhat depressed, in spite of the scent of the early golden mimosa that came through the open dining-room windows. For the time was approaching when I must leave Cannes after many years, and return to England to take up the threads of London life, broken more or less since the outbreak of the war. There were many reasons for my taking this step; some financial, some domestic. My confrères of the Royal Academy had done me the honour of admitting me to full membership, and it behoved me to take some active interest in Academy affairs. By remaining in Cannes I was losing a great deal of work as a portrait painter. I had tempting offers for a season in New York. Cannes seemed to have changed during the last year or two. The floating society had become more what the French called “*rastaquouère*” and vulgarly monied. A casino where you can throw on the baccarat table an indefinite number of white plaques representing £800 each is not a resort where gentlefolk find the amenities of gracious life. The kind of people whose portraits I used to paint, and wanted to paint, were going elsewhere. Cost of living was rising. Thus, I found that further sojourn in Cannes was to my financial disadvantage. Meanwhile my health, impaired by unkind Germans in the war—my original reason for settling in the South of France—was now re-established. I could face Polar blizzards with impunity. Besides, there existed in London a greatly loved stepdaughter of mine, of whom I wrote some years ago,[1] one Dorothy, happily married and the mother of three, yet none too well off, with whom I could share a fairly spacious establishment. She was longing, she declared, to look after me. After my years of widower-hood I was beginning to grow lonely, and longed to be looked after. . . .

[1] *Vide* “The Coming of Amos.”

If I didn’t tell you all this—which is apparently irrelevant—I don’t think you would understand why I was greatly moved by Tombarel’s words:

“I am losing you. And I am getting old.”

It was only then that I realized that the bond of friendship between the old man and myself had been toughened and strengthened into one of affection.

We were both of us solitaries and in some queer way had interwoven, imperceptibly growing, very delicate, yet very real tendrils of our lives.

You see, I was looking forward not only to a renewal of life, but to very dear companionship. Tombarel, who came to me, perhaps alone of mortals, with his little problems and cares and reachings for sympathy, would be left behind in a greater loneliness on his monotonous little hilltop of Creille.

Tombarel sighed. “*Pecaïre!*”

The word, as Alphonse Daudet says, of all the sadnesses of the Midi. What does it mean? Perhaps, “Jesus, pity us all, for we have sinned!”

After lunch I sent him up to rest. I had persuaded him to stay with me, instead of lodging, as was his intention, at some horrid obscure little hotel in Cannes. Creille was impossible, of course, on account of the snow-flake.

He came down late in the afternoon, rested and refreshed. It was early December. The studio curtains were drawn; a cheery wood fire blazed under the chimney-piece. Tombarel loved the studio. He sank with a sigh of content into a comfortable armchair.

“Food, wine and sleep, that’s all a man needs in order to maintain his virility. Now I can confront all the lions and tigers of destiny with a stout heart. I am helping myself, *cher ami*, to one of your excellent cigarettes. . . . There is a collatéral branch of my family—my grandmother’s father was a de Trellière, and he had for his family motto: *Mortuus sed invictus.* Dead but unconquered. All the de Trellières are dead save me. And it is my duty to remain unconquered until death and after. *Voilà!*”

He swept a hand over his white shock of hair, and pulled his beard into a swaggering point, and regarded me with luminous eyes.

“And all this while you have taken my fantastic adventure of my snow-flake from Picardy for granted, without questioning me.”

“*Flegme britannique!*” I laughed.

He flickered delicate protesting fingers.

“Ah, no, most sympathetic of friends. You knew that in my own way and in my own time I should admit you to my full confidence.”

“That’s perfectly true,” said I.

“Well, you know,” said he, looking vaguely into space, “*c’est toute une histoire*.”

I smiled. How often had he not prefaced chapters of his reminiscences with those words. “*Toute une histoire.*” Quite a story.

Tombarel began:

"In life there is Love and love. One with a capital letter and one without. It is the one with the capital letter that makes or mars a man's existence. No, not always. Perhaps in my case it has not marred it, but has left a sanctifying influence. On account of it I have remained unmarried. I have already told you."

My mind went back to the old nun whom I had seen leaving Tombarel's home a couple of years back, when he thought he was about to die.

"That," he went on, "is the sacred flame compounded of body and soul, lit by God and mounting up to Heaven, and the Angels reach for it and tend it with their hands, so that it shall not perish before the Day of Judgment. . . . Well, so much for Love with the capital letter. But man is a very human being. If you can suggest anything more human than man—except perhaps woman—as a philosopher I shall be obliged. All sorts of little loves, of necessity, flutter through his life; some with fragrance, others leaving a taint behind."

He threw his cigarette into the fire.

"I'm talking the platitudes of senility. Why don't you stop me? I might just as well announce to you that there's scarcely any tide in the Mediterranean, whereas at Saint Malo there is one of fifteen metres."

I laughed, told him I was all ears, interested in his *Apologia pro vita sua*, and quite convinced that the story he was about to relate was concerned with one of the little loves that had a fragrance behind it; even that of potpourri.

He sprang forward in his chair.

"That's the word. Potpourri, withered petals of dead roses but spiced with memories beyond all possibilities of corruption. A jar. One lifts the lid. Nothing but the delicate essence of things of long ago." He sighed. "Yes. It was like that; I raise the lid after nearly fifty years and the fragrance remains. . . . A grand passion? No. Well, I will tell you."

"I was a student in Paris. The Beaux-Arts—that Palace of Dreams where so few of them come true. But she was no little Mimi or Musette. Ah, no! Her friends were of the Faubourg—the Faubourg St. Germain—into which I, son of an old family, had my *entrée*. It was at a house of the old aristocracy that I met her first and on subsequent occasions. Dagmar Ferraboni. A strange juncture of names—North and South; but the solution was simple. She was a Swede who had married an Italian. As she never spoke of him, I thought he was dead; and for all the information given to me by my friends, she might have been a widow. But a young widow; a year, two years at least, older than I. And beautiful, tall and slender, and fair—*mon Dieu*, how fair!—with hair like flaxen floss. Anyhow, you know the pure Scandinavian type. It is not as

rare as all that. But there was pure flame lurking beneath the chiselled white marble of her. . . .”

He went on; perhaps with the obvious. The warm-blooded young son of Provence and the snow queen of Sweden animated by hidden fires fell in love with each other in the most ordinary way in the world. She was, if not rich, at least comfortably off, and lived in a charming fiat near the Luxembourg. Tombarel, no threadbare student dwelling in attics, had a reputable *chambre garnie* in the rue Cujas, half a mile to the east. Thus they could meet frequently without let or hindrance in all sorts of pleasant places besides the austere *salon* of the Marquise Douarière de la Tour-Rochambeau. How, when and where they threw their young and happy caps over the windmills, I don’t know. Tombarel didn’t tell me, being a man of all the delicacies. Nor does it matter. The fact remains that from early spring to late summer of a fatal year, they were culpably happy.

“But with what discretion!” cried Tombarel. “An idyll was an idyll in those days. Once out of Paris, you were lost to the world! Saint-Cloud, Meudon, Fontainebleau . . . and one was in the deep country—lilies-of-the-valley, roses climbing up the walls and peeping in at your window, the smell of hay, no Tout-Paris, no tourists blighting the land with petrol vapour and making privacy impossible. Now you go to Disette-le-Trou (Starvation in the Hole), in the middle of the mountains of Auvergne, and the next morning an automobile drives up to your inn and out steps a friend of you both whom you think at Monte Carlo or the Champs-Elysées. . . . No, my friend, I’m glad I’m not young these days.”

The abstract morality of the matter I didn’t discuss with him. He had made his point. Fifty years ago you could pursue, conduct, carry through an idyll in a far more sweet and poetical secrecy than in these modern times when the glare of publicity reveals your every act. Yet Tombarel was an honourable man.

“Marry me, Northern Goddess of my soul,” he would cry. “You are free. You are well born. The few scattered members of my family whom perhaps, under the Code, I might have to summon as a *Conseil de Famille*, would raise no objection.”

But she would laugh. And her laughter, as Tombarel said in terms more of poetical than of precise definition, was that of Trolls far away in the gorges of Norwegian fiords.

“Why, *bien-aimé*, why touch with a commonplace finger the most beautiful and delicate thing that ever happened?”

At last came a day, a very bad and gloomy day, a day of pouring rain at the end of July, when he received a message summoning him at once to her pretty

apartment near the Luxembourg.

“My dear,” said she, “all is over and we must part.”

Young Tombarel stood aghast. Part? Why?

She gave him to understand that such most beautiful and delicate idylls often had commonplace consequences.

“All the more reason, *mon adorée*,” cried Tombarel, clasping her to his bosom, “that you should marry me at once.”

She disengaged herself sadly from his embrace.

“How can I, when my husband is alive?”

Thunderbolts fell on and all around Tombarel. In his Southern way he raved and tore his hair and said many anguished things, wise and foolish. The wise utterances concerned her reputation. What was she going to do? In what way could he shield her? His life was hers.

She regarded him with the serenity of Freya, the goddess of her frozen North. She spoke. Her eyes and her voice assured him of her love; but her words were as cold as a sentence of death.

Her husband was alive—very much alive, as she had reason to know—somewhere in Italy. For the moment she had lost him. They had parted two years ago. Apparently as intolerable a fellow as a bad Italian can be. She never spoke of him; tried not to think of him. That was why she tacitly encouraged her Paris friends to assume her widowhood. Divorce? She shrugged her shoulders. Impossible. Remember, this was fifty years ago, when the slipping out of double harness was a devil of a business.

Besides, they were both Catholics. . . . Tombarel again tore his hair. What was to be done? To the clear-brained daughter of the North, who had had a heart-to-heart talk with the Norns, the Parcae, or Fates of her Ancestors, her course was simplicity itself. She would return to the bosom of her family, who had heard only vaguely of the differences between husband and wife, and the child would be born in Stockholm in all the honour and officialism of holy wedlock. After that, semblances of difficulty could be despised. That, to all intents and purposes, was the end of things. There was much heart-rending, of course. But the lady, in a serene and not unheroic way, broke the last link with a final snap, and went off to Stockholm leaving no address. He had one communication from her: a telegram.

“Girl. Alcida. Happy. Dagmar.”

Then for twenty years she disappeared from his life; and in twenty years many things happen to turn the course of a man’s spiritual and emotional existence.

Therefore when, twenty years afterwards, they met, suddenly and unexpectedly, each had to tear through the meshes and veils and webs in which their lives had been enveloped.

He was in full practice of his dreary profession of land-surveying and had gone to Paris to interview a client. Their appointment, one day, was at the terrace of the Hôtel Continental—the long terrace that from time immemorial (to us) has lain open to the garden courtyard. His client was late. He sat down at a little table, and glancing around saw a fair and gracious lady in her early forties looking at him. At the table were four or five people at tea. It was a pleasant afternoon in early July. Tombarel half rose. The lady rose wholly and crossed the space between them.

“It is you?”

“*Oui, Madame, c’est moi.*”

He bent and kissed her hand.

“You forgive me, Alcide?”

“Could such a question arise, *chère amie*?”

“You look just the same.”

“And you even younger.”

“Ah, no!” she sighed. “That is more what I looked like when you knew me.” She waved to her table at which sat a very pretty girl, with her own fair hair and, oddly enough, Tombarel’s dark flashing eyes.

“Alcida. You remember my telegram.”

Tombarel smiled and nodded, but his eyes and much of his heart were on his daughter.

Dagmar smiled. “She does you credit.”

“She is beautiful,” said Tombarel. “And you”—he recovered himself—“what has become of you?”

“I am a widow—this time really. He died—oh, fourteen years ago and I have not re-married. Everything passed as I said it would—and, as far as Alcida is concerned, I am the most virtuous woman in Sweden.”

She laughed in her old ironical, self-confident way.

“Come, let me present you.”

She led him up to her table and made the introduction. Her daughter, her father, Monsieur Stefansen, a tall, aristocratic old gentleman, with a white moustache and white imperial; the Vicomte des Fougères, a dapper fellow in blue cavalry uniform, the fiancé of Alcida. And Monsieur de Tombarel was

one of her oldest friends, an intimate, as she had been, in the long ago, of the Marquise de la Tour-Rochambeau, now for many years with the saints in heaven.

Dagmar had lost none of her touch on life. No woman alive could have presented daughter to unsuspected father with more airy grace. Tombarel, man of the world and of all the courtesies, accepted the situation with ceremonious urbanity. But, *ah, mon Dieu*, as he said to me, how his heart beat! There was his own child, looking at him with his own eyes—the eyes that stared at him every morning when he made his toilette before his mirror. And no one dreamed that those eyes were his.

"*C'est la vie, mon vieux,*" sighed Tombarel.

They talked; Tombarel gathered that everybody was perfectly happy. Old Mr. Stefansen, a wealthy shipbuilder of Stockholm, adored his daughter Dagmar and his granddaughter Alcida; everybody adored Raoul des Fougères by whom most obviously Alcida was adored. After a while Tombarel, looking round, caught sight of an impatient client drumming his fingers on a neighbouring table. He rose and made his adieux.

"When can I have the honour, Madame," said he, in the stilted French way, "of presenting to you my homage?"

She fixed him with queer, definite eyes.

"*Mais*, Monsieur, we are going early to-morrow morning to visit my future son-in-law's family in Touraine. And you, Monsieur de Tombarel?"

"I leave Paris to-morrow evening for my Midi. My poor office is in Nice; but I have my little patrimony in the mountain town of Creille, where I was born—I remember having wearied you to death, in the long ago, singing its praises. Now, *mon Dieu*, I am Monsieur le Maire."

"And that address will always find you?"

"Until I die, Madame," said Tombarel.

He bowed and joined his impatient client.

And once again Dagmar and his daughter vanished from his life for an incredible space of years.

He might have sought them out. A dashing cavalry officer of old lineage could be traced in half an hour. The *Annuaire Militaire*, resembling our Army List as one pea does another, would have informed him month by month of the whereabouts of Alcida's husband, and then, by postal process, he could have assured the receipt of a letter from himself to Dagmar at any moment.

But *cui bono*? Who would profit by such a step? And the French mistranslation of the Latin: *à quoi bon*? What would be the good of it?

Dagmar's attitude on the occasion of their accidental meeting had been the perfection of taste and tact. But she had given him most clearly to understand that any future meeting, possible, of course, according to the changes and chances of this mortal world, must be equally accidental. And she was right. To blunder deliberately into those lives would be an offence.

"It was hard," said he, "to recognize the second guillotine cut in our lives. But still? We were talking of fragrance. Baudelaire says:

> Grain de musc qui gît invisible
> Au fond de mon éternité.

It's true. All the time the memories of Dagmar and my daughter who looked at me with my own eyes remained in the depths of my soul like the grain of musc of the poet. . . . And then, my friend," said he, with one of his outspread gestures, "one must forget, if one must live; forget the dead flowers that once rioted in your garden and be grateful for the delicate and unaccusing perfume of the potpourri. That is to say, if you have lived your life as best you may, as a man of honour. And that's what I boast to have done," he cried, sitting up in his chair and twirling his moustache like an elderly d'Artagnan.

"My dear old friend," said I, "if anyone impugned your honour. I'd . . ."

"Naturally," said Tombarel.

And only a week or two ago had come the letter, a sudden cry from out of the past; an agonized cry for help. And now that he had taken me so far into his confidence he drew the letter from his note-case and gave it to me to read. It was signed Dagmar. . . . It was the cry of a soul in pain. If he still lived and remembered their lost youth and the love that had been between them, would he come to her before she died? She was in dreadful need, and many terrors beset the bed from which she would never rise again. That was about the gist of the letter, for it contained no details. It gave the address of a suburb of Amiens.

"This, too," said Tombarel, passing me another letter, "from the curé, I take it, of her parish."

It was short, simple and grave, to the effect that if Tombarel would come to the bedside of Madame Ferraboni, he would be performing a Christian act, and

would doubtless enable a sorely afflicted woman to die at peace with God.

“Could one think twice about such a summons?” asked Tombarel.

He journeyed to Amiens; found the house, a poor little villa in half an acre of ground in the Faubourg de Hem. Leaving the taxi-cab which he had hired at the gate, he rang the bell.

The door was opened by the fairest, palest, most fragile slip of a blue-eyed girl he had ever seen. She was attired in some poor kind of wrap. She looked at him out of haggard young eyes.

“You are Monsieur Tombarel?”

“Yes, Mademoiselle.”

“My grandmother is expecting you. She received your telegram.”

Tombarel put a hand to his heart which gave a sudden thud. He said: “Your grandmother had only one child—a daughter—isn’t that so?”

She smiled wanly: “Yes, Monsieur, my mother.”

“Ah, *mon Dieu*,” he sighed beneath his breath. “*Mon Dieu!*”

This bit of white thistledown was his own granddaughter, his own flesh and blood. He looked at her and his eyes grew moist.

“I remember meeting your mother, Mademoiselle, many years ago, just before her marriage. She resembled you a little, although her eyes were dark.”

“Then you knew her better than I, Monsieur, for she died when I was born.”

“Ah, *mon Dieu*,” cried Tombarel, this time aloud, and throwing out his arms. “And I who never heard . . . And your grandmother?”

“She still lives. That is all one can say. The doctor this morning could say no more. Will you come upstairs, Monsieur?”

Raised on pillows in a heavily canopied bed, Tombarel saw the woman he had once loved, the mother of his child; now an old, old woman, older than he himself, withered by a deadly malady and fighting still against it, as she had fought for years. She raised a thin hand and a light glowed in her dim blue eyes.

“I knew you would come. I felt sure you were alive in your kingdom of the mountains.” She fondled his fingers. “You haven’t changed. Of course you are snow white, but if you dyed yourself black you would look the same as I’ve remembered you.”

At this point of his story Tombarel sighed deeply.

“How can I tell you of my emotions, *cher ami*, at such an encounter? The yet living ghost of a love of nearly half a century ago. A love that, strange as it may seem, had remained faithful to me. She told me so in the sacred words of the dying. Ah! human beings are strange, and women the strangest of all. That side of things you must imagine for yourself. It is only the facts, sordid and heart-rending, that I can put before you.”

He did so, in his own picturesque and emotional way, which I cannot attempt to reproduce. He had met his daughter Alcida, as I told you, years and years before, casually in the Hôtel Continental, and after that Dagmar had again taken herself out of his life. Why? Well, why try to relight burnt-out fires? That had been the way Tombarel had thought of it. And again, perhaps trying to relight them would have caused disaster to comfortable lives. We must come to facts. The first was the marriage of Alcida to the fair-haired, dashing young cavalry officer, the Vicomte des Fougères. The second was the death in childbirth of Alcida. The third a squabble between grand-parents, Dagmar and Raoul’s mother, the Comtesse des Fougères, over the custody of the motherless infant, in which Dagmar, apparently backed by Raoul, emerged triumphant.

The fourth—and now we must lose count—idyllic years for Dagmar, woman of wealth, who kept house for son-in-law and grandchild in Paris. Then came the war, and with it general cataclysm. Raoul was killed. In the Russian Revolution the Comte des Fougères lost his fortune, like thousands of other Frenchmen, who, in the opening years of the century, had been dazzled by dreams of the limitless wealth of their new ally. Madame des Fougères died. The family estate in Touraine was sold for a song, and the old Comte still lived precariously on the proceeds in a small hotel in Blois.

It was a dismal tale of ruin, altogether, that Tombarel unfolded. If you don’t find it gay, it is not my fault. I can’t help it. Facts are facts, and a conscientious chronicler is bound to State them.

We come to the end of the war. By this time Dagmar’s father, the distinguished Mr. Stefansen, well-to-do shipbuilder of Stockholm, had been dead for years out of number. A generation of partners in the firm had arisen who knew not Stefansen and his honest methods. The result was that Dagmar, who had ever preferred France to Sweden, and since her daughter’s marriage had cut herself off from Swedish associations in favour of French, found her income from her father’s estate gradually growing smaller and smaller. In answer to anxious inquiries she was told that, after the war, there was such a glut of ships that owners were glad to get rid of them at two-pence apiece. Dagmar, then an old lady, not being business-like, accepted the preposterous explanation, and didn’t ask what had become of the enormous profits that must

have been made during the war.

But she was valiant. She had her young granddaughter to look after. She got rid of her Paris house and took possession of the little villa in Amiens which was practically the child’s sole patrimony.

“With regard to this,” said Tombarel parenthetically, “you must see how the Almighty somehow turns a man’s vices to a good end. This little villa in Picardy, what was the bachelor Vicomte des Fougères, heir to a château in Touraine, doing with it? Why, obviously—for it was his before his marriage—to house some pretty little lady of his fancy while he was in garrison at Amiens. There’s lots of *bonté* in the *bon Dieu* when you come to think of it.”

Well, there in the little villa did the aged Madame Ferraboni and the child live for many years—that is to say, many years in a child’s life, through her teens and into her twenties. What kind of an upbringing the girl had Tombarel didn’t know. So how can I tell you? She had apparently been educated in what day-school her grandmother could afford.

“And all the time,” I interrupted at this point of the story, “you haven’t told me the girl’s name.”

“Clothilde,” said Tombarel. “An ancestral name in the Fougères family. Our old pre-war aristocracy built itself a tradition, as you very well know. But, apparently through her little air of a saint, her father called her Sainte Nitouche—then Nitouche, and then the grandmother, throwing back to Scandinavian and Italian influences, called her Nita. So as Nita she has been known all her life.”

Being satisfied, I bade him proceed. He proceeded in his story from bad to worse.

About two years ago the gang of villains who were running the shipbuilding business in Stockholm were found out in all kinds of financial villainy. It seems Sweden rocked with the scandal. The whole thing went phut, and the daughter of old man Stefansen was left penniless. She had only her own little meagre economies to live on. And the dread disease was wasting her away.

Nita found some wretchedly paid work—teaching, apparently—in Amiens, that aided them to struggle through some sort of an existence.

“My dear Fontenay,” said Tombarel, leaning forward in his chair and fixing me with tragic eyes, “it is only to you I would tell such a horror. When I arrived at the Villa Joyeuse—imagine the irony of it!—they had but a hundred francs for all their fortune.”

“But wasn’t the girl, Nita, earning some money?” I asked somewhat stupidly, all this retrospect having put the present out of my head.

He made an impatient gesture.

"How could she be earning money? Why do you suppose I brought her here in the *Train Bleu*, with a woman to look after her?"

"Of course," said I, "I was forgetting that."

"*La pauvre enfant!* She had let herself be seduced under promise of marriage by the son of the biggest house where she gave lessons, and two months ago he had the bad taste to be killed in a stupid motor accident. Her term approaches. That's why she's here."

"Good God!" I cried, startled by the unexpected.

Tombarel misunderstood, perhaps, my tone and look.

"Put away your Anglo-Saxon prudery, my dear friend. There are things too tragic to be what you call 'shocking.' What more blame is there on her than on her grandmother and myself, who are responsible for the birth of her mother, and therefore for her own existence? Tell me that."

I took his trembling old hands in mine, and soothed him and told him that the horrible reproachful word had passed out of our vocabulary for over half a century. I assured him of my heartfelt sympathy for himself and for the snow-flake of Picardy who was now . . . "Well, you see," said I.

He mopped his leonine forehead.

"*Pardon, très cher ami*, I'm getting old, and I am *tout bouleversé*."

Of course, he was all upset. These things in a well-regulated universe oughtn't to happen to men of over seventy. He leaned back, white and tired, in his chair. I gave him a nip of old brandy.

After a while he apologized again, with one of his ironical smiles.

"I'm not such an old carcass as all that yet. I'll fight always. And when the spectre with the scythe comes along, I hope I'll be able to say: '*Fais ton sale métier*'—carry on with your dirty trade—'and finish with it as soon as possible.' "

He rose, and drew himself up magnificently. "But he hasn't put his nose round the corner yet. . . . And, *mon pauvre ami*, where was I in my story?"

I prompted him and he went back to Amiens. What he told me you can easily imagine yourself. More than literally had he carried out the curé's injunctions. The faint and tender glow of an old love soothed the dying eyes of the ancient woman. Nita, passionately beloved by her, was accepted by Tombarel as a sacred trust. The peace of God entered her soul. The curé who administered the last rites shed tears when he told Tombarel that never had he been present at a death more beautiful or more sanctified.

So that was the end of Tombarel's first love, his first romance which had lingered only as a fragrance through the many, many years. It wasn't the great and serious love of his life. It was on account of Froisette—the Love with the capital letter—that he had never married. This Provençal great gentleman, with all his Southern passions, with all his impatient Latin short cuts through conventional morality in order to arrive at the nakedness of right and wrong, as I have tried to put before you in these tales of Tombarel, had deep within him the sweet poetry and delicacy of a woman. Solange Monniot—otherwise Froisette—was the woman of his tempestuous, and afterwards hopeless, adoration. By her had his life been sanctified.

But the previous passing love of the Norse Dagmar had left behind an inextinguishable fragrance. I repeat the figure of speech perhaps boringly, but I'm anxious that you should understand Tombarel.

I said a while ago that the death of Dagmar was the end of a romance. I must confess inaccuracy of statement. For there, in the small *clinique* somewhere along the Boulevard Carnot in Cannes, was this old romance alive, poignantly alive, continued as it were remorselessly through the generations.

The snow-flake from Picardy was very ill. They thought she might melt away.

Tombarel spent much time at the *clinique*. He gave me bulletins twice daily. It was almost a case of starvation, said he. The poor child had gone without nourishment so that the old grandmother should want as little as possible. For herself what did it matter? Her hope in life was dead; nothing but disgrace before her; possibly, had the old woman died before Tombarel came on the scene, like a venerable Saint George scattering dragons, she would have done something desperate.

"It was God's mercy," said he, "that took me to Amiens."

He stayed on with me, apologetically. Look at the trouble he was causing. I bade him consider I disregarded Angélique's trouble when I took advantage of his newly installed bathroom and stayed with him for a fortnight. Besides, I reminded him, the time was drawing near when I should give up the Villa d'Estérel and go away to England, and unless he visited me there, I might never have the opportunity of entertaining him again.

"I don't know what I shall do without you," he lamented. "There are so few friends of my own world left. One of the penalties of old age. Even my good friend General Duhamel . . . gone. *Tiens!* It was through him we first made acquaintance. How things link themselves together!"

“And the linking-up process will go on until the very last,” said I, “until both you and I pass over the border. And I believe in the compensation-balance in Life.”

“Perhaps you are right,” he admitted. “But at present I see little chance.”

“There may be your granddaughter, Nita.”

I said this with much diffidence, because the reports he brought me were as dark as could be. He had convoked great specialists from Nice and from Marseilles and they both had shaken dubious heads. It was doubtful if she could live till the child was born, and in any case, in her low state of vitality, she could not survive its birth.

Tombarel sighed and shook his head. He had suddenly grown to look very old, somewhat frail. He said he couldn’t sleep. And he was neglecting his duties at Creille. He had lost count of the duration of his absence. I bade him let Creille go to the devil. He looked pained, murmured something about that animal of a Guiol; whereby I gathered that if Creille were pleasantly led down the primrose-path, it would not so tragically matter, but that under the guidance of his old linen-draper enemy, the Deputy-Mayor, the town would be heading to Gadarene catastrophe. A very cast-down old gentleman was my dear friend Tombarel.

Then there came a night when I was awakened from a sound sleep by my man François in nondescript attire. It was about three in the morning. It was a telephone call for Monsieur Tombarel, urgent, from the *clinique*. François thought it wiser to inform me first. I commended him for his wisdom and went to the telephone in the assurance of tragedy.

I explained myself hurriedly. Whatever message they had for Monsieur Tombarel must come through me. I wasn’t going to have him killed outright in my house.

“But there’s no question, *cher Monsieur*,”—it was the doctor’s voice—“of our good Tombarel being killed. On the contrary. There is quite a sound, healthy boy born about an hour ago, and the little mother is not going on so badly.”

I carried on a five-minutes’ conversation with the doctor, who seemed to be delighted at the confusion of his eminent confrères of Nice and Marseilles. It had happened all of a sudden. He himself had not been surprised, having suspected chronological inexactitude in the poor child’s account of herself. . . .

I crept up to Tombarel’s room, opened the door very gently, and saw by the light of the corridor lamp, and heard from his pillow, that my old friend was fast asleep.

Early in the morning we went round to the *clinique* and found that all was

well.

“She’s not going to die,” cried the doctor. “People in my *clinique* don’t die. Of course a snowdrop like that isn’t a female cabbage. She will need care. That I will give her. *N’ayez pas peur*.”

“From snow-flake to snowdrop,” said I to Tombarel, “is a step in the right direction.”

For the first time for many days Tombarel laughed. He put both hands on my shoulders. That was true. They were devilishly solid, snowdrops, in spite of their fragile appearance.

“And the child?”

“You can see it.”

A nurse brought into the antechamber the small bundle of pink amorphous flesh. Tombarel looked down on it.

“*Et ça vit encore?*”

The nurse assured him that the boy was as alive as any human being a few hours old could possibly be.

Tombarel clutched me by the arm so tightly that his grip almost hurt, and stretched out a long finger towards the babe.

“Do you realize that that is my own great-grandson—the product of me, Alcide de Tombarel?”

I caught a glow in his old, dark eyes. He bent down his venerable head and touched some part of the pink thing with his lips. . . .

A month or two afterwards I set out from Cannes on a sorrowful errand: to pay my last visit to Tombarel at Creille.

I had put everything in order, sold my villa, and despatched what household goods I desired to keep to England. I was leaving the next day. Even the little two-seater that I drove was not my own, but had been put at my disposal by an absent friend. I had taken root in the Midi for eight or nine years—ever since the end of the war. It is always a painful business to tear up one’s roots.

There were many friends of whom I must take leave—Marius Pogomas, Monsieur Guiol, Père Capenas, Monsieur l’Abbé Cabassol—before arriving at Tombarel’s. For I knew that after bidding him farewell, I should want to shoot right away out of Creille. As it was, after having accomplished my visits, I was almost tearful when I drew up at Tombarel’s gate.

He rose from his seat beneath the straggling cedar, and, with both arms outstretched, advanced to meet me in his old courteously exuberant way. I congratulated him on the recovery of his health.

“If a man isn’t healthy when he’s got most things to make him happy, when will he be healthy? I say ‘most things,’ my friend,” he added. “If it were not for your departure, I should have everything.”

I think I made suitable response. Then I asked him about the health of his newly acquired family. He glowed. I was going to see. He went to the open door of the house and in a loud voice called for Angélique. She appeared, and we exchanged courtesies.

“Tell Madame to bring the *petit* to show Monsieur.”

A little later there emerged a shy, golden-haired bit of a girl, carrying the child in her arms. Tombarel put an arm round her shoulders.

“My friend,” said he, “may I present to you my granddaughter, Madame Fougères, and my great-grandson, Alcide Marie Joseph de Tombarel Fougères?”

We sat under the shade of the cedar and drank the *porto blanc* that Angélique brought out, and talked as best we could. Tombarel was called away for a minute or two by the vineyard hand.

“*Chère Madame,*” said I, “I hope you are happy here?”

Her blue eyes filled with tears. “I had no idea there could be such happiness in the world. My grandfather——” She raised a helpless hand to convey the inadequacy of words to express her thoughts.

I smiled. “You can take it from me, Madame, that he is the nearest thing to the *bon Dieu* you are ever likely to meet in this world. But even the *bon Dieu* Himself is human and craves two-penn’orth of love.”

“Ah, Monsieur,” she cried, “what kind of a creature should I be if I didn’t give him all the love in my soul?”

I’m not used to talking like the pious father in an 1840 Sunday-school book; and I felt somewhat priggish. But I was anxious for Tombarel’s sake, to strike some chord in the girl. It rang true and harmonious.

“And the little *bonhomme*?”

The little *bonhomme*, as she showed me, was a remarkably solid young person. He fed and slept and generally conducted himself like an angel. Tombarel returning, found the three of us close friends.

We lunched indoors. After the meal Tombarel and I took our coffee under the cedar.

“It has always been a sorrow to me,” he said, “that with me the name of Tombarel should die. After all, it has existed or rather persisted in the obscure history of provincial France since the Crusades. And now, at last, at the age of seventy-three, I see it still persisting. Not merely my adopted child, but my direct descendant.”

After some further talk I remarked, having a general knowledge of French law:

“I thought you couldn’t legally adopt anyone until he was of age?”

“Ah!” cried Tombarel, with one of his sunny smiles. “That is true in a general way. But there is Article 366 of the Code Civil. I die. What matter? But I have made my will under that Article, so that when he comes of age he is adopted. He takes my name. If I had a title other than the superannuated one of Vidame—if, indeed, I had the title of Marquis or Comte—he would be the legitimate bearer of the title. My dear friend, you cannot conceive the happiness that has come to me in my old age.”

We parted an hour or so later, with sincere protestations of mutual affection.

I drove off, comforted by the conviction that I was leaving Tombarel by no means desolate. I sped, perhaps rather faster than I should have done, through the narrow, sour-smelling, much-beloved streets of the little town, waving a farewell here and there to one of my friends. I emerged from the Place Georges Clemenceau, climbed the ragged path and struck the mountain road. Before the bend which would hide Creille from me, I stopped the car and got out. I wanted to see, for the last time, perhaps, the Trumpeter of the War Memorial on the point of the abyss. The distance as the crow flies, so deep was the curve I had travelled, was only about a couple of hundred yards. I saw a little group standing beneath the White Trumpeter, which had come out to take the final leave of me. I waved my hat; Tombarel waved his, the old enormously brimmed Provençal hat.

And then suddenly he plucked the child from the bosom of Angélique, and held it up high in his hands; the child that would wear the proud old name and, when the White Trumpeter’s appeal should ring through the gorges, would spring to arms in defence of Eternal France.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

[The end of *The Town of Tombarel* by William J. (John) Locke]