



*Guy de Maupassant*  
1850-1893

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## BOULE DE SUIF

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## INTRODUCTION

This new translation of Maupassant's *Boule de Suif* is the first piece of prose fiction to appear on the web-site; and at first sight, prose fiction as a genre may seem to present few of the difficulties encountered in translating either poetry or drama. There are no problems of verse form to be resolved – questions about stanzaic patterns, rhyme schemes, metrical structures, visual and auditory effects, and so on. No problems, either, about a constant and complex interplay of different voices, through which the characters in any play establish their separate and individual personalities. But works of narrative fiction – novels, novellas, short stories – appear less obviously encumbered by form. Whereas *Paradise Lost* rendered as a series of ten thousand haiku, or *King Lear* as vaudeville farce, would change the original text utterly, the exigencies of form seem to weigh less heavily with works of prose fiction. Take a simple, basic issue: that of length. How long is a short story? Is it 1000, 3000, 6000, 10000 words? At what point does a long short story turn into a short novella, or a long novella into a short novel? And how far are any of these questions about length truly central to the genre? Prose fiction seems driven, rather, by other, more easily translated features: the narrative energy of a story being told, the urgency of expectation about what could happen next. So embedded is such a drive in stories the world over that it should not be difficult to render a story in one language into a story in another.

This translation of *Boule de Suif* (and, running to over 13,000 words, is it a long short story or a short novella?) faces many of the questions above. First published in 1880, it immediately established Maupassant as one of the finest short-story writers in Europe, a reputation that he consolidated in the over three hundred stories he wrote subsequently. Set in a specific time (the winter of 1870-71 immediately after the defeat of the French by the Prussian army), in a specific place (the road from Rouen to Tôtes, and then on to Dieppe), and in specific circumstances (ten travellers trapped in a coach and then in a small hotel), the story nonetheless expresses more universal themes: class divisions and social hypocrisy, group oppression and individual victims, emotional and moral

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betrayal. It is this creative tension between specificity and generality that gives the story much of its imaginative energy.

It is, though, Maupassant's details, rather than his universal themes, that raise significant issues in translation. However small or marginal they may seem, the choice of one rather than another radically affects the impact of the story as a whole.

### characters' titles

One immediate decision for the translator is whether to retain the French titles that Maupassant gives his characters (*Monsieur, Madame, Mademoiselle*), or whether to Anglicise them into Mr., Mrs., Miss. The names of his characters, however, have an unmistakably French ring (*Loiseau, Carré-Lamadon, Rousset*); and a clear incongruity of both sound and sense arises when an Anglicised title is placed before a French name: Mrs. Loiseau, Mrs. Carré-Lamadon, and so on. Such cultural clashes have been avoided by retaining the French titles. In one instance, however, an Anglicisation of title has seemed natural and idiomatic, and therefore *le comte et la comtesse Hubert de Bréville* has been rendered as 'the Count and Countess Hubert de Bréville'.

### geographical details

The names that Maupassant gives to particular streets and buildings have led to similar differences of response. Street-names have almost always sounded more convincing in the original French, rather than in some hybrid collocation or total Anglicisation. And so, *rue Grand-Pont* is retained, rather than altered to 'Grand-Pont Street' or (even worse) 'Big-Bridge Street'. But the names of the two hotels that feature in the story (*l'Hôtel de Normandie* and *l'Hôtel du Commerce*) translate well into English, as the 'Normandy Hotel' and the 'Commercial Hotel'. The latter name, in particular, evokes in English the second-rate, rather seedy surroundings of the establishment in which Maupassant's characters are obliged to remain.

In terms of the geographical distances that Maupassant mentions, preference has almost always been given to a modern Anglicisation. And so, *à deux ou trois lieues sous la ville* has been translated, not archaically as 'two or three leagues from the city', nor even unidiomatically as 'six or nine miles from the city', but as 'some few miles from the city'. *Quatre lieues*, similarly, has been rendered as 'less than ten miles', with some

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licence allowed to the rather indeterminate length of the English equivalent 'league'.

### **money**

Given the obsessive interest some of his characters have in material wealth, it is scarcely surprising that Maupassant makes a number of references in the story to money, mentioning both *francs* (i.e. the *old* French franc, not the new franc or even newer euro), and also *livres* (pounds). Two characters are believed to receive *cinq cent mille livres de revenu*. Another sends *six cent mille francs* to England. Yet another claims he would give *mille francs* for a bite to eat. The translation of such sums into a convincing modern idiom is not easy, not least because of the changing differences in value between English and French currency, and the vast monetary inflation between 1880 and the present. There may be economic historians who could compute the value of 600,000 old francs in 1880 to the equivalent in pounds in the early 21st century. But of far greater significance is the simple impact that any sum of money has upon modern readers. And so, the two characters who are said to receive *cinq cent mille livres de revenu* continue to bring in 'five hundred thousand pounds a year', just as another character continues to promise 'a thousand pounds' for the taste of a piece of ham. The translated sums do not need to be needlessly inflated to have a comparable effect.

### **historical details**

Elsewhere, physical details that establish the historical location of the story (four-horse coaches, foot-warmers, watch-chains, cavalry officers, lanterns, sabres, nightcaps, and so on) have been retained, without any attempt to 'contemporise' them into a 21st century context – even if their modern equivalents could be found, which is rarely the case. There is no question that these details anchor Maupassant's story in a specific time and place, but it is important to recognise that they do not confine it there. It is significant that the opening paragraphs of *Boule de Suif* focus upon crowds of people (defeated soldiers, victorious soldiers, townsfolk) at a particular moment in their lives (1870-71). The final words of the story, though, present a single individual who has been used and betrayed, and whose tears slip down into a darkness that seems timeless and universal. 'Et Boule de Suif pleurait toujours; et parfois un sanglot, qu'elle n'avait pu retentir, passait...dans les ténèbres.'

Tim Chilcott  
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## CHRONOLOGY

- 1850 is born on 5 August at the Château de Miromesniel, near Dieppe, into a comfortably middle-class though emotionally unhappy family. His father, Gustave, and mother, Laure, are ill-suited to each other, in terms of both temperament and rank.
- 1854 the family moves to less palatial accommodation near Le Harve, where in 1856, his younger brother Hervé is born.
- 1859-60 a pupil at the Lycée Impérial Napoléon in Paris. After the effective separation of his parents, moves with his mother and brother to Étretat, on the Channel coast. She reads him Shakespeare, and a priest instructs him in grammar, mathematics, and Latin.
- 1863 legal separation of his parents. First sexual experience with a country girl one year his senior. Begins to attend Yvetot seminary, which he loathes for its bigotry and restrictiveness.
- 1866 saves the English poet Swinburne from drowning in the sea off Étretat, and is several times invited to Swinburne's villa, where he is presented with a mummified hand as a souvenir. The object is to feature in several of his later stories.
- 1868 is expelled from Yvetot seminary for having composed an allegedly obscene poem, and enters a lycée in Rouen. Becomes known to the novelist Gustave Flaubert and his friend the poet Louis Bouilhet, who take him under their wing and become his mentors, both personally and professionally.
- 1869 moves to Paris to read law, and lives in the same building as his father.

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- 1870 upon the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, is called up and posted to Rouen.
- 1871 leaves the army.
- 1872-3 starts his career as a civil service clerk, and is appointed to the French Admiralty.
- 1874 begins to meet a number of celebrated French writers (Mallarmé, Huysmans, Zola), as well as the influential Edmond de Goncourt at Flaubert's apartment. Confides to a friend that he has contracted syphilis, which is later to cause him periodic seizures.
- 1875 his first story 'La main d'écorché' ('The Shrivelled Hand') is published in February, under the pseudonym Joseph Prunier.
- 1878 begins work on his first novel, *Une Vie*. Through Flaubert, gains an appointment to the Ministry of Education and resigns from the Admiralty.
- 1880 in a collection entitled *Les Soirées de Médan*, which contains stories by Zola, Huysmans and others, *Boule de Suif* is published in April, to universal acclaim. But health problems (heart, alopecia, poor vision) begin to show themselves, and gradually worsen during the following decade. Becomes the literary executor for Flaubert, whose death in May affects him deeply.
- 1881 publishes his first volume of short stories under the title *La Maison Tellier*. The book reaches its twelfth edition within two years.
- 1883 his first novel, *Une Vie*, is published, with 25,000 copies sold in less than a year. With his name increasingly well known and his writing in demand, writes a ceaseless flow of short stories, finally numbering over three hundred.
- 1884 relationships of varying intimacy with wealthy and influential women in society: Comtesse Potocka (1852-1943), Marie Bashkirtseff (1858-84). Begins to spend an increasing amount of time in the south of France.

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- 1885 his best-known novel, *Bel-Ami*, is published.
- 1886 continues an ever more prolific output of short stories.
- 1887 publication of *Mont-Oriol*, his third novel. Younger brother Hervé begins to show signs of mental instability, and his mother's ill-health declines still further.
- 1888 publication of his novel *Pierre et Jean*.
- 1889 starts to supervise the anthologising and translation into several European languages of his enormous number of short stories. His fifth novel *Fort comme la mort* is published. His brother Hervé is placed in a mental institution in Lyon, and dies from syphilis in November.
- 1890 his last novel, *Notre Coeur*, is published; but the number of short stories he is able to write decreases because of growing illness.
- 1891 suffers from loss of memory and confusion. A general paralysis begins to affect his body, and then his mind.
- 1892 attempts to commit suicide, and is voluntarily admitted to a *maison de santé* in Passy, near Paris, under the care of one of his friends, Dr Esprit Blanche.
- 1893 dies on 6 July, a month short of his forty-third birthday, and is buried in the cemetery at Montparnasse in Paris.

## *Boule de suif*

Pendant plusieurs jours de suite des lambeaux d'armée en déroute avaient traversé la ville. Ce n'était point de la troupe, mais des hordes débandées. Les hommes avaient la barbe longue et sale, des uniformes en guenilles, et ils avançaient d'une allure molle, sans drapeau, sans régiment. Tous semblaient accablés, éreintés, incapables d'une pensée ou d'une résolution, marchant seulement par habitude, et tombant de fatigue sitôt qu'ils s'arrêtaient. On voyait surtout des mobilisés, gens pacifiques, rentiers tranquilles, pliant sous le poids du fusil; des petits moblots alertes, faciles à l'épouvante et prompts à l'enthousiasme, prêts à l'attaque comme à la fuite; puis, au milieu d'eux, quelques culottes rouges, débris d'une division moulue dans une grande bataille; des artilleurs sombres alignés avec des fantassins divers; et, parfois, le casque brillant d'un dragon au pied pesant qui suivait avec peine la marche plus légère des lignards.

Des légions de francs-tireurs aux appellations héroïques: «les Vengeurs de la Défaite—les Citoyens de la Tombe—les Partageurs de la Mort»—passaient à leur tour, avec des airs de bandits.

Leurs chefs, anciens commerçants en draps ou en graines, ex-marchands de suif ou de savon, guerriers de circonstance, nommés officiers pour leurs écus ou la longueur de leurs moustaches, couverts d'armes, de flanelle et de galons, parlaient d'une voix retentissante, discutaient plans de campagne, et prétendaient soutenir seuls la France agonisante sur leurs épaules de fanfarons; mais ils redoutaient parfois leurs propres soldats, gens de sac et de corde, souvent braves à outrance, pillards et débauchés.

Les Prussiens allaient entrer dans Rouen, disait-on.

La Garde nationale qui, depuis deux mois, faisait des reconnaissances très prudentes dans les bois voisins, fusillant parfois ses propres

## *The Dumpling*

For several days in a row, the remnants of a defeated army had been passing through the town. They weren't disciplined troops, but a disorganised rabble. The men had long, dirty beards, with their uniforms in tatters; and they moved forward listlessly, without a flag, without a regiment. They all looked overwhelmed, worn out, incapable of thought or resolve, marching only out of habit, and collapsing from exhaustion as soon as they came to a halt. More than anything, you could see reservists, peaceful folk who'd been living on their incomes, now bending under the weight of their rifles; alert little conscripts, easily frightened and quickly excited, as ready to run away as to attack; and then, in their midst, some regulars in red trousers, leftovers of a division pulverised in a great battle. Mixed in with these diverse foot-soldiers were grim artillerymen, and, occasionally, the gleaming helmet of a lumbering dragoon who could barely keep up with the quicker pace of the rank and file.

Legions of irregulars with high-sounding names – 'Avengers of Defeat', 'Citizens of the Tomb', 'Brothers to the Death' – would pass by in their turn, looking like bandits.

Their leaders – former drapers or corn-merchants, one-time dealers in tallow or soap, soldiers by circumstance, appointed as officers for their money or the length of their moustaches, laden with weapons, flannel and gold braid – would speak in booming voices, discuss battle plans, and behave as though they alone bore the agony of France on their braggart shoulders. But they sometimes went in fear of their very own men, who were often immeasurably brave, but who plundered and debauched, and deserved to be hanged. **NOTE**

Rumour had it that the Prussians were about to enter Rouen.

The National Guard, which had for the past two months been reconnoitring with the utmost caution in the nearby woods, sometimes

sentinelles, et se préparant au combat quand un petit lapin remuait sous des broussailles, était rentrée dans ses foyers. Ses armes, ses uniformes, tout son attirail meurtrier, dont elle épouvantait naguère les bornes des routes nationales à trois lieues à la ronde, avaient subitement disparu.

Les derniers soldats français venaient enfin de traverser la Seine pour gagner Pont-Audemer par Saint-Sever et Bourg-Achard; et, marchant après tous, le général, désespéré, ne pouvant rien tenter avec ces loques disparates, éperdu lui-même dans la grande débâcle d'un peuple habitué à vaincre et désastreusement battu malgré sa bravoure légendaire, s'en allait à pied, entre deux officiers d'ordonnance.

Puis un calme profond, une attente épouvantée et silencieuse avaient plané sur la cité. Beaucoup de bourgeois bedonnants, émasculés par le commerce, attendaient anxieusement les vainqueurs, tremblant qu'on ne considérât comme une arme leurs broches à rôtir ou leurs grands couteaux de cuisine.

La vie semblait arrêtée; les boutiques étaient closes, la rue muette. Quelquefois un habitant, intimidé par ce silence, filait rapidement le long des murs.

L'angoisse de l'attente faisait désirer la venue de l'ennemi.

Dans l'après-midi du jour qui suivit le départ des troupes françaises, quelques uhlands, sortis on ne sait d'où, traversèrent la ville avec célérité. Puis, un peu plus tard, une masse noire descendit de la côte Sainte-Catherine, tandis que deux autres flots envahisseurs apparaissaient par les routes de Darnetal et de Boisguillaume. Les avant-gardes des trois corps, juste au même moment, se joignirent sur la place de l'Hôtel-de-Ville; et par toutes les rues voisines, l'armée allemande arrivait, déroulant ses bataillons qui faisaient sonner les pavés sous leur pas dur et rythmé.

Des commandements criés d'une voix inconnue et gutturale montaient le long des maisons qui semblaient mortes et désertes, tandis que, derrière les volets fermés, des yeux guettaient ces hommes victorieux, maîtres de la cité, des fortunes et des vies, de par le «droit de guerre». Les habitants, dans leurs chambres assombries, avaient l'affolement que donnent les cataclysmes, les grands bouleversements meurtriers de la terre, contre lesquels toute sagesse et toute force sont inutiles. Car la

shooting their own sentries and preparing for action whenever a tiny rabbit rustled the undergrowth, had now returned home. Their weapons, their uniforms, and all the murderous paraphernalia with which they had terrified every stone on the main roads for ten miles around, had suddenly disappeared.

The last remaining French soldiers had finally crossed the Seine to reach Pont-Audemer by way of Saint-Sever and Bourg-Achard. Behind them, flanked by two staff officers, their general walked in despair. Powerless to do anything with this rag-bag of an army, he was bewildered by the total disarray that had befallen a nation used to victory, yet now, despite its legendary courage, disastrously beaten.

A profound calm, a sense of silent, terrified foreboding, hung over the city. Many of its portly middle-class inhabitants, emasculated by the world of business, awaited the conquerors anxiously, trembling lest their roasting spits or long kitchen knives be taken as a weapon.

Life seemed to have ground to a halt. The shops were closed, the streets quiet. From time to time, a figure would quickly scamper by, frightened by the silence, keeping close to the walls.

The strain of waiting made everyone long for the enemy to arrive.

In the afternoon of the day following the departure of the French troops, a few Uhlans, **NOTE** coming from who knows where, crossed the city quickly. Then, a little later, a black mass swept down St Catherine's Hill while two other waves of invaders appeared on the roads from Darnetal and Bois-Guillaume. The advance guards of the three corps, arriving simultaneously, linked up in the square of the town hall; and along all the neighbouring streets, the German army was pouring, its battalions making the stones ring out under heavy, rhythmic steps.

Orders shouted out in a foreign, guttural tongue echoed along the houses, which seemed dead and deserted. From behind closed shutters, eyes were watching these victorious men – masters, 'according to the rights of war', of the city, of fortunes, and of lives. In their darkened rooms, the inhabitants felt the panic that cataclysmes can bring, those great deadly upheavals of the earth, against which all wisdom and strength are useless. The same feeling recurs each time the settled order

même sensation reparait chaque fois que l'ordre établi des choses est renversé, que la sécurité n'existe plus, que tout ce que protégeaient les lois des hommes ou celles de la nature, se trouve à la merci d'une brutalité inconsciente et féroce. Le tremblement de terre écrasant sous les maisons croulantes un peuple entier; le fleuve débordé qui roule les paysans noyés avec les cadavres des boeufs et les poutres arrachées aux toits, ou l'armée glorieuse massacrant ceux qui se défendent, emmenant les autres prisonniers, pillant au nom du Sabre et remerciant un Dieu au son du canon, sont autant de fléaux effrayants qui déconcertent toute croyance à la justice éternelle, toute la confiance qu'on nous enseigne en la protection du Ciel et en la raison de l'homme.

Mais à chaque porte des petits détachements frappaient, puis disparaissaient dans les maisons. C'était l'occupation après l'invasion. Le devoir commençait pour les vaincus de se montrer gracieux envers les vainqueurs.

Au bout de quelque temps, une fois la première terreur disparue, un calme nouveau s'établissait. Dans beaucoup de familles, l'officier prussien mangeait à table. Il était parfois bien élevé, et, par politesse, plaignait la France, disait sa répugnance en prenant part à cette guerre. On lui était reconnaissant de ce sentiment; puis on pouvait, un jour ou l'autre, avoir besoin de sa protection. En le ménageant on obtiendrait peut-être quelques hommes de moins à nourrir. Et pourquoi blesser quelqu'un dont on dépendait tout à fait? Agir ainsi serait moins de la bravoure que de la témérité.—Et la témérité n'est plus un défaut des bourgeois de Rouen, comme au temps des défenses héroïques où s'illustra leur cité.—On se disait enfin, raison suprême tirée de l'urbanité française, qu'il demeurerait bien permis d'être poli dans son intérieur pourvu qu'on ne se montrât pas familier, en public, avec le soldat étranger. Au dehors on ne se connaissait plus, mais dans la maison on causait volontiers, et l'Allemand demeurait plus longtemps, chaque soir, à se chauffer au foyer commun.

La ville même reprenait peu à peu de son aspect ordinaire. Les Français ne sortaient guère encore, mais les soldats prussiens grouillaient dans les rues. Du reste, les officiers de hussards bleus, qui traînaient avec arrogance leurs grands outils de mort sur le pavé, ne semblaient pas avoir pour les simples citoyens énormément plus de mépris que les officiers de chasseurs, qui, l'année d'avant, buvaient aux mêmes cafés.

of things is upset, when security exists no longer, and all that was protected by the laws of mankind or nature finds itself at the mercy of a mindless, savage force. The earthquake that crushes an entire population beneath the rubble of its houses; the overflowing river that sweeps away drowned peasants, together with the bodies of their cattle and the rafters torn off from their roofs; the glorious army that massacres all who defend themselves, and takes others as prisoners, plundering in the name of the Sword and thanking God to the roar of the canon – all these are terrifying scourges that destroy any belief in eternal justice, any trust that we are taught to have in divine protection or human reasoning.

Small detachments of men were soon knocking at every door, then disappearing inside the houses. After the invasion, this was the occupation. The conquered had now to show their hospitality to their conquerors.

After some while, once the initial terror had subsided, a new calm was established. In many houses, the Prussian officer would eat at the same table as the family. He was sometimes very well-bred and, out of politeness, would sympathise with France, and speak of his repugnance at taking part in the war. The sentiment was gratefully accepted; after all, some day or other, they might have need of his protection. By handling him carefully, they might perhaps be given a few less men to feed. And why offend someone on whom you totally depend? To behave in that way would be less courageous than foolhardy. And foolhardiness was no longer a failing of Rouen's middle-classes, as it once had been when the city was acclaimed for its heroic defences. Last of all – in a masterly rationalisation of French notions of manners – they told themselves it was perfectly permissible to be polite to the foreign soldier indoors, as long as they made no show of familiarity with him in public. Out of doors, they did not know each other. Inside the house, they would happily chat away, and the German would stay a little longer every evening, warming himself beside the family fire.

The town itself gradually regained its old appearance. The French still scarcely ever went out, but the Prussian soldiers were teeming in the streets. Indeed, the officers from the Blue Hussars, who arrogantly dragged their instruments of death along the streets, didn't seem to have that much greater contempt for the ordinary townsfolk than the French cavalry officers who had sat drinking in the same cafés the year before.



Il y avait cependant quelque chose dans l'air, quelque chose de subtil et d'inconnu, une atmosphère étrangère intolérable, comme une odeur répandue, l'odeur de l'invasion. Elle emplissait les demeures et les places publiques, changeait le goût des aliments, donnait l'impression d'être en voyage, très loin, chez des tribus barbares et dangereuses.

Les vainqueurs exigeaient de l'argent, beaucoup d'argent. Les habitants payaient toujours; ils étaient riches d'ailleurs. Mais plus un négociant normand devient opulent et plus il souffre de tout sacrifice, de toute parcelle de sa fortune qu'il voit passer aux mains d'un autre.

Cependant, à deux ou trois lieues sous la ville, en suivant le cours de la rivière, vers Croisset, Dieppedalle ou Biessart, les mariniers et les pêcheurs ramenaient souvent du fond de l'eau quelque cadavre d'Allemand gonflé dans son uniforme, tué d'un coup de couteau ou de savate, la tête écrasée par une pierre, ou jeté à l'eau d'une poussée du haut d'un pont. Les vases du fleuve ensevelissaient ces vengeances obscures, sauvages et légitimes, héroïsmes inconnus, attaques muettes, plus périlleuses que les batailles au grand jour et sans le retentissement de la gloire.

Car la haine de l'Étranger arme toujours quelques Intrépides prêts à mourir pour une Idée.

Enfin, comme les envahisseurs, bien qu'assujétissant la ville à leur inflexible discipline, n'avaient accompli aucune des horreurs que la renommée leur faisait commettre tout le long de leur marche triomphale, on s'enhardit, et le besoin du négoce travailla de nouveau le cœur des commerçants du pays. Quelques-uns avaient de gros intérêts engagés au Havre que l'armée française occupait, et ils voulurent tenter de gagner ce port en allant par terre à Dieppe où ils s'embarqueraient.

On employa l'influence des officiers allemands dont on avait fait la connaissance, et une autorisation de départ fut obtenue du général en chef.

Donc, une grande diligence à quatre chevaux ayant été retenue pour ce voyage, et dix personnes s'étant fait inscrire chez le voiturier, on résolut de partir un mardi matin, avant le jour, pour éviter tout rassemblement.

And yet there was something in the air, something subtle and strange, an unbearable foreign atmosphere, like a spreading odour, the odour of invasion. It permeated the houses and the public squares, altered the taste of food, made people feel they were on a journey, far away, among dangerous and barbaric tribes.

The conquerors demanded money, a great deal of it. The people always paid; they were rich, after all. But the wealthier a Norman businessman becomes, the more he suffers from any kind of sacrifice, from seeing any portion of his fortune passing into another's hands.

Meanwhile, some few miles **NOTE** from the city, downstream the river towards Croisset, Dippedalle or Biessart, bargees and fishermen would often haul up from the bottom of the water some German body, bloated in his uniform, stabbed or kicked to death, or his head smashed in with a stone, or thrown in the water by a push from the top of a bridge. The mud of the river covered up these secret acts of vengeance, savage and yet justified, the unrecorded heroism, the silent attacks that were more perilous than battles in full daylight, and without the throb of glory.

For hatred of foreigners will always rouse the fearless few, ready to die for an ideal.

Although the invaders had imposed the strictest discipline on the town, they had not inflicted any of the horrors that rumour had attributed to them throughout their triumphal march, and people at length became bolder. The need to do business once again exercised the hearts of the local tradesmen. Some of them had major interests in Le Harve, which the French army still held, and they wanted to try and reach the port by going overland to Dieppe, and taking a boat from there.

Through the influence of the German officers whom they had come to know, a permit to leave town was obtained from the general in command.

And so, a large four-horse coach was hired for the journey, and ten people signed up at the carrier's. It was decided to leave one Tuesday morning, before dawn, so as to avoid any crowds.

Depuis quelque temps déjà la gelée avait durci la terre, et le lundi, vers trois heures, de gros nuages noirs venant du Nord apportèrent la neige qui tomba sans interruption pendant toute la soirée et toute la nuit.

A quatre heures et demie du matin, les voyageurs se réunirent dans la cour de l'Hôtel de Normandie, où l'on devait monter en voiture.

Ils étaient encore pleins de sommeil, et grelotaient de froid sous leurs couvertures. On se voyait mal dans l'obscurité; et l'entassement des lourds vêtements d'hiver faisait ressembler tous ces corps à des curés obèses avec leurs longues soutanes. Mais deux hommes se reconnurent, un troisième les aborda, ils causèrent:—«J'emmène ma femme,»—dit l'un.—«J'en fais autant.»—«Et moi aussi.»—Le premier ajouta:—«Nous ne reviendrons pas à Rouen, et si les Prussiens approchent du Havre nous gagnerons l'Angleterre.»—Tous avaient les mêmes projets, étant de complexion semblable.

Cependant on n'attelait pas la voiture. Une petite lanterne, que portait un valet d'écurie, sortait de temps à autre d'une porte obscure pour disparaître immédiatement dans une autre. Des pieds de chevaux frappaient la terre, amortis par le fumier des litières, et une voix d'homme parlant aux bêtes et jurant s'entendait au fond du bâtiment. Un léger murmure de grelots annonça qu'on maniait les harnais; ce murmure devint bientôt un frémissement clair et continu, rythmé par le mouvement de l'animal, s'arrêtant parfois, puis reprenant dans une brusque secousse qu'accompagnait le bruit mat d'un sabot ferré battant le sol.

La porte subitement se ferma. Tout bruit cessa. Les bourgeois gelés s'étaient tus; ils demeuraient immobiles et roidis.

Un rideau de flocons blancs ininterrompu miroitait sans cesse en descendant vers la terre; il effaçait les formes, poudrait les choses d'une mousse de glace; et l'on n'entendait plus, dans le grand silence de la ville calme et ensevelie sous l'hiver, que ce froissement vague, innommable et flottant, de la neige qui tombe, plutôt sensation que bruit, extrêmement d'atomes légers qui semblaient emplir l'espace, couvrir le monde.

L'homme reparut, avec sa lanterne, tirant au bout d'une corde un cheval triste qui ne venait pas volontiers. Il le plaça contre le timon, attacha les traits, tourna longtemps autour pour assurer les harnais, car il

For some time now, the ground had been hard with frost, and on the Monday, around three o'clock, great black clouds from the north brought snow that fell continuously all that evening and throughout the night.

At half past four in the morning, the travellers met in the courtyard of the Normandy Hotel, where they were to board the coach.

They were still half asleep and shivering with cold under their blankets. It was hard to make each other out in the darkness; and the piles of heavy winter clothing they had on made them look like portly priests in long cassocks. But two of the men recognised each other, a third then joined them, and they chatted away. 'I'm taking my wife out of this,' said one. 'I'm doing the same.' 'So am I.' The first man added, 'We're not coming back to Rouen. If the Prussians advance on Le Harve, we'll make for England.' Being of a similar temperament, they all had the same plans.

But the horses had not yet been harnessed. Every so often, a small lantern carried by a stable-hand appeared from a darkened doorway, only to disappear immediately into another. Horses' hooves stamped on the ground, muffled by the dung in the stable. A man's voice, talking and swearing at the animals, could be heard from deep inside the building. A faint tinkling of bells signalled that the harness was being put on, and the tinkle soon became a clear and steady jingling, punctuated by the horse's movements – sometimes stopping, then starting up again with a sudden shake and the dull thud of an iron horse-shoe hitting the ground.

Suddenly, the door closed. All noise ceased. The frozen townfolk had stopped talking and stood there, stiff and motionless.

All the while, an unbroken curtain of white flakes sparkled as it fell to the ground, blurring shapes and powdering everything with a foaming of ice. In the deep silence of the town buried in wintry stillness, you could hear nothing but a vague, indescribable, floating rustle of falling snow – more a sensation than a sound – a mingling of weightless atoms that seemed to fill up space, and cover the world.

The man reappeared with his lantern, leading at the end of a rope a sorry-looking horse that came out unwillingly. He stood it against the coach's shaft and fastened the traces, spending a long time going round

ne pouvait se servir que d'une main, l'autre portant sa lumière. Comme il allait chercher la seconde bête, il remarqua tous ces voyageurs immobiles, déjà blancs de neige, et leur dit:—«Pourquoi ne montez-vous pas dans la voiture, vous serez à l'abri, au moins.»

Ils n'y avaient pas songé, sans doute, et ils se précipitèrent. Les trois hommes installèrent leurs femmes dans le fond, montèrent ensuite; puis les autres formes indécises et voilées prirent à leur tour les dernières places sans échanger une parole.

Le plancher était couvert de paille où les pieds s'enfoncèrent. Les dames du fond, ayant apporté des petites chaufferettes en cuivre avec un charbon chimique, allumèrent ces appareils, et, pendant quelque temps, à voix basse, elles en énumérèrent les avantages, se répétant des choses qu'elles savaient déjà depuis longtemps.

Enfin, la diligence étant attelée, avec six chevaux au lieu de quatre à cause du tirage plus pénible, une voix du dehors demanda:—«Tout le monde est-il monté?»—Une voix du dedans répondit:—«Oui.»—On partit.

La voiture avançait lentement, lentement, à tout petits pas. Les roues s'enfonçaient dans la neige; le coffre entier geignait avec des craquements sourds; les bêtes glissaient, soufflaient, fumaient; et le fouet gigantesque du cocher claquait sans repos, voltigeait de tous les côtés, se nouant et se déroulant comme un serpent mince, et cinglant brusquement quelque croupe rebondie qui se tendait alors sous un effort plus violent.

Mais le jour imperceptiblement grandissait. Ces flocons légers qu'un voyageur, Rouennais pur sang, avait comparés à une pluie de coton, ne tombaient plus. Une lueur sale filtrait à travers de gros nuages obscurs et lourds qui rendaient plus éclatante la blancheur de la campagne où apparaissaient tantôt une ligne de grands arbres vêtus de givre, tantôt une chaumière avec un capuchon de neige.

Dans la voiture, on se regardait curieusement, à la triste clarté de cette aurore.

Tout au fond, aux meilleures places, sommeillaient, en face l'un de l'autre, M. et Mme Loiseau, des marchands de vins en gros de la rue Grand-Pont.

and round to secure the harness, since he could use only one hand, the other one carrying the light. As he was about to fetch the second animal, he noticed the travellers standing motionless, already white with snow, and said to them, 'Why don't you get into the coach? At least you'll have some shelter.'

They'd apparently not thought of this, and rushed towards the coach. The three men settled their wives in the back and then got in themselves. Then the other vague and shrouded figures clambered on to the last seats in turn, without exchanging a word.

Their feet sank into the straw that covered the floor. The ladies in the back, having brought along little copper foot-warmers that ran on some chemical fuel, lit the devices, and spent some time enumerating their advantages, repeating things they all had known for ages.

At last the coach was harnessed up, with six horses rather than four because of the more difficult conditions. A voice from outside called, 'Is everybody in?' A voice inside answered, 'Yes.' They were off.

The coach moved forward slowly, slowly, at a snail's pace. The wheels sank into the snow; the whole body of it groaned with dull creaks; the animals slipped and panted and gave off steam; and the coachman's massive whip kept cracking on and on, darting about on every side, knotting and then uncoiling like a thin snake, as it gave a sudden sting to some chubby rump that then would tense up for greater effort still.

Yet imperceptibly, it was getting lighter. Those feathery flakes that one of the passengers – a Rouen man born and bred – had likened to a rainfall of cotton-wool, were no longer falling. A murky light was filtering through vast, dark, heavy clouds, that made the whiteness of the countryside more dazzling still. Sometimes, there would appear a line of tall trees covered in frost, sometimes a cottage with a hood of snow.

Inside the coach, by the melancholy light of dawn, they eyed each other curiously.

Right at the back, in the best seats, Monsieur and Madame Loiseau, wholesale wine merchants on the rue Grand-Pont, were dozing opposite each other.

Ancien commis d'un patron ruiné dans les affaires, Loiseau avait acheté le fonds et fait fortune. Il vendait à très bon marché de très mauvais vin aux petits débiteurs des campagnes et passait parmi ses connaissances et ses amis pour un fripon madré, un vrai Normand plein de ruses et de jovialité.

Sa réputation de filou était si bien établie, qu'un soir, à la préfecture, M. Tournel, auteur de fables et de chansons, esprit mordant et fin, une gloire locale, ayant proposé aux dames qu'il voyait un peu somnolentes de faire une partie de «Loiseau vole», le mot lui-même vola à travers les salons du préfet, puis, gagnant ceux de la ville, avait fait rire pendant un mois toutes les mâchoires de la province.

Loiseau était en outre célèbre par ses farces de toute nature, ses plaisanteries bonnes ou mauvaises; et personne ne pouvait parler de lui sans ajouter immédiatement:—«Il est impayable, ce Loiseau.»

De taille exigüe, il présentait un ventre en ballon surmonté d'une face rougeaude entre deux favoris grisonnants.

Sa femme, grande, forte, résolue, avec la voix haute et la décision rapide, était l'ordre et l'arithmétique de la maison de commerce, qu'il aimait par son activité joyeuse.

A côté d'eux se tenait, plus digne, appartenant à une caste supérieure, M. Carré-Lamadon, homme considérable, posé dans les cotons, propriétaire de trois filatures, officier de la Légion d'honneur et membre du Conseil général. Il était resté, tout le temps de l'Empire, chef de l'opposition bienveillante, uniquement pour se faire payer plus cher son ralliement à la cause qu'il combattait avec des armes courtoises, selon sa propre expression. Mme Carré-Lamadon, beaucoup plus jeune que son mari, demeurait la consolation des officiers de bonne famille envoyés à Rouen en garnison.

Elle faisait vis-à-vis à son époux, toute petite, toute mignonne, toute jolie, pelotonnée dans ses fourrures, et regardait d'un oeil navré l'intérieur lamentable de la voiture.

Ses voisins, le comte et la comtesse Hubert de Bréville, portaient un des noms les plus anciens et les plus nobles de Normandie. Le comte, vieux gentilhomme de grande tournure, s'efforçait d'accentuer, par les

Formerly clerk to a merchant who had failed in business, Loiseau had bought up the concern and made his fortune. He sold very bad wine at very low prices to small country shopkeepers, and was considered by his friends and acquaintances to be a wily old rascal, a typical Norman, full of tricks and joviality.

So well established was his reputation as a crook that, one evening at the County Hall, **NOTE** Monsieur Tournel, a local celebrity of clever, biting wit, and the writer of stories and songs, proposed to the ladies, who seemed to him a little drowsy, that they should play a game of 'Loiseau vole'. **NOTE** The joke spread like wildfire through the Council Leader's **NOTE** drawing rooms, and from there to those in the town. The jaws of the entire province were in stitches for a month.

In addition, Loiseau was famous for pranks of all kinds, and for his jokes, good and bad. No one could speak of him without at once adding, 'He's priceless, that Loiseau.'

A squat figure, he presented a paunch belly, topped with a ruddy face that was framed by two greying muttonchops.

His wife – tall, stout, determined-looking, with a loud voice and brisk manner – provided the order and arithmetic for the business, which he kept bubbling through his happy bonhomie.

Next to them, more dignified and belonging to a higher class, sat Monsieur Carré-Lamadon, a man of considerable substance, firmly established in the cotton trade, the owner of three textile mills, officer of the Legion of Honour, and member of the General Council. **NOTE** Throughout the Empire, **NOTE** he had stayed the leader of a benevolent opposition, solely to gain a better price for switching to the cause that he had opposed with 'gentlemanly weapons', as he phrased it. Madame Carré-Lamadon, very much younger than her husband, remained a consolation to those officers from good families who found themselves stationed at Rouen.

Very dainty, very demure, very pretty, she sat opposite her husband, cuddled up in her furs, as she looked round disconsolately at the shabby interior of the coach.

Her neighbours, the Count and Countess Hubert de Bréville, bore one of the noblest and oldest names in Normandy. The Count, an old gentleman of distinguished bearing, tried as hard as possible, through his

artifices de sa toilette, sa ressemblance naturelle avec le roy Henri IV qui, suivant une légende glorieuse pour la famille, avait rendu grosse une dame de Bréville dont le mari, pour ce fait, était devenu comte et gouverneur de province.

Collègue de M. Carré-Lamadon au Conseil général, le comte Hubert représentait le parti orléaniste dans le département. L'histoire de son mariage avec la fille d'un petit armateur de Nantes était toujours demeurée mystérieuse. Mais comme la comtesse avait grand air, recevait mieux que personne, passait même pour avoir été aimée par un des fils de Louis-Philippe, toute la noblesse lui faisait fête, et son salon demeurait le premier du pays, le seul où se conservât la vieille galanterie, et dont l'entrée fût difficile.

La fortune des Bréville, toute en biens-fonds, atteignait, disait-on, cinq cent mille livres de revenu.

Ces six personnes formaient le fond de la voiture, le côté de la société rentée, sereine et forte, des honnêtes gens autorisés qui ont de la Religion et des Principes.

Par un hasard étrange, toutes les femmes se trouvaient sur le même banc; et la comtesse avait encore pour voisines deux bonnes soeurs qui égrenaient de longs chapelets en marmottant des *Pater* et des *Ave*. L'une était vieille avec une face défoncée par la petite vérole comme si elle eût reçu à bout portant une bordée de mitraille en pleine figure. L'autre, très chétive, avait une tête jolie et malade sur une poitrine de phthisique rongée par cette foi dévorante qui fait les martyrs et les illuminés.

En face des deux religieuses, un homme et une femme attiraient les regards de tous.

L'homme, bien connu, était Cornudet le démoc, la terreur des gens respectables. Depuis vingt ans, il trempait sa grande barbe rousse dans les bocks de tous les cafés démocratiques. Il avait mangé avec les frères et amis une assez belle fortune qu'il tenait de son père, ancien confiseur, et il attendait impatiemment la République pour obtenir enfin la place méritée par tant de consommations révolutionnaires. Au Quatre Septembre, par suite d'une farce peut-être, il s'était cru nommé préfet, mais quand il voulut entrer en fonctions, les garçons de bureau, demeurés seuls maîtres de la place, refusèrent de le reconnaître, ce qui le

dress and grooming, to emphasise the resemblance he bore to Henry IV. The latter, according to proud family legend, had fathered a child on a lady from Bréville, whose husband, as a result, had become a count and governor of the province.

A colleague of Monsieur Carré-Lamadon on the General Council, Count Hubert represented the Orléanist party in the county. **NOTE** The story of his marriage to the daughter of a small Nantes shipowner had always been shrouded in mystery. But since the countess had a distinguished air about her, was a finer hostess than anyone, and was even said to have been loved by one of the sons of Louis-Philippe, she was celebrated by all the nobility; and her drawing-room, with its exclusive access, remained the foremost in the land – the only one to preserve old gallantries.

The Bréville's fortune, all of it in landed property, was said to bring in five hundred thousand pounds a year.

These six people occupied the back of the coach, representing well-to-do society, serene and strong – respectable, upright people who had both religion and principles.

By a strange coincidence, all the women found themselves sitting on the same side; and the Countess also had as neighbours two nuns, fingering their long rosaries and muttering their *Our Fathers* and *Hail Marys*. One of them was old, with a face so pitted by smallpox that she seemed to have taken a hail of shrapnel at point-blank range. The other, very puny-looking, had a pretty but sickly countenance, and a consumptive chest eaten away by that all-devouring faith that creates martyrs and visionaries.

Opposite the two nuns, a man and a woman attracted everyone's attention.

The man, Cornudet, was a well-known democrat and the terror of all respectable people. For twenty years, he had been dipping his great red beard into the beer glasses of every pro-democratic café around, and with the help of comrades and friends, had run through a fairly sizable fortune inherited from his father, a former confectioner. Now, he was waiting impatiently for the Republic, so that he might at last obtain the position that so many revolutionary drinks had surely earned him. On the fourth of September, perhaps as the result of a practical joke, he'd thought he'd been appointed Council Leader. But when he'd tried to take up his duties, the office workers, the only ones in charge of the place, refused to

recognise his authority, and he'd been forced to beat a retreat. He was a contraignit à la retraite. Fort bon garçon, du reste, inoffensif et serviable, il s'était occupé avec une ardeur incomparable d'organiser la défense. Il avait fait creuser des trous dans les plaines, coucher tous les jeunes arbres des forêts voisines, semé des pièges sur toutes les routes, et, à l'approche de l'ennemi, satisfait de ses préparatifs, il s'était vivement replié vers la ville.

Il pensait maintenant se rendre encore plus utile au Havre, où de nouveaux retranchements allaient être nécessaires.

La femme, une de celles appelées galantes, était célèbre par son embonpoint précoce qui lui avait valu le surnom de Boule de Suif. Petite, ronde de partout, grasse à lard, avec des doigts bouffis, étranglés aux phalanges, pareils à des chapelets de courtes saucisses; avec une peau luisante et tendue, une gorge énorme qui saillait sous sa robe, elle restait cependant appétissante et courue, tant sa fraîcheur faisait plaisir à voir. Sa figure était une pomme rouge, un bouton de pivoine prêt à fleurir; et là-dedans s'ouvraient, en haut, deux yeux noirs magnifiques, ombragés de grands cils épais qui mettaient une ombre dedans; en bas, une bouche charmante, étroite, humide pour le baiser, meublée de quenottes luisantes et microscopiques.

Elle était de plus, disait-on, pleine de qualités inappréciables.

Aussitôt qu'elle fut reconnue, des chuchotements coururent parmi les femmes honnêtes, et les mots de «prostituée», de «honte publique» furent chuchotés si haut qu'elle leva la tête. Alors elle promena sur ses voisins un regard tellement provocant et hardi qu'un grand silence aussitôt régna, et tout le monde baissa les yeux à l'exception de Loiseau, qui la guettait d'un air émoussillé.

Mais bientôt la conversation reprit entre les trois dames, que la présence de cette fille avait rendues subitement amies, presque intimes. Elles devaient faire, leur semblait-il, comme un faisceau de leurs dignités d'épouses en face de cette vendue sans vergogne; car l'amour légal le prend toujours de haut avec son libre confrère.

Les trois hommes aussi, rapprochés par un instinct de conservateurs à l'aspect de Cornudet, parlaient argent d'un certain ton dédaigneux pour les pauvres. Le comte Hubert disait les dégâts que lui avaient fait subir les Prussiens, les pertes qui résulteraient du bétail volé et des récoltes

good-natured sort, nevertheless, harmless and obliging, and had busied himself with matchless enthusiasm in organising the town's defences. He'd had pits dug in the open country, all the saplings in the neighbouring forests felled, and traps set up on all the roads. At the enemy's approach, he had quickly doubled back into town, satisfied he'd done all he could to prepare.

Now, he thought, he could do more good in Le Harve, where new defences were going to be needed.

The woman, one of those known as 'loose', was famous for a premature portliness that had earned her the nickname *Dumpling*. **NOTE** Small, as round as a barrel, as fat as a pig, with puffy fingers tightly jointed that looked like strings of small sausages, her stretched and shiny skin, and the enormous bosom that bulged under her dress, made her desirable and sought after nevertheless, such was the pleasure at seeing her freshness. She had a rosy apple of a face, a peony bud just bursting into bloom. At the top there opened up two magnificent dark eyes, shaded by thick black lashes that cast a shadow inside; lower down, a small charming mouth, moist for kissing, with tiny, gleaming teeth. **NOTE**

She was said, moreover, to be full of inestimable qualities.

As soon as she was recognised, there was hurried whispering among the respectable women, and the words 'prostitute' and 'public disgrace' were whispered loudly enough for her to look up. She cast such a direct and challenging look at her neighbours that total silence reigned at once, and everyone looked down apart from Loiseau, who was titillated as he gazed at her.

Soon, though, conversation resumed between the three ladies, whom the presence of this 'woman' had suddenly made almost intimate friends. It seemed to them they had a duty to present a united front of marital dignity in front of this shameless harlot. Legitimised love always looks down upon its easy-going colleague.

The three men as well, drawn together by an instinct of preservation at the sight of Cornudet, began to talk about money in the kind of way that showed no regard for the poor. Count Hubert spoke of the damage that the Prussians had made him suffer – the losses that would result from

perdues, avec une assurance de grand seigneur dix fois millionnaire que ces ravages gêneraient à peine une année. M. Carré-Lamadon, fort éprouvé dans l'industrie cotonnière, avait eu soin d'envoyer six cent mille francs en Angleterre, une poire pour la soif qu'il se ménageait à toute occasion. Quant à Loiseau, il s'était arrangé pour vendre à l'Intendance française tous les vins communs qui lui restaient en cave, de sorte que l'État lui devait une somme formidable qu'il comptait bien toucher au Havre.

Et tous les trois se jetaient des coups d'oeil rapides et amicaux. Bien que de conditions différentes, ils se sentaient frères par l'argent, de la grande franc-maçonnerie de ceux qui possèdent, qui font sonner de l'or en mettant la main dans la poche de leur culotte.

La voiture allait si lentement qu'à dix heures du matin on n'avait pas fait quatre lieues. Les hommes descendirent trois fois pour monter des côtes à pied. On commençait à s'inquiéter, car on devait déjeuner à Tôtes et l'on désespérait maintenant d'y parvenir avant la nuit. Chacun guettait pour apercevoir un cabaret sur la route, quand la diligence sombra dans un amoncellement de neige et il fallut deux heures pour la dégager.

L'appétit grandissait, troublait les esprits; et aucune gargote, aucun marchand de vin ne se montraient, l'approche des Prussiens et le passage des troupes françaises affamées ayant effrayé toutes les industries.

Les messieurs coururent aux provisions dans les fermes au bord du chemin, mais ils n'y trouvèrent pas même de pain, car le paysan défiant cachait ses réserves dans la crainte d'être pillé par les soldats qui, n'ayant rien à se mettre sous la dent, prenaient par force ce qu'ils découvraient.

Vers une heure de l'après-midi, Loiseau annonça que décidément il se sentait un rude creux dans l'estomac. Tout le monde souffrait comme lui depuis longtemps; et le violent besoin de manger, augmentant toujours, avait tué les conversations.

De temps en temps, quelqu'un bâillait; un autre presque aussitôt l'imitait; et chacun, à tour de rôle, suivant son caractère, son savoir-vivre et sa position sociale, ouvrait la bouche avec fracas ou modestement en portant vite sa main devant le trou béant d'où sortait une vapeur.

Boule de Suif, à plusieurs reprises, se pencha comme si elle cherchait

stolen livestock and ruined crops – but with the self-assurance of a nobleman, a millionaire ten times over, whom this devastation would scarcely bother for as much as a year. Monsieur Carré-Lamadon, whose cotton business had been hard hit, had taken care to send 600,000 francs to England, arranging as always to have something set aside for a rainy day. **NOTE** As for Loiseau, he had managed to sell the French Supplies Ministry all the ordinary wine he had left in his cellars, so that the State now owed him a very substantial sum of money, which he was expecting to collect at Le Harve.

All three exchanged brief, friendly glances. Despite their different circumstances, they felt themselves brothers by dint of their money, the great free-masonry of those who possess, who can make gold jingle whenever they put their hands in their trouser pockets.

The coach was moving along so slowly that, by ten o'clock that morning, they had covered less than ten miles. Three times the men got out to climb the hills on foot. They were beginning to worry, because they were supposed to have lunch in Tôtes, and they despaired now of reaching it before nightfall. Everyone was on the lookout for a wayside inn, when the coach got stuck in a snowdrift and it took two hours to free it.

As their appetites grew, their spirits sank. Not a single eating-house, a single bar, came into sight. The Prussian advance, and the passing through of starving French troops, had frightened all business away.

The men ran off for food in the farmhouses beside the road, but they couldn't find so much as a crust of bread. The wary peasants had hidden their supplies for fear of being looted by soldiers who had nothing to put in their mouths, and who would take whatever they found by force.

At about one in the afternoon, Loiseau declared that he could positively feel a hard emptiness in his stomach. Everyone had been suffering similarly for a long time; and the violent need for food, that kept on growing, had killed all conversation.

From time to time, someone would yawn. Someone else would almost immediately do the same; and everyone in turn – according to character, manners, and social position – would open their mouth either noisily or discreetly, bringing their hands up over the gaping hole from which a frozen breath emerged.

On several occasions, the Dumpling would lean down, as if looking

quelque chose sous ses jupons. Elle hésitait une seconde, regardait ses voisins, puis se redressait tranquillement. Les figures étaient pâles et crispées. Loiseau affirma qu'il payerait mille francs un jambonneau. Sa femme fit un geste comme pour protester; puis elle se calma. Elle souffrait toujours en entendant parler d'argent gaspillé, et ne comprenait même pas les plaisanteries sur ce sujet. «Le fait est que je ne me sens pas bien, dit le comte, comment n'ai-je pas songé à apporter des provisions?»—Chacun se faisait le même reproche.

Cependant, Cornudet avait une gourde pleine de rhum; il en offrit; on refusa froidement. Loiseau seul en accepta deux gouttes, et, lorsqu'il rendit la gourde, il remercia: «C'est bon tout de même, ça réchauffe, et ça trompe l'appétit.»—L'alcool le mit en belle humeur et il proposa de faire comme sur le petit navire de la chanson: de manger le plus gras des voyageurs. Cette allusion indirecte à Boule de Suif choqua les gens bien élevés. On ne répondit pas; Cornudet seul eut un sourire. Les deux bonnes soeurs avaient cessé de marmotter leur rosaire, et, les mains enfoncées dans leurs grandes manches, elles se tenaient immobiles, baissant obstinément les yeux, offrant sans doute au Ciel la souffrance qu'il leur envoyait.

Enfin, à trois heures, comme on se trouvait au milieu d'une plaine interminable, sans un seul village en vue, Boule de Suif se baissant vivement, retira de sous la banquette un large panier couvert d'une serviette blanche.

Elle en sortit d'abord une petite assiette de faïence, une fine timbale en argent, puis une vaste terrine dans laquelle deux poulets entiers, tout découpés, avaient confi sous leur gelée; et l'on apercevait encore dans le panier d'autres bonnes choses enveloppées, des pâtés, des fruits, des friandises, les provisions préparées pour un voyage de trois jours, afin de ne point toucher à la cuisine des auberges. Quatre goulots de bouteilles passaient entre les paquets de nourriture. Elle prit une aile de poulet et, délicatement, se mit à la manger avec un de ces petits pains qu'on appelle «Régence» en Normandie.

Tous les regards étaient tendus vers elle. Puis l'odeur se répandit, élargissant les narines, faisant venir aux bouches une salive abondante avec une contraction douloureuse de la mâchoire sous les oreilles. Le mépris des dames pour cette fille devenait féroce, comme une envie de la

something under her skirts. She would hesitate a second, look at her neighbours, then quietly sit upright again. Every face was pale and tense. Loiseau declared he would give a thousand pounds for a knuckle of ham. His wife made a gesture as if to protest, but then calmed down. It always hurt her to hear of money being wasted, and she didn't even understand jokes on the subject. 'The fact is that I don't feel well,' said the Count, 'how could I have thought not to bring food?' Everyone was regretting the same oversight.

Cornudet, however, had on him a flask of rum. He offered it round, and was coldly refused. Loiseau alone took a couple of sips, and returned it with his thanks, 'Good stuff, that. Warms you up. Cheats the appetite.' The alcohol had put him in a cheery mood, and he suggested they did like the sailors in the song about the little boat: eat the fattest of the passengers. This oblique reference to the Dumpling shocked those who'd been brought up well. No one responded; only Cornudet managed a smile. The two nuns had stopped mumbling over their rosaries. They remained still, hands deep inside their long sleeves, eyes resolutely cast down, no doubt offering up to Heaven the suffering it had sent them.

Finally, at three o'clock, as they found themselves in the middle of an endless plain, with not a single village in sight, the Dumpling bent down quickly and drew out from under her seat a large basket covered with a white napkin.

First she took out a small china plate and a delicate silver tumbler, then a huge terrine in which two whole chickens, all carved up, were preserved in their own aspic. They caught sight of more good things in the basket, all wrapped up: pâtés, fruit, other delicacies. She had prepared food for three days' travelling, so as to avoid the cooking of wayside inns. The necks of four bottles protruded from among the packages of food. She took a chicken wing and, daintily, began to eat it with one of those little rolls known in Normandy as a *régence*.

Every eye was trained on her. Then the smell began to spread; nostrils flared, mouths watered with saliva, and jaws painfully contracted under the ears. The ladies' contempt for this 'woman' was turning into a ferocious longing, either to kill her, or to cast her, with her tumbler, her



tuer ou de la jeter en bas de la voiture, dans la neige, elle, sa timbale, son panier et ses provisions.

Mais Loiseau dévorait des yeux la terrine de poulet. Il dit: «A la bonne heure, madame a eu plus de précaution que nous. Il y a des personnes qui savent toujours penser à tout.» Elle leva la tête vers lui: «Si vous en désirez, monsieur? C'est dur de jeûner depuis le matin.» Il salua: «Ma foi, franchement, je ne refuse pas, je n'en peux plus. A la guerre comme à la guerre, n'est-ce pas, madame?» Et, jetant un regard circulaire, il ajouta: «Dans des moments comme celui-ci, on est bien aise de trouver des gens qui vous obligent.»—Il avait un journal qu'il étendit pour ne point tacher son pantalon, et sur la pointe d'un couteau toujours logé dans sa poche, il enleva une cuisse toute vernie de gelée, la dépeça des dents, puis la mâcha avec une satisfaction si évidente qu'il y eut dans la voiture un grand soupir de détresse.

Mais Boule de Suif, d'une voix humble et douce, proposa aux bonnes soeurs de partager sa collation. Elles acceptèrent toutes les deux instantanément, et, sans lever les yeux, se mirent à manger très vite après avoir balbutié des remerciements. Cornudet ne refusa pas non plus les offres de sa voisine, et l'on forma avec les religieuses une sorte de table en développant des journaux sur les genoux.

Les bouches s'ouvraient et se fermaient sans cesse, avalaient, mastiquaient, engloutissaient férocement. Loiseau, dans son coin, travaillait dur, et, à voix basse, il engageait sa femme à l'imiter. Elle résista longtemps, puis, après une crispation qui lui parcourut les entrailles, elle céda. Alors son mari, arrondissant sa phrase, demanda à leur «charmante compagne» si elle lui permettait d'offrir un petit morceau à Mme Loiseau. Elle dit: «Mais oui, certainement, monsieur,» avec un sourire aimable, et tendit la terrine.

Un embarras se produisit lorsqu'on eût débouché la première bouteille de bordeaux: il n'y avait qu'une timbale. On se la passa après l'avoir essuyée. Cornudet seul, par galanterie sans doute, posa ses lèvres à la place humide encore des lèvres de sa voisine.

Alors, entourés de gens qui mangeaient, suffoqués par les émanations des nourritures, le comte et la comtesse de Bréville, ainsi que M. et Mme Carré-Lamadon souffrirent ce supplice odieux qui a gardé le nom de

basket, her provisions, out of the coach and into the snow.

Loiseau was eating the terrine of chicken with his eyes. 'When all's said and done,' **NOTE** he declared, 'Madame here has taken more precautions than we have. Some people always think of everything.' She looked up at him. 'Would you like some, sir? It's hard to go all day long without food.' He bowed. 'Good lord, to be frank, I can't refuse. I can't stand any more of this. Desperate times, desperate measures, eh, madame?' **NOTE** And, glancing around at everyone, he added, 'At times like this, it's so good to find people who will help.' He had a newspaper that he spread out so as not to get grease on his trousers; and with the point of a pocket-knife that he always carried, he lifted a drumstick all glazed with aspic. Tearing at it with his teeth, he munched it with such obvious relish that a great sigh of distress went up in the coach.

But the Dumpling, in a humble, gentle voice, asked the nuns to share her meal. Both of them accepted straight away and, having stammered their thanks, began to eat as fast as they could, without looking up. Cornudet didn't refuse his neighbour's offer either, and with the nuns, a sort of table was formed by draping newspapers over their knees.

Mouths opened and closed without a pause, swallowing, chewing, gulping down ferociously. In his corner, Loiseau was solidly at work, and in a low voice, he urged his wife to do the same. For a long time, she resisted, but then a spasm of hunger ran right through her insides, and she gave in. Her husband, choosing his words with care, asked their 'charming companion' if she would allow him to offer a morsel to Madame Loiseau. 'Of course, sir, certainly,' she said with a kindly smile, and held out the terrine.

Some awkwardness arose when they opened the first bottle of claret. There was only one goblet. But after wiping it, they passed it round. Only Cornudet, out of gallantry no doubt, placed his lips on the spot that was still wet from the lips of his female neighbour.

Surrounded by people eating, and choking from the smell of food, the Count and Countess de Bréville, as well as Monsieur and Madame Carré-Lamadon, were suffering that awful torture associated with the name of

Tantale. Tout d'un coup la jeune femme du manufacturier poussa un soupir qui fit retourner les têtes; elle était aussi blanche que la neige du dehors; ses yeux se fermèrent, son front tomba: elle avait perdu connaissance. Son mari, affolé, implorait le secours de tout le monde. Chacun perdait l'esprit, quand la plus âgée des bonnes soeurs, soutenant la tête de la malade, glissa entre ses lèvres la timbale de Boule de Suif et lui fit avaler quelques gouttes de vin. La jolie dame remua, ouvrit les yeux, sourit et déclara d'une voix mourante qu'elle se sentait fort bien maintenant. Mais, afin que cela ne se renouvelât plus, la religieuse la contraignit à boire un plein verre de bordeaux, et elle ajouta:—«C'est la faim, pas autre chose.» Alors Boule de Suif, rougissante et embarrassée, balbutia en regardant les quatre voyageurs restés à jeun: «Mon Dieu, si j'osais offrir à ces messieurs et à ces dames ...» Elle se tut, craignant un outrage. Loiseau prit la parole: «Eh, parbleu, dans des cas pareils tout le monde est frère et doit s'aider. Allons, mesdames, pas de cérémonie, acceptez, que diable! Savons-nous si nous trouverons seulement une maison où passer la nuit? Du train dont nous allons nous ne serons pas à Tôtes avant demain midi.»—On hésitait, personne n'osant assumer la responsabilité du «oui».

Mais le comte trancha la question. Il se tourna vers la grosse fille intimidée, et, prenant son grand air de gentilhomme, il lui dit: «Nous acceptons avec reconnaissance, madame.»

Le premier pas seul coûtait. Une fois le Rubicon passé, on s'en donna carrément. Le panier fut vidé. Il contenait encore un pâté de foie gras, un pâté de mauviettes, un morceau de langue fumée, des poires de Crassane, un pavé de Pont-l'Évêque, des petits-fours et une tasse pleine de cornichons et d'oignons au vinaigre, Boule de Suif, comme toutes les femmes, adorant les crudités.

On ne pouvait manger les provisions de cette fille sans lui parler. Donc on causa, avec réserve d'abord, puis, comme elle se tenait fort bien, on s'abandonna davantage. Mmes de Bréville et Carré-Lamadon, qui avaient un grand savoir-vivre, se firent gracieuses avec délicatesse. La comtesse surtout montra cette condescendance aimable des très nobles dames qu'aucun contact ne peut salir, et fut charmante. Mais la forte Mme Loiseau, qui avait une âme de gendarme, resta revêche, parlant peu et mangeant beaucoup.

Tantalus. Suddenly, the manufacturer's young wife let out a sigh that made everybody turn. She was as white as the snow outside. Her eyes closed, and her head fell forward: she had lost consciousness. Panic-stricken, her husband begged for everyone's help. But their minds seemed to have gone blank until the elder of the nuns lifted up the poor woman's head, slipped the Dumpling's goblet between her lips, and made her swallow a few drops of wine. The pretty lady stirred, opened her eyes, smiled, and declared in a faint voice that she was feeling perfectly well now. But, so it wouldn't happen again, the nun made her drink a whole glass of claret, adding, 'It's just hunger, nothing else.' Blushing and embarrassed, the Dumpling looked at the four travellers still without food, and stammered, 'My goodness, if I dared offer these ladies and gentlemen...' She fell silent, afraid of causing offence. Loiseau spoke up, 'Look, in these circumstances, we're all brothers and sisters. We must help each other out. Come along, ladies. No fuss now. For God's sake, eat. Who knows if we'll even find an inn to spend the night. At the rate we're going, we won't be in Tôtes before noon tomorrow.' They hesitated, no one daring to take responsibility for saying 'yes'.

The Count quickly settled the question. Turning towards the fat, cowed woman, he replied in his most lordly manner, 'Madame, we gratefully accept.'

Only the first step was hard. Once the Rubicon had been crossed, they set squarely to work. The basket was emptied and still found to contain a pâté of foie gras, a pâté of lark, a piece of smoked tongue, some Crassane pears, a slab of Pont l'Évêque cheese, some petits fours, and a cup full of pickled cucumbers and onions. Like all women, the Dumpling loved raw vegetables.

They could hardly eat the loose woman's food without speaking to her. So they began to talk, with reserve at first, but then, as she was behaving with perfect manners, they opened up more. Mesdames de Bréville and Carré-Lamadon, ladies of high refinement, were gracious and diplomatic. The Countess, in particular, showed the kindly condescension of a noblewoman whom no contact could ever sully, and was charming. But stout, old Madame Loiseau, who had the soul of a police-officer, continued surly, speaking little and eating a lot.

On s'entretint de la guerre, naturellement. On raconta des faits horribles des Prussiens, des traits de bravoure des Français; et tous ces gens qui fuyaient rendirent hommage au courage des autres. Les histoires personnelles commencèrent bientôt, et Boule de Suif raconta, avec une émotion vraie, avec cette chaleur de parole qu'ont parfois les filles pour exprimer leurs emportements naturels, comment elle avait quitté Rouen: «J'ai cru d'abord que je pourrais rester, dit-elle. J'avais ma maison pleine de provisions, et j'aimais mieux nourrir quelques soldats que m'expatrier je ne sais où. Mais quand je les ai vus, ces Prussiens, ce fut plus fort que moi! Ils m'ont tourné le sang de colère; et j'ai pleuré de honte toute la journée. Oh! si j'étais un homme, allez! Je les regardais de ma fenêtre, ces gros porcs avec leur casque à pointe, et ma bonne me tenait les mains pour m'empêcher de leur jeter mon mobilier sur le dos. Puis il en est venu pour loger chez moi; alors j'ai sauté à la gorge du premier. Ils ne sont pas plus difficiles à étrangler que d'autres! Et je l'aurais terminé, celui-là, si l'on ne m'avait pas tirée par les cheveux. Il a fallu me cacher après ça. Enfin, quand j'ai trouvé une occasion, je suis partie, et me voici.»

On la félicita beaucoup. Elle grandissait dans l'estime de ses compagnons qui ne s'étaient pas montrés si crânes; et Cornudet, en l'écoutant, gardait un sourire approbateur et bienveillant d'apôtre; de même un prêtre entend un dévot louer Dieu, car les démocrates à longue barbe ont le monopole du patriotisme comme les hommes en soutane ont celui de la religion. Il parla à son tour d'un ton doctrinaire, avec l'emphase apprise dans les proclamations qu'on collait chaque jour aux murs, et il finit par un morceau d'éloquence où il étrillait magistralement cette «crapule de Badinguet».

Mais Boule de Suif aussitôt se fâcha, car elle était bonapartiste. Elle devenait plus rouge qu'une guigne, et, bégayant d'indignation: «J'aurais bien voulu vous voir à sa place, vous autres. Ça aurait été du propre, ah oui! C'est vous qui l'avez trahi, cet homme! On n'aurait plus qu'à quitter la France si l'on était gouverné par des polissons comme vous!» Cornudet, impassible, gardait un sourire dédaigneux et supérieur, mais on sentait que les gros mots allaient arriver quand le comte s'interposa et calma, non sans peine, la fille exaspérée, en proclamant avec autorité que toutes les opinions sincères étaient respectables. Cependant la comtesse et la manufacturière, qui avaient dans l'âme la haine irraisonnée des gens comme il faut pour la République, et cette instinctive tendresse que

Naturally, they talked about the war, the terrible things that the Prussians had done, and the courageous deeds of the French. All these people who were running away as fast as they could paid tribute to the bravery of the others. Personal stories soon followed. With real emotion, and the passionate language that loose women sometimes use to express their natural anger, the Dumpling told how she had come to leave Rouen. 'At first I thought I could stay,' she said. 'I'd a house full of food, and I preferred to feed a few soldiers than be banished to goodness knows where. But when I saw them, those Prussians, it was more than I could take! They made my blood boil; I cried all day long out of shame. Oh, if only I'd been a man! I'd watch them out of my window, those fat pigs with their pointy helmets. And my maid had to hold my hands down to stop me throwing my furniture down on their backs. Then some of them came to stay in my house. I leapt at the first one's throat. They aren't any harder to strangle than anyone else! And I'd have finished him off, too, if they hadn't dragged me away by the hair. I had to hide after that. In the end, when I'd the chance, I left, and here I am.'

She was warmly congratulated, and rose in the esteem of her companions, none of whom had shown such bravery. Listening to her, Cornudet retained the kindly, approving smile of an apostle, the smile of a priest hearing a true believer praising God. For just as men in cassocks have a monopoly on religion, so too do democrats with long beards have a monopoly on patriotism. He too held forth in turn, with the dogmatic bombast he had picked up from the proclamations pasted daily on the walls. He finished with a bit of eloquence in which he masterfully trounced that 'scum Badinguet'. **NOTE**

The Dumpling, though, immediately lost her temper, since she was a Bonapartist. Turning redder than a cherry, she stammered indignantly, 'I'd have liked to have seen you in his shoes, any of you. What a shambles that would have been, eh? That man – it's you who've betrayed him. We'd all have had to leave France if it'd been run by scoundrels like you!' Cornudet, unmoved, retained his disdainful, superior smile; but you could sense that heated words were about to erupt when the Count stepped in. Not without difficulty, he calmed the aggravated woman down, declaring authoritatively that all opinions sincerely held were worthy of respect. The Countess and the manufacturer's wife, however, who harboured in their hearts the irrational hatred for the Republic felt by all respectable people, as well as that instinctive feeling all women have

nourrissent toutes les femmes pour les gouvernements à panache et despotiques, se sentaient, malgré elles, attirées vers cette prostituée pleine de dignité, dont les sentiments ressemblaient si fort aux leurs.

Le panier était vide. A dix on l'avait tari sans peine, en regrettant qu'il ne fût pas plus grand. La conversation continua quelque temps, un peu refroidie néanmoins depuis qu'on avait fini de manger.

La nuit tombait, l'obscurité peu à peu devint profonde, et le froid, plus sensible pendant les digestions, faisait frissonner Boule de Suif, malgré sa graisse. Alors Mme de Bréville lui proposa sa chaufferette dont le charbon, depuis le matin, avait été plusieurs fois renouvelé, et l'autre accepta tout de suite, car elle se sentait les pieds gelés. Mmes Carré-Lamadon et Loiseau donnèrent les leurs aux religieuses.

Le cocher avait allumé ses lanternes. Elles éclairaient d'une lueur vive un nuage de buée au-dessus de la croupe en sueur des timoniers, et, des deux côtés de la route, la neige qui semblait se dérouler sous le reflet mobile des lumières.

On ne distinguait plus rien dans la voiture; mais tout à coup un mouvement se fit entre Boule de Suif et Cornudet; et Loiseau, dont l'oeil fouillait l'ombre, crut voir l'homme à la grande barbe s'écarter vivement comme s'il eût reçu quelque bon coup lancé sans bruit.

Des petits points de feu parurent en avant sur la route. C'était Tôtes. On avait marché onze heures, ce qui, avec les deux heures de repos laissées en quatre fois aux chevaux pour manger l'avoine et souffler, faisait quatorze. On entra dans le bourg et devant l'Hôtel du Commerce on s'arrêta.

La portière s'ouvrit! Un bruit bien connu fit tressaillir tous les voyageurs; c'étaient les heurts d'un fourreau de sabre sur le sol. Aussitôt la voix d'un Allemand cria quelque chose.

Bien que la diligence fût immobile, personne ne descendait, comme si l'on se fût attendu à être massacré à la sortie. Alors le conducteur apparut, tenant à la main une de ses lanternes qui éclaira subitement jusqu'au fond de la voiture les deux rangs de têtes effarées, dont les bouches étaient ouvertes et les yeux écarquillés de surprise et d'épouvante.

showy, despotic governments, felt drawn despite themselves to this dignified prostitute, whose views so closely coincided with their own.

The basket was now empty. Between the ten of them, they had made short work of its contents, and they were sorry it hadn't been bigger. Conversation continued for some while, but cooled a little once they had finished eating.

Night was falling, and little by little the darkness deepened. The cold, which was more noticeable as they digested, made the Dumpling shiver, despite her chubbiness. Madame de Bréville offered her her little foot-warmer, which had been refuelled several times since the morning, and the Dumpling accepted immediately, for she felt her feet were freezing. Madame Carré-Lamadon and Madame Loiseau gave theirs to the nuns.

The coachman had lit the lanterns. They cast a bright glare on the cloud of steam that hovered over the sweating rumps of the wheel-horses, and on the snow that seemed to unroll under the shifting beams of light on both sides of the road.

Inside the coach, nothing now could be made out. All of a sudden, though, there was some kind of movement between the Dumpling and Cornudet. Loiseau, peering into the darkness, thought he saw the long-bearded man recoil suddenly, as if from some soundless, well-aimed blow.

Little dots of light appeared on the road ahead. It was Tôtes. They had been travelling for eleven hours. With the four rest periods for the horses to eat their oats and get their breath back, which had taken two hours, it amounted to thirteen hours. **NOTE** They entered the town and stopped outside the Commercial Hotel.

The coach-door was opened, and a familiar sound made all the travellers jump: the scraping of a sabre sheath along the ground. Immediately, a German voice shouted something out.

The coach had come to a complete halt, but no one got out, as if they were expecting to be slaughtered as they stepped down. Then the coachman appeared, holding in his hand one of the lanterns that suddenly lit up all the way to the back of the coach. Two rows of terrified faces stared out open-mouthed, wide-eyed with shock and fear.

A côté du cocher se tenait, en pleine lumière, un officier allemand, un grand jeune homme excessivement mince et blond, serré dans son uniforme comme une fille en son corset, et portant sur le côté sa casquette plate et cirée qui le faisait ressembler au chasseur d'un hôtel anglais. Sa moustache démesurée, à longs poils droits, s'amincissant indéfiniment de chaque côté et terminée par un seul fil blond, si mince qu'on n'en apercevait pas la fin, semblait peser sur les coins de sa bouche, et, tirant la joue, imprimait aux lèvres un pli tombant.

Il invita en français d'Alsacien les voyageurs à sortir, disant d'un ton raide:«—Foulez-vous tescentre, messieurs et tames?»

Les deux bonnes soeurs obéirent les premières avec une docilité de saintes filles habituées à toutes les soumissions. Le comte et la comtesse parurent ensuite, suivis du manufacturier et de sa femme, puis de Loiseau poussant devant lui sa grande moitié. Celui-ci, en mettant pied à terre, dit à l'officier: «Bonjour monsieur», par un sentiment de prudence bien plus que par politesse. L'autre insolent comme les gens tout-puissants, le regarda sans répondre.

Boule de Suif et Cornudet, bien que près de la portière, descendirent les derniers, graves et hautains devant l'ennemi. La grosse fille tâchait de se dominer et d'être calme: le démocr tourmentait d'une main tragique et un peu tremblante sa longue barbe roussâtre. Ils voulaient garder de la dignité, comprenant qu'en ces rencontres-là chacun représente un peu son pays; et pareillement révoltés par la souplesse de leurs compagnons, elle, tâchait de se montrer plus fière que ses voisines, les femmes honnêtes, tandis que lui, sentant bien qu'il devait l'exemple, continuait en toute son attitude sa mission de résistance commencée au défoncement des routes.

On entra dans la vaste cuisine de l'auberge, et l'Allemand, s'étant fait présenter l'autorisation de départ signée par le général en chef et où étaient mentionnés les noms, le signalement et la profession de chaque voyageur, examina longuement tout ce monde, comparant les personnes aux renseignements écrits.

Puis il dit brusquement:—«C'est bien», et il disparut.

Alors on respira. On avait faim encore; le souper fut commandé. Une demi-heure était nécessaire pour l'apprêter; et, pendant que deux

Standing beside the coachman, in the full glare of the lantern, was a German officer. He was a tall young man, extremely thin and blond, his uniform fitting as tightly as a woman's corset, and tilted to one side of his head, a flat shiny cap which made him look like some page-boy in an English hotel. His enormous moustache, with its long straight hairs tapering off indeterminately on either side, and ending in a single hair so fine its tip was invisible, seemed to weigh upon the corners of his mouth and pull his cheeks down, so that his lips appeared to droop.

In a heavy Alsatian accent, he asked the travellers to step down, saying stiffly, 'Vood you pleass get out, ladiess end chentlemen?' **NOTE**

The two nuns were the first to obey, with the meekness of holy sisters who were used always to submit. The Count and the Countess appeared next, followed by the manufacturer and his wife, then by Loiseau pushing his bigger and better half in front of him. As he set foot on the ground, he said to the officer, 'Good evening, sir,' more out of caution than politeness. With the insolence of total power, the officer looked at him without responding.

Although closest to the door, the Dumpling and Cornudet were the last to get out, serious and haughty in the face of the enemy. The plump woman tried to control herself and to stay calm; the democrat was yanking at his long, reddish beard with a tragic and slightly shaky hand. They wanted to maintain their dignity, conscious that in encounters like this, everyone represents their country in some way. Disgusted by the spinelessness of their companions, she tried to show her greater pride compared with her neighbours, the respectable women; whilst he, feeling he should set an example, showed in his whole attitude the resistance that had begun in the digging up of the roads.

They entered the inn's vast kitchen, where the German was shown the travel permit signed by the general in command, which listed the names, descriptions, and professions of each traveller. He inspected everyone at length, checking the people against the written information.

Then, 'It iss goot,' he said curtly, and disappeared.

They could all breathe again. Still hungry, supper was ordered. Half an hour would be needed to prepare it, and while two servants were

servantes avaient l'air de s'en occuper, on alla visiter les chambres. Elles se trouvaient toutes dans un long couloir que terminait une porte vitrée marquée d'un numéro parlant.

Enfin on allait se mettre à table, quand le patron de l'auberge parut lui-même. C'était un ancien marchand de chevaux, un gros homme asthmatique, qui avait toujours des sifflements, des enrouements, des chants de glaires dans le larynx. Son père lui avait transmis le nom de Follenvie.

Il demanda:

—Mademoiselle Élisabeth Rousset?

Boule de Suif tressaillit, se retourna:

—C'est moi.

—Mademoiselle, l'officier prussien veut vous parler immédiatement.

—A moi?

—Oui, si vous êtes bien mademoiselle Élisabeth Rousset.

Elle se troubla, réfléchit une seconde, puis déclara carrément:

—C'est possible, mais je n'irai pas.

Un mouvement se fit autour d'elle; chacun discutait, cherchait la cause de cet ordre. Le comte s'approcha:

—Vous avez tort, madame, car votre refus peut amener des difficultés considérables, non seulement pour vous, mais même pour tous vos compagnons. Il ne faut jamais résister aux gens qui sont les plus forts. Cette démarche assurément ne peut présenter aucun danger; c'est sans doute pour quelque formalité oubliée.

Tout le monde se joignit à lui, on la pria, on la pressa, on la sermonna, et l'on finit par la convaincre; car tous redoutaient les complications qui pourraient résulter d'un coup de tête. Elle dit enfin:

—C'est pour vous que je le fais, bien sûr!

apparently looking after it, they went to inspect the bedrooms. They were all off a long corridor, at the end of which was a glazed door with the number '100' on it. **NOTE**

At last everyone was taking a seat at the table, when the innkeeper himself appeared. He was a former horse-dealer, a fat, asthmatic man who was always hoarse and wheezing, and rattling the phlegm in his throat. His father had bequeathed him the name of Follenvie.

He asked, 'Mademoiselle Élisabeth Rousset?'

The Dumpling jumped and turned around, 'That's me.'

'Mademoiselle, the Prussian officer would like a word with you, straight away.'

'With me?'

'If you're really Mademoiselle Élisabeth Rousset, yes.'

Flustered, she thought for a moment, then said bluntly,

'That may be. But I'm not going.'

There was a stir around her. Every one was talking, trying to work out the reason for the summons. The Count approached her.

'Madame, you're making a mistake. Your refusal could bring about serious difficulties, not just for you, but for all your companions. You should never resist those stronger than you. The request can surely not mean danger. It's probably some formality that's been overlooked.'

Everyone supported him. They begged her, pressured her, lectured her, and finally convinced her. All feared the complications that could result from an impulsive response. Finally, she said,

'Just remember, I'm doing this for you.'

La comtesse lui prit la main:

—Et nous vous remercions.

Elle sortit. On l'attendit pour se mettre à table.

Chacun se désolait de n'avoir pas été demandé à la place de cette fille violente et irascible, et préparait mentalement des platitudes pour le cas où on l'appellerait à son tour.

Mais, au bout de dix minutes, elle reparut, soufflant, rouge à suffoquer, exaspérée. Elle balbutiait: «Oh! la canaille! la canaille!»

Tous s'empresaient pour savoir, mais elle ne dit rien; et comme le comte insistait, elle répondit avec une grande dignité: «Non, cela ne vous regarde pas, je ne peux pas parler.»

Alors on s'assit autour d'une haute soupière d'où sortait un parfum de choux. Malgré cette alerte, le souper fut gai. Le cidre était bon, le ménage Loiseau et les bonnes soeurs en prirent, par économie. Les autres demandèrent du vin; Cornudet réclama de la bière. Il avait une façon particulière de déboucher la bouteille, de faire mousser le liquide, de le considérer en penchant le verre, qu'il élevait ensuite entre la lampe et son oeil pour bien apprécier la couleur. Quand il buvait, sa grande barbe, qui avait gardé la nuance de son breuvage aimé, semblait tressaillir de tendresse; ses yeux louchaient pour ne point perdre de vue sa chope, et il avait l'air de remplir l'unique fonction pour laquelle il était né. On eût dit qu'il établissait en son esprit un rapprochement et comme une affinité entre les deux grandes passions qui occupaient toute sa vie: le Pale Ale et la Révolution; et assurément il ne pouvait déguster l'un sans songer à l'autre.

M. et Mme Follenvie dînaient tout au bout de la table. L'homme, râlant comme une locomotive crevée, avait trop de tirage dans la poitrine pour pouvoir parler en mangeant; mais la femme ne se taisait jamais. Elle raconta toutes ses impressions à l'arrivée des Prussiens, ce qu'ils faisaient, ce qu'ils disaient, les exécrant, d'abord, parce qu'ils lui coûtaient de l'argent, et, ensuite, parce qu'elle avait deux fils à l'armée. Elle s'adressait surtout à la comtesse, flattée de causer avec une dame de qualité.

The Countess took her hand:

'And we thank you for it.'

She went out. They all waited for her return before sitting down at the table.

Each of them regretted they had not been asked for, instead of that violent, quick-tempered girl; and they turned over in their minds the banalities they would offer should they in turn be called.

In ten minutes, though, she had reappeared, panting, as red as if she'd been smothered, furious. She stammered out, 'The bastard, the filthy bastard.'

Everyone crowded round to find out what had happened, but she said nothing. When the Count began to insist, she replied with great dignity, 'No, it has nothing to do with you. I can't talk about it.'

They all sat down around a large soup tureen from which the smell of cabbage rose. In spite of the incident, supper was cheerful. The cider was good; and, for economy's sake, the Loiseaus and the nuns had some. All the others ordered wine, apart from Cornudet who called for beer. He had a particular way of opening the bottle, making the beer foam, and watching it as he tilted the glass, which he then held up between the lamp and his eye, the better to appraise the colour. When he drank, his large beard – which matched the colour of his favourite beverage – seemed to quiver affectionately. His eyes squinted so as not to lose sight of his tankard, and he looked as if he were fulfilling the one function for which he had been born. You might have said he had established in his mind a connection, an affinity even, between the two great passions that consumed his life: pale ale and revolution. He could not taste the one without automatically thinking of the other.

Monsieur and Madame Follenvie were eating at the far end of the table. The man, wheezing like a broken-down locomotive, had too tight a chest to be able to speak while eating. But the woman never stopped talking. She related all her impressions of the Prussians' arrival, what they had done, what they had said – cursing them first for costing her money, and then because she had two sons in the army. She directed most of her comments to the Countess, honoured to chat with a lady of quality.

Puis elle baissait la voix pour dire des choses délicates, et son mari, de temps en temps, l'interrompait:

—Tu ferais mieux de te taire, madame Follenvie. Mais elle n'en tenait aucun compte, et continuait:

—Oui, madame, ces gens-là ça ne fait que manger des pommes de terre et du cochon, et puis du cochon et des pommes de terre. Et il ne faut pas croire qu'ils sont propres.—Oh non!—Ils ordurent partout, sauf le respect que je vous dois. Et si vous les voyiez faire l'exercice pendant des heures et des jours; ils sont là tous dans un champ:—et marche en avant, et marche en arrière, et tourne par-ci, et tourne par-là.—S'ils cultivaient la terre au moins, ou s'ils travaillaient aux routes dans leur pays!—Mais non, madame, ces militaires, ça n'est profitable à personne! Faut-il que le pauvre peuple les nourrisse pour n'apprendre rien qu'à massacrer!—Je ne suis qu'une vieille femme sans éducation, c'est vrai, mais en les voyant qui s'esquintent le tempérament à piétiner du matin au soir, je me dis:—Quand il y a des gens qui font tant de découvertes pour être utiles, faut il que d'autres se donnent tant de mal pour être nuisibles! Vraiment, n'est-ce pas une abomination de tuer des gens qu'ils soient Prussiens, ou bien Anglais, ou bien Polonais, ou bien Français?—Si l'on se venge sur quelqu'un qui vous a fait tort, c'est mal, puisqu'on vous condamne; mais quand on extermine nos garçons comme du gibier, avec des fusils, c'est donc bien, puisqu'on donne des décorations à celui qui en détruit le plus?—Non, voyez-vous, je ne comprendrai jamais ça!

Cornudet éleva la voix:

—La guerre est une barbarie quand on attaque un voisin paisible; c'est un devoir sacré quand on défend la patrie.

La vieille femme baissa la tête:

—Oui, quand on se défend, c'est autre chose; mais si l'on ne devrait pas plutôt tuer tous les rois qui font ça pour leur plaisir?

L'oeil de Cornudet s'enflamma:

—Bravo, citoyenne! dit-il.

M. Carré-Lamadon réfléchissait profondément. Bien qu'il fût

Then she would lower her voice to broach more delicate matters, and from time to time, her husband would interrupt,

'Madame Follenvie, you'd be better off keeping quiet.' But she took not the slightest notice, and continued:

'Yes, my lady, those people, they do nothing but eat potatoes and pork, then pork and potatoes. And don't think they're clean. Oh no! They do their...begging your pardon, my lady...do their business all over the place. And if you were ever to see them doing their drill, hours and days on end. There they all are, out in a field – forward march, backward march, turn this way, turn that. If only they farmed the land, or mended their own country's roads. But no, my lady, that's soldiers, not a scrap of use to anyone. Do poor people have to feed them just so they can learn how to kill? I'm just an old woman, I know...no education. But seeing them knocking themselves out marching around from morning to night, I ask myself, when there're people who find so many new ways of being useful, why must others go out of their way to do harm? Really, isn't it just horrible to kill people, whether they're Prussians, or English, or Polish, or French? If you take revenge on someone who's done you harm, that's wrong and you're punished for it. But when our boys are shot dead like animals, that's all right. The more you kill, the more they give you medals. You see, I'll never be able to understand that. Never.'

Cornudet raised his voice,

'War is barbaric when you attack a peaceful neighbour. It's a sacred duty when you defend your homeland.'

The old woman looked down,

'Yes, when you're defending yourself, that's something different. But shouldn't you instead kill all the kings who do this to amuse themselves?'

Cornudet's eyes blazed:

'Good for you, citizen,' he said.

Monsieur Carré-Lamadon was deep in thought. Although he was an



fanatique des illustres capitaines, le bon sens de cette paysanne le faisait songer à l'opulence qu'apporteraient dans un pays tant de bras inoccupés et par conséquent ruineux, tant de forces qu'on entretient improductives, si on les employait aux grands travaux industriels qu'il faudra des siècles pour achever.

Mais Loiseau, quittant sa place, alla causer tout bas avec l'aubergiste. Le gros homme riait, toussait, crachait; son énorme ventre sautillait de joie aux plaisanteries de son voisin, et il lui acheta six feuillettes de bordeaux pour le printemps, quand les Prussiens seraient partis.

Le souper à peine achevé, comme on était brisé de fatigue, on se coucha.

Cependant Loiseau, qui avait observé les choses, fit mettre au lit son épouse, puis colla tantôt son oreille et tantôt son oeil au trou de la serrure, pour tâcher de découvrir ce qu'il appelait: «les mystères du corridor». Au bout d'une heure environ, il entendit un frôlement, regarda bien vite, et aperçut Boule de Suif qui paraissait plus replète encore sous un peignoir de cachemire bleu, brodé de dentelles blanches. Elle tenait un bougeoir à la main et se dirigeait vers le gros numéro tout au fond du couloir. Mais une porte, à côté, s'entr'ouvrit, et, quand elle revint au bout de quelques minutes, Cornudet, en bretelles, la suivait. Ils parlaient bas, puis ils s'arrêtèrent. Boule de Suif semblait défendre l'entrée de sa chambre avec énergie. Loiseau, malheureusement, n'entendait pas les paroles, mais, à la fin, comme ils élevaient la voix, il put en saisir quelques-unes. Cornudet insistait avec vivacité. Il disait:

—Voyons, vous êtes bête, qu'est-ce que ça vous fait?

Elle avait l'air indigné et répondit:

—Non, mon cher, il y a des moments où ces choses-là ne se font pas; et puis, ici, ce serait une honte.

Il ne comprenait point, sans doute, et demanda pourquoi. Alors elle s'emporta, élevant encore le ton:

—Pourquoi? Vous ne comprenez pas pourquoi? Quand il y a des Prussiens dans la maison, dans la chambre à côté, peut-être?

ardent admirer of great military men, this country-woman's common sense made him think of the wealth that so many idle and thus costly hands, so much unproductive manpower, could bring to a country. If only they were employed on great industrial projects that might take centuries to complete.

Loiseau, getting up from his seat, went over to chat quietly with the innkeeper. The fat man laughed, and coughed, and spat. His enormous belly jiggled with mirth at his neighbour's jokes, and he bought six barrels of claret from him for the spring, when the Prussians would be gone.

The moment supper was over, so exhausted were they all, they went straight up to bed.

Loiseau, however, who had been observing things, put his wife to bed, and then pressed first his ear and then his eye to the keyhole, in order to discover what he called 'the secrets of the corridor'. After about an hour, he heard a rustling, looked quickly, and caught sight of the Dumpling, who looked chubbier than ever, in a blue cashmere dressing-gown trimmed with white lace. She was carrying a candlestick in her hand, and was making for the big number at the very end of the hall. But a door to the side opened ajar and, when she returned a few minutes later, Cornudet, in his braces, was following her. They spoke very quietly, then stopped. The Dumpling seemed to be doing all that she could to stop him entering her room. Unfortunately, Loiseau couldn't make out their words, but towards the end, as they raised their voices, he managed to catch the odd phrase. Cornudet was being extremely insistent. He was saying,

'Oh come on now, don't be silly. What difference does it make to you?'

She seemed indignant, and replied,

'My good man, no. There're times when such things aren't done. Here, it'd be shameful.'

He did not seem to understand at all, and asked why not. At this, she lost her temper, and raised her voice still more:

'Why not? You don't understand why not? When there're Prussians in the house, perhaps in the room next door?'

Il se tut. Cette pudeur patriotique de catin qui ne se laissait point caresser près de l'ennemi, dut réveiller en son coeur sa dignité défaillante, car, après l'avoir seulement embrassée, il regagna sa porte à pas de loup.

Loiseau, très allumé, quitta la serrure, battit un entrechat dans sa chambre, mit son madras, souleva le drap sous lequel gisait la dure carcasse de sa compagne qu'il réveilla d'un baiser en murmurant: «M'aimes-tu, chérie?»

Alors toute la maison devint silencieuse. Mais bientôt s'éleva quelque part, dans une direction indéterminée qui pouvait être la cave aussi bien que le grenier, un ronflement puissant, monotone, régulier, un bruit sourd et prolongé, avec des tremblements de chaudière sous pression. M. Follenvie dormait.

Comme on avait décidé qu'on partirait à huit heures le lendemain, tout le monde se trouva dans la cuisine; mais la voiture, dont la bâche avait un toit de neige, se dressait solitaire au milieu de la cour, sans chevaux et sans conducteur. On chercha en vain celui-ci dans les écuries, dans les fourrages, dans les remises. Alors tous les hommes se résolurent à battre le pays et ils sortirent. Ils se trouvèrent sur la place, avec l'église au fond, et, des deux côtés, des maisons basses où l'on apercevait des soldats prussiens. Le premier qu'ils virent épluchait des pommes de terre. Le second, plus loin, lavait la boutique du coiffeur. Un autre, barbu jusqu'aux yeux, embrassait un mioche qui pleurait et le berçait sur ses genoux pour tâcher de l'apaiser; et les grosses paysannes dont les hommes étaient à «l'armée de la guerre», indiquaient par signes à leurs vainqueurs obéissants le travail qu'il fallait entreprendre: fendre du bois, tremper la soupe, moudre le café; un d'eux même lavait le linge de son hôtesse, une aïeule tout impotente.

Le comte, étonné, interrogea le bedeau qui sortait du presbytère. Le vieux rat d'église lui répondit: «Oh! ceux-là ne sont pas méchants; c'est pas des Prussiens à ce qu'on dit. Ils sont de plus loin; je ne sais pas bien d'où; et ils ont tous laissé une femme et des enfants au pays; ça ne les amuse pas, la guerre, allez! Je suis sûr qu'on pleure bien aussi là-bas après les hommes; et ça fournira une fameuse misère chez eux comme chez nous. Ici, encore, on n'est pas trop malheureux pour le moment, parce qu'ils ne font pas de mal et qu'ils travaillent comme s'ils étaient

He fell silent. This prostitute's patriotic sense of decency, who wouldn't let herself be touched with the enemy so close, must have revived some faltering dignity in his heart, for he just kissed her, and stealthily made his way back to his door.

Highly aroused, Loiseau came away from the keyhole, did a little skip and jump in the room, put on his nightcap, and lifted the sheet under which lay the sturdy frame of his wife. Waking her with a kiss, he murmured, 'Do you love me, my darling?'

Then the entire house fell silent. Soon, though, from somewhere – an indeterminate place anywhere from the cellar to the attic – there arose a powerful snoring, monotonous and regular; a dull, drawn-out sound, like the rumblings of a boiler under pressure. Monsieur Follenvie had fallen asleep.

They'd agreed that they would leave at eight the following morning, and so everyone gathered in the kitchen. The coach, however, its top covered by a roof of snow, stood alone in the middle of the yard, with neither horses nor coachman. They searched for him in vain in the stables, in the haylofts, in the sheds. The men then decided to scour the neighbourhood, and off they went. They gathered in the square, with the church at the back and, on either side, low-roofed houses in which Prussian soldiers could be seen. The first one they came across was peeling potatoes. The second, further on, was scrubbing out the barber's shop. Another, bearded up to the eyes, was cuddling a crying toddler, rocking it on his knees to try and calm it down. The stout countrywomen whose husbands were 'off at war' gestured to their willing conquerors the work that needed to be done: chopping the wood, preparing the soup, grinding the coffee. One of them was even doing the laundry for his hostess, a crippled old lady.

The Count, astonished by what he saw, questioned the verger who was coming out of the presbytery. The old churchman answered: 'Oh, these men aren't a bad lot. They aren't Prussians, from what they tell me. They come from further away, I'm not sure where. They've all left a wife and children back home. The war – they don't enjoy it either, would you believe. I'm sure they cry for their men as much over there. And all this will cause them just as much unhappiness as us. We're still not too bad here for the moment. They don't do any harm; they work just as they

dans leurs maisons. Voyez-vous, monsieur, entre pauvres gens, faut bien qu'on s'aide ... C'est les grands qui font la guerre.»

Cornudet, indigné de l'entente cordiale établie entre les vainqueurs et les vaincus, se retira, préférant s'enfermer dans l'auberge. Loiseau eut un mot pour rire: «Ils repeuplent.» M. Carré-Lamadon eut un mot grave: «Ils réparent.» Mais on ne trouvait pas le cocher. A la fin on le découvrit dans le café du village, attablé fraternellement avec l'ordonnance de l'officier. Le comte l'interpella:

—Ne vous avait-on pas donné l'ordre d'atteler pour huit heures?

—Ah! bien oui, mais on m'en a donné un autre depuis.

—Lequel?

—De ne pas atteler du tout.

—Qui vous a donné cet ordre?

—Ma foi! le commandant prussien.

—Pourquoi?

—Je n'en sais rien. Allez lui demander. On me défend d'atteler, moi je n'attelle pas.—Voilà.

—C'est lui-même qui vous a dit cela?

—Non, monsieur, c'est l'aubergiste qui m'a donné l'ordre de sa part.

—Quand ça?

—Hier soir, comme j'allais me coucher. Les trois hommes rentrèrent fort inquiets.

On demanda M. Follenvie, mais la servante répondit que Monsieur, à cause de son asthme, ne se levait jamais avant dix heures. Il avait même formellement défendu de le réveiller plus tôt, excepté en cas d'incendie.

On voulut voir l'officier, mais cela était impossible absolument, bien qu'il logeât dans l'auberge, M. Follenvie seul était autorisé à lui parler

would at home. You see, sir, if you're poor, you have to help each other... It's the great who make the wars.'

Cornudet, indignant at the friendly relationships that had been established between conquerors and conquered, went off, preferring to shut himself up in the inn. Loiseau joked, 'I'd call it repopulation.' Monsieur Carré-Lamadon was more serious, 'I think you mean reparation.' But still the coachman could not be found. Eventually, he was discovered in the village café, fraternising with the officer's orderly. The Count called out to him,

'Weren't you given orders to have the horses ready by eight?'

'Certainly. But then I was given another one.'

'What was that?'

'Not to have them ready.'

'Who gave you that order?'

'The Prussian officer, of course.'

'Why?'

'I don't know. Go and ask him. I'm told not to get them ready, I don't get them ready. That's that.'

'Did he tell you himself?'

'No, sir. The innkeeper gave me the order. On his behalf.'

'And when was this?'

'Last night, as I was going up to bed.' The three men went back to the inn, very perturbed.

They asked to see Monsieur Follenvie, but the servant girl replied that her master never got up before ten, because of his asthma. They had strict orders not to wake him earlier, unless there was a fire.

They tried to see the officer, but that was absolutely impossible. Even though he was staying in the inn, only Monsieur Follenvie was authorised

pour les affaires civiles. Alors on attendit. Les femmes remontèrent dans leurs chambres, et des futilités les occupèrent.

Cornudet s'installa sous la haute cheminée de la cuisine où flambait un grand feu. Il se fit apporter là une des petites tables du café, une canette, et il tira sa pipe qui jouissait parmi les démocrates d'une considération presque égale à la sienne, comme si elle avait servi la patrie en servant à Cornudet. C'était une superbe pipe en écume admirablement culottée, aussi noire que les dents de son maître, mais parfumée, recourbée, luisante, familière à sa main, et complétant sa physionomie. Et il demeura immobile, les yeux tantôt fixés sur la flamme du foyer, tantôt sur la mousse qui couronnait sa chope; et chaque fois qu'il avait bu, il passait d'un air satisfait ses longs doigts maigres dans ses longs cheveux gras pendant qu'il humait sa moustache frangée d'écume.

Loiseau, sous prétexte de se dégourdir les jambes, alla placer du vin aux débitants du pays. Le comte et le manufacturier se mirent à causer politique. Ils prévoyaient l'avenir de la France. L'un croyait aux d'Orléans, l'autre à un sauveur inconnu, un héros qui se révélerait quand tout serait désespéré: un du Guesclin, une Jeanne d'Arc peut-être? ou un autre Napoléon Ier? Ah! si le prince impérial n'était pas si jeune! Cornudet, les écoutant, souriait en homme qui sait le mot des destinées. Sa pipe embaumait la cuisine.

Comme dix heures sonnaient, M. Follenvie parut. On l'interrogea bien vite; mais il ne put que répéter deux ou trois fois, sans une variante, ces paroles: L'officier m'a dit comme ça: «Monsieur Follenvie, vous défendrez qu'on attelle demain la voiture de ces voyageurs. Je ne veux pas qu'ils partent sans mon ordre. Vous entendez. Ça suffit.»

Alors on voulut voir l'officier. Le comte lui envoya sa carte où M. Carré-Lamadon ajouta son nom et tous ses titres. Le Prussien fit répondre qu'il admettrait ces deux hommes à lui parler quand il aurait déjeuné, c'est-à-dire vers une heure.

Les dames reparurent et l'on mangea quelque peu, malgré l'inquiétude. Boule de Suif semblait malade et prodigieusement troublée.

On achevait le café quand l'ordonnance vint chercher ces messieurs.

to speak to him about civilian matters. And so they waited. The women went back up to their rooms, and whiled away the time with pointless tasks.

Cornudet settled down under the high kitchen mantel, where a huge fire was blazing. He had one of the little café tables brought over, with a bottle of beer, and began to draw on his pipe. Among the democrats, it enjoyed a prestige almost equalling his own, as though in serving him, it was serving the country as well. It was a superb meerschaum, beautifully seasoned, as black as the teeth of its owner, but fragrant, curved, gleaming, fitting comfortably in his hand, and rounding off the features of his face. He sat there motionless, his eyes fixed now on the flames in the hearth, now on the foam that crowned his tankard of beer. Every time he took a sip, he ran his long, thin fingers through his long, greasy hair with a satisfied air, while he sucked the foam from the edge of his moustache.

Under the pretext of wanting to stretch his legs, Loiseau went round to the local shopkeepers to sell some wine. The Count and the manufacturer began to talk politics, and to speculate about France's future. One believed in the Orléanists, the other in some unknown saviour, a hero who would appear when all seemed lost: another du Guesclin, perhaps a Joan of Arc, another Napoléon I. Ah, if only the imperial prince were not so young! **NOTE** Listening to them, Cornudet smiled like a man who knew the decrees of fate. His pipe filled the kitchen with its smell.

Just as ten o'clock struck, Monsieur Follenvie appeared. They rushed up to question him; but he could only repeat two or three times, without variation, the same words. 'The officer said to me, just like this: "Monsieur Follenvie, you will stop anyone from getting the coach ready tomorrow for these travellers. I don't want them to leave without my order. You understand? Enough said".'

They wanted then to see the officer. The Count sent in his card, to which Monsieur Carré-Lamadon had added his name and all his titles. The Prussian sent a reply that he would receive the two men to speak with him when he had had his lunch, that was to say, round about one o'clock.

The ladies reappeared and, despite their anxiety, they all ate a little. The Dumpling seemed ill and dreadfully troubled.

They were finishing their coffee when the orderly came to find the gentlemen.

Loiseau se joignit aux deux premiers; mais comme on essayait d'entraîner Cornudet pour donner plus de solennité à leur démarche, il déclara fièrement qu'il entendait n'avoir jamais aucun rapport avec les Allemands; et il se remit dans sa cheminée, demandant une autre canette. Les trois hommes montèrent et furent introduits dans la plus belle chambre de l'auberge où l'officier les reçut, étendu dans un fauteuil, les pieds sur la cheminée, fumant une longue pipe de porcelaine, et enveloppé par une robe de chambre flamboyante, dérobée sans doute dans la demeure abandonnée de quelques bourgeois de mauvais goût. Il ne se leva pas, ne les salua pas, ne les regarda pas. Il présentait un magnifique échantillon de la goujaterie naturelle au militaire victorieux.

Au bout de quelques instants il dit enfin:

—Qu'est-ce que fous foulez?

Le comte prit la parole:

—Nous désirons partir, Monsieur.

—Non.

—Oserai-je vous demander la cause de ce refus?

—Parce que che ne feux pas.

—Je vous ferai respectueusement observer, Monsieur, que votre général en chef nous a délivré une permission de départ pour gagner Dieppe; et je ne pense pas que nous ayons rien fait pour mériter vos rigueurs.

—Che ne feux pas ... foilà tout ... Fous poufez tescentre.

S'étant inclinés tous les trois, ils se retirèrent.

L'après-midi fut lamentable. On ne comprenait rien à ce caprice d'Allemand; et les idées les plus singulières troublaient les têtes. Tout le monde se tenait dans la cuisine et l'on discutait sans fin, imaginant des choses invraisemblables. On voulait peut-être les garder comme otages—mais dans quel but?—ou les emmener prisonniers? ou, plutôt, leur demander une rançon considérable? A cette pensée, une panique les

Loiseau joined the first two; but when they tried to drag Cornudet along to give more weight to their undertaking, he proudly declared that he had no intention of having anything to do with the Germans, and he returned to the fireplace, ordering another beer. The three men went upstairs and were ushered into the most beautiful room in the inn, where the officer received them. He was sprawled out on an armchair, his feet up on the mantelpiece, smoking a long porcelain pipe. He was wrapped in a showy dressing-gown, no doubt stolen from the abandoned house of a respectable citizen with bad taste. He didn't get up, didn't greet them, didn't look at them. He was a prize example of the boorishness inherent in the victorious military man.

After several moments, he finally spoke:

'Vot is it you vont?'

The Count spoke up,

'We should like to leave, sir.'

'No.'

'Dare I ask the reason for this refusal?'

'Becoss I do not vish you to.'

'I respectfully point out to you, sir, that your commanding officer has given us a travel permit to go to Dieppe. I don't think we've done anything to warrant this harshness.'

'I don't vont you to...zat iss all...you may go.'

The three men bowed and withdrew.

It was a wretched afternoon. They couldn't fathom the German's whim, and the oddest ideas worried away in their heads. Everyone stayed in the kitchen, and they talked endlessly, imagining the most farfetched things. Perhaps they were to be held hostage. But then what for? Or taken prisoner? Or held up for a hefty ransom? At the thought of this, they were

affola. Les plus riches étaient les plus épouvantés, se voyant déjà contraints, pour racheter leur vie, de verser des sacs pleins d'or entre les mains de ce soldat insolent. Ils se creusaient la cervelle pour découvrir des mensonges acceptables, dissimuler leurs richesses, se faire passer pour pauvres, très pauvres. Loiseau enleva sa chaîne de montre et la cacha dans sa poche. La nuit qui tombait augmenta les appréhensions. La lampe fut allumée, et comme on avait encore deux heures avant le dîner, Mme Loiseau proposa une partie de trente-et-un. Ce serait une distraction. On accepta. Cornudet lui-même, ayant éteint sa pipe par politesse, y prit part.

Le comte battit les cartes—donna—Boule de Suif avait trente-et-un d'emblée; et bientôt l'intérêt de la partie apaisa la crainte qui hantait les esprits. Mais Cornudet s'aperçut que le ménage Loiseau s'entendait pour tricher.

Comme on allait se mettre à table, M. Follenvie reparut; et, de sa voix graillonnante, il prononça: «L'officier prussien fait demander à Mlle Elisabeth Rousset si elle n'a pas encore changé d'avis.»

Boule de Suif resta debout, toute pâle; puis, devenant subitement cramoisie, elle eut un tel étouffement de colère qu'elle ne pouvait plus parler. Enfin elle éclata: «Vous lui direz à cette crapule, à ce saligaud, à cette Charogne de Prussien, que jamais je ne voudrai; vous entendez bien, jamais, jamais, jamais.»

Le gros aubergiste sortit. Alors Boule de Suif fut entourée, interrogée, sollicitée par tout le monde de dévoiler le mystère de sa visite. Elle résista d'abord; mais l'exaspération domina bientôt: «Ce qu'il veut?... ce qu'il veut? Il veut coucher avec moi!» cria-t-elle. Personne ne se choqua du mot, tant l'indignation fut vive. Cornudet brisa sa chope en la reposant violemment sur la table. C'était une clameur de réprobation contre ce soudard ignoble, un souffle de colère, une union de tous pour la résistance, comme si l'on eût demandé à chacun une partie du sacrifice exigé d'elle. Le comte déclara avec dégoût que ces gens-là se conduisaient à la façon des anciens barbares. Les femmes surtout témoignèrent à Boule de Suif une commisération énergique et caressante. Les bonnes soeurs, qui ne se montraient qu'aux repas, avaient baissé la tête et ne disaient rien.

thrown into panic. The wealthiest were the most terrified, already seeing themselves having to hand over sacks full of gold to this arrogant soldier, in order to buy back their lives. They racked their brains to come up with plausible lies, how to conceal their wealth and pass themselves off as the poorest of the poor. Loiseau took off his watch-chain and hid it in his pocket. The encroaching night increased their worries. The lamp was lit, and since they still had two hours before dinner, Madame Loiseau suggested a game of *thirty-one*. **NOTE** It would take their minds off things. Everyone agreed, even Cornudet, who snuffed out his pipe out of politeness, and took part.

The Count shuffled the cards and dealt. The Dumpling got thirty-one straight away; and soon interest in the game calmed the fears that were haunting their minds. Cornudet, however, noticed that the Loiseaus had got together to cheat.

As they were about to sit down at table, Monsieur Follenvie reappeared. In his throaty voice, he declared, 'The Prussian officer asks Mademoiselle Élisabeth Rousset whether she's changed her mind yet.'

The Dumpling remained standing, drained pale. Then, suddenly turning crimson, she had such a fit of anger that she couldn't speak. Finally, she burst out, 'You can tell that bugger, that bastard, that Prussian pig, that I'll never do it. D'you understand? Never, never, never.'

The fat innkeeper left the room. Immediately, the Dumpling was surrounded, questioned, entreated by everyone to reveal the secret of her visit. At first, she resisted; but fury soon got the better of her. 'What does he want?...what does he want? He wants to sleep with me!' she cried out. No one was offended by the words, so strong was the indignation. Cornudet shattered his tankard as he banged it down on the table. There was an outcry of protest against this shameless mercenary, a wave of anger, everyone united in resistance, as if each of them had been asked to share in the sacrifice demanded of her. The Count declared in disgust that such people were behaving like the old barbarians. The women, especially, showed the Dumpling an intense and kindly sympathy. The nuns, who showed up only for meals, had bowed their heads and were saying nothing.

On dîna néanmoins lorsque la première fureur fut apaisée; mais on parla peu: on songeait.

Les dames se retirèrent de bonne heure; et les hommes, tout en fumant, organisèrent un écarté auquel fut convié M. Follenvie qu'on avait l'intention d'interroger habilement sur les moyens à employer pour vaincre la résistance de l'officier. Mais il ne songeait qu'à ses cartes, sans rien écouter, sans rien répondre; et il répétait sans cesse: «Au jeu, messieurs, au jeu.» Son attention était si tendue qu'il en oubliait de cracher, ce qui lui mettait parfois des points d'orgue dans la poitrine. Ses poumons sifflants donnaient toute la gamme de l'asthme, depuis les notes graves et profondes jusqu'aux enrouements aigus des jeunes coqs essayant de chanter.

Il refusa même de monter, quand sa femme, qui tombait de sommeil, vint le chercher. Alors elle partit toute seule, car elle était «du matin», toujours levée avec le soleil, tandis que son homme était «du soir», toujours prêt à passer la nuit avec des amis. Il lui cria: «Tu placeras mon lait de poule devant le feu,» et se remit à sa partie. Quand on vit bien qu'on n'en pouvait rien tirer, on déclara qu'il était temps de s'en aller, et chacun gagna son lit.

On se leva encore d'assez bonne heure le lendemain avec un espoir indéterminé, un désir plus grand de s'en aller, une terreur du jour à passer dans cette horrible petite auberge.

Hélas! les chevaux restaient à l'écurie, le cocher demeurait invisible. On alla, par désœuvrement, tourner autour de la voiture.

Le déjeuner fut bien triste; et il s'était produit comme un refroidissement vis-à-vis de Boule de Suif, car la nuit, qui porte conseil, avait un peu modifié les jugements. On en voulait presque à cette fille, maintenant, de n'avoir pas été trouver secrètement le Prussien, afin de ménager, au réveil, une bonne surprise à ses compagnons. Quoi de plus simple? Qui l'eût su, d'ailleurs? Elle aurait pu sauver les apparences en faisant dire à l'officier qu'elle prenait en pitié leur détresse. Pour elle, ça avait si peu d'importance!

Mais personne n'avouait encore ces pensées.

Dans l'après-midi, comme on s'ennuyait à périr, le comte proposa de

After the first anger had died down, they had some dinner nevertheless. But there was little talk; they were deep in thought.

The ladies went up early. The men, left to smoke, organised a round of *écarté*, **NOTE** to which they invited Monsieur Follenvie. They hoped that some subtle questioning of him might indicate the best ways of getting round the officer's resistance. But he thought of nothing but his cards. He heard nothing, he said nothing, only repeating time and again, 'On with the game, gentlemen, on with the game.' So deep was his concentration he would forget to spit, which would sometimes produce organ notes inside his chest. His wheezing lungs played up and down the entire asthmatic scale, from deep bass notes to the hoarse, squawking treble of young cocks trying to crow.

He refused to go upstairs even when his wife, who was dropping with tiredness, came looking for him. So she left all alone. She was an early bird, **NOTE** always getting up with the sun, while her husband was a night owl, always ready to pass the night away with friends. He called out to her, 'Put my eggflip by the fire, will you?', and returned to his hand. When they saw they wouldn't get anything out of him, they decided it was time to go, and each one went up to his bed.

They got up quite early the next day with a vague hope, a stronger wish to leave, and the fear of yet another day in that horrible little inn.

Alas, the horses were still in the stable, and the coachman was again nowhere to be seen. For lack of anything better to do, they hung around the coach.

Lunch was very miserable. A general coolness had sprung up towards the Dumpling, for having slept on the problem, they had rather changed their views. Now, they were almost angry with the prostitute for not having gone to the Prussian in secret, and given her companions a nice surprise when they woke up. What could have been easier? Who would've known, besides? She could have saved face by telling the officer she felt sorry for their predicament. And it would've meant so little to her!

But no one as yet confessed such thoughts.

In the afternoon, as they were bored to death, the Count proposed they

faire une promenade aux alentours du village. Chacun s'enveloppa avec soin et la petite société partit, à l'exception de Cornudet, qui préférait rester près du feu, et des bonnes sœurs, qui passaient leurs journées dans l'église ou chez le curé.

Le froid, plus intense de jour en jour, piquait cruellement le nez et les oreilles; les pieds devenaient si douloureux que chaque pas était une souffrance; et lorsque la campagne se découvrit, elle leur apparut si effroyablement lugubre sous cette blancheur illimitée que tout le monde aussitôt retourna, l'âme glacée et le cœur serré.

Les quatre femmes marchaient devant, les trois hommes suivaient, un peu derrière.

Loiseau, qui comprenait la situation, demanda tout à coup si cette «garce-là» allait les faire rester longtemps encore dans un pareil endroit. Le comte, toujours courtois, dit qu'on ne pouvait exiger d'une femme un sacrifice aussi pénible, et qu'il devait venir d'elle-même. M. Carré-Lamadon remarqua que si les Français faisaient, comme il en était question, un retour offensif par Dieppe, la rencontre ne pourrait avoir lieu qu'à Tôtes. Cette réflexion rendit les deux autres soucieux.—« Si l'on se sauvait à pied, »—dit Loiseau. Le comte haussa les épaules:— «Y songez-vous, dans cette neige? avec nos femmes? Et puis nous serions tout de suite poursuivis, rattrapés en dix minutes, et ramenés prisonniers à la merci des soldats.»—C'était vrai; on se tut.

Les dames parlaient toilette; mais une certaine contrainte semblait les désunir.

Tout à coup, au bout de la rue, l'officier parut. Sur la neige qui fermait l'horizon, il profilait sa grande taille de guêpe en uniforme, et marchait, les genoux écartés, de ce mouvement particulier aux militaires qui s'efforcent de ne point maculer leurs bottes soigneusement cirées.

Il s'inclina en passant près des dames, et regarda dédaigneusement les hommes qui eurent, du reste, la dignité de ne point se découvrir, bien que Loiseau ébauchât un geste pour retirer sa coiffure.

Boule de Suif était devenue rouge jusqu'aux oreilles; et les trois femmes mariées ressentaient une grande humiliation d'être ainsi rencontrées par ce soldat, dans la compagnie de cette fille qu'il avait si cavalièrement traitée.

took a walk round the outskirts of the village. Everyone wrapped up warmly and the little group set out, with the exception of Cornudet, who preferred to stay by the fire, and the nuns, who spent their days in the church or at the priest's house.

The cold, which was becoming more intense every day, stung their ears and noses painfully. Their feet hurt so badly that every step was torture; and when the countryside came into view, it appeared to them so frighteningly bleak under its limitless whiteness that everyone turned back immediately, their spirits chilled and their hearts clenched tight .

The four women walked on ahead, and the three men followed, a little behind.

Loiseau, who understood the situation, suddenly asked how much longer that whore was going to make them stay in such a dump. The Count, ever chivalrous, said such an awful sacrifice couldn't be asked of a woman, and that it must come from her herself. Monsieur Carré-Lamadon remarked that if the French launched a counter-attack by way of Dieppe, as had been speculated, the confrontation could take place only in Tôtes. This observation worried the other two. 'What if we tried to get away on foot?' asked Loiseau. The Count shrugged his shoulders, 'What are you thinking of? In this snow? With our wives? We'd be pursued straight away, caught in ten minutes, and brought back here as prisoners. And at the mercy of their soldiers.' It was true; they fell silent.

The ladies were talking about clothes, but a certain reserve appeared to be dividing them.

Suddenly, at the end of the street, the officer appeared. His tall figure in his wasp-waisted uniform was silhouetted against the snow that closed off the horizon, and he was walking, knees apart, with that gait peculiar to soldiers when they strive not to dirty their carefully polished boots.

He bowed as he passed the ladies, and looked disdainfully at the men who, at least, had enough dignity not to raise their hats, even though Loiseau started to make a gesture of removing his headgear.

The Dumpling flushed crimson to the ears, and the three women felt greatly humiliated at being met by the soldier like that, in the company of the prostitute he had treated so off-handedly.



Alors on parla de lui, de sa tournure, de son visage. Mme Carré-Lamadon, qui avait connu beaucoup d'officiers et qui les jugeait en connaisseur, trouvait celui-là pas mal du tout; elle regrettait même qu'il ne fût pas Français, parce qu'il ferait un fort joli hussard dont toutes les femmes assurément raffoleraient.

Une fois rentrés, on ne sut plus que faire. Des paroles aigres furent même échangées à propos de choses insignifiantes. Le dîner, silencieux, dura peu, et chacun monta se coucher, espérant dormir pour tuer le temps.

On descendit le lendemain avec des visages fatigués et des coeurs exaspérés. Les femmes parlaient à peine à Boule de Suif.

Une cloche tinta. C'était pour un baptême. La grosse fille avait un enfant élevé chez des paysans d'Yvetot. Elle ne le voyait pas une fois l'an, et n'y songeait jamais; mais la pensée de celui qu'on allait baptiser lui jeta au coeur une tendresse subite et violente pour le sien, et elle voulut absolument assister à la cérémonie.

Aussitôt qu'elle fut partie, tout le monde se regarda, puis on rapprocha les chaises, car on sentait bien qu'à la fin il fallait décider quelque chose. Loiseau eut une inspiration: il était d'avis de proposer à l'officier de garder Boule de Suif toute seule, et de laisser partir les autres. M. Follenvie se chargea encore de la commission, mais il redescendit presque aussitôt. L'Allemand, qui connaissait la nature humaine, l'avait mis à la porte. Il prétendait retenir tout le monde tant que son désir ne serait pas satisfait.

Alors le tempérament populacier de Mme Loiseau éclata:—«Nous n'allons pourtant pas mourir de vieillesse ici. Puisque c'est son métier, à cette gueuse, de faire ça avec tous les hommes, je trouve qu'elle n'a pas le droit de refuser l'un plutôt que l'autre. Je vous demande un peu, ça a pris tout ce qu'elle a trouvé dans Rouen, même des cochers! oui, madame, le cocher de la préfecture! Je le sais bien, moi, il achète son vin à la maison. Et aujourd'hui qu'il s'agit de nous tirer d'embarras, elle fait la mijaurée, cette morveuse!... Moi, je trouve qu'il se conduit très bien, cet officier. Il est peut-être privé depuis longtemps; et nous étions là trois qu'il aurait sans doute préférées. Mais non, il se contente de celle à tout

Then they began to talk about him, about his figure, about his face. Madame Carré-Lamadon, who had known many officers and who judged them like a connoisseur, found this one not at all bad. She was even sorry he wasn't French, because he would have made a very dashing hussar over whom all the women would surely have gone crazy.

Once they had got back, they didn't know what to do. Harsh words were exchanged over the merest trifle. Dinner, silent, didn't last long. Everyone went up to bed, hoping they could kill time by sleep.

They came down the next morning with tired faces and frayed tempers. The women hardly spoke to the Dumpling.

A bell rang out. It was for a christening. The fat loose woman had had a child who was being brought up by the peasants of Yvetot. She didn't see it even once a year, and never thought about it; but the notion that it was going to be baptised now filled her heart with a sudden, intense feeling for her own, and she insisted on attending the ceremony.

As soon as she was gone, everyone looked at each other and brought their chairs together. They knew very well that, in the end, a decision had to be made. Loiseau had a brainwave. What about suggesting to the officer that the Dumpling be detained by herself, and let the others go? Monsieur Follenvie once more acted as a go-between, but he came back down almost immediately. The German, who knew human nature, had shown him the door. He intended to detain everyone for as long as his wishes remained unsatisfied.

At this, Madame Loiseau's commonness erupted: 'We're surely not going to die of old age here, are we? It's that slut's job to do it with any man. I don't think she's got the right to say no to one and not another. Just let me ask you this. In Rouen, didn't she take whatever she could find? Even coachmen! Yes, madame, even the Council Leader's coachman! I happen to know because he buys his wine from us. And now, when it's a question of getting us out of this jam, she gives herself airs, the tart. If you ask me, I think the officer's behaved very well. Perhaps he's gone without it for ages. He'd have probably preferred the three of us. But no, he's satisfied with that common whore. He

le monde. Il respecte les femmes mariées. Songez donc, il est le maître. Il n'avait qu'à dire: «Je veux», et il pouvait nous prendre de force avec ses soldats.»

Les deux femmes eurent un petit frisson. Les yeux de la jolie Mme Carré-Lamadon brillaient, et elle était un peu pâle, comme si elle se sentait déjà prise de force par l'officier.

Les hommes, qui discutaient à l'écart, se rapprochèrent. Loiseau, furibond, voulait livrer «cette misérable» pieds et poings liés, à l'ennemi. Mais le comte, issu de trois générations d'ambassadeurs, et doué d'un physique de diplomate, était partisan de l'habileté: «Il faudrait la décider», – dit-il.

Alors on conspira.

Les femmes se serrèrent, le ton de la voix fut baissé, et la discussion devint générale, chacun donnant son avis. C'était fort convenable du reste. Ces dames surtout trouvaient des délicatesses de tournures, des subtilités d'expression charmantes, pour dire les choses les plus scabreuses. Un étranger n'aurait rien compris, tant les précautions du langage étaient observées. Mais la légère tranche de pudeur dont est bardée toute femme du monde ne recouvrant que la surface, elles s'épanouissaient dans cette aventure polissonne, s'amusaient follement au fond, se sentant dans leur élément, tripotant de l'amour avec la sensualité d'un cuisinier gourmand qui prépare le souper d'un autre.

La gaieté revenait d'elle-même, tant l'histoire leur semblait drôle à la fin. Le comte trouva des plaisanteries un peu risquées, mais si bien dites qu'elles faisaient sourire. A son tour Loiseau lâcha quelques grivoiseries plus raides dont on ne se blessa point; et la pensée brutalement exprimée par sa femme dominait tous les esprits: «Puisque c'est son métier à cette fille, pourquoi refuserait-elle celui-là plus qu'un autre?» La gentille Mme Carré-Lamadon semblait même penser qu'à sa place elle refuserait celui-là moins qu'un autre.

On prépara longuement le blocus, comme pour une forteresse investie. Chacun convint du rôle qu'il jouerait, des arguments dont il s'appuierait, des manoeuvres qu'il devrait exécuter. On régla le plan des attaques, les ruses à employer, et les surprises de l'assaut, pour forcer cette citadelle vivante à recevoir l'ennemi dans la place.

respects married women. Just think. He's in charge. He only has to say, "That's what I want", and he could have his soldiers take us by force.'

The two women gave a little shudder. The eyes of the pretty Madame Carré-Lamadon were glistening, and she turned a little pale, as if she already felt she had been taken forcibly by the officer.

The men, who had been talking separately, came over. Loiseau, beside himself with rage, wanted to have 'that miserable woman' bound hand and foot, and handed over to the enemy. But the Count, the product of three generations of ambassadors, and blessed with a diplomat's bearing, was partial to more subtlety. 'We must let *her* decide,' he said.

And so they plotted.

The women huddled together, their voices lowered, and in the general discussion, each of them gave an opinion. It was all very correct. The ladies were particularly adept at finding delicate turns of phrase, charming subtleties of expression, to express the most improper things. So carefully were their proposals phrased that a stranger would have understood nothing. But since the veneer of modesty with which every woman in the world is armoured covers only the surface, they blossomed out in this scandalous adventure, and were thrilled to the core. Feeling themselves quite in their element, they toyed with love like a sensual gourmet chef preparing someone else's supper.

So amusing did the affair seem to them in the end that their good spirits returned spontaneously. The Count told a few jokes that were a little racy, but so wittily phrased they made everyone smile. Loiseau in turn came out with even saucier dirty stories, but no one took offence. The thought, brutally expressed by his wife, was uppermost in everyone's mind. 'Since it's that whore's trade, why should she turn one man away rather than another?' The lovely Madame Carré-Lamadon even seemed to think that, in her place, she would have turned this one away less quickly than some others.

They prepared for the blockade at length, as if a fortress was being besieged. Everyone agreed on the roles they were to play, the arguments they would deploy, the manoeuvres that they would execute. They settled on a plan of attack, the tricks to use, the surprise assaults, that would force this living citadel to let the enemy enter inside her walls.

Cornudet cependant restait à l'écart, complètement étranger à cette affaire.

Une attention si profonde tendait les esprits, qu'on n'entendit point rentrer Boule de Suif. Mais le comte souffla un léger: «Chut!» qui fit relever tous les yeux. Elle était là. On se tut brusquement et un certain embarras empêcha d'abord de lui parler. La comtesse, plus assouplie que les autres aux duplicités des salons, l'interrogea: «Était-ce amusant, ce baptême?»

La grosse fille, encore émue, raconta tout, et les figures, et les attitudes, et l'aspect même de l'église. Elle ajouta: «C'est si bon de prier quelquefois.»

Cependant, jusqu'au déjeuner, ces dames se contentèrent d'être aimables avec elle, pour augmenter sa confiance et sa docilité à leurs conseils.

Aussitôt à table, on commença les approches. Ce fut d'abord une conversation vague sur le dévouement. On cita des exemples anciens: Judith et Holopherne, puis, sans aucune raison, Lucrece avec Sextus, Cléopâtre faisant passer par sa couche tous les généraux ennemis, et les réduisant à des servilités d'esclave. Alors se déroula une histoire fantaisiste, éclosée dans l'imagination de ces millionnaires ignorants, où les citoyennes de Rome allaient endormir à Capoue Annibal entre leurs bras, et, avec lui, ses lieutenants, et les phalanges des mercenaires. On cita toutes les femmes qui ont arrêté des conquérants, fait de leur corps un champ de bataille, un moyen de dominer, une arme, qui ont vaincu par leurs caresses héroïques des êtres hideux ou détestés, et sacrifié leur chasteté à la vengeance et au dévouement.

On parla même en termes voilés de cette Anglaise de grande famille qui s'était laissée inoculer une horrible et contagieuse maladie pour la transmettre à Bonaparte sauvé miraculeusement, par une faiblesse subite, à l'heure du rendez-vous fatal.

Et tout cela s'était raconté d'une façon convenable et modérée, où parfois éclatait un enthousiasme voulu propre à exciter l'émulation.

On aurait pu croire, à la fin, que le seul rôle de la femme, ici-bas, était un perpétuel sacrifice de sa personne, un abandon continu aux caprices

Cornudet, however, stayed on the sidelines, and kept out of things completely.

So deeply absorbed was everybody's mind that they didn't hear the Dumpling return. But the Count whispered a soft 'shush', which made everyone look up. There she was. Everyone stopped talking abruptly. At first, a vague embarrassment kept them from speaking to her. But the Countess, more practised than the others in the ruses of the drawing-room, asked her, 'And did you enjoy the christening?'

The plump young woman, still moved, related everything, the faces, the expressions, even the appearance of the church. She added, 'It's sometimes so good to say one's prayers.'

Until lunch, the ladies were happy to be kind to her, so as to increase her trust in them, and her amenability to their advice.

Once at the table, they began their approach. First there was some vague conversation about self-sacrifice. Ancient examples were cited: Judith and Holofernes, then for no apparent reason Lucretia and Sextus, **NOTE** then Cleopatra, who had taken all the enemy generals into her bed and reduced them to the docility of slaves. Then a totally made-up story was rolled out, hatched in the imagination of these ignorant millionaires, of how the women of Rome set off for Capua to lull Hannibal asleep in their arms and, along with him, his lieutenants and his phalanxes of mercenaries. They cited all the women who had halted conquerors; who had made their bodies battlefields, a means of domination, a weapon; who had conquered hideous, hateful beings through their heroic caresses, and sacrificed their chastity for revenge and for self-sacrifice.

They even spoke in veiled terms about the English woman from a noble family who had let herself be inoculated with a horrible and contagious disease, so as to transmit it to Bonaparte, who was miraculously saved by a sudden dizzy spell at the time of the fatal meeting.

And all of this was related in a sober and measured way, with occasional bursts of enthusiasm that were meant to inspire emulation.

You would have thought, in the end, that the only role of women here on earth was an endless sacrifice of their bodies, a constant submission to

des soldatesques. Les deux bonnes soeurs ne semblaient point entendre, perdues en des pensées profondes, Boule de Suif ne disait rien.

Pendant tout l'après-midi, on la laissa réfléchir. Mais, au lieu de l'appeler «madame» comme on avait fait jusque-là, on lui disait simplement «mademoiselle», sans que personne sût bien pourquoi, comme si l'on avait voulu la faire descendre d'un degré dans l'estime qu'elle avait escaladée, lui faire sentir sa situation honteuse.

Au moment où l'on servit le potage, M. Follenvie reparut, répétant sa phrase de la veille: «L'officier prussien fait demander à Mlle Elisabeth Rousset si elle n'a point encore changé d'avis.»

Boule de Suif répondit sèchement: «Non, monsieur.» Mais au dîner la coalition faiblit. Loiseau eut trois phrases malheureuses. Chacun se battait les flancs pour découvrir des exemples nouveaux et ne trouvait rien, quand la comtesse, sans préméditation peut-être, éprouvant un vague besoin de rendre hommage à la Religion, interrogea la plus âgée des bonnes soeurs sur les grands faits de la vie des saints. Or, beaucoup avaient commis des actes qui seraient des crimes à nos yeux; mais l'Église absout sans peine ces forfaits quand ils sont accomplis pour la gloire de Dieu, ou pour le bien du prochain. C'était un argument puissant: la comtesse en profita. Alors, soit par une de ces ententes tacites, de ces complaisances voilées, où excelle quiconque porte un habit ecclésiastique, soit simplement par l'effet d'une inintelligence heureuse, d'une secourable bêtise, la vieille religieuse apporta à la conspiration un formidable appui. On la croyait timide, elle se montra hardie, verbeuse, violente. Celle-là n'était pas troublée par les tâtonnements de la casuistique; sa doctrine semblait une barre de fer; sa foi n'hésitait jamais; sa conscience n'avait point de scrupules.

Elle trouvait tout simple le sacrifice d'Abraham, car elle aurait immédiatement tué père et mère sur un ordre venu d'En Haut; et rien, à son avis, ne pouvait déplaire au Seigneur quand l'intention était louable. La comtesse, mettant à profit l'autorité sacrée de sa complice inattendue, lui fit faire comme une paraphrase édifiante de cet axiome de morale: «La fin justifie les moyens.»

Elle l'interrogeait.

—Alors, ma soeur, vous pensez que Dieu accepte toutes les voies, et

the whims of military rabble. The two sisters, lost in deep thought, seemed not to hear anything. The Dumpling said nothing.

The whole afternoon, they let her ponder. But instead of calling her 'Madame', as they'd done until then, they simply called her 'Mademoiselle', without even knowing why. It was as if they wanted to take her down a peg from the respectability she had achieved, and make her realise her shameful position.

As the soup was being served, Monsieur Follenvie reappeared, and repeated his words of the day before, 'The Prussian officer asks if Mademoiselle Elisabeth Rousset has changed her mind yet.'

The Dumpling answered drily: 'No, sir.' But over dinner, the coalition weakened. Loiseau made three unfortunate remarks. They were all racking their brains to come up with new examples and finding nothing, when the Countess, possibly without any motive beyond a vague need to pay tribute to religion, questioned the elder of the nuns about the great events in the lives of the saints. Many of them had committed acts that would be crimes in our eyes, but the Church had readily forgiven such misdeeds if they had been done for the glory of God, or the good of one's neighbours. It was a powerful argument, and the Countess took advantage of it. But then, whether through a tacit understanding, a veiled complicity, in which those who wear ecclesiastic habits excel, or simply through blissful ignorance and helpful stupidity, the old nun gave a huge support to the conspiracy. They had thought her timid, but she showed herself to be bold, talkative, violent. She wasn't troubled by the groping hesitations of casuistry. Her doctrine was like an iron bar. Her faith knew no doubt, her conscience no scruple.

She understood Abraham's sacrifice perfectly, and she would have killed both mother and father at once upon an order from on high. In her opinion, nothing could displease the Lord when the intention was honourable. The Countess, taking advantage of the sacred authority vested in her unexpected ally, led her to give an edifying summary of this moral principle: 'The ends justify the means.'

She questioned her.

'So then, sister, do you think God accepts all courses of action, and

pardonne le fait quand le motif est pur?

—Qui pourrait en douter, madame? Une action blâmable en soi devient souvent méritoire par la pensée qui l'inspire.

Et elles continuaient ainsi, démêlant les volontés de Dieu, prévoyant ses décisions, le faisant s'intéresser à des choses qui, vraiment, ne le regardaient guère.

Tout cela était enveloppé, habile, discret. Mais chaque parole de la sainte fille en cornette faisait brèche dans la résistance indignée de la courtisane. Puis, la conversation se détournant un peu, la femme aux chapelets pendants parla des maisons de son ordre, de sa supérieure, d'elle-même, et de sa mignonne voisine, la chère soeur Saint-Nicéphore. On les avait demandées au Havre pour soigner dans les hôpitaux des centaines de soldats atteints de la petite vérole. Elle les dépeignit, ces misérables, détailla leur maladie. Et tandis qu'elles étaient arrêtées en route par les caprices de ce Prussien, un grand nombre de Français pouvaient mourir qu'elles auraient sauvés peut-être! C'était sa spécialité, à elle, de soigner les militaires; elle avait été en Crimée, en Italie, en Autriche, et, racontant ses campagnes, elle se révéla tout à coup une de ces religieuses à tambours et à trompettes qui semblent faites pour suivre les camps, ramasser des blessés dans des remous des batailles, et, mieux qu'un chef, dompter d'un mot les grands soudards indisciplinés; une vraie bonne soeur Ran-tan-plan dont la figure ravagée, crevée de trous sans nombre, paraissait une image des dévastations de la guerre.

Personne ne dit rien après elle, tant l'effet semblait excellent.

Aussitôt le repas terminé, on remonta bien vite dans les chambres pour ne descendre, le lendemain, qu'assez tard dans la matinée.

Le déjeuner fut tranquille. On donnait à la graine semée la veille le temps de germer et de pousser ses fruits.

La comtesse proposa de faire une promenade dans l'après-midi; alors le comte, comme il était convenu, prit le bras de Boule de Suif, et demeura derrière les autres, avec elle.

Il lui parla de ce ton familier, paternel, un peu dédaigneux, que les hommes posés emploient avec les filles, l'appelant: «ma chère enfant», la

forgives any deed whose motive is pure?'

'Who could doubt it, Madame? An action that is reprehensible in itself often becomes worthy through the thought that has inspired it.'

And so they went on, untangling the will of God, predicting his decisions, and making him take an interest in things that really scarcely concerned him.

All this was expressed in a veiled, careful, discreet way. But every word from the holy woman with the wimple made a breach in the indignant resistance of the courtesan. Then the conversation took a somewhat different tack. The woman with the dangling rosary spoke about the houses of her order, about her Mother Superior, about herself, and about her fragile companion, dear sister Saint-Nicéphore. They were being sent to Le Havre to look after hundreds of soldiers in the hospitals who had been stricken with smallpox. She described the poor wretches and gave details of their illness. But while they were being detained on the way by that Prussian's whim, a great number of Frenchmen could die whom they might perhaps have otherwise saved. Looking after soldiers was her special field; she'd been out in the Crimea, in Italy and Austria; and as she described her campaigns, she suddenly revealed herself as one of those drum-and-trumpet nuns who seemed born to follow the troops, gathering up the wounded from the swirl of battle, and, better than any general, putting down the most undisciplined old trooper with a single word. She was a real rat-a-tat-tat nun whose ravaged face, pitted with countless pockmarks, seemed a perfect image of the devastations of war.

So excellent was her effect that nobody said anything after her.

As soon as the meal was over, they all went up quickly to their rooms and didn't come down until rather late the following morning.

Lunch was quiet. They were giving the seed sown the previous day time to germinate and bear fruit.

In the afternoon, the Countess suggested a walk. So the Count, as had been planned, took the Dumpling's arm and walked with her, behind the others.

He spoke to her in that familiar, fatherly, slightly patronising way that mature men of the world **NOTE** adopt with prostitutes. He addressed her

traitant du haut de sa position sociale, de son honorabilité indiscutée. Il pénétra tout de suite au vif de la question:

—Donc, vous préférez nous laisser ici, exposés comme vous-même à toutes les violences qui suivraient un échec des troupes prussiennes, plutôt que de consentir à une de ces complaisances que vous avez eues si souvent en votre vie?

Boule de Suif ne répondit rien.

Il la prit par la douceur, par le raisonnement, par les sentiments. Il sut rester «monsieur le comte», tout en se montrant galant quand il le fallut, complimenteur, aimable enfin. Il exalta le service qu'elle leur rendrait, parla de leur reconnaissance; puis soudain, la tutoyant gaiement: «Et tu sais, ma chère, il pourrait se vanter d'avoir goûté d'une jolie fille comme il n'en trouvera pas beaucoup dans son pays.»

Boule de Suif ne répondit pas et rejoignit la société. Aussitôt rentrée, elle monta chez elle et ne reparut plus. L'inquiétude était extrême. Qu'allait-elle faire? Si elle résistait, quel embarras!

L'heure du dîner sonna; on l'attendit en vain. M. Follenvie, entrant alors, annonça que Mlle Rousset se sentait indisposée, et qu'on pouvait se mettre à table. Tout le monde dressa l'oreille. Le comte s'approcha de l'aubergiste, et, tout bas: «Ça y est?—Oui.» Par convenance, il ne dit rien à ses compagnons, mais il leur fit seulement un léger signe de la tête. Aussitôt un grand soupir de soulagement sortit de toutes les poitrines, une allégresse parut sur les visages. Loiseau cria: «Saperlipopette! je paye du Champagne si l'on en trouve dans l'établissement»; et Mme Loiseau eut une angoisse lorsque le patron revint avec quatre bouteilles aux mains. Chacun était devenu subitement communicatif et bruyant; une joie égrillarde emplissait les cœurs. Le comte parut s'apercevoir que Mme Carré-Lamadon était charmante, le manufacturier fit des compliments à la comtesse. La conversation fut vive, enjouée, pleine de traits.

Tout à coup, Loiseau, la face anxieuse et levant les bras, hurla: «Silence!» Tout le monde se tut, surpris, presque effrayé déjà. Alors il tendit l'oreille en faisant «Chut!» des deux mains, leva les yeux vers le plafond, écouta de nouveau, et reprit, de sa voix naturelle: «Rassurez-vous, tout va bien.»

as 'my dear child'; he talked down to her from the heights of his social position, his unquestionable respectability. He got straight to the point:

'So would you rather leave us here, exposed like you to all the violence that a Prussian troop defeat would bring, than agree to one of those indulgences you've given so often in your life?'

The Dumpling did not answer.

He tried gentleness, reason, emotion. He still remained 'the Count', but the whole while, whenever it was necessary, he was gallant, flattering, and kind. He praised the favour that she would be doing them, and spoke of their gratitude. Then suddenly, addressing her with light-hearted intimacy, **NOTE** 'And you know, my dear, he'd then be able to boast he'd had a prettier girl than many he'd find in his own country.'

The Dumpling did not reply, and joined the rest of the group. As soon as they got back, she went up to her room and didn't reappear. The anxiety was intense. What was she going to do? The problems if she held out!

The hour struck for dinner. They waited for her in vain. Monsieur Follenvie came in and announced that Mademoiselle Rousset was feeling unwell, and that they should start without her. Everyone's ears pricked up. The Count went over to the innkeeper and said, very quietly, 'Everything all right, then?' 'Yes.' Out of propriety, he said nothing to his companions, but gave them the slightest nod of the head. Immediately, a huge sigh of relief rose from everyone, and a look of elation burst out on their faces. Loiseau cried out, 'Hallelujah! **NOTE** I'll pay for the champagne, if there's any in the house.' Madame Loiseau, though, was considerably distressed when the innkeeper came back with four bottles in his hands. Everyone had suddenly become chatty and loud; a bawdy merriment filled their hearts. The Count appeared to realise that Madame Carré-Lamadon was charming, and the manufacturer paid compliments to the Countess. The talk was lively, playful, full of wit.

Suddenly, with a worried expression, Loiseau raised his arms and shouted, 'Quiet!' Everyone fell silent, surprised, almost panicking again. He cocked his ear while making 'shush' signs with his hands, looked up at the ceiling, listened again, then continued in a normal voice, 'Rest assured, all's going well.'

On hésitait à comprendre, mais bientôt un sourire passa.

Au bout d'un quart d'heure il recommença la même farce, la renouvela souvent dans la soirée; et il faisait semblant d'interpeller quelqu'un à l'étage au-dessus, en lui donnant des conseils à double sens puisés dans son esprit de commis voyageur. Par moments il prenait un air triste pour soupirer: «Pauvre fille;» ou bien il murmurait entre ses dents d'un air rageur: «Gueux de Prussien, va!» Quelquefois, au moment où l'on n'y songeait plus, il poussait, d'une voix vibrante, plusieurs:«Assez! assez!» et ajoutait, comme se parlant à lui-même: «Pourvu que nous la revoyions; qu'il ne l'en fasse pas mourir, le misérable!»

Bien que ces plaisanteries fussent d'un goût déplorable, elles amusaient et ne blessaient personne, car l'indignation dépend des milieux comme le reste, et l'atmosphère qui s'était peu à peu créée autour d'eux était chargée de pensées grivoises.

Au dessert, les femmes elles-mêmes firent des allusions spirituelles et discrètes. Les regards luisaient; on avait bu beaucoup. Le comte, qui conservait, même en ses écarts, sa grande apparence de gravité, trouva une comparaison fort goûtée sur la fin des hivernages au pôle et la joie des naufragés qui voient s'ouvrir une route vers le sud.

Loiseau, lancé, se leva, un verre de Champagne à la main: «Je bois à notre délivrance!» Tout le monde fut debout; on l'acclamait. Les deux bonnes soeurs, elles-mêmes, sollicitées par ces dames, consentirent à tremper leurs lèvres dans ce vin mousseux dont elles n'avaient jamais goûté. Elles déclarèrent que cela ressemblait à la limonade gazeuse, mais que c'était plus fin cependant.

Loiseau résuma la situation.

—C'est malheureux de ne pas avoir de piano parce qu'on pourrait pincer un quadrille.

Cornudet n'avait pas dit un mot, pas fait un geste; il paraissait même plongé dans des pensées très graves, et tirait parfois, d'un geste furieux, sa grande barbe qu'il semblait vouloir allonger encore. Enfin, vers minuit, comme on allait se séparer, Loiseau, qui titubait, lui tapa soudain sur le ventre et lui dit en bredouillant: «Vous n'êtes pas farce, vous, ce

They took some time to cotton on, but soon a smile spread round.

After a quarter of an hour, he went through the same routine again, repeating it frequently during the evening. He would pretend he was calling to someone on the floor above, and offering him advice full of *double entendres*, dredged from his travelling salesman's mind. At times, he would adopt a wistful air and sigh, 'Poor girl.' Or, furious, he would mutter between his teeth, 'That swine of a Prussian.' Sometimes, just when they were no longer thinking about it, he would shout out in a quivering voice, 'Enough! enough!' And he'd add, as if talking to himself, 'Let's hope we'll see her again! That he's not the death of her, the bastard!'

Although the jokes were in appallingly bad taste, they amused and offended no one. Like everything else, indignation depends on context; and the atmosphere that had been gradually created around them was full of saucy thoughts.

By dessert, even the women were making discreet, witty allusions. Eyes were sparkling; they'd had a lot to drink. The Count, who even in his indiscretions, maintained his grand and serious bearing, made a much enjoyed comparison about the end of winter at the north pole, and the joy of shipwrecked sailors as they saw a passage to the south open up.

Loiseau, really got going now, stood up, a glass of champagne in his hand: 'I drink to our deliverance!' Everyone rose to their feet and applauded him. Even the two nuns, urged on by the ladies, agreed to wet their lips in the sparkling wine they'd never tasted before. They declared it was like fizzy lemonade, but more subtle of course.

Loiseau caught the general mood:

'What a shame we don't have a piano. We could have had a dance.'

**NOTE**

Cornudet had not said a single word, had not moved at all. He seemed sunk deep in serious thought, from time to time tugging angrily at his long beard that he appeared to want to make even longer. Finally, about midnight, just as they were about to break up, Loiseau staggered over to him, poked him suddenly in the stomach, and spluttered at him, 'A barrel

soir; vous ne dites rien, citoyen?» Mais Cornudet releva brusquement la tête, et, parcourant la société d'un regard luisant et terrible: «Je vous dis à tous que vous venez de faire une infamie!» Il se leva, gagna la porte, répéta encore une fois: «Une infamie!» et disparut.

Cela jeta un froid d'abord. Loiseau, interloqué, restait bête; mais il reprit son aplomb, puis, tout à coup, se tordit en répétant: «Ils sont trop verts, mon vieux, ils sont trop verts.» Comme on ne comprenait pas, il raconta les «mystères du corridor». Alors il y eut une reprise de gaieté formidable. Ces dames s'amusaient comme des folles. Le comte et M. Carré-Lamadon pleuraient à force de rire. Ils ne pouvaient croire.

—Comment! vous êtes sûr? Il voulait....

—Je vous dis que je l'ai vu.

—Et, elle a refusé....

—Parce que le Prussien était dans la chambre à côté.

—Pas possible?

—Je vous le jure.

Le comte étouffait. L'industriel se comprimait le ventre à deux mains. Loiseau continuait:

—Et, vous comprenez, ce soir, il ne la trouve pas drôle, mais pas du tout.

Et tous les trois repartaient, malades, essoufflés.

On se sépara là-dessus. Mais Mme Loiseau, qui était de la nature des «cette chipie» de petite Carré-Lamadon avait ri jaune toute la soirée: «Tu sais, les femmes, quand ça en tient pour l'uniforme, qu'il soit Français ou bien Prussien, ça leur est, ma foi, bien égal. Si ce n'est pas une pitié, Seigneur Dieu!»

Et toute la nuit, dans l'obscurité du corridor coururent comme des frémissements, des bruits légers, à peine sensibles, pareils à des souffles,

of laughs you've been tonight. Got nothing to say, citizen?' Cornudet looked up sharply and, glaring fiercely over the entire group, said, 'I'll tell you all. What you've just done is a disgrace!' He got up, went to the door, and said yet again, 'It's a disgrace!', then vanished.

It cast a chill at first. Loiseau was taken aback and dumbstruck. But he regained his composure, then suddenly doubled over with laughter as he repeated, 'Sour grapes, my friend, sour grapes.' Since no one understood, he related 'the secrets of the corridor'. At this, there was a renewed burst of good humour. The ladies were in hysterics. The Count and Monsieur Carré-Lamadon laughed so hard they cried. They couldn't believe it.

'What...? You're sure...? He wanted to...?'

'I tell you I saw it.'

'And she refused...?'

'Because the Prussian was in the next room.'

'Never.'

'I swear.'

The Count was choking with laughter. The manufacturer was clutching his sides. Loiseau went on:

'So now you see why he doesn't find this evening funny. Not funny at all.'

And then the three of them were off again, sick and choking with laughter.

Upstairs, they went their separate ways. As she and her husband were getting into bed, Madame Loiseau, who had a stinging way, remarked that 'that little bitch' Madame Carré-Lamadon had been forcing herself to laugh all evening. 'You know, when women go for a man in uniform, they don't care if he's French or Prussian. Honest to God, isn't it pathetic?'

And all night long, there was a kind of rustling along the darkness of the corridor, slight noises barely audible, like breathing, the padding of



des effleurements de pieds nus, d'imperceptibles craquements. Et l'on ne dormit que très tard, assurément, car des filets de lumière glissèrent longtemps sous les portes. Le champagne a de ces effets-là; il trouble, dit-on, le sommeil.

Le lendemain, un clair soleil d'hiver rendait la neige éblouissante. La diligence, attelée enfin, attendait devant la porte, tandis qu'une armée de pigeons blancs, rengorgés dans leurs plumes épaisses, avec un oeil rosé, taché, au milieu, d'un point noir, se promenaient gravement entre les jambes des six chevaux, et cherchaient leur vie dans le crottin fumant qu'ils éparpillaient.

Le cocher, enveloppé dans sa peau de mouton, grillait une pipe sur le siège, et tous les voyageurs radieux faisaient rapidement empaqueter des provisions pour le reste du voyage.

On n'attendait plus que Boule de Suif. Elle parut.

Elle semblait un peu troublée, honteuse; et elle s'avança timidement vers ses compagnons, qui, tous, d'un même mouvement, se détournèrent comme s'ils ne l'avaient pas aperçue. Le comte prit avec dignité le bras de sa femme et l'éloigna de ce contact impur.

La grosse fille s'arrêta, stupéfaite; alors, ramassant tout son courage, elle aborda la femme du manufacturier d'un «bonjour, madame» humblement murmuré. L'autre fit de la tête seule un petit salut impertinent qu'elle accompagna d'un regard de vertu outragée. Tout le monde semblait affairé, et l'on se tenait loin d'elle comme si elle eût apporté une infection dans ses jupes. Puis on se précipita vers la voiture où elle arriva seule, la dernière, et reprit en silence la place qu'elle avait occupée pendant la première partie de la route.

On semblait ne pas la voir, ne pas la connaître; mais Mme Loiseau, la considérant de loin avec indignation, dit à mi-voix à son mari: «Heureusement que je ne suis pas à côté d'elle.»

La lourde voiture s'ébranla, et le voyage recommença. On ne parla point d'abord. Boule de Suif n'osait pas lever les yeux. Elle se sentait en même temps indignée contre tous ses voisins, et humiliée d'avoir cédé, souillée par les baisers de ce Prussien entre les bras duquel on l'avait hypocritement jetée.

bare feet, imperceptible creaking. No one got to sleep till very late, undoubtedly, for slivers of light slipped from underneath their doors for a long time. They say that champagne is like that: it disturbs your sleep.

The next day, a bright winter sun had turned the snow dazzlingly white. The coach, at last made ready, was waiting in front of the door, while an army of white pigeons, puffed up in thick plumage, their pink eyes marked in the centre with a black dot, paraded solemnly between the legs of the six horses, pecking for food in the steaming dung scattered around.

The coachman, wrapped up in his sheepskin coat on his box, was puffing at his pipe as all the radiant travellers hurriedly packed in provisions for the rest of the journey.

They were waiting only for the Dumpling. She appeared.

She looked a little anxious and ashamed, and came up to her companions timidly. In a single movement, they all turned away as if they hadn't seen her. The Count took his wife's arm with a dignified air, and led her away from such sullied contact.

The plump young woman stopped in her tracks, dumbstruck. Then, summoning all her courage, she went up to the manufacturer's wife and murmured politely, 'Good morning, Madame.' The other woman gave a little impertinent nod of greeting, which she accompanied with a glare of outraged virtue. Everyone seemed busy and kept their distance, as though she were carrying some infection in her skirts. Then they dashed towards the coach, leaving her to arrive last. Silently, she took up the seat she'd had during the first part of the journey.

No one seemed to see her, or know her. Madame Loiseau looked at her indignantly from afar, and muttered to her husband, 'Thank goodness I'm not sitting next to her.'

The heavy coach rumbled into motion, and the journey started off again. No one spoke at first. The Dumpling didn't dare look up. Simultaneously, she felt contempt for all her neighbours, and shame for having given in – to the dirty kisses of that Prussian into whose arms they had so hypocritically thrown her.

Mais la comtesse, se tournant vers Mme Carré-Lamadon, rompit bientôt ce pénible silence.

—Vous connaissez, je crois, Mme d'Étrelles?

—Oui, c'est une de mes amies.

—Quelle charmante femme!

—Ravissante! Une vraie nature d'élite, fort instruite d'ailleurs, et artiste jusqu'au bout des doigts; elle chante à ravir et dessine dans la perfection.

Le manufacturier causait avec le comte, et au milieu du fracas des vitres un mot parfois jaillissait: «Coupon—échéance—prime—à terme.»

Loiseau, qui avait chipé le vieux jeu de cartes de l'auberge, engraisé par cinq ans de frottement sur les tables mal essuyées, attaqua un bésigue avec sa femme.

Les bonnes soeurs prirent à leur ceinture le long rosaire qui pendait, firent ensemble le signe de la croix, et tout à coup leurs lèvres se mirent à remuer vivement, se hâtant de plus en plus, précipitant leur vague murmure comme pour une course d'*oremus*; et de temps en temps elle baisaient une médaille, se signaient de nouveau, puis recommençaient leur marmottement rapide et continu.

Cornudet songeait, immobile.

Au bout de trois heures de route, Loiseau ramassa ses cartes: «Il fait faim», dit-il.

Alors sa femme atteignit un paquet ficelé d'où elle fit sortir un morceau de veau froid. Elle le découpa proprement par tranches minces et fermes, et tous deux se mirent à manger.

—Si nous en faisons autant, dit la comtesse. On y consentit et elle déballa les provisions préparées pour les deux ménages. C'était, dans un de ces vases allongés dont le couvercle porte un lièvre en faïence, pour indiquer qu'un lièvre en pâté gît au-dessous, une charcuterie succulente, où de blanches rivières de lard traversaient la chair brune du gibier,

But the Countess, turning to Madame Carré-Lamadon, soon broke the awkward silence.

'I believe you know Madame D'Étrelles.'

'Yes, she's a friend of mine.'

'What a delightful woman!'

'Quite enchanting! Truly refined, and well educated too. She's an artist to the tips of her fingers, sings ravishingly, and draws to perfection.'

The manufacturer was chatting with the Count and, above the rattle of the window panes, a word would occasionally leap out: 'Dividend...maturity date...options...futures.'

Loiseau had pinched the inn's old pack of cards, greasy from five years' contact with dirty tabletops; and he started on a game of bezique with his wife.

The nuns clasped the long rosaries that hung from their belts, and made the sign of the cross together. All at once, their lips began to move rapidly, ever faster and faster, quickening their muffled murmurs as if they were in some race of 'let us pray', 'let us pray'. From time to time, they would kiss a medallion, cross themselves again, then start their quick, unending muttering once more.

Cornudet sat motionless, lost in thought.

After three hours' travelling, Loiseau gathered up his cards. 'I'm hungry,' he said.

At this his wife reached for a package, tied up with string, from which she brought out a piece of cold veal. She cut it neatly into thin, firm-set slices, and the two of them began to eat.

'Perhaps we should all do the same,' said the Countess. Everyone agreed, and she unpacked the provisions that had been prepared for the two couples. In one of those long dishes whose lid sported a china hare, to show that a pâté of hare lay inside, they had some succulent cold meat, in which the brown flesh of the game had been streaked with white rivers

mêlée à d'autres viandes hachées fin. Un beau carré de gruyère, apporté dans un journal, gardait imprimé: «faits divers» sur sa pâte onctueuse.

Les deux bonnes soeurs développèrent un rond de saucisson qui sentait l'ail; et Cornudet, plongeant les deux mains en même temps dans les vastes poches de son paletot sac, tira de l'une quatre oeufs durs et de l'autre le croûton d'un pain. Il détacha la coque, la jeta sous ses pieds dans la paille et se mit à mordre à même les oeufs, faisant tomber sur sa vaste barbe des parcelles de jaune clair qui semblaient, là dedans, des étoiles.

Boule de Suif, dans la hâte et l'effarement de son lever, n'avait pu songer à rien; et elle regardait, exaspérée, suffoquant de rage, tous ces gens qui mangeaient placidement. Une colère tumultueuse la crispa d'abord, et elle ouvrit la bouche pour leur crier leur fait avec un flot d'injures qui lui montait aux lèvres; mais elle ne pouvait pas parler tant l'exaspération l'étranglait.

Personne ne la regardait, ne songeait à elle. Elle se sentait noyée dans le mépris de ces gredins honnêtes qui l'avaient sacrifiée d'abord, rejetée ensuite, comme une chose malpropre et inutile. Alors elle songea à son grand panier tout plein de bonnes choses qu'ils avaient goulûment dévorées, à ses deux poulets luisants de gelée, à ses pâtés, à ses poires, à ses quatre bouteilles de Bordeaux; et sa fureur tombant soudain, comme une corde trop tendue qui casse, elle se sentit prête à pleurer. Elle fit des efforts terribles, se raidit, avala ses sanglots comme les enfants, mais les pleurs montaient, luisaient au bord de ses paupières, et bientôt deux grosses larmes, se détachant des yeux, roulèrent lentement sur ses joues. D'autres les suivirent plus rapides, coulant comme des gouttes d'eau qui filtrent d'une roche, et tombant régulièrement sur la courbe rebondie de sa poitrine. Elle restait droite, le regard fixe, la face rigide et pâle, espérant qu'on ne la verrait pas.

Mais la comtesse s'en aperçut et prévint son mari d'un signe. Il haussa les épaules comme pour dire: «Que voulez-vous, ce n'est pas ma faute.» Mme Loiseau eut un rire muet de triomphe et murmura: «Elle pleure sa honte.»

Les deux bonnes soeurs s'étaient remises à prier, après avoir roulé dans un papier le reste de leur saucisson.

of bacon fat, mixed together with other finely chopped meats. There was also a sizable slab of Gruyère, wrapped in newspaper, with 'The News in Brief' printed on its oily surface.

The two nuns unwrapped a ring of sausages that smelt of garlic; and Cornudet, plunging his two hands simultaneously into the deep pockets of his overcoat, drew out four hard-boiled eggs from one, and a crust of bread from the other. He removed the shells, threw them down into the straw under his feet, and began to bite into the eggs, making crumbs of bright yellow fall into his enormous beard, where they looked like stars.

In the haste and panic of getting ready, the Dumpling had had no time to think of anything; and infuriated, choking with rage, she looked at all these people calmly eating. A wave of anger gripped her, and her mouth opened to denounce their behaviour with a flood of abuse that rose to her lips. But so choked was she with indignation that she couldn't speak.

No one looked at her, or gave her a thought. She felt as if she had drowned in the contempt of these respectable swine, who'd first sacrificed her, then turned her away like a dirty, useless thing. Then she thought of her big basket overflowing with good food that they'd greedily devoured – the two chickens shining in aspic, the pâtés, the pears, the four bottles of claret. And, like an overstretched string that snaps, her anger suddenly gave way, and she felt on the verge of tears. She made desperate efforts, steeled herself, swallowed her sobs as children do. But the tears welled up, glistening round the rim of her eyelids; and soon two great teardrops brimmed over her eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks. Others followed, ever faster, flowing like drops of water trickling from a rock, and falling steadily upon the rounded curve of her breast. She sat erect, staring ahead, her face stiff and pale, hoping that no one would notice her.

But the Countess did, and gestured to alert her husband. He shrugged his shoulders as if to say, 'So what? It's not my fault.' Madame Loiseau gave a silent chuckle of triumph and murmured: 'She's crying out of shame.'

Having rolled the rest of their sausage in paper, the two nuns had gone back to praying.

Alors Cornudet, qui digérait ses oeufs, étendit ses longues jambes sous la banquette d'en face, se renversa, croisa ses bras, sourit comme un homme qui vient de trouver une bonne farce, et se mit à siffloter la *Marseillaise*.

Toutes les figures se rembrunirent. Le chant populaire, assurément, ne plaisait point à ses voisins. Ils devinrent nerveux, agacés, et avaient l'air prêts à hurler comme des chiens qui entendent un orgue de barbarie. Il s'en aperçut, ne s'arrêta plus. Parfois même il fredonnait les paroles:

Amour sacré de la patrie,  
Conduis, soutiens, nos bras vengeurs,  
Liberté, liberté chérie,  
Combats avec tes défenseurs!

On fuyait plus vite, la neige étant plus dure; et jusqu'à Dieppe, pendant les longues heures mornes du voyage, à travers les cahots du chemin, par la nuit tombante, puis dans l'obscurité profonde de la voiture, il continua, avec une obstination féroce, son sifflement vengeur et monotone, contraignant les esprits las et exaspérés à suivre le chant d'un bout à l'autre, à se rappeler chaque parole qu'ils appliquaient sur chaque mesure.

Et Boule de Suif pleurait toujours; et parfois un sanglot, qu'elle n'avait pu retenir, passait, entre deux couplets, dans les ténèbres.

Then Cornudet, who was still digesting his eggs, stretched his long legs out under the seat opposite, leaned back, folded his arms, and smiled like a man who'd just thought of a good joke. He began to whistle the *Marseillaise*.

Everyone's face went dark. Clearly, the populist song was finding no favour with his neighbours. They became tense, on edge, and looked ready to howl like dogs at a hurdy-gurdy. He noticed its effects, and carried on. From time to time, he even quietly sang the words:

*May the sacred love of our native land,  
Guide and support our avenging hands.  
Freedom, dearest liberty,  
Fight with those protecting you!*

They sped along more quickly, since the snow was harder now. But all the way to Dieppe, throughout the long, gloomy hours of the journey, over the bumpy roads, through the twilight and then in the deep darkness of the coach, he kept up his avenging, monotonous whistling – fiercely, stubbornly – compelling their frayed and weary minds to follow the song from beginning to end, to remember every word that they would sing to every bar.

And the Dumpling was still crying. From time to time, between one verse and the next, a sob she couldn't suppress would slip down into the darkness.

## NOTES

**deserved to be hanged** a literal translation of the original would read ‘men for/of the sack and the rope’, a reference to the hood placed over the heads of condemned men before they were hanged. [RETURN](#)

**a few Uhlans** the ‘Uhlans’ were originally Polish light cavalry officers, who later also served in the Prussian and Austrian armies. Here, the ‘Uhlans’ are lancers in the invading army. [RETURN](#)

**some few miles** the Introduction addresses the problems of translating terms of measurement into convincing modern English. To render Maupassant’s *deux ou trois lieues* as ‘two or three leagues’ seems quaint and archaic, and as ‘six to nine miles’ ludicrously unidiomatic. Hence, the choice of the phrase ‘some few miles’. [RETURN](#)

**the County Hall** there is no exact equivalent to *la préfecture* in English, although ‘county’ is the nearest term. A *préfecture* is an administrative district or region, corresponding to a *département*, led by a *préfet*, who represents the national government at local level. Here, the French refers to the offices or rooms occupied by the civil servants who work for the *préfecture*. [RETURN](#)

**a game of ‘L oiseau vole’** an untranslatable pun upon the multiple meanings of the phrase. *L oiseau* is both the character’s name, and also means ‘the bird’. *Vole* can denote both ‘flies’ and also ‘steals’. All four senses intermingle in the French, which suggests that Loiseau is a man very adept at feathering his own nest, not always honestly. [RETURN](#)

**the Council Leader** like *la préfecture*, the word for its leader (*le préfet*) is not easily translated, not least because the nearest equivalent is ‘prefect’, a term irresistibly (and inappropriately) evoking in English the hierarchies of school life. ‘Mayor’, ‘Lord Mayor’, ‘Chief Executive’, ‘County Chairman’ were all considered as possible equivalents, but were finally rejected in favour of ‘the Council Leader’. [RETURN](#)

**member of the General Council** the ‘General Council’ (*Conseil général*) is the governing political body of the *département*. [RETURN](#)

## NOTES

**throughout the Empire** a reference to the imperial Bonapartist régime of Napoleon III (known as the Second Empire), which ran from 1852 to 1870. [RETURN](#)

**in the county** the closest equivalent in English to the French *département* is ‘county’. The social and class resonances of the word ‘county’ in English, in phrases like ‘they’re very county’ or ‘a county accent’, are particularly appropriate to Count Hubert’s position and standing. [RETURN](#)

**the nickname *Dumpling*** the nickname that Maupassant gives to his eponymous heroine, *Boule de suif*, has been variously translated. Literally, the phrase means ‘ball of suet’, ‘ball of fat’ or ‘ball of tallow’, and it has been rendered as ‘Dumpling’, ‘Dimples’, ‘Butterball’, ‘Lardycake’, and so on. ‘Dumpling’, slightly objectified by the addition of the definite article in ‘the Dumpling’, has seemed the term that best evokes her physical size and weight, yet also the emotional fullness of her personality. It is a word of affection, rather than ridicule. [RETURN](#)

**tiny, gleaming teeth** the word *quenottes* has a child-like, even childish, ring in French, equivalent perhaps to ‘toothies’ or ‘toothy-pegs’ in English. To apply these terms directly to Boule de suif, though, seems incongruously infantile, hence the translation ‘tiny, gleaming teeth’. [RETURN](#)

**set aside for a rainy day** the original literally means ‘a pear for *or* in case of thirst’. The natural equivalent idiom in English would be ‘to set aside *or* to save for a rainy day.’ [RETURN](#)

**‘when all’s said and done’** the French *à la bonne heure* suggests a final position, or a concluding acknowledgment, that is captured in the English idiom ‘when all’s said and done’. [RETURN](#)

**desperate times, desperate measures** the French *à la guerre comme à la guerre* evokes the common proverbial wisdom of a ‘response that is appropriate to the situation’, as does the English rendering here. [RETURN](#)

**scum Badinguet** *Badinguet* was a nickname for Napoleon III, after the workman who had earlier helped him to escape from the fortress of Ham in 1846. *Crapule* is sometimes translated as ‘scoundrel’, even though the term has now lost much of its condemnatory power. Hence the choice of the stronger ‘scum’ in the translation. [RETURN](#)

**thirteen hours** Maupassant strangely mis-counts the figures he provides, and makes them total fourteen hours (*faisait quatorze*). **RETURN**

**‘vood you pleass get out, ladies end chantlemen?’** the French gives the Prussian officer a strong guttural accent, which is reproduced here.

**RETURN**

**1 oo** the number 100 was commonly placed on hotel doors to indicate the toilet. Whether a visual pun upon ‘1 oo’ was ever intended, though, is more debatable. **RETURN**

**Orléanists...were not so young** Maupassant invokes a number of historical and contemporary references here. After the revolution of 1848, the Orléanists supported the younger branch of the French royal family, and hoped to place Louis-Philippe’s grandson, the Comte de Paris, on the throne. Du Guesclin was a fourteenth-century warrior and hero, and famous scourge of English raiders. Joan of Arc (c. 1412-31), the virgin saint and national heroine of France, led the French army to important victories, but was eventually captured by the English and burnt at the stake. Napoleon (1769-1821), the French military and political leader who ruled France, is widely regarded as one of history’s greatest commanders, as well as the architect of the Napoleonic Code, which laid the civil and bureaucratic foundation for the modern French state. The ‘imperial prince’ was Eugène Louis, the fourteen-year old son of Napoleon III. **RETURN**

**a game of thirty-one** *trente-et-un* is a card game in which the first player to achieve exactly that number wins. **RETURN**

**écarté** another card game that combines features of both rummy and canasta. **RETURN**

**early bird...night owl** the English idiom perfectly captures Maupassant’s contrast: ‘elle était “du matin”...tandis que son homme était “du soir”’. **RETURN**

**Judith and Holofernes...Lucretia and Sextus** in order to save the city of Bethulia, the Jewish heroine Judith seduced Holofernes, who was laying siege to it, and beheaded him as he lay asleep in a drunken stupor. However, the introduction of Lucretia and Sextus has no real relevance to the situation, as Maupassant indicates in his ‘puis, sans aucune raison’. Sextus Tarquin’s rape of Lucretia led to the overthrow of Tarquinius Superbus and the establishment of a republic. The historical allusions throughout this paragraph clearly point up the ignorance of the company rather than its sophistication or knowledge. **RETURN**

**mature men of the world** the original *les hommes posés* is a resonant phrase, *posés* suggesting a certain weightiness, even solemnity, of place and position. In the context, ‘mature men of the world’ tries to capture the social status that the Count self-regardingly accords himself. **RETURN**

**addressing her with light-hearted intimacy** addressing Boule de Suif, the Count suddenly uses the familiar and intimate *tu* (*la tutoyant*) rather than the more formal *vous*. But modern English cannot distinguish between these two forms of ‘you’, hence the rendering ‘with...intimacy’. **RETURN**

**‘Hallelujah!’** the original *saperlipopette* has a humorous, vexatious ring, which is captured in the ironic exclamation ‘Hallelujah!’ **RETURN**

**a dance** literally, the French reads *un quadrille*, which was a dance performed by four couples in a square formation, and usually containing five parts or figures. **RETURN**

## FURTHER READING AND LINKS

### Editions

The standard edition in French of Maupassant's novellas and short stories is *Contes et Nouvelles*, ed. Louis Forestier, 2 vols. *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade* series. Paris: Gallimard, 1974.

### Translations

The following collections include useful translations of *Boule de Suif* into English:

- Roger Colet      *Selected Short Stories*. London and New York: Penguin Books, 1971. [presents an English translation only]
- Steven Jupiter      *Guy de Maupassant: Best Short Stories/Les Meilleurs Contes*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1996. [a dual-language version, with French and English on facing pages]
- Siân Miles      *Guy de Maupassant: A Parisian Affair and Other Stories*. London and New York: Penguin Books, 2004. [presents an English translation only]
- [anon]      *Guy de Maupassant: The Best Short Stories*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics, 1997. [presents an English translation only]
- [anon]      *Guy de Maupassant: The Necklace and Other Short Stories*. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1992 (Dover Thrift Editions). [presents an English translation only]

## FURTHER READING AND LINKS

### Critical discussions in English

Few discussions of Maupassant's work, whether in French or English, fail to mention *Boule de Suif*, if only in passing. But for a short study concentrating exclusively upon the story, see

Peggy Chaplin      *Maupassant: Boule de Suif*. Glasgow: University of Glasgow French and German Publications, 1988.

### Web-sites

The following sites present a great deal of useful material about Maupassant and *Boule de Suif*, including biographies, chronologies, criticism, translations into various languages, and audio recordings. All provide links to further interesting material.

<http://www.guydemaupassant.fr>

<http://www.maupassantiana.fr>

<http://www.maupassant.free.fr>