The Joy of Life

Émile Zola

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PREFACE

'La Joie de Vivre,' here translated as 'The Joy of Life,' was written by M. Zola in 1883, partly at his country house at Médan, and partly at Bénodet, a little seaside place in Brittany. The scene of the story is laid, however, on the coast of the neighbouring province of Normandy, between the mouth of the Orne and the rocks of Grandcamp, where the author had sojourned, more than once, in previous years. The title selected by him for this book is to be taken in an ironical or sarcastic sense. There is no joy at all in the lives of the characters whom he portrays in it. The story of the 'hero' is one of mental weakness, poisoned by a constantly recurring fear of death; whilst that of his father is one of intense physical suffering, blended with an eager desire to continue living, even at the cost of yet greater torture. Again, the story of the heroine is one of blighted affections, the wrecking of all which might have made her life worth living. And there is a great deal of truth in the various pictures of human existence which are thus presented to us; however much some people, in their egregious vanity, may recoil from the idea that life and love and talent and glory are all very poor and paltry things. M. Zola is not usually a pessimist. One finds many of his darkest pictures relieved by a touch of hopefulness; but there is extremely little in the pages of 'La Joie de Vivre,' which is essentially an analysis of human suffering and misery. Nevertheless, the heroine, Pauline Quenu, the daughter of the Quenus who figure largely in 'Le Ventre de Paris' ('The Fat and the Thin'), is a beautiful, touching, and almost consolatory creature. She appears to the reader as the embodiment of human abnegation and devotion. Her guardians rob her, but she scarcely heeds it; her lover Lazare, their son, discards her for another woman, but she

forgives him. It is she who infuses life into the lungs of her rival's puny babe; and when Lazare yields to his horrible fear of death it is she who tries to comfort him, who endeavours to dispel the gloomy thoughts which poison his hours. No sacrifice is too great for her—money, love, she relinquishes everything, in the vain hope of securing a transient happiness for the man to whom she has given her heart. At times, no doubt, she yearns for his affection, she experiences momentary weaknesses, but her spirit is strong, and it invariably triumphs over her rebellious flesh.
Lazare, on the other hand, is one of those wretched beings whose number seems to be constantly increasing in our midst, the product of our corrupt civilisation, our grotesque educational systems, our restlessness and thirst for wealth, our thousand vices and our blatant hypocrisy. At the same time he is a talented young fellow, as are so many of the wretched *décadents* of nowadays; and 'something more or something less' in his brain might have turned his talent into genius. In this respect, indeed, he suggests another of M. Zola's characters, Claude Lantier, the painter of 'L'Œuvre'; but he is far weaker than was Claude, whose insanity sprang from his passion for his art, whereas Lazare's mental disorder is the fruit of that lack, both of will-power and of the spirit of perseverance, which always becomes manifest in decaying races. Briefly, he is a type of the talented, versatile, erratic weakling—a variety of what Paris expressively calls the *arriviste* , who loomed so largely through the final years of the last century, and who by force of numbers, not of power, threatens to dominate the century which has just begun.
In one respect Lazare differs greatly from Claude Lantier. Claude's insanity drove him to suicide, but Lazare shrinks from the idea of annihilation. His whole life indeed is blighted by the unreasoning fear of death to which I have previously alluded. In the brightest moments of Lazare's existence, in the broad sunshine, amid the fairest scenes of

Nature, in the very transports of love, as in moments of anxiety and bereavement, and as in the gloom, the silence, and the solitude of night, the terrible, ever-recurring thought flashes on him: 'My God, my God, so one must die!' In the course of years this dread is intensified by the death of his mother and his old dog; and neither of the women who love him—the devoted Pauline, whom he discards, and the puppet Louise, whom he marries—can dispel it. The pious may argue that this fear of death is only natural on the part of an unbeliever, and that the proper course for Lazare to have pursued was to have sought the consolation of religion. But they have only to visit a few lunatic asylums to find in them extremely devout patients, who, whilst believing in a resurrection and a future life, nevertheless dread death quite as keenly as Lazare Chanteau did. Indeed, this fear of dissolution constitutes a well-known and perfectly defined disorder of the brain, rebellious alike to scientific and to spiritual treatment.

By the side of Lazare and Pauline 'La Joie de Vivre' shows us the former's parents. There is Lazare's mother, who despoils and wrongs Pauline for his benefit, who lives a life of sour envy, and who dies a wretched death, fearful of punishment. And there is his father, whose only thought is his stomach, and who, as I have mentioned, clings despairingly to a semblance of life amid the direst physical anguish. Louise, whom Lazare marries, is a skilfully drawn type of the weak, pretty, scented, coquettish, frivolous woman, who seems to have been with us ever since the world began, the woman to whom men are drawn by a perversion of natural instincts, and whom they need, perhaps, in order that in their saner moments they may the better appreciate the qualities of those few who resemble Pauline. As for the subordinate characters of the story, the grumpy Norman servant, though of a type often met with in M. Zola's stories, is perhaps the best, the various changes in her disposition towards the heroine being described with

great fidelity to human nature. Then the rough but kind-hearted old doctor, the sturdy, tolerant priest, the artful and vicious village children, are all admirably delineated by M. Zola, and grouped around the central figures in such wise as to add to the truth, interest, and impressiveness of his narrative. And, painful as the tale at times may be, it is perhaps as well, in these days of pride and vanity, that one should be recalled now and again to a sense of the abject grovelling which unhappily characterises such a vast number of human lives. It may slightly console one, no doubt, to remember that there are at least some Paulines among us. But then, how few they are, and how numerous on the other hand are the men like Lazare and the women like his mother! When all is considered, judging by what one sees around one every day, one is forced to the conclusion that this diseased world of ours makes extremely little progress towards real sanity and health.

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THE JOY OF LIFE

I

I

When the cuckoo-clock in the dining-room struck six, Chanteau lost all hope. He rose with a painful effort from the arm-chair in which he was sitting, warming his heavy, gouty legs before a coke fire. Ever since two o'clock he had been awaiting the arrival of Madame Chanteau, who, after five weeks' absence, was to-day expected to bring from Paris their little cousin, Pauline Quenu, an orphan girl, ten years of age, whose guardianship they had undertaken.

'I can't understand it at all, Véronique,' he said, opening the kitchen-door. 'Some accident must have happened to them.'

The cook, a tall stout woman of five-and-thirty, with hands like a man's and a face like a gendarme's, was just removing from the fire a leg of mutton, which seemed in imminent danger of being over-done. She did not express her irritation in words, but the pallor of her usually ruddy cheeks betokened her displeasure.

'Madame has, no doubt, stayed in Paris,' she said curtly, 'looking after that endless business which is putting us all topsy-turvy.'

'No! no!' answered Chanteau. 'The letter we had yesterday evening said that the little girl's affairs were completely settled. Madame was to arrive this morning at Caen, where she intended making a short stay to see Davoine. At one o'clock she was to take the train again; at two she would alight at Bayeux; at three, old Malivoire's coach would put her down at Arromanches. Even if Malivoire wasn't ready to start at once, Madame ought to have been here by four o'clock, or by half-past at the latest. There are scarcely six miles from Arromanches to Bonneville.'

The cook kept her eyes fixed on the joint, and only shook

her head while these calculations were thrown at her. After some little hesitation Chanteau added: 'I think you had better go to the corner of the road and look if you can see anything of them, Véronique.'
She glared at him, growing still paler with suppressed anger.
'Why? What for? Monsieur Lazare is already out there, getting drenched in looking for them: and what's the good of my going and getting wet through also?'
'The truth is,' murmured Chanteau, softly, 'that I am beginning to feel a little uneasy about my son as well. He ought to have been back by this time. What can he have been doing out on the road for the last hour?'
Without vouchsafing any answer Véronique took from a nail an old black woollen shawl, which she threw over her head and shoulders. Then, as she saw her master following her into the passage, she said to him, rather snappishly: 'Go back to your fire, if you don't want to be bellowing with pain to-morrow.'
She shut the door with a bang, and put on her clogs while standing on the steps and crying out to the wind:
'The horrid little brat! Putting us to all this trouble!'
Chanteau's composure remained perfect. He was accustomed to Véronique's ebullitions of temper. She had entered his service in the first year of his married life, when she was but a girl of fifteen. As soon as the sound of her clogs had died away, he bolted off like a schoolboy, and planted himself at the other end of the passage, before a glass door which overlooked the sea. There he stood for a moment, gazing at the sky with his blue eyes. He was a short, stout man, with thick closely-cut white hair. He was scarcely fifty-six years old, but gout, to which he was a martyr, had prematurely aged him.
Just then he was feeling anxious and troubled, and hoped that little Pauline would be able to win Véronique's affection. But was it his fault that she was coming? When

the Paris notary had written to tell him that his cousin Quenu, whose wife had died some six months previously, had just died also, charging him in his will with the guardianship of his little daughter, he had not felt able to refuse the trust. It was true they had not seen much of one another, as the family had been dispersed. Chanteau's father, after leaving the South and wandering all over France as a journeyman carpenter, had established a timber-yard at Caen; while, on the other hand, Quenu, at his mother's death, had gone to Paris, where one of his uncles had subsequently given him a flourishing pork-butcher's business, in the very centre of the market district. [1] They had only met each other some two or three times, on occasions when Chanteau had been compelled by his gout to quit his business and repair to Paris for special medical advice. But the two men had ever had a genuine respect for one another, and the dying father had probably thought that the sea air would be beneficial to his daughter. The girl, too, as the heiress of the pork-butcher's business, would certainly be no charge upon them. Madame Chanteau, indeed, had fallen so heartily into the scheme that she had insisted upon saving her husband all the dangerous fatigue of the journey to Paris. Setting off alone and bustling about she had settled everything, in her perpetual craving for activity; and Chanteau was quite contented so long as his wife was pleased.

But what could be detaining the pair of them? Anxiety seized him again, as he looked out upon the dark sky, over which the west wind was driving huge masses of black clouds, like sooty rags whose tattered ends draggled far away into the sea. It was one of those March gales, when the equinoctial tides beat furiously upon the shores. The flux was only just setting in, and all that could be seen of it was a thin white bar of foam, far away towards the horizon. The wide expanse of bare beach, a league of rocks and

gloomy seaweed, its level surface blotched here and there with dark pools, had a weirdly melancholy aspect as it lay stretched out beneath the quickly increasing darkness that fell from the black clouds scudding across the skies.
'Perhaps the wind has overturned them into some ditch,' murmured Chanteau.
He felt constrained to go out and look. He opened the glass door, and ventured in his list-slippers on to the gravelled terrace which commanded a view of the village. A few drops of rain were dashed against his face by the hurricane, and a terrific gust made his thick blue woollen dressing-jacket flap and flap again. But he struggled on, bareheaded and bending down, and at last reached the parapet, over which he leaned while glancing at the road that ran beneath. This road descended between two steep cliffs, and looked almost as though it had been hewn out of the solid rock to afford a resting-place for the twenty or thirty hovels of which Bonneville consisted. Every tide threatened to hurl the houses from their narrow shingle-strewn anchorage and crush them against the rocky cliff. To the left there was a little landing-place, a mere strip of sand, whither amid rhythmic calls men hoisted up some half-score boats. The inhabitants did not number more than a couple of hundred souls. They made a bare living out of the sea, clinging to their native rocks with all the unreasoning persistence of limpets. And on the cliffs above their miserable roofs, which every winter were battered by the storms, there was nothing to be seen except the church, standing about half-way up on the right, and the Chanteaus' house across the cleft on the other hand. Bonneville contained nothing more.
'What dreadful weather it is!' cried a voice.
Chanteau raised his head and recognised the priest, Abbé Horteur, a thick-set man of peasant-like build, whose red hair was still unsilvered by his fifty years. He used a plot of graveyard land in front of the church as a vegetable

garden, and was now examining his early salad plants, tucking his cassock the while between his legs in order to prevent the wind from blowing it over his head. Chanteau, who could not make himself heard amidst the roaring of the gale, contented himself with waving his hand.
'They are doing right in getting their boats up, I think,' shouted the priest.
But just then a gust of wind caught hold of his cassock and wrapt it round his head, so he fled for refuge behind the church.
Chanteau turned round to escape the violence of the blast. With his eyes streaming with moisture he cast a glance at his garden, over which the spray was sweeping, and the brick-built two-storeyed house with five windows, whose shutters seemed in imminent danger of being torn away from their fastenings. When the sudden squall had subsided, he bent down again to look at the road; and just at that moment Véronique returned. She shook her hands at him.
'What! you have actually come out!—Be good enough to go into the house again at once, sir!'
She caught him up in the passage, and scolded him like a child detected in wrong-doing. Wouldn't she have all the trouble of looking after him in the morning when he suffered agonies of pain from his indiscretion?
'Have you seen nothing of them?' he asked, submissively.
'No, indeed, I have seen nothing—Madame is no doubt taking shelter somewhere.'
He dared not tell her that she should have gone further on. However, he was now beginning to feel especially anxious about his son.
'I saw that all the neighbourhood was being blown into the air,' continued the cook. 'They are quite afraid of being done for this time. Last September the Cuches' house was cracked from top to bottom, and Prouane, who was going up to the church to ring the *Angelus* , has just told me that

he is sure it will topple over before morning.'
Just as she spoke a big lad of nineteen sprang up the three steps before the door. He had a spreading brow and sparkling eyes, and a fine chestnut down fringed his long oval face.
'Ah! here's Lazare at last!' said Chanteau, feeling much relieved. 'How wet you are, my poor boy!'
In the passage the young man hung his hooded cloak, which was quite saturated with sea-water.
'Well?' interrogated his father.
'I can see nothing of them,' replied Lazare. 'I have been as far as Verchemont, and waited under the shed at the inn there, and kept my eyes on the road, which is a river of mud. But I could see no sign of them. Then, as I began to feel afraid that you might get uneasy about me, I came back.'
The previous August Lazare had left the College of Caen, after gaining his Bachelor's degree; and for the last eight months he had been roaming about the cliffs, unable to make any choice of a profession, for he only felt enthusiastic about music, a predisposition which distressed his mother extremely. She had gone away very much displeased with him, as he had refused to accompany her to Paris, where she had thought she might be able to place him in some advantageous position.
'Now that I have let you know I am all right,' the young man resumed, 'I should like to go on to Arromanches.'
'No, no! it is getting late,' said Chanteau. 'We shall be having some news of your mother presently. I am expecting a message every moment. Listen! Isn't that a carriage?'
Véronique had gone to open the door.
'It is Doctor Cazenove's gig,' she said. 'Shall I bring him in, sir? Why! good gracious! there's madame in it!'
They all three hurried down the steps. A huge dog, a cross between a sheep-dog and a Newfoundland, who had been lying asleep in a corner of the passage, sprang forward and

began to bark furiously. Upon hearing this barking, a small white cat of delicate aspect made its way to the door, but, at the sight of the wet and dirt outside, it gave a slight wriggle of disgust with its tail, and sat down very sedately on the top step to see what was going to happen.
A lady about fifty years of age sprang from the gig with all the agility of a young girl. She was short and slight, her hair was still perfectly black, and her face would have been quite pleasant but for the largeness of her nose. The dog sprang forward and placed his big paws on her shoulders, as though he wanted to kiss her; but this displeased her.
'Down! down! Matthew. Get away, will you? Tiresome animal!'
Lazare ran across the yard behind the dog, calling as he went, 'All right, mother?'
'Yes, yes!' replied Madame Chanteau.
'We have been very anxious about you,' said Chanteau, who had followed his son, in spite of the wind. 'What has happened to make you so late?'
'Oh! we've had nothing but troubles,' she answered. 'To begin with, the roads are so bad that it has taken us nearly two hours to come from Bayeux. Then, at Arromanches, one of Malivoire's horses went lame and he couldn't let us have another. At one time I really thought we should have to stay with him all night. But the Doctor was kind enough to offer us his gig, and Martin here has driven us home.'
The driver, an old man with a wooden leg, who had formerly served in the navy, and had there had his limb amputated by Cazenove, then a naval surgeon, had afterwards taken service under the Doctor. He was tethering the horse when Madame Chanteau suddenly checked her flow of speech and called to him:
'Martin! help the little girl to get down!'
No one had yet given a thought to the child. The hood of the gig fell very low, and only her black skirt and little black-gloved hands could be seen. She did not wait,

however, for the coachman's assistance, but sprang lightly to the ground. Just then there came a fierce puff of wind, which whirled her clothes about her and sent the curls of her dark brown hair flying from under her crape-trimmed hat. She did not seem very strong for her ten years. Her lips were thick; and her face, if full, showed the pallor of the girls who are brought up in the back shops of Paris. The others stared at her. Véronique, who had just bustled up to welcome her mistress, checked herself, her face assuming an icy and jealous expression. But Matthew showed none of this reserve. He sprang up between the child's arms and licked her with his tongue.

'Don't be afraid of him!' cried Madame Chanteau. 'He won't hurt you.'

'Oh! I'm not at all afraid of him,' said Pauline quietly; 'I am very fond of dogs.'

Indeed, Matthew's boisterous welcome did not seem to disturb her in the slightest degree. Her grave little face broke out into a smile beneath her black hat, and she affectionately kissed the dog on his snout.

'Aren't you going to kiss your relations too?' exclaimed Madame Chanteau. 'See, this is your uncle, since you call me your aunt; and this is your cousin, a great strapping scapegrace, who isn't half as well behaved as you are.'

The child manifested no awkward shyness. She kissed everyone, and even found a word or two for each, with all the grace of a young Parisienne already schooled in politeness.

'I am very much obliged to you, uncle, for taking me to live with you——You will see that we shall get on very well together, cousin——'

'What a sweet little thing she is!' cried Chanteau, quite delighted.

Lazare looked at her in surprise, for he had pictured her as being much smaller and far more shy and childish.

'Yes, indeed, she is a sweet child,' said the lady, 'and you

have no idea how brave she is! The wind blew straight in our faces as we drove along, and the rain quite blinded us. Fully a score of times I thought that the hood, which was flapping about like a veil, would be carried away altogether. Well, that child there, instead of being alarmed, was quite amused by it all and enjoyed it. But what are we stopping out here for? It is no use getting any wetter than we are; the rain is beginning to fall again.'

She turned round to see where Véronique was. When she saw her keeping aloof and looking very surly, she said to her sarcastically:

'Good evening, Véronique. How are you? While you are making up your mind to come and speak to me, you had better go and get a bottle of wine for Martin. We have not been able to bring our luggage with us, but Malivoire will bring it on early to-morrow.'

Then she suddenly checked herself and hastily returned to the gig. 'My bag! my bag! Ah, there it is! I was afraid it had slipped into the road.'

It was a large black leather bag, already whitened at the corners by wear. She would not trust it to her son, but persisted in carrying it herself. Just as they were at last about to enter the house, another violent squall made them halt, short of breath, near the door. The cat, sitting on the steps with an air of curiosity, watched them fighting their way onwards; and Madame Chanteau then inquired if Minouche had behaved properly during her absence. The name of Minouche again brought a smile to Pauline's serious little face. She stooped down and fondled the cat, which rubbed itself against her skirts, whilst holding its tail erect in the air. Matthew for his part, in proclamation of the return, began to bark again as he saw the family mounting the steps and entering the vestibule.

'Ah, it is pleasant to be home again!' said Madame Chanteau. 'I really thought that we should never get here. Yes, Matthew, you are a very good dog, but please be quiet

—Lazare, do make him keep still. He is quite splitting my ears!'
However, the dog proved obstinate, and the entry of the Chanteaus into their dining-room was accompanied by this lively music. They pushed Pauline, the new daughter of the house, before them; Matthew came on behind, still barking loudly; and Minouche followed last, with her sensitive hair bristling amidst the uproar.
In the kitchen Martin had already drunk a couple of glasses of wine, one after the other, and was now hastening away, stamping over the floor with his wooden leg and calling 'good-night' to everybody. Véronique had just put the leg of mutton to the fire again, as it had got quite cold. She thrust her head into the room, and asked:
'Will you have dinner now?'
'Yes, indeed we will,' said Chanteau. 'It is seven o'clock. But, my good girl, we must wait till madame and the little one have changed their things.'
'But I haven't got Pauline's trunk here,' said Madame Chanteau. 'Fortunately, however, our underclothing is not wet. Take off your cloak and hat, my dear. There, take them away, Véronique. And take off her boots. I have some slippers here.'
The cook knelt down before the child, who had seated herself. Madame Chanteau took out of her bag a pair of small felt slippers and put them on the girl's feet. Then she took off her own boots, and, once more dipping her hand into the bag, brought out a pair of shoes for herself.
'Shall I bring dinner in now?' asked Véronique again.
'In a minute. Pauline, come into the kitchen and wash your hands and face. We will make more of a toilet later on, for, just now, we are dying of hunger.'
Pauline came back first, having left her aunt with her nose in a bowl of water. Chanteau had resumed his place in his big yellow velvet arm-chair before the fire. He was rubbing his legs mechanically, fearing another attack of pain; while

Lazare stood cutting some bread in front of the table, on which four covers had been laid more than an hour before. The two men, who were scarcely at their ease, smiled at the child, without managing to find a word to say to her; while she calmly inspected the room, which was furnished in walnut-wood. Her glance wandered from the sideboard and the half-dozen chairs to the hanging lamp of polished brass, and then rested upon some framed lithographs which hung against the brown wall-paper. Four of them represented the seasons, and the fifth was a view of Vesuvius. Probably the imitation wainscotting of oak-coloured paint, scratched and showing the plaster underneath, the flooring soiled with old grease-spots, and the general shabbiness of this room, where the family lived, made her regret the beautiful marble-fitted shop which she had left the previous day, for her eyes assumed an expression of sadness, and she seemed to guess all the cares that lay concealed in this her new dwelling-place. Then, after curiously examining a very old barometer mounted in a case of gilded wood, her eyes turned to a strange-looking affair which monopolised the whole of the mantelpiece. It was enclosed in a glass box, secured at the edges by strips of blue paper. At first sight it looked like a toy, a miniature wooden bridge; but a bridge of extremely intricate design.

'That was made by your great-uncle,' explained Chanteau, who was delighted to find a subject of conversation. 'My father, you know, began life as a carpenter, and I have always preserved his masterpiece.'

He was not at all ashamed of his origin, and Madame Chanteau tolerated the presence of the bridge on the mantelpiece, in spite of the displeasure which this cumbersome curiosity always caused her by reminding her of her marriage with a working-man's son. But the little girl was no longer paying attention to her uncle's words, for through the window she had just caught sight of the far-

reaching horizon, and she eagerly stepped forward and planted herself close to the panes, whose muslin curtains were held back by cotton loops. Since her departure from Paris her one continual thought had been the sea. She had dreamed of it and never ceased to question her aunt about it during their journey; inquiring at every hill they came to whether the sea lay at the other side of it. When at last they reached the beach at Arromanches, she had been struck silent with wonder, her eyes dilating and her heart heaving with a heavy sigh. From Arromanches to Bonneville she had every minute thrust her head out of the gig's hood, in spite of the violent wind, in order to look at the sea, which seemed to follow them. And now the sea was still there; it would always be there, as though it belonged to her. With her eyes she seemed to be slowly taking possession of it. The night was falling from the grey sky, across which the wind drove the clouds at headlong speed. Amid the increasing darkness of that turbulent evening only the white line of the rising tide could be distinguished. It was a band of foam, which seemed to be ever widening, a succession of waves flowing up, pouring over the tracts of weed and covering the ridges of rock with a soft gliding motion, whose approach seemed like a caress. But far away the roar of the billows increased, huge crests arose, while at the foot of the cliff, where Bonneville had stowed itself away as securely as possible behind its doors, there hovered a death-like gloom. The boats, drawn up to the top of the shingle, lay there, alone and deserted, like huge stranded fish. The rain steeped the village in vaporous mist, and only the church still stood out plainly against a pale patch of sky.

Pauline stood by the window in silence. Her little heart was heaving anew. She seemed to be stifling, and as she drew a deep sigh all her breath appeared to drain from her lips.

'Well! it's a good deal bigger than the Seine, isn't it?' said Lazare, who had just taken his stand behind her.

The girl continued to be a source of much surprise to him; he felt all the shy awkwardness of a schoolboy in her presence.
'Yes, indeed,' she replied, in a very low voice, without turning her head.
'You are not frightened of it?'
At this she turned and looked at him with an expression of astonishment. 'No, indeed. Why should I be? The water won't come up so far as this!'
'Ah! one never knows what it will do,' he said, yielding to an impulse to make fun of her. 'Sometimes the water rises over the church.'
She broke into a hearty laugh, an outburst of noisy, healthy gaiety, the merriment of a sensible person whom the absurd delights.
'Ah! cousin,' said she, playfully taking the young man's hand, 'I'm not so foolish as you think. You wouldn't stop here if the sea were likely to come up over the church.'
Lazare laughed in his turn, and clasped the child's hands. The pair were henceforth hearty friends. In the midst of their merriment Madame Chanteau returned into the room. She appeared quite delighted, and exclaimed as she rubbed her hands: 'Ah! you have got to know each other, then? I felt quite sure you would get on well together.'
'Shall I bring in dinner, Madame?' asked Véronique, standing by the kitchen door.
'Yes, certainly, my girl. But you had better light the lamp first; it is getting too dark to see.'
The night, indeed, was falling so quickly that the dining-room would have been in darkness but for the red glow of the coke fire. Lighting the lamp caused a further delay, but at last the operation was satisfactorily performed, and the table lay illuminated beneath the lowered shade. They were all in their places, Pauline between her uncle and cousin, and opposite her aunt, when the latter rose from her chair again, with that restlessness of one who can never remain

still.
'Where is my bag? Wait a moment, my dear; I am going to give you your mug. Take the glass away, Véronique. The little girl is used to having her own mug.'
She took a silver mug, already a little battered, out of her bag, and, having first wiped it with her napkin, placed it before Pauline. Then she put the bag away behind her, on a chair. The cook brought in some vermicelli soup, warning them, in her crabbed fashion, that it was much overcooked. No one dared complain, however. They were all very hungry, and the soup hissed in their spoons. Next came some soup-beef. Chanteau, fond of dainties, scarcely took any of it, reserving himself for the leg of mutton. But when this was placed upon the table there was a general outcry. It was like fried leather; surely they could not eat it!
'I knew very well how it would be,' said Véronique, placidly. 'You oughtn't to have kept it waiting.'
Pauline, with a laugh, cut her meat up into little bits, and managed to swallow it, in spite of its toughness. As for Lazare, he was quite unconscious of what he had upon his plate, and would have eaten slices of dry bread without knowing that they were not cut from a fowl's breast. Chanteau, however, gazed at the leg of mutton with a mournful expression.
'And what else have you got, Véronique?'
'Fried potatoes, sir.'
He made a gesture of despair and threw himself back in his chair.
'Shall I bring the beef back again, sir?' asked the cook.
But he answered her with a melancholy shake of his head.
'As well have bread as boiled beef. Oh, my gracious! what a dinner! and just in this bad weather, too, when we can't get any fish.'
Madame Chanteau, who was a very small eater, looked at him compassionately.
'My poor dear,' she said, suddenly, 'you quite distress me. I

have brought a little present with me; I meant it for to-morrow, but as there seems to be a famine this evening——'
She had opened her bag as she spoke and drew out of it a pan of *foie gras* . Chanteau's eyes flashed brightly. *Foie gras!* Ah, it was forbidden fruit! A luxury which he adored, but which his doctor had absolutely forbidden him to touch.
'You know,' continued his wife, 'you must have only a very little. Don't be foolish, now, or you shall never have any more.'
Chanteau had caught hold of the pan, and he began to open it with trembling hands. There were frequently tremendous struggles between his greediness and his fear of gout; and almost invariably it was his greediness that got the upper hand. Never mind! it was too good to resist, and he would put up with the pain that would follow.
Véronique, who had watched him helping himself to a thick slice, took herself off to the kitchen, grumbling as she went: 'Well, well! how he will bellow to-morrow!'
The word 'bellow' was habitually on her tongue, and her master and mistress had grown quite used and reconciled to it, so naturally and simply did it come from her lips. When the master had an attack of gout he bellowed, according to Véronique, and she was never scolded for her want of respect in saying so. The dinner ended very merrily. Lazare jokingly dispossessed his father of the *foie gras* . When the cheese and biscuits were put upon the table, Matthew's sudden appearance caused a boisterous commotion. Until then he had been lying asleep under the table. But the arrival of the biscuits had awakened him. He seemed to have scented them in his sleep. Every evening, just at this stage of the meal, it was his custom to get up and shake himself and make the round of the table, questioning the faces of the diners to see if they were charitably disposed. Usually it was Lazare who first took pity upon him, but that evening Matthew, on his second circuit of the table, halted by Pauline's side and gazed up at

her earnestly with his honest human-like eyes; and then, divining in her a friend both of man and beast, he laid his huge head on her little knee, without dropping his glance of mild supplication.
'Oh, what a shameful beggar you are!' said Madame Chanteau. 'Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Matthew, to be so greedy?'
The dog swallowed at a single gulp the piece of biscuit which Pauline offered him, and then again laid his head on her little knee, asking for another piece, with his eyes constantly fixed on those of his new friend. She laughed at him and kissed him and found him very amusing, with his flattened ears and the black spot under his left eye, the only spot of colour that marked his rough white hairy coat.
Then there came a diversion of another character. Minouche, growing jealous, leapt lightly upon the edge of the table, and began to purr and rub her head against the little girl's chin, swaying her supple body the while with all the grace of a young kid. To poke one with her cold nose and kiss one lightly with her sharp teeth, while she pounded about with her feet like a baker kneading dough, was her feline way of caressing. Pauline was now quite delighted between the two animals. The cat on her left, the dog on her right, took possession of her and worried her shamefully in order to secure all her biscuits.
'Send them away,' said her aunt. 'They will leave you nothing for yourself.'
'Oh! that doesn't matter,' she placidly replied, feeling quite happy in being despoiled.
They finished, and Véronique removed the dishes. The two animals, seeing the table quite bare, gave their lips a last lick and then took themselves off, without even saying 'thank you.'
Pauline rose from her chair, and went to stand by the window, straining her eyes to penetrate the darkness. Ever since the soup had been put upon the table she had been

watching the window grow darker and darker, till it had gradually become as black as ink. Now it was like an impenetrable wall; the dense darkness had hidden everything—sky, sea, village, and even church itself. Nevertheless, without feeling in the least disturbed by her cousin's jests, she tried to distinguish the water, worrying to find out how far the tide was going to rise; but she could only hear its ever-increasing roar, its angry threatening voice, which seemed to grow louder every minute amidst the howling of the wind and the splashing of the rain. Not a glimmer, not even the whiteness of the foam, could be seen in that chaos; and nothing was heard but the rush of the waves, lashed on by the gale in the black depths.

'Dear me,' said Chanteau, 'it is coming up stiffly, and yet it won't be high-water for another couple of hours.'

'If the wind were to blow from the north,' put in Lazare, 'Bonneville would certainly be swept away. Fortunately for us here, it is coming slantwise.'

The little maid had turned and was listening to them, her big eyes full of an expression of anxious pity.

'Bah!' said Madame Chanteau, 'we are safe under shelter, and we must let other folks get out of their trouble as best they may——Tell me, my dear, would you like a cup of hot tea? And then, afterwards, we will go to bed.'

Véronique had laid an old red cloth, with a faded pattern of big bunches of flowers, over the dinner-table, around which the family generally spent the evening. They took their accustomed places. Lazare, who had left the room for a moment, came back carrying an inkstand, a pen, and a whole handful of papers, and, seating himself beneath the lamp-light, he began to copy some music. Madame Chanteau, whose eyes since her return had never ceased following her son with an affectionate glance, suddenly became very stiff and surly.

'That music of yours again! You can't devote an evening to us, then, even on the night of my return home?'

'But, mother, I am not going out of the room. I mean to stay with you. You know very well that this doesn't interfere with my talking. Fire away and talk to me, and I will answer you.'

He went on with his work, covering half the table with his papers. Chanteau had stretched himself out comfortably in his arm-chair, with his hands hanging listlessly at his sides. In front of the fire Matthew lay asleep, while Minouche, who had sprung upon the table again, was performing an elaborate toilet, carefully licking her stomach, with one leg cocked up in the air. The falling light from the hanging lamp seemed to make everything cosy and homelike, and Pauline, who with half-closed eyelids had been smiling upon her newly-found relatives, could no longer keep herself from sleep, worn out as she was with fatigue and rendered drowsy by the heat of the room. Her head slipped down upon her arm, which was resting on the table, and lay there, motionless, beneath the placid glow of the lamp. Her delicate eyelids looked like a silk veil cast over her eyes, and soft regular breath came gently from her pure lips.

'She must be tired out,' said Madame Chanteau, lowering her voice. 'We will just wake her up to give her some tea, and then I will take her to bed.'

Then silence reigned in the room. No sound broke upon the howling of the storm except the scratching of Lazare's pen. It was perfect quiet, the habitual sleepiness of life spent every evening in the same spot. For a long time the father and mother looked at each other without saying a word. At last Chanteau asked, in a hesitating voice:

'And is Davoine doing well at Caen?'

'Bah! Doing well, indeed! I told you that you were being taken in!'

Now that the child was fast asleep they could talk. They spoke in low tones, however, and at first seemed inclined to tell each other what there was to be told as briefly as possible. But presently passion got the better of them and

carried them on, and, by degrees, all the worries of the household became manifest.

At the death of his father the former journeyman carpenter, who had carried on his timber-trade with ambitious audacity, Chanteau had found the business considerably compromised. A very inactive man himself, unaspiring and careful, he had contented himself with simply putting matters on a safe basis, by dint of good management, and living upon a moderate but sure profit. The one romance of his life was his marriage. He had married a governess whom he had met in a friend's family. Eugénie de la Vignière, the orphan daughter of one of the ruined squireens of the Cotentin, reckoned upon fanning his indolent nature into ambition. But he with his imperfect education, for he had been sent late to school, recoiled from vast schemes, and opposed his own natural inertness to the ambitious plans of his wife. When their son was born, she transferred to that child her hopes for the family's rise in life, sent him to college, and superintended his studies every evening herself. But a last disaster upset all her plans. Chanteau, who had suffered from gout from the time he was forty years of age, at last experienced such severe and painful attacks that he began to talk about selling his business. To Madame Chanteau this portended straitened means and mediocrity, the spending of their remaining days in retirement on their petty savings, and the casting of her son into the struggle for life, without the support of an income of twenty thousand francs, such as she had dreamed of for him.

Thereupon she had insisted upon having, at any rate, a hand in the sale. The profits were about ten thousand francs a year, on which the family made a considerable show, for Madame Chanteau was fond of giving parties. Having discovered a certain Davoine, she had worked out the following scheme. Davoine was to buy the timber business for a hundred thousand francs, but he was only to

pay fifty thousand in money; in consideration of the other fifty thousand remaining unpaid, the Chanteaus were to become his partners in the business and share the profits. This man Davoine appeared to be a very bold fellow, and, even if he did not extend the business of the firm, they would still be sure of five thousand francs a year, which, added to the interest of the fifty thousand invested in stock, would give them altogether an income of eight thousand francs. [2] And on this they would get on as well as they could, pending the time when their son should achieve some brilliant success and be able to extricate them from a life of mediocrity.

It was upon these principles that the business was sold. Two years previously Chanteau had bought a seaside house at Bonneville, which he had been able to get as a bargain through the bankruptcy of an insolvent debtor. Instead of selling it again at a profit, as for a time she had thought of doing, Madame Chanteau determined that the family should go and live there, at any rate until Lazare had achieved his first successes. To give up her parties and bury herself in such an out-of-the-way place was for her, indeed, almost suicide; but as she had agreed to surrender their entire house to Davoine, she would have had to rent another, and so she summoned up all her resolution to go in for a life of economy, with the firm hope of one day making a triumphal return to Caen, when her son should have gained a high position. Chanteau gave his consent to everything. His gout would have to accommodate itself to the sea air, and, besides, of three doctors whom he had consulted, two had been good enough to declare that the fresh breezes from the open would act as a splendid tonic on his system generally. So, one morning in May, the Chanteaus departed to settle at Bonneville, leaving Lazare, then fourteen years old, at the college at Caen.

Since this heroic exile, five years had passed, and the

affairs of the family had gone from bad to worse. As Davoine was constantly launching out into fresh speculations, he was ever telling them that it was necessary he should have further advances; and the consequence was that all the profits were risked again and again, and the balance-sheet generally showed a loss. The Chanteaus were reduced to living at Bonneville on the three thousand francs a year derived from the money they had invested in stock, and they were so hardly pressed that they had been obliged to sell their horse, and get Véronique to undertake the management of the kitchen garden.

'At any rate, Eugénie,' said Chanteau, a little timorously, 'if I have been let in, it is partly your fault.'

But she repudiated the responsibility altogether. She always conveniently forgot that the partnership with Davoine was her own work.

'My fault indeed!' she replied drily. 'How can that be? Am I laid up? If you were not such an invalid, we might perhaps be millionaires.'

Whenever his wife attacked him in this bitter fashion, he always lowered his head with pain and shame at the thought that it was his illness that was ruining the family.

'We must wait and be patient,' he murmured. 'Davoine appears to be very confident of the success of his new scheme. If the price of deal goes up, we shall make a fortune.'

'And what good will that be?' interrupted Lazare, who was still copying out his music. 'We have enough to eat as it is. It is very foolish of you worrying yourselves in this way. I don't care a bit about money.'

Madame Chanteau shrugged her shoulders again.

'It would be a great deal better if you cared about it a little more, and didn't waste your time in foolish nonsense.'

It was she herself who had taught him to play the piano, though the mere sight of a score now sufficed to make her angry. Her last hope had fled. This son of hers, whom she

had dreamed of seeing a prefect or a judge, talked of writing operas; and she foresaw that in the future he would be reduced to running about the streets giving lessons, as she herself had once done.

'Here is the balance-sheet for the last three months, which Davoine gave me,' she said. 'If things continue in this way, it will be we who shall owe him money by next July.'

She had put her bag upon the table, and she took out of it a paper, which she handed to Chanteau. He just turned it round, and then laid it down in front of him without opening it. At that moment Véronique brought in the tea. No one spoke for some time, and the cups remained empty. Minouche was dozing placidly beside the sugar-basin, and Matthew was snoring like a man before the fire. The roar of the sea continued outside like a mighty bass accompaniment to the peaceful echoes of the drowsy room.

'Won't you awaken her, mother?' said Lazare, at last. 'It can't be good for her to go on sleeping there.'

'Yes! yes!' murmured Madame Chanteau, who seemed buried in deep thought, with her eyes fixed upon Pauline. They all three looked at the sleeping girl. Her breathing was very calm, and there was a flowery softness about her pale cheeks and rosy lips beneath the glow of the lamp-light. Her chestnut curls, which the wind had disarranged, cast a slight shadow over her delicate brow. Then Madame Chanteau's thoughts reverted to her visit to Paris, and all the bother she had met with there, and she felt quite astonished at the enthusiasm with which she had undertaken the child's guardianship, inspired with instinctive regard for a wealthy ward, though her intentions of course were scrupulously honourable, and quite without thought of benefiting by the fortune of which she would be trustee.

'When I alighted at the shop,' she began slowly, 'she was wearing a little black frock, and she came to kiss me, sobbing and crying. It is a very fine shop indeed; beautifully

fitted up with marble and plate-glass, and just in front of the markets. There was such a servant there, about as big as a jackboot, with a fresh red face. It was she who had given information to the notary, and had brought him to put everything under seal. When I got there she was going on quietly selling sausages and black puddings. It was Adèle who told me about our poor cousin Quenu's death. Ever since he had lost his wife, six months previously, his blood seemed to be suffocating him. He was constantly fidgeting about his neck with his hand to loosen his neckerchief; and at last they found him one evening lying with his face all purple in a bowl of dripping. His uncle Gradelle died in just the same way.'

She said no more, and silence fell again. Over Pauline's face, as she lay asleep, there played a passing smile, suggesting some pleasant dream.

'And the law business, was that all transacted satisfactorily?' asked Chanteau.

'Oh! quite so. But your lawyer was very right in leaving a blank for the name in the power-of-attorney; for it appears that I could not have acted in your stead, as women are not eligible in such matters. But, as I wrote and told you, on my arrival I went to consult the parish lawyer who sent us the extract from the will in which you were appointed guardian. He at once inserted his chief clerk's name in the power-of-attorney, which is quite a common course, he tells me. Then we were able to get along. I went before a justice of the peace and nominated as members of the family council three relations on Lisa's side: two young cousins, Octave Mouret and Claude Lantier, and a cousin by marriage, Monsieur Rambaud, who lives at Marseilles; then, on our side, that is Quenu's side, I chose his nephews, Naudet, Liardin, and Delorme. It is a very proper council, you see, and one which we can easily manage as we think best for the child's benefit. At their first meeting they