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The Hounded Man

The
HOUNDED MAN

by
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TO
PAUL BOURGET

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At dawn, having lined up his four batches of bread and crescent buns, still warm, on the shelves of the shop, Lampieur went up to his room, and, with the whole weight of his weariness upon him, he sometimes managed to sleep. But when Lampieur awoke his anguish awoke with him. It gave him no rest.

Then the man threw back the covers, got up, put on his old slippers, and opened a little skylight in the roof to breathe the outside air, A thousand noises reached him. He identified them, one by one, from the rumble of the busses which shook the houses of Rue Rambuteau against his own, down to the tinkle—so feeble and yet so clear—of a bell on a distant peddler's cart.

Lampieur listened to these sounds like a man who has lost his bearings, and seeks an

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answer in the slightest sign. And the sounds of the street did answer him. They reassured him. They told him that soon he would go down and mingle in their mechanical whirl, in their fires, in their lights that were beginning to shine in shop windows, in their ceaseless vibrations.

Still Lampieur was in no hurry to leave his room. Each time he opened his door he felt what was almost fear at the thought that there was someone lurking behind it, waiting for him. . . . It robbed him of all assurance. And yet he could see that the hall leading to the stairs was empty, that no one barred his way.

"Let's go!" he said to himself, and hurriedly he closed the door behind him, and, carefully watching his movements, he hurried to the street and lost himself in the crowd.

Chapter 1

FOR three weeks the police had been searching for the Rue Saint Denis murderer, and every night of those three weeks Lampieur had punctually taken himself to a little saloon near the Market, where he was well known.

"Ah, here comes Monsieur Francois!" the host would call out. "Always on the dot. . . . It's a pleasure!" He would stand two wine glasses on the bar, fill them with white Bordeaux, raise his to his customer's health, and swallow the glassful at one draught.

It was that dead hour of the day preceding the arrival of the early evening crowd. A few shabby clients sat on the benches with their half-pint of beer, spread out the butts they had collected, and rolled cigarettes from

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the contents. Others munched the remainders of lunches they had brought wrapped up in old newspapers. Near the door an old woman who was known as "Everybody's Mother" stared into the street, watching for the arrival of fresh clients from whom she begged, with a certain dignity.

It was a strange dive, narrow as a hallway, filthy, filled with a clammy dampness. But it was not without color at night, when hatless, crudely painted prostitutes came in to warm themselves at the stove, mingling with the derelicts who were its most distinguished clientele. There could be found Renee, always wearing the same sweater, Madame Berthe with her eternal umbrella, Gilberte the consumptive, fat Therese, Yvette, Gaby, Lilas of Brittany, and Leontine who was said to have run away from home because she wanted to "see life."

Lampieur knew several of these girls. Every night on his way to work, he passed

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them where they stood near a dingy hotel. Sometimes they said "Good evening."

"Good night," he would answer, and pursue his way past the rows of shuttered shops, pretending not to notice their manœuvres.

Midnight still found them at their post, stamping their high heels on the sidewalk. Much later, five or six of them, walking up Rue Saint Denis, would crouch in front of the sidewalk grill of the bakery and ask for a piece of fresh bread. They had a string with which one after the other lowered pennies down to the baker, who took his money and replaced it with a chunk of bread.

Lampieur hated these girls. He was offended by their shrill brazen voices calling to him from the sidewalk, by their presence on the street at an hour when only policemen, solitary passers-by, drunks and those peculiar moving shadows of the night that seem incorporeal, are abroad. It was intolerable.

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Besides, these wretches disturbed him in his work and always left him somberly irritated.

What did they want? "All right, all right, I'm coming. You don't have to make such a racket!" All for a dime's worth of bread! He wasn't obliged to serve them! And what were they doing now, instead of pulling up their string?

"My god! Do I have to carry it up to you?" Lampieur exclaimed.

He hated the sight of that string dangling down the wall as though there was nothing holding it above. It reminded him of the horrible night when, returning to the cellar in which he had his bakery, he had found it hanging motionlessly from the grill. . . . Who had let it down during his absence? Lampieur did not dare ask himself the question. He had stared at it open-mouthed, incapable even of thought, trying to pull himself together. At last he had picked up the end of the string from the floor and tied a chunk of bread to it. Then he had put it

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out of his mind. Later someone had come and had pulled it up, silently, in the rain. . . •

"What a night!" remarked Madame Berthe, shaking her umbrella.

She came to the stove where Gilberte sat coughing.

"Have a gin?" asked big Therese.

"Yes," said Gilberte in a dead voice.

"How about you?" asked Leontine of Yvette and Lilas, whose mannerisms she was trying to imitate.

Lampieur, leaning against the bar, watched them as they accepted.

They were the cause of all his anguish. One of them, he did not know which, knew that he had been away from the bakery the night of the crime, at the very hour mentioned in the newspapers the next day.

How could such a glaring clue have failed to awaken these women's suspicion? At first

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Lampieur had thought himself lost. If he did not betray himself by running away, it was certainly less by a process of reasoning than because he lived so close to the scene of the tragedy. A strange power kept him invincibly on the spot. Not that he already felt the need to look again at the entrance to the house, with its brown door, its long and commonplace hall and, at the far end, the glass of the door through which he had broken into the *conciergerie's* room. . . . He would have gone far out of his way rather than pass that house. It was a much more subtle and elusive thing that forbade him to leave the neighborhood or to change in any way his ordinary routine.

"All right, one for me too. That makes three," ordered Leontine.

Leontine was almost a child, or rather one of those puny people one meets in large cities, faded before ever having bloomed, who at twenty look either sixteen or thirty, and never age any more. Small and shab-

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bily dressed, with her serious little face under the powder and rouge, and her silent and attentive air, she was unlike any of her companions.

Lampieur watched her. . . . Was she the one? He could not tell. But as he watched her, without betraying the torment of his mind, as he studied each expression and gesture, he began to notice her pleasant face, her blue eyes ringed with black, the gentle and submissive way she had toward Lilas the Breton and Yvette—this last a coquette whose expensively dressed black hair was kept in permanently alluring order with a net.

"Which one?" wondered Lampieur.

He suffered. He was powerless before them, and without hope of ever catching any reassuring sign. Yet what would he not have given to know how he stood with the one girl who had only to speak a word to have him arrested! Would she say that word? Why hadn't she done so already?

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What were her reasons? Lampieur could not guess. But by keeping silence—and at times it seemed to him she must have decided to do so—this girl became his accomplice, and had him at her mercy.

Chapter 2

LAMPIEUR lived in perpetual uncertainty, haunted, tormented, terrified. Yet it was not his crime that obsessed him. He scarcely ever thought of that now. And when he did happen to think of the old woman he had throttled to death in her little room for the sake of the rent money she had collected, he felt no remorse. He saw nothing but the money. And he congratulated himself on the perfect hiding place he had made for it—a hole in the bakeshop wall, plugged up again and the surface powdered with flour, exactly like the rest of the wall. Nobody would ever find it. He was sure of that. He alone knew the spot, and this knowledge was at times like a miraculous balm when his nerves were racked their tightest.

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He had played a lone hand throughout ; and yet, through a single oversight, someone, still shrouded in mystery, had the power to step in and claim the price of silence. How much would he want? Or rather, having stopped to consider, would he not end by refusing so dangerous an alliance, and instead reveal to the police the damning coincidence of the baker's unexplained absence from his shop at the very hour the crime was supposed to have been committed? A simple coincidence, people would say. All right, but how allay suspicion and keep the police from investigating so promising a clue? Lampieur despaired at the thought of it. Moreover, the trail once taken, discovery was inevitable. There was no lack of evidence. And what damning evidence! There was the little servant girl to whom, just three months before, the *concierge* Lampieur had killed had naively complained of having so much money to carry. Another servant, waiting to be served in the bakeshop, had not failed

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to scold her for her carelessness, and the bakery woman had joined in.

"Hide your money, Madame Courte!" she had said between her teeth.

"There's certainly a lot of it. . . . Just think!" the other had answered.

And Lampieur, who had been arranging his bread on the shelves of the store recalled the yellow brightness of that winter morning when, without any serious thoughts as yet, the idea of an old woman carrying several thousand francs in her purse had filled him with a somber astonishment.

What could he answer to all this if once it were mentioned? He had no answer. And Lampieur trembled between the fear that he would some day have to face the question and the hope, still vague and uncertain, that he might be spared. Who could suspect him? His conduct heretofore had been beyond reproach. Never had

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there been the slightest complaint from any of his customers. Moreover, he was not one of those workmen who are perfectly conscientious at their work, but lead dubious personal lives, frequenting concerts and dance halls. He never went to such places. As for old man Fouasse's saloon near the market, where he had his daily glass of wine before dinner, he was an old friend of the house and Fouasse himself, if called upon, would have sworn that not once in all the years he had been a customer, had Lampieur been drunk.

Moreover, to look at Lampieur, with his close-cropped head, his trousers hitched up tightly by a suspender used as a belt, his blue-striped vest, his body already bent, his enormous hands, his powerful rounded shoulders and his serious expression, no one would guess that behind such an appearance could lurk anything but a gruff honest man, of about forty, and without any conversation. In fact, he never spoke. He listened to some

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complaining of the scarcity of cigarette butts, to others complaining about their jobs, and about the police. . . . He listened and watched. No one paid any attention to him excepting when he put his glass down on the bar and called:

"Barkeep! Another of the same!"

This habitual reserve, impervious to the most excited questioning, stood him in good stead now when Monsieur Fouasse, having finished his evening paper, began to explain his theories of the crime.

"Sure, sure," Lampieur would answer.

"Just you watch, now, Monsieur Francois" the saloonkeeper would continue. "Just you watch and see if they don't have the rogue in no time."

"Ah!"

"Yes! How much will you bet?"

Lampieur was not betting. He would nod his head and, with a slow movement that looked natural enough even though there was no great assurance behind it, he would

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raise his glass of white wine and take a sip.

"Well, no, they won't get him," the saloon-keeper would declare. "Because a job like that, right at the very Market, was certainly no cinch! Do you want to know what I think? I think he didn't do it alone. There must have been two of them. Or else he had a woman for a lookout."

"A woman?"

Monsieur Fouasse shrugged his shoulders.

"Exactly!" he declared. "A woman! And if ever they nab him, don't look any farther. You'll see. It'll be because of a woman. It always is."

"Always," the murderer repeated after him and then, finishing his glass, he walked away with heavy tread, his mind reeling in black bewilderment, wondering whether he should continue to look for the woman to whom fate had forever bound his destiny.

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Lampieur had only to descend to his basement and find himself alone there with his oven, his kneading-trough, his basket moulds piled one inside the other against the wall, for the thought of the girl to return and torment him. She did not present herself like someone rising from a corner and advancing toward him. But she was there, in a corner of his mind, seated, silent, motionless. She seemed to be waiting. Each time Lampieur noticed her presence, he was troubled. What was she waiting for? Buck up! He wasn't going to be scared. That was stupid. He would line up his moulds, sprinkle two or three soft handfuls of flour into them before slapping in the nicely measured dough: he would come, he would go, pile more wood in the oven, and drive all thoughts from his mind. It was a mistake to let himself be stampeded that way. Wasn't he man enough to pull himself together? Hanging to a nail in front of him, his watch ticked off the hour. Lampieur

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weighed his dough, kneaded it. His mind was a blank. The oven was getting warm. . . .

Down in his cellar, little by little, the man forgot his anguish, forgot everything but the hour that slowly advanced through the night to the steady tic-tic-tic of his watch.

Then the image would come back. It was announced by a sort of a sudden vague anxiety that crept over Lampieur, and made him attentive to the slightest sound. She was coming back. She was irresistible. And, if he tried to fight back her sinister clutch, she made effective use of the slightest noise behind his back, or the faintest echo of footsteps pacing the sidewalk, to strike terror into the very heart of his anguish.

Down in his cellar Lampieur could see nothing, and he dared not wonder who might be walking by or perhaps stopping at the sidewalk grill. He thought of what Fouasse had said. The certainty that a woman is always mixed up in the failure of the most

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carefully planned job, just as the saloon-keeper had said, robbed him now of all desire to know this woman. Alas! Why should there be a woman up there, in front of the shop? Lampieur could hear her walking. What did she hope for? What was making her pace up and down over his head, without ever moving away? What was she trying to do? Was she trying by her nightly presence to force him to come out and compromise himself? Lampieur felt that if he gave in to this woman's will he would be lost—not so much because of his abandoning his work to approach her as because of the morbid need he felt at such moments to speak to her and to come to a showdown.

Already, when he was in the saloon near those girls whom he suspected one after the other, he had to make an effort not to address them as he now wanted to so much. What would he say to them? No, no, it was only a whim, one of those crazy whims that must be fought back at once if they are

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not to lead inevitably to disaster. Lampieur realized this. He pulled himself together. He must be crazy to allow himself to be tempted that way. He must be mad. He was losing his mind. Or else was he living wide awake in a dream?

That was the impression he had on certain nights when, under the spell of an influence he could not understand, he pictured the comings and goings of his mysterious accomplice around the sidewalk grill. Certainly, on the night of the crime she must have prowled that way, astonished at first to find no one down below in the bakeroom, then beginning to wonder why there was no one there, crouching, calling, dropping the pennies on the end of the string, looking again through the grill to see if the man who always answered was not perhaps asleep. How long had she waited? In the end, she must have gone away. Had she returned before he got back to his cellar? Lampieur would have liked to believe it. But what if she had gone through the maneuver

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several times, and yelled to make herself heard? He shuddered at the thought that some passer-by, perhaps even a neighbor, witnessing the whole scene, might have gone in secret a few days later to tell the police.

There was nothing impossible about that. In that case this girl who patrolled in front of the shop was working for the police. Her purpose became clear. She was laying a trap. She wanted to lure Lampieur to the street. Once face to face with her, how could he help betraying himself? There was no man living who could defend himself in a situation like that. Of course, Lampieur had only to deny that he was out at all the night of the crime. Who had seen him? It was very simple: he had gone to sleep in the woodshed beside the bakeroom. Anyone is likely to get tired. Especially on a night job like his, so hard that practically all the bakeries had discontinued it. Could anyone prove he hadn't been asleep in the other cellar as he said? Lampieur had no other de-

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fence. He would stick to this one through everything.

But why should he have to defend himself at all? Nobody was accusing him. Moreover, when he began to leave his bakeroom now and then for a drink in Fouasse's saloon, with the confused notion of manufacturing an alibi after the fact, there was no one abroad. Lampieur could not believe his eyes. He would have sworn that someone was there, as on every other night. Was it possible? The empty street with its shining sidewalks, its arclights, the closed fronts of its houses, opened wide before him, and it was not until he reached the Market that he met the first of the girls on their nightly patrol.

Chapter 3

THE days and nights followed thus crazily. Lampieur, who was counting them, could not tell them apart for the horrible feeling that they were still the same day and the same night, dragging with them the same black misery. February was coming to a close. It rained day and night, stopping only at rare intervals. All Paris waded through a liquid mud that the cartwheels splashed right up to the housefronts like black rocket fire. Every view was blurred, and the hurrying crowds made endless processions of umbrellas. Lampieur took to rising late. He would leave his room about six o'clock, not knowing what to do with himself. The rain-spattered windows of the deserted Market shone in the dull glow of the street lights. The place exuded a cold

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and bitter sea smell that filled the neighboring streets where one and sometimes two days' accumulation of garbage clogged the running gutters.

The air at Fouasse's was so poisoned with the smell of damp tobacco pipes and musty decrepitude that it was choking. Lampieur was used to it. It did not bother him. In fact he breathed it in with the delight of a man emerging from a nightmare into his old familiar world.

Every time he went into the old dive Lampieur saw Leontine coming in or going out and each time, at the glance she threw him, he found it difficult to suppress the wonder he felt at finding her so constantly on his tracks. He noticed that she was always alone when he met her, and that she no longer looked the same. What was the matter with her? he wondered. Her eyes seemed to have grown. He could see nothing else in her little face, and they burned feverishly, with a sad expression of weariness.

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ness and bewilderment. Lampieur was well aware of this, but he was suspicious of his impressions, and steadfastly refused to attribute these increasingly frequent meetings to anything but coincidence. Yet he could not help feeling she was trying to communicate with him. What could she want of him? And, if she really had something to say, why did she go about it in such a peculiar, mysterious way? Lampieur did not dare make a guess. He hesitated. He was afraid of Leontine. And, as the time for him to go to work approached, his fear became more and more difficult to fight, and he no longer knew how to resist the woman's subtle influence.

From now on it was no longer a mere idea that stirred fearsome ghosts in his mind and drove him to self-tormenting stratagems. The image of Leontine now joined in the peace-shattering work. He saw her everywhere. The obsession was taking visible form. It had a face and body, and they

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were those of Leontine with her wide and spell-bound eyes, her walk, her mannerisms, her obstinate gentleness, the pained bewilderment one read in her countenance. Every now and then she stood solidly before him. And, at the very moment when he saw her, when he knew that he had only to put out his hand to touch her, Lampieur could hear her pacing up and down on the sidewalk outside, and could clearly recognize her step.

"What's this? What's this?" he stammered in a fury.

He would then try to regain his spirits and put an end to the terror that haunted the very depths of his soul. But he didn't have the breath . . . he was shaking like a leaf. Sweat poured from him. He feared that, even were he capable of calling her, she would not answer. Nevertheless he did not doubt for a moment that she was standing up there, in front of the shuttered shop. It was she who paced up and down there, she and no other. As soon as night fell a

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morbid need must possess her to walk up the street, to prowl like a soul in pain around the bakeshop, to approach the grill, choose a spot on which to stand motionless, for hour after hour. . . . Why shouldn't she answer if he called? Perhaps she was waiting to be called. What was there to prevent Lampieur from calling? Where was the risk? He would risk nothing. Besides, he didn't have to call Leontine by name. He had only to make some sort of a cry, or to whistle. She would understand. She would stoop down and he could say:

"Well, what do you want?"

So arguing Lampieur moved away from the grill, filled with an indescribable excitement at the temptation to call the girl. He paced his cellar with great strides, and at last resumed his work. The most sanguine thoughts came to him in hordes, and he clutched at them like a drowning man snatching at anything within reach. But they were frail straws to keep him above water.

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They could not support him for long. They broke or eluded his grasp, and a few more treacherous ones got tangled about him and fettered him. Lampieur still snatched at them, in vain. In vain did he bring the full force of his obstinacy to bear on the obsession. Soon he returned to Leontine, and some abominable thought that, a few minutes before, he had welcomed for the hope it seemed to offer, now tormented him as though it were decreed that he should go through the worst agonies of fear and approaching madness.

What was this voice that whispered to him, "That isn't Leontine up there. . . . It isn't she. . . . Perhaps it's someone else. . . . Perhaps it's no one. . . . Go and see! Go on up! You were mistaken. . . . There never was anybody. Why should you think the watcher hid herself? It's nothing but the sound of the rain. . . . Listen! Don't you hear something? Listen! Listen! What's that

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noise? You can't stay here in uncertainty.

. . . Go on! Go on up!"

"Go on up!" the voice commanded.

Lampieur would not go up. A shadow, the shadow of his terror, staggered about, bumping into the walls. He followed it with burning eyes. It enveloped him in a maze of steps, stumbled, rose, leaned against the kneading-trough, tried to climb it to reach the grill and flee. Was it the shadow that had spoken? It was silent now. It scuttled about in a nightmare silence in which a thousand sounds seemed to jostle noiselessly there, right in front of him, a thousand sounds that he could not hear, that nevertheless resounded within him with a gruesome clamor.

Still Lampieur held his ground, and refused to go and see who stood in the street for, had he found no one, as the voice had whispered, every hope of escaping the lurking madness he sensed all around him would fade, and he would no longer have the

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strength to do anything to save himself. No, he would not go out to look. He would not go! What torture! He would not go! For a moment the sense that he had conquered himself filled him with a sort of unhappy triumph.

It was, however, nothing but a respite in the endless fight. At each return of his obsession Lampieur retreated, step by step, and each time he lost irrecoverable ground. Every moment of calm was followed by another crisis, more deadly than the last, that wore him out as falling water, drop by drop, eats away a stone. His will was dwindling. Lampieur was only too sure that some night, he could not say when, he would give in to a will more obstinate than his own and go up, out to the street, and find out for certain whether someone were really there.

Chapter 4

IT WAS really Leontine who paced the street above the bakeroom. Lampieur had seen her from behind the shutters of the shop. He was now waiting, motionless, for her to return silently again, as she had done before. . . . The girl suspected nothing. She walked stooping in the rain. Her clothes were soaking. Her shoes were full of water, but she seemed not to notice it, she was so weary and incapable of thought. One single fixed idea led her, drove her, forced her to advance noiselessly toward the shop. Lampieur, who was waiting for the moment when she would pass the place, could not hear her step. It was strange. He wondered how he had been able to recognize her step from the cellar, since she now moved like a shadow. A few moments ago

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she had almost frightened him with this startling way of slowly moving, of gliding rather than walking, and of suddenly merging into the night. How far down the street would she go before retracing her steps? Lampieur had no idea. He could only make a thousand guesses and remain rooted to his place with bated breath, without making a single movement for fear of revealing to Leontine that she was being watched.

How long she took to return! Lampieur was wretched with disappointment and morbid anxiety. The crack in the shutter showed him a narrow field of sidewalk, directly in front of the shop door, and nothing else. Had Leontine halted just outside his field of vision? He strained his ears in vain. He could scarcely distinguish faintly in the sounds that came from around the Market the rumble of the marketmen's heavy rigs or the sudden startling shriek of a motor horn. At times a cold, damp wind whistling

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through the shutters, drove the rain against them. The shadow of a street lamp writhed on the sidewalk. The man could hear and see nothing else. The street was deserted. Nothing moved in it but the wind. Even the wind fell at times and the lonely rain fell very straight, silent, close, indifferent, as if from time immemorial it had chosen this very day and this banal sleeping street wherein to bury itself.

Watching it drop from the sky without troubling the silence, Lampieur little by little lost all control over himself. An apprehension born of his desire to see Leontine and of the failure of his vigil, kept him from remembering why it was he stood there behind the shutters, straining his very soul toward some nameless thing, that was perhaps no more than a dream. Of course he had a definite objective, and doubtless he would reach it. But after that, what? When the girl came, would he go to her? **Would he speak to her? . . . He was**

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still tormented by the words of Fouasse—"If ever they nab him, don't look any further. You'll see. It'll be because of a woman. It always is. . . ." Lampieur repeated the sentence. Each word, each letter was deeply graven in his memory. What would he do? And, having given in to the obsessing need to know who paced up and down on the sidewalk, could he be sure now that he would have the strength not to go to the woman, not to reveal to her his anguish? He was far from sure. . . . And yet if he let her know him, if he changed her suspicions to certainties, he was lost. Fouasse had warned him without knowing it. "If ever they nab him. . . ." As though he were reading from a printed page, Lampieur spelled out the phrase:

"If ever they nab htm. . . ."

Couldn't he understand what it meant? It had a meaning, all right. A brutal meaning—he would be nabbed—he, **Lampieur**.

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. . . Exactly. . . . Why not? Had he forgotten his crime? That's right. . . . He hadn't forgotten it, but he didn't think of it—scarcely ever thought of it. In his mind, it was less the crime that mingled memories with painful thoughts, than that disconcerting matter of the string, and the complicity in which Leontine was mixed up. How could it have happened? Why? It was unreasonable. A murderer without remorse? He, a murderer, had none. He didn't ever know yet what remorse was. For the first two or three days a sort of astonishment had mingled with his fear. Then his fear had crowded out every other feeling, while he acquired a vague notion that he would not be troubled if he continued to live as usual. It seemed that something like a tacit understanding had been reached between his conscience and the mechanical force of his most fixed habits. And so, having nothing more to fear from that quarter, Lampieur had begun to think of his un-

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willing accomplice and her denouncing him to the police, and he had only one care—to escape from her.

"If they nab him . . ." he repeated almost aloud, "nab him. . . ." The thought was intolerable. It harassed him. It seemed to mock him, to laugh, to reproach him for waiting for Leontine without knowing what he wanted to do when she came. When he had spoken to her, did he want her to denounce him? She was the woman Fouasse had meant. Lampieur had no worse enemy in the world. Couldn't he feel it? Of course he felt it. He knew it. He was convinced of it. But the mood in which his thoughts turned lay heavily within him, confounding pleasure and horror to the point where he could no longer distinguish between them, and he savored them both with a somber joy.

If Leontine had appeared at that moment Lampieur would certainly have gone to her and confessed everything. He had half-

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opened the door of the shop, widening his field of vision. But Leontine was not there, and Lampieur felt an irritation that grew as the time passed, bringing him nothing but the indistinct, far-off sounds of the night and the occasional hoarse shriek of the little engine that was drawing freight cars up Boulevard Saint Michel toward the Market. Perhaps Leontine had wandered into a bar. Perhaps she stood under the monster arc lights admiring the great wagons and trucks unloading heaps of vegetables at the market stalls. Lampieur fancied her frail figure in the midst of a busy crowd, staring without seeing the people bustling around her about their business. How could anything interest her but himself? He could not understand it. A sort of jealousy came to mingle with his irritation—a jealousy that was bitter and groping, stealthy, cynical, full of distress and vagueness, full of dull passion. Lampieur was not fooled by it; from the moment he saw Leontine and was sure it was she who

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prowled about the bakery every night he had felt that this girl belonged to him. A feeling that he did not try to understand made him assume rights that he did not yet possess over her, but that he nevertheless considered unquestionable. But for his crime, would Leontine have fallen a victim to this strange attraction that drove her and possessed her? He could easily see that she would not have. Well then, why did she not complete her mysterious patrol tonight? Why did she not bring to it the obstinacy of other nights? Why. . . .

Lampieur opened the door wide. The icy air and the wind-whipped rain struck him in the face. He took one step on the sidewalk, looked about. . . . Leontine was standing near the grill, motionless. He could see her, pressed to the wall, like a shadow he dared not approach.

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"Well?" he called from a distance.
"Well? What's the matter?"

The shadow answered nothing.

"I am talking to you," cried Lampieur.
"Do you hear? Yes. You! I'm talking to you! . . . Can't you hear me?"

He thought Leontine was going to flee.

"What brings you here every night?" he asked, hurriedly barring her way. He repeated, "Every night? . . ."

He now stood beside her and his arm, put out to retain her, dropped.

"You wouldn't be coming on purpose to bother me?" asked Lampieur after a short pause. "Say, I want to know. . . . You aren't by chance trying to annoy me, are you? Oh, I know you. It'll do you no good to stand there and play your little game. .. . What? You'd better answer me, do you hear? I won't let you go till you answer me."

He advanced and stood leaning over her, a dark look in his eyes, his fists clenched, his

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breath heavy, a monster of terrified anger.

"No! No!" gasped Leontine.

Lampieur gave a sort of hoarse and disconcerting laugh. Recovering himself he dug into his pockets the two enormous fists with which he had seemed ready to strike the girl, straightened up and waited. Leontine remained silent. She stared ahead of her at some vague point, and the terror that gripped her made her shake, and bend almost in two against the wall where she still leaned.

"Well?" said Lampieur gruffly.

He was astonished at having been able to keep himself from seizing Leontine and shaking her to make her answer. But how long was he going to stay like this? He gazed at her, studied her with heavy attention . . . and he was no longer afraid. He had mastered his fear. It had disappeared. A sense of emptiness, almost as though his very soul were absent, made a deep, gaping, mysterious hole within himself, around which every thought seemed seized

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with dizziness and disquiet—everything but his own consciousness, and, when he turned his attention to Leontine, he felt even more strongly that he had somehow become a great gap into which he had to tumble an immense weight. . . . It was this weight that pressed upon him and prevented him from making any movement or stirring from where he stood. It paralyzed all his strength, kept it elsewhere, far away, nowhere, outside of space and time, busy at the gigantic labor of first starting this weight, then moving it, rolling it, poising it on the edge of the abyss. . . . Lampieur shook himself.

"You don't want to talk to me?" he insisted.

His hands, still in his trousers pockets, seemed to him so heavy he could not lift them to raise them against Leontine. Why bother? The poor girl was getting enough as it was. Her teeth were chattering, her whole body was shaking, and at times she

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jerked her head or swung it slowly, by starts accompanied with more violent trembling of her hands and shoulders.

"There, there," said Lampieur, "don't be scared. I'm not going to hurt you."

Leontine seemed to be making an effort to answer.

"Me!" exclaimed Lampieur. "Me? It isn't true. . . . I don't want to do any harm! It isn't true . . . it isn't true. . . ."

He repeated a third time, so low he could scarcely be heard:

"It isn't true."

And, without knowing very clearly to what he had just referred, he felt himself suddenly delivered of some nameless obsession, while Leontine, daring at last to look at him, clung desperately to his arm which he did not withdraw, and burst into tears.

Chapter 5

LAMPIEUR was to remember later the *lj* almost voluptuous feeling he had had listening to a woman weep for the first time. But, at the very moment when she could no longer hold back her tears she was still merely Leontine to him, less a woman than his accomplice, and he was filled with terror.

"What are you crying for?" he asked.

He had not foreseen that she might weep like this, hanging on to his arm, so hard to drag along that she seemed weighted with lead. Still he dragged her, carried her. He did not want her to remain out in the rain. He himself was soaked. A kind of pity, mingling with his terror, made light in his brain.

"You mustn't cry," he murmured again

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and again. "It doesn't do any good. . . . No. Come, come along."

Leontine allowed herself to be led; she was at the end of her strength. But for Lampieur she would have dropped to the ground. But he wasn't deserting her, he hadn't withdrawn his arm. On the contrary, he was supporting her now and she understood vaguely that he was leading her toward the bakery.

"Come . . . come along" Lampieur repeated.

He pushed open the half-closed door, entered, found a chair on which he placed his strange burden.

"Thank you," said Leontine.

She had stopped crying. But she was still shuddering and shaking with hiccoughs, and unable to control herself. Where was she? She did not even wonder. She realized simply that she was no longer outside. The air was warm and very peaceful. In the doubtful light rising from the stairway she

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made out a mirror by its gray and oblique reflection, a counter, shelves, two trucks in which Lampieur had brought up his first batches of bread, a scale. . . .

"Monsieur!" called Leontine.

"I'm here," said Lampieur.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh! No! I don't want to," slowly murmured Leontine.

With a weary gesture she pushed away the memories, the thoughts, the images that danced before her and that, while remaining meaningless, threatened to assume a meaning soon that would revive her torment. In the endless maze that whirled before her eyes, Leontine was recognizing little by little the purpose of all her nights of vigil. She could not mistake it. And this thing that kept rising out of the deep and troubled movements of her conscience—she recognized in it the relentless force that had driven her, ever since the night of the crime, toward the grill where Lampieur had found

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her a few moments ago. Now she was so close she almost touched the very cause of her suffering. She was no longer out in the street. It seemed to her she must have gone some fantastic road from there to here. No one could prevent her from rising, from walking straight toward the stairway from which rose the light of the cellar, from going down to the cellar. . . .

"Where are you going?" cried Lampieur.

She did not turn her head. An imperious force had put her on her feet and led her to the center of the shop. From there she could see the first steps of the cellar stairs, the wall along which a rope held by iron brackets served as railing, and the vault of the basement. The light rising from down there illumined her face. Her eyes reflected the light. They sparkled. Lampieur realized that he could not stop her.

"All right," he grumbled. "Take hold of the rope and lower your head."

She took the rope, lowered her head. She

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did exactly as she was told, mechanically. Behind her the man walked as though he also were obeying the same commands, but, while Leontine descended stiffly, like an automaton, he leaned down and gazed into the cellar with an odd feeling of astonishment and stupor. He was haunted by the ridiculous idea that he had left some evidence of his crime about. What evidence? Was he crazy? Why should he have forgotten anything of the kind? Lampieur did not know. His glance, turning everywhere at once, questioned each object, the walls, the floor of beaten earth, the kneading-trough, the board that covered it, the cloth thrown over the bread pans, the split wood, a pair of old slippers, a napkin, some baskets and the rickety stool on which he sat at midnight to eat a bit of bread and cheese. One by one he examined these things with which he lived every night, and found them all in their place. Why shouldn't they be? Nobody had anything to do with them but

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himself. Still he studied them with a suspicious eye, as though by their disposition and the appearance they made they **might** reveal to Leontine the answer she sought from them.

Leontine, standing in the midst of them, regarded them, unable to advance farther. Her feet seemed rooted to the ground. Everything she saw about her entered tumultuously into her brain, sowing even greater disorder there. She could not understand. She stared. Her suffering seemed to be escaping her. It was not pain; it was a chaos of sensations and of the most confused ideas; an unreal saraband of images and memories; an extravagant rout. . . . Doubtless this place was a cellar. There was the automatic kneading machine; there the grate of the oven; there the pale opening of the sidewalk grill, and there, beside her, the man who usually was to be found in the cellar when she came to buy bread. Since Lampieur was **in the** cellar, **what was L6on-**

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tine doing there? She had not realized that Lampieur would be there. His presence upset everything. It absolutely prevented her from going back in memory, from facing herself in order to experience with all the horror she expected the sensation of again finding the cellar empty, this time by actually entering it, as she had seen it the night of the crime, when she lowered her pennies from the sidewalk.

"Sit down," said Lampieur.

He approached the stool and added:

"It's more comfortable near the oven. . . . It's warmer. . . . And then you'll be less in my way."

"Yes," answered Leontine.

She sat down as he had invited her, and watched him put wood into the grate, then take off his vest and shirt and draw out the baked loaves by twos and threes with his broad shovel.

"All right?" he asked after a long moment.

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Leontine nodded.

"On a night like this it's pretty comfortable here," added Lampieur.

"It's comfortable," she repeated.

A warm appetizing odor filled the air. The odor of burning dry wood, the odor of bread. . . . Leontine breathed it in deeply.

"It's funny," she added later. "It reminds me of when I was a kid . . . errands. . . ."

"Ah!" commented Lampieur, absently.

He turned. Somewhere a clock was tolling two frail strokes into the night.

"Speaking of errands," Lampieur observed, "the others haven't come."

"What others?"

"Why, for bread," he murmured.

"Why," she asked pensively after a long pause, "are you expecting them?"

"Me?"

She turned her eyes on him.

"I'm not expecting them," said Lampieur,

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"They come when they like and, naturally, when I'm here, they don't always come."

He spoke slowly, halting on each word as though, having used it, he had to recapture it. But he was troubled, and the words escaped him. They came all by themselves out of his mouth.

"Don't you believe me?" he asked.

Leontine had no answer; she didn't know. . . . Why did he ask her such a question?

"All right, all right," grumbled Lampieur, pretending to resume his work, "only . . ."

He did not finish his sentence. A compact, heavy silence, full of doubt and uneasiness, fell between him and Leontine.

Chapter 6

EMPIEUR found Leontine at Fouasse's the next day when he came down from his room at the usual hour. He did not experience the reaction he had expected. He felt no uneasiness at meeting her again. In fact he was almost pleased to see her; her presence seemed to soothe him. Still, what did this woman mean to him? Lampieur could not have said. It was not she who mattered; or rather, it was she, but indirectly; for Lampieur was less conscious of Leontine than of the peace of mind he owed to her. Strange peace, that has lasted all day, that lasted still. Did he understand it? All he knew was that he felt more sure of himself now thanks to this woman whom he knew and from whom he had no reason to fear anything.

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Leontine was watching Lampieur from where she sat, and he understood that she had come there entirely on his account. Lampieur wanted nothing better. He realized his power over this girl. Hadn't he hoped to meet her in Fouasse's? He had no more need for introspection ; he was relieved of the compulsion he had felt hitherto to torment himself and to multiply, as though for his pleasure, the agonies of his fear and his imagination. Could it be possible? He was filled with a new emotion—a sort of unexpected joy, detachment, a sense of secret deliverance. Lampieur could scarcely believe it. For the first time since his crime everything became simple and natural. He could see it. People, things. . . . What miracle had transformed the chaos in which he had been tossed for so long into this sort of small, peaceful and ordered universe? A miracle, indeed. It would have taken nothing less. Lampieur was sure of that. Around him were the wretched derelicts, the girls,

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the taciturn drinkers who made up the ordinary clientele of the saloon. They came; they went. Some sought quiet corners in which to sit before a glass of wine and empty it. Others leaned against the bar. Lampieur realized with amazement that not one of his neighbors paid any attention to him.

They were the same wretched derelicts who could be seen every evening at nightfall, gathering in the bars around the Market for protection against the cold and the rain. Lampieur had rubbed shoulders with them so often that in their midst he was proof against any shock. What fantasies had he woven around them? He had mistrusted them. He had been uneasy among them. As for the women, Fouasse's speech about them was not calculated to improve Lampieur's attitude toward them. He couldn't forget that speech. Still, its allusion, proven in the person of Leontine, had lost its former meaning for him. Pregnant at first with a mysterious menace, it had now lost its

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mystery and was no longer really a menace. Lampieur would have sworn to that. What could Leontine do? She knew nothing definite. There was nothing she could tell. He hadn't confided in her. At the last moment he had had the strength to restrain his speech, to control himself, to raise a sort of barrier between himself and the poor girl. He remembered it very well. Then Leontine had left. . . . He had accompanied her to the door of the store, and no one had seen them.

Thus do things happen in life without their balance being shaken or even threatened for long. Lampieur was dimly aware of this, for if he had gained a sense of self-confidence from his meeting with Leontine, it was only by virtue of a more treacherous exchange. Eh well! That was the usual price of those odd bargains. Lampieur need not worry about that. The important thing was that he should be free of the trouble from which he had suffered, and could begin

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again to live in precarious pleasure. Already, without his willing, it was almost a pleasure. And for all its unexpectedness he was enjoying the sense of it, powerless to shake it off.

"Well?" Monsieur Fouasse asked.

Lampieur shook the hand extended over the counter, and moved up his glass.

"Wait and have one on me," said Monsieur Fouasse.

They clinked glasses. Outside, the street lights mingled, and people walking in every direction were silhouetted against the windows of the bar. A gray mist, streaked with running drops, covered the panes. The same damp mist veiled the single brown-framed mirror in the room. Muddy streamlets meandered among the cigar butts through the soft layer of sawdust on the floor, and when the door opened at times, an icy draught ran among the legs while the noises of the street, which had been a confused rumble, rose to a resounding uproar.

"Hey! The door! The door!" yelled

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two or three men to "Everybody's Mother" who, on the point of going out, had detained a customer in the doorway.

Lampieur shook himself.

"Will you close the door!" put in Monsieur Fouasse.

And, as the door closed, he said simply, "I'd just like to see myself having to say the same thing twice in my own place."

"Well said!" commented Lampieur admiringly.

Only the night before it would doubtless have mattered to him not at all that "Everybody's Mother" showed herself obedient to the bartender's order. He would not have noticed it. But now Lampieur was interested in the slightest event he witnessed, and took part in it.

"So everything is all right," he said.

"That's the way it should be," answered Monsieur Fouasse.

Lampieur giggled. "That's the way it should be," he repeated, for his own satisfac-

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tion. No "Everybody's Mother" had the right to trouble the peace with her idiosyncracies. It was unthinkable. "Order first," thought Lampieur. By that he meant that the weaker must give way to the will of the stronger. Otherwise there was no meaning in anything. What could he have done, for instance, if Leontine had undertaken to resist him? Fortunately, she did not. She was easy to lead. She effaced herself. She was making herself as small as possible, over there, in front of a glass she had not touched. Lampieur was grateful to her for it. At any rate, this girl would give him no trouble. Her thoughts, her suspicions, the morbid anxiety visible in her glance, were of no importance. They would eventually change of their own accord, and disappear. Lampieur had no doubt of that. Besides, should she attempt to follow her desire for terrible certainties, Lampieur was determined to give her no satisfaction. For her, as for him, anything was better than that morbid

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curiosity he knew she felt. Judging from the effect it had had on him, such a curiosity only complicated things uselessly and drove them outside of common bounds. And then what? Lampieur had a horrible memory of what followed that.

"Well," he murmured, reaching in his pocket for his purse.

He paid his bill.

"I'm through being the way I was," he said to himself. "Good night, boss!"

"See you again," answered Monsieur Fouasse.

Outside, Lampieur turned up Rue des Precheurs. The fresh air, filled with the sea-odors rising from the gutters, filled his lungs.

"It's all bunk," he said to himself.

Chapter 7

BUNK! It was bunk, in fact, from which he had made his escape. But Leontine had left the bar after him, and was following him without his knowledge. When he entered the restaurant where he took dinner every night, she did not dare go farther, and waited outside, so that when Lampieur came out he met her once more.

"Ah!" he said, taken off his guard.

His first impulse, which he did not repress, was to take a step backward, and this angered him. Then he pulled himself together. All around him the lighted shops, the passers by, the carriages made a moving arabesque of light and shadow before his eyes.

"Spying on me?" asked Lampieur.

He pulled down the heavy peak of his cap over his eyes.

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"I'm not spying on you," answered Leontine.

Lampieur surveyed the street to the right, where he meant to go. He looked at Leontine and said, shrugging his shoulders:

"Isn't it too bad!" in a surly voice.

Leontine attempted to approach him.

"Go away!" cried Lampieur. "Go on! Beat it! . . . Do I know you?" he murmured as he moved past the store fronts. "I don't know you."

And, as Leontine said nothing:

"You'd better not bother me, now!" he declared as he started walking again.

Still Leontine followed Lampieur from a distance toward the bakery, and Lampieur couldn't stop her. What was he to do? Leontine never turned her eyes from him. When she saw him turn, she was all the more attracted by his gestures and the anxiety they betrayed. At last Lampieur stopped and waited for her. What did this girl want of him? Was she going to haunt him for ever?

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He dared not think of it. It filled him with hate and distress.

"Good God!" he grumbled.

Vague passers by went up and down the street in front of the bars. Some women at a hotel door were making signs to them. Lampieur turned away. Before him he could see the outline of roofs advancing into the sky, and, rising above them, the twin spires of the church of Saint Leu.

"What are you following me for?" said Lampieur when Leontine came within speaking distance. "Do you want to talk to me?"

Leontine nodded.

"Listen," he murmured between his teeth. "Come closer."

"Yes. The cops," she observed with a quick glance toward two policemen standing near a saloon.

They passed the policemen.

"Last night . . ." Leontine began.

"What?"

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"I didn't go after you, did I?" she said all in one breath.

"I'm not talking about last night," countered Lampieur. "I'm talking about now, and I don't understand your idea of following after me the way you're doing."

"It's not an idea," said the girl.

"Yes it is," said Lampieur. "It's an idea of getting after me to bother me, to do me harm, to make trouble. You think I didn't feel it?"

"I'm in trouble," murmured Leontine.

Lampieur scowled.

"Because I'm in trouble," she affirmed in a dull voice. "And I've had it for a long time, all right. For days and days. It's there . . . here, see?"

She touched her breast.

"Inside," she exclaimed. "I can't help it. I can't. It's impossible. And when you yelled to me just now not to follow you, did you think I'd listen to you?"

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Lampieur raised an arm, then let it drop.

"There you are," said Leontine. "I'd like to, but I can't. It's stronger than me. It drives me. It's as though I weren't myself any more. . . ."

She seemed to pull herself together, then:

"Are you in trouble?" she asked.

Lampieur did not answer. He fumbled a moment with the edge of his cap, and stopped.

"I didn't think of anything at first, see?" continued Leontine, also stopping. "That night when I came for bread. I had dropped the string and the money. . . ."

"Sure, I know" painfully articulated Lampieur.

He looked around with an uneasy, suspicious air, and, trying to regain a little assurance, he added:

"I know. I was lying down in the woodshed beside the bakeroom and I heard somebody calling."

"I was calling," explained Leontine.

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"Then you came back?"

"I came back."

Lampieur smiled oddly.

"I came back two or three times," Leontine continued, "and each time I called. . . ."

Lampieur's smile stiffened. It strongly emphasized the anxiousness of his gaze and the fixed serious expression of his motionless face.

"But, the last time you came, you saw me?" asked Lampieur. "Was there anybody else outside?"

"I was alone," Leontine admitted.

"And when you called?"

"There was nobody but me," she said.

Then she added:

"Only, the next day, there was all that in the papers"

"To hell with the newspapers," Lampieur interrupted roughly. "What does that prove?"

He broke into a forced laugh.

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"Eh?" he continued, moving on again. "I never read the papers. Don't pay any attention to them. It's none of my business. I haven't got any time, along with my job. What should it matter to me?"

Leontine pulled at his sleeve.

"Don't get angry," she said fearfully.

"Well!" Lampieur scolded. "Where do you get that stuff? I swear! I've had enough of that! If I listened to you I'd go crazy . . .

"And wouldn't you like that?" he added with a sort of bitter irony, to free himself from the uneasiness he felt.

At this moment, clinging to the walls and seeking safety in the bars, girls hurried by, and men raising the collars of their raincoats.

"A raid!" squeaked a voice.

Running steps could be heard on the sidewalks. Doors slammed as though at the approach of a sudden storm. Then there

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was a moment of silence, and girls could be heard calling anxiously to each other.

"Give me your arm, quick, quick . . ." begged Leontine.

Lampieur obeyed.

The morals squad was coming. They could be seen at street corners, moving abreast, and driving their wretched prey before them. They came from everywhere, forming a chain, pursuing their mysterious business.

"If only we can get by. . . . If only we can get by. . . ." Leontine was saying.

"Why, of course," said Lampieur.

He advanced, Leontine on his arm, almost dragging her after him, toward the policemen.

"Excuse me," he murmured and, while he recited his name and trade, and searched his pockets for some means of identification, a whistle blew sharply and the line of officers broke and let him through.

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"Let's hurry now," Lampieur urged.
"They might bar the street farther up."

"Oh dear," moaned Leontine. "What a life!"

"What a life!" repeated Lampieur.

He hastened his steps, dragging his companion from Rue Tiquetonne into Grand-Cerf alley, which they passed without a word. The lane led to other streets, quieter and darker. Lampieur and Leontine threaded these, without knowing where they were going, walking in silence, not daring to turn back. At last they reached a secluded saloon where they ordered wine, and sat down facing each other. Lampieur pulled out his watch.

"That's the eleventh time in a month," said Leontine.

"And they've never taken you?"

"No. Never."

"The eleventh raid!" commented Lampieur, looking at his watch.

Leontine added:

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"What are they trying to do?"

"Nobody knows," murmured Lampieur.

"People talk, sometimes."

"Think of that!"

"Why not?" Lampieur insisted, leaning toward Leontine.

She started.

"Listen," he warned.

She was uneasily moving her untouched glass over the table and trying to formulate a question.

"They won't find out anything with their raids, you bet," she confided. "What do they ever catch? They're giving themselves a lot of trouble for nothing."

"One good catch is enough," Lampieur interrupted. "Suppose they got you . . . Eh? Yes, you. That might happen. . . "

"I don't say no."

"Well? If it should happen that they got you, what would you do?"

"Me?"

"They'd question you?"

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"Likely."

"Ah, likely. You see? They'd ask you questions."

"What of that?" countered Leontine.

"What of that? What of that? . . .
Why, nothing. . . . Still, all your
tricks . . . hanging around the bakery
all the time. . . . You think they
haven't noticed?"

Leontine was trying to make an answer.

"And then, there's that notion of yours,"
said Lampieur in a low reproachful tone.
"That notion you won't tell me, that you're
keeping to yourself all the time to brood
over. I'm not blind."

"I don't talk about it . . . to any-
one," Leontine pleaded.

"But you believe it?"

"That depends."

"Oh, you can't tell me that," Lampieur
declared. "When a woman's got something
in her head"

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"What does it matter to you?" Leontine demanded.

Lampieur drew back.

"All right," he said, "let's not talk about it . . . it'll be better that way."

He swung back on his chair for a moment, pretending to close the conversation. But the look he showed Leontine betrayed him, and he knew this better than anyone.

"Let's not talk about it any more!" he grumbled, fighting himself, trying to overcome his need to learn more. "You're right . . . your notion doesn't matter to me. . . . You're free. . . . I don't have to bother about it . . . • Only," he stopped swinging, "if it should do me harm some day, I Wouldn't let it. . . ."

"Come on," Leontine protested, "don't talk so loud!"

Lampieur spoke with emphasis.

"You'd find me ready," he said seriously, and, laying his enormous hands flat on the edge of the table, he crouched in such a

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frightening attitude that Leontine lost all her nerve.

"But," she stammered, "my idea"

"As sure as I am here," he said. "I swear it. Understand?"

Both sat staring at the pale light in the bottle and glasses between them, so as not to see on each other's face the expressions written there. Leontine was frightened. Lampieur terrified her. For all her efforts she could not shake off the idea that he was the old woman's murderer. Every allusion Lampieur made to it gave it greater force and urgency. Without a doubt, Lampieur has committed the crime he was denying. His manner, his equivocal and furtive attitude, his bursts of anger, his violence, everything betrayed him. Why was he forever returning in roundabout manner to what Leontine thought of that tragic affair? Why was he so worried by everything relating to the crime? An innocent man wouldn't bother about it. He would have the assurance of a

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clear conscience, while Lampieur . . .

He broke the silence.

"What are you thinking about?" he asked, without detaching his gaze from its vague focus. "Still your notion?"

"Yes," she said.

He put his elbows on the table heavily and, dropping his inert, obsessing hands on the oilcloth:

"Go on," he murmured.

Leontine rose. Her fright would not let her answer. It shook her in a way that was painful to see.

"Oh, well!" said Lampieur. "We're going, if you prefer. I've got my work to do. . . . Wait!"

He emptied his glass, rose, wiped his mouth with a heavy hand, and handed a bill to the waiter.

"Well?" he called when he got outside, "Leontine!"

She answered with a sigh so weak that he

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repeated, "Leontine!" before joining her at the gray housefront where she was watching for him. They advanced side by side in the street, the prey of a dull uneasiness which prevented both from speaking.

"Don't go so fast," Lampieur commanded, Leontine began to implore him.

"Say," she moaned, "you're not going to torment me more . . . you're not going to go and ask me your questions again? . . . I'm afraid of you, now. . . . Do I know? . . . I'm afraid. . . . What are you sore at me for?"

"I want to know," he declared.

Instinctively Leontine put up her arm to protect her face.

"Oh! None of your tricks," Lampieur muttered. "Put down your arm and answer me. You think it's me, don't you?"

"I haven't any idea. . . ."

"The old woman," he added in a colorless voice.

Leontine staggered.

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"Don't be afraid," Lampieur said, holding her up.

She motioned to him to let her go and, leaning against the wall, she gazed vacantly about her. Lampieur approached. Then she began to breathe heavily as though her breath were short.

Lampieur shook her.

"I'll scream," she warned him, still trying to breathe. "I'll . . . I'll scream. . . . Don't touch me. . . . Don'"

"I will if I like," he declared. "But I don't want to, see? I don't want to. . . . Go ahead and be scared! . . . I don't care. . . . If you knew me, you'd know how little I care. . . . It doesn't matter to me. . . . And above all, don't you scream. . . . Don't you go screaming. . . . Here, look. . . ." He put out his hands, "You'd better not make a single sound, or if you do——"

He planted himself in front of her. Leontine felt herself losing consciousness.

Chapter 8

WHEN Leontine came to herself the deserted street in which she lay recalled nothing to her mind. It required a long effort to recollect why she should find herself in such a place. Rain was falling. Leontine took her head between her hands, then groped on the ground for her handbag. It was wet, and she wiped it on her coat. Suddenly she realized that her clothes too were wet, and she got up. But she could not control her legs. They fled from her. They refused to obey. It gave her an odd sensation, and she had to lean against the wall. Then she remembered dimly having leaned against this wall in the same way. She collected her wits. She recognized the street, and began to tremble in all her members, and her teeth chattered.

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"My God! My God!" she moaned.

She thought Lampieur was still there and that, standing in the dark, he was brooding over his obscure and tortuous designs. She sought him with her eyes. She looked all about her and, not seeing him, tried to collect herself. . . . No. Lampieur was gone. Leontine looked again, leaned forward. The dim street revealed nothing. A strange calm seemed to weigh upon her as in a dream.

"Where are you?" called Leontine.

Over there, at a distance which seemed to her unbelievable, the street opened into another street, where lights shone on the house-fronts. Shadows of men could be seen at the corner, like a quiet, thick swarm, seeming to move and gesticulate automatically. Tar-paulin covered wagons passed . . . horses . . . spokes of wheels. . . . Leontine noticed all these things. . . . She named them to herself, and, little by little,

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they began to lose their far-off aspect and to assume an almost normal appearance.

"Why of course, its Rue Dussoubs!" Leontine murmured in recognition.

She started toward this street, which she knew, and from where she could take her bearings. She moved slowly and painfully. The Market rose at her right. She could see against the sky its burning bush of light through the rain. The sky was alight with its glow above the black roofs, and wisps of glowing mist floated through the air.

As she moved toward the corner she began to feel at home once more in the familiar bustle of the Market. She could hear the hoarse voices of the rag-pickers putting up their carts for the night; storehouses were opening up. She passed smoky little saloons and dim dank recesses where hand-carts were being rented by the hour or by the night. Here were hallways with flickering lights, and here were the all-night coffee stalls. As she mingled with the night-life of the Mar-

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ket she began to feel herself. She watched the people, the houses, and forgot Lampieur. An immense weariness began to weigh on her, and she staggered under it like an overloaded beast of burden.

"Hello, sister," called out a porter who jostled her, bent under an enormous sack.

"Woof!" cried another.

"The lady's fallen!" remarked a third.

Jeers followed Leontine, but she did not hear them. She had only one thought as she made her way through the joking crowd, and that was to get out of its way and get to Fouasse's by the shortest route. But the big fellow standing in a doorway out of the rain repeated:

"The lady fell in the mud."

"Oh, it's nothing," Leontine answered.

And, as though to apologize for attracting attention, she added, "I didn't hurt myself."

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared the stranger.

Leontine continued on her way. Everywhere about her, in every corner and in every

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bar the vegetable peddlers, laborers, beggar women, tattered wretches jostled and scurried. Great trucks moved through this mass of humanity and drew up before the platforms without having hurt anyone. Porters came up and unloaded the trucks. This one contained neatly halved pink pigs; that one, carcasses of mutton; others, nonchalantly making their way through the tangle of men and traffic, carried piled-up rolls of skins and smelled of the slaughterhouse.

"There!" said Leontine.

She was in sight of Fouasse's. Another weary block and she was there.

It was close to midnight, and Fouasse's was usually nearly empty at this hour; but the raid had crowded the place, and no one dared go out.

"Leontine! Hey! Leontine!" several voices hailed.

She came to a table where Renee, Madame Berthe, fat Therese and Lilas were treating each other and whispering together.

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"Where'd you come from?" asked Madame Berthe, looking her up and down.

Lilas added:

"Did the cops make that mess?"

"Not on your life," Leontine explained. "I slipped and fell getting away from them."

"Say," whispered fat Therese, "they nabbed Gilberte."

"Ah!"

"Yvette too," added Renee, taking a gold tipped cigarette from her lips.

"And Peg-leg Marguerite, who was so stuck up," Madame Berthe announced deliberately. "Well, my dear, they threw her in like the others."

"It makes me sick," remarked Lilas the Breton.

"That is to say," Renee declared, pulling at the loose sleeves of her sweater, "the district's getting rotten."

"You can't have any peace."

"No, you can't have any peace," said Leontine.

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She took off her coat, felt it, brushed it and hung it over the back of a chair by the fire.

"Sit down," suggested Madame Berthe. She sat down.

"They're making it tough since that old woman was killed on Rue Saint Denis," declared Lilas the Breton. "They can't get over that, and we're the ones that suffer."

"Naturally," assented Madame Berthe.

"As though they didn't think the guy who did the job put it over on them," threw in fat Therese with admiration. "There's a good chance of that."

Leontine said nothing. She was examining the folds of her skirt one by one, and looking at her shoes under the chair so as not to be tempted to join in the conversation. What could she add to their complaints? All she could do would be to say too much. The memory of Lampieur, still pregnant with a nameless menace, kept Leontine's mouth closed. After all, it was no more than

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suspicion. She refused to make up her mind. No matter how strong her suspicions were, they did not prove that Lampieur had killed. She might have believed he had . . . perhaps she still did. . . . Did that mean that she was right, and that Lampieur's life was in her hands? It was too much for her. Still, the terror of the recent scene with him made her feel a dull resentment against him. She was still full of it. But this resentment was toward Lampieur the man, not toward the murderer. It was none of her business if he were a murderer. She knew that. It wasn't for her to interfere. Why should she? On principle? She had no principles. That was a word with no meaning to her, or rather one of odious association, since it was used to justify the actions of the police. Was she going to join in their hates? No. She had suffered too much at their hands.

"I'd rather die," she decided.

Besides, supposing that some day she de-

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cided to let these gentlemen share some purely personal impressions of her own, what was there to prove she wouldn't be the first victim? She had no defence. Much more, wouldn't they call her an accomplice for having kept quiet so long? It was already too late. She would be taken for Lampieur's accomplice-, willing or not she couldn't save herself from that, or from having to share in the retribution. . . .

"Yes, yes," Renee declared, "there's a good chance he's got far away."

Leontine shook herself.

"What do you think about it?" Lilas asked her sullenly.

"I think the same as you," quickly answered Leontine.

Chapter 9

TH A T night's conversation left Leontine in a sort of chronic despair and dread from which she suffered more than one might have thought. Now she was as much afraid of the police as she was of Lampieur, and she cherished her dread without any effort to understand it. Wherever she went, she felt pursued. Everywhere she saw traps laid for her. At Fouasse's, strangers seemed to be watching her. She didn't like their looks. These strangers would disappear after two or three nights, following one knew not what tangled mysterious trail. On the other hand, Lampieur did not return to Fouasse's. Where could he have gone? On several evenings Leontine waited for him around the little restaurant where he used to eat. She waited in vain. He did not appear.

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He must have changed his eating place. It was very simple. But in all this there was something strange and fearsome which fed the girl's terror. This terror soon became so morbid that she evaded the most innocuous passers-by, without reason. Everything took on an air of suspicion for her. She came to the point of considering moving out of the district.

The neighborhood where she had her furnished room, with its crowded avenues and its streets conveniently designed for her business, suited her well. But in that district, as everywhere else, the morals squad makes its rounds, and the women they watch have few secrets from them. Leontine would have been defenceless before them. She was alone. She was taking a chance, and that chance terrified her. She didn't believe in luck. She was superstitious like all her kind and a coward in face of her own thoughts, and she could not make up her mind. At

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last she put herself in the hands of fate, and remained where she was.

"Well!" said Lampieur. "It's you?"

"Yes," she answered fearfully.

He was talking to her from below and Leontine, crouched over the grill, was peering into the cellar. She had dropped a string, and called.

"What do you want?" Lampieur asked. "Some bread?"

"Give me ten sous' worth," murmured Leontine.

She saw him lower his head, move backward and disappear, then return.

"Drop me the money," he ordered.

"Well?" asked Lampieur in wonder, as she did not move. "What are you waiting **for?**"

He shook the thin string that Leontine had dropped to him, but she let go of it and **it fell at his feet.**

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"What?" he mumbled.

Leontine waved her hands.

"I didn't mean to," she exclaimed, speaking very fast. "No, I didn't mean to. It dropped when you pulled. . . ."

Lampieur did not answer. He shook his head several times, and his face took on a worried air.

"You don't think I'd have done it on purpose?" asked Leontine, still talking very fast.

At last she said, "Can I go down and get it?"

"Come on," answered Lampieur.

Leontine clung for a moment to the bars of the grill, and her first impulse, when she rose, was to flee. But it was useless. She opened the door of the bakery, and the bell clanged tremendously, it seemed to her. Then she closed it behind her and went toward the stairs.

Down in the cellar the light shone on things from below. Long rays, as though shot from a searchlight, fell on the walls and

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the furniture, leaving the corners in a reddish gloom.

"This way," called Lampieur.

A shadow, which suddenly cut off the light, moved over the walls.

"Oh! I know. . . . I know. . . ."
Leontine answered painfully.

She seized the rope in its heavy iron brackets and descended.

"Good evening," she said.

"Good evening," said Lampieur.

Leontine was touched by the gentle voice in which he answered, and that troubled her.

"Don't bother yourself," she said with embarrassment.

He went to where the string and the piece of bread had fallen, and picked them up.

"Here," he said, handing them to Leontine. "They're yours. Take them."

"I don't know," she commented, to cover her embarrassment. "Aren't things changed here?"

"No, nothing," said Lampieur.

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He looked at Leontine, and continued:

"You're the one that's changed. Don't you think so?"

"Me?"

"Yes. You."

"My goodness!" she stammered. "What makes you say a thing like that?"

"I can see," declared Lampieur, as he leaned against a wall of the cellar and gave Leontine a significant look.

"Ah!" she said then, "you think so?"

"Sure," he insisted. "You've come back. And, to come back, you must have got over being afraid of me . . . the way you used to be."

"I'm still afraid," Leontine admitted.

Lampieur gave a little discreet laugh.

"You don't look it," he murmured. Then suddenly changing his tone and his manner, he added with a sort of solicitude, "You're not too hot?"

Leontine wilted.

"Well!" continued Lampieur. "Take off

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your coat. You might catch cold going out. I'm telling you to take off your coat. Don't you want to?"

He approached her.

"Bah, you've got plenty of time," he argued. "Besides, since you've come, we've got something to talk about, eh?"

"I'm in for it," thought the poor girl.

Nevertheless she undid her coat and handed it to Lampieur who opened a door and hung it behind it.

"This," he said, from behind the door, "is the woodshed."

He added, without emphasis, "The woodshed, where I sleep some times, while the oven is burning, when I'm too tired. . . ."

Leontine listened, breathless, while her glance roved over the thick white walls and ceiling that hemmed her in. The heat was suffocating, and not a sound penetrated from the outside world.

"Even if I screamed, it wouldn't do any good," she thought.

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Wild thoughts leaped to her mind, and a slight shiver ran up her back. What an adventure! Leontine felt that she was lost.

"But what are you doing behind that door?" she found courage to ask.

"I'm bringing in some wood," answered Lampieur.

There followed a silence broken by the dull sound of rolling logs as the man filled his arms. Then he pushed open the door and returned, walking to the oven bent almost double under a load of wood which he dropped with a loud crash.

"Costs money," Lampieur remarked, pointing to the oven. "Night and day, without a stop. You can imagine. . . ."

"Yes . . . yes," faltered Leontine, "I guess so."

"Come and have a look," continued Lampieur, leading her toward the woodshed, "a pile like that lasts only four days."

He showed her the wood, piles of it reaching to the ceiling.

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"See?" he remarked.

An odor of the woods, of moss, lichen and sap filled the woodshed.

"What's that?" asked Leontine, noticing a blanket lying on the ground.

"That's my bed," answered Lampieur.

Leontine turned away. There was something in Lampieur's voice as he said "My bed" that no woman could mistake.

"Let's go out," she said then.

They found themselves again face to face in the bakeroom, where the heat was so great one seemed to be walking in flames.

"I think I'll go," Leontine suggested, to shake off the torpor that was gaining on her.

Lampier did not frown. But he gazed at Leontine with a glance so fierce that she became alarmed.

"I'd like my coat," she said quickly.

"Ah, your coat?"

"Give it to me."

"Wait!" Lampieur murmured.

A struggle was going on within him that

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could be clearly seen in every expression of his face.

"Ah! Ah!" he muttered. "Your coat____"

"I have to go," begged Leontine.

"No," said Lampieur. "You can go afterward. . . ."

"After what?"

"I've got a proposition," he began, trying to give some coherence to his words. "An arrangement . . . whatever you like. . . ." He made a gesture of irritation. "Anyway, think it over before you give me your answer. . . . Tell me, were you glad to see me again?"

"Please!" Leontine implored.

"Eh?" Lampieur grumbled. "Quit that. . . . There isn't any please, see? Only, since that night, I've been thinking about how scared you are of me, and I felt bad about it, because I'm not as bad as I look. . . . No, no, I'm not bad. . . . I'm not. . . . So I thought it out by myself . . . the way I live . . ."

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in my room . . . here, there, always alone, even in the restaurants. And I said to myself . . . Eh? You get the idea? I didn't like to think you were scared of me. It's a fact, absolutely. Don't you believe it?"

Leontine took a backward step.

"What?" he said in astonishment. "You don't believe it? Go on! You can bet your life I've been sorry about you. But you don't know anything yet about how I got the idea of being nice with you, and having you understand me. You can't know that. And yet I couldn't get the idea out of my head, at first, all night. Do you hear that? I kind of liked you from the first. And the next day I still had the idea. I've got it now, that idea about what you had become for me. But, already those things between us..." "What things?" asked Leontine weakly.

"Things that'll have to be got over pretty soon," he said with force. "And so I didn't

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dare to go where I could find you, the next day. I was ashamed. And then, what would you have said, eh? Who knows? I didn't like to seem to be running after you to talk to you. You wouldn't have listened to me. Well, for the first nights, I was almost crazy down here. Nothing worked. . . . It was your fault, understand, with all your scariness. It kept me from going out there into the street where you were and explaining what was troubling me. Fortunately working down here helped me get a grip on myself, and then I knew that you'd be the one to make the first move. . . ."

"I didn't want to come," said Leontine.

"But you did come. I knew you would. I was sure of it . . . as sure as I am here, and you can't imagine how much it pleased me. There. **You're** not obliged to answer me tonight. Think it over. Take your time. Take until tomorrow night. You can come right down through the bake-shop."

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"And if I answered right now?" asked Leontine, with visible repugnance.

Lampieur swaggered. "Then it'll have to be the answer I want," he declared in a low voice. Then, very calmly, hitching up his big denim trousers, he waited.

Leontine became white, and seemed about to speak, for a moment, but her throat contracted and she could not articulate a single word.

"Well?" asked Lampieur. "It's yes?"

He took a step toward her . . . another step. She gazed at him as he advanced. He repeated:

"It's yes?"

Leontine suddenly noticed that he was stripped to the waist. She could see his arms, his chest, his shoulders white and shining, and, for the first time in her life, she felt an overwhelming shame and disgust. But it was too late, and when he pressed her to him she could only say:

"What do you want of me now?"

Chapter 10

WHEN she awoke in Lampieur's room next morning she felt none of the emotions he might have wished her to feel. Instead, she felt like a prostitute, craving nothing but rest, feeling for one man the horror inspired in her by all men, and by her degradation. As she looked about her she was overwhelmed by a sense of humiliation, mingling with her shame. And yet she had no one but herself to blame if now she was committed to eternal acceptance of Lampieur's attentions. There was no escape. Whatever wretched consequences resulted of her adventure, she would have to accept them, for she herself had made them possible. She pictured to herself the horrible future she had brought upon herself.

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The fact was that she had given in to Lampieur out of fear that he would remember his threats and perhaps carry them out. She felt she could not have prevented him. She remembered the cellar with its chalky walls, the dead silence that reigned there, its air of a dungeon cut off from all the world. . . . Why, oh why had she gone in there? She could not remember. It seemed to her as though the events of the night before had happened to someone else. It was only in snatches that she recollected her far-off impressions, remembered her haunting desire to find her way to the grill, to lean down and to call Lampieur. That desire was the cause of everything. It had overpowered her, robbed her of her own will. Even now, contemplating her degradation, she felt as though she had been robbed of her individuality, and had become someone else. She was pervaded with a sense of wonder. She had in fact changed, and she felt a great pity for herself.

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Lampieur snored beside her, crushed with weariness, in the depths of sleep. If only she too could escape from her torment! But she could not. There was no escape from the horror of her thoughts.

"It's like that," she repeated over and over again, "It's like that. There's nothing to be done."

She examined the narrow untidy room. It was strewn with cigarette butts. A trunk served for dresser. Through the skylight the daylight streamed in, harsh, raw, cutting, painful to the eye. Leontine could not stand it. She turned, gazed at Lampieur for a long moment, then closed her eyes and tried to make her mind a blank.

"Ahhhh!" came from Lampieur.

Instinctively Leontine moved as far away from him as she could, and feigned sleep for fear he would wake up.

"What?" he murmured, as though in a dream. "What? You . . . you were waiting for me?" He stirred, breathing with

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difficulty. "What?" he continued. "I . . . I . . . don't . . . know. . . ." He continued emitting words, making no sense, but somehow betraying an indescribable terror.

"Come on! Come on!" murmured Leontine.

She shook Lampieur and gently roused him from his horrible dream.

"It's me," she said. "Can't you see?"

"Yes," he answered.

He sat up and gazed at Leontine.

"Weren't you sleeping?" he asked in a voice that was not his own.

"No, I wasn't sleeping," admitted Leontine.

Lampieur stared at her stupidly, then seemed to pull himself together as he fell into a heavy meditation.

Leontine had also sat up, and her eyes remained glued on Lampieur who seemed to have forgotten her for a moment. What could he be thinking about? She could not

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guess, but it was evident from the way he frowned and glanced at her that she had a part in his thoughts, and that these thoughts were tinged with suspicion and distrust.

"Aren't we going out?" Leontine asked sharply.

For answer Lampieur got up, slipped his feet into his old slippers, pulled on his trousers, went to a table and began to wash. Leontine followed him with fascinated eyes as he dipped his head into the cold water, scrubbed, dried himself. He attended to his toilet with the minute concentration of a man who is not sure of himself. As he emptied the dirty water into a bucket, he said:

"Yes, we can go out," and he made room for Lepntine who rose in her turn and began to dress.

It might have been three in the afternoon. The light that fell through the skylight was still strong and even, but it had begun to slant. Lampieur looked at his watch, dropped it back into his pocket, looked out

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of the window. The worry on his face turned at times into an expression of sad resignation. Whatever his thoughts were, he kept them to himself, walking about the room, sitting down, standing up, carefully avoiding Leontine. He hated that girl. He measured the space that separated them, and his thoughts turned on the thousand terrors she had made him suffer. He could see her outside, slinking along the walls. He could see her in the cellar. He could not get her out of his mind.

But all these thoughts and the torment they caused were as nothing beside the fact that this girl of misfortune was here, in his very room. He would have liked to drive her out. As she stood by the bed, dressing, Lampieur was filled with regret for his action of the night before. Now that his mind was clear, he felt no desire for Leontine. He could not understand how he could ever have desired her. What morbid appetite could have driven him toward

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her? All he wanted now was to get down to the street, and to find an excuse for leaving the girl, never to see her again.

But when they finally reached the street, they found themselves in the grip of a hopeless uneasiness. Each wanted to part from the other, but neither dared say the first word. People hurried all about them. Omnibuses moved noisily. The uproar around them was so great neither could formulate a sentence. Besides, it was not yet dark. Slanting rays fell on the houses and diffused a sort of glow that made the whole street luminous. It was this glow that troubled Lampieur and embarrassed Leontine. In the dark, probably, the words would have come. But Lampieur was afraid to see the effect of his words on the girl, and he feared to lose control of the situation, facing this girl whose thoughts he could not guess.

"Later," he thought, passing a weary hand over his eyes, "It will be better."

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"Are we going to Fouasse's?" asked Leontine.

"No," answered Lampieur. "We're going that way—"

He pointed in a direction opposite to that of the bar, and went on without another word.

"You see," murmured Leontine after a few moments, "I'll have to go to my hotel."

Lampieur did not frown.

"All right, go ahead," he said. "Is it far from here?"

"Pretty far."

"I'll go with you," he said, and followed closely as she turned to the left into the Sebastopol boulevard, where shop fronts were beginning to light up.

At this time of evening the streets were crowded, and the street cars dashed at top speed along the tracks. At certain points policemen would stop the traffic. The pedestrians who had waited in gathering num-

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bers at the corner would cross, then the traffic resumed its course.

Night was falling. Old women so faded and ugly one would have thought their charms had long lost all commercial value, were beginning to fill the scattered benches along the sidewalks. Other old women loitered in front of the shops. Sandwichmen plodded up and down under their placards. Pale youths walked along in groups, and young prostitutes, returning to their business after the horrors of the day, moved among the passers-by, throwing them painted smiles and sly invitations.

Lampieur looked at Leontine.

"Is it still far?" he asked.

Leontine did not hear him. She was making her way through the crowd without paying any attention to Lampieur. She was indifferent to his presence. To her, Lampieur was not this man who walked beside her, unable to conquer his indecision. She was thinking of the other Lampieur, the one

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whose crime, she had imagined, and who horrified her. It was the crime that exerted upon her an influence that nothing she could do would dispel. This man hung upon her with all his weight; he crushed her; he filled her with cowardice and sadness. It was no longer possible to escape him. It was no longer a matter of breaking with Lampieur. She had done that once, and she had been compelled at last to return, to call him, to go down to his cellar. That had happened only the night before. She could not forget that. And, to cap it all, Lampieur had taken her and then turned away with outrageous contempt.

Chapter II

THAT is what Leontine could not wipe out of her memory, for she had clearly understood that it was not a question of love between her and Lampieur, but of gross desire that nothing could help her escape. She had no illusions. But if, in default of love, he had only confessed his torment, she would have offered her sympathy, since it was this very torment that had attracted her to him. Alas, Leontine knew what her sort could expect, and she blamed no one. It was the way of life, to be accepted just as one accepts so many other unpleasant necessities.

Deep in such bitter thoughts, Leontine walked along, and Lampieur accompanied her. They did not speak. They walked side by side, seeing nothing. The boulevards were jammed with traffic.

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"My God!" grumbled Lampieur.

He paused. Then, as Leontine went on without paying him any attention, he caught up to her, astonished at himself for having failed to take advantage of the opportunity to leave her.

"Well," he thought, "what's all this?"

He felt an odd sense of injury at Leontine's lack of attention. "We'll see," he resolved. "We'll see. . . . This won't last long!" Deep within him all sorts of dim hostile intentions were forming and taking life. He did not resist them. Rather, they seemed to lead toward the goal he had had in view ever since that morning. What a goal! Lampieur himself was not yet aware of it, and he did not realize that his hostility to the wretched girl had been born earlier than that day. If he thought that his dislike for the girl, and his secret desire to make her suffer, dated only from the moment when he became aware of them, he was wrong. He had hated her stubbornly from

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the day of his crime. Perhaps it was this hate that had made him take her and humiliate her. He might not understand it, but there was no other explanation for his desire. His desire for her had been born of his hate, but he did not know it.

What need was there, anyway, for him to understand what had prompted his desire the night before? It could not have made more keen the satisfaction he had in the resolution he had made.

"Hey! Listen! Listen!" called Leontine, as Lampieur walked blindly on, wrapped up in his thoughts.

He stopped in surprise, and asked:

"Is this the place?"

"Yes, this is it," she murmured.

Lampieur saw a dirty entrance, a flight of stairs, a white globe on which the word "HOTEL" was painted in black letters. He saw Leontine, and she was looking at him, waiting for him to make a decision.

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"All right, all right," he grumbled. "Go ahead. . . . I'll follow you."

He took Leontine by the arm and made her go in first.

Her room, on the fourth floor, looked out over a courtyard and the kitchens of a building which was taller than the hotel, and kept it half in darkness even in broad daylight.

The window of the room would not close tight. A ragged curtain hung over it. Uneven tiles served for a floor.

Leontine lit a lamp, drew the curtain, and while Lampieur was closing the door she took off her coat and sat on the bed.

"It's big," commented Lampieur.

"What?"

"I was talking about the room," he said, and, not knowing what more to say, he sat down on a chair, took off his cap, and said nothing. He started at the red flame of the lamp, as though waiting for her to speak. But the silent minutes followed each other, and Lampieur's uneasiness grew, for he had

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suddenly thought of something that had never occurred to him before, something that surprised him and made him think.

For the first time, in fact, Leontine had ceased to be a nondescript, a mythical person about whom he knew nothing save that she was afraid and that she possessed a secret. Where was the secret? Lampieur could see the room, the bed, the wretched curtain that covered the window. All these things, which had no importance, began to take on a meaning and force him to think of Leontine as a person having a life of her own—even a person of special importance to himself.

Little by little he was becoming accustomed to this novel and disconcerting fact. After all, what did it matter if Leontine had a life of her own? What person, no matter how dependent on another, hasn't? He himself had an individual existence—only he had lived away from reality so long, in a world of suspicions and fears, that he

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was aware only of them and of the phantoms they engendered. This was the reason for his surprise and for the embarrassment Leontine had seen when he had sat down and stared without saying a word.

Leontine tried to fathom his silence, but in vain. If he had accompanied her to the room, wasn't it because he had something to say to her? Wasn't he going to say it? His silence became unbearable at last. It wasn't reasonable. It troubled Leontine, and frightened her.

On her part, she was wondering what mad idea had prompted her to permit Lampieur to accompany her to her room. He was acting so strangely. Was he mad? She saw him rise, move to the lamp, lower **the** wick. Then he went to the mantel, picked up the objects on it one by one and examined them, as though looking for an answer to the curiosity that had led him to them.

"That," he said in **a** low voice, picking up **a little photograph, "is that yours?"** He

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turned to Leontine and, still holding it in his hand, he added, "It's a baby."

"Sure."

"What baby?" he asked. "Have you got one?"

"Dead," answered Leontine.

Lampieur put the picture back and, taking a step away, looked around him sullenly.

"He died at three," added Leontine. "He was with some people I'd paid to take care of him in the country."

"When was that?"

"After I left home. In fact, I left home because of him. You can understand they didn't want me at home, with a baby. The old man kicked me out."

"And your mother?"

"Never had a mother," she explained. "Did you?"

"Me? Oh, I've still got my people," he muttered. "Only, they don't live in Paris. They don't know Paris. They're pretty good people, out there. . . ." He raised

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his arm, then let it drop. "Out there . . ." he added, and for a moment his eyes turned on a picture that he alone could see.

The moment did not last. Leontine had caught, however, an unaccustomed gleam in his eye, but it only cowed her. Lampieur broke the spell with a burst of ugly laughter, and became another man.

"Hey! What?" he asked. "Was I talking?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Leontine hesitantly. "Don't you remember?"

"Maybe I do," he said. "I talked about my people." He sneered, and added in a tone of contempt, "When that happens, I don't think only of them. I think of myself, and I remember that they were pretty hard. Ha! That time's far away, thank God."

"Don't think any more about it," Leontine suggested.

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"Yes," he said, as though talking to himself. "Yes . . . yes. . . ."

"We all have memories."

"It's funny! . . ."

He added, "Bad memories."

"Everybody has," she said.

Chapter 12

AMPIEUR understood now why he had wanted to be rid of Leontine, and he felt with sadness that he would not succeed. He was tied to her by too many memories. He could not break with her without having everything to fear from it. That is why he had followed her here, and why he could not make up his mind to go. For him the whole world was bounded by this hotel room which contained the girl. He felt it. He more than felt it—he was sure of it, and it made him angry.

And still this room contained a terrible danger if he permitted himself the half-confidences he had begun to make. They would lead him to far. Already they might have **lost him**. Fortunately he had caught himself

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in time. He looked at Leontine, and his hate awoke.

"Well?" he asked. "What are we going to do now?"

"Why, nothing."

"Sure," said Lampieur. "There's nothing to do. Your scheme's failed."

"What scheme?"

"Oh, I know," he whispered, "I understand. You think I couldn't see it?"

Leontine shook her head.

He continued:

"Come on: First of all, why did you go back to your hotel? Wasn't it so I'd follow you?"

"No."

"And what about the picture on the mantel? Say, I suppose you didn't know it was there? It's a good trick, you know. . . . the picture of a dead kid. It's caught many another."

"Stop!" begged Leontine. "You haven't any right to say things like that. . . ."

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It isn't true. . . . I couldn't help it if you followed me."

"That's likely!"

"The proof . . . the proof . . ."

"Oh, get away with your proof!" sneered Lampieur.

"The proof is that I wanted to get away from you . . ."

"What?"

"Go away . . . yes," she almost shouted. "Anywhere. Just so I could get away, far, far . . . Where I could have forgotten you."

Lampieur started.

"You?" he roared. "You wanted to do that?" He approached her. "Listen," he said, his face white. "You're lying. You can't forget . . . Don't give me such stories. You can't forget. It was so I'd be left alone that you wanted to go, so I'd go crazy again, so I'd go looking for you . . . So I'd . . ."

"Stop tormenting me!"

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"You're the one that's tormenting me," he retorted hoarsely. "You're the one. . . . Last night, you came just for that . . . you dropped your string . . . Eh? In the cellar . . . Than you called . . . And then you let go the string on purpose to come down . . . Will you tell me different?"

He towered over her.

"Answer!" he commanded. "Isn't it true? Answer! I want to know what made you do those things . . . Why did you come back? . . . What do you want?"

"Don't come nearer!" she warned.

He stopped short. She leaned, trembling, against the edge of the bed, gazing into his eyes with a look so intense that he could not bear it.

"Go away," she said. "Go away. Go! go! You can see that you must go . . . that you must leave me alone . . . that I haven't any strength left. You're only trying to do me harm."

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Suddenly she buried her face in her hands, and Lampieur stood silent. His hate was leaving him. It was giving place to a stupor in which came the odd fear that she would end by escaping him. He had wanted nothing more than just that. Only two or three hours before he had wished he could leave her and never see her again. But he had counted without her. He hadn't imagined that she could feel the same way toward him, and the thought wounded his self-esteem. It was unbearable.

Lampieur needed no more, now that he saw the situation in its true light, to make him try to mend it. He felt he still had a chance. So long as he remained, no matter what she did he would have the advantage. In fact, Leontine no longer dared tell him to go away. She had moved away from him. She stood waiting, and Lampieur could see by her pallor that she could not resist him much longer.

"All right," he muttered. "Since you

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don't want us to know each other any more, I'll leave you alone"

He put on his cap and, moving toward the door, he added in a low voice:

"We've got the same idea. Us living the way I thought It can't be done any more."

Leontine sighed.

"Don't make excuses," said Lampieur. "Don't tire yourself. We tried. Well, we didn't succeed. There are lots of others like us."

"What makes you tell me that?" asked Leontine.

Lampieur smiled bitterly.

"Because" he answered, and waving his arm as though pointing to the room, he looked at the girl with so strange an eye that she thought him sincere, and let herself be taken in.

"Well," he concluded. "To each one his own life, eh?"

He was perfectly sincere as he spoke, for

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he felt he must hold her not only because she could betray him, but also because it gave him a sense of pleasure to avenge himself on her for what he had suffered. No other feeling was mingled with this. He was pitiless, and in that lay his power.

Still he did not go, and Leontine did not have the courage to drive him out. New chains had been forged about them, drawing them together, and perhaps down in her heart Leontine blessed them, as though they were saving her from oblivion.

Chapter 13

AFTER that scene in which they had not A. been able to part, they entered a strange existence. Leontine came to live in Lampieur's room. That is to say, she waited for him, sometimes until morning, in an office at the Market, where he came for her, and they went up to sleep. They could be seen at dinner together in Rue Saint Denis every evening. Then Lampieur went to his work and Leontine employed her time as she had always done until midnight, when Lampieur met her at Fouasse's and gave her to drink.

No one had anything to say about this. It was perfectly natural. It was known that Lampieur earned his living and was a good workman. And so everyone agreed that he had the right to do as he pleased. But Leontine's companions did not look on it in

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the same way; they were a little surprised, and they sometimes talked about it when Leontine was not there, and sensed something mysterious in it.

There was evidently some mystery in all this. No one who gave it thought could doubt it, the two were so ill-matched. Lampieur's worried air, his rough and sulky manners, Leontine's reserve toward him, could not be overlooked. They were punctual enough in their meetings, but neither showed any pleasure. They drank at the same table, without a single word. Mutual indifference separated them even more than one could guess. What could it mean? Nobody knew. It wasn't usual. And when at last Lampieur called for the check, it was noticed that he often left Leontine without even a goodnight, and that she remained in her place, silent and motionless, as though in a dream.

If it was a dream, it was a sober one. But what would people have thought of Leontine

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and Lampieur if they could see them at home, when they went to bed? They did not exchange a single word. Lampieur turned in first. He watched his companion for a moment, then went to sleep, and Leontine lay down beside him, finally joining him in a somber rest filled with nightmares.

It was in sleep that they found each other. They were possessed by the same torment. It brought them face to face with the abominable necessity which forced them to take refuge together, out of the world of reality in a word of fears and eternal anguish. Through their dreams, in the confused mingling of their consciousnesses, they sought each other, in the illusion that they understood and sustained each other. Leontine never wearied of it. She brought a tireless zeal to the task. She spent herself prodigally. And when she awoke and found that she had to resume her daily task, she huddled against Lampieur, and sometimes she wept.

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On his part, Lampieur seemed to see in reality the vague forms that had surrounded him in his dreams. He saw them, and then all vanished without reason, as though through an evil spell, and he found himself in the presence of Leontine who was no longer any help to him.

These awakenings depressed them more and more, for the more Lampieur and Leontine strove to escape their torment, the more forcibly they were forced to return to it. And there was nothing else that could claim their interest. Nothing in the street or in the bars could distract them. They could not even become interested in people who they thought were watching them. These people at once become meaningless, grotesque, harmless. What was there for them to see? Lampieur paid no attention to them. He was mechanically rude to them. It was the same with his work. He got through with it like an automaton performing a set task. His body toiled away in the cellar, but

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his spirit was far away, or else near, perhaps even in the cellar, but busy at something else.

Lampieur would forget Leontine at such moments. She was nothing to him, or else she was only momentarily related to this or that thought, and it was of no importance. The only thing that mattered was that he had begun to brood over his crime, and while he did not suffer, he was troubled. Already five or six times he had had to pull himself together and make an effort of memory to realize that he, Lampieur, had actually committed it. At times he believes himself the victim of a horrible delusion. Then some detail would spring to his rescue, he would recognize it, and his doubt would flee.

He presently began to gather as many details as he could, and to reconstruct the facts of his banal murder. Then began his trouble. He puzzled over the motives that had impelled him, recollected them only dimly, and with the greatest effort. Was it

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the money? Was it a taste for danger? Doubtless both. Sometimes a third motive would appear dimly—something belonging to Lampieur's very nature, the same impulse that now caused his sadistic tyranny over Leontine.

As for Leontine, she understood nothing of this. She thought his callousness and brutality only due to the fact of his crime, and for this reason she forgave him. How often had she tried to picture the crime, and put herself in his place, the better to feel his suffering and share it with him! She felt an immense need to devote herself to him, a constant need that in the end brought her consolation. She had, in a sense, become another woman. Nothing could shake her devotion. For instance, she felt no vexation if he left her sitting at the table in Fouasse's without a word; instead she followed him with her thoughts, with a humble and resigned tenderness. She went with him in spirit. She wished he might find peace and,

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had it been necessary, she was ready to sacrifice her peace to his.

But all the peace Leontine could taste was so little that it would have tempted no one. Could anyone call the worry and distress in which she lived peace? She would get up, leave the bar, and, far from resenting the feelings Lampieur had awakened in her, she felt grateful. It seemed to her that they gave her an aim, some reason for her wretched existence; she felt that somehow they redeemed her. It was a new existence which purified her of the daily shame of her former life. Leontine felt exalted. Out of her girlhood dreams she had fashioned a sort of ideal, of a passionate and superior way of living, and she felt herself filled with this ideal. Thanks to this ideal, which only a girl could have held so high before her, Leontine regretted nothing. Perhaps, even, she felt a bitter sort of satisfaction in the thought of all she had gone through to reach the point where she could pay the price of

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such a transformation. There was no clash between this and the things she cared for, and that made up her life. Without changing anything, it raised Leontine to a higher level, and offered a strange means of putting her in harmony with herself and of giving her confidence. A kind of happiness mingled with her torment, attaching her to Lampieur, providing its compensation for the cares that, woman-like, she felt it her duty to share.

In the streets at night, among her kind, her strange happiness went with her and bore her up. In her mind she saw Lampieur toiling in his cellar, keeping watch over himself. The thought of his crime dominated her, but it had lost its horror. She had become accustomed to it. More than this, it was her only means of identifying herself with Lampieur, of staying by him every moment to shield him from the consequences of his crime. They were terrible consequences, but they carried the indescribable attraction which

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retribution and great anguish exert. Leon-tine knew this. She knew, too, that coarse as he was, Lampieur might come to realize, as she had, the compelling power exercised upon all sinners by the thought of retribution. It was dreadful to think of this. She would not submit to it, and fought desperately against the idea, feeling that in doing so she secretly diverted Lampieur from the deadly attraction that called to her.

Determined though she was to protect him at all costs from this danger, she had never dared warn him against it. What was the use? When he was there she was self-conscious and lost her assurance. She was never at ease with him. Amid all the intimacy of their life they had never been able to speak openly, or even to talk of foolish little things together. Under ordinary, simple words, strange allusions might creep in . . . ambiguous questionings . . . Lampieur had never allowed it. Having once made his fateful confidence to her, he held his tongue,

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and if he did speak it was reluctantly, and in such vague terms that his speech meant nothing. How could she have persuaded him to listen to her? He would have stopped her short. And so she kept her fears to herself and opened her heart to no one.

Chapter 14

ENTINE took to prowling about the bakery where Lampieur worked. She had taken alarm at the thought that he too might begin to feel the treacherous fascination of his crime and its consequences. She felt her nearness protected him. At least, she told herself she believed it, for it reassured and comforted her.

In her dreams she helped him outwit the most cunning schemes, rescued him from every trap, gave him courage. She liked such dreams. They helped her to plan how to overcome his resentment, should he hear of her touching solicitude. She did not feel the need to speak. She wandered, slowly pacing a vigilant patrol around the bakery, approaching by ever narrowing circles, halting at last three doors up in a bar from

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where she could watch the street unnoticed, ready to give Lampieur warning at sight of the slightest danger. Each night, sitting among the drinkers in this bar, Leontine felt again an odd pity for Lampieur, which she did not resist. She abandoned herself to it. It gave her a strange pleasure. It seemed to offer an added reason to cling to him. At length she forgot even the nature of her emotion.

This bar to which Leontine drifted every night was frequented by longshoremen and laborers, and occasional sordid women who regaled themselves with red wine. It was not a noisy place. A fate from which none might hope to escape seemed to weigh equally upon all. Those nights in the Market! Here a drinker, elbows on the bar, had the somnolent air of the beasts in harness who wait in the street for the stroke of a whip to awaken them. There another, sprawled across the table, held his head in his hands and stared vacantly about him. A heavy, weary silence

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filled the bar. The place took on the fantastic air of a nightmare filled with a cruel, sullen light. As daylight approached, the fascination of the place grew on Leontine. She could not tear herself away. Between those people, each with his trouble and his silent torment, and the girl who was so weary, so absolutely exhausted, there was no visible difference. Only an immense sense of futility mingled with Leontine's desire to be of use to Lampieur, and, whatever she undertook, it robbed her even of the hope that it might not be in vain.

Along toward morning, Leontine became aware of her condition, and grieved. An uncertain light began to filter through the windows of the bar. It outlined the roofs across the way with a pale halo. Then the sky began to lighten. It became gray, a dirty, uniform, endless gray, which slowly bleached as the light rose and mingled with it. In the street, Leontine first saw a sort of troubled movement around the remaining

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gas lights. Soon the lights ceased to exist. They yellowed, they burned meaninglessly in the greater light of day. Then, suddenly, the harsh clang of a street car and its intruding roar of wheels tore the silence.

Then Lampieur pushed open the door of the bar, and Leontine returned to life, while all about her seemed at the same time to awaken, to move, to jostle each other. Store shutters were folded back; persiennes opened ; people began to pass the bar or, like Lampieur, entered and called for hot coffee which was brought to them at the counter. Leontine called Lampieur. He approached, sat beside her, and each understood, from the glance they exchanged, how much harsh satisfaction they felt at being together again. This single glance sufficed them. Then Lampieur and Leontine beckoned to the waiter. Later they went out quietly, without attracting any attention.

"Coming?" Lampieur said.

Leontine hurried after him and they re-

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turned to Rue des Precheurs, to their room under the roof, and quickly went to bed.

Had Leontine wished, she could have waited for Lampieur in this room, instead of spending her nights in the bar where she tired herself out and suffered her agonizing fears. Lampieur had suggested it many times. But over there, at least, she could tell herself that she was watching over Lampieur, and could know if any danger threatened. Here—what wouldn't she be imagining? It would have been even worse. She would have gone mad; she could not have stood it. At times when she was with Lampieur she felt herself so stifled that she felt a sort of obscure desire to get away, to walk straight ahead, anywhere, and to try to begin a new life somewhere else. Could she do it? At once Lampieur's presence recalled her to reality, and made her feel that perhaps Lampieur, too, felt such a desire, and suffered from it as much as she. Why did he not give in to her? Leontine dared not think

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about it. She would be nothing without Lampieur. He had taken her out of her life and brought her so strange a destiny that she feared she would be incapable of returning to her old existence and bearing the burden of it. It was too heavy for her. It would have crushed her. She could scarcely sustain its weight by clinging to Lampieur. Let him merely leave her, and seek elsewhere the rest which he knew he would not find, and that would be the end of Leontine. She would lose everything at once. Whatever she tried, she could not have managed to begin life again.

Fortunately such sad moments did not last long, and they uncovered their forlorn vistas only to make her appreciate the more the bitter joys of her present condition. After all, Lampieur was saving her from herself. He gave her the illusion of being more than a mere girl, and this illusion had its value. Thanks to the crime he had committed, life had taken on a new meaning. It was **not**

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merely a succession of days and nights, of pleasures, of disconnected acts. On the contrary, day and night Lampieur's crime maintained its significance for him and for the girl. It was always present in their memories; it brought them back to each other. Whatever they did, though they never mentioned it, it was this crime that decided every question and conditioned all their existence.

It would have been easy to prove this in the case of Lampieur if anyone had taken the trouble, for he too had changed. His disposition and his manner were getting out of hand. He was no longer master of them. He had some terrible moments. On some nights, as he got up in his room and dressed, a frightful distress could be read in his eyes. Nothing mattered to him. He had no joy in life. His depression became so painful that it showed in his face. At other times he was seized with a sort of rage. It had no special object, but it would burst out at the slightest provocation, and Leontine endured it without

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complaint, so great was the pity that awoke in her and filled her with submissiveness. Lampieur could not help realize this. But it was just this that maddened him most, and he raged at her all the more because she did not fight back and did not seem to resent it.

Those were scenes of indescribable violence. Lampieur yelled at Leontine the disgust she inspired in him, and reproached her for having changed his life. Leontine listened in silence. His abuse did not touch her, nor even did the blows he gave her to make her answer him. She knew only too well that it was not she who had the power to change Lampieur's life. And she felt he knew it too. It was because he suffered that he let himself go like that. She did not hold Lampieur responsible for the harm he caused. She forgave him. His outbursts were followed by such frightful periods of reaction, of overwhelming moroseness, in which he could not find himself, that she felt sure they **were caused by no ill-will toward herself.**

Chapter 15

AFTER one of these scenes Lampieur, unexpectedly repentant, apologized to Leontine, and she could not keep back her tears.

"Don't cry, girl. . . . Come on, don't cry," said Lampieur. "What's the matter?"

"I can't help it," she murmured.

Lampieur wavered.

"Of course," he said, and, approaching her, he gazed at her gravely with a mingled surprise and compassion that softened him and made him think.

"What are you crying for?" he asked, as though Leontine's answer might bring him a startling revelation.

Leontine shook her head.

"There are times when a fellow doesn't

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know what he's doing," said Lampieur. "He can't hold back. . . . He's driven. . . . He's carried away by words. . . . He goes too far. . . ."

"Oh!" answered Leontine without looking up. "That's not what I'm crying for."

"What then?"

"It's for other things," she said.

Lampieur did not insist.

"Yes," he finished in a dull voice.

He was filled with an indescribable unease. These other things that Leontine had suddenly evoked were things that Lampieur had constantly in mind, things that he did not want her to notice.

It was evening. Through the open skylight Lampieur could see the reddening sky filling with a slowly rising down of calm and delicate vapor. He remained almost a whole minute looking up, then he shook himself and turned to Leontine.

"What things?" he asked painfully.

Leontine shuddered.

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"Well," continued Lampieur, trying to mask his emotions under an air of assurance, "go ahead! . . . What do you mean by 'things'?"

"My God!" Leontine exclaimed.

Lampieur went on:

"We ought to understand each other for once, just the same, you with your 'things', and all your ways of talking. Ever think of that?"

"I can't."

"Ha ha! I thought so," grumbled Lampieur. "Just because I want to, you don't. That'll be enough of that! I've had enough of always coming back to it, and making trouble. I can't stand it any more. . . . How about you?"

He laid his big hand on Leontine's shoulder and added quietly:

"It's still your blamed notion, isn't it?"

Lampieur did not wait for her answer. He withdrew his hand and let it fall heavily.

"You haven't any reason for holding your

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notion against me," he said sullenly. "That's what makes all the trouble between us. Don't say no. Ever since we've been together, there's always been that notion of yours to stand between us. What do you want? I don't dare defend myself against it, because you'd only believe it the more. . . ."

Leontine listened without interrupting. Not all his words could convince her. They were the same he had used before to persuade her that he was; not guilty. Why should he lie again? Why did he take so much trouble to make her believe what was not true? Leontine knew that Lampieur had committed the Rue Saint Denis crime. He had almost confessed it the night she fainted. Far more, by his manner, by his constant anxiety, Lampieur had only added to his confession, in Leontine's eyes. Did he think she hadn't drawn any conclusions? It humiliated her. She was not so dull as that. Was he trying to make fun of her?

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lowed him with her eyes. Was he going to make another scene? The wretched girl could not have stood it this time. She had come to the end of her courage and the pity she had hitherto felt for him had turned to bitter resentment. Not only was Lampieur treating her as he would not dare treat anyone else, but he also distrusted her, treated her as an enemy—and he repulsed her. Leontine felt that she would never succeed in making him act differently toward her, and she lost heart. Even now, he ignored the share she had had in Lampieur's terrible anguish. She had spent herself, worn herself out in vain trying to give him by her presence a comfort of which he was unaware: she remained a stranger to him. If he had permitted her to remain with him, it was because he was afraid of her, because he feared that she might talk some day and attract attention to himself. He could laugh, he could defy her to tell what she knew; still he did not forgive her for know-

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ing. . . . That being the case, Leontine began to wonder what there was left to live for. There was nothing. Everything she had tried to do was crumbling, was becoming futile. An immense void yawned before her . . . a desert . . . an abyss. Leontine gazed into its depth, and was filled with a nameless horror that made her head reel.

"Well!" said Lampieur. "Are you seeing things?"

He had put on his cap, and, under his swagger, his cowardice was so evident that Leontine was struck by the sight of it.

"Where are you going?" she asked.

Lampieur opened the door.

"You can see for yourself," he answered.

"Good night. I'm going down."

And he went out hurriedly, without asking Leontine to come to dinner with him in Rue Saint Denis, as he had done every night.

Chapter 16

LEONTINE remained alone in the room, and for the first time in many days she did not think at once of Lampieur nor of the hurt he had given her.

Twilight spread around her and dimmed all the objects in the room. Leontine felt astonishingly at ease. What did it matter to her that Lampieur had gone? Over there, in the lighted streets, in the poor restaurant where she could picture him sitting at a small table, she felt that he was already regretting having left so suddenly. It would certainly change his habitual routine. Would he go to work? Leontine could not doubt that he would. She had therefore all the leisure she needed to make the decision that Lampieur's departure had made necessary. She decided. She expected nothing

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more from such a man. His coarseness, his hardness of heart had broken down her last resistance. Leontine was no longer sorry for him. Instead she felt contempt and resentment toward him, and she no longer suffered. The sense of ease she had felt was gaining on her, reaching the depths of her being. What a deliverance, what a peace! She could not yet believe it, and yet she knew that at last, after so much weariness, after so many torments, she was at last able to relax and to enjoy the calm delights of absolute detachment.

Night was falling, a pure, melting, soft night, and, as a silken scarf slips and falls, it enveloped Leontine and filled her with warmth. Was it perhaps the first night of Spring? It had the even and tender power of a Spring night over Leontine, who wondered at receiving it without tears and without distaste. Still, on a night so different from the others, Lampieur must have gone out of the restaurant. What thoughts were

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moving him? What obscure emotions? Leontine tried to relate them to her own. She pictured the street, its lights, its people, its shops, its uniform house fronts. Walking up this street at this moment, did Lampieur feel that the air about him was lighter than it had been? She almost hoped so. But no. For a man so coarse, nothing would count but his security and isolation. He mocked at the rest. He was not even aware of it. Besides, supposing that Lampieur was partly touched by the mysterious presence of this night, he would certainly defend himself against the feeling as though it were a sudden illogical temptation.

As a matter of fact, Lampieur on the way to the bakery felt an unaccountable charm in everything about him. Wherever he turned his eyes, he met an unaccustomed sight. The lights of wineshops shone brilliantly ; they gave out so bright and deep a glow that one was attracted to them. Doors remained open. The yellow light of the street lamps

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lent life to the colors and letters of the posters that covered the walls. The sidewalks seemed to have an elastic spring under his steps.

Lampieur gave himself to the influence of these discoveries. They came to his aid; they were pleasing to him, and he argued from their fortunate effect that he had been right in breaking with Leontine and ceasing to worry about her. Still, if ever he thought of Leontine, all his pleasure fled; it turned to anxiety and to lurking irritation. It was not natural. Lampieur pulled himself together. He set the image of Leontine up against this vague pleasure that he felt, and his irritation became stronger. It dominated him. It filled him with bitterness. Soon he had nothing before him but this image ; he thought of nothing else, while, as he walked up the street, he had no interest any more in anything.

It was at this moment that, up in the room, Leontine, having decided to leave Lampieur

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and to try to live as she could, told herself that it was time to go, but did not find the strength to do so. For more than an hour she sat reproaching herself for her weakness. The thought that Lampieur would come along in the morning to this room, that he would lie down in this bed and awaken the next day, weakened her resolve. She could not stand the idea. For all her efforts to make herself accept the idea, for all her desire to go, it took an immense effort to rise, to turn toward the door, to open it . . . There she nearly lost all her courage. But still the door was open, and Leontine had only to close it behind her. She thought herself saved. Saved from what? Standing among the passers-by, Leontine thought it over. She was not saved from Lampieur. Never had he had a more somber fascination for her. Ah, he had her tight. He was strong. Even at that distance, the dark power which emanated from him retained its morbid attraction. Leontine could not escape it. Be-

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sides, did she really want to get away from Lampieur? Real as had been her desire, it was abandoning her now. It ceased to uphold her, and the poor girl realized that she was powerless to resist her destiny.

Chapter 17

THIS evening was to prove one of the most uncertain and tormented periods in Leontine's life. She spent the first half of it at Fouasse's, among the girls she knew, waiting for Lampieur. But he did not come. Toward midnight, she went up Rue Saint Denis and began to prowl around the bakery. A light shone through the grill. This reassured Leontine, who passed it several times without stopping, and caught sight of Lampieur down in the oven room. One o'clock struck. Leontine continued her patrol, reached the end of the street, crossed to the other sidewalk. The deserted street yawned to the sky. Rare pedestrians passed hurriedly on their way to the Market. They would reach one of the cross streets, make a fleeting, moving silhouette under the light,

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turn and disappear. Others came from the opposite direction. Then lurking prostitutes emerged from the darkness and accosted men. Leontine saw them very clearly from afar, going, coming, disappearing, reappearing. She could also see down the street two policemen who walked with very slow steps in front of a bar, and, at about their level, a taxi parked at the door of a hotel.

The taxi, the policemen, the five or six prostitutes and the occasional passers-by, each far apart from the others, scarcely disturbed the sleeping aspect of the street. Rather their silent presence emphasized its air of stagnant quietude. Leontine noted the fact. She herself moved softly, noiselessly along her way, like those people whom she watched over there, and she had an odd sensation of incoherence. All about her the houses, shouldering the sky, raised to it their stories filled with night. Everything slept in the blind alleys. Leontine noticed this and, as she

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continued her way, she was surprised to find the same calm wherever she looked.

She did not again feel the softness nor the thick and comfortable laxness that had been hers in the evening. Instead she had an almost voluptuous sense of the wretchedness in which she existed. She took some hope from her emotion. She realized once again that no danger threatened Lampieur and, aided by habit, she forgot the scene he had recently made and began to think of his re-joining her in the morning at the bar where he always looked for her before returning to his room.

Leontine stopped in front of this bar, but it did not open excepting between three and four, according to the ordinance, and so she did not stay long before its closed front. She went on her way and, looking across the street, she recognized the entrance of the house where Lampieur had committed the crime. Usually Leontine did not stop to look at the dull front of this house when

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she came to it. She turned her head and hurried past. The mere sight of it aroused in her an invincible dislike. It frightened her. Still it was only a house like the others, mean and old. Its entrance, the brown door carefully locked since the murder, had nothing to attract attention. During the day one could see the bright walls down a long hall, the piled-up steps of a stairway, the windows of an office. Leontine recalled certain details: there was nothing striking about them. But as soon as the door was closed at night, everything about the house seemed funereal. With its shutters closed, its inert mass seemed to give it an air of strangeness. Did nobody else notice it? Did Lampieur—who had not dared pass the house for more than a month—not find it unpleasant to look at? Several times, as he passed it, he had not been able to keep back a sudden start. It had not surprised Leontine, who herself felt an instinctive horror of it. The fact that no one but they had

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discovered that such a house seemed, in a manner of speaking, to be awaiting something, frightened Leontine. She wondered whether the thing could not take on the power of an obsession.

It was not the first night that Leontine had asked herself such an absurd question, and had left the question unanswered. But on this night, for some alarming reason, she did not succeed in freeing herself from a horde of vague presentiments. She left herself at the mercy of her fears, standing before the house, searching it with her eyes, striving to wrest from it its fearsome secret. She could not have said what made her do so. More, she realized that to stand so intently before that house was to risk being noticed, and arousing suspicion. Someone might be lurking behind one of the closed shutters. There was nothing really impossible about that. Leontine's spine froze at the thought. She was seized with panic. She took a few steps down the street and,

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immensely impressed by her sudden idea, she watched all her movements, and turned her head several times.

Nowhere, up or down the street, could she discover anything unusual. The taxi had not moved. Far away, people came and went at intervals, and the untiring prostitutes accosted them, always discreetly, always in the same way. Leontine could see them at the same spot they had occupied before. She could see the taxi, as before. Only the policemen had disappeared from behind the taxi.

"Bah!" she thought. "I'm making a fool of myself with all these notions. Not much chance of a cop standing at the window every night to spy on the people who know the house! What a dream!"

She nevertheless felt ill at ease, and started toward the Market whose noisy animation would dispel the painful thoughts she found so hard to shake off. There, in **the racket of the wagons and among**

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the busy workmen, she lost some of her anxiety. The men carefully lining up cases and baskets along the sidewalks diverted her sight. She watched them. Then her attention turned to the butcher shop where men bent under immense quarters of meat bore them from the wagons to the hooks where they were hung. A stale, sickening odor filled the air. Farther on in the building, dealers in sausages, fried fish and bacon were selling their wares at twenty sous a portion. There was a queue before their stands, and another before that of an old woman who ladled soup into the bowls that each held out in turn. Leontine passed by all these eaters. She was not hungry. An occasional slip on some rotting garbage warned her to watch her step. Here high tumbrils of cabbage were being unloaded; there, lettuce; farther on, other vegetables. The smell of earth and water, fresh and abundant, exuded from the wagons. It suddenly evoked a vision of market gardens with

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well-watered beds such as there are on the outskirts of the city, and Leontine remembered Sundays in the suburbs, when she went to visit her baby, and helped it to walk around the garden. She had been almost happy then. Her life had had some meaning. She did nothing but save up the child's weekly keep, buy toys, clothing, linen, sweets. What love she put into these little things! What intimate pleasure and tenderness she felt! Then the baby died. It had been buried out there, in the country, and the strong earthy odor that Leontine now smelled seemed an after-taste of the horrible memory of the narrow pit in which rested her son. She re-lived all her grief in thought, to the gray and rainy day in May on which had been held the pathetic funeral in a country where no one knew her. Yes, it was the very same smell of freshly turned earth that Leontine had breathed through her tears. She had not forgotten it: it was a garden smell, almost pleasant,

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almost comforting. How strange! Even in so inhospitable a place, it would have been easy that night for Leontine to indulge to the full her will to suffer in a mournful rehearsal of her old sorrow.

Everything invited her to it. Her break with Lampieur, her cowardice toward him, her imaginations, her terrors. . . . All these painful things had had their effect upon her. They had prepared the way for the worst distress, they had made her so ready for self-torture that she felt a sort of painful satisfaction in it. So many torments and trials were too much. She counted them up: it seemed to her she could stand no more. Their sum gave her to hope that fate would have mercy on her, that an easier future would make up to her for her present pain.

"Hey there, kid!" came a man's voice from behind her.

Leontine took to her heels.

"Well, what's the matter?" mumbled the voice.

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It was that of a drunk who, offering his sympathy to Leontine, had hoped she would listen and perhaps keep him from having to go home alone.

"As you like," he finished, with perfect dignity.

Leontine was already far. She crossed the Market and, taking Turbigo street, was hurrying toward the neighborhood of the bakery, to watch over it. Her recent anguish had given place to a strange need to be near Lampieur. He alone counted with her at this moment. She forgave his faults. She was attracted toward him. From the position of the rigs and the cluttered appearance of the sidewalk, Leontine realized clearly that it was half-past two. She hastened her step, turned the corner of Rue Saint Denis. . . .

As she reached the grill with its glowing light she saw, a little farther on, erect and motionless, a man staring at the entrance of a house, and she recognized Lampieur.

Chapter 18

WHAT? " he answered. "It's you again?"

"You must go away from here," she commanded in a confused and strained voice.

"What?" said Lampieur.

He did not seem to understand. Nevertheless he followed Leontine and let himself be led along the dull house fronts that bordered the sidewalk.

"You! . . . You! . . ." was all he said as he walked. "You've come back. . . . Ah! Ah! You've come back. . . ."

"What were you doing there?" asked Leontine.

Lampieur felt a sort of somber joy.

"That's my business," he said.

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He added, "I'm free to go where I like, ain't I?"

"Come . . . come along," begged Leontine. She led him to a nearby street, sometimes pulling him by the arm, saying that she had something very important to tell him that concerned him. Lampieur turned a curious eye on her, and shook his head. Nevertheless he accompanied her, and she did not ask for more.

When they were in the next street, Lampieur stopped.

"Well," he began. "What's all this? What does it mean?"

"There was some one spying," Leontine said.

"Someone?"

"Yes, someone behind the shutter," she declared.

Lampieur thought this over.

"Huh!" he grunted. "You're sure?"

He seemed to awaken from a heavy torpor, and his face took on a fearful, anguished

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expression that moved Leontine and aroused all her zeal.

"It was to be expected," Lampieur murmured at length. "Sure. It's a fine fix."

"We could leave the quarter . . ." Leontine suggested.

"What did you say?"

"I said it would be better not to stay here," she repeated humbly. "Don't you think so?"

"It's a question," said Lampieur. "Where would we go?"

"We would leave. . . ."

"No," he declared. "I don't want to leave here. . . . Besides, it would be the same thing. . . . You think it would make any difference?"

"Still . . ."

"No. Absolutely no," said Lampieur stubbornly. "In the first place, if you're so sure there's somebody behind the shutter, you must have seen him. Answer me! If you saw him, why didn't you tell me?"

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"It was just a minute ago," Leontine explained. "I stopped here. . . ."

"In front of the house?"

"Yes," she had to admit.

Lampieur rocked on his heels and, looking Leontine in the eyes, he breathed deeply and said nothing.

"We can't remain this way," she faltered. She moved close to him.

"Behind what shutters?" he asked.

"On the first floor. . . ."

"The swine!" commented Lampieur.

He seemed to make a sudden decision, and stopped rocking himself to look intently into Leontine's eyes, to read the thoughts that they held. Leontine turned her head to escape his scrutiny, took his arm, and said with an effort:

"I'm not lying. Oh please come. Listen to me. The man over there in the house must have some idea now. He'll accuse you. . . ."

"What idea?"

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"Why, that it's you," she said.

Lampieur shuddered.

"Come!" she insisted.

She tried to cling closer to him, to keep him from leaving her. It was in vain. With one movement he freed himself, and took two or three quick steps before he staggered and clung to the wall.

Leontine hurried to him.

"Get away! Beat it! Get to hell out of here!" he snapped at her. "I'll go alone."

"Lean on me," she begged.

He looked at her severely.

"What? You?" he asked, trying to hurt her.

"I'll go too," she murmured.

Supporting Lampieur, Leontine soon found herself back in Rue Saint Denis. She did not know what she was doing. Neither did Lampieur. He was livid. As Leontine helped him along he kept repeating:

"I'll go. . . . I'll go. . . ."

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Where did he want to go? Leontine did not dare ask him for fear of irritating him more and yet she feared that, under the spell of his crime, he intended to stop in front of the house where he had committed it. If that was his intention, what would happen? Leontine was sure, now, that there was someone in the house, and that it was too late to escape his invisible watch. Had she not already, without meaning to, awakened his first suspicion? She reproached herself for her carelessness, without hoping to mend its result. The only thing to do was to flee. Why was Lampieur so averse to it? Leontine could not understand. On the other hand, could she abandon him without making one last effort to help him in his bewilderment? He seemed to have lost all notion of everything. He groaned. He repeated over and over the same words.

"Why yes," said Leontine. "Take it easy. . . ."

"Let's go," said Lampieur.

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Suddenly he made an incoherent gesture, spoke some words devoid of any meaning and, glancing about him with the eyes of a madman he began to shake while his teeth chattered.

"We must go in," Leontine advised.

Lampieur made a sign to silence her.

"No, no," she amended quickly, "instead I'll tell them at the bakery that you couldn't stay. Let me lead you. . . . Do you mind?"

They stood for a short moment, facing *each* other, without a word. Lampieur could not stop his trembling. Bars were beginning to open up along the street, passers-by became more frequent, girls were returning by twos and threes from the Market to go to bed. They were no longer looking for men. They were like horses on the way to the stable who feel the reins hanging loosely in the harness. Leontine, who had been one of them, envied them. She remembered her one great moment, the glow

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that it had ; she remembered her one intoxication. Alas! There remained of all that but a memory mingled with bitterness and useless regrets. Was it her fault? Lampieur was most to blame. But for him, but for the fascination he had exerted over Leontine, she would never have thought of changing her life, or rather she would never have felt the need to redeem herself. To what had that idea brought her? Leontine could see it well, and she felt an overwhelming sadness.

"Come," she murmured at length, without conviction. "Are we going?"

Lampieur took her arm and, leading her while clinging to her, he made her turn back and take a long detour which enabled them to evade the eyes of the man who awaited them over there, in the house, as they thought.

Chapter 19

THIS man became their one preoccupation for some time. He never left their thoughts. They saw him everywhere. The terror he inspired was intolerable. Lampieur could no longer sleep. He lay awake all day in his room, crouching between the sheets, staring dully at the door-handle. It seemed to him at times that, outside, a hand was on the door, that the knob was about to turn. He would close his eyes. . . . His heart palpitated madly. Then, to give himself courage to look again at the door, he repeated to himself that the door was double-locked, and the key in the hole. This certainty only half reassured him. He was afraid. He perspired with fear in his bed and Leontine, who slept no

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more than he, felt seized in her turn with a horror that froze her to the bone.

Several days passed thus, however, and nothing happened. Lampieur had resumed his work. Leontine accompanied him to the shop, but she had no longer the courage to walk the streets as before, nor to go to the bar where Lampieur met her. The house of terror stood between this bar and the bake-shop, so Leontine turned toward the Market. There she found her companions, and, mingling with them, she gained a new life. They went together to Fouasse's, and Leontine offered them to drink ; she answered their questions; she talked to forget herself. It pleased her. It was a change from Lampieur and the ghastly hours she spent with him. Later, Lampieur would come. He sat at the table with Leontine, and the girls, after drinking with him, withdrew and left them alone.

"See you again!" Leontine called to them. Monsieur Fouasse came near.

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"Well!" he asked Lampieur, whose worried air had made him wonder for some time. "Things going badly?"

Lampieur shrugged his shoulders.

"Bah!" the barkeeper continued. "You mustn't let things worry you, Monsieur Francois. . . ."

"Oh, yes," Lampieur grumbled.

Leontine, ill at ease between these two men who stood facing each other without finding anything more to say, smiled mechanically, with a timid and resigned air.

She found it hard now to stand Lampieur and to share his anxieties ; they were too painful to her. Besides, Lampieur was becoming so strange that Leontine could no longer follow to the end his incoherent expressions. What made him torture himself so? He should get the better of it. But no. It was not permitted him. Instead of feeling himself more free from fear for having just missed falling into a trap, as the days went by he could only imagine new traps

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laid everywhere for him. He unburdened himself to Leontine. He told her of his fears, and at times, driven by an imperious need to make of her a confidant, he spoke to her of his crime, approached it by such direct allusions that he was filled with a somber fever and gave Leontine new cause for apprehension.

The wretched girl tried in vain to break him of the taste he seemed to have for telling her the story of his crime. He was obsessed with it. He went into the minutest detail. Leontine did not listen. She recalled the time when Lampieur treasured his black secret and was determined to let no one possess it. Why should he now find pleasure in mixing Leontine up in all that sordid business? She was no longer curious. The more Lampieur confided in her, the more she drew away from him and showed a cold hostility. Lampieur saw nothing of it. On the contrary he thought that by acting as he did he dominated Leontine and made

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of her an intimate and proved ally. Had she not been fascinated by the crime from the very first? Lampieur saw no farther than that. His egotism made Leontine necessary to him, and he gave himself up to her while giving himself up to the ghastly pleasures of his memories.

Chapter 20

LEONTINE was not deceived. She had a clear image of what her condition would be if she continued to live with Lampieur and to use up in torment what strength was left to her. If Lampieur had been harsh toward her, no matter how much she had been deceived, Leontine would have forgiven him. She had only to retreat into her own illusions. But now it was very different. His cowardice was only too apparent. He displayed it so gratuitously that she could not overlook it, or escape a feeling of disgust. To Leontine's disgust was added an obscure resentment. What did it matter to her if Lampieur sometimes accused himself of a crime in her presence? He was telling her nothing new. Did he hope to win her sympathy? It was too late now. As for

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the sense of horror that the recital aroused, Leontine did not want it. She had had enough. The regret she had felt the other night at sight of the five or six girls coming from the Market was working on her. She thought of the time when, like these girls, she walked up the same street, with the same carelessness. Where had that time gone? Leontine asked herself: Would it ever return? She sighed for it. At least those girls, for all the servitude in which they spent their nights, were free during the day. Leontine contrasted her ruined life with theirs. She must certainly have lost her mind to have been willing to live with Lampieur as she did when she might have remained what she was and never wished for anything to change her way of living. Only now did she realize what a terrible mistake she had made. She thought of it bitterly, and now her only desire was to forget her misstep and return as fast as possible to her old condition.

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She was so evidently determined that Lampieur noticed it.

"What's the matter with you?" he first asked her.

But she did not answer. She shut herself up in a heavy silence, glanced at him and dropped her head.

"There's something the matter," commented Lampieur.

Soon Leontine refused to accompany him, and he began to wonder what she did while he worked, and to take alarm. He had no confidence in those girls. He knew they were gossips and ready for mischief. Wouldn't they provoke Leontine to talk to them about him? He was at the mercy of a talkative woman. This made him more careful, more somber, gave him moments of temper. What sort of madness had led him to confide in Leontine? It was certainly the most serious kind of madness, for if ever Leontine let fall a word of what he had confessed, she would not know how to

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deny it. And even if she did? Lampieur was thrown into despair. He felt his last hope slipping. He foresaw the end.

Any other man would not have hesitated: he would have fled. Lampieur could not make up his mind. The reason that had determined his conduct the day after the crime still prevailed. It was less a reason than a form of cowardice, an inconsistency. He could see it, but his seeing it did not help. Besides, his terror of arrest robbed him of all initiative and made him morbidly fatalistic. It acted upon him directly; it forbade resistance. What could he do against such an idea? He had no taste even for trying to outwit it, even to wrestle with it for the sake of his peace, even to hope for any chance to put off for a single moment his imminent fate. An urge more powerful even than that of self-protection had him in its grip. Lampieur did not resist it. He drifted. And his drifting gave him at last almost a sense of peace, a strange numbness

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like a sort of powerful and automatic drunkenness.

Yes, it was drunkenness. . . . Lampieur realized it. It was made manifest in a hundred ways, always the same, and it seemed that their madness was all the greater because of Leontine. Lampieur clung to Leontine in his frenzy. He craved to believe that she would not speak. He wanted to persuade himself that she would remain his accomplice, no matter what happened. Was it too much to ask? At times he felt it was not. At other times his confidence deserted him and then he resolved to force Leontine to tell him what she intended to do, and whether she intended him harm.

Leontine had no cause to tell what she knew, nor even to feel harshly toward Lampieur, now that she had half regained her liberty. She admitted it quite simply. But this half-freedom did not satisfy her.

"Naturally," Lampieur reproached her.

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"Now that things are getting hot, you want to go away."

"Maybe," she said.

Lampieur wilted.

"What if it didn't please me?" he asked, without conviction.

Leontine gave a little laugh.

"Just because I've let you leave me alone," continued Lampieur, "don't get the idea that you can order me around."

Leontine began to laugh softly.

"Enough of that!" Lampieur scolded. "If that's what you've learned from the women you frequent, you've learned it well."

"Oh!" giggled Leontine. "The women I frequent. . . ."

Lampieur looked at her.

"I know what I'm talking about," he declared, "I saw it well enough after we began to go back to Fouasse's. Am I right?"

They were just coming out of the bar, and, quarreling aloud in the street, they started for their room. Leontine dragged her steps.

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She did not want to go home. Lampieur stopped abruptly.

"Go ahead!" he commanded.

"Oh!" said Leontine, stopping and taking on a mocking air. "So he's getting angry!"

Lampieur advanced toward her.

"So long!" she said, and started quickly away, without any explanation and without giving him time to recover from his surprise.

Chapter 21

THERE is no describing the day that followed for Lampieur. He fell into profound depression. His distress was terrible. It grew, in his room, upon his memories of Leontine, of their common suffering, of their strange intimacy, of the habit they had gradually formed of suffering for each other. Now that he found himself alone in the presence of so much pain, he felt it would become too great for him. What was he to do? Where could he find, weak as he was, the courage to see his cause through to the end? It was lost from the start. So long as Leontine had helped him to bear up under his troubles, nothing had mattered to him very much. They touched him only indirectly. But now that Leontine was no longer there to protect him, Lampieur

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tremblingly felt himself disarmed, and he wretchedly awaited the first strokes of fate without any will to resist. Hitherto, despite their violence, his troubles had not touched Lampieur in his weakest spot. What new distress would rise up now? What secret depths would now be harrowed? In his cowardice, Lampieur almost went mad at the mere thought of what threatened his spirit. He feared everything equally. The more he thought, the more fearsome seemed his fate, the more his horror grew at the knowledge that there was no escape.

That is why Lampieur missed Leontine. She was no longer there to distract him from his torment and to arouse his irritation against herself. He saw this so clearly that he shuddered. How could the fact have escaped him until then? He called to Leontine. What was he to become without her? Already the mere understanding of what she had meant to him was a warning of new torments. **How fearful** would they be?

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Despite his certainty of impending doom, he still found a sense of security in the memory of Leontine, and he clung to that memory with the despair of a man who sees the void opening beneath his feet, and feels its fascination. . . .

Then his last resources left him. Lam-pieur found himself alone in the world, and he began to experience an unexpected pain. It seemed to him that something in him demanded this pain in order to be reborn. It astonished him at first. He was undergoing a transformation of all his ways, awaking to the sense of an existence of which he had not had the humblest notion since the day of his crime. What could such a transformation mean? Where would it lead? Lam-pieur could not tell. He was like a man who, in an accident, seeing all his life pass before him, receives a disconcerting impression. . . . It was all a surprise. He momentarily wished to pull himself together, to return to Leontine—but that was no

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longer possible. In fact, Leontine's departure was the direct cause of the phenomenon that Lampieur was experiencing. He had to stand its consequences. He resigned himself. He gave himself up to them and, little by little, as his mind cleared, he began to realize how strictly just was his present isolation. He blamed himself fully, with bitter sincerity.

Led on by this sincerity, Lampieur little by little came to feel pity for himself. He began to go back in his thoughts to the crime. In all the time it had been in his thoughts, he had never yet faced it in all its terrors nor delved into the depths of its horror. This time, Lampieur recollected the motives which had led him to his crime. The same loneliness in which he now dwelt had been his lot. It gave him a sense of uselessness, of self-contempt, of distress. . . . He recalled it all. Of all his life that period had been the most absurd. His days had been of one obsessing monotony, his nights

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each as long and ineffectual as the other. What was the sense in going on? he had often asked himself. He had no vices. He was bored. Each evening as he came from his room, he reflected that the next day would bring precisely the same routine at precisely the same hour, that tomorrow he would go again to Fouasse's, and again drink another glass of the same wine. It humiliated him, it hurt him. The people he listened to around him seemed barren of the slightest interest. He watched them nevertheless, he studied them as though they were grotesque toys which seemed to live but did not live at all. And he was just like them. Like them he leaned against the bar, smoked, came, went. . . . Was that called living? He was deathly sick of **it all.**

Under his rough exterior Lampieur hid a constant unrest. Everything troubled him. It became like an intolerable mania, and Lampieur did not know how to control it.

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Lampieur came to have an opinion of himself which nothing seemed to justify, but which nevertheless brought him some solace. He considered himself so different from the others that he found little trouble in believing that he was. Believing it, he soon concluded it was best not to let anyone know, and he bent his efforts to this end. It flattered his vanity. Then by the weight of circumstances his satisfaction lessened, his unrest returned, again he became the victim of his own anxiety.

From that day, everything made him disgusted with himself ; he spent several weeks in an incoherent mood, tormenting himself, worrying that he no longer found interest in anything, and awaiting the day that would offer him a desperate chance to retrieve his self-respect. Lampieur had always been a coward, and he wondered anxiously what trial fate might offer to test him, when, one morning, in the bakeshop, a certain Madame Courte, a caretaker, had ingenuously

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complained of having to keep the rent money each rent day.

Despite his best efforts, Lampieur was no longer master of himself that day. He did not go to bed. He could be seen from morning to night, drinking in the bars of the quarter and staring at his neighbors with insolent eyes. He finished by getting nearly drunk. . . .

His manners and his bearing astonished those who knew him. He exaggerated every gesture, and betrayed an exaltation so grotesque that Lampieur alone failed to perceive his condition. He could not help himself. His thoughts were all for that caretaker. He felt that the hour of decision had come at last, and he felt himself ready for it. For him it was like the news of sudden success after all hope had been abandoned. It was like a deliverance. He became bold. The wine intoxicated him less than his ambition and, two or three days later, he had no more doubts of his impending success.

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He had from October to January to prepare himself, and he laid out for himself a detailed program. First he worked out his project, then he prepared to carry it out. Who could have guessed what was going on in his mind? He left the bakery at sunrise and, sometimes, instead of going down the street he reversed his steps and threw a searching glance in passing down the long hall which he proposed to enter.

The caretaker's lodge was at the end, on the right. It opened on a courtyard. One evening when the caretaker was out, Lampieur inspected this court. He found it had no outlet. But at every story windows opened on it, as did a window of the lodge. Lampieur feared that through this someone might see from the court into the lodge. He came closer, studied it at length, and went away reassured, having seen a curtain hanging at one side which must be drawn across at night.

Toward the end of December, Lampieur

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was ready. He had his plan well in mind. He knew the name of the tenant he would ring so as not to disturb the caretaker in her sleep. Only at that point was there any complication. The key was not sufficient to let him into the lodge. There was also a bolt which would have to be forced with a dexterous blow, quickly and noiselessly. This bolt offered the most serious problem. Lampieur solved it the very evening of the crime. He entered the lodge, unscrewed the socket of the bolt, and fixed it so it would come off without resistance. This done he returned to his room, put gloves, a suit, and a pair of shoes in a parcel, and went to work. He was calm. The suit into which he changed after carefully brushing it, the shoes he put on, bore not a speck of flour. He had carefully washed himself in the cellar. He started out as the clock struck a quarter to twelve, and it was not until he returned that he clearly realized the risks he had run, and the dangers

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against which he would have to guard daily, all about him.

"The old woman! . . ." he cried suddenly, with a start.

He had been dreaming, sitting erect on his bed, fully clothed. Before him he saw the hapless woman who had been his victim. . . . He thought he heard her. His fingers seemed upon her throat, and between them he could feel the palpitating, swollen flesh. It was ghastly. Slowly he relaxed his grip, and, still half in the power of his hallucination, he tried to release himself while, beside him, the body of his victim dropped heavily among the sheets.

At that moment Lampieur could not have told where he was. He rose from the bed in horror, and the ghastly vision rose too. It spread before his eyes wherever he turned. Lampieur shook herself. . . . Why should **he** be pacing his room like a caged animal ? Thank God, he had not yet come to that! **The** thought that he could do as he pleased

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reassured him. The thought nevertheless seemed stupid. It seemed so reasonable that he did not know what to make of it. Was he really free, with the frightful image of the old woman haunting him to the point where he felt he needed nothing but to be rid of it? He would have liked to think so, but the vision persisted. It accompanied him, obsessed him, hounded him. For all his efforts it reigned all about him; fight as he would, it reigned over him as well, and tormented him relentlessly.

At last he gave up resisting the tenacious presence of the vision, and tried to accustom himself to it. At once his attitude changed. His shoulders dropped, his face shriveled, and, with a shudder that shook his whole being he collapsed under a misfortune so frightful that he lost all sense of everything but an overwhelming horror of himself and of the evil that tortured him.

This horror surpassed everything in abomination. He beheld the vision of a narrow,

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tumbled bed, across which lay a corpse, in mournful and tragic immobility. Then, over the bed, spread the presence of Death. It was so heavy that a hole began to gape among the sheets. Lampieur felt engulfed into it irresistibly. He felt the touch of a cold cadaver. He struggled with it desperately. Alas! The more he struggled, the more vivid grew the feeling of being hopelessly mired in the bed's ghastly hole. The corpse dragged him down deeper and deeper, and his futile cries rose louder and more desperate. . . .

There came no answer to his awful cry. He himself had no answer. He felt himself dragged into ghastly depths, down to the very refuse which he disturbed at every moment, the stench and the mad terror. He gasped for breath. His strength was gone, he had lost all hope. The whole world was abandoning him, and, to top it all, Lampieur himself was powerless in the face of his nameless torture.

Chapter 22

A MPIEUR remained in his room until night, crying out, begging for an answer, powerless to calm his tortured mind.

He went out at about seven o'clock, locked his door, and went down. His face was blanched. He shook so violently that no one could help noticing him. Lampieur did not care. He hugged the shop fronts as he went along, staring with dazzled eyes at the lights. They fascinated him. They produced in him a sort of drunkenness. Several times he halted before a window and stood there with glittering eyes. His eyes seemed to ask so strange a question that passers-by were startled.

What sort of a man could this be? Each person that Lampieur passed turned to stare

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at him. But Lampieur saw no one, and expected from no one the succor he craved.

His steps led him instinctively toward Fouasse's saloon. Lampieur noticed it. He recognized the entrance to the bar, its windows, its counter. He did not go in. He turned to the left, passed more shop windows, walking with a bearing that struck everyone he met, and found himself in Rue Saint-Denis.

Between its somber houses the street presented a narrow, oblique vista. Here and there a light revealed the lines of a house, a strip of a sidewalk, a bit of roadway against a background of darkness. Lampieur stared sullenly at these spots of light and, as he advanced, he grew more and more downcast. • . .

Where was he going? He moved from force of habit only. He was not going to work tonight.

Something else awaited him over there, and he moved toward it anxiously, with a

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question in his mind which grew more and more pressing, and made him quicken his steps.

In the short time it took to reach the level of the bakery this question assailed him with such force that he barely escaped stopping on the way and sinking into the gutter. What made him suffer so? His recent vision choked him to the bursting point with degrading emotions. He could not endure its flavor, its atrocious repulsiveness. His legs were betraying him. His sight swam with vertigo. He was smothering. He groaned. Far better to die twenty times than to live under such conditions, and he felt an infinite terror at the thought that there might be awaiting him a more intimate and more abominable horror.

The trouble was that now Lampieur held himself responsible for his distress, and despaired of placating his fate even by giving way to the most cruel remorse. He regretted his crime. He held it in utter ab-

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horrence. His conscience was in full revolt. . . . Could he abase himself more than that? He was ready to do so if he could. He would have thrown himself on the tomb of the old woman and wept bitter tears upon it if by that he could have purchased a little peace. His cowardice refused no form of humiliation. Rather it craved them all. It yearned to be succored, to be spared. . . . Was Lampieur really responsible? In his madness he clung to the frailest support. He called to witness a thousand proofs of his former honesty—it was not his fault that he had committed such a crime! Could he foresee the fearful effect it would have on him some day?

He did not ask for much—a moment's respite, a minute, a second. . . . Would he be vouchsafed not even that? Why not even that? Did not his supplications prove his utter sincerity? Pity! He would beg on his knees! He would strike his breast! He would mortify himself in a thousand

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ways! Would he be repulsed again? Was there still greater punishment in store? He accepted it. . . . What? Was that not enough? What was he to do? He had only to be told. He was ready to obey. He had no argument to offer. . . .

"Move on!" He seemed to hear the command ring in the very depths of his body.

Lampeur lowered his head and moved on. He reached the bakery, jerked open the door, went down to the cellar.

A workman he did not know stood at the oven.

"Are you the fellow I had to replace?" asked the latter.

"Yes," said Lampeur.

He went to the wall, scraped, removed a large stone, took the money that lay in the aperture, put it into his pocket and hurried away without even answering the stupefied "Good-night" that accompanied his exit.

Once outside, Lampeur did not have far to go to reach the house he felt a need to see

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again. He approached the house, studied its front, then the door, drew back, crossed several times from one sidewalk to the other. . . . He felt something almost like relief, or, at least, his distress seemed to give place to recollections so precise that they absorbed his mind and saved him from himself.

"Yes, yes," he muttered.

Once that door had opened. Lampieur had closed it behind him. He remembered the snap of the bell-cord and the click of the lock which answered his ring. . . . Then he had entered. He had walked down the hall, had reached the end. . . . What memories! Each was a perfect link in the chain of events that led Lampieur down that awful hall. They made him relive the minutes that preceded his crime. So realistic and powerful was the atmosphere surrounding him that at moments he expected to see the door open once more and let him in. . . . At such moments he retreated

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a step or two. • . . He passed to the opposite sidewalk and, striving to contain the macaber exaltation that gripped him, he emitted strange words, and could not keep from walking up and down, gesticulating.

It was not possible that Lampieur could stand before such a house and not be noticed. Neighbors saw him. They watched him. One of them decided to accost him, but Lampieur did not recognize him, and continued his performance. The neighbors disappeared. They went into their houses, but reappeared at their windows where they sat and exchanged comments. . . . What was that man doing there? Was he drunk? They followed his strange actions in the street, watched him start, stop, advance again. What was the meaning of such a performance? None dared give his opinion, but each thought the same. They became indignant.

"Hey there! If you please," called out the one who had accosted" Lampieur. "Hadh't you better beat it?"

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Lampieur raised his head. He noticed all these people spying on him from their windows. He stood his ground, glaring at them with sharp, suspicious eyes.

"We'll send for the police!" cried a woman's voice.

"The police!" repeated Lampieur. "Oh! The police!"

He burst out laughing stupidly and, shrugging his shoulders, made as if to go. Other windows had opened. From one side of the street to the other exclamations, answers, shreds of sentences were exchanged. Lampieur understood his indiscretion. He started, fled, almost ran to the first corner, turned it, and found himself rapidly striding down Sebastopol boulevard. . . .

Chapter 23

IT was scarcely past eleven when Lampieur came down Sebastopol boulevard. Not five minutes later, despite the long detour he took, he found himself again on Rue Saint Denis at the Square des Innocents. Only then did he regain confidence, and a sigh of strange satisfaction escaped from his breast. His steps slowed down; he rounded the square and as he walked in its neighborhood the image of Leontine little by little took the place of the old woman's, and his torment lessened. It was here, in front of the entries to low hotels, that Leontine and her kind carried on their business. Lampieur began to look for her. He questioned several girls, passed them, lost himself in the dark streets, then, retracing his steps, took

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his stand and waited for fate to bring him the one he wanted.

There was, in fact, a strong likelihood that the girl would soon reach one of these peculiar hotels. Lampieur saw Madame Berthe come in with a passer-by. A little later, he recognized Renee. Madame Berthe came out. She returned almost immediately with another man, and Lampieur moved away for fear of being recognized. Almost everywhere in this quarter, where the warehouses and depots remained closed until after midnight, girls could be found at street corners, offering their services. The sight of them brought a bitter humiliation to Lampieur. He pictured Leontine busy like these girls with her low occupation, and he suddenly felt a sort of jealousy which irritated him against her and made her hateful.

"Psst! Psst! Hey!" called a woman who had noticed him from across the street.

Lampieur did not seem to hear. He took a cigarette from his pocket, lit it, and, leaning

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his back against a wall, he smoked with bent head. What did he hope for from Leontine? What did he want to say to her? She disgusted him now. . . . She was too much like those dreary prostitutes who walked the pavements, offering themselves to the first comer, without distinction. He was almost nauseated, and the thought came to him that he was wrong not to go away and try somewhere else to begin life again alone.

That was his plan. Feeling with thick fingers in his vest pocket, he touched the money he had put there. The touch of the bills reminded him of his crime and of the frightful moments he had just passed through. Lampieur stiffened. He regained all his roughness. Then he turned his thoughts to Leontine, brought up a thousand memories of her, and gave himself up to their spell. These memories still retained their charm for him. They enabled him to glimpse a possible existence, if Leontine would agree to flee with him. Had she not suggested it

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to him? He was eager to go. The money hidden in his pocket would help him. But Leontine had to accompany him. Without her, he was good for nothing. . . . He suffered too much. He worried too much. The day he had gone through weighed on him. He could not have found courage to go through another. It was too much for his strength. He would have given up everything rather than have to go again through the agony of that frightful day.

Still Leontine did not appear, and Lampieur wondered anxiously if she had not already put into execution herself the plan he had in mind. The thought appalled him. He pulled himself together, and, throwing away his cigarette, mechanically lit another and walked across the street. . . . There was a bar a little farther up. Lampieur searched it with his eyes, then began again to walk about and to look in every bar he passed. Thus wandering, stopping at the door of even the smallest saloons, Lam-

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pieur covered the whole quarter. As fast as his illusions abandoned him, his thoughts of Leontine gained on him, and he blamed himself bitterly for having caused her to go away and leave him.

That she was like girls Lampieur passed, and as debased as they, no longer caused him shame. His righteous disgust was forgotten. He had no more jealousy nor anger. What mattered all her depravity? He was ready to excuse it, tolerate it, welcome it, and never refer to it. It was by his own great fault that Leontine had resumed her old life. He accused himself with severity, and admitted his guilt

At last, accusing himself of a thousand sins and magnifying them as though on purpose, Lampieur lost all control of himself. He looked everywhere for Leontine, in vain. She was nowhere. Wherever he went, near the hotels, around the saloons, here, or there, girls approached him, but not the girl he sought. He waved them away without a

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word. Soon, having passed him more than once, they recognized him and did not insist. They let him follow his grotesque patrol. They lost interest in him and Lampieur, seeing them move away, told himself with infinite distress that no one would ever be interested in him again.

This brought his sense of being lost to its height. It hurt him to feel so absolutely alone. Why persist? Lampieur gave up all determination; he walked the streets, entered bars, sat down, got up, wandered on. Midnight, then the half hour struck, stores opened up, but Lampieur noticed nothing.

At times, however, as he opened saloon doors, he saw all sorts of people gathered around tables, emptying steins. He could not understand why these people should be there. Why did they stare at him as he walked to the bar and swallowed at a gulp the little glass of rum he ordered? He suspected them of knowing where Leontine was. Then he drank a second little glass . . .

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a third little glass . . . then he moved to the next place, sure in his mind that everyone knew where the girl was, that he was being purposely kept in ignorance. As this conviction became rooted in his mind, he came to the conclusion that he must still go through a thousand pains before meeting Leontine. The thought that she was only a woman of the streets became stronger. He made no effort to evade it. Rather he dwelt on it with a sort of sharp distress and shameful pleasure. In his eyes, no shame was great enough. Didn't these people know that? Lampieur gazed long at them. He counted them. They were workmen of the Market, to whom Leontine had certainly offered herself, like the others.

The image of the girl mingling with all these men humiliated him; it wounded him, and he wanted it to humiliate and wound him all the more. Thus, he felt, when he met her he would have earned the right to leave with her, and lead another life. . . .

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Disgust, abasement, shame—he must know them all. His cowardice made them all necessary and, little by little, he accepted them, like some strange necessity of life and death from which there is no escape.

Chapter 24

ALL night, striving to degrade himself, ending by finding a somber satisfaction in the result, Lampieur wandered about the Market saloons and got himself very drunk. The thought that, having undergone the most cruel trials for Leontine, he would find her at last, exalted him, and presently took on the force of a certainty in his mind. Lampieur was sure of meeting Leontine again. This idea born of his drunkenness, seemed natural to him, and sustained him.

But what trials must he still bear before meeting the girl and persuading her to flee with him? He did not know. It was a matter between his conscience and a sort of far-away Justice, vaguely ready, according to circumstances, to be moved or to remain unbending. Lampieur placed himself in its

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hands. He accepted in advance the suffering that might be assigned to him. This bargain by which he advanced to meet the most dismal humiliations, reassured him and led him to believe he would in the end receive his due.

Leontine thus became for him the symbol of expiation and deliverance, and he clung to it all the more firmly for his desire to leave the quarter and escape the police. He wanted nothing else. Above all, at this moment, the hope that Leontine would help him succeed in his plan encouraged him to expect its success. Nevertheless it was getting late, the dawn was making a vague approach, and Leontine, by remaining out of sight, prevented Lampieur from starting anything.

He advanced painfully through the streets, making his way among the porters. He was bumped. He was jostled. He did not get angry. He effaced himself. He gave way each time and then started again, with halting

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steps, avoiding the silent crowds gathered around the tall carts, unloading them.

Thus advancing, Lampieur frequently crossed from sidewalk to sidewalk and, being drunk, he made astonishing zig-zags at times, and knew it. But that did not prevent his thoughts from returning at once to Leontine, and assuring him that he would find her. His need to see her again was strengthened as it became a drunk's fixed idea. It was enough for him. It guided him toward her, despite his staggering, and he had no more doubts when, at the end of an extravagant series of wanderings and detours, he recognized the little bar near the bakery where he went every morning.

It was there that Leontine used to wait for him. Lampieur entered. He looked down at the group of poor people around him and, with a drunkard's swaying walk he simply rounded two or three tables and found himself miraculously at a last one, at which sat Leontine before a cup of coffee.

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"Here I am," said Lampieur.

He took a chair and, dropping into it, yawned and asked:

"Want anything else to drink?"

"Where did you come from?" asked Leontine in wonder.

"Over there," he answered. "From the Market. . . ."

She rose.

"Waiter!" called Lampieur.

"No, I paid," she murmured. "Let's get out of here. We couldn't be quiet here."

Lampieur followed Leontine out of the room obediently, without feeling the slightest astonishment at his providential meeting. It seemed to him perfectly natural. Only, once in the street, his exaltation fell, and he dared not make a step for fear the people who had threatened to call the police during the night had done so.

"Quick! Quick!" cried Leontine.

She drew Lampieur by the sleeve, and added in a very low voice:

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"You mustn't go back to your place, now."

"I suspected it," he answered. "They went for the cops?"

Leontine turned away.

"All right! All right!" he said. "I know."

He hastened as best he could to obey the girl and, walking at her side, he confided:

"I've got the money. Get me? All we've got to do is to take a room in a hotel until tonight. . . . Do you know a hotel? I've got to talk to you."

"About what?" she asked, still guiding Lampieur.

He explained:

"I've got to talk to you, see . . . because of the money. . . ."

"But I don't know any hotel," Leontine protested. "Besides, I'm going. I can't stay with you."

"Why?"

"No . . . I only wanted to warn you that it was better to get out, and never come

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back," stammered the girl. "Let me go, now. Go away, alone. . . . You've still got time. . . ."

"No chance," muttered Lampieur. "I won't go alone. . . ."

"You're crazy!"

"I can't do it," he said.

The dawn, illuminating the grey house fronts and the roofs, was growing. On the store fronts, the walls, the doors, it crudely revealed mud stains, holes in the plaster, a thousand drawings and coarse inscriptions, and each object struck by its fresh light seemed to fade before it.

Lampieur had a moment of horrible lucidity.

"They'll come," he declared. "They'll get me."

"You've got to run!" urged Leontine.

"With you?"

"Go!"

He shook his head, still half drunk:

"I thought you'd have pity," he mur-

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mured in a plaintive voice. "I thought you'd go with me. . . ."

Leontine answered. "I couldn't."

"Well, all right," said Lampieur, staring darkly before him, but without moving a hand's breadth from the direction in which Leontine walked.

Where was she going? He didn't care. For the moment his only hope was in Leontine, and he was determined not to leave her for an instant. Nothing else mattered. He told himself he would soften her at last, that she would take pity on him. She was not a bad girl. She would give in. She would presently agree to go with him. Why did she seem not to want to? Lampieur would not admit her sincerity. He felt there was something in Leontine's ways that he could not explain, that he could not understand. . . . He was no longer drunk, however. . . .

He walked straight, he recognized the

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street, he knew where it led, and he strove to pierce Leontine's purpose.

Suddenly she stopped.

"Over there!" she said.

Lampieur made out in the crowd several men with round hats, who emerged from a bar and were coming toward them.

"Don't stop," whispered Lampieur to Leontine. "We'll pass them as though there was nothing the matter."

"It's they," she murmured. "I saw them in the bar once before during the night. . . . They knew your name. . . . I heard them ask the bartender before you came in."

"Go ahead . . . go ahead. . . ." he commanded. "Get to the edge of the sidewalk. They won't see me behind you. All we have to do is not show we know they're looking for me, and pretend we're talking."

"I'm afraid," Leontine confessed.

Lampieur, digging his hands into his

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pockets, started. Still, he added in a surly voice:

"If you hadn't stopped to argue, we wouldn't have got into this. Ah! By God! If they don't pick me up, I'll be lucky."

"We haven't any choice," groaned Leontine.

"Go ahead!" he scolded.

They made a few steps in this way, watching with a horrible sense of fear the slightest movements of the detectives, and, the closer they came, the less hope they had of being able to escape their vigilance.

Lampieur made a mournful figure as he hugged the walls: he shook, his face was of a frightful pallor, and his eyes, below the soft peak of his cap, strove in vain to conceal the terror with which they shone.

"They'll recognize me," said Leontine. "They're going to recognize me. . . ."

Lampieur gave a long sigh.

"Look out! Now's the time when we

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pass or we're done. If they see us coming, that's the end. . . ."

"Swine!" said Leontine.

They were within fifteen or twenty feet of the detectives, who seemed to be strolling innocently between the shops which were opening up on either side. Clerks were taking down the shutters from store windows. A little servant was going to the dairy with an empty bottle. Others carried the morning papers, bread, provisions.

"Softly, softly," said Lampieur between his teeth.

The detectives had not yet noticed them. The three of them held the center of the street, throwing slow questioning glances to right and left.

"Ah!" whispered Lampieur. "They're getting out of the way of the rig."

It was a night hack on its way back to its station, which, by chance, obliged the detectives to move aside for it to pass. Lampieur and Leontine quickened their steps behind

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the hack. They hurried forward. Each thought himself already out of danger.

Lampieur, feeling a tap on the shoulder, turned.

"What! What!" he stammered.

Leontine called him.

"You too," said a voice. "Stay where you are. And don't make a scene!"

Lampieur let himself be handcuffed without resistance, then he was roughly pushed forward. He dared not look at Leontine who walked at his side, weeping silently.

THE END.

