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GOODMAN DROP-OF GOLD.

In 18-- I visited one of the dilapidated houses of the village of Soucy. The master of that house was no more.

At the sight of so much desolation, of so much ruin, so much misery, my heart melted, and I burst into tears. The children, whom I strained to my breast--it was not for them to comprehend my words, when I cried out--

Of these seventy-nine years, more than sixty had been spent in constant labor. No one was earlier or later in the field. How many times had I seen him in the summer days work out with fatigue.

My grandfather belonged to the class of landed farmers, that is to say, of those who cultivate their small estates themselves, with the occasional assistance of their kinsfolk, wisely dispensing with the proctor, in order to avoid ruin.

In default of means and resolution, the family of my grandfather were perishing of hunger by the side of their own uncultivated fields.

They were called drops of gold, because falling to the earth under the semblance of dew-drops, they were afterwards transformed to little pieces of money in the eyes of those who beheld them.

It was pretended that Goodman Drop-of-Gold went about begging, at church doors, at banquets, at balls, at dwelling-houses, everywhere, and that, by the assistance of a mysterious word, he obtained whatever he asked for.

though Goodman Drop-of-Gold might have had a real existence, no one had yet claimed to have made his acquaintance. Nevertheless, a multitude of stories of his benevolence were current in the country.

One winter evening, her grand-daughter Bridget, a pretty girl of seventeen, was silently weeping in the chimney-corner. The opposite corner was occupied by my grandmother; and, as Bridget blew her nose frequently, and as frequently rubbed her eyes, the good old woman, slowly raising her head, said to her--

'You are crying, Bridget?' 'Yes, grandamma,' replied the young girl. 'You are tired of your poor grandmother?' 'Oh, no, no.'

'You are sick, then?' 'No.' 'Perhaps you are in pain?' 'No, grandamma.'

My grandmother preserved a momentary silence, as it to recall far-off memories. Bridget's tears fell faster than ever. My grandmother resumed--

At this name, my grandamma gave an affrighted start in her old wooden chair, and shook her head. James Dupre was rich; there was no probability that his father would consent to this marriage.

'Your heart has made an unfortunate choice, my poor Bridget,' said my grandmother, stirring the fire.

'That is just what I am crying about,' replied Bridget. 'James has this very moment left me, crying himself. His father does not wish him to marry; he says that he is too young.'

It was Christmas Eve, and the full moon was shining in all its splendor. The rich farmer Dupre, having been detained late at the city, was returning to the village, at the hour of midnight, with M. Durand, his notary.

'My pony trembles like a leaf,' responded Durand.

'Can it be that our animals imagine goblins or wehr-wolves about?' said the farmer, with a loud and prolonged laugh.

His laugh was repeated in the adjoining forest. 'Bah! perhaps these poor creatures believe in ghosts, and fancy one has appeared to them,' replied the notary.

'Did you hear that, Monsieur Durand?' 'What?' interrogated the notary.

They listened a moment attentively, and heard the stroke of a pickaxe ringing in the vineyard of the late Francis Remy.

'It is that astonishing me,' said Dupre.

'Oh! my dear man, that some misfortune is going to happen us. Have you not this long

'Some one is mocking us; or it may be the echo of our own voices,' said he.

'Nevertheless, the trembling horses were all in sweat with terror.

'Upon my word, Monsieur Durand, there is something supernatural about this,' exclaimed Dupre.

'Did you see those sparks, down yonder in the vineyard?' exclaimed Dupre, ashy pale with fear.

'Doubtless they are; will-o'-the-wisps,' replied the notary.

Then it was they perceived in the vineyard the figure of an old man, stooping down and digging up the earth, and casting to the right and left the clods which he trampled under his straw-filled wooden shoes.

'Holla! good man, what are you doing there, in that vineyard?' shouted Dupre. 'Come out, at once. Do not disturb our property, if you please. We know well enough how to cultivate it without your help.'

'Your property, neighbor Dupre! It is, then, no longer the property of the widow of Francis Remy?'

'This vineyard, burdened by a mortgage since Remy's death, will to-morrow become my own, the widow Remy not being able to pay the debt then due.'

'Good neighbor Dupre,' resumed the old man, 'can you not allow the poor widow a little longer time?'

'Who are you, I should like to know?' inquired the farmer, whose teeth chattered with terror.

'If I were to judge by that flock of white linen, by that crimson waistcoat, by those gray gaiters, you should be--bat--no, no--he is dead, quite dead--you should be--'

'The Goodman Drop-of-Gold,' interrupted the old man.

At that name, the farmer uttered a yell of terror, ran to the mare, spring upon her back, and fled at full gallop.

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'Look at me,' replied the stouter-like figure of the old man.

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'He is so sad, he weeps so, he says nothing, is always sighing, eats scarcely any thing, and avoids his friends and comrades, to go one knows not where?'

'To go one knows not where!' ejaculated Dupre, with an angry gesture. 'Your boy quits the house to go and run about the fields with the girl Bridget--'

'And a pretty girl she is, too!'

'Ah! A plague on her witch's beauty, say I,' was the farmer's ill-humored rejoinder.

'Oh! a very fine family arrangement, Mrs. Dupre--very fine, indeed, considering that the young lady will have but a single cow for her marriage portion, not an ear of wheat, besides, not a grape-seed, not an inch of land. And, for her entire wealth, what has she!--a worn-out petticoat, and the water in the well.'

'That is as much as to say, then, that you also take sides with the girl?' returned the farmer, angrily.

'I confess that I have gone a little too far in giving reasons for my fear--yes, husband, I am afraid,' she whispered, drawing nearer to him, and darting an uneasy glance at the window which looked out upon the street.

'Alfred! of what?' inquired the farmer.

'We are threatened by some great misfortune, dear husband,' she resumed, still in a whisper.

'Let us see--speed! What is it?'

'A little before you came home, about eleven o'clock, I should think, I heard some one crying out under the window--listen to me, good neighbor Dupre, I beg of you. Little Bridget is very unhappy. She loves your son James--you know it, and yet you forbid him to marry her. Take care! James loves Bridget, do not oppose his marrying her, for you will do a bad action. Whoever does evil brings misfortune on himself. Therefore, good neighbors, do not depend upon the house of the widow Remy, and mourning upon your own--Sorrow shall visit it heavily if you refuse to your son the hand of Bridget! Who are you?'

'I was also thinking that. For, when I said to her, "I shall endeavour to move the heart of my husband to promote the happiness of those dear children," he raised his head towards me, looked at me with eyes that resembled glowing coals, and then exclaimed in a low, hollow, and prolonged tone, "Thanks, neighbors! I made the sign of the cross, and neither saw nor heard anything more."

'Nevertheless, wife, you did wrong in making that promise.'

'Marry! Listen, husband, if it should concern the life of my boy--'

'The life of our James--it would really be worth while to think about the matter. Let us see, husband, before we go to bed; how will you decide? If it should return, that troubled ghost, it would certainly be necessary to give it an answer.'

'Wife, we shall see about that to-morrow, in the daytime. Cover the fire, and let us go sleep.'

And all the time he was unfastening his gaiters, the farmer kept saying:

'Positively, there is some witchcraft at the bottom of this!'

For a very long time, my grandmother had slept but little. That same night she was lying

awake thinking of her poor dead husband; of her vineyard, now about to be sold, because she could not lift the mortgage; of her grandchildren, so poorly clad, so unhappy; of Bridget, so broken-hearted; and the poor old woman still found a tear to shed for their woes, when suddenly she heard a noise as of the trampling of many cattle, and the bleating of a flock of sheep, crossing the court yard.

'Come, little white ones, my beauties come, go in there.'

'The barking of a dog, who seemed to be driving the sheep into the fold, followed. My grandmother parted the curtains, with the intention of getting out of bed and seeing what was the matter in the court-yard. She suddenly stopped. The moon was shining full into the room. She distinctly saw an old man, who, bent over the kneading-trough, was silently counting some pieces of money, and arranging them in piles.

'Spirit of my poor husband, is it you?' cried my grandmother.

The old man made no reply, and continued his counting. My grandmother took her rosary and began to say her prayers.

'Good Heaven!' exclaimed she, 'why is this sad vision sent to me? Perhaps my dear husband asks a Mass of us. We shall leave one said to-morrow.'

She finally came to close the eyes of the poor woman.

The bright day shone forth. Farmer Dupre regarded as but folly the reasonings, opinions, and terms of the preceding night.

My grandmother aroused Bridget, who ran out to the stable and sheep-fold. Goodman Drop-of-Gold had listened favourably to their petitions.

'Do not trouble yourself in the least as to the source of this money. It is yours, as are also the cows in the stable, and the sheep in the sheep-fold. Lift the mortgage from your property. Bridget is now sure of her marriage portion. I am your friend.'

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