

go, let me go in his place. I want a character for my next novel, and there's one ready made."

"My dear fellow, the simplest way will be to compile Marc Mauduit's notes and documents and make a large volume out of them, entitled 'Memoirs of Fleur d'Echafaud.' You will sell fifty thousand copies, I wager."

"Besides, you will save your imagination so much," said Gildas; "the drama is complete."

"How's that?"

"Well, it seems," said the poet, "that Fleur d'Echafaud belongs to an excellent family. Stolen by a sort of female Caliban, in revenge for his sister's death, the wretch at first placed little Marc in a circus or the booth of a mountebank, or something of that sort. Over and above this education on the tight-rope she had him taught Latin and Greek to disguise him the more. In this new skin he came out as you know, and will end as you can foresee. It seems that this monster of a woman revealed the whole thing to his parents."

"That explains Fleur d'Echafaud's attempt to escape," said the painter. "His family furnished the means, and his early training at the circus did the rest; if his foot had not slipped in climbing a wall, he would have been off to America."

"So you see it is as I said, a perfect drama," said Gildas.

"I must have a talk with my publisher about it," said the author; "in a fortnight it would bring in twenty thousand francs."

"Will you come, Benedict?" asked the crayon artist.

"No, no," said he, shuddering.

Gildas took an opportunity to whisper to the artist:

"Never speak of the Pomereul family before Benedict."

The shade of sadness on Benedict's face was deeper than before.