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said the cashier, as Alphonse tucked the book in his pocket. Twenty thousand eight hundred francs—it would be worth taking.

"Never fear!" laughed Alphonse, and set out for the bank.

"And now a word about M. de Maupigny, the senior partner. He was a fiend of malignancy and settled purpose. That which he planned he carried out. Who got on his bad books paid the piper, if it took a lifetime. Heavily built and swarthy, a Gascon without the Gascon's temperament—and this due to a Sicilian grandfather of great force of character—Jean Marie de Maupigny was a formidable enemy and a terrible taskmaster.

"How it happened Alphonse never knew. Why the twenty thousand eight hundred francs he carried did not reach the bank he never could tell. Who had followed the little fellow in the coat of alpaca no one knew. What Alphonse said, when he recovered his senses, was that he was passing through a little alley



"It will be just twenty years. Go!"

on his way to the bank, noticing a rag-picker behind him, and then he knew no more until he opened his eyes in the hospital.

"That the rag-picker had known of the amount of the deposit—was it probable, my friends? At any rate, the money was gone, and the honest fellow was heart-broken.

"Did M. de Maupigny send the miserable Alphonse flowers, and tell him not to grieve—that it could not have been helped—that when he came out he should be a partner? No. M. de Maupigny was not that kind of man. So far from thinking the affair trivial, he was furious at Alphonse's carelessness.

"Heloise was not so harsh. She it was who brought flowers to him, and who read him the news in La Presse, or laughed with him over the innocent pictures in Le Rire, and told him to hurry up and get out of the hospital and they would be married at once.

"I can get along on very little," she said, "and you have come so near death that we must not waste any more time."

"Ah Heloise!" said Alphonse. "I must spend my time looking for the money. Every house in Paris shall be searched when I get well. It was a Parisian who took the bills, and no Parisian ever leaves Paris if he can help it; therefore in Paris I will find the money."

"That is delirium," said a nurse who was passing.

"Thank you," said Heloise.

"The thought that Heloise would marry him, poor as he was, caused Alphonse to recover rapidly, and in a fortnight's time he reported at the counting-house of his employers. M. de Maupigny received him with black looks.

"Where is the money?" said M. de Maupigny.

"It was very unfortunate," began Alphonse, a cold sweat breaking out on his forehead.

"It was asinine!" roared M. de Maupigny.

"I will look for it," said Alphonse.

"You will not have time!" screamed M. de Maupigny.

The heart of Alphonse sank.

"What will you?" said he.

"This will I," said M. de Maupigny. "How much did you get a week?"

"Fifty francs."

"After this you will receive a different sum," said M. de Maupigny.

"The simple Alphonse, wondering if his employer was going to raise his

salary, opened his mouth with astonishment.

"Shut your mouth!" yelled the Gascon. "Hereafter your salary is thirty francs a week until the debt is paid. You owe me twenty thousand eight hundred francs. You will pay me twenty francs a week until the debt is paid."

"Alphonse sank limply to the floor. M. de Maupigny lifted him to his feet, and shook him until he was able to stand.

"Do you know how long that will take?"

"All my life," faltered Alphonse.

"Perhaps," said M. de Maupigny cynically. "I hope you will have the grace to live until you have paid it. It will be just twenty years. Go!"

"Scarce knowing what he did, the miserable Alphonse went to the cashier and told him that hereafter he was to pay the house twenty francs a week until the stolen money had been paid. Then he took up his pen, dipped it in red ink, wiped it mechanically upon the lapel of his coat of alpaca, and began with a heavy heart to make entries in the ledger.

"That evening he learnt what faithfulness in woman is. He went to see Heloise, and told her that it would be twenty years before he could even think of marrying her.

"What are twenty years?" said she, with a pretty shrug of her shoulders. "My grandmother lived to be a hundred and two!"

"Ma foi, but it was fine, my friends!"

"Year after year, at high noon of a Saturday, Alphonse went to the office of the detestable M. de Maupigny, and said: 'Sir, here are twenty francs. Please credit me with them.'

"Drop them into the tin box," M. de Maupigny would say, not looking up from his work, and Alphonse would drop what might have been such a nest-egg for him and the girl into the hateful box that seemed to mock him.

"During this time Alphonse lived on next to nothing, and lost half a pound of weight in a month. He could no longer afford the wax to spindly his mustache, so he went smooth-shaven. He who had had one of the most fetching mustaches in the whole silk trade!

"Once a week he met Heloise and took a turn with her in the Luxembourg Gardens, where they had first walked together. Each week all that he said was:

"I am twenty francs nearer paying the debt. Do you still love me?"

"As long as life lasts!" was the invariable response.

"Then they would walk around the



"What are twenty years?"

gardens and he would see her home. He would kiss her on the left cheek, and then go to his humble lodging, far from his old quarters, and dream of her at night.

"And always he wore the coat of alpaca that he had had on when he was assaulted by the robber.

"Years do not go by, my friends, without taking their toll, and no one would have said that at twenty-six Heloise was as beautiful as she had been at sixteen, when Alphonse had fallen in love with her. He, on his part, was haggard, lacked zest in life, and lived only to pay the debt.

On the tenth anniversary of the robbery M. Horsdœuvre, the jolly partner of M. de Maupigny, said:

"Alphonse has served us faithfully