



work!) when, on returning to the village, I found the good people in an unwonted state of excitement.

They were gathered round two imposing gendarmes, gesticulating and talking vehemently, the gendarmes themselves appearing not a little disturbed. Avoiding the crowd, I went straight to Thébault's cottage, and on my way to my rooms, paused for a chat in the kitchen with Maman Manon, who as usual was sitting as close to the wood embers on the hearth as she possibly could with safety.

"There is some commotion in the village," I began to say. "Do you know what is the cause of it?"

"My dear madame!" cried pretty Fifine, her dark eyes sparkling with excitement, and holding up her hands, "have you not heard that a madman of the most dangerous kind has escaped from the asylum? The Brigadier and his men are now searching for him. I pray you, madame, to remain at home, or at least not to venture far from the village, until the unhappy man is captured."

I confess that Fifine's news startled me not a little, but I reflected that my stay at Saint Pierre was nearly at an end, and that even a few hours' idleness would greatly interfere with the completion of my picture—a picture which I fondly hoped would create a sensation in the artistic world. So, trying to make light of all misgivings, I succeeded in persuading myself that there was no need to make any change in my usual routine of work.

Having thus determined to set aside the girl's warning, ten minutes' sharp walking brought me, at my usual hour next day, to my sketching ground on the far side of the promontory, and I took up my accustomed position on the summit of the cliff.

Behind me, in a field of growing buckwheat, stood a most picturesque old windmill, which was now in so ruinous a state that it would move visibly before the slightest gust of wind, its timbers as they swayed to and fro creaking and groaning as if in pain at their approaching dismemberment. Below me lay, at an immense depth, a succession of jagged, pointed rocks, the waves boiling and seething against them. About a hundred yards off, on the extreme point to the right, was a little hut, built of seaweed, for the accommodation of the coast-guardsmen, whose life seemed to be of the *dolce far niente* kind, as he was generally to be observed lying on the pile of seaweed inside, smoking cigars.

On this occasion I supposed he was as usual resting himself, as he was not to be seen, nor was any life visible save a cow and a goat—tethered by their horns to a stake run in the ground—on a little patch of grass some distance off, and below me, on a rock overhanging one of the pools formed by the water between the outer layer of rocks and those forming the base of the cliff, an old woman.

She was fishing with a rod, and had a basket lying beside her. Her appearance from the distance was rather startling, as she wore a man's coat, and a short skirt, her head being crowned by a nightcap, over which was tied a coloured handkerchief. She stood motionless as a statue, and had evidently been there a long while; also I felt sure she would continue to stand there until her basket was full, for I had often watched her before, and had admired the patience with which she persevered in her task, knowing as she did full well that the financial result would only be about tenpence, fish being very cheap indeed at Saint Pierre.

It was a lovely day, the sky was bright and clear, without a cloud, and there was just enough breeze to send the little fishing boats gaily along, while their owners lay lazily in the stern holding the tiller.

The air smelt deliciously of wild thyme, clover, and hillside flowers generally, and I sat on my camp-stool on the edge of the cliff so thoroughly enjoying doing nothing that I was in no hurry to begin my work. My eyes wandered dreamily over the sea and rock-bound coast, my mind the while resting itself by dwelling on the extreme solitude of the surroundings, when suddenly I felt rather than heard the short crisp grass rustle behind me, and looking round, saw coming towards me a closely-havened man, without a cap, and dressed in a fisherman's blue knitted jersey and black trousers.

One glance at his wild eyes sufficed to thrill me with a terror far beyond anything words can express, for I saw at once that the poor wretch was mad, and I was naturally seized with the conviction that this must be the much-talked-of lunatic, of whom the gendarmes had been in search the preceding evening.

Calling to mind how necessary it is to disguise fear in the presence of the insane, I tried to smile, and said as jauntily as I could—but with my heart beating till it seemed ready to burst—"Good morning, monsieur!—a fine day," and then added, "Are there any pretty shells down there on the shore?—if so, could monsieur get me some?"—quite forgetting that there was no sand, and that there could not consequently be any shells.

It turned out, however, to be a lucky suggestion on my part, as whether my voice soothed him, or the idea of the shells pleased him, I know not; but his eyes lost the terrible wild glare, and he replied, almost politely, "I will go and seek some shells at once if madame desires to buy some."

With these words, to my intense relief he began at once to descend the little winding goat-path which led down the cliff. I sat for a moment quietly till he was out of sight, and then, almost fainting with terror, I crawled on to the Preventive Station, which I have already mentioned, where I found the coast-

guardsman as usual dozing on his bed of "varech."

It was a little while before I had breath to make him understand the situation, but I succeeded at last in doing so, and grasping his carbine, he was just starting off in pursuit of the maniac, when his step was arrested by fearful shrieks coming up from below. One glance revealed the cause, and side by side we stood motionless, transfixed with horror at the scene which was being enacted before us.

The maniac had reached the bottom, and was now on the same rock as the old woman, round whose neck he had thrown his arms, and a deadly struggle for life was taking place. Whether hunger had caused him to seize on her basket of fish, and she had resented the attempt, or whether the thirst for blood had again asserted itself, will never be known, but the struggle was a terrible and hopeless one.

The old woman kept her ground at first bravely, but in one last wild grapple both lost their footing, and falling together into the swirling, foaming abyss beneath, never rose again. The coastguardsman lost no time in procuring help—as searchers for conger eels were at work round the other side of the cliff—and with the help of their hooks the bodies of the murderer and the murdered were finally drawn out of the deep pool in which both had found a watery grave.

The man was eventually identified as the escaped lunatic, and it was discovered that a day or two before he had waylaid a fisherman (who had been spending some time at a cabaret), had murdered him, thrown the corpse into the brushwood which skirted the common, and then, with the cunning of his disease, put on the dead man's clothes and pursued his way unmolested to the old disused mill, where a cap and other things were afterwards found.

When on my return to the village my adventure became known, I was quite the heroine of the hour, and the bon Dieu was fervently thanked for having protected me through such peril.

Soon after this event I returned to England, and on my departure no one was more deeply affected than my old enemy, Maman Manon, while she gave it as her grave opinion that no French lady would ever be more charming.

I was no, without suspicion that her love was influenced by the use she had had of my teapot, and the many other little delicacies she had enjoyed at my expense. But it was not without regret on my own part that I said good-bye to Saint Pierre. I felt I left real friends behind me; and doubtless my humble admirers in that far-away corner of the world still talk of the Englishwoman's adventure with the madman.

A. E. G.

