

Yo who have seen a vinegar-faced old maid snubbing a meek domestic, think not that Pepin was 'kept in his place' by any such means, or by any such maid. The little Marie—Trombone's offspring was ten years old when Pepin first saw her, and they had kissed each other morning and night, with no single interruption, ever since. Until she was fifteen she used to sit on his knee. With her arm round his neck, she would try to comprehend the great schemes he had for making clocks of marvellous construction; clocks without wheels, clocks without pendulums, clocks small enough to go in one's pocket, the weights whereof she innocently conceived were to be artfully concealed *dans les pantalons*. He made the prettiest trinkets for her ears and fingers. Neither did anything without the knowledge of the other. They loved with the truest simplest affection, and were inseparable. And Pepin was content to provide for M. Trombone's bodily and spiritual wants for six sous a day rather than part from his sister, so he called the little Marie; an arrangement with which her papa did not interfere. And this was how Monsieur Trombone managed his business.

Marie was returning from the market one day when the state-coach of Monsieur le Marquis de la Grenouillegonfiée met and passed her. The Marquis was looking from the window, and seeing pretty Marie, he puckered the wrinkles of his wicked old face into a ravishing leer. Marie flushed and laughed. This marquis looked so droll—exactly like Plerrot in Filoubon's fantoccini show. Perhaps a little colour was in her cheeks, and the smile yet lingered in her eyes as she turned round to look after the lumbering equipage. The Marquis was hanging out of the window, and appeared still more like Plerrot as he kissed his hand to her. She laughed outright, and ran home to tell Pepin. Pepin was sitting at his bench. He must have had a very troublesome job in hand, for he never looked up during the recital of the comic incident, and never smiled at what had amused Marie so mightily.

"I wonder what he meant by smiling at me?" Marie said naively, looking sideways at Pepin. "He doesn't know himself. Those rich folks always are fools," said Pepin. The answer was not complimentary, and for that reason probably not satisfactory. For Marie left Pepin, and presently put the same question to the pretty little body she found reflected in her mirror. The reflection shook its bright little head at her, and seemed to say, "There's no doubt about it, Marie, you are the prettiest girl in Goumache, and that's why the marquis made himself so ridiculous." She twisted herself sideways, holding up her round arms, better to see her figure; that inspection was satisfactory. Then, as she couldn't twist the glass low enough, she pulled her short petticoats on one side, and looked at her ankles; those, and her feet as well, were worthy of her new clocked stockings and her best high-heeled shoes. For the first time in her life she disagreed with Pepin's radical idea of aristocratic imbecility. Perhaps, after all, M. le Marquis de la Grenouillegonfiée was not such a fool as he looked. Pepin was certainly very cross all the morning, and quiet to an unusual degree; and Marie felt, though she hardly knew why, that she was in some way concerned. Any doubt she had was dispelled in the afternoon. She was sitting with her work at the shop-door, when Pepin came and leant against the door-post.

"Marie, when the marquis smiled at you did you smile at him?"

"Yes."

"Did he see you smile?"

"Yes."

"And what did he do then?"

"Why, he—he—kissed his hand to me."

Marie flushed. She had left this detail out of her former narration. Pepin said nothing, but looked as black as a thundercloud. Marie made a feeble attempt at indifference, and began to hum; but she broke off suddenly in the first bar.

"I don't know why you should look angry, Pepin. There's no harm in laughing, is there?"

"Yes, there is."

Marie rose immediately, and went to the door of the stairs.

"Why are you going?" asked Pepin.

"To avoid your displeasure, monsieur. I cannot help laughing when people make themselves ridiculous."

Marie made a saucy curtsy, and ran up-stairs, sufficiently loud for Pepin to hear, and with what earnestness may be imagined by the fact that ten minutes afterwards she ran down in tears, and throwing her arms about Pepin's neck, begged him to forgive his naughty little Marie. But though they were quite good friends again, they found that the old link of brotherly and sisterly love had been broken and was not restored; but in its place what sweeter tie it was found them together they yet hardly knew. Already they had felt the torn concealed within the rosy wreath, and breathed its honey odour.

In the evening, as they walked through the meadow, they were very silent; and when, resting their arms upon the rail, they leant over the bridge looking into the water flowing down the mill-stream, they spoke not a word. The silence touched their hearts as never had their pleasantest conversations. Once, as Marie looked sideways at Pepin, she found him looking sideways at her. They both coloured, and resumed their study of the gudgeons struggling against the current in the stream beneath them.

The gudgeons, influenced by Heaven knows what, turned tall and scuttled down with the stream. Pepin shifted a little nearer to Marie,

and presently she felt his arm slide round her waist. He had never hesitated in doing this before; and she had never until now noticed the pleasantness of this kind of warm close girdle. She felt constrained to yield to its pressure; and so the two young heads met, and their glowing cheeks touched, while both looked happy enough and pretty enough for a picture. And if a pre-Raphaelite should attempt this picture, I would have him depict the gudgeons carried away and tumbling head-over-heels under the mill-wheel.

There are certain people who, like certain insects, see to have been sent on purpose to prevent our staying too long in the pleasant place they get into. M. le Marquis de la Grenouillegonfiée was of this kind of people, and a lovers' Elysium was the pleasant place into which he crept. Pepin was gone to fit a lock at the other end of the village, and the little Marie was as usual sitting with her work at the door, when the awful Grenouillegonfiée equipage made its appearance on the Place, and drew up before the clockmaker's shop. Marie flew to the door at the back of the shop, and waited with a palpitating heart in the passage; but presently she was compelled to emerge from her refuge, for the dreadful old marquis was thumping the floor with his crutch with what vehemence his withered old muscles could command. Pale as a shade, and with not the vestige of a smile on her face, Marie stood before him, whilst he leered and gabbled and chuckled over the confusion he saw in the poor girl's face. At length he professed to want a ring. Marie laid some before him, from which he selected one, and fumbled it about upon his finger.

"See, my pretty, pretty, pretty how love affects me, even to my finger-tips. Prithoe do with your fair fingers what Cupid will not permit mine to do." The marquis stretched out his palsied hand.

Marie hesitated. If she did not put the ring on, this dreadful old man would make it an excuse for staying ever so much longer; if she did put it on, she would have to tell Pepin, and perhaps that would make him jealous. She was perplexed. The marquis had been in the shop ten minutes, and Madame Lechat, the village gossip, had already passed thrice. Madame Lechat, with her long nose, passing for the fourth time, decided her; she pushed the ring down the marquis's finger. The old sinner clasped her hand in his and drew it to his lips; she snatched it away, and looked to the door to see if Madame Lechat had seen this. In the doorway stood Pepin.

The following morning, as M. Trombone was preparing to get a little fresh air, as he was pleased to term his diurnal visit to the Soleil d'Or, Pepin touched his arm, and said:

"Monsieur, may I speak one word with you?"

"Why not, my good Pepin? Turenne has listened to Turenne's Trombone; why should not Trombone listen to Trombone's Pepin?"

"Monsieur, my term of service has expired."

"M-O-n Dieu!"

"I am anxious for the future."

"Be tranquil, my child. Fear not. You are a good boy, and Turenne's Trombone suffers not merit to remain unrecognised. You shall go on as if your indentures were binding on me for ever, my little cabbage!"

"Monsieur, I desire to wed the little Marie."

"My God! I am electrified!"

"Monsieur, we love each other."

"What money have you saved from your income?" asked M. Trombone, after vainly struggling to multiply six sous a day by seven years.

"None."

"Peste!"

"It costs me all for clothes."

"You must be less extravagant. You must save, my good Pepin, and then, in about five or six years, we shall see, we shall see. Good morning, my good—"

"But, monsieur, one moment. I have other views."

"It is impossible!"

"I desire to wed Marie next Sunday."

M. Trombone's leg gave way under him. He would have sunk to the earth but for the rigidity of his wooden limb. Pepin continued:

"When we are married we shall go to Paris."

"This infant is insane," said Trombone to himself. "Who will pay for the journey?" he added to Pepin.

"We shall walk!"

"A million leagues! My God, a fine marriage trip!"

"I shall pay expenses by working on the way."

"How much will there be left for Turenne's Trombone. And between us, my charming little butterfly, when do you think of returning?"

"When my fortune is made."

"Ah, poor babe, these detestable clocks have softened his brain. The devil though, it is inconvenient for me," thought the old soldier.

"Pepin, suppose I say this is unwise; I cannot suffer my daughter to marry you; what then?"

"Monsieur, I shall walk to Paris by myself."

"But suppose I say, Pepin, you shall marry the little Marie provided that you take her not from beneath the roof of her fond father, nor her fond father from beneath the roof of the Soleil d'Or?"

"I will answer to-morrow."

"And I, my Pepin, shall be prepared to offer—or not—to-morrow. And now, for the sake of St. Cecilia, suffer me to get a breath of fresh air. I choke, I burn; my vitals are like briars-torns within me. Adieu!"

During the day M. Trombone was inspired;

and the next morning met Pepin with the face of a fat lamb and the eyes of a fox.

"Pepin!"

"Monsieur."

"What is my daughter, my sweet, my angelic Marie—what is she worth?"

"Ten million worlds!"

M. Trombone embraced Pepin with tears in his eyes.

"Pepin, although Turenne's right hand, I am no scholar, but reckoning a world to be worth two sous, would ten million be equivalent to a thousand livres, think you?"

"Truly."

"Then go, my spiritual infant, and bring me which you choose, the worlds or the livres, and when the little Marie shall be yours."

"How long will you give me to procure them?"

"One year."

"Monsieur, it shall be done. A notary shall make out the agreement."

Pepin made up his bundle, and the little Marie helped him—that is, she increased its bulk with innumerable useless things that might serve him in some remote emergency, and refreshed him in his labours with tender kisses and caresses. She bore up bravely during the day, her eyes only twinkling now and then, which they will do as well with a smile as with a tear. Why should she cry when her own brave good Pepin was going to earn fame, and bring back money enough to make her his wife? This was the question she repeated to herself again and again and again, until Nature answered, telling her that she was a foolish little woman, with a heart even softer than her head. Then her head gave up the contest, and her heart had it all its own way, and sufficient ado had Pepin to kiss her tears away after that.

M. Trombone never rose before the Soleil d'Or; and as Pepin was to rise the next day with the other and earlier rising sun, the parting between Turenne's Trombone and Trombone's Pepin took place over night. M. Trombone was dramatically pathetic, and his feelings were considerably intensified by his being in liquor at the time.

When Pepin opened his door the next morning, he found sitting there fast asleep the little Marie. The poor girl had tossed about in her bed for an hour after parting with her lover, and then it seemed to her that the morning must be close at hand, and that she had been lying there the whole night. How terrible it would be if the fatigue should overcome her, and she should be asleep when Pepin departed! She rose and dressed herself in the dark, and crept along to Pepin's door. He was not stirring yet; but her mind was infinitely relieved. It was so pleasant to be near the one she loved so much. She looked from the window; but no light streaks told of the approaching morning. She sat down by the door, and thought about Pepin for hours, until at last, when the morning light touched the horizon, sleep closed the eyelids of Pepin's watching angel, and she slept.

Pepin hesitated. Should he leave without awakening her, and spare her the pain of separation? A suspicion of the truth decided him not to do this. When, taking her head between his hands he kissed it, she said hastily, whilst her hands clutched his nervously,

"Yes, yes, my dearie, I am awake—I am awake!"

She was not pretty this morning, for her face was swollen and distorted with fatigue and grief; and she was not smart as she was wont to be. She used to wear a little finery at every available point of her person—she being one of those pretty gay creatures who can wear, without looking vulgar, any quantity of ornament. This morning not even her ear-rings were graced by being worn. It seemed as though she were mourning already for the lover she was to lose.

Pepin walked ten miles and began to feel hungry. He sat beneath an apple-tree by the way-side, and opened his bundle. He took out the embroidered handkerchief that Marie had insisted upon his taking, and which she prized as the most costly article of her wardrobe. Apparently kissing it gave him appetite, for he presently turned his attention to a loaf with avidity: that, too, Marie had put in. He broke it in half, but hungry as he was he did not eat. For there, in the middle of the loaf, lay Marie's ear-rings, and her brooch and her three rings, and every gimcrack she possessed except the watch Pepin made and had given her the day before. Perhaps altogether these things were worth twelvepence; but the dear little soul, when she put them there, thought she was providing against the greatest poverty that might come to her sweetheart. Would any degree of want and privation induce him to part with them.

Pepin found work pretty readily in the villages on his route, and entered Rouen with sixty sous in his pocket. But in the city he found no work, for the citizens had plenty of resident clockmakers, and the clockmakers had plenty of workmen. So he went out of Rouen with a heavier heart and a lighter pocket. At length he reached Paris, and presenting himself before the chief watchmaker, asked for employment.

"What can you do?" asked M. Pendule.

"Anything," answered modest Pepin.

M. Pendule was a Frenchman, and tolerant of bumptiousness. He was himself bumptious.

"I will give you a chance, young man. I myself am risen from nothing. I had a chance. Regard this clock: it is the most perfect in the world. I made it. It has only one fault—it will not go. Remedy the defect, and I engage you at two livres a week."

That evening the clock acted superbly, and Pepin was engaged. The letter conveying this intelligence to the little Marie was read with joyful emotion by the faithful girl; and Turenne's Trombone systematically intoxicated himself. In nine months Pepin saved sixty-eight livres; thus he had but to get nine hundred and thirty-two in the following two months. Some would have despaired. Pepin was young; more than that, he was French: he did not despair.

At that time there were in Paris two eccentric English virtuosos—collectors of curiosities—a M. Smisse and a M. Jaunez. These hated each other as only insulars can. One day M. Jaunez had bought, at the market of Smiffel, a quad-room wife; she was almost black. The next day M. Smisse bought a negress; she was quite black. These men had come to Paris and brought with them their rivalry; also they brought with them their gold. M. Jaunez purchased a Strasbourg clock. Its top was adorned with a stage. On this, at every hour, a garden sprang up, in which, half-concealed by a bush, stood Adam and Eve. Various beasts then crossed, and Adam nodded his head as if in the act of naming them. When the beasts had passed, the whole sank beneath the stage. It was a marvel of workmanship.

M. Smisse was insane when he heard of M. Jaunez's treasure. One morning he was attracted to a window by a curious piece of clockwork. On the top of the clock was a sentry-box; at the hour the door opened, a sentry issued, cocked, presented, and fired his musket, shouldered it, and returned within his sentry-box, the door of which immediately closed. This work was Pepin's. The insular rushed into the shop. M. Pendule was composing a sonnet. He was a poet. A poet can do anything. M. Pendule made clocks that did everything but go, and sonnets that did anything but sell. What matter? He still made clocks and sonnets. Giants regardlessly step over obstacles that pigmies never surmount. To return.

M. Smisse with difficulty made himself understood. M. Pendule saw what was wanted instantaneously.

"You desire a machine that shall eclipse the affair of M. Jaunez?"

"Entirely," said M. Smisse. "His beasts only slide over, and Adam merely turns his head half round. Now, if you could make my Adam's head turn round completely, and my beasts walk across—"

"Wagging their tails," suggested M. Pendule. "That would be perfection truly," replied the Englishman with enthusiasm. "Can you achieve this?"

"This and more, monsieur."

"And the price?"

"I will tell you to-morrow."

M. Smisse departed in an ecstasy of joy, and Mr. Pendule called to him Pepin.

"Pepin!"

"Monsieur."

"I desire a clock. Upon it grows a flowering plain. On one side stands M. Noah beside his ark. Across the flowery mead there winds a procession of beasts and of birds and of fishes. They enter the ark walking and gracefully waving their tails. M. Noah follows and shuts the door. The rain descends, and waters cover the surface of the stage. The ark rocks upon the waves. M. Noah opens a window, waving his handkerchief, and revolving his head as the curtain falls upon the interesting tableau."

"Monsieur, I will do this."

"And the cost, Pepin?"

"One thousand livres, independent of assistants and material—these to be furnished by you."

"Pepin, do you know what you say?"

"Monsieur, as well as what you ask."

Upon these terms Pepin commenced his labours the following morning. M. Smisse was willing to pay two thousand livres to enrage the soul of Mr. Jaunez.

One night as Pepin was returning from his work he observed a crowd, and discovered that the object of their curiosity was a mountebank, who was playing the tabor, while six young girls upon stilts went through their curious evolutions. The mountebank, whose eye was continually roving round the crowd to see if any new-comer was desirous of contributing to his support, no sooner beheld Pepin than he terminated his performance, and threw himself into the arms of the young mechanic. The mountebank was Filoubon—one of the cleverest, pleasantest, most unprincipled rascals in the world. He was known and welcomed in every village of France. He was trusted in none. He robbed one place and spent the plunder in the next. The talented Filoubon family consisted of six charming young ladies. In all probability these pretty girls, like Filoubon's respectable breeches, had been stolen, and were for sale. For the past ten years not one of the Mesdemoiselles Filoubon had been younger than fifteen years, and not one older than eighteen. No one seeing the family one year would recognize them the next but for the presence of Filoubon and his assertion of paternal rights.

Besides these, there were in many villages many girls both old and young whom Filoubon might lawfully have affiliated. Their features would have proved the equity of his claim; this was partly why he did not claim them. Filoubon was not what one may call pretty or handsome. Again, some were too young and some were too old for professional purposes, and to avoid invidious distinction, he relinquished the charming creatures to the villages he honoured by populating. Again, my faith, how could one man have reconciled those mothers?

With all this, there was not a soul from Lorraine to Gascony who would have prosecuted