

IV.

A bird twice caught is doubly dear; and the cage hung from its accustomed place on the clothes-line that evening in the garden, beside which Evariste sat and smoked his pipe. And for the first time in the seven years of their married life, the husband shunned the wife; with Madame Clavette in turn—less two years the thirty-one of her lord and master—at last conscious of the great width of a gap that had slowly widened, even from the very day on which *M. le Curé* had joined them together.

When Evariste arose at the usual hour next morning at which he always lit the fire and prepared breakfast, he found this intention forestalled, and his wife, for once, before him.

Immediately dressing, he afterwards partook of the morning meal in the silence of a man who sees nothing before but his repast and the duties of the day.

It was a sleepless night that Madame Clavette had passed. But it was not the loss of a few hours' rest, however, that made her appear so heavy-eyed and worn when morning broke, for thought can splinter the mind into more pieces than a blow shivers glass, and Madame had just faced thoughts that were limited neither in number nor aggression.

She looked up wistfully, nay, timidly, as Evariste arose and strode over to where his hat hung, and went out of doors, but she lacked the power to stop him—all the former daring, heartless raillery, and selfish, unthinking ways now gone, transforming her in her husband's presence as one suddenly aloof and bereft what to do or say. Evariste might have seen these things had it so pleased him, but it pleased him not; for never once looked he in the direction of his wife, construing the silence of her misgiving into one of sullen defiance.

Fed and tended for the first time since its arrival by other hands than its master's, the bird that morning looked down upon Evariste's approach with a saucy note of recognition. But if Evariste smiled, he also frowned, to note these things.

"Bah!" he muttered, regarding the bird fixedly, "she might have let well-

enough alone. What amends are these, L'Petit, compared with your loss? Sin himself lurks in the hearts of some women. God forgive her for the black trick she played me yesterday. She will have enough for next confession—*vraie-ment!*" saying which, and with a reflective shake of his head, the speaker stalked off down the garden.

At the hour of noon a voice from the doorway called him to dinner, but if the weeder heard, he gave no heed.

"Ev-a-riste!" and surely there was a quaver in the voice this time—a round, smooth voice, too, when the owner liked.

The answer floated back on a far from encouraging tone: "Well, what is it?"

"Dinner!"

"I have no hunger," brusquely. "The day is too hot for meat. If I want later, there is fruit for the plucking," and, stooping down, the speaker went on again with his work.

Madame nervously plucked at the bosom of her dress, and brushed the hair back from her forehead with a degree of uncertainty; but she, so bold and ready of tongue heretofore, had not a word to say because of the lump in her throat. Creeping softly back into the house she sat down—but not to eat.

There it stood for hours—the dinner she had gotten ready with so much care; and when the shadows began to lengthen and the pipings of birds outside to subside into the twitter of approaching even, Madame arose from the couch where she had thrown herself and lain as one without life, to bathe her flushed face in cool water, and smooth out the hair that was tossed. This was followed by a particular brushing of her dress, and general tidying of her person; after which—scrupulously exact in the neat appearance she presented—Madame Clavette left the house, and tip-toed down the garden to where Evariste was known to be weeding the onions.

A high pivot-hedge concealed one-half the garden from the other, and, as Madame drew near, and would pass through the only and narrow gap, a low voice beyond told her that Evariste, working towards the house, was nearer than she expected; and this fact, coupled with the sound of his voice, halted her