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# **SAC-AU-DOS**

**By Joris Karl Huysmans**

Translated by L. G. Meyer.

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As soon as I had finished my studies my parents deemed it useful to my career to cause me to appear before a table covered with green cloth and surmounted by the living busts of some old gentlemen who interested themselves in knowing whether I had learned enough of the dead languages to entitle me to the degree of Bachelor.

The test was satisfactory. A dinner to which all my relations, far and near, were invited, celebrated my success, affected my future, and ultimately fixed me in the law. Well, I passed my examination and got rid of the money provided for my first year's expenses with a blond girl who, at times, pretended to be fond of me.

I frequented the Latin Quarter assiduously and there I learned many things; among others to take an interest in those students who blew their political opinions into the foam of their beer, every night, then to acquire a taste for the works of George Sand and of Heine, of Edgard Quinet, and of Henri Murger.

The psychophysical moment of silliness was upon me.

That lasted about a year; gradually I ripened. The electoral struggles of the closing days of the Empire left me cold; I was the son neither of a Senator nor a proscrip and I had but to outlive, no matter what the régime, the traditions of mediocrity and wretchedness long since adopted by my family. The law pleased me but little. I thought that the *Code* had been purposely maldirected in order to furnish certain people with an opportunity to wrangle, to the utmost limit, over the smallest words; even today it seems to me that a phrase clearly worded can not reasonably bear such diverse interpretation.

I was sounding my depths, searching for some state of being that I might embrace without too much disgust, when the late Emperor found one for me; he made me a soldier through the maladroitness of his policy.

The war with Prussia broke out. To tell the truth I did not understand the motives that made that butchery of armies necessary. I felt neither the need of killing others nor of being killed by them. However that may be, enrolled in the

*Garde mobile* of the Seine, I received orders, after having gone in search of an outfit, to visit the barber and to be at the barracks in the Rue Lourcine at seven o'clock in the evening.

I was at the place punctually. After roll-call part of the regiment swarmed out of the barrack gates and emptied into the street. Then the sidewalks raised a shout and the gutters ran.

Crowding one against another, workmen in blouses, workmen in tatters, soldiers strapped and gaitered, without arms, they scanned to the clink of glasses the Marseillaise over which they shouted themselves hoarse with their voices out of time. Heads geared with képis {1} of incredible height and ornamented with vizors fit for blind men and with tin cockades of red, white and blue, muffled in blue-black jackets with madder-red collars and cuffs, breached in blue linen pantaloons with a red stripe down the side, the militia of the Seine kept howling at the moon before going forth to conquer Prussia. That was a deafening uproar at the wine shops, a hubbub of glasses, cans and shrieks, cut into here and there by the rattling of a window shaken by the wind. Suddenly the roll of the drum muffled all that clamor; a new column poured out of the barracks; there was carousing and tipping indescribable. Those soldiers who were drinking in the wine shops shot now out into the streets, followed by their parents and friends who disputed the honor of carrying their knapsacks;

the ranks were broken; it was a confusion of soldiers and citizens; mothers wept, fathers, more contained, sputtered wine, children frisked for joy and shrieked patriotic songs at the top of their shrill voices.

1 Military hats.

They crossed Paris helter-skelter by the flashes of lightning that whipped the storming clouds into white zigzags. The heat was overpowering, the knapsack was heavy; they drank at every corner of the street; they arrived at last at the railway station of Aubervilliers. There was a moment of silence broken by the sound of sobbing, dominated again by a burst of the Marseillaise, then they stalled us like cattle in the cars. "Good night, Jules! may we meet soon again! Be good! Above all write to me!" They squeezed hands for a last time, the train whistled, we had left the station. We were a regular shovelful of fifty men in that box that rolled away with us. Some were weeping freely, jeered at by the others who, completely lost in drink, were sticking lighted candles into their provisions and bawling at the top of their voices: "Down with Badinguet! and long live Rochefort!" {2}

2 "Badinguet, nickname given to Napoleon III; Henri Rochefort, anti-Napoleon journalist and agitator.

Others, in a corner by themselves, stared silently and sullenly at the broad floor that kept vibrating in the dust. All

at once the convoy makes a halt—I got out. Complete darkness—twenty-five minutes after midnight.

On all sides stretch the fields, and in the distance lighted up by sharp flashes of lightning, a cottage, a tree sketch their silhouette against a sky swollen by the tempest. Only the grinding and rumbling of the engine is heard, whose clusters of sparks flying from the smokestack scatter like a bouquet of fireworks the whole length of the train. Every one gets out, goes forward as far as the engine, which looms up in the night and becomes huge. The stop lasted quite two hours. The signal disks flamed red, the engineer was waiting for them to reverse. They turn; again we get back into the wagons, but a man who comes up on the run and swinging a lantern, speaks a few words to the conductor, who immediately backs the train into a siding where we remain motionless. Not one of us knows where we are. I descend again from the carriage, and sitting on an embankment, I nibble at a bit of bread and drink a drop or two, when the whirl of a hurricane whistles in the distance, approaches, roaring and vomiting fire, and an interminable train of artillery passed at full speed, carrying along horses, men, and cannon whose bronze necks sparkle in a confusion of light. Five minutes after we take up our slow advance, again interrupted by halts that grow longer and longer. The journey ends with daybreak, and leaning from the car window, worn out by the long watch of the night, I look out upon the country that surrounds us: a succession of chalky plains, closing in the horizon, a band of pale green

like the color of a sick turquoise, a flat country, gloomy, meagre, the beggarly Champagne Pouilleuse!

Little by little the sun brightens, we, rumbling on the while, end, however, by getting there! Leaving at eight o'clock in the evening, we were delivered at three o'clock of the afternoon of the next day. Two of the militia had dropped by the way, one who had taken a header from the top of the car into the river, the other who had broken his head on the ledge of a bridge. The rest, after having pillaged the hovels and the gardens, met along the route wherever the train stopped, either yawned, their lips puffed out with wine, and their eyes swollen, or amused themselves by throwing from one side of the carriage to the other branches of shrubs and hencoops which they had stolen.

The disembarking was managed after the same fashion as the departure. Nothing was ready; neither canteen, nor straw, nor coats, nor arms, nothing, absolutely nothing. Only tents full of manure and of insects, just left by the troops off for the frontier. For three days we live at the mercy of Mourmelon.<sup>{3}</sup> Eating a sausage one day and drinking a bowl of café-au-lait the next, exploited to the utmost by the natives, sleeping, no matter how, without straw and without covering. Truly such a life was not calculated to give us a taste for the calling they had inflicted on us.

3 A suburb of Chalons.

Once in camp, the companies separated; the laborers

took themselves to the tents of their fellows; the bourgeois did the same. The tent in which I found myself was not badly managed, for we succeeded in driving out by argument of wine the two fellows, the native odor of whose feet was aggravated by a long and happy neglect.

One or two days passed. They made us mount guard with the pickets, we drank a great deal of eau-de-vie, and the drink-shops of Mourmelon were full without let, when suddenly Canrobert {4} passed us in review along the front line of battle. I see him now on his big horse, bent over the saddle, his hair flying, his waxed mustaches in a ghastly face. A mutiny was breaking out. Deprived of everything, and hardly convinced by that marshal that we lacked nothing, we growled in chorus when he talked of repressing our complaints by force: "Ran, plan, plan, a hundred thousand men afoot, to Paris, to Paris!"

4 Canrobert, a brave and distinguished veteran, head of the Sixth Corps of the Army of the Rhine.

Canrobert grew livid, and shouted, planting his horse in the midst of us. "Hats off to a marshal of France!" Again a howl goes up from the ranks; then turning bridle, followed in confusion by his staff officers, he threatened us with his finger, whistling between his separated teeth. "You shall pay dear for this, gentlemen from Paris!"

Two days after this episode, the icy water of the camp made me so sick that there was urgent need of my entering

the hospital. After the doctor's visit, I buckle on my knapsack, and under guard of a corporal, here I am going limping along, dragging my legs and sweating under my harness. The hospital is gorged with men; they send me back. I then go to one of the nearest military hospitals; a bed stands empty; I am admitted. I put down my knapsack at last, and with the expectation that the major would forbid me to move, I went out for a walk in the little garden which connected the set of buildings. Suddenly there issued from the door a man with bristling beard and bulging eyes. He plants his hands in the pockets of a long dirt-brown cloak, and shouts out from the distance as soon as he sees me:

"Hey you, man! What are you doing over here?" I approach, I explain to him the motive that brings me. He thrashes his arms about and bawls:

"Go in again! You have no right to walk about in this garden until they give you your costume."

I go back into the room, a nurse arrives and brings me a great military coat, pantaloons, old shoes without heels, and a cap like a nightcap. I look at myself, thus grotesquely dressed, in my little mirror. Good Heavens, what a face and what an outfit! With my haggard eyes and my sallow complexion, with my hair cut short, and my nose with the bumps shining; with my long mouse-gray coat, my pants stained russet, my great hedless shoes, my colossal cotton cap, I am prodigiously ugly. I could not keep from laughing. I turn my head toward the side of my bed neighbor, a tall boy

of Jewish type, who is sketching my portrait in a notebook. We become friends at once; I tell him to call me Eugène Lejantel; he responds by telling me to call him Francis Emonot; we recall to each other this and that painter; we enter into a discussion of esthetics and forget our misfortune. Night arrives; they portion out to us a dish of boiled meat dotted black with a few lentils, they pour us out brimming cups of coco-clairet, and I undress, enchanted at stretching myself out in a bed without keeping my clothes and my shoes on.

The next morning I am awakened at about six o'clock by a great fracas at the door and a clatter of voices. I sit up in bed, I rub my eyes, and I see the gentleman of the night before, still dressed in his wrapper, brown the color of cachou, who advances majestically, followed by a train of nurses. It was the major. Scarcely inside, he rolls his dull green eyes from right to left and from left to right, plunges his hands in his pockets and bawls:

"Number One, show your leg—your dirty leg. Eh, it's in a bad shape, that leg, that sore runs like a fountain; lotion of bran and water, lint, half-rations, a strong licorice tea. Number Two, show your throat—your dirty throat. It's getting worse and worse, that throat; the tonsils will be cut out tomorrow."

"But, doctor—"

"Eh, I am not asking anything from you, am I? Say one

word and I'll put you on a diet."

"But, at least—"

"Put that man on a diet. Write: diet, gargles, strong licorice tea."

In that vein he passed all the sick in review, prescribing for all, the syphilitics and the wounded, the fevered and the dysentery patients his strong licorice tea. He stopped in front of me, stared into my face, tore off my covering, punched my stomach with his fist, ordered albuminated water for me, the inevitable tea; and went out snorting and dragging his feet.

Life was difficult with the men who were about us. There were twenty-one in our sleeping quarters. At my left slept my friend, the painter; on my right, a great devil of a trumpeter, with face pocked like a sewing thimble and yellow as a glass of bile. He combined two professions, that of cobbler by day and a procurer of girls by night. He was, in other respects, a comical fellow who frisked about on his hands, or on his head, telling you in the most naïve way in the world the manner in which he expedited at the toe of his boot the work of his menials, or intoned in a touching voice sentimental songs:

"I have cherished in my sorrow—ow  
But the friendship of a swallow—ow."

I conquered his good graces by giving him twenty sous to

buy a liter of wine with, and we did well in not being on bad terms with him, for the rest of our quarters—composed in part of attorneys of the Rue Maubuée—were well disposed to pick a quarrel with us.

One night, among others, the 15th of August, Francis Emonot threatened to box the ears of two men who had taken his towel. There was a formidable hubbub in the dormitory. Insults rained, we were treated to "roule-en-coulet de duchesses." Being two against nineteen, we were in a fair way of getting a regular drubbing, when the bugler interfered, took aside the most desperate and coaxed them into giving up the stolen object. To celebrate the reconciliation which followed this scene, Francis and I contributed three francs each, and it was arranged that the bugler with the aid of his comrades should try to slip out of the hospital and bring back some meat and wine.

The light had disappeared from the major's window, the druggist at last extinguished his, we climb over the thicket, examine our surroundings, caution the men who are gliding along the walls not to encounter the sentinels on the way, mount on one another's shoulders and jump off into the field. An hour later they came back laden with victuals; they pass them over and reenter the dormitory with us; we suppress the two night lamps, light candle-ends stuck on the floor, and around my bed in our shirts we form a circle. We had absorbed three or four liters of wine and cut up the best part of a leg of mutton, when a great clattering of

shoes is heard; I blow out the candle stubbs, by the grace of my shoe, and every one escapes under the beds. The door opens; the major appears, heaves a formidable "Good Heavens!" stumbles in the darkness, goes out and comes back with a lantern and the inevitable train of nurses. I profit by the moment to disperse the remains of the feast; the major crosses the dormitory at a quick step, swearing, threatening to take us all into custody and to put us in stocks.

We are convulsed with laughter under our coverings; a trumpet-flourish blazes from the other side of the dormitory. The major puts us all under diet; then he goes out, warning us that we shall know in a few minutes what metal he is made of.

Once gone, we vie with each other in doing our worst; flashes of laughter rumble and crackle. The trumpeter does a handspring in the dormitory, one of his friends joins him, a third jumps on his bed as on a springboard and bounces up and down, his arms balancing, his shirt flying; his neighbor breaks into a triumphant cancan; the major enters abruptly, orders four men of the line he has brought with him to seize the dancers, and announces to us that he is going to draw up a report and send it to whom it may concern.

Calm is restored at last; the next day we get the nurses to buy us some eatables. The days run on without further incident. We are beginning to perish of ennui in this hospital, when, one day, at five o'clock, the doctor bursts

into the room and orders us to put on our campaign clothes and to buckle on our knapsacks.

We learn ten minutes later that the Prussians are marching on Chalons.

A gloomy amazement reigns in the quarters. Until now we have had no doubts as to the outcome of passing events. We knew about the too celebrated victory of Sarrebrück, we do not expect the reverses which overwhelm us. The major examines every man; not one is cured, all had been too long gorged with licorice water and deprived of care. Nevertheless, he returns to their corps the least sick, he orders others to lie down completely dressed, knapsack in readiness. Francis and I are among these last. The day passes, the night passes. Nothing. But I have the colic continually and suffer. At last, at about nine o'clock in the morning, appears a long train of mules with "cacolets,"<sup>{5}</sup> and led by "tringlots."<sup>{6}</sup>

5 Panier seats used in the French army to transport the wounded.

6 Tringlots are the soldiers detailed for this duty.

We climb two by two into the baskets. Francis and I were lifted onto the same mule, only, as the painter was very fat and I very lean, the arrangement see-sawed; I go up in the air while he descends under the belly of the mule, who, dragged by the head, and pushed from behind, dances and

flings about furiously. We trot along in a whirlwind of dust, blinded, bewildered, jolted, we cling to the bar of the cacolet, shut our eyes, laugh and groan. We arrive at Chalons more dead than alive; we fall to the gravel like jaded cattle, then they pack us into the cars and we leave Chalons to go—where? No one knows.

It is night; we fly over the rails. The sick are taken from the cars and walked up and down the platforms. The engine whistles, slows down and stops in a railway station—that of Reims, I suppose, but I can not be sure. We are dying of hunger, the commissary forgot but one thing: to give us bread for the journey. I get out. I see an open buffet, I run for it, but others are there before me. They are fighting as I come up. Some were seizing bottles, others meat, some bread, some cigars. Half-dazed but furious, the restaurant-keeper defends his shop at the point of a spit. Crowded by their comrades, who come up in gangs, the front row of militia throw themselves onto the counter, which gives way, carrying in its wake the owner of the buffet and his waiters. Then followed a regular pillage; everything went, from matches to toothpicks. Meanwhile the bell rings and the train starts. Not one of us disturbs himself, and while sitting on the walk, I explain to the painter how the tubes work, the mechanism of the bell. The train backs down over the rails to take us aboard. We ascend into our compartments again and we pass in review the booty we had seized. To tell the truth, there was little variety of food. Pork-butcher's meat and nothing but pork-butcher's meat! We had six

strings of Bologna sausages flavored with garlic, a scarlet tongue, two sausages, a superb slice of Italian sausage, a slice in silver stripe, the meat all of an angry red, mottled white; four liters of wine, a half-bottle of cognac, and a few candle ends. We stick the candle ends into the neck of our flasks, which swing, hung by strings to the sides of the wagon. There was, thus, when the train jolted over a switch, a rain of hot grease which congealed almost instantly into great platters, but our coats had seen many another.

We began our repast at once, interrupted by the going and coming of those of the militia who kept running along the footboards the whole length of the train, and knocked at our window-panes and demanded something to drink. We sang at the top of our voices, we drank, we clinked glasses. Never did sick men make so much noise or romp so on a train in motion!

One would have said that it was a rolling Court of Miracles; the cripples jumped with jointed legs, those whose intestines were burning soaked them in bumpers of cognac, the one-eyed opened their eyes, the fevered capered about, the sick throats bellowed and tumbled; it was unheard of!

This disturbance ends in calming itself. I profit by the lull to put my nose out of the window. There was not a star there, not even a tip of the moon; heaven and earth seem to make but one, and in that intensity of inky blackness, the lanterns winked like eyes of different colors attached to the

metal of the disks. The engineer discharged his whistle, the engine puffed and vomited its sparks without rest. I reclose the window and look at my companions. Some were snoring, others disturbed by the jolting of the box, gurgled and swore in their sleep, turning over incessantly, searching for room to stretch their legs, to brace their heads that nodded at every jolt.

By dint of looking at them, I was beginning to get sleepy when the train stopped short and woke me up. We were at a station; and the station-master's office flamed like a forge fire in the darkness of the night. I had one leg numbed, I was shivering from cold, I descend to warm up a bit. I walk up and down the platform, I go to look at the engine, which they uncouple, and which they replace by another, and walking by the office I hear the bills and the tic-tac of the telegraph. The employee, with back turned to me, was stooping a little to the right in such a way that from where I was placed, I could see but the back of his head and the tip of his nose, which shone red and beaded with sweat, while the rest of his figure disappeared in the shadow thrown by the screen of a gas-jet.

They invite me to get back into the carriage, and I find my comrades again, just as I had left them. That time I went to sleep for good. For how long did my sleep last? I don't know—when a great cry woke me up: "Paris! Paris!" I made a dash for the doorway. At a distance, against a band of pale gold, stood out in black the smokestacks of

factories and workshops. We were at Saint-Denis; the news ran from car to car. Every one was on his feet. The engine quickened its pace. The Gare du Nord looms up in the distance. We arrive there, we get down, we throw ourselves at the gates. One part of us succeeds in escaping, the others are stopped by the employees of the railroad and by the troops; by force they make us remount into a train that is getting up steam, and here we are again, off for God knows where!

We roll onward again all day long. I am weary of looking at the rows of houses and trees that spin by before my eyes; then, too, I have the colic continually and I suffer. About four o'clock of the afternoon, the engine slackens its speed, and stops at a landing-stage where awaits us there an old general, around whom sports a flock of young men, with headgear of red képis, breached in red and shod with boots with yellow spurs. The general passes us in review and divides us into two squads; the one for the seminary, the other is directed toward the hospital. We are, it seems, at Arras. Francis and we form part of the first squad. They tumble us into carts stuffed with straw, and we arrive in front of a great building that settles and seems about to collapse into the street. We mount to the second story to a room that contains some thirty beds; each one of us unbuckles his knapsack, combs himself, and sits down. A doctor arrives.

"What is the trouble with you?" he asks of the first.

"A carbuncle."

"Ah! and you?"

"Dysentery."

"Ah! and you?"

"A bubo."

"But in that case you have not been wounded during the war?"

"Not the least in the world."

"Very well! You can take up your knapsacks again. The archbishop gives up the beds of his seminarists only to the wounded."

I pack into my knapsack again all the knick-knacks that I had taken out, and we are off again, willy-nilly, for the city hospital. There was no more room there. In vain the sisters contrive to squeeze the iron beds together, the wards are full. Worn out by all these delays, I seize one mattress, Francis takes another, and we go and stretch ourselves in the garden on a great glass-plot.

The next day I have a talk with the director, an affable and charming man. I ask permission for the painter and for me to go out into the town. He consents; the door opens; we are free! We are going to dine at last! To eat real meat, to drink real wine! Ah, we do not hesitate; we make straight for the best hotel in town. They serve us there with a

wholesome meal. There are flowers there on the table, magnificent bouquets of roses and fuchias that spread themselves out of the glass vases. The waiter brings in a roast that drains into a lake of butter; the sun himself comes to the feast, makes the covers sparkle and the blades of the knives, sifts his golden dust through the carafes, and playing with the pomard that gently rocks in the glasses, spots with a ruby star the damask cloth.

Oh, sacred joy of the guzzlers! My mouth is full and Francis is drunk! The fumes of the roast mingle with the perfume of the flowers; the purple of the wine vies in gorgeousness with the red of the roses. The waiter who serves us has the air of folly and we have the air of gluttons, it is all the same to us! We stuff down roast after roast, we pour down bordeaux upon burgundy, chartreuse upon cognac. To the devil with your weak wines and your thirty-sixes, {7} which we have been drinking since our departure from Paris! To the devil with those whimsicalities without name, those mysterious pot-house poisons with which we have been so crammed to leanness for nearly a month! We are unrecognizable; our once peaked faces redden like a drunkard's, we get noisy, with noise in the air we cut loose. We run all over the town that way.

7 Brandy of thirty-six degrees.

Evening arrives; we must go back, however. The sister who is in charge of the old men's ward says to us in a small

flute-like voice:

"Soldiers, gentlemen, you were very cold last night, but you are going to have a good bed."

And she leads us into a great room where three night lamps, dimly lighted, hang from the ceiling. I have a white bed, I sink with delight between the sheets that still smell fresh with the odor of washing. We hear nothing but the breathing or the snoring of the sleepers. I am quite warm, my eyes close, I know no longer where I am, when a prolonged chuckling awakes me. I open one eye and I perceive at the foot of my bed an individual who is looking down at me. I sit up in bed. I see before me an old man, tall, lean, his eyes haggard, lips slobbering into a rough beard. I ask what he wants of me. No answer! I cry out: "Go away! Let me sleep!"

He shows me his fist. I suspect him to be a lunatic. I roll up my towel, at the end of which I quietly twist a knot; he advances one step; I leap to the floor; I parry the fisticuff he aims at me, and with the towel I deal him a return blow full in the left eye. He sees thirty candles, he throws himself at me; I draw back and let fly a vigorous kick in the stomach. He tumbles, carrying with him a chair that rebounds; the dormitory is awakened; Francis runs up in his shirt to lend me assistance; the sister arrives; the nurses dart upon the madman, whom they flog and succeed with great difficulty in putting in bed again. The aspect of the dormitory was eminently ludicrous; to the gloom of faded rose, which the

dying night lamps had spread around them, succeeded the flaming of three lanterns. The black ceiling, with its rings of light that danced above the burning wicks, glittered now with its tints of freshly spread plaster. The sick men, a collection of Punch and Judies without age, had clutched the piece of wood that hung at the end of a cord above their beds, hung on to it with one hand, and with the other made gestures of terror. At that sight my anger cools, I split with laughter, the painter suffocates, it is only the sister who preserves her gravity and succeeds by force of threats and entreaties in restoring order in the room.

Night came to an end, for good or ill; in the morning at six o'clock the rattle of a drum assembled us, the director called off the roll. We start for Rouen, Arrived in that city, an officer tells the unfortunate man in charge of us that the hospital is full and can not take us in. Meanwhile we have an hour to wait. I throw my knapsack down into a corner of the station, and though my stomach is on fire, we are off, Francis and I, wandering at random, in ecstasies before the church of Saint-Ouen, in wonder before the old houses. We admire so much and so long that the hour had long since passed before we even thought of looking for the station again. "It's a long time since your comrades departed," one of the employees of the railroad said to us; "they are in Evreux." "The devil! The next train doesn't go until nine o'clock—Come, let's get some dinner!"

When we arrived at Evreux, midnight had come. We

could not present ourselves at a hospital at such an hour; we would have the appearance of malefactors. The night is superb, we cross the city and we find ourselves in the open fields. It was the time of haying, the piles were in stacks. We spy out a little stack in a field, we hollow out there two comfortable nests, and I do not know whether it is the reminiscent odor of our couch or the penetrating perfume of the woods that stirs us, but we feel the need of airing our defunct love affairs. The subject was inexhaustible. Little by little, however, words become fewer, enthusiasm dies out, we fall asleep.

"Sacre bleu!" cries my neighbor, as he stretches himself. "What time can it be?" I awake in turn. The sun will not be late in rising, for the great blue curtain is laced at the horizon with a fringe of rose. What misery! It will be necessary now to go knock at the door of the hospital, to sleep in wards impregnated with that heavy smell through which returns, like an obstinate refrain, the acrid flower of powder of iodoform! All sadly we take our way to the hospital again. They open to us but alas! one only of us is admitted, Francis;—and I, they send me on to the lyceum. This life is no longer possible, I meditate an escape, the house surgeon on duty comes down into the courtyard. I show him my law-school diploma; he knows Paris, the Latin Quarter. I explain to him my situation. "It has come to an absolute necessity." I tell him "that either Francis comes to the lyceum or that I go to rejoin him at the hospital." He thinks it over, and in the evening, coming close to my bed,

he slips these words into my ear! "Tell them tomorrow morning that your sufferings increase." The next day, in fact, at about seven o'clock, the doctor makes his appearance; a good, an excellent man, who had but two faults; that of odorous teeth and that of desiring to get rid of his patients at any cost. Every morning the following scene took place:

"Ah, ha! the fine fellow," he cries, "what an air he has! good color, no fever. Get up and go take a good cup of coffee; but no fooling, you know! don't go running after the girls; I will sign for you your *Exeat*; you will return to-morrow to your regiment."

Sick or not sick, he sent back three a day. That morning he stops in front of me and says:

"Ah! saperlotte, my boy, you look better!"

I exclaim that never have I suffered so much.

He sounds my stomach. "But you are better," he murmurs; "the stomach is not so hard." I protest—he seems astonished, the interne then says to him in an undertone:

"We ought perhaps to give him an injection; and we have here neither syringe nor stomach-pump; if we send him to the hospital—?"

"Come, now, that's an idea!" says the good man, delighted at getting rid of me, and then and there he signs the order for my admission. Joyfully I buckle on my

knapsack, and under guard of one of the servants of the lyceum I make my entrance at the hospital. I find Francis again! By incredible good luck the St. Vincent corridor, where he sleeps, in default of a room in the wards, contains one empty bed next to his. We are at last reunited! In addition to our two beds, five cots stretch, one after the other, along the yellow glazed walls. For occupants they have a soldier of the line, two artillerymen, a dragoon, and a hussar. The rest of the hospital is made up of certain old men, crack-brained and weak-bodied, some young men, rickety or bandy-legged, and a great number of soldiers—wrecks from MacMahon's army—who, after being floated on from one military hospital to another, had come to be stranded on this bank. Francis and I, we are the only ones who wear the uniform of the Seine militia; our bed neighbors were good enough fellows; one, to tell the truth, quite as insignificant as another; they were, for the most part, the sons of peasants or farmers called to serve under the flag after the declaration of war.

While I am taking off my vest, there comes a sister, so frail, so pretty that I can not keep from looking at her; the beautiful big eyes! the long blond lashes! the pretty teeth! She asks me why I have left the lyceum; I explain to her in roundabout phrases how the absence of a forcing pump caused me to be sent back from the college. She smiles gently and says to me: "Ah, sir soldier, you could have called the thing by its name; we are used to everything." I should think she was used to everything, unfortunate

woman, for the soldiers constrained themselves but little in delivering themselves of their indiscreet amenities before her. Yet never did I see her blush. She passed among them mute, her eyes lowered, seeming not to hear the coarse jokes retailed around her.

Heavens! how she spoiled me! I see her now in the morning, as the sun breaks on the stone floor the shadows of the window bars, approaching slowly from the far end of the corridor, the great wings of her bonnet flapping At her face-She comes close to my bed with a dish that smokes, and on the edge of which glistens her well-trimmed finger nail. "The soup is a little thin to-day," she says with her pretty smile, "so I bring you some chocolate. Eat it quick while it's hot!"

In spite of the care she lavished upon me, I was bored to death in that hospital. My friend and I, we had reached that degree of brutishness that throws you on your bed, trying to kill in animal drowsiness the long hours of insupportable days. The only distractions offered us consisted in a breakfast and a dinner composed of boiled beef, watermelon, prunes, and a finger of wine—the whole of not sufficient quantity to nourish a man.

Thanks to my ordinary politeness toward the sisters and to the prescription labels that I wrote for them, I obtained fortunately a cutlet now and then and a pear picked in the hospital orchard. I was, then, on the whole, the least to be pitied of all the soldiers packed together, pell-mell, in the

wards, but during the first days I could not succeed even in swallowing the meagre morning dole. It was inspection hour, and the doctor chose that moment to perform his operations. The second day after my arrival he ripped a thigh open from top to bottom; I heard a piercing cry; I closed my eyes, not enough, however, to avoid seeing a red stream spurt in great jets on to the doctor's apron. That morning I could eat no more. Little by little, however, I grew accustomed to it; soon I contented myself by merely turning my head away and keeping my soup.

In the mean while the situation became intolerable. We tried, but in vain, to procure newspapers and books; we were reduced to masquerading, to donning the hussar's vest for fun. This puerile fooling quickly wore itself out, and stretching ourselves every twenty minutes, exchanging a few words, we dive our heads into the bolsters.

There was not much conversation to be drawn from our comrades. The two artillerymen and the hussar were too sick to talk. The dragoon swore by the name of heaven, saying nothing, got up every instant, enveloped in his great white mantle, and went to the wash-bowls, whose sloppy condition he reported by means of his bare feet. There were some old saucepans lying about in which the convalescents pretended to cook, offering their stew in jest to the sisters.

There remained, then, only the soldier of the line: an unfortunate grocer's clerk, father of a child, called to the

army, stricken constantly by fever, shivering under his bedclothes.

Squatting, tailor-fashion, on our bed, we listen to him recount the battle in which he was picked up. Cast out near Froeschwiller, on a plain surrounded with woods, he had seen the red flashes shoot by in bouquets of white smoke, and he had ducked, trembling, bewildered by the cannonading, wild with the whistling of the balls. He had marched, mixed in with the regiments, through the thick mud, not seeing a single Prussian, not knowing in what direction they were, hearing on all sides groans, cut by sharp cries, then the ranks of the soldiers placed in front of him, all at once turned, and in the confusion of flight he had been, without knowing how, thrown to the ground. He had picked himself up and had fled, abandoning his gun and knapsack, and at last, worn out by the forced marches endured for eight days, undermined by fear, weakened by hunger, he had rested himself in a trench. He had remained there dazed, inert, stunned by the roar of the bombs, resolved no longer to defend himself, to move no more; then he thought of his wife, and, weeping, demanded what he had done that they should make him suffer so; he picked up, without knowing why, the leaf of a tree, which he kept, and which he had about him now, for he showed it to us often, dried and shriveled at the bottom of his pockets.

An officer had passed meanwhile, revolver in hand, had called him "coward," and threatened to break his head if he

did not march. He had replied: "That would please me above all things. Oh, that this would end!" But the officer at the very moment he was shaking him on to his feet was stretched out, the blood bursting, spurting from his neck. Then fear took possession of him; he fled and succeeded in reaching a road far off, overrun with the flying, black with troops, furrowed by gun-carriages whose dying horses broke and crushed the ranks.

They succeeded at last in putting themselves under shelter. The cry of treason arose from the groups. Old soldiers seemed once more resolved, but the recruits refused to go on. "Let them go and be killed," they said, indicating the officers; "that's their profession. As for me I have children; it's not the State that will take care of them if I die!" And they envied the fate of those who were slightly wounded and the sick who were allowed to take refuge in the ambulances.

"Ah, how afraid one gets, and, then, how one holds in the ear the voices of men calling for their mothers and begging for something to drink," he added, shivering all over. He paused, and, looking about the corridor with an air of content, he continued: "It's all the same, I am very happy to be here; and then, as it is, my wife can write to me," and he drew from his trousers pocket some letters, saying with satisfaction: "The little one has written, look!" and he points out at the foot of the paper under his wife's labored handwriting, some up-and-down strokes forming a dictated

sentence, where there were some "I kiss papas" in blots of ink.

We listened twenty times at least to that story, and we had to suffer during mortal hours the repetitions of that man, delighted at having a child. We ended by stopping our ears and by trying to sleep so as not to hear him any more.

This deplorable life threatened to prolong itself, when one morning Francis, who, contrary to his habit, had been prowling around the whole of the evening before in the courtyard, says to me: "I say, Eugène, come out and breathe a little of the air of the fields." I prick my ears. "There is a field reserved for lunatics," he continued; "that field is empty; by climbing onto the roofs of the outhouses, and that is easy, thanks to the gratings that ornament the windows, we can reach the coping of the wall; we jump and we tumble into the country. Two steps from the wall is one of the gates of Evreux. What do you say?"

I say—I say that I am quite willing to go out, but how shall we get back?

"I do not know anything about that; first let us get out, we will plan afterward. Come, get up, they are going to serve the soup; we jump the wall after."

I get up. The hospital lacked water, so much so that I was reduced to washing in the seltzer water which the sister had had sent to me. I take my siphon, I mark the painter who cries fire, I press the trigger, the discharge hits him full in

his face; then I place myself in front of him, I receive the stream in my beard, I rub my nose with the lather, I dry my face. We are ready, we go downstairs. The field is deserted; we scale the wall; Francis takes his measure and jumps. I am sitting astride the coping of the wall, I cast a rapid glance around me; below, a ditch and some grass, on the right one of the gates of the town; in the distance, a forest that sways and shows its rents of golden red against a band of pale blue. I stand up; I hear a noise in the court; I jump; we skirt the walls; we are in Evreux!

Shall we eat? Motion adopted.

Making our way in search of a resting-place, we perceive two little women wagging along. We follow them and offer to breakfast with them; they refuse; we insist; they answer no less gently; we insist again; they say yes. We go home with them, with a meat-pie, bottles of wine, eggs, and a cold chicken. It seems odd to us to find ourselves in a light room hung with paper spotted with lilac blossoms and green leaves; there are at the casements damask curtains of red currant color, a mirror over the fireplace, an engraving representing a Christ tormented by the Pharisees. Six chairs of cherry wood and a round table with an oilcloth showing the kings of France, a bedspread with eiderdown of pink muslin. We set the table, we look with greedy eye at the girls moving about. It takes a long time to get things ready, for we stop them for a kiss in passing; for the rest, they are ugly and stupid enough. But what is that to

us? It's so long since we have scented the mouth of woman!

I carve the chicken; the corks fly, we drink like toppers, we eat like ogres. The coffee steams in the cups; we gild it with cognac; my melancholy flies away, the punch kindles, the blue flames of the Kirschwasser leap in the salad bowl, the girls giggle, their hair in their eyes. Suddenly four strokes ring out slowly from the church tower. It is four o'clock. And the hospital! Good heavens, we had forgotten it! I turn pale. Francis looks at me in fright, we tear ourselves from the arms of our hostesses, we go out at double quick.

"How to get in?" says the painter.

Alas! we have no choice; we shall get there scarcely in time for supper. Let's trust to the mercy of heaven and make for the great gate!

We get there; we ring; the sister concierge is about to open the door for us and stands amazed. We salute her, and I say loud enough to be heard by her:

"I say, do you know, they are not very amiable at that commissariat; the fat one specially received us only more or less civilly."

The sister breathes not a word. We run at a gallop for the messroom; it was time, I heard the voice of Sister Angèle who was distributing the rations. I went to bed as quickly as possible, I covered with my hand a spot my beauty had

given me the length of my neck; the sister looks at me, finds in my eyes an unwonted sparkle, and asks with interest: "Are your pains worse?"

I reassure her and reply: "On the contrary, sister, I am better; but this idleness and this imprisonment are killing me."

When I speak of the appalling ennui that is trying me, sunk in this company, in the midst of the country, far from my own people, she does not reply, but her lips close tight, her eyes take on an indefinable expression of melancholy and of pity. One day she said to me in a dry tone: "Oh, liberty's worth nothing to you," alluding to a conversation she had overheard between Francis and me, discussing the charming allurements of Parisian women; then she softened and added with her fascinating little moue: "You are really not serious, Mr. Soldier."

The next morning we agreed, the painter and I, that as soon as the soup was swallowed, we would scale the wall again. At the time appointed we prowl about the field; the door is closed. "Bast, worse luck!" says Francis, "*En avant!*" and he turns toward the great door of the hospital. I follow him. The sister in charge asks where we are going. "To the commissariat." The door opens, we are outside.

Arrived at the grand square of the town, in front of the church, I perceive, as we contemplate the sculptures of the porch, a stout gentleman with a face like a red moon

bristling with white mustaches, who stares at us in astonishment. We stare back at him, boldly, and continue on our way. Francis is dying of thirst; we enter a café, and, while sipping my demi-tasse, I cast my eyes over the local paper, and I find there a name that sets me dreaming. I did not know, to tell the truth, the person who bore it, but that name recalled to me memories long since effaced. I remembered that one of my friends had a relation in a very high position in the town of Evreux. "It is absolutely necessary for me to see him," I say to the painter; I ask his address of the café-keeper; he does not know it; I go out and visit all the bakers and the druggists that I meet with. Every one eats bread and takes medicine; it is impossible that one of those manufacturers should not know the address of Monsieur de Fréchêdé. I did find it there, in fact; I dust off my blouse, I buy a black cravat, gloves, and I go and ring gently, in the Rue Chatrain, at the iron grating of a private residence which rears its brick facade and slate roofs in the clearing of a sunny park. A servant lets me in. Monsieur de Fréchêdé is absent, but Madame is at home. I wait for a few seconds in a salon; the portière is raised and an old lady appears. She has an air so affable that I am reassured. I explain to her in a few words who I am.

"Sir," she says with a kind smile, "I have often heard speak of your family. I think, even, that I have met at Madame Lezant's, madame, your mother, during my last journey to Paris; you are welcome here."

We talked a long time; I, somewhat embarrassed, covering with my képi the spot on my neck; she trying to persuade me to accept some money, which I refuse.

She says to me at last: "I desire with all my heart to be useful to you. What can I do?" I reply: "Heavens, Madame, if you could get them to send me back to Paris, you would render me a great service; communications will be interrupted very soon, if the newspapers are to be believed; they talk of another *coup d'état*, or the overthrow of the Empire; I have great need of seeing my mother again; and especially of not letting myself be taken prisoner here if the Prussians come."

In the mean while Monsieur de Fréchêdé enters. In two words he is made acquainted with the situation.

"If you wish to come with me to the doctor of the hospital," he says, "you have no time to lose."

To the doctor! Good heavens! and how account to him for my absence from the hospital? I dare not breathe a word; I follow my protector, asking myself how it will all end. We arrive; the doctor looks at me with a stupefied air. I do not give him time to open his mouth, and I deliver with prodigious volubility a string of jeremiads over my sad position.

Monsieur de Fréchêdé in his turn takes up the argument, and asks him, in my favor, to give me a convalescent's

leave of absence for two months.

"Monsieur is, in fact, sick enough," says the doctor, "to be entitled to two months' rest; if my colleagues and if the General look at it as I do your protégé will be able in a few days to return to Paris."

"That's good," replies Monsieur de Fréchêdé. "I thank you, doctor; I will speak to the General myself to-night."

We are in the street; I heave a great sigh of relief; I press the hand of that excellent man who shows so kindly an interest in me. I run to find Francis again. We have but just time to get back; we arrive at the gate of the hospital; Francis rings; I salute the sister. She stops me: "Did you not tell me this morning that you were going to the commissariat?"

"Quite right, sister."

"Very well! the General has just left here. Go and see the director and Sister Angèle; they are waiting for you; you will explain to them, no doubt, the object of your visits to the commissariat."

We remount, all crestfallen, the dormitory stairs. Sister Angèle is there, who waits for us, and who says:

"Never could I have believed such a thing! You have been all over the city, yesterday and to-day, and Heaven knows what kind of life you have been leading!"

"Oh, really!" I exclaim.

She looked at me so fixedly that I breathed not another word.

"All the same," she continued, "the General himself met you on the Grand Square to-day. I denied that you had gone out, and I searched for you all over the hospital. The General was right, you were not here. He asked me for your names; I gave him the name of one of you, I refused to reveal the other, and I did wrong, that is certain, for you do not deserve it!"

"Oh, how much I thank you, my sister!" But Sister Angèle did not listen to me. She was indignant over my conduct! There was but one thing to do; keep quiet and accept the downpour without trying to shelter myself.

In the mean time Francis was summoned before the director, and since, I do not know why, they suspected him of corrupting me; and since he was, moreover, by reason of his foolery, in bad odor with the doctor and the sisters, he was informed that he must leave the hospital the following day and join his corps at once.

"Those huzzies with whom we dined yesterday are licensed women, who have sold us; it was the director himself who told me," he declared furiously.

All the time we are cursing the jades and lamenting over our uniforms which made us so recognizable, the rumor

runs that the Emperor is taken prisoner and that the Republic has been proclaimed at Paris; I give a franc to an old man who was allowed to go out and who brings me a copy of the "Gaulois." The news is true. The hospital exults, Badinguet fallen! it is not too soon; good-bye to the war that is ended at last.

The following morning Francis and I, we embrace and he departs. "Till we meet again," he shouts to me as he shuts the gate; "and in Paris!"

Oh, the days that followed that day! What suffering! what desolation! Impossible to leave the hospital; a sentinel paced up and down, in my honor, before the door. I had, however, spirit enough not to try to sleep. I paced like a caged beast in the yard. I prowled thus for the space of twelve hours. I knew my prison to its smallest cranny. I knew the spots where the lichens and the mosses pushed up through the sections of the wall which had given way in cracking. Disgust for my corridor, for my truckle-bed flattened out like a pancake, for my linen rotten with dirt, took hold of me. I lived isolated, speaking to no one, beating the flint stones of the courtyard with my feet, straying, like a troubled soul, under the arcades whitewashed with yellow ochre the same as the wards, coming back to the grated entrance gate surmounted by a flag, mounting to the first floor where my bed was, descending to where the kitchen shone, flashing the sparkle of its red copper through the bare nakedness of the

scene. I gnawed my fists with impatience, watching at certain hours the mingled coming and going of civilians and soldiers, passing and repassing on every floor, filling the galleries with their interminable march.

I had no longer any strength left to resist the persecution of the sisters, who drove us on Sunday into the chapel. I became a monomaniac; one fixed idea haunted me; to flee as quickly as possible that lamentable jail. With that, money worry oppressed me. My mother had forwarded a hundred francs to me at Dunkirk, where it seems I ought to be. The money never appeared. I saw the time when I should not have a sou to buy either paper or tobacco.

Meanwhile the days passed. The De Fréchêdés seemed to have forgotten me, and I attributed their silence to my escapades, of which they had no doubt been informed. Soon to all these anxieties were added horrible pains: ill-cared for and aggravated by my chase after petticoats, my bowels became inflamed. I suffered so that I came to fear I should no longer be able to bear the journey. I concealed my sufferings, fearing the doctor would force me to stay longer at the hospital. I keep my bed for a few days; then, as I felt my strength diminishing, I wished to get up, in spite of all, and I went downstairs into the yard. Sister Angèle no longer spoke to me, and in the evening, while she made her rounds in the corridor and in the mess, turning so as not to notice the sparks of the forbidden pipes that glowed in the shadows, she passed before me, indifferent, cold, turning

away her eyes. One morning, however, when I had dragged myself into the courtyard and sunk down on every bench to rest, she saw me so changed, so pale, that she could not keep from a movement of compassion. In the evening, after she had finished her visit to the dormitories, I was leaning with one elbow on my bolster, and, with eyes wide open, I was looking at the bluish beams which the moon cast through the windows of the corridor, when the door at the farther end opened again, and I saw, now bathed in silver vapor, now in shadow, and as if clothed in black crepe, according as to whether she passed before the casements or along the walls, Sister Angèle, who was coming toward me. She was smiling gently. "To-morrow morning," she said to me, "you are to be examined by the doctors. I saw Madame de Fréchêdé to-day; it is probable that you will start for Paris in two or three days." I spring up in my bed, my face brightens, I wanted to jump and sing; never was I happier. Morning rises. I dress, and uneasy, nevertheless, I direct my way to the room where sits a board of officers and doctors.

One by one the soldiers exhibit their bodies gouged with wounds or bunched with hair. The General scraped one of his finger nails, the Colonel of the Gendarmerie {8} fans himself with a newspaper; the practitioners talk among themselves as they feel the men. My turn comes at last. They examine me from head to foot, they press down on my stomach, swollen and tense like a balloon, and with a unanimity of opinion the council grants me a convalescent's

leave of sixty days.

8 Armed police.

I am going at last to see my mother, to recover my curios, my books! I feel no more the red-hot iron that burns my entrails; I leap like a kid!

I announce to my family the good news. My mother writes me letter after letter, wondering why I do not come. Alas! my order of absence must be countersigned at the division headquarters at Rouen. It comes back after five days; I am "in order"; I go to find Sister Angèle; I beg her to obtain for me before the time fixed for my departure permission to go into the city to thank De Fréchêdé, who have been so good to me. She goes to look for the director and brings me back permission. I run to the house of those kind people, who force me to accept a silk handkerchief and fifty francs for the journey. I go in search of my papers at the commissariat. I return to the hospital, I have but a few minutes to spare. I go in quest of Sister Angèle, whom I find in the garden, and I say to her with great emotion:

"Oh, dear Sister, I am leaving; how can I ever repay you for all that you have done for me?"

I take her hand which she tries to withdraw, and I carry it to my lips. She grows red. "Adieu!" she murmurs, and, menacing me with her finger, she adds playfully, "Be good! and above all do not make any wicked acquaintances on

the journey."

"Oh, do not fear, my Sister, I promise you!"

The hour strikes; the door opens; I hurry off to the station; I jump into a car; the train moves; I have left Evreux. The coach is half full, but I occupy, fortunately, one of the corners. I put my nose out of the window; I see some pollarded trees, the tops of a few hills that undulate away into the distance, a bridge astride of a great pond that sparkles in the sun like burnished glass. All this is not very pleasing. I sink back in my corner, looking now and then at the telegraph wires that stripe the ultramarine sky with their black lines, when the train stops, the travellers who are about me descend, the door shuts, then opens again and makes way for a young woman. While she seats herself and arranges her dress, I catch a glimpse of her face under the displacing of her veil. She is charming; with her eyes full of the blue of heaven, her lips stained with purple, her white teeth, her hair the color of ripe corn. I engage her in conversation. She is called Reine; embroiders flowers; we chat like old friends. Suddenly she turns pale, and is about to faint. I open the windows, I offer her a bottle of salts which I have carried with me ever since my departure from Paris; she thanks me, it is nothing, she says, and she leans on my knapsack and tries to sleep. Fortunately we are alone in the compartment, but the wooden partition that divides into equal parts the body of the carriage comes up only as far as the waist, and one can see and above all hear the

clamor and the coarse laughter of the country men and women. I could have thrashed them with hearty good will, these imbeciles who were troubling her sleep! I contented myself with listening to the commonplace opinions which they exchanged on politics. I soon have enough of it; I stop my ears. I too, try to sleep; but that phrase which was spoken by the station-master of the last station, "You will not get to Paris, the rails are torn up at Mantes," returned in my dreams like an obstinate refrain. I open my eyes. My neighbor wakes up, too; I do not wish to share my fears with her; we talk in a low voice. She tells me that she is going to join her mother at Sèvres. "But," I say to her, "the train will scarcely enter Paris before eleven o'clock to-night. You will never have time to reach the landing on the left bank."

"What shall I do?" she says, "if my brother is not down at my arrival?"

Oh, misery, I am as dirty as a comb and my stomach burns! I can not dream of taking her to my bachelor lodgings, and then I wish before all to see my mother. What to do? I look at Reine with distress. I take her hand; at that moment the train takes a curve, the jerk throws her forward; our lips approach, they touch, I press mine; she turns red. Good heavens, her mouth moves imperceptibly; she returns my kiss; a long thrill runs up my spine; at contact of those ardent embers my senses fail. Oh! Sister Angèle, Sister Angèle! a man can not make himself over! And the train roars and rolls onward, without slackening speed; we are

flying under full steam toward Mantes; my fears are vain; the track is clear. Reine half shuts her eyes; her head falls on my shoulder; her little waves of hair tangle with my beard and tickle my lips. I put my arm about her waist, which yields, and I rock her. Paris is not far; we pass the freight-depots, by the roundhouses where the engines roar in red vapor, getting up steam; the train stops; they take up the tickets. After reflection, I will take Reine to my bachelor rooms, provided her brother is not waiting her arrival. We descend from the carriage; her brother is there. "In five days," she says, with a kiss, and the pretty bird has flown. Five days after I was in my bed, atrociously sick, and the Prussians occupy Sèvres. Never since then have I seen her.

My heart is heavy. I heave a deep sigh; this is not, however, the time to be sad! I am jolting on in a fiacre. I recognize the neighborhood; I arrive before my mother's house; I dash up the steps, four at a time. I pull the bell violently; the maid opens the door. "It's Monsieur!" and she runs to tell my mother, who darts out to meet me, turns pale, embraces me, looks me over from head to foot, steps back a little, looks at me once more, and hugs me again. Meanwhile the servant has stripped the buffet. "You must be hungry, M. Eugène?" I should think I was hungry! I devour everything they give me. I toss off great glasses of wine; to tell the truth, I do not know what I am eating and what I am drinking!

At length I go to my rooms to rest, I find my lodging just as I left it. I run through it, radiant, then I sit down on the divan and I rest there, ecstatic, beatific, feasting my eyes with the view of my knickknacks and my books. I undress, however; I splash about in a great tub, rejoicing that for the first time in many months I am going to get into a clean bed with white feet and toenails trimmed. I spring onto the mattress, which rebounds. I dive my head into the feather pillow, my eyes close; I soar on full wings into the land of dreams.

I seem to see Francis, who is lighting his enormous wooden pipe, and Sister Angèle, who is contemplating me with her little moue; then Reine advances toward me, I awake with a start, I behave like an idiot, I sink back again up to my ears, but the pains in my bowels, calmed for a moment, awake, now that the nerves become less tense, and I rub my stomach gently, thinking that the horrors of dysentery are at last over! I am at home. I have my rooms to myself, and I say to myself that one must have lived in the promiscuity of hospitals and camps to appreciate the value of a basin of water, to appreciate the solitude where modesty may rest at ease.

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