

I. By Pipe-Smoke

It is the twenty-sixth of October 18**. The Brasserie du Bel Escholier in the Latin Quarter is overflowing with women.

What do you expect the women to do? The brasserie is the only place where anything is moving! Everywhere else, they can't live, even alone—all the more so when they want to feed some brat half-dead of sloth and paternal excess, whose mother doesn't want to drown it like one kitten too many in the litter.

Those mothers who can't give their children the nourishment of doves, but don't want them to be food from crows, have to enable them to live! It's crueller than killing them, but they hope that they'll be happy. Have you ever seen, when a bird's-nest falls out of a tree, how the female tries to save her brood? It's the same with human nests fallen from the tree of poverty. At the brasserie, in the midst of pipe-smoke and tankards of beer, the girls drink in order to make the clients drink. They have to do their job.

It's a grey evening at the end of autumn, no longer warm enough to sleep under bridges or in the ditches of the fortifications; vagabonds are creeping around, searching with their eyes, beneath lowered pupils, sniffing the air, in search of shelter.

If one listened to what they are saying, perhaps it would be this: "There are so many buildings doing nothing, in which one might take refuge for a while." Workers aren't always obliging—isn't the boss behind them? No sooner do they find someone installed than they get more annoyed than foreman, because they might find themselves on the street like the comrades; they could lose their jobs if they tolerated it.

The poor, having nothing but rags to protect them from the cold, creep around and huddle together like birds, leaving their nests before dawn to resume their eternal peregrinations. Sometimes, they have incredible luck; one day, an old man found some wood-chips, as soft as wool, under a lean-to; it's true that he only got that lucky once; he was so tired that he died there. The rats that were eating him when the odor gave him away never told whether or not they had started while he was still alive. He was so weak that he could scarcely defend himself; the autopsy revealed that he had died of hunger, his stomach as hollow as a lantern.

We shan't get carried away; we'll see worse things in the course of the story, and they're far from equaling the ones we pass over in silence.

At the brasserie, the smoke is so thick that Jupiter could hide behind the cloud.

A bunch of toffs, the verdigrised scrapings of faded root-stocks, are stewing in the hottest corner of the establishment. On a table at the back, they're talking literature; three or four shiverers rummaging through the new works; there are others they don't recognize, "irregulars," they say—those little clowns have infallible futures. One of them unfolds a copy of a student newspaper, the *Totor*, with great precision, and if that doesn't shout out: "I'm a writer!" it's not his fault. He's the one who holds the dice of the conversation; he's recounting how someone named X***, whom neither he nor any of the others likes, has sent him a volume of verse. Yes, X*** has rendered him that homage.

In the middle of the table, another, a little less chilly, listens while smoking; he's enveloped in black smoke, through which he peers occasionally while removing his pipe from his lips.

"That's how it is!" continues the penman. "X*** has dared to send me his book of verse—as if anyone wrote verse nowadays! Oo la la! What a guitar! I read three or four of the little jokes—he's an idiot! Oo la la!"

"What's the title?"

"How do I know? X*** didn't dare put his name on it, but I could tell that it's him. It's enough to make you sleep for twenty-four hours. Oo la la!"

"Are you going to write a review?" asks another shiverer.

"As if! I'm not one to help newcomers and unknowns. There are enough of them, and pretentious with it. The no-name writes eclogues. He wants, he says, to sing like Racan¹ of shepherds and woods. Imbecile!"

¹ Honorat de Bueil Racan (1589-1670), author of the pastoral drama *Bergeries*.

“What?” says the least stupid of the wrecks, setting down his pipe—the quotation has touched him sharply, as has the insult, the book attributed to X*** being his.

Have no fear that they’ll fight. They won’t even bite one another; they’re only viper-mimics. They’ll only hiss a little; their venom’s only drool.

One of the waitresses, a tall brunette with dark-circled eyes often looks sideways, quivering, at a scarcely correct group of young men—who have “had a drink,” I guarantee—howling, that being the appropriate term for a conversation in a passionate tone, all of whose participants are “half seas over.”

Opposite, two gentlemen, properly dressed with proper manners—too proper, even—are gravely seated, distinguished by all kinds of excessively-visible sobriety. They aren’t smoking, scarcely drinking—expensive wine, it’s true—and chatting in moderation.

In spite of this concordance of sobriety, there isn’t the slightest rapport between them; they’re acting in the same play, that’s all; one of them is playing more stupidly than the other, of course. One could as easily credit the one with the upper hand with sixty years as forty; there’s nothing living in his face but his eyes, two round eyes, as magnetic as a night-bird’s, as cruel as a raptor’s. Those eyes efface all the rest; one sees nothing but them, and one would be scared if, instead of being correctly dressed, the gentleman was wearing a vagabond’s rags.

The other is a product of modern fattening, but he’s the kind of man who eats others’ cutlets instead of offering them his. He has the small head and enormous body of an ox of old Albion. Wrapped up in his clothes one might take him for a fat scarab wedged into its wing-cases.

When they came in, the brasserie’s little dog hid under a bench, sticking out its head to howl, but the officer charged with surveillance judged that the animal was causing a disturbance and made it understand, with a swift kick, that such manifestations are forbidden. Bristling like a wild boar, it retreated under the bench.

These details were not lost on the incorrectly-dressed group, some noisy, the others silent, who are supping tankards of beer opposite the overly correct men.

One of the silent ones has sketched the neighboring group; he’s a thin, dark Irishman—the other is a young madman, a reporter for a subversive newspaper, who has illustrated his scribble, following the Irishman’s example, with the same two faces, which would have pleased an artist.

The brunette, who, while going back and forth across the brasserie, finds the means to stimulate drinking by chatting instead of having a drink—which spares her the torture of drinking in spite of having had enough—often looks at the Irish artist. She has a certain wit and dispenses it freely, which keeps the imbeciles at a distance.

The clients like to chat with the beautiful young woman, as bold as a man and as reserved as a little girl. This evening, she’s distracted by the sight of the Irishman; her verve is less marked than usual; there’s a mist of melancholy over her wit.

At the artist’s table, laughing wholeheartedly, are two young men closely resembling one another, long-legged, alert and hot-blooded, with brilliant eyes; one is a creole, the other originally from Marseilles; the memory of the sea haunts their dreams, but they have no time to pause for reverie; they’re gaily taking the road to rude combat.

Julius Borelli, the creole, writes combative literature; in the hands of some, the pen is mightier than the sword, and he wants to be one of them.

The other, Pierre Mayard, is a teacher in a day-school; he too tries to fight with his face covered; he’s a scholar grafted on to the root-stock of a poet, but he hides that particularity carefully, because people would mock him—as if he had chosen his birth!—and that would be a waste of time.

Julius, who is scribbling his daily bread-and-butter, does not lose sight either of the dog or the two correct gentlemen; he makes portraits of them in a style as realistic as possible; the animal resemblances of the two men are unspared, and obtain the agreement of the Irishman, whose eyes approve. He fixes the two faces at the top of the piece of paper, emerging like a figurehead from the mouth of the dog, drawn below.

No detail has escaped Julius; he has heard the plaint of the anguished beast; that has sent a shiver down his spine and he gazes as the little animal with the bristling hair when it sticks its head out from time to time.

One of the gentleman, the one who resembles a dung-beetle—that being what Julius understands by “scarab”—is reading a news item in a low voice, which he punctuates with his reflections. The

other, the man with the round eyes, replies briefly to the reflections of the reader who is attempting to pontificate about the news item.

“Human remains found in the Bièvre have been sent to the morgue. The remains were a femur and a sawn-off piece of skull. They were fished out near the Poplars, where the Bièvre enters Paris; they must have come from the Clamart amphitheater.”²

“What good does it do,” the scarab adds, “to recount these things in public? It only stirs up trouble.” So saying, he nods his head, as if something has fallen on his scalp and he is trying to get rid of it.

The other is not pontificating, and says in an acid tone: “My dear Monsieur, the public loves that! If there were no crimes, there are people who wouldn’t sleep tranquil; people like horror, in order to be able to tremble in security.”

“What about morality?” the scarab goes on. “My opinion is that crime novels ought to be banned; they put ideas in criminals’ heads.”

The man with the round eyes smiles. “My dear Monsieur,” he says, emphasizing the syllables with his acrid voice, “when novelists think up such things, it’s because they’re feverish; they only talk about exaggerated things; anyway, they never know such things as they are, unless they’re in the business, and then it would be stupid slander.”

Well, well! The correct gentlemen is philosophizing as if he were “in the business” himself. And Julius, obsessed with that thought, studies the gentlemen even more closely. The latter, sensing the gaze, fixes his round eyes on the young man.

Two of the brasserie waitresses are chatting, half in French and half in German, while playing—these without distraction—their role as cup-bearers; they’re almost drunk, but are still drinking anyway, to engage the clients. Both blondes, with black-ribbon butterflies on their heads, they’re daughters of Alsace, with the slightly pudgy faces of beer-drinkers.

“Always trinking gives one a tick head, eh, Fraouchen?”

“It’s the lousy beer in tis place, my tear Rosen.”

“I neat to get out!”

“Me too, but you’re skint; tose with flannelette knickers can decamp, not us.”

(The fault is not with their argot but with their French.)

“My tear Rosen, it upsets the stumach to hit the bottle without a tirst.”

(That what they hate the most, in fact; the brasserie waitresses obliged to drink feel sea-sick.)

“Me, I’m always thirsty without being able to hit the bottle,” exclaims the café-concert singer, laughing as she downs a glass of absinthe to refresh her throat.”

“Shut up!” says one of the girls, sobered by fear. “You’ll get me the sack—they’ll think I’m complaining and kick me out.”

“And she’ll get your job.” (Frauchen has disappeared.)

“Oh, she promised me she wouldn’t! What if she’s gone to tell the boss...”

“Hey—Rosen’s playing her tune again!” says a fat black waitress with the look of an ant. “You need to drink to get maggots in your belly. Me, I think it’s good to get drunk. That’s what empties us of melancholy, isn’t it? The cramps go away in time. Here, my darling, knock it back—I’m pouring.”

She brings another glass of absinthe for the singer.

At the other end of the room, a group of pimps are eyeing up a girl who was formerly the mistress of a guillotine-victim—such celebrities are much sought-after. Old artillerymen have offered to marry her, but they only had the guns—she wants the guns loaded, for choice; she’d be very stupid, wouldn’t she, to let herself get rolled over? It’s for her that her cavalier snuffed an old lady; she knew his worth—it was her who turned him in, and claimed the reward.

She also knows the price she demands for parading in the brasseries. There she attracts a crowd of imbeciles in quest of perverted sensations; they love the odor of a Charlot basket.³

² Clamart was one of the ancient cemeteries of Paris; in 1884 a dissecting-theater was built there for the purposes of anatomical research.

³ “Charlot”—a diminutive of Charles—is nowadays most familiar in France with reference to Charlie Chaplin, but in 1886 its unqualified use still conjured up the phantom of Charles Sanson, the executioner of Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette.

It seems that at the table of the ill-dressed, they're waiting to meet someone—for nothing very serious, but still, it's a rendezvous—but then again, realists go to the Brasserie du Bel Escholier to see the group surrounding the mistress of the guillotine-victim. It's worth the trouble!

One of the drunks has a skull like a kneecap, horribly flat, and the mouth of a pike; another, little blinking eyes beneath short rigid lashes. We'll say politely that he has the face of a boar; perhaps he's descended—without any wordplay—from the wild boar of the Ardennes.⁴ That's a great feudal name. Here's another representative of the nobility, small and thin with avid red eyes; almost a dwarf, only his eyes and mouth are large. This monster looks like an octopus; his hands are hairy; he reproduces the ancestral type of a remote ancestor omitted from the genealogy of his family. An enormous financier takes up enough room for six; one might think he's a mastodon; he's totally round, and his face has no more expression than the head of a leech; his feet seem to be in a sack one only sees the mouth and the enormous jaws.

And so many others, so many others!

The fat black girl and the octopus are talking in low voices, doubtless about something that resembles them.

It's this group the Irishman sketches, while Julius scribbles and the others chat and smoke.

Still at the same table, here's a drama critic. He has a box for the new play at the Palais-Royal (*Madame Pouffart*) and has come to look for a couple of friends; it won't cost him anything—which is within everyone's means—and besides, it's a comedy, and the grotesque always gives rise to black ideas. It's inspiring for the drama, and makes it all the more pleasant for the author.

Julius and Pierre Mayard accept. The Irishman, for his part, has noticed the girl with the black eyes and goes over to her.

"I don't believe," he says, "that you have anything in common with anyone I've known, but it's necessary that I talk to you."

Both tremble as they arrange a rendezvous for the following morning, not daring to ask for more.

This rendezvous surprises the young men; the Irishman isn't one for arranging rendezvous. That devil Odream. Who would have believed it?

But they see so many things that, a few moments afterwards, they're no longer thinking about it.

Two more young men arrive, semi-bourgeois students this time, who'll get bogged down in the sandbank. They still have clear heads. They chat; they debate; they argue; they lose their heads; they gesticulate—with the result that a carafe falls on the tankards and knocks them over; everything that can fall over follows suit; liquids pour out. They jump back. There go the chairs. Julius' papers fall off; he picks them up, shaking off the water that covers them, not wanting to lose the two caricatures at the head of his article.

The correctly-dressed man has seen the faces. He looks with his round eyes at Julius, who looks back at him. They certainly won't forget one another.

The fall of the chairs attracts the establishment's waiters, and the officer, who wants to throw out the noisy group, who drink so little but break things so noisily, but a new arrival reestablishes calm. He's a Russian who sports the legendary name of Olaff. Tall, with dark blue eyes, hair as bushy as a mane and the broad and bulbous forehead of a bear, one scarcely ever sees him with the same expression; from one moment to the next, his mobile face follows his thoughts.

Comrade Olaff, as his friends call him, is looking for them to say goodbye. He's going away for a few months, and is on his way to the railway station. Olaff pays for the breakages—he's in funds for the moment—and the ill-dressed band takes its place at a tidier table, having ordered more beers in order to stay.

During the uproar, Julius has seen that the little dog, now free, has sneaked up on the man with the round eyes and ripped the bottom of his trousers, perhaps nipping his ankles slightly; the man, not wanting anyone to find out about the dog's sentiments, has contented himself with crushing its paw beneath his foot. All that has happened silently; Azor, understanding that he ought not get so close to his enemy's legs, has gone back into hiding.

The officer no longer remembers that he had sent someone to fetch reinforcements when the agents arrive. A stormy explanation ensues, and further uproar, even noisier. Olaff forms a bulwark for

⁴ A famous animal of prodigious size, much hunted and finally killed, in 1485, which lived on in legend and literature.

Julius, who is finishing off his article for the subversive paper for which he writes about communal misery.

He has a fist of iron, that Olaff, but here come more agents; the young men can't hold out. The Irishman, an inoffensive spectator thus far, having hastily sketched the scene, with his paper against the wall, comes to the rescue, using the flat of his hand like an Irish dagger, driving the assailants back by striking them in the neck like a butcher. The hand doesn't cut, but it shoves people aside forcefully.

Julius has finished his article, and puts it in his pocket.

Olaff, wanting to get the ridiculous skirmish over and done with, snuffs out the gas-jet burning over the table. A few young men, and even a few of the brasserie girls in places that aren't in view, throw themselves at the jets; the gas goes out and only the street-lights sent a feeble light through the windows.

Followed by the agents, who are groping their way through the tables and knocking them over, the young men hurl themselves outside and disperse in all directions. A few of them go to meet up with their friends in front of the Odéon. There are six of them! No one's missing.

"Are you coming to the Palais-Royal? Are you coming here? Are you coming there?" ask four voices at the same time of the blond with the Herculean fist.

"You know full well that I'm going to the Gare de Lyon."

"That's true—we'll go with you."

"Thanks, but you'll make too much noise for the comrade who's waiting for me there."

"Go, then, you old bear! One might think you were in trouble with the law!"

They shake hands, laughing, and send the bear on his way, calm and confident, toward the station.

The Irishman has gone back to his lodgings, in great haste to be alone.

Julius, Pierre and the theater critic head for the Palais-Royal.

Under the lantern of a tobacconist's shop, Julius takes two preaddressed envelopes out of his wallet—making a mistake, of course, in putting his two missives into them—throws the one bearing the address of his paper into the letter-box, but accidentally drops the other one outside the letter-box. He feels relieved; he has nothing further to do today.

Julius has no suspicion that he has just cast the dice of his fate. He stands there, stunned; the two men occupying his thoughts are in front of him, coming in the opposite direction: the scarab and the man with the round eyes. Have you ever noticed how more frequently you encounter people you aren't expecting than people you are?

While Julius and his friends continue on their way, the man with the round eyes bends down to pick up a little white rectangle standing out against the sidewalk—Julius's letter—puts it in his pocket and continues on his way, in company with the scarab.

What had happened at the brasserie after the departure of the young men was inevitable. As soon as order was reestablished—which is to say, the gaslight was restored—the two gentlemen had left, still correct and grave, even though a further incident had occurred, the latter without Julius noticing it.

While the lights were out, the man with the round eyes had poured into his companion's glass the contents of a minuscule phial concealed in his hand, and had also sprinkled some on a little cake, which he had thrown under the table, intended for Azor (he was not a man to forget anyone). That was imprudent, for the dog was suspicious of the treat, which stank of an enemy hand, and it remained on the ground.

It was not the man with the round eyes who would have to suffer the consequences of that.

Let's return to the Palais-Royal. Julius and his companions were greatly astonished to discover, in the box opposite theirs, still perfectly irreproachable in their appearance, the two correct gentlemen, one still leading the other. Obviously, he didn't know about the business regarding the Bièvre, but Julius was anxious. It was not that he liked the scarab, but he sensed that he was in danger; it was the same sentiment one feels for a drowning dog.

The man with the round eyes calmly unsealed the letter he had found, and read it at his ease.

It appears, Julius thought, that the gentleman doesn't like to read his letters in front of inconvenient witnesses—there's some story of a woman in that missive he's contemplating.

Poor Julius!

The round eyes fixed on his article were gazing at it attentively, with good reason.

Under the title *Profiles*, Julius told the story of the incident with the brasserie dog, under grotesque names, with the accompaniment of conjectures that were scarcely flattering. The article concluded as follows:

Whether that bird of ill-omen is seeking live or dead prey, whether he is lying in ambush on his own account or serving as a falcon for others, what is certain is that he's an evil bird.

That animal has evil designs. Watch out, old chap, that I don't find you at work! You were too scared of letting Azor's sentiments be known not to be a bad lot. And you, Azor, thanks, my boy—but be careful he doesn't throw you in the water, claiming that he's executing a rabid dog.

JULIUS BORELLI

The man with the round eyes put the letter back in his pocket, addressing a vulpine smile to his good luck.

“What the Devil's distracting you, Julius?” said the critic. “One might think that you weren't listening to the play—it's funnier than most comedies, not tiresome at all.”

Julius was, indeed, not listening, for a human life in danger is something else; his scarab seemed to him to be in sinister company; he was watching. At a play however, in a crowd, that was impossible.

In order to chase away the thought that was obsessing him, Julius became the most cheerful of the three; after all, the stout man could not be in any danger; he was the other's friend. Nevertheless, the thought kept coming back. He became sad while the entire audience laughed like crazy.

As for the scarab, he laughed enough to make his fat belly quiver beneath his wing-cases. He even laughed so long and hard that he suddenly collapsed.

He was carried out and lavished with care; a physician immediately came to his aid, but it was all in vain—for those who noticed it.

That death cast a chill over the remainder of the performance.

Julius had nothing but probabilities; he had not even sufficient grounds to be able to warn the victim—who would not have believed him anyway. However, his heart swelled as if he had been able to prevent the catastrophe, so simple that no one would have believed him.

Aren't sudden deaths frequent? The newspapers recorded them every day. Perhaps it was only that. Was he going mad?

But what about Azor?

Bah! Dogs aren't infallible.

As he was about to go back into his lodgings, Julius saw a light in the window of the Irishman Odream, whom we met at the brasserie. Odream lived above Julius. He had the idea of confiding his anxieties to him.

“I agree,” said the Irishman, “that bizarre things often happen, but you can't bring your scarab back to life, can you? Nor can you denounce the other on the grounds that he looks like a bird of ill-omen and that a dog bit him.”

“For a start, I never denounce anyone.”

“If you did it in these circumstances, with Azor as your only witness, they'd put you in the hands of an alienist, and they wouldn't be wrong.”

“You can't deny that it's strange, though.”

“I don't deny it.”

“What can I do, then?”

“Absolutely nothing. The man can't be resurrected; it's necessary to consider it as a *fait accompli*.”

“There's scarcely any way to consider it otherwise.”

“That's true. There are fatalities.”

“You ought to know about strange things. For one thing, you're not called Odream. It's a pseudonym, wordplay to signify that you come from a land of dreams.”

“On the contrary; I come from a place where people no longer dream.”

“What do you mean?”

“This morning, I wouldn’t have wanted to tell you this; now, it’s different. You need to talk too; it’ll do you good, and I know you’re discreet. No, my name isn’t Odream; I adopted that name after I was hanged.”

“Hanged? Now you’re not making sense.”

“Certainly, hanged—but the thing was done summarily, by drunken soldiers, while sacking a region. They were short of rope and came back to get mine, thinking I was dead. I wasn’t, that’s all—it’s quite simple. It was in Ireland, during the last insurrection; they hanged six of us, like a chandelier, from the branches of the willows by the roadside. When they took me down to get the rope they threw me in the grass. The night dew brought me round, it seems. I was young and strong; I remember it as if it were today. It was in spring; there were roses in the grass in Ireland; one might have taken them for huge drops of blood. I got up, tottering, and went back to my house; it had been burned; my wife and daughter had disappeared.”

“Your wife! Your daughter? How long ago was this, and how old are you?”

“Thirty! We grow old slowly; the Irish race stays green for a long time, and even if it’s cut down like a hayfield, it always grows back tall and sturdy.”

“Are you sure that your wife and daughter are dead?”

“I’ve been looking for them for ten years, on the basis of presumptions as poorly founded as yours regarding the man with the round eyes. I always will, guided by some instinct that says to me: *you’ll see them again*—and at the same time, I recognize the impossibility of searching thus for two stems in a scythed crop. Nevertheless, I go on. I’ve traveled across Europe, and thanks to my talent in drawing, which permits me to blend in anywhere, I’ve followed, as one follows a mirage, the legend of the hanged man’s diamonds, which made my daughter such a rich heiress, for which many claimants for her dowry are searching at the same time as me. You can compare my persistence to that of Lady Franklin having the polar ice explored.”⁵

“Aren’t you being irrational, with your hanged man’s diamonds?”

“Less than you were just now with your man with round eyes. The diamonds exist, I put them in a safe place myself—alas!—for my beloveds, who will never come back.”

“And you haven’t sold them to help in your search?”

“Only one—the least valuable; the others are waiting for my daughter and her mother.”

“Olaff would tell you that they could support a people in revolt.”

“Olaff has a revolutionary passion; my passion is for my vanished darlings.”

“And you’ve never found a single clue?”

“Once there was more than a clue; I saw a young woman with a perfect resemblance to Georges—Georges is my wife—but aged twenty years in ten. Perhaps it wasn’t her, but who knows? They had to leave without resources, and it was necessary to bring up her daughter.”

“When did you see her?”

This evening, at the brasserie—but no, it wasn’t her. And yet, that woman had a glint in her eyes, and the impossible sometimes happens.”

“Are you going to see her again?”

“We’re meeting this morning—which is to say, five hours from now; it’s two o’clock.”

“Oh, that’s what it was!” said Julius. “We thought you’d got lucky.”

The Irishman laughed sadly.

They parted at dawn.

Instead of going to bed, Julius went to work; he occupied himself with a host of things, especially the sciences; he brought home enough chemical products to terrify the whole world.

The thought of the man with the round eyes came back to haunt him, though; he thought about crimes that went unsolved because those who had committed them were reputedly honest, about human stupidity, and the prejudices beneath which those vipers sheltered eternally, and poor Julius felt sad.

⁵ Sir John Franklin led an expedition to find the North-West Passage in 1845 and never came back; aided by the American newspapers, his wife (or rather, his widow) made such a fuss that several more expeditions were sent, in succession to find him. More men perished looking for him than had been in the original expedition.

What he was waiting for, curled up in an old armchair, it would have been impossible for him to say. Perhaps one scents events coming, having inherited an ability from our bestial ancestors, which scented the approach of an enemy.

The readers of the subversive paper for which Julius wrote were very surprised when they eventually read the following, inserted in confidence, under the usual rubric of *Profiles*:

My old bear,

I'll send this to Lyon, since you're going to spend a week there.

I don't believe that it will be possible for you to come back, so write immediately to the friend of whom you've often spoken to me, and ask him to obtain a second witness unknown to our entourage.

It concerns my sister; I want the matter to remain secret; I'm writing to you, being unable to see you alone this evening.

No one must know anything about this affair. Some mud always sticks to a woman for whom one fights a duel.

Our mutual friends are as ignorant as anyone else as to the reasons for the duel, which are that my sister has been grossly insulted by a filthy pig by the name of Sylvain Mirbel; you will understand that I want to kill the rotten beast without having all the trumpets of the press before me, and that, in the contrary case, the true reason for the duel must not become known.

I'm counting on you; hurry.

Goodbye, and thanks.

JULIUS BORELLI

The idea of publishing a letter in which one begs secrecy for something that one wants to hide was astonishing at first; then the article was considered as a joke; it was, in any case, so lacking in significance that no one would have paid any attention to it without the name of the fat financier being printed in full; that was defamation.

Julius, unaware of all these things, fell asleep during the day. He woke up abruptly when someone knocked on his door.

Had his friend Olaff sent a telegram already? No, the letter couldn't even have reached Olaff; it wasn't yet midday.