

BOOK ONE

I

In the month of December 1776 I took the Lyon diligence in order to return to Paris. There were eight of us in the vehicle: a Benedictine, an actor, two actresses, an advocate, a merchant, a person of unknown profession and myself—not to mention a monkey, six dogs, three parrots, two parakeets, an Angola goat and the various human individuals garnishing the imperial.

The Benedictine was the greatest consumer of Spanish tobacco in Europe, the best of gourmets and the finest connoisseur of choice morsels. One of the two actresses, who played queens, was as libertine as R***, whom she resembled facially, to the extent that I initially mistook her for her, and as malevolent as La S***.¹ The soubrette was serious, melancholy, regular in her speech and almost as amiable as the delicate Fannier. The actor was a tragedian, as handsome a man as P***il, who played as badly, with a conceit and insolence that might but ought not to be compared with *****. The advocate, whom I recognized in spite of his disguise, was a famous man whom I hold in scant esteem and like even less, loathed and persecuted, a persecutor and even a calumniator. The merchant was a good man, very rich, very simple, drinking well, eating well and sleeping even better, snoring for four, and taking almost as much tobacco as the Benedictine, with whom he conversed about worldly matters.

The unknown quantity was a man neither young nor old, neither handsome nor ugly, neither fat nor thin, neither tall nor short, who did not appear to be either rich or poor, who neither talked too much nor too little, and all of whose actions announced that he neither loved nor hated anyone in the world.

There remains “me.” That “me” is an eccentric, too singular to describe in a few words. Imagine a small man, who holds himself so awkwardly that he seems counterfeit, of sad and dreamy expression, his head sunk between his shoulders, his vague and indeterminate gait representing a living specimen of a Guianan Acephale;² who alone, as in society, conversed with his own thoughts, to the point of bursting into laughter, crying out and weeping without the company being able to suspect the reason; timid and brutal to excess; loving pleasure and disdaining out of pride the objects that procure it; preaching tolerance and not being able to suffer the slightest contradiction, etc. That is my portrait, unflattering, at the bottom of which one could put: L-g-t, but I declare that it is not me...

I had soon had enough of the monk, the actor and even the merchant; the two actresses had soon had enough of me; so that after two days, there was only the unknown quantity with whom I found that I could converse. Thanks to his character, he tolerated me as much as I desired. Gradually, we formed a bond, and as I have a few good qualities that I have not mentioned, he treated me as a friend.

It was toward the evening of the fourth day when he finally asked me: “Who are you?”

I replied to his question with the portrait I have just traced.

“That’s exactly what I wanted,” he said, “and not your condition or estate.”

I replied to that.

“I call myself Friend Nicolas. I’ve been a shepherd, a vine-grower, a gardener, a laborer, a student, an apprentice monk, an artisan in a city, married, cuckolded, libertine, sage, stupid, intelligent, ignorant

¹ The satirical passages in *Les Posthumes* reveal that Restif, who did not approve of actresses in general, had a particular distaste for “Mademoiselle Raucourt (Francoise Saucerette) and “Madame Sainval” (Claire de Sainval).

² Author’s note: “Men of America of whom Cortal speaks on page 58 of his *Voyages*, whose head is in the chest.” The reference presumably intends to indicate Francisco Coreal’s *Voyages aux indes occidentales* (1722), although it is false, no such reference occurring on p.58 of any volume of the rather humdrum text. The fact that Restif did his own typesetting did not make him any less likely to make typographical errors, especially in rendering proper names; the mysterious P***il might similarly be misrendered, the actor N***** has in mind perhaps being Beaumesnil.

and philosophical; finally, I'm an author. I've written numerous works; most of which were bad, but I sensed it; I had the good sense to be ashamed of them and to tell myself that I had only published them out of the necessity of living and feeding my own children and my wife's—for after all, I really am what I said I am, children don't make themselves, and someone has to nourish them.

“The most important of my works is *Compère Nicolas*; which is to say, my own life. I anatomize there the human heart, and I hope that that book, made at my own expense, will be the most useful of books, in that I dissect myself unsparingly, thus sacrificing myself, a new Curtius, to the utility of my peers. I'm composing another, entitled *Le Hibou*, and another...”³

The unknown quantity interrupted me, with a half-smile, and said: “You're what I need; you can be my historiographer. I have the most singular things to tell you. It's not a matter of rendering them plausible, because they aren't. I speak French as you do, I have no more accent than you, I'm neither whiter nor blacker, and yet there is between my homeland and yours the entire diameter of the terrestrial globe. I was born in the austral hemisphere, at 00 degrees from the equator and 00 degrees of longitude,⁴ on an island called Île Christine.”

He fell silent. I looked at him in astonishment, but as he continued to remain silent, I spoke again, full of various thoughts.

“What!” I said. “Is it possible that Nature duplicates herself in the two hemispheres, and that at the same latitude, one finds not only the same plants and the same animals, but also the same humans, the same empires, and people speaking the same languages! Oh, if that were so it would be a fine discovery, and your story would be marvelous enough, and interesting enough, to make me a fortune and get me out of the poverty in which I've been languishing since my father's curse—for you should know that I've been cursed, and it's for that reason that I'm poor and a cuckold.

The Austral man shook his head and asked me why I had been cursed. I told him my story, such as it is found in certain letters that only ought to be published after my death.⁵ He shook his head again, but he made no reply to my story.

We were approaching the capital, and as our conversation had been very particular we wanted, out of politeness, before separating, not to allow our traveling companions to take away a bad impression of us. We paid them compliments and made eulogies of them; they returned them, with the exception of the malevolent actress, who savored incense but never incensed anyone herself; she thought she merited everything and owed nothing.

Finally, we arrived. The Benedictine got up first in order to get down; he shook his robe and caused us each to sneeze six times, with the exception of the merchant. We separated with as much indifference as if we had never met. The actor and the actresses went to lodge at the Carrousel, the Benedictine at Saint-Germain-des-Prés, the advocate in the Rue de la Calandre, the merchant in the Rue des Bourdonnais, and the dogs, the parrots and the goats probably followed their mistresses. As for me, I took the unknown quantity home, not forgetting his monkey, which appeared to me to be very singular.

When we were sorted and rested, we resumed our conversation with more liberty than in the Lyon diligence.

“I don't want to leave you in error,” the Austral man said to me. “The inhabitants of the Antarctic hemisphere are absolutely different from the humans of this one; everything is clear-cut in those isolated climes, because everything there has remained as it emerged from the hands of Nature. Instead of the people having, as in Europe, Asia and even in Africa, amalgamated themselves, so to speak, and improved themselves—or, at least, the most perfect have annihilated those of the same species who appeared to them to be a hindrance, or deformed, etc.—in the southern hemisphere, it's entirely the

³ The final sentence is omitted from the Laffont edition.

⁴ The author does not mean zero degrees; he uses the formula 00 to replace omitted numbers as he uses asterisks (and, occasionally, dots and hyphens) to replace omitted letters in words; I have retained his formula rather than substituting asterisks.

⁵ i.e., those contained in novel *La Malédiction paternelle*.

opposite. Nothing there is mixed, the half-perfected beings have remained so to this today; with the consequence that the sight of them is alarming, and Europeans would not fail to destroy them.

“It’s for that reason that we have decided to keep our homeland hidden. There is a law that applies to all foreigners who have landed there, either in a vessel in good condition or by way of shipwreck; they are retained, without ever being able to return home. However, they are accorded a treatment that ought not to leave them any regrets; they enjoy all the advantages of citizens without being forced to work; it’s only their children who are returned to the common order. By the same token, we only have one good ship, which is always equipped by the State; it’s always confided to princes of the blood, whom it’s impossible to deceive, for reasons you’ll soon know—for I’m going to tell you a story that will astonish you.”

He left it there for the first day, and as he had excited my curiosity to an inexpressible point, I waited for the next day with a great deal of impatience. It finally arrived, that morrow so much desired; we had chocolate, and after the breakfast, my man said to me:

“I am French by origin, as are almost all my compatriots. We live in a beautiful island beyond the Tropic of Capricorn, which we have named after our first queen, who is still alive. It is under the same meridian as France; we have days and nights of the same hours as here. I’ve told you that there’s a law that renders distant journeys by the inhabitants impossible. Thus, you can believe that I’m traveling with the consent of the leaders of my nation.

“Of all the men I’ve encountered thus far, in the six months that I’ve been traveling in the southern provinces of France, you are the only one in whom I thought I could confide, because I hope that you will help me in my research. It’s neither treasures nor wealth that are the goal of my voyage; it has a much more important objective. I want to make contact with a scholar of the first order, a philosopher above the common run, like J.-J. Rousseau, Monsieur de Voltaire or Monsieur de Buffon, and convince him to allow himself to be taken with me by those of our princes of the blood who have the faculty of making use of artificial wings, and traveling all over the world.

“Today, I shall tell you the story of the sage mortal to whom we owe the origin of the best government there is in the world, but before then, I’d like you to tell me certain things I don’t know. Which of your great men, for example, would consent to allow himself to be taken to the Austral lands?”

“That question,” I said, “isn’t very difficult. The greatest men are Monsieur de Voltaire, Monsieur Rousseau and Monsieur de Buffon; there is also Monsieur Franklin here, an envoy of the United States of America, who might suit your purpose, but there isn’t any likelihood that he would abandon the interests of his own country in order to satisfy another. As for Monsieur de Voltaire, he’s too old; younger, you could have had him easily, but...he’s too witty. That fine fault is scarcely tolerable in this land, where one can have all possible wit with impunity; I imagine that in your land, he wouldn’t catch on. Monsieur de Buffon might be more suitable, but he’s sufficient well-off here not to want to leave us. There remains Monsieur Rousseau. I believe you could have him easily. He complains about us, and would willingly abandon us. But in order that his disappearance shouldn’t make too much noise, it’s necessary to come to some arrangement with him. He could appear to die. Monsieur le Marquis de Girardin, to whose estate he has retired, can erect his tomb, and on the very day that his sudden death is afflicting all Europe with his loss—very real for us—your princes of the blood will have taken him away.

The Australian embraced me joyfully. In order not to keep the reader in suspense I shall say very briefly that the abduction in question was carried out with perfect ease; only J.-J. Rousseau’s friends were informed of it, and me. I shall keep silent as long as I live, and this story will only appear after my death. Thus, Posterity will know that the cenotaph in Ermenonville is empty.⁶

The Australian then began speaking, in these terms, to tell me the extraordinary facts you are about to read.

⁶ Rousseau died—or, according to N*****, pretended to die—in 1778.

It was about seventy years ago that a young man from the Dauphiné found the secret of flying—like the birds, because it's necessary to explain that in French.⁸ And the motive that gave him such a keen desire to fly was amour.

Victorin—that was the Dauphinois' name—the son of a simple procurator fiscal, had fallen madly in love with the beautiful Christine, the daughter of his Seigneur. Christine was beauty personified, or at least, the most beautiful thing that Victorin had seen. He thought of nothing but her; he was desiccated by love, and as that sentiment was unsustainable by any hope, it was a frightful torture. The young man only sought solitude, and when he found himself in some beautiful landscape, between hills crowned with woods, it seemed to him that he was breathing the air of liberty, the ancient and sweet equality of human beings—for there is nothing in the world that more efficaciously restores a man to his natural state than open country, fertile and surrounded by woods or fallow land. He experienced then a delightful sentiment, unknown in inhabited locales—especially here, where everything in parkland and there are “no trespassing” signs everywhere.

There was a domestic in the procurator fiscal's household who was a rather bad lot—which is to say idle—but who was a great reader, named Jean Vezinier. The fellow had read the beautiful and veridical histories of Fortunatus, who, by the virtue of his little hat, transported himself and his beauty anywhere he wished; that of Michel Morin, of the *Mariage de la Mort avec Creusefosse*, and the birth of little Morats, their children, who ate earth instead of bread, etc.⁹ It was to that fellow, whose intelligence was ornamented by so much fine knowledge, that Victorin confessed that his great desire was to have wings and to fly.

Jean Vezinier listened gravely, and after having reflected for three-quarters of an hour, he replied: “It's not impossible.”

Victorin, transported, leapt for joy, and begged Vezinier, who had a great deal of talent for all petty works of invention, to lend a hand to the project, and see what they might accomplish.

In consequence, they hid themselves away, in order to steal as much time as possible from useful occupations. They made wheels that locked together; they complicated the movements, and succeeded in making a wooden wheel that operated two canvas wings. The heavy machine could lift a man off the ground but it required a very tiring effort to make the wheel spin. The inventive Jean Vezinier resolved to try it out anyway, not wanting to imperil his master's son.

They went up a mountain, climbed on to a crag, and Vezinier abandoned himself to the wind. He had given his wings a curvature, like those of birds, but the ensemble of his made it resemble fairly closely a large bat. He encountered an inconvenience that he had not anticipated; having no progressive impulsion, they could only follow the wind. He nevertheless flew some distance, which transported young Victorin with joy. He imagined, on seeing Jean Vezinier fly, that with a further adjustment and lighter wings, it would be possible to give himself a progressive movement, an ascending movement to lift himself, and a descending one in order to land.

Jean flew as far as his strength would permit, but was exhausted in less than a quarter of an hour, and let himself fall to the ground by slowing his speed. Victorin ran to him and prevented him from hurting himself when he landed, because he was falling horizontally, face forwards.

⁷ The chapter breaks in the main text are not in the first edition, but the manner in which they break up the text make it more reader-friendly than the various devices used in the original version.

⁸ It is necessary to explain it because in French, *le secret de voler* could also mean “the secret of stealing.”

⁹ *Fortunatus* was a chapbook, whose story is cobbled together from various legends and folktales, first published in German in the early 16th century, which enjoyed enormous popularity in various versions and several other languages. The character of Michel Morin was featured in an oft-reprinted early 18th century humorous text cast in the form of a funeral oration for a cowherd who fell out of a tree; he then began to crop up in other texts. The title [Le] *Mariage de la Mort avec Creusefosse* [The Marriage of Death and Gravedigger] appears to be fictitious.

After that trial, Victorin and Jean Vezinier only talked about their wings, and what they would do when they could fly long distances. Victorin only breathed for Christine, and wanted to go find an island or an inaccessible mountain in order to take her there and live with her, but Jean Vezinier had many other ideas. He wanted to avenge himself on his enemies, and kill them from high in the air. He wanted to carry off the daughters of the town, who had disdained him as a husband because of his idleness, and enjoy them at his whim, in order to return them to their parents dishonored. He wanted, above all, a certain Edmée Boissard, the daughter of the schoolmaster and the prettiest of the marriageable girls, who had preferred the Maréchal's son to him. Victorin did not approve of those dispositions, and often reproached him for them, but as he needed Vezinier, he dared not criticize him too much.

Finally, they perfected their wings, and after a few additions, and having substituted taffeta for canvas, they succeeded in giving them a progressive horizontal, and even retrograde, movement; and in rising up and descending perpendicularly at will. They went to try them out in the country, in a deserted spot.

They both took off together, but misfortune caused Jean Vezinier's mechanism to break, and he fell from a height into a pond, where he drowned. Victorin was not strong enough to help him; he returned to the house, where he recounted the domestic's accident, without saying anything about the cause. People ran to the pond, and pulled Vezinier out, but they did not understand anything of the muddy machine to which he was harnessed. Victorin, who had his reasons, cut it into pieces in order to get rid of it, and broke the wheels dexterously, in order that they would be incomprehensible. Jean was taken back to the house, absolutely drowned. They might have been able to recall him to life had they known about discoveries recently made in France, but the help that was administered then only finished him off.

So, Victorin was alone, and abandoned to his own genius. He often returned to the same solitude in order to dream about his project, think about Christine, and slake his young soul's thirst with the ambrosia of liberty.

One day, when he was in a distant place, he saw two big birds—they were storks—separated from their flock by some accident. The two birds were flying side by side in search of food. Victorin admired them.

"Oh, if I could fly like them," he exclaimed, "that would be worth as much as nobility in Christine's eyes. I'd carry her away, I'd adore her, I'd give her anything she wanted; I'd build her a nice comfortable nest on a sheer crag, out of the reach of men. How happy we'd be! For I love her as much as she would love me, and when, after ten years, we'd have pretty children as beautiful as her, I'd go to find Monsieur de ***, her father, taking him one of my daughters, bearing a strong resemblance to her mother, and I'd say to him: 'Look, Monsieur, here's your daughter rejuvenated, whom I'm returning to you.'

"And he'd say to me: 'How's that, Victorin? Where have you been for ten years?' But I wouldn't tell him anything, and, immediately deploying my wings, which he wouldn't have seen because I'd have hidden them behind my back, I'd fly away, and he'd be very astonished.

"And he'd ask my daughter, whom we'd have educated very well: 'Who are you, beautiful child, and where have you come from?'

And she'd reply: 'From the home of my father and mother, Monseigneur, who love one another very tenderly, and are lodged in a beautiful nest of gold, silver and silk, constructed on a very high rock.'

"And who is your father?"

"You've just seen him, Monseigneur.'

"And your mother?"

"Her name is Christine de ***, Monseigneur.

"And immediately, Monsieur de *** would embrace her, with tears in his eyes, saying to her 'Ah! That's my daughter.' But he'd be angry with me, because I'd abducted her and I'm not a gentleman. And he'd say: 'Where is this nest?'

"And the little one would say: 'I don't know, Monseigneur, because my Papa, who is a Flying Man, brought me here through the air; but don't be angry, Monseigneur, and have pity on me.'

"And Monsieur de *** would look at my daughter, who would resemble Mademoiselle Christine, and he'd kiss her, calling her his dear daughter. And then he'd ask how his demoiselle is with me. And

my daughter would tell him how I love her mother; how I hasten to do everything that might please her; how I serve her; how I never let her want for anything; how I nourish her on the best birds, and good white bread from the city, and how I hunt and work every day for her, so well that she also loves me with all her heart.

“And when he’d heard all that he’d say; ‘Oh, if I could only see my poor daughter!’”

It was thus that young Victorin soothed his troubles for a few hours—but they only came back afterwards with more violence, for when he was in the midst of his pleasant chimera, his intelligence would wake up suddenly and he would say, tearfully: “Alas, all that isn’t true!”

In his profound melancholy, he sought solitude even more, and no one would ever have seen him, if the desire he had to see Christine had not forced him to go to the château frequently.

One day, when he was in the garden, Christine arrived there with her chambermaid. Victorin was intoxicated by the pleasure of looking at her. Christine wanted a bouquet of white roses that grew high on the bush. The chambermaid tried to pick them, but she pricked her finger and made it bleed, and, having perceived Victorin, she called to him:

“You’re more dexterous than me, Monsieur Victorin; pick some of these roses for my young mistress.”

Victorin launched himself into the rose bush, tore his sleeves, his ruff and his hands; the blood flowed, but he picked the roses and presented them to Christine, trembling with pleasure.

“My God, Monsieur Victorin,” the Beauty said to him, “you’re wounded!”

And she took her handkerchief, which she soaked in his blood; she even pulled out a little thorn that had remained stuck in his flesh. Victorin fainted with pleasure. They thought it was the pain, and the beautiful Christine let two tears fall upon him, which reanimated him. He smiled as he came round, which reassured Christine, and caused her natural and sympathetic tone to be succeeded by the attitude of disdain that the daughter of a provincial nobleman cannot, in all conscience, prevent herself from having toward her inferiors. But that attitude only inflamed Victorin’s heart further; he noticed above all that the beautiful Christine had just put a rose on her bosom, the heart of which was stained with his blood.

He watched her draw away, in the fashion of a lightly built nymph treading the grass of the bosage with delicate feet.

Scarcely had Christine quit Victorin than the young man found one of those butterflies with a proboscis that suck flowers without landing on them, and whose flight seems continuous. He tried to catch the insect alive, and when he held it, he tried to divine the mechanism of its flight by examining the movement of its wings. He spent a long time in that meditation, and when he thought that he had penetrated nature’s secret, he began his trials.

Two entire years of arduous labor, which Jean Vezinier would doubtless have abridged, produced nothing but deformation and scant effect, by comparison with what he wanted to achieve and with the perfection of nature. Meanwhile, Christine increased in age and beauty. There was talk of her marrying. Victorin shivered, and redoubled his efforts. He examined all kinds of flight, of insects as well as birds. That of the butterfly appeared to him to be facile to imitate, but it required too powerful a spring and overly large wings. He returned to that of the grouse, which approached his hovering butterfly’s genre of flight, and re-examined its articulation. That of geese and big birds appeared facile, but it is heavy and requires denser air—which is to say, condensed by cold, like that which reigns at a great height.

He made all those reflections, even though he was a simple peasant, alone and unaided. What can love not achieve! Oh, that alone was the inventor of all the arts!

Finally, Victorin perfected Jean Vezinier’s invention; his machine gave him, by virtue of the rapid movement of its mechanism, the flight of the grouse to lift himself from the ground, and, by means of a slower movement, the flight of the great birds of passage, which only beat the air with a regular and distinct tempo. He composed his wings of the lightest silk fabric and sustained them with struts of whalebone, stronger at the point of origin, which, tapering gradually, closely resembled the ribs of bird’s feathers.

He took those improved wings into the deserted countryside to make a new full-scale trial. He had tried previously in his father’s courtyard, during mass on Sundays when everyone was at church, but he

had not dared to fly high, either for fear of being seen by children or the fear of some accident that might have forced him to receive help and betray his secret.

He left for the solitary location in the morning, determined to run every risk, and to go up as high as possible, even if he lost his life in the trial. To lose Christine would have been a far worse misfortune!

Having arrived on an isolated hill, Victorin fitted his wings.

A broad and sturdy strap, which he had had prepared by the harness-maker, circled his waist. Two others, smaller, attached to his knee-boots, garnished each leg and thigh laterally and then passed through a leather buckle fixed to the belt. Two broad bands continued over his ribs and joined a hood that was fitted to his shoulders by four straps through which his arms passed. Two strong mobile strips of whalebone, the bases of which were supported by the boots, in order that the feet could activate them, continued over the ribs, contained by little rings of oiled boxwood and rising all the way to the head, in order that the taffeta of the wings could be prolonged that far.

The wings, attached to the two exterior lateral straps, were placed in such a fashion that they bore the man in his entire length, including the head and half the legs. A kind of sharply tapered parasol, retained in its extension by six silk threads, served to enable him to lean forward, aiding him to lift his head, or to adopt an entirely perpendicular stance.

As the Flying Man had to be able to make use of both hands, the mechanism that gave movement to the wings was activated by two straps that passed under the sole of each foot in such a way that, in order to fly, it was necessary to make the ordinary action of walking—a movement that could, in consequence, be accelerated and slowed down at will. The two feet each gave a complete movement to both wings; they dilated them and caused them to beat simultaneously, but by virtue of the effect of a little mechanism, the right foot operated the extension of the closed parasol, and the left foot brought it back while opening it.

The mechanism was executed by the two collateral struts of whalebone, moved by a wheel with two notches that passed under the feet, and which, turning in the same direction, pulled the left whalebone and, in continuing, hooked on to a button of the right whalebone in order to drive it. The same springs could also be moved with the hand.

Flight was rendered stationary and perpendicular by a certain compression of the wings, effected by the two strings, which came under the armpits and passed into a chin-strap, to which the head gave movement; the effect of the two strings was to lower the tip of the parasol and direct it in all possible directions.

The components of the flying machine were only made of boxwood, but they were not overly fatigued, with the exception of two teeth and their supports that were made of polished steel softened by an unctuous substance; the only part subject to wearing away by friction was the strap that moved the spring of the wings; it was made of silk, but of much greater strength, and the Flying Man always had several of them in his pocket; he checked it every time he took off, and never waited until it was too worn to replace it. The advantage that it had was that, once he was in the air, the silken strap suffered so little fatigue that it was sufficient for a long-haul voyage.

After a few weeks of experiments, Victorin found a means of fitting a second mechanism to his machine, similar to the first but weaker, capable in case of an accident of sustaining him in the air while he fitted another strap to the principal device.

So, Victorin arrived on a hill, climbed up on a small rock, and first gave his wings that rapid movement of the flight of a grouse. He rose above the ground thus with sufficient facility. His lack of habituation to finding himself in the air made him dizzy, however; he could only go higher by closing his eyes.

He soon felt a fairly considerable degree of cold, and most of all, he found that he was soaring with so much ease that the slightest movement of his legs gave the wings the strength to sustain him. He opened his eyes momentarily, and saw that he was at a prodigious height. He tugged then on the two strings designed to move the tapered parasol in all directions, and directed the tip downwards, which caused him to descend rather rapidly.

When he saw that he was near the ground, he held it horizontally in order to get back to the hill and the rock, from which he was more than two leagues distant, although he had only been flying for fifteen

minutes, so rapid had his flight been. He landed there, folding up the taffetas of the legs and doubling the erectile movement.

Victorin was therefore able, by means of the direction of the parasol, to give his wings three kinds of flight: erectile, which lifted him from the ground, depressive,¹⁰ which brought him back to it, and horizontal by which one moved forward. With practice, the Flying Man could combine those three directions by means of almost simultaneous movements.

After various trials that crowned his success, Victorin folded up his artificial wings and went home very content. He rectified certain defects he had noticed, and, full of confidence, dared one night to carry out a considerable journey.

There was the most beautiful moonlight. Victorin emerged from his bedroom without being seen by anyone, and from the courtyard of the paternal house, by means of his parasol, rose above the buildings.

The semi-darkness enabled him to be less frightened by the height at which he found himself, with the consequence that he resolved to pass over Christine's father's château. He directed his flight, following the terrestrial road, of which he never lost sight, and came above the fortunate abode of the object of his adoration. He could still see a light therein, and tried to get closer to the window—but the noise of his wings and the mechanism, in the silence of the night, was so loud that it woke up the château's dogs; they started barking, making a frightful racket. Everyone put their heads out of the windows, and Victorin had the pleasure of seeing Christine.

The old Seigneur had looked up, and was very surprised to see a bird so huge that he had never heard mention of one like it. Monsieur de ***, who feared losing sight of it, shouted for someone to bring him his double-barreled shotgun. It was brought and Victorin, to his regret, was obliged to draw away.

When he was at a great height, he began to sing, words that the more sonorous air of the elevated region rendered quite intelligible:

*Beautiful Christine, whom I adore,
And whose attractions are so sweet,
Must I then draw away from thee?
I hoped to linger until dawn
In this place embellished
By your lovely presence.
I flee, having been dismissed
But I conserve the resonance.*

The entire château heard that stanza, and it caused the greatest astonishment, but no one could tell where the singing voice was coming from. They searched everywhere, but in vain. Finally, the beautiful Christine went back to her room, and Victorin, no longer having any hope of seeing the sovereign of his thoughts, directed his flight toward the nearest city, which was seven leagues away. He arrived there in less than an hour, and lifted a young woman away from libertines who had attacked her.¹¹ He deposited her in her home through the window that she indicated to him, although half-fainted in fear, believed him to be the Devil, and then an Angel—which made a great deal of noise the next day.

Content with that trial, he returned to his father's house, went back to his bedroom, and went to bed.

In the morning he examined the silken strap that activated the mechanism; he found it almost worn away and was alarmed; he spent all day finding the mechanism the support that I mentioned, in order to avoid falling to earth and breaking his neck, like poor Jean Vezinier, if that essential strap should fail.

Meanwhile, the nocturnal adventure caused a great deal of fuss at the château, the city and throughout the locale. A hundred people who had not seen or heard anything were nevertheless sure that

¹⁰ I have retained literal transcriptions of *érecteur* and *dépresseur*; the erotic analogies are clearly intentional.

¹¹ The casual rescue of damsels in distress was later to become a standard part of the repertoire of "the nocturnal spectator"—the protagonist of Restif's quasi-autobiographical series of anecdotes *Les Nuits de Paris*, and, at a much later date, a standard element of the stereotyped role of the comic book superhero.

they had seen the great bird. The stanza he had sung was repeated, copied in every possible fashion except the correct one. Victorin laughed a great deal secretly, and understood how popular rumors are made. He went to the château the same day and, having learned that Mademoiselle Christine was in the garden, went there, and did not take long to find himself within range of being seen by her.

As soon as she noticed him, she made him a sign to approach.

“Well, Monsieur Victorin, did you see the great bird too?”

“Yes, Mademoiselle, and better than anyone else, I can assure you.”

“Not better than Papa and me, for we saw it as I can see you.”

“I won’t dispute what you say, Mademoiselle, but I saw it very well and heard its song, for I remembered it and made a copy.”

“Let me see,” said Christine. “That way, I’ll know whether you really saw it, for of the thirty people who tried to repeat it to me this morning, there wasn’t one who got it right.”

Christine took the song from Victorin’s hands, and read it with astonishment.

“That’s it exactly,” she said, blushing slightly. “But where were you, then?”

“I assure you, Mademoiselle, that I didn’t set foot outside my father’s house, but as the bird that sang it was very high, it was audible a long way away.”

“Are you in your right mind?” Christine replied. “You’re trying to tell me that it was the big bird that sang it? You won’t make me believe that, or that you weren’t in the vicinity of the château. I don’t like to be told lies.”

“I’m only telling the exact truth, Mademoiselle, when I assure you that I didn’t take a single step outside my father’s house; I respect you too much to lie to you.”

“That’s singular,” said Christine to her chambermaid, “for I believe him; Victorin isn’t a liar.” To the son of the procurator fiscal she said: “Do you mind if I keep your copy?”

“It would give me a pleasure, Mademoiselle, greater than I could have hoped.”

“There are more beautiful roses, but I warn you that if you sustain a single scratch, I won’t take them.”

Victorin ran to the bush of white roses; he picked the most beautiful ones, without pricking himself, or at least without being seen to do so, and brought them to Christine, who put them on her bosom. She had scarcely done so when the most beautiful came away from its pedicle and fell. Victorin hastened to pick it up, but could not return it; he raised it swiftly to his lips twice, and then ran to pick another.

Christine had noticed what he had done and blushed, but Victorin was such a handsome fellow that she was not annoyed by it. The young man brought back a beautiful rose, which Christine received with embarrassment. She continued her walk, asking Victorin to tell her the common names of the different plants that ornamented the garden.

What happy moments! Victorin thought he was in heaven.

Finally Christine went back in, and the amorous young man had to return to the procurator fiscal’s house.

Ravishing chimeras occupied him on the way. He imagined that he had abducted Christine, that he had taken her to a charming and inaccessible place; that he was loved there, and that they lived happily, in complete liberty. That idea made him shiver, and he formed the resolution to try to effectuate it.

In order to succeed in that more easily, he asked his father, who was rich, to place him in the city with a procurator, in order to learn a little practical law, a science absolutely necessary in rural areas in order not to be devoured by seigneurial law,¹² much harsher than higher law. That was precisely the intention of the procurator fiscal; his son was only falling in with his views by making that request, which drew praise.

Victorin was fitted out with new and fashionable clothes. He was given a small sum of money, and when everything was ready, the day of his departure was fixed. It was the day before, but Victorin was not asleep. As his province was the Dauphiné, the town of ***, its chief place, was only five or six

¹² *Basse-justice* [seigneurial law] was a hangover from feudal times, which enabled minor offences to be judged and penalized by the lord of the manor rather than being submitted to *haut-justice* [the high court].

leagues away from the Inaccessible Mountain, thus named because the mountain was shaped like an inverted sugar-loaf.

Giving the pretext of going hunting, Victorin had departed one morning before dawn with his wings and provisions for the day. As soon as he was in the country he had flown to the Inaccessible Mountain and had arrived there as dawn broke. He had found on the mountain a very agreeable esplanade with a little stream that filtered between the rocks and reentered the ground almost as soon as it had emerged. A soft lawn carpeted the charming location. On the northern side, a rather profound cavern was visible, and on the southern side, the steep sides of the mountain were garnished with bushes, most all covered with the nests of a thousand different birds. There were also some wild trees, among them a chestnut-tree. A swarm of bees was buzzing around a rock with a southern exposure, sufficiently deeply fissured to lodge those useful insects.

Victorin spent the day in that lovely place, where he had the satisfaction of perceiving a few wild goats. When the heat of the day reached its highest intensity, he explored his new domain, in order to make sure that it did not contain any venomous beasts. He did, in fact, find a few snakes, which he killed. Then he flew over the rocks covering the cavern, where he discovered another esplanade that appeared to him to be a very agreeable place for the summer, because of the coolness and shade that the rocks maintained there. He alighted there and explored it; he did not find any venomous reptile, but a great many turtle-doves and wood-pigeons.

There were five or six little springs, which appeared to be produced by the crater of an ancient volcano, filled with ice that only melted in period of the most intense heat, because the sun's rays could not penetrate into it; the crater formed a natural glacier. He drank the water and found it excellent.

This, he said to himself, will be my summer palace; it's here that the beautiful Christine will preserve the lilies of her complexion. The other esplanade will be my abode in winter, spring and autumn.

After having examined everything he had a meal, which he would have liked to share with Christine, and having recovered his strength, he rose up to a fearful height, trying to fly more boldly than ever. He came down again rapidly, striving to vary the direction of the pointed parasol, and seizing large pieces of rock in both hands as he rose, while his feet operated the erector very swiftly. He returned to horizontal flight by means of his chin, without releasing his burden, and maintained his flight at a sufficiently great height not to be seen by people down below.

All his trials succeeded fairly well, albeit after he had recommenced several times; and when night fell he returned to the parental home, which was an hour and a half away at the most. Transported by joy at his discovery, he resolved to employ all of the night that remained to him before his departure for the city in carrying various items to the Inaccessible Mountain, such as all the agricultural implements, clothes and linen he could procure. He also took chickens, rabbits and even two lambs, a male and a female.

He did more; having perceived in the courtyard of the château one evening a great deal of linen belonging to Christine and her chambermaid—slips, stockings, etc.—that had been hung out to dry after being bleached (which was only done once a year) he stole it during the night, formed several packages, and, in three trips, ferried to the Inaccessible Mountain almost all of it that belonged to the Seigneur's daughter. They were a great fuss at the château the next day; searches were carried out, various people were accused, but as it was impossible to discover any proof, the linen not being found anywhere, either at the merchants in the city or at the fairs, no one could be seriously harassed.

After that significant coup, Victorin went to spend an entire day on the mountain, which he would have been able to regard as his petty empire if he had not had a sovereign himself who did not even allow him to dispose of her person. He carried out further flights carrying heavy burdens. He arranged comfortable retreats for his chickens and his lambs, which took him very little time because he found a great many shelters under the rocks. He then began to cultivate a little patch of land, preparing it to plant vine-stocks, which he proposed to uproot from his father's garden—which he did the following night; and as the holes were prepared he only had to carry them in wicker baskets, which he put into the ground with them, in order that they could be taken out again easily.

He then reflected that it would be necessary to put someone there to look after his lambs, chickens etc, which might otherwise be lost, or at least go wild. In the town there was a sister-in-law of Jean Vezinier's, widowed very young and without children. The woman had not been very sage after her husband's death, and it was believed that her brother-in-law, Jean, who had seduced her first, At any rate, the woman had had a bastard daughter, whom she had nourished and brought up herself, but the unfortunate child was exposed to the scorn and ridicule of other children, which mortified her mother greatly. Victorin thought that it would give those two creatures pleasure to be carried to the Inaccessible Mountain, where he would nourish them and not only make them responsible for the care of the animals but cultivating a garden and beginning to sow a plot with wheat.

Having made that resolution, he put the plan into execution. One evening, while walking in the town, he perceived La Vezinier alone with her daughter, taking the air at their door without daring to chat to the neighbors. He went to them and told them that he had to talk to them but that, not that, wanting to be seen, they had to go to a remote place that he would indicate to them. While they went there Victorin fitted his wings and rose into the air. As he had told the mother and daughter to climb on to a rock, in order that he could see them at a distance and not have to hail them, he fell upon them and carried them both away, by means of broad straps that he wound around them under their armpits.

They lost consciousness out of fright, and Victorin, redoubling his effort, went with his burden to the Inaccessible Mountain in less than an hour. He set them down there with provisions that he brought for them, threw water in their faces, and when he saw them coming round, he flew away without being seen. As the mother could read, however, he set out on a piece of paper what she had to do.

When she recovered, the woman read the note; she saw the promise that they would not be left without food and would soon be given company, which consoled her slightly. She had a strange idea about her abduction, however, when she found herself in a land without inhabitants; she thought she had been brought there by the Devil as a punishment for her past conduct. Nevertheless, she did as she was ordered and set to work with her daughter. Victorin brought them more provisions from time to time, by night, without showing himself.

For himself, having returned to his father's house, he went to bed and slept rather late. Everything causes a sensation in a little town; the next day, he heard everyone talking about the disappearance of La Vezinier and her daughter. It was said that he had gone away out of displeasure, but people were very surprised that they had not sold their property, or even their utensils. All the wells were searched, for fear that they had been thrown into one; enquiries were made in the neighboring villages and on the roads, but nothing was discovered. It was then that good souls said that the Devil had taken them away, which was soon regarded as certain by all the old wives in the region.

By means of these preparations, Victorin had a fixed and determined plan. He did not fail to present himself every day in the gardens of the château and to try to render himself agreeable to Christine by his attentions. He succeeded in that. On the eve of his departure from the city he had seen the Seigneur's daughter during the day, and on encountering him, she had smiled at him in a very obliging manner. He followed her without affectation. The beautiful Christine, either deliberately or accidentally, dropped her fan and carried on walking. Victorin picked it up and ran to give it back to her, but on the way he lifted it to his lips five or six times, and Christine perceived it. Even so, she received it in a gracious fashion.

She was alone at that moment. She asked him questions. She asked him whether he had a mistress.

"Yes, Mademoiselle."

"Is she beautiful?"

"Like the fresh dew of the morning."

"Does she love you?" And she added, precipitately: "Oh, undoubtedly!"

"Alas, no," said Victorin, with a sigh.

"She's either not much of a connoisseur, then, or very proud."

"Yes, Madame, she's proud, but she has reason to be. I'm nothing compared with her."

"She's a great Lady, then?"

"She's more than that, Mademoiselle; she's Beauty personified; a King wouldn't be too great for her."

“You’re piquing my curiosity. So where is this Beauty hiding?”

“Among the lilies and the roses; she lives in charming places, which she embellishes further.”

“You’ve read romances then, Monsieur Victorin?”

“Yes, Mademoiselle; I’ve read *Cyrus*, *Polexandre*, *Clélie*, *Astrée* and *La Princesse de Clèves*, which pleased me even more.”¹³

“I suspected as much, to hear you talk.”

“Oh, Mademoiselle, it’s a great honor that you do me.”

“It’s necessary to read the English authors: *Pamela*, *Clarissa*, *Grandison*.”

“I don’t have them.”

“I’ll tell Julienne to lend them to you. But don’t become a Lovelace, at least!”

“As soon as you forbid me, Mademoiselle, I can assure you that I will not.”¹⁴

Christine smiled at the naïve fashion in which Victorin replied to her. Having reached the end of the path, however, she perceived her father, her mother and a few friends nearby. Christine blushed at her familiarity with the son of the procurator fiscal. She adopted her disdainful attitude, still charming regardless, in order to say: “Adieu, Victorin.”

The young man bowed to his companion and withdrew, as stylishly as he could, although he sensed that his peasant-like awkwardness had spoiled his reverence. He left the château, firmly resolved to neglect nothing in the city to acquire fine manners before executing his designs upon Mademoiselle Christine.

He left the next day on horseback, accompanied by one of his father’s domestics, and arrived in the evening in ***, at the home of Maître Troismotsparligne, a *procureur* in the seneschal’s court.

Victorin was a handsome fellow; lively colors animated his cheeks, and a masculine and robust attitude, devoid of harshness, combined with his natural beauty. His principal goal being to learn fine manners, in order to render himself agreeable to Christine when he had abducted her, he made that his first subject of study. In wanting to please, one pleases.

Madame Troismotsparligne was a well-made woman of about twenty-five, although her husband was well past fifty. At twenty paces, or even ten, she could pass for a pretty woman; the form of her face was agreeable, and her color was almost equal to Victorin’s. Seen at close range, however, one found that she was much scarred by smallpox. Her walk was voluptuous, and even lascivious, her figure admirable; she had a pretty leg and a charming foot, so she took extremely good care of her adornment.

It was that woman who caused Victorin’s first aggravations; Victorin, whose senses were new and vigorous, only needed a spark to catch fire. But what can true love not accomplish! Victorin resisted the attractions, the advances, the charms and the lures of the Procurator’s wife, or he responded with some politeness, which was only to form his fine manners, because he knew that there is nothing like lessons from a woman to form a young man.

However,¹⁵ he cast his eyes over the young men of condition who inhabited the city and searched for models among Christine’s equals, convinced that the Latin proverb (for he had learned the rudiment) *Similis simili gaudet*—one only pleases with those similar to oneself—is the truest of all proverbs.

There was then in that city of the Dauphiné, whose name is irrelevant here, a young gentleman who passed for the Corypheus of the locale. He was a handsome fellow, the son of a mother more than good, rich, conceited and putting all his merit into his clothes, his embroideries, his ruffles, his jewels and a very

¹³ The first four titles are among the longest novels in existence: the ten volumes of *Artamène ou le Grand Cyrus* (1649-1653), by Madeleine de Scudery but signed by her brother, total nearly two million words; she also wrote the kindred romance *Clélie* (1654-1660). *Polexandre* (1619-1637), by Marin Le Roy de Gomberville, is more in the vein of an adventure story. The classic pastoral novel *L’Astrée* (1607-1627) is by Honoré d’Urfé. The much shorter *La Princesse de Clèves* (1678), published anonymously but generally attributed to Madame de La Fayette, is a more intense and tightly-plotted novel of passion set in the court of Henri II.

¹⁴ Lovelace is Clarissa Harlowe’s abductor in the longest of the three novels by Samuel Richardson cited by Christine.

¹⁵ The following episode is omitted in its entirety from the Laffont edition, in spite of its relevance to the following section; the Laffont text resumes with the line “On Saturdays he returned to the Inaccessible Mountain.”

elegant carriage, in which he took pleasure in riding after dinner every day for two or three hours. It was that dandy whose acquaintance, and even amity, Victorin was ambitious to make. He had one sure mean of achieving that in an instant, which was to make him party to his invention, but the young clerk had no intention of doing that! As he had found the rare secret of flying through the air, though, he could surely find the more facile one of flying on the ground.

One day, Victorin encountered the fop on the rampart alone, beside his carriage, into which he was about to climb back and return to the beautiful streets of the city. "Monsieur," he said, going up to him casually, "I possess a secret which might perhaps give you pleasure; I can make your carriage move without horses."¹⁶

"Thos words excited the attention of the fop; he stopped, and seeing a well-dressed young man he asked who he was.

"I'm only a procurator's clerk," Victorin replied, "but I have brilliant hopes."

Meanwhile, the fop reflected for the first time, darting a glance at his horses. "A fine secret," he said, "that would make my carriage go without its most beautiful ornament!"

"That's not what I'm claiming, Monsieur," said Victorin. "Your horses would be accompanying the carriage, but they would only be hitched by the reins, and that would excite the admiration of the whole city."

At those words, the delighted fop, foolish, vain and arrogant as he was, threw his arms around the procurator's clerk and kissed him to both cheeks, calling him his dear friend. "When can you operate this marvel?" he asked him.

"You appreciate," Victorin replied, "that I'm not employing any magic..."

"When can it be done?" the fop interrupted, urgently.

"Not now; it's necessary for me to dispose my mechanisms in your carriage. I'll set to work tomorrow, and in a week, at the latest, you'll enjoy the pleasure of astonishing the city, being celebrated throughout the province, throughout the kingdom, Europe, and perhaps the world—for I want to give you the honor of the invention."

"Oh, it will be necessary not to communicate it to anyone!" cried the fop, pirouetting with joy.

From that moment on, Victorin became the intimate of the rich young man; he took him everywhere and introduced him into the best society of the city as a young man who had "brilliant hopes" and who could be received.

That was all that Victorin wanted. He adopted the tone of society, and became nothing less than an accomplished cavalier.

In the meantime, he worked on his new friend's carriage. A locksmith made him the mechanism, without knowing its purpose, and after the week for which he had asked, the machine was ready. The fop was effervescent with pleasure. He climbed into his carriage one Sunday at four o'clock in the afternoon, in the most beautiful weather; his coachman harnessed the horses; the traces were taken away, which amazed the man and made him think that his master was mad—but Victorin has tested the machine, and by means of two seesaws set in motion by the carriage-driver's feet the wheels assumed the movement of a rapid trot. A lever placed within the reach of the hand permitted steering; but increasing the movement one could go uphill, and by slowing it down could descend without danger. The coachman looked at it stupidly at first; then he made the sign of the cross and cried that it was the Devil. His master threatened him, but the rogue would not climb back up. A few blows of the cane made him see reason.

At first no one paid attention to the marvel of the carriage, but Victorin was waiting for the vehicle with a few of his friends in the busiest square in the city; he pointed the phenomenon out to them. They drew closer, and ran after it in order to follow it and see the carriage. The populace imitated them;

¹⁶ Author's note: "Announcements have been seen in 1779 on the part of a man who possesses Victorin's second secret; my friend should not be accused of having credited it to his hero in imitation of that mechanician, since the manuscript is initialed by the late Monsieur de Mairobert, dead before the announcement. [Joly.]" The writer and royal censor Mathieu-Francois Pidansat de Mairobert committed suicide in March 1779. Restif knew him well and claimed in his autobiographical writings to mourn his death on its anniversary every year.

everything was in turmoil, and the fop, swearing, could not part the crowd; he retraced his steps, between two lines of admirers, and enjoyed all his glory. What a moment for a dandy! He could not contain himself; he overflowed with ease, glory, foolishness and pleasure.

After having shown off sufficiently he went home, too weary to do any more because of the movement he had been obliged to make with his feet in order to make the carriage go. I forgot to say that he had the horses removed before entering the courtyard, and that the movement of the carriage was not slowed down in the least by their absence, which completed confounding the incredulous.

One fraction of the sectors went away profoundly astonished, while the other—the ignorant populace—went home convinced that the fop had made a pact with the Devil.

You can imagine how many questions bombarded the possessor of such a fine secret in the circles in which he showed himself for the rest of the evening. His merit appeared a hundred times more brilliant, and many women virtuous enough until that moment to scorn his fatuity were finally disposed to lay down their arms to him. Did he take advantage of it? That is not part of my story.

“Who would have believed,” said foolish old women, “that a man apparently so light-headed, so frivolous, was occupied with inventions capable of immortalizing him? See how often one is mistaken in the judgments one makes!”

Even sensible people were surprised, for no one thought about Victorin, who only had the appearance of a naively clever and very young man...

But it is time to get back to our hero.

On Saturdays he returned to the Inaccessible Mountain in order to take food to La Vezinier and her daughter—these voyages were made by night, but Victorin returned to spend Sunday afternoon in the city; he landed in a little wood and came back on foot—and occupy himself with putting the grotto into a fit state to receive Christine. He brought different things there, which he was able to procure by means of the presents that his friend the fop gave him in the first flush of his gratitude: a beautiful bed, chairs, tables, a chest of drawers, and even a sofa. He also brought silverware, fabrics, gauzes, etc.

When all of that was in the grotto he thought about consolidation; the southern esplanade could be entirely cultivated and furnish nourishment to thirty or forty people. That cultivation was proceeding very slowly in the hands of La Vezinier and her daughter; they needed an aide, and above all horses or oxen. Victorin knew a poor young man in his village who was in love with the daughter of a rich farmer, in whose employ he was a plowman and vine-grower. He abducted him one evening and brought him to the Inaccessible Mountain, after which he placed three horses and a plow there, wheat to sow, etc. He promised the poor fellow, who did not recognize him and mistook him for the Devil, like the woman and the bastard girl, to bring him his mistress, on condition that he treated her well. He showed him the provisions, ordered him to work to till the ground with the two women, and promised to visit him every week.

Victorin had taken care not to abduct the farmer’s daughter, in order to ensure that no one suspected what had happened to the plowboy. He was also waiting for a favorable opportunity to seize her during the night, in order not to be seen by anyone, and that opportunity was hard to find, given that it took him at least an hour by night to come from the city to his village, and he could not make the journey very often.

Finally, however, chance favored him and his hopes; one evening, the young woman left all her own underwear and her mother’s extended in the garden. Victorin arrived, saw it, and stole it, along with corsets, skirts, etc. The next day, he returned again and, having perceived the farmer hiding in one corner of the garden with his shotgun, his wife in the other and his servants dispersed, tried to find the daughter.

She was at the door of the house, a lantern in her hand. He swooped down on her, flying in an inverted arc; she uttered a feeble scream, and fainted. Victorin carried her away to the Inaccessible Mountain, on which he left her, after having alerted La Vezinier and the boy, enjoining the latter, under pain of his life, to respect her until he had found a means of marrying them.

That gave a great deal of pleasure to the poor boy, who saw in consequence that it was not the Devil who had carried him off, since the Devil only encourages us to evil. That was his reflection, and that of La Vezinier. Poor Cathos was very astonished, on coming round, to find herself in the arms of Joachim!

He did all he could to convince her that it was not him who had abducted her; she could not believe any of it, and wanted to return to her father's house, until he made her see that that was impossible, and that they could not get out of the place where they were now living.

It was then autumn. Cathos was very surprised to find the two women there who had been believed to have drowned in a well. All three of them aided Joachim in his work and they sowed sufficient ground to nourish ten or twelve people. Victorin came to see them often, as much to bring them provisions as to encourage them to work. As for him, he had resolved to wait until the return of summer before abducting Christine, unless some suitor appeared who asked for her hand in marriage. But none presented himself who was agreeable, with the result that Victorin had time to embellish the dwelling that he destined for the sovereign of his thoughts, and even to prepare little Estates of which she would be the queen.

He transported a shoemaker and a hairdresser to the Inaccessible Mountain, the latter to serve as chambermaid, and a dressmaker, a tailor and a cook. Afterwards, reflecting that all those people might well have a desire for one another, one evening, he brought a priest, whom he informed of his intentions on the way. The Ecclesiastic told the new inhabitants of the Inaccessible Mountain to make their mutual choices, and that he would marry them. The plowboy married his Cathos, the shoemaker the cook and the tailor the dressmaker. There remained the hairdresser, to whom Victorin made the promise that he would soon find her an agreeable husband.

Victorin was so occupied with his own affairs that he did those of his procurator rather poorly. He often received reprimands, but the procurator's wife always took his side warmly. That did not please Maître Troismotsparligne at all, who resolved to get rid of a young man so well liked by his wife. In consequence he wrote a letter of very sharp complaints to Victorin's father, in which he asked him to come and fetch his son. The procurator's wife, who saw the address on the letter, suspected its contents; she made arrangements to take possession of it when the procurator gave it to the maidservant to take it to the post office, and wrote another in an entirely contrary tone. The procurator fiscal replied in consequence, and sent presents of game to the procurator, who did not understand it at all, but as his clerk had mended his ways somewhat, he decided to be patient.

For his part, Victorin saw the term approaching that he had fixed for the abduction of Christine; he perceived that the amity of the fop was cooling, and the presents were already drying up. He hastened to make all his arrangements for the execution of his important design. It is said—although I am not sure of it—that, penetrated by the last procedure of the procurator's wife, he testified his gratitude to her, but still with the view of completing his formation for Christine, and that he received various little gifts from her, which contributed more than a little to the ornamentation of the grotto of the Inaccessible Mountain.

Finally, he had a desire to pay a visit to his parents. The procurator wanted nothing better, and Victorin set off on horseback—but he had taken care, on the preceding nights, to take all his baggage to the grotto, with the exception of his wings. There is no need to depict here the reception that his parents gave him, thanks to the letter from the obliging wife of the procurator. Victorin responded to it, but yearned to go up to the château.

The opportunity presented itself that same evening, for a small matter that the procurator fiscal wanted to communicate to his Seigneur. He sent his son, because he was better spoken and better educated.

Victorin dressed up before presenting himself, with the exquisite taste in which fools excel—although he was not one—and which alone had made the reputation of the fop. He arrived brilliantly; he was announced. The Seigneur was at table with a numerous company.

"It's Victorin, the son of my procurator fiscal, Mesdames!"

"Send him in."

A handsome cavalier appeared. Christine's heart quivered. Kindly smiles brightened the faces of six ladies, who had already assumed disdainful expressions. Even the Seigneur, on seeing the well-dressed young peasant, who bowed with an infinite grace, could not forbid himself a sentiment of respect, or something closely resembling one, since he recognized Victorin and addressed him as "Monsieur."

The young man acquitted his commission in fine speech, and with intelligence.

"I'm very content with you," replied Christine's father. "You haven't wasted your time in the city, and I can see that I've been told the truth about the fine acquaintances you've made there...damn it! Do you know, Mesdames, that he was the intimate of the most elegant of the young gentlemen of ***?"

"Of whom?" asked a Lady from the city. "Of Monsieur de Bourbonne? Indeed, I recognize Monsieur! Everyone attributes a marvelous invention to him, by means of which Monsieur de B*** has had traveled all round the city several times, in a carriage that moves of its own accord."

"Moves of its own accord!" cried the other Ladies. "Oh, Monsieur, will you explain that to us?"

"Sit down here," the Seigneur said to him. "With your permission, Mesdames?"

"Oh, my God yes! Monsieur de B*** is well-known to us, and he's eaten with him very habitually," said the Lady from the city.

"Set a place!" cried the Master.

And Victorin, addressed as *Monsieur*, was seated beside Christine, of whom he seemed to be begging pardon for a very respectful gaze.

"Well," said the Seigneur, "tell us a little about this invention?"

"It's really Monsieur de B***'s" the young man replied, modestly.

"Oh, you're keeping the secret!" cried the Lady from the city. "Everyone knows that it's yours, and Monsieur de B*** admitted it to his mother."

"I might have helped him with it."

"My God, my dear Victorin," said the Seigneur, transported by joy, "you must make me one like it."

"I'll do more, Monsieur. Often, six horses can't pull a carriage with all the compost from the cesspit that's piled up in it; I'll make you a machine that will pull it with a single horse!"

"Oh, I'll let you off the other one," said the good Seigneur, again transported by joy. "That's the useful one! But my dear boy, do you know that your fortune's made, if you want it?"

"I have no ambition," Victorin replied, "and if the human heart were not susceptible to a gentler passion, I'd be perfectly happy in my estate..."

And his eyes turned involuntarily toward Christine, with an expression of respect and tenderness, which the young demoiselle probably sensed, for she blushed like a rose opening at the dawn of a beautiful day.

"You'll only have to make a trivial adjustment to Christine's carriage."

"Tomorrow," said the young man, ardently.

All the Ladies retained Victorin, and the men presented humble requests to him. He promised to do what he could."

The next day, he set to work for his Seigneur, and by means of the work that he got the locksmith and the cartwright to do, he had finished the machine in three days. He was going to try it out in the absence of the father and the daughter, but the beautiful individual found out, and witnessed that with the help of only two valets, the machine hauled a cart full of fertilizer out of a hollow that six strong horses could hardly draw on a flat surface. Young Victorin had a particular talent for mechanics, aided by that of Jean Vezinier, whom he had undoubtedly surpassed; their first attempt at their wings had been another masterpiece!

Victorin had returned to his father's house before the Seigneur arrived, wanting to leave the beautiful Christine the pleasure of telling him the story of what had happened; he had instructed her as to how to have the trial repeated, in order that she might amuse her father. The young demoiselle was not insensible to that delicacy. The good Seigneur, in his turn, was infinitely satisfied.

Meanwhile, Victorin was occupied with his favorite project. He continued to transport, every night, useful objects or mere items of commodity to the Inaccessible Mountain. He had the pleasure of seeing his farmer ready to harvest a fine crop. The previous spring, he had planted vines on a hillock, but until they bore fruit, he had had the strength, so powerful was his mechanism, to transport a few casks of Bordeaux and Arbois wine. To make those journeys he found pretexts for visiting the neighborhood; he flew by night, arriving before daybreak, made his purchases and carried them away the following night, after taking care to place them conveniently during the evening.

Finally, everything was ready to receive Christine. The harvest was gathered in on the Inaccessible Mountain; Victorin had just finished a windmill to grind the wheat; all the necessary things had been constructed. He finally determined to abduct his mistress. A fortunate hazard even enabled him to take possession of a trunk that contained her most beautiful clothes.

Christine was due to go to the city. Victorin was so well informed that he knew that the Seigneur thought that sojourn necessary for his daughter. It was the eve of the departure and the carriage was loaded. Victorin had examined everything that same evening. He removed during darkness almost everything that belonged to his mistress, and made two trips to the Inaccessible Mountain that night. In the first he took the trunk, in the second he watched out for the moment when Christine would come out for the departure. It was bound to be early in the morning, because they wanted to arrive in the city in time for dinner.

He was not deceived in his expectation. At daybreak everyone was up and about in the Château de B***m**t. There was no moon and the obscurity was perfect. Victorin, who had done so many trial runs in abducting all the people of whom he had need to serve the sovereign of his will adequately, was hovering motionlessly above the château, much as an eagle with hooked talons lies in wait for a lamb that is commencing to bound into the flowery meadow in order to graze.

Christine finally appeared, preceded by her chambermaid, who was lighting her path, and accompanied by her father, who as swearing at the idle valets. She remained on the perron while her father and the chambermaid went down to the courtyard.

The moment was too precious not to be seized. Victorin, directing his erector parasol downwards, fell from the heights of the sky upon the beautiful Christine and lifted her up, saying to her: "Have no fear, divinity of my soul; I adore you; have no fear!"

But fear was the stronger. Christine, feeling herself lifted up by some kind of monster, uttered a piercing scream and fainted.

That scream was heard by her father, as well as the sound of Victorin's flight, which he mistook for the fall of a part of his château.

"Oh! My daughter has been crushed!" he cried. And he flew in the direction from which the scream had come. As he ran, his lantern went out—but everything was standing, nothing had fallen. He called to Christine, but Christine did not reply to his redoubled cries.

The domestics came running; they searched, they groped. Christine could no longer be found.

During that tumult, dawn broke; they thought that they would finally discover what they trembled to see: Christine crushed—but there was not the slightest trace of her! What dolor that was for a father idolatrous of a daughter so meritorious and so beautiful!