

succeeded, it meant safety, escape through the market square and the back lanes of the village.

Interrupted as he was fumbling at the bolts, the man turning stupid, lost his head, charged at old Goussot and sent him spinning, dodged the eldest brother and, pursued by the four sons, doubled back down the long passage, ran into the old couple's bedroom, flung his legs through the broken window and disappeared.

The sons rushed after him across the lawns and orchards, now darkened by the falling night.

"The villain's done for," chuckled old Goussot. "There's no way out for him. The walls are too high. He's done for, the scoundrel!"

The two farm-hands returned, at that moment, from the village; and he told them what had happened and gave each of them a gun:

"If the swine shows his nose anywhere near the house," he said, "let fly at him. Give him no mercy!"

He told them where to stand, went to make sure that the farm-gates, which were only used for the carts, were locked, and, not till then, remembered that his wife might perhaps be in need of aid:

"Well, mother, how goes it?"

"Where is he? Have you got him?" she asked, in a breath.

"Yes, we're after him. The lads must have collared him by now."

The news quite restored her; and a nip of rum gave her the strength to drag herself to the bed, with old Goussot's assistance, and to tell her story. For that matter, there was not much to tell. She had just lit the fire in the living-hall;

and she was knitting quietly at her bedroom window, waiting for the men to return, when she thought that she heard a slight grating sound in the linen-room next door:

"I must have left the cat in there," she thought to herself.

She went in, suspecting nothing, and was astonished to see the two doors of one of the linen-cupboards, the one in which they hid their money, wide open. She walked up to it, still without suspicion. There was a man there, hiding, with his back to the shelves.

"But how did he get in?" asked old Goussot.

"Through the passage, I suppose. We never keep the back door shut."

"And then did he go for you?"

"No, I went for him. He tried to get away."

"You should have let him."

"And what about the money?"

"Had he taken it by then?"

"Had he taken it! I saw the bundle of bank-notes in his hands, the sweep! I would have let him kill me sooner.... Oh, we had a sharp tussle, I give you my word!"

"Then he had no weapon?"

"No more than I did. We had our fingers, our nails and our teeth. Look here, where he bit me. And I yelled and screamed! Only, I'm an old woman you see.... I had to let go of him...."

"Do you know the man?"

"I'm pretty sure it was old Trainard."

"The tramp? Why, of course it's old Trainard!" cried the farmer. "I thought I knew him too...."

Besides, he's been hanging round the house these last three days. The old vagabond must have smelt the money. Aha, Trainard, my man, we shall see some fun! A number-one hiding in the first place; and then the police.... I say, mother, you can get up now, can't you? Then go and fetch the neighbours.... Ask them to run for the gendarmes.... By the by, the attorney's youngster has a bicycle.... How that damned old Trainard scooted! He's got good legs for his age, he has. He can run like a hare!"

Goussot was holding his sides, revelling in the occurrence. He risked nothing by waiting. No power on earth could help the tramp escape or keep him from the sound thrashing which he had earned and from being conveyed, under safe escort, to the town gaol.

The farmer took a gun and went out to his two labourers: