

"What you say shows a good heart, Germain," rejoined Père Maurice; "I know you loved my daughter, that you made her happy, and that if you could have satisfied Death by going in her place, Catherine would be alive at this moment and you in the cemetery. She well deserved to have you love her like that, and if you don't get over her loss, no more do we. But I'm not talking about forgetting her. The good God willed that she should leave us, and we don't let a day pass without showing Him, by our prayers, our thoughts, our words, our acts, that we respect her memory and are grieved at her departure. But if she could speak to you from the other world and tell you her will, she would bid you seek a mother for her little orphans. The question, then, is to find a woman worthy to take her place. It won't be very easy; but it isn't impossible; and when we have found her for you, you will love her as you loved my daughter, because you are an honest man and because you will be grateful to her for doing us a service and loving your children."

"Very good, Père Maurice," said Germain, "I will do what you wish, as I always have done."

"I must do you the justice to say, my son, that you have always listened to the friendship and sound arguments of the head of your family. So let us talk over the matter of your choice of a new wife. In the first place, I don't advise you to take a young woman. That isn't what you need. Youth is fickle; and as it's a burden to bring up three children, especially when they're the children of another marriage, what you must have is a kind-hearted soul, wise and gentle, and used to hard work. If your wife isn't about as old as yourself, she won't have sense enough to accept such a duty. She will think you too old and your children too young. She will complain, and your children will suffer."

"That is just what disturbs me," said Germain. "Suppose she should hate the poor little ones, and they should be maltreated and beaten?"

"God forbid!" said the old man. "But evil-minded women are rarer in these parts than good ones, and a man must be a fool not to be able to put his hand on the one that suits him."

"True, father: there are some good girls in our village. There's Louise and Sylvaine and Claudie and Marguerite—any one you please, in fact."

"Softly, softly, my boy, all those girls are too young or too poor—or too pretty; for we must think of that, too, my son. A pretty woman isn't always as steady as a plainer one."

"Do you want me to take an ugly one, pray?" said Germain, a little disturbed.

"No, not ugly, for you will have other children by her, and there's nothing so sad as to have ugly, puny, unhealthy children. But a woman still in her prime, in good health and neither ugly nor pretty, would do your business nicely."

"It is easy to see," said Germain, smiling rather sadly, "that to get such a one as you want we must have her made to order; especially as you don't want her to be poor, and rich wives aren't easy to get, especially for a widower."

"Suppose she was a widow herself, Germain? what do you say to a widow without children, and a snug little property?"

"I don't know of any just now in our parish."

"Nor do I, but there are other places."

"You have some one in view, father; so tell me at once who it is."

## IV. GERMAIN, THE CUNNING PLOUGHMAN

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"Yes, I have some one in view," replied Père Maurice. "It's one Léonard, widow of one Guérin, who lives at Fourche."

"I don't know the woman or the place," replied Germain, resigned, but becoming more and more depressed.

"Her name is Catherine, like your deceased wife's."

"Catherine? Yes, I shall enjoy having to say that name: Catherine! And yet, if I can't love her as well as I loved the other, it will cause me more pain than pleasure, for it will remind me of her too often."

"I tell you that you will love her: she's a good creature, a woman with a big heart; I haven't seen her for a long time, she wasn't a bad-looking girl then; but she is no longer young, she is thirty-two. She belongs to a good family, all fine people, and she has eight or ten thousand francs in land which she would be glad to sell, and buy other land where she goes to live; for she, too, is thinking of marrying again, and I know that, if her disposition should suit you, she wouldn't think you a bad match."

"So you have arranged it all?"

"Yes, subject to the judgment of you two; and that is what you must ask each other after you are acquainted. The woman's father is a distant relation of mine and has been a very close friend. You know him, don't you—Père Léonard?"

"Yes, I have seen him talking with you at the fairs, and at the last one you breakfasted together: is this what you were talking about at such length?"

"To be sure; he watched you selling your cattle and thought you did the business very well, that you were a fine-appearing fellow, that you seemed active and shrewd; and when I told him all that you are and how well you have behaved to us during the eight years we've lived and worked together, without ever an angry or discontented word, he took it into his head that you must marry his daughter; and the plan suits me, too, I confess, considering the good reputation she has, the integrity of her family, and what I know about their circumstances."

"I see, Père Maurice, that you think a little about worldly goods."

"Of course I think about them. Don't you?"

"I will think about them, if you choose, to please you; but you know that, for my part, I never trouble myself about what is or is not coming to me in our profits. I don't

understand about making a division, and my head isn't good for such things. I know about the land and cattle and horses and seed and fodder and threshing. As for sheep and vines and gardening, the niceties of farming, and small profits, all that, you know, is your son's business, and I don't interfere much in it. As for money, my memory is short, and I prefer to yield everything rather than dispute about thine and mine. I should be afraid of making a mistake and claiming what is not due me, and if matters were not simple and clear, I should never find my way through them."

"So much the worse, my son, and that's why I would like you to have a wife with brains to take my place when I am no longer here. You have never been willing to look into our accounts, and that might make trouble between you and my son, when you don't have me to keep the peace between you and tell you what is coming to each of you."

"May you live many years, Père Maurice! But don't you worry about what will happen when you are gone; I shall never dispute with your son. I trust Jacques as I trust myself, and as I have no property of my own, as everything that can possibly come to me, comes to me as your daughter's husband and belongs to our children, I can be easy in my mind and so can you; Jacques would never try to defraud his sister's children for his own, as he loves them almost equally."

"You are right in that, Germain. Jacques is a good son, a good brother, and a man who loves the truth. But Jacques may die before you, before your children are grown up, and one must always have a care not to leave minors without a head to give them good advice and arrange their differences. Otherwise the lawyers interfere, set them at odds with each other, and make them eat everything up in lawsuits. So we ought not to think of bringing another person into our house, man or woman, without saying to ourselves that that person may some day have to direct the conduct and manage the business of thirty or more children, grandchildren, sons-in-law, and daughters-in-law. No one knows how much a family may grow, and when the hive is too full and the time has come to swarm, every one thinks about carrying off his honey. When I took you for my son-in-law, although my daughter was rich and you poor, I never reproached her for choosing you. I saw you were a good worker, and I knew well that the best sort of riches for country people like us is a good pair of arms and a heart like yours. When a man brings those things into a family, he brings enough. But it's different with a woman: her work in the house is to keep, not to get. Besides, now that you are a father and are looking for a wife, you must remember that your new children, having no sort of claim on the inheritance of your first wife's children, would be left in want if you should die, unless your wife had some property of her own. And then, it would cost something to feed the children you are going to add to our little colony. If that should fall on us alone, we would take care of them, never fear, and without complaining; but everybody's comfort

would be diminished, and the first children would have to take their share of the privations. When families increase beyond measure, and their means do not increase in proportion, then want comes, however bravely we may struggle against it. This is all I have to say, Germain; think it over, and try to make yourself agreeable to Widow Guérin; for her good management and her crowns will bring us aid for the present and peace of mind for the future."

"Very good, father. I will try to like her and make her like me."

"To do that you must go to see her."

"At her home? At Fourche? That's a long way, isn't it? and we don't have much time to run about at this season."

"When a marriage for love is on the carpet, you must expect to waste time; but when it's a marriage of convenience between two people who have no whims and who know what they want, it's soon arranged. Tomorrow will be Saturday; you can shorten your day's ploughing a bit and start about two o'clock, after dinner; you will be at Fourche by night; there's a good moon just now, the roads are excellent, and it isn't more than three leagues. Fourche is near Magnier. Besides, you can take the mare."

"I should rather go afoot in this cool weather."

"True, but the mare's a fine beast, and a suitor makes a better appearance if he comes well mounted. You must wear your new clothes and carry a nice present of game to Père Léonard. You will say that you come with a message from me, you will talk with him, you will pass the Sunday with his daughter, and you will return with a *yes* or a *no* on Monday morning."

"Very good," replied Germain calmly, and yet he was not altogether calm.

Germain had always lived a virtuous life, as hard-working peasants do. Married at twenty, he had loved but one woman in his life, and since he had become a widower, although he was naturally impulsive and vivacious, he had never laughed and dallied with any other. He had faithfully cherished a genuine regret in his heart, and he did not yield to his father-in-law without a feeling of dread and melancholy; but the father-in-law had always managed his family judiciously, and Germain, who had devoted himself unreservedly to the common work, and consequently to him who personified it, the father of the family,—Germain did not understand the possibility of rebelling against sound arguments, against the common interest of all.

Nevertheless, he was sad. Few days passed that he did not weep for his wife in secret, and, although solitude was beginning to weigh upon him, he was more terrified at the thought of forming a new union, than desirous to escape from his grief. He said to himself vaguely that love might have consoled him if it had taken him by surprise, for love does not console otherwise. One cannot find it by seeking it; it comes to us when