

The Fate of Madame Cabanel

Eliza Lynn Linton

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Progress had not invaded, science had not enlightened, the little hamlet of Pieuvrot, in Brittany.

They were a simple, ignorant, superstitious set who lived there, and the luxuries of civilization were known to them as little as its learning. They toiled hard all the week on the ungrateful soil that yielded them but a bare subsistence in return; they went regularly to mass in the little rock-set chapel on Sundays and saints' days; believed implicitly all that monsieur le cure said to them, and many things which he did not say; and they took all the unknown, not as magnificent, but as diabolical.

The sole link between them and the outside world of mind and progress was Monsieur Jules Cabanel, the proprietor, par excellence, of the place; maire, juge de paix, and all the public functionaries rolled into one. And he sometimes went to Paris whence he returned with a cargo of novelties that excited envy, admiration, or fear, according to the degree of intelligence in those who beheld them.

Monsieur Jules Cabanel was not the most charming man of his class in appearance, but he was generally held to be a good fellow at bottom. A short, thickset, low-browed man, with blue-black hair cropped close like a mat, as was his blue-black beard, inclined to obesity and fond of good living, he had need have some virtues behind the bush to compensate for his want of personal charms. He was not bad, however; he was only common and unlovely.

Up to fifty years of age he had remained the unmarried prize of the surrounding country; but hitherto he had resisted all the overtures made by maternal fowlers, and had kept his liberty and his bachelorhood intact. Perhaps his handsome housekeeper, Adèle, had something to do with his persistent celibacy. They said she had, under their breath as it were, down at la Veuve Prieur's; but no one dared to so much as hint the like to herself. She was a proud, reserved kind of woman; and had strange notions of her own dignity which no one cared to disturb. So, whatever the underhand gossip of the place might be, neither she nor her master got wind of it.

Presently and quite suddenly, Jules Cabanel, who had been for a longer time than usual in Paris, came home with a wife. Adèle had only twenty-four hours' notice to prepare for this strange home-coming; and the task seemed heavy. But she got through it in her old way of silent determination; arranged the rooms as she knew her master would wish them to be arranged; and even supplemented the usual nice adornments by a voluntary bunch of flowers on the salon table.

'Strange flowers for a bride,' said to herself little Jeannette, the goose-girl who was sometimes brought into the house to work, as she noticed heliotrope called in France la fleur des veuves scarlet poppies, a bunch of belladonna, another of aconite scarcely, as even ignorant little Jeannette said, flowers of bridal welcome or bridal significance. Nevertheless, they stood where Adèle had placed them; and if Monsieur Cabanel meant anything by the passionate expression of disgust with which he ordered them out of his sight, madame seemed to understand nothing, as she smiled with that vague, half-deprecating look of a person who is assisting at a scene of which the true bearing is not understood.

Madame Cabanel was a foreigner, and an Englishwoman; young, pretty and fair as an angel.

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'La beauté du diable,' said the Pieuvrotines, with something between a sneer and a shudder; for the words meant with them more than they mean in ordinary use. Swarthy, ill-nourished, low of stature and meagre in frame as they were themselves, they could not understand the plump form, tall figure and fresh complexion of the Englishwoman. Unlike their own experience, it was therefore more likely to be evil than good. The feeling which had sprung up against her at first sight deepened when it was observed that, although she went to mass with praiseworthy punctuality, she did not know her missal and signed herself à travers. La beauté du diable, in faith!

'Pouf!' said Martin Briolic, the old gravedigger of the little cemetery; 'with those red lips of hers, her rose cheeks and her plump shoulders, she looks like a vampire and as if she lived on blood.'

He said this one evening down at la Veuve Prieur's; and he said it with an air of conviction that had its weight. For Martin Briolic was reputed the wisest man of the district; not even excepting Monsieur le curé who was wise in his own way, which was not Martin's nor Monsieur Cabanel who was wise in his, which was neither Martin's nor the curé's. He knew all about the weather and the stars, the wild herbs that grew on the plains and the wild shy beasts that eat them; and he had the power of divination and could find where the hidden springs of water lay far down in the earth when he held the baguette in his hand. He knew too, where treasures could be had on Christmas Eve if only you were quick and brave enough to enter the cleft in the rock at the right moment and come out again before too late; and he had seen with his own eyes the White Ladies dancing in the moonlight; and the little imps, the Infins, playing their prankish gambols by the pit at the edge of the wood. And he had a shrewd suspicion as to who, among those black-hearted men of La Crèche-en-bois the rival hamlet was a loup-garou, if ever there was one on the face of the earth and no one had doubted that! He had other powers of a yet more mystic kind; so that Martin Briolic's bad word went for something, if, with the illogical injustice of ill-nature his good went for nothing.

Fanny Campbell, or, as she was now Madame Cabanel, would have excited no special attention in England, or indeed anywhere but at such dead-alive, ignorant, and consequently gossiping place as Pieuvrot. She had no romantic secret as her background; and what history she had was commonplace enough, if sorrowful too in its own way. She was simply an orphan and a governess; very young and very poor; whose employers had quarrelled with her and left her stranded in Paris, alone and almost moneyless; and who had married Monsieur Jules Cabanel as the best thing she could do for herself. Loving no one else, she was not difficult to be won by the first man who showed her kindness in her hour of trouble and destitution; and she accepted her middle-aged suitor, who was fitter to be her father than her husband, with a clear conscience and a determination to do her duty cheerfully and faithfully all without considering herself as a martyr or an interesting victim sacrificed to the cruelty of circumstances. She did not know however, of the handsome housekeeper Adèle, nor of the housekeeper's little nephew to whom her master was so kind that he allowed him to live at the Maison Cabanel and had him well taught by the curé. Perhaps if she had she would have thought twice before she put herself under the same roof with a woman who for a bridal bouquet offered her poppies, heliotrope and poison-flowers.

If one had to name the predominant characteristic of Madame Cabanel it would be easiness of temper. You saw it in the round, soft, indolent lines of her face and figure; in her mild blue eyes and placid, unvarying smile; which irritated the more petulant French temperament and especially disgusted Adèle. It seemed impossible to make madame angry or even to make her understand when she was insulted, the housekeeper used to say with profound disdain; and, to do the woman justice, she did not spare her endeavours to enlighten her. But madame accepted all Adèle's haughty reticence and defiant continuance of mistress-hood with unwearied sweetness; indeed, she expressed herself gratified that so much trouble was taken off her hands, and that Adèle so kindly took her duties on herself.

The consequences of this placid lazy life, where all her faculties were in a manner asleep, and where she was enjoying the reaction from her late years of privation and anxiety, was, as might be expected, an increase in physical beauty that made her freshness and good condition still more remarkable. Her lips were redder, her cheeks rosier, her shoulders plumper than ever; but as she waxed, the health of the little hamlet waned, and not the

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oldest inhabitant remembered so sickly a season, or so many deaths. The master too, suffered slightly; the little Adolphe desperately.

This failure of general health in undrained hamlets is not uncommon in France or in England; neither is the steady and pitiable decline of French children; but Adèle treated it as something out of all the lines of normal experience; and, breaking through her habits of reticence spoke to every one quite fiercely of the strange sickliness that had fallen on Pieuvrot and the Maison Cabanel; and how she believed it was something more than common; while as to her little nephew, she could give neither a name nor find a remedy for the mysterious disease that had attacked him.

There were strange things among them, she used to say, and Pieuvrot had never done well since the old times were changed. Jeannette used to notice how she would sit gazing at the English lady, with such a deadly look on her handsome face when she turned from the foreigner's fresh complexion and grand physique to the pale face of the stunted, meagre, fading child. It was a look, she said afterwards, that used to make her flesh get like ice and creep like worms.

One night Adèle, as if she could bear it no longer, dashed down to where old Martin Briolic lived, to ask him to tell her how it had all come about and the remedy.

'Hold, Ma'am Adèle,' said Martin, as he shuffled his greasy tarot cards and laid them out in triplets on the table; 'there is more in this than one sees. One sees only a poor little child become suddenly sick; that may be, is it not so? and no harm done by man? God sends sickness to us all and makes my trade profitable to me. But the little Adolphe has not been touched by the Good God. I see the will of a wicked woman in this. Hem!' Here he shuffled the cards and laid them out with a kind of eager distraction of manner, his withered hands trembling and his mouth uttering words that Adèle could not catch. 'Saint Joseph and all the saints protect us!' he cried; 'the foreigner the Englishwoman she whom they call Madame Cabanel no rightful madame she! Ah, misery!'

'Speak, Father Martin! What do you mean!' cried Adèle, grasping his arm. Her black eyes were wild; her arched nostrils dilated; her lips, thin, sinuous, flexible, were pressed tight over her small square teeth.

'Tell me in plain words what you would say!'

'Broucolaque!' said Martin in a low voice.

'It is what I believed!' cried Adèle. 'It is what I knew. Ah, my Adolphe! woe on the day when the master brought that fair-skinned devil home!'

'Those red lips don't come by nothing, Ma'am Adèle,' cried Martin nodding his head. 'Look at them they glisten with blood! I said so from the beginning; and the cards, they said so too. I drew "blood" and a "bad fair woman" on the evening when the master brought her home, and I said to myself, "Ha, ha, Martin! you are on the track, my boy on the track. Martin!" and, Ma'am Adèle, I have never left it! Broucolaque! that's what the cards say, Ma'am Adèle.

Vampire. Watch and see; watch and see; and you'll find that the cards have spoken true.

'And when we have found, Martin?' said Adèle in a hoarse whisper.

The old man shuffled his cards again. 'When we have found, Ma'am Adèle?' he said slowly.

'You know the old pit out there by the forest? the old pit where the lutins run in and out, and where the White Ladies wring the necks of those who come upon them in the moonlight?'

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Perhaps the White Ladies will do as much for the English wife of Monsieur Cabanel; who knows?'

'They may,' said Adèle, gloomily.

'Courage, brave woman!' said Martin. 'They will.'

The only really pretty place about Pieuvrot was the cemetery. To be sure there was the dark gloomy forest which was grand in its own mysterious way; and there was the broad wide plain where you might wander for a long summer's day and not come to the end of it; but these were scarcely places where a young woman would care to go by herself; and for the rest, the miserable little patches of cultivated ground, which the peasants had snatched from the surrounding waste and where they had raised poor crops, were not very lovely. So Madame Cabanel, who, for all the soft indolence that had invaded her, had the Englishwoman's inborn love for walking and fresh air, haunted the pretty little graveyard a good deal. She had no sentiment connected with it.

Of all the dead who laid there in their narrow coffins, she knew none and cared for none; but she liked to see the pretty little flower-beds and the wreaths of immortelles, and the like; the distance too, from her own home was just enough for her; and the view over the plain to the dark belt of forest and the mountains beyond, was fine.

The Pieuvrotines did not understand this. It was inexplicable to them that any one, not out of her mind, should go continually to the cemetery not on the day of the dead and not to adorn the grave of one she loved only to sit there and wander among the tombs, looking out on to the plain and the mountains beyond when she was tired.

'It was just like ' The speaker, one Lesouëf, had got so far as this, when he stopped for a word.

He said this down at la Veuve Prieur's where the hamlet collected nightly to discuss the day's small doings, and where the main theme, ever since she had come among them, three months ago now, had been Madame Cabanel and her foreign ways and her wicked ignorance of her mass-book and her wrong-doings of a mysterious kind generally, interspersed with jesting queries, banded from one to the other, of how Ma'am Adèle liked it? and what would become of le petit Adolphe when the rightful heir appeared? some adding that monsieur was a brave man to shut up two wild cats under the same roof together; and what would become of it in the end? Mischief of a surety.

'Wander about the tombs just like what, Jean Lesouëf?' said Martin Briolic. Rising, he added in a low but distinct voice, every word falling clear and clean: 'I will tell you like what, Lesouëf like a vampire! La femme Cabanel has red lips and red cheeks; and Ma'am Adèle's little nephew is perishing before your eyes. La femme Cabanel has red lips and red cheeks; and she sits for hours among the tombs. Can you read the riddle, my friends? For me it is as clear as the blessed sun.'

'Ha, Father Martin, you have found the word like a vampire!' said Lesouëf with a shudder.

'Like a vampire!' they all echoed with a groan.

'And I said vampire the first,' said Martin Briolic. 'Call to mind I said it from the first.'

'Faith! and you did,' they answered; 'and you said true.'

So now the unfriendly feeling that had met and accompanied the young Englishwoman ever since she came to Pieuvrot had drawn to a focus. The seed which Martin and Adèle had dropped so sedulously had at last taken root; and the Pieuvrotines would have been ready to accuse of atheism and immorality any one who had doubted their decision, and had declared that pretty Madame Cabanel was only a young woman with nothing special to do, a naturally fair complexion, superb health and no vampire at all, sucking the blood of a living child or living

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among the tombs to make the newly buried her prey.

The little Adolphe grew paler and paler, thinner and thinner; the fierce summer sun told on the half-starved dwellers within those foul mud-huts surrounded by undrained marshes; and Monsieur Jules Cabanel's former solid health followed the law of the rest. The doctor, who lived at Crèche-en-bois, shook his head at the look of things; and said it was grave. When Adèle pressed him to tell her what was the matter with the child and with monsieur, he evaded the question; or gave her a word which she neither understood nor could pronounce. The truth was, he was a credulous and intensely suspicious man; a viewy man who made theories and then gave himself to the task of finding them true. He had made the theory that Fanny was secretly poisoning both her husband and the child; and though he would not give Adèle a hint of this, he would not set her mind at rest by a definite answer that went on any other line.

As for Monsieur Cabanel, he was a man without imagination and without suspicion; a man to take life easily and not distress himself too much for the fear of wounding others; a selfish man but not a cruel one; a man whose own pleasure was his supreme law and who could not imagine, still less brook, opposition or the want of love and respect for himself. Still, he loved his wife as he had never loved a woman before. Coarsely moulded, common-natured as he was, he loved her with what strength and passion of poetry nature had given him; and if the quantity was small, the quality was sincere. But that quality was sorely tried when now Adèle, now the doctor hinted mysteriously, the one at diabolical influences, the other at underhand proceedings of which it behoved him to be careful, especially careful what he eat and drank and how it was prepared and by whom; Adèle adding hints about the perfidiousness of English women and the share which the devil had in fair hair and brilliant complexions. Love his young wife as he might, this constant dropping of poison was not without some effect. It told much for his steadfastness and loyalty that it should have had only so small effect.

One evening however, when Adèle, in an agony, was kneeling at his feet madame had gone out for her usual walk crying: 'Why did you leave me for such as she is? I, who loved you.

who was faithful to you, and she, who walks among the graves, who sucks your blood and our child's she who has only the devil's beauty for her portion and who loves you not?' something seemed suddenly to touch him with electric force.

'Miserable fool that I was!' he said, resting his head on Adèle's shoulders and weeping. Her heart leapt with joy. Was her reign to be renewed? Was her rival to be dispossessed?

From that evening Monsieur Cabanel's manner changed to his young wife but she was too easy-tempered and unsuspecting to notice anything, or if she did, there was too little depth in her own love for him it was so much a matter of untroubled friendliness only that she did not fret but accepted the coldness and brusqueness that had crept into his manner as good-naturedly as she accepted all things. It would have been wiser if she had cried and made a scene and come to an open fracas with Monsieur Cabanel. They would have understood each other better; and Frenchmen like the excitement of a quarrel and a reconciliation.

Naturally kind-hearted, Madame Cabanel went much about the village, offering help of various kinds to the sick. But no one among them all, not the very poorest indeed, the very poorest the least received her civilly or accepted her aid. If she attempted to touch one of the dying children, the mother, shuddering, withdrew it hastily to her own arms; if she spoke to the adult sick, the wan eyes would look at her with a strange horror and the feeble voice would mutter words in a patois she could not understand. But always came the same word, 'broucolaque!'. 'How these people hate the English!' she used to think as she turned away, perhaps just a little depressed, but too phlegmatic to let herself be uncomfortable or troubled deeply.

It was the same at home. If she wanted to do any little act of kindness to the child, Adèle passionately refused her. Once she snatched him rudely from her arms, saying as she did so:

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'infamous broucolaque! before my very eyes?' And once, when Fanny was troubled about her husband and proposed to make him a cup of beef-tea à l'Anglaise, the doctor looked at her as if he would have looked through her; and Adèle upset the saucepan; saying insolently but yet hot tears were in her eyes 'Is it not fast enough for you, madame? Not faster, unless you kill me first!'

To all of which Fanny replied nothing; thinking only that the doctor was very rude to stare so fixedly at her and that Adèle was horribly cross; and what an ill-tempered creature she was; and how unlike an English housekeeper!

But Monsieur Cabanel, when he was told of the little scene, called Fanny to him and said in a more caressing voice than he had used to her of late: 'Thou wouldst not hurt me, little wife? it was love and kindness, not wrong, that thou wouldst do?'

'Wrong? What wrong could I do?' answered Fanny, opening her blue eyes wide. 'What wrong should I do to my best and only friend?'

'And I am thy friend? thy lover? thy husband? Thou lovest me dear?' said Monsieur Cabanel.

'Dear Jules, who is so dear; who so near?' she said kissing him, while he said fervently:

'God bless thee!'

The next day Monsieur Cabanel was called away on urgent business. He might be absent for two days, he said, but he would try to lessen the time; and the young wife was left alone in the midst of her enemies, without even such slight guard as his presence might prove.

Adèle was out, It was a dark, hot summer's night, and the little Adolphe had been more feverish and restless than usual all the day. Towards evening he grew worse; and though Jeannette, the goose-girl, had strict commands not to allow madame to touch him, she grew frightened at the condition of the boy; and when madame came into the small parlour to offer her assistance, Jeannette gladly abandoned a charge that was too heavy for her and let the lady take him from her arms.

Sitting there with the child in her lap, cooing to him, soothing him by a low, soft nursery song, the paroxysm of his pain seemed to her to pass and it was as if he slept. But in that paroxysm he had bitten both his lip and tongue; and the blood was now oozing from his mouth. He was a pretty boy; and his mortal sickness made him at this moment pathetically lovely. Fanny bent her head and kissed the pale still face; and the blood that was on his lips was transferred to hers.

While she still bent over him her woman's heart touched with a mysterious force and prevision of her own future motherhood Adèle, followed by old Martin and some others of the village, rushed into the room.

'Behold her!' she cried, seizing Fanny by the arm and forcing her face upwards by the chin 'behold her in the act! Friends, look at my child dead, dead in her arms; and she with his blood on her lips! Do you want more proofs? Vampire that she is, can you deny the evidence of your own senses?'

'No! no!' roared the crowd hoarsely. 'She is a vampire a creature cursed by God and the enemy of man; away with her to the pit. She must die as she has made others to die!'

'Die, as she has made my boy to die!' said Adèle; and more than one who had lost a relative or child during the epidemic echoed her words, 'Die, as she has made mine to die!'. 'What is the meaning of all this?' said Madame Cabanel, rising and lacing the crowd with the true courage of an Englishwoman. 'What harm have I done to any of

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you that you should come about me, in the absence of my husband, with these angry looks and insolent words?'

'What harm hast thou done?' cried old Martin, coming close to her. 'Sorceress as thou art, thou hast bewitched our good master; and vampire as thou art, thou nourishest thyself on our blood!

Have we not proof of that at this very moment? Look at thy mouth cursed broucolaque; and here lies thy victim, who accuses thee in his death!'

Fanny laughed scornfully, 'I cannot condescend to answer such folly,' she said lifting her head.

'Are you men or children?'

'We are men, madame,' said Legros the miller; 'and being men we must protect our weak ones. We have all had our doubts and who more cause than I, with three little ones taken to heaven before their time? and now we are convinced.'

'Because I have nursed a dying child and done my best to soothe him!' said Madame Cabanel with unconscious pathos.

'No more words!' cried Adèle, dragging her by the arm from which she had never loosed her hold. 'To the pit with her, my friends, if you would not see all your children die as mine has died as our good Legros' have died!'

A kind of shudder shook the crowd; and a groan that sounded in itself a curse burst from them.

'To the pit!' they cried. 'Let the demons take their own!'

Quick as thought Adèle pinioned the strong white arms whose shape and beauty had so often maddened her with jealous pain; and before the poor girl could utter more than one cry Legros had placed his brawny hand over her mouth. Though this destruction of a monster was not the murder of a human being in his mind, or in the mind of any there, still they did not care to have their nerves disturbed by cries that sounded so human as Madame Cabanel's. Silent then, and gloomy, that dreadful cortege took its way to the forest, carrying its living load; gagged and helpless as if it had been a corpse among them. Save with Adèle and old Martin, it was not so much personal animosity as the instinctive self-defence of fear that animated them. They were executioners, not enemies; and the executioners of a more righteous law than that allowed by the national code. But one by one they all dropped off, till their numbers were reduced to six; of whom Legros was one, and Lesouëf, who had lost his only sister, was also one.

The pit was not more than an English mile from the Maison Cabanel. It was a dark and lonesome spot, where not the bravest man of all that assembly would have dared to go alone after nightfall, not even if the curé had been with him; but a multitude gives courage, said old Martin Briolic; and half a dozen stalwart men, led by such a woman as Adèle, were not afraid of even lutins or the White Ladies.

As swiftly as they could for the burden they bore, and all in utter silence, the cortege strode over the moor; one or two of them carrying rude torches; for the night was black and the way was not without its physical dangers. Nearer and nearer they came to the fatal bourn; and heavier grew the weight of their victim. She had long ceased to struggle; and now lay as if dead in the hands of her bearers. But no one spoke of this or of aught else. Not a word was exchanged between them; and more than one, even of those left, began to doubt whether they had done wisely, and whether they had not better have trusted to the law. Adèle and Martin alone remained firm to the task they had undertaken; and Legros too was sure; but he was weakly and humanly sorrowful for the thing he felt obliged to do. As for Adèle, the woman's jealousy, the mother's anguish and the terror of superstition, had all wrought in her so that she would not have raised a finger to have lightened her victim of one of her pains, or have

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found her a woman like herself and no vampire after all.

The way got darker; the distance between them and their place of execution shorter; and at last they reached the border of the pit where this fearful monster, this vampire poor innocent Fanny Cabanel was to be thrown. As they lowered her, the light of their torches fell on her face.

'Grand Dieu!' cried Legros, taking off his cap; 'she is dead!'

'A vampire cannot die,' said Adèle, 'It is only an appearance. Ask Father Martin.'

'A vampire cannot die unless the evil spirits take her, or she is buried with a stake thrust through her body,' said Martin Briolic sententiously.

'I don't like the look of it,' said Legros; and so said some others. They had taken the bandage from the mouth of the poor girl; and as she lay in the flickering light, her blue eyes half open; and her pale face white with the whiteness of death, a little return of human feeling among them shook them as if the wind had passed over them.

Suddenly they heard the sound of horses' hoofs thundering across the plain. They counted two, four, six; and they were now only four unarmed men, with Martin and Adèle to make up the number. Between the vengeance of man and the power and malice of the wood-demons, their courage faded and their presence of mind deserted them. Legros rushed frantically into the vague darkness of the forest; Lesouëf followed him; the other two fled over the plain while the horsemen came nearer and nearer. Only Adèle held the torch high above her head, to show more clearly both herself in her swarthy passion and revenge and the dead body of her victim. She wanted no concealment; she had done her work, and she gloried in it. Then the horsemen came plunging to them Jules Cabanel the first, followed by the doctor and four gardes champêtres.

'Wretches! murderers!' was all he said, as he flung himself from his horse and raised the pale face to his lips.

'Master,' said Adèle; 'she deserved to die. She is a vampire and she has killed our child.'

'Fool!' cried Jules Cabanel, flinging off her hand. 'Oh, my loved wife! thou who did no harm to man or beast, to be murdered now by men who are worse than beasts!'

'She was killing thee,' said Adèle. 'Ask monsieur le docteur. What ailed the master, monsieur?'

'Do not bring me into this infamy,' said the doctor looking up from the dead. 'Whatever ailed monsieur, she ought not to be here. You have made yourself her judge and executioner, Adèle, and you must answer for it to the law.'

'You say this too, master?' said Adèle.

'I say so too,' returned Monsieur Cabanel. 'To the law you must answer for the innocent life you have so cruelly taken you and all the tools and murderers you have joined to you.'

'And is there to be no vengeance for our child?'

'Would you revenge yourself on God, woman?' said Monsieur Cabanel sternly.

'And our past years of love, master?'

'Are memories of hate, Adèle,' said Monsieur Cabanel, as he turned again to the pale face of his dead wife.

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'Then my place is vacant,' said Adèle, with a bitter cry. 'Ah, my little Adolphe, it is well you went before!'

'Hold, Ma'am Adèle!' cried Martin.

But before a hand could be stretched out, with one bound, one shriek, she had flung herself into the pit where she had hoped to bury Madame Cabanel; and they heard her body strike the water at the bottom with a dull splash, as of something falling from a great distance.

'They can prove nothing against me, Jean,' said old Martin to the garde who held him. 'I neither bandaged her mouth nor carried her on my shoulders. I am the gravedigger of Pieuvrot, and, ma foi, you would all do badly, you poor creatures, when you die, without me! I shall have the honour of digging madame's grave, never doubt it; and, Jean,' he whispered, 'they may talk as they like, those rich aristos who know nothing. She is a vampire, and she shall have a slatte through her body yet! Who knows better than I? If we do not tie her down like this, she will come out of her grave and suck our blood; it is a way these vampires have.'

'Silence there!' said the garde, commanding the little escort. 'To prison with the assassins; and keep their tongues from wagging.'

'To prison with martyrs and the public benefactors,' retorted old Martin. 'So the world rewards its best!'

And in this faith he lived and died, as a forçat at Toulon, maintaining to the last that he had done the world a good service by ridding it of a monster who else would not have left one man in Pieuvrot to perpetuate his name and race. But Legros and also Lesouëf, his companion, doubted gravely of the righteousness of that act of theirs on that dark summer's night in the forest; and though they always maintained that they should not have been punished, because of their good motives, yet they grew in time to disbelieve old Martin Briolic and his wisdom, and to wish that they had let the law take its own course unhelped by them reserving their strength for the grinding of the hamlet's flour and the mending of the hamlet's sabots and the leading of a good life according to the teaching of monsieur le cure and the exhortations of their own wives.