

old patron of the inn, awakened by Larue with a colossal shout, had served him breakfast, and as the early laborers passed, they spread the tidings. Larue had gone straight over to the château of his betrothed to put an end to her anxieties — a man from Africa does not stand on calling-hours — and every one was in raptures. Except Dufour.

This forlorn wretch sought out de Choisy, and found him at breakfast, in his garden; for the morning had broken warm and sunny. The youth was in a state bordering on madness; having blasphemed God, he now blasphemed the devil; and he brutally reminded the priest that he had invested a quarter of a million francs or thereabouts in black magic, and all he had had for it was the scare of his life. The priest put him off smoothly; all would yet go well; they would find a way to get rid of the obnoxious soldier. But Dufour had spent the night with the brandy bottle, to try to recover the nerve which he had lost when the apparition before the altar had knocked him senseless; he had tried the same medicine for the shock of the news of Larue's return; and he was in no condition to listen to the priest's sophistries. In vain de Choisy explained that the appearance in the church was a sort of warning of the ill luck that had followed, that it was only needful to evoke the devil again, ask his advice, and follow his instructions.

Luckily Madame la Marquise de Branlecu happened to pass by. On her arm was a basket of fine cakes and meats; she was visiting her poor. She paused, and looked over the wall, courtesying to the priest and asking his blessing. But Dufour, now savagely drunk, roared out his story at her. Her woman's wit rose deft to the occasion. "How nice for you!" she exclaimed, pretending to misunderstand, "and so your friend has come back after you thought him lost. You must ask the good father to say for him the Mass of St. Sécaire!" She courtesied again; the priest rose and blessed her solemnly; Dufour stood aghast. Her misunderstanding, her nonchalance, stupefied him. The priest improved the occasion. "You are a young fool," he said; "go home and drink no more. Come to me when you are sober! I promise you by the faith of him we saw last night that you shall have your wish." With a heavy hand on the wretch's shoulder, he pushed him through the gate.

Some hours later, the Marquise sought her lover in the confessional. "Abandoned woman!" he cried out upon her, "are you so lost that you dare to mention that accursed rite? I have sinned, no doubt, but — the Mass of Saint Sécaire!"

"My dear Father," she answered laughingly, "I dare not argue with a priest upon theology. But it seems to me that we have no hope of salvation — unless we repent, which the devil forbid! — and that being so, the best thing we can do is to stand as high as we can in the hierarchy of the damned! Come, let us do it! If it succeeds, the money means success for us; if it fails, we are no worse off. Besides, I want to do it; I want to do it! I want to do it! I want to be your clerk!" "By all the flames of hell!" replied the apostate, "certainly men are lost through women. I will do it, though the devil drag us to damnation in the very church itself!"

That evening de Choisy explained to Dufour the peculiar merits of the Mass of Saint Sécaire. "Let it work quickly!" grumbled the fool, "I bet he wastes no time in putting her in the pen."

In point of fact, the preparations for the mass took longer than those for the marriage; the Church joined Captain Larue

and Félice D'Aubigny in holy matrimony only four days later.

It was a hard task to persuade Dufour to patience; but one cannot perform the Mass of Saint Sécaire except at the half-moon when she is waning. The priest and his mistress thought it best to admit him to a portion of their secrets; and he was comforted.

The Marquise exercised all her fascination and her tact; he had only a few weeks to wait, if he got no satisfaction by then, why, we were all in the same boat. We would all give up this silly magic, which led nowhere; Dufour should have his money back; we would try to get Félice for him in some other way, and all remain good friends.

And, alone with de Choisy: "If the fool kicks, put him on to cocaine; he'll be mad in ten days, and no one will believe a word he may say. But that's a last resource."

One night — they were rehearsing the mass for the grand occasion — she asked him point blank if he believed in magic.

"Well," he answered, "I do and I don't. Nothing has ever happened — nothing to be sure of. And yet — I hardly know how to put it — well — it comes off. I do an evocation to produce a certain effect: nothing comes of it. But I hear a fortnight later, perhaps, that something happened at that very time which brings about that effect in a perfectly natural way."

She showed that she did not care if it happened or no. "I love it; I love it!" she cried; "there is nothing else in the world for me. But I want to see the devil myself; I want to give him all I have given you." The priest made a wry face; then he turned and crushed her with a kiss. "I love you for everything," he cried.

#### IV.

The great clock of Arques-le-Roi boomed out eleven strokes. Instantly, at a distance of some three miles, a man's voice answered it.

The man was Father de Choisy. He was dressed in his most noble vestments, but the crosses on them had been elaborated by dividing each arm into two parts, so that each cross made four Ys at the base. He was standing at the ruined altar of a deserted chapel, a place long since given over to the owl and bat. There was enough roof left to give shelter to occasional tramps or gypsies, but all trace of door or window was departed. By his side stood the atrocious woman who inspired him, robed also as a priest, but with her garments looped in such a manner as to make the dress indecent. There were two lights upon the altar, candles of black wax, both on the north side of what served for crucifix.

This was a live toad nailed to a scarlet cross. Around it was wrapped a strip of linen, torn from one of Captain Larue's shirts by a bribed laundress. For incense a stick of yellow sulphur smouldered on charcoal.

Through the open roof the stars looked calmly down upon the profanation. The voice of de Choisy was the sole vibration in that still air. He began to say the Mass, but reversing the order of the words of every sentence. His voice was a peculiar nasal drone, rising and falling by sharp and inharmonious changes. When he should have made the sign of the cross, instead he spat upon the ground, and crossed it with his left foot. The divine names he replaced by a peculiar hissing whistle.

The host was triangular, made of unleavened oatmeal mixed with blood. For chalice he used a vessel consecrated to all baseness and impurity, and the cloth with which he covered it was a