

Current Literature.

THE FIRST SNOW.

Gay bloom the flowers in Springtime set,
And streaky apples linger yet;
'Twas autumn but a week ago,
Why, then, these flakes of snow?

The Little Cask.

Maitre Chicot, the innkeeper of Espeville,
pulled up his tilbury before the gate of Mere Maglorie's farm.

He fastened his reins to a fence post,
and entered the yard. He possessed
some real estate adjoining the old woman's land,

"I was born here, and I'm going to die here, too,"
was what she always said. He found her peeling potatoes in front of her door.

"Well, old mother, how is the health,
always hearty, eh?" "So-so, and you Maitre Chicot?"

"Eh! eh! just a little twinge once in awhile;
otherwise I'm all right enough." "Alions! so much the better."

And she said nothing more. Chicot watched her working. Her crooked fingers,
knobby and hard as the legs of a crab,

Chicot seemed to be worried, hesitated and anxious,
with something that clung to the tip of his tongue and would not venture to leave it.

"Say! Mere Maglorie." "What can I do for you?" "Well, this farm of yours;
you still don't want to sell it?"

"If that's what you want—no! Never come for that here.
What I say, I say—no use talking about it any more."

"You see, I've thought of an arrangement that would be just the thing for both of us."

"What's that?" "See here—you'll sell it to me,
and then you'll keep it just as you do now. Don't you see what I mean? Listen, and I'll show you."

The old woman stopped peeling her potatoes,
and fixed on the innkeeper's face two keen eyes, still very bright under their crumpled eyelids.

"I want to explain the thing to you. Every month I'll give you 150 francs.
You hear me!—every month I'll come here in my tilbury and pay you down thirty francs or 100 francs.

"That is all-very well for me; but how about you?
That won't give you the farm."

He went on again to explain: "Don't you bother your head about that.
You'll stay here just as long as the good God allows you to live. You'll always remain here at home in your own house."

"That is all-very well for me; but how about you?
That won't give you the farm."

frances every month. It's all clear profit for you and no loss."
The old woman remained dumb, surprised, uneasy, but nevertheless visibly tempted.

"I'll not say no. Only I want to reason with myself about the affair.
You come back and we'll talk it over again, some time next week. Then I'll tell you just what I think about it."

And Maitre Chicot went off as happy as a king who had just conquered an empire. Mere Maglorie remained thoughtful.

She did not sleep the next night. For four whole days she was in a fever of hesitation.
She felt sure there was something unlucky for herself in such an arrangement,

"At this rate even," said the notary, "suppose you live fifteen years more,
he would still only have paid you 45,000 francs."

The old woman actually trembled with excitement at the prospect of fifty francs every month;
but she was still very suspicious, fearful of a thousand possible schemes to defraud her;

When Chicot came to ask for his answer, she made him first coax her for a long time—declaring that she would not do it, but really tortured by the fear that he might refuse to give the price.

Chicot jumped with disappointment and refused. Then in order to convince him, she began to argue about the probable duration of her life:

"I've got only five or six years more to live—that's sure. Here I am in my seventy-third year, and not stout at all for that. I thought something was tearing my very inside out, and they had to carry me to bed."

Chicot didn't allow himself to be caught. "That'll do, you old humbug!
you're solid as the church tower—you're going to live to be at least 110 years old."

The whole day was spent in discussion. But as the old woman would not yield an inch, the inn-keeper at last agreed to pay the fifty francs a month.

Three years went by. The good woman remained miraculously well.
She did not seem to have become one day older, and Chicot was in despair.

It was the end of her, in fact. She died the winter after, just about Christmas time, having lain down, very drunk in the snow.

"Who is this man?" "The one who is rushing along with his hat on the back of his head,
and his eyes hanging out?"

"Not dead yet, eh, old carcass?" He did not know what to do.
Every time he looked at her he wanted to strangle her.

"Not exactly. She meant to, but her bean came up and she forgot all about it; consequently there was a freeze-up.
Poor girl! She is very sorry! If tears would thaw the pipes she would shed 'em by the hundred."

"And why does the man rush?" "He is on his way to the plumber for consolation."

"And what will the plumber do?" "He will show the man 14,678 calls which were booked before he came in,
and which must be attended to in rotation"

English authorities give interesting results of cross breeding between the merino and the heavy English sheep,
has long been a hobby with many New Zealand flock owners.

The innkeeper, radiant with delight, served here with chicken, pudding,
chatterlings, mutton with caper sauce. But she ate scarcely anything—temperate as she had been from her childhood—

Chicot, much disappointed, coaxed her in vain. Neither would she drink, she refused to take any coffee.

"Well, I'm sure you'll take a little glass of fine liquor, anyhow?" "Ah, that! yes. I'll not say no to that."

"Try that, old mother, and see if it isn't just famous!"

And the good woman began to sip it very slowly, very fastidiously,
making the pleasure endure as long as possible. When she got to the bottom, she turned the glass up to pour the very last drop down her throat, and said:

"That is fine!" She had no sooner said it than Chicot poured out another glassful for her.
She wanted to refuse, but it was too late, and she sipped it all up, very slowly, as she had done the first time.

Then he tried to get her to swallow a third, but she resisted. He persisted: "Why, that's milk, I tell you!—that's cream. I take ten and twelve glasses without feeling any the worse.
That goes down just like sugar; never hurts the stomach, never goes to the head; why, it just evaporates off the tongue. Nothing so fine for the health!"

And as she liked it very much, she yielded; but she only swallowed half a glassful. Then Chicot, in a burst of generosity, cried out:

"See here; I tell you what I'll do with you. Since you like it, I'm going to give you a little cask of it—make you a present of one—just to show folks that we are good friends."

The old woman did not say no; and went home slightly tipsy. Next day, early, the inn-keeper drove into Mere Maglorie's yard,
and took out of the bottom of the vehicle a little cask bound with iron hoops.

"And I want to tell you one thing, you know; when it's all gone, there's plenty more for you. Don't be backward in telling me. I don't care about the cost of it. The sooner it's finished the better pleased I'll be."

Four days later he returned. The old woman was sitting at the door, busy cutting up bread for her soup. He sat down beside her, bid her goodbye bent his face down very close to hers while talking, for the purpose of smelling her breath.
And he smelled a strong smell of alcohol. Then his face brightened.

"Say, mother, I'm sure you'll offer me a little glass, eh?" And they took two or three drinks together. But very soon there was a rumor through the country that old Mere Maglorie was drinking, and getting hopelessly drunk, all by herself.

Chicot never went to see her any more; and whenever anybody would speak of the old woman he would exclaim: "Isn't it awful to see a person of her age form such a habit?
And, you see, when one's as old as that, there's no hope for one. Some day or other it'll be the end of her!"

It was the end of her, in fact. She died the winter after, just about Christmas time, having lain down, very drunk in the snow.
And Maitre Chicot found himself in possession of the farm. He declared: "If that old fool hadn't got to drinking she'd have lived ten years longer anyhow."—Guy de Maupassant.

"Who is this man?" "The one who is rushing along with his hat on the back of his head,
and his eyes hanging out?" "Yes."

"That is the man who warned the servant girl the other night to shut off water so the pipes wouldn't freeze?" "And the good girl obeyed?"

"Not exactly. She meant to, but her bean came up and she forgot all about it; consequently there was a freeze-up.
Poor girl! She is very sorry! If tears would thaw the pipes she would shed 'em by the hundred."

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