

Paris was blockaded, starved, in its death agony. Sparrows were becoming scarcer and scarcer on the rooftops and the sewers were being depopulated. One ate whatever one could get. As he was strolling sadly along the outer boulevard one bright January morning, his hands in his trousers pockets and his stomach empty, M.¹ Morissot [mò re sò], watchmaker by trade but local militiaman for the time being, stopped short before a fellow militiaman whom he recognized as a friend. It was M. Sauvage [so vâzh], a riverside acquaintance.

Every Sunday, before the war, Morissot left at dawn, a bamboo pole in his hand, a tin box on his back. He would take the Argenteuil railroad, get off at Sceaux, and walk to Marante Island. As soon as he arrived at this ideal spot he would start to fish; he fished until nightfall. Every Sunday he would meet a stout, jovial little man, M. Sauvage, a haberdasher² in Rue Notre-Dame-de-Lorette, another ardent fisherman. Often they spent half a day side by side, line in hand and feet dangling above the current. Inevitably they had struck up a friendship. Some days they did not speak. Sometimes they did; but they understood one another admirably without saying anything because they had similar tastes and responded to their surroundings in exactly the same way.

On a spring morning, toward ten o'clock, when the young sun was drawing up from the tranquil stream wisps of haze which floated off in the direction of the current and was pouring down its vernal warmth on the backs of the two fanatical anglers,³ Morissot would sometimes say to his neighbor, "Nice, isn't it?" and M. Sauvage would answer, "There's nothing like it." And that was enough for them to understand and appreciate each other. On an autumn afternoon, when the sky, reddened by the setting sun, cast reflections of its scarlet clouds on the water, made the whole river crimson, lighted up the horizon, made the two friends look as ruddy as fire, and gilded the trees which were already brown and beginning to tremble with a wintry shiver, M. Sauvage would look at Morissot with a smile and say, "Fine sight!" And Morissot, awed, would answer, "It's better than the city, isn't it?" without taking his eyes from his float. As soon as they recognized one another they shook hands energetically, touched at meeting under such changed circumstances. M. Sauvage, with a sigh, grumbled, "What goings-on!" Morissot groaned dismally, "And what weather! This is the first fine day of the year." The sky was, in fact, blue and brilliant. They started to walk side by side, absent-minded and sad. Morissot went on, "And fishing! Ah! Nothing but a pleasant memory." "When'll we get back to it?" asked M. Sauvage.

1. M. abbreviation for *Monsieur* (ma syô'), or "Mister" or "Sir" (French).
2. haberdasher (hab' er dash' er) n. person who is in the business of selling men's clothing.
3. anglers (anj' glarz) n. people who fish with hook and line.

Reading Strategy

Identifying Significant Details What important elements of the story are revealed in the first paragraph?

ardent (ard' ent) adj. intensely enthusiastic or devoted

vernal (vern' al) adj. springlike

Reading Check

How do M. Morissot and M. Sauvage know each other?