HONORÉ DE BALZAC

FATHER GORIOT

Оноре де Бальзак

Father Goriot

де Бальзак О.

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Содержание

Honoré de Balzac
Father Goriot

To the great and illustrious Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire, a token of admiration for his works and genius.
DE BALZAC.

FATHER GORIOT

Mme. Vauquer (*nee* de Conflans) is an elderly person, who for the past forty years has kept a lodging-house in the Rue Nueve-Sainte-Genevieve, in the district that lies between the Latin Quarter and the Faubourg Saint-Marcel. Her house (known in the neighborhood as the *Maison Vauquer*) receives men and women, old and young, and no word has ever been breathed against her respectable establishment; but, at the same time, it must be said that as a matter of fact no young woman has been under her roof for thirty years, and that if a young man stays there for any length of time it is a sure sign that his allowance must be of the slenderest. In 1819, however, the time when this drama opens, there was an almost penniless young girl among Mme. Vauquer's boarders.

That word drama has been somewhat discredited of late; it has been overworked and twisted to strange uses in these days of dolorous literature; but it must do service again here, not because this story is dramatic in the restricted sense of the word, but because some tears may perhaps be shed *intra et extra muros* before it is over.

Will any one without the walls of Paris understand it? It is open to doubt. The only audience who could appreciate the results of close observation, the careful reproduction of minute detail and local color, are dwellers between the heights of Montrouge and Montmartre, in a vale of crumbling stucco watered by streams of black mud, a vale of sorrows which are real and joys too often hollow; but this audience is so accustomed to terrible sensations, that only some unimaginable and well-neigh impossible woe could produce any lasting impression there. Now and again there are tragedies so awful and so grand by reason of the complication of virtues and vices that bring them about, that egotism and selfishness are forced to pause and are moved to pity; but the impression that they receive is like a luscious fruit, soon consumed. Civilization, like the car of Juggernaut, is scarcely stayed perceptibly in its progress by a heart less easy to break than the others that lie in its course; this also is broken, and Civilization continues on her course triumphant. And you, too, will do the like; you who with this book in your white hand will sink back among the cushions of your armchair, and say to yourself, "Perhaps this may amuse me." You will read the story of Father Goriot's secret woes, and, dining thereafter with an unspoiled appetite, will lay the blame of your insensibility upon the writer, and accuse him of exaggeration, of writing romances. Ah! once for all, this drama is neither a fiction nor a romance! *All is true*, – so true, that every one can discern the elements of the tragedy in his own house, perhaps in his own heart.

The lodging-house is Mme. Vauquer's own property. It is still standing in the lower end of the Rue Nueve-Sainte-Genevieve, just where the road slopes so sharply down to the Rue de l'Arbalete, that wheeled traffic seldom passes that way, because it is so stony and steep. This position is sufficient to account for the silence prevalent in the streets shut in between the dome of the Pantheon and the dome of the Val-de-Grace, two conspicuous public buildings which give a yellowish tone to the landscape and darken the whole district that lies beneath the shadow of their leaden-hued cupolas.

In that district the pavements are clean and dry, there is neither mud nor water in the gutters, grass grows in the chinks of the walls. The most heedless passer-by feels the depressing influences of a place where the sound of wheels creates a sensation; there is a grim look about the houses, a suggestion of a jail about those high garden walls. A Parisian straying into a suburb apparently composed of lodging-houses and public institutions would see poverty and dullness, old age lying down to die, and joyous youth condemned to drudgery. It is the ugliest quarter of Paris, and, it may be added, the least known. But, before all things, the Rue Nueve-Sainte-Genevieve is like a bronze frame for a picture for which the mind cannot be too well prepared by the contemplation of sad hues and sober images. Even so, step by step the daylight decreases, and the cicerone's droning voice grows hollower as the traveler descends into the Catacombs. The comparison holds good! Who shall say which is more ghastly, the sight of the bleached skulls or of dried-up human hearts?

The front of the lodging-house is at right angles to the road, and looks out upon a little garden, so that you see the side of the house in section, as it were, from the Rue Nueve-Sainte-Genevieve. Beneath the wall of the house front there lies a channel, a fathom wide, paved with cobble-stones, and beside it runs a graveled walk bordered by geraniums and oleanders and pomegranates set in great blue and white glazed earthenware pots. Access into the graveled walk is afforded by a door, above which the words MAISON VAUQUER may be read, and beneath, in rather smaller letters, "*Lodgings for both sexes, etc.*"

During the day a glimpse into the garden is easily obtained through a wicket to which a bell is attached. On the opposite wall, at the further end of the graveled walk, a green marble arch was painted once upon a time by a local artist, and in this semblance of a shrine a statue representing Cupid is installed; a Parisian Cupid, so blistered and disfigured that he looks like a candidate for one of the adjacent hospitals, and might suggest an allegory to lovers of symbolism. The half-obliterated inscription on the pedestal beneath determines the date of this work of art, for it bears witness to the widespread enthusiasm felt for Voltaire on his return to Paris in 1777:

"Whoe'er thou art, thy master see;
He is, or was, or ought to be."

At night the wicket gate is replaced by a solid door. The little garden is no wider than the front of the house; it is shut in between the wall of the street and the partition wall of the neighboring house. A mantle of ivy conceals the bricks and attracts the eyes of passers-by to an effect which is picturesque in Paris, for each of the walls is covered with trellised vines that yield a scanty dusty crop of fruit, and furnish besides a subject of conversation for Mme. Vauquer and her lodgers; every year the widow trembles for her vintage.

A straight path beneath the walls on either side of the garden leads to a clump of lime-trees at the further end of it; *line*-trees, as Mme. Vauquer persists in calling them, in spite of the fact that she was a de Conflans, and regardless of repeated corrections from her lodgers.

The central space between the walls is filled with artichokes and rows of pyramid fruit-trees, and surrounded by a border of lettuce, pot-herbs, and parsley. Under the lime-trees there are a few green-painted garden seats and a wooden table, and hither, during the dog-days, such of the lodgers as are rich enough to indulge in a cup of coffee come to take their pleasure, though it is hot enough to roast eggs even in the shade.

The house itself is three stories high, without counting the attics under the roof. It is built of rough stone, and covered with the yellowish stucco that gives a mean appearance to almost every house in Paris. There are five windows in each story in the front of the house; all the blinds visible through the small square panes are drawn up awry, so that the lines are all at cross purposes. At the side of the house there are but two windows on each floor, and the lowest of all are adorned with a heavy iron grating.

Behind the house a yard extends for some twenty feet, a space inhabited by a happy family of pigs, poultry, and rabbits; the wood-shed is situated on the further side, and on the wall between the wood-shed and the kitchen window hangs the meat-safe, just above the place where the sink discharges its greasy streams. The cook sweeps all the refuse out through a little door into the Rue Nueve-Sainte-Genevieve, and frequently cleanses the yard with copious supplies of water, under pain of pestilence.

The house might have been built on purpose for its present uses. Access is given by a French window to the first room on the ground floor, a sitting-room which looks out upon the street through the two barred windows already mentioned. Another door opens out of it into the dining-room, which is separated from the kitchen by the well of the staircase, the steps being constructed partly of wood, partly of tiles, which are colored and beeswaxed. Nothing can be more depressing than the sight of

that sitting-room. The furniture is covered with horse hair woven in alternate dull and glossy stripes. There is a round table in the middle, with a purplish-red marble top, on which there stands, by way of ornament, the inevitable white china tea-service, covered with a half-effaced gilt network. The floor is sufficiently uneven, the wainscot rises to elbow height, and the rest of the wall space is decorated with a varnished paper, on which the principal scenes from *Telemaque* are depicted, the various classical personages being colored. The subject between the two windows is the banquet given by Calypso to the son of Ulysses, displayed thereon for the admiration of the boarders, and has furnished jokes these forty years to the young men who show themselves superior to their position by making fun of the dinners to which poverty condemns them. The hearth is always so clean and neat that it is evident that a fire is only kindled there on great occasions; the stone chimney-piece is adorned by a couple of vases filled with faded artificial flowers imprisoned under glass shades, on either side of a bluish marble clock in the very worst taste.

The first room exhales an odor for which there is no name in the language, and which should be called the *odeur de pension*. The damp atmosphere sends a chill through you as you breathe it; it has a stuffy, musty, and rancid quality; it permeates your clothing; after-dinner scents seem to be mingled in it with smells from the kitchen and scullery and the reek of a hospital. It might be possible to describe it if some one should discover a process by which to distil from the atmosphere all the nauseating elements with which it is charged by the catarrhal exhalations of every individual lodger, young or old. Yet, in spite of these stale horrors, the sitting-room is as charming and as delicately perfumed as a boudoir, when compared with the adjoining dining-room.

The paneled walls of that apartment were once painted some color, now a matter of conjecture, for the surface is incrusted with accumulated layers of grimy deposit, which cover it with fantastic outlines. A collection of dim-ribbed glass decanters, metal discs with a satin sheen on them, and piles of blue-edged earthenware plates of Touraine ware cover the sticky surfaces of the sideboards that line the room. In a corner stands a box containing a set of numbered pigeon-holes, in which the lodgers' table napkins, more or less soiled and stained with wine, are kept. Here you see that indestructible furniture never met with elsewhere, which finds its way into lodging-houses much as the wrecks of our civilization drift into hospitals for incurables. You expect in such places as these to find the weather-house whence a Capuchin issues on wet days; you look to find the execrable engravings which spoil your appetite, framed every one in a black varnished frame, with a gilt beading round it; you know the sort of tortoise-shell clock-case, inlaid with brass; the green stove, the Argand lamps, covered with oil and dust, have met your eyes before. The oilcloth which covers the long table is so greasy that a waggish *externe* will write his name on the surface, using his thumb-nail as a style. The chairs are broken-down invalids; the wretched little hempen mats slip away from under your feet without slipping away for good; and finally, the foot-warmers are miserable wrecks, hingeless, charred, broken away about the holes. It would be impossible to give an idea of the old, rotten, shaky, cranky, worm-eaten, halt, maimed, one-eyed, rickety, and ramshackle condition of the furniture without an exhaustive description, which would delay the progress of the story to an extent that impatient people would not pardon. The red tiles of the floor are full of depressions brought about by scouring and periodical renewings of color. In short, there is no illusory grace left to the poverty that reigns here; it is dire, parsimonious, concentrated, threadbare poverty; as yet it has not sunk into the mire, it is only splashed by it, and though not in rags as yet, its clothing is ready to drop to pieces.

This apartment is in all its glory at seven o'clock in the morning, when Mme. Vauquer's cat appears, announcing the near approach of his mistress, and jumps upon the sideboards to sniff at the milk in the bowls, each protected by a plate, while he purrs his morning greeting to the world. A moment later the widow shows her face; she is tricked out in a net cap attached to a false front set on awry, and shuffles into the room in her slipshod fashion. She is an oldish woman, with a bloated countenance, and a nose like a parrot's beak set in the middle of it; her fat little hands (she is as sleek as a church rat) and her shapeless, slouching figure are in keeping with the room that reeks

of misfortune, where hope is reduced to speculate for the meanest stakes. Mme. Vauquer alone can breathe that tainted air without being disheartened by it. Her face is as fresh as a frosty morning in autumn; there are wrinkles about the eyes that vary in their expression from the set smile of a ballet-dancer to the dark, suspicious scowl of a discounter of bills; in short, she is at once the embodiment and interpretation of her lodging-house, as surely as her lodging-house implies the existence of its mistress. You can no more imagine the one without the other, than you can think of a jail without a turnkey. The unwholesome corpulence of the little woman is produced by the life she leads, just as typhus fever is bred in the tainted air of a hospital. The very knitted woolen petticoat that she wears beneath a skirt made of an old gown, with the wadding protruding through the rents in the material, is a sort of epitome of the sitting-room, the dining-room, and the little garden; it discovers the cook, it foreshadows the lodgers – the picture of the house is completed by the portrait of its mistress.

Mme. Vauquer at the age of fifty is like all women who "have seen a deal of trouble." She has the glassy eyes and innocent air of a trafficker in flesh and blood, who will wax virtuously indignant to obtain a higher price for her services, but who is quite ready to betray a Georges or a Pichegru, if a Georges or a Pichegru were in hiding and still to be betrayed, or for any other expedient that may alleviate her lot. Still, "she is a good woman at bottom," said the lodgers who believed that the widow was wholly dependent upon the money that they paid her, and sympathized when they heard her cough and groan like one of themselves.

What had M. Vauquer been? The lady was never very explicit on this head. How had she lost her money? "Through trouble," was her answer. He had treated her badly, had left her nothing but her eyes to cry over his cruelty, the house she lived in, and the privilege of pitying nobody, because, so she was wont to say, she herself had been through every possible misfortune.

Sylvie, the stout cook, hearing her mistress' shuffling footsteps, hastened to serve the lodgers' breakfasts. Beside those who lived in the house, Mme. Vauquer took boarders who came for their meals; but these *externes* usually only came to dinner, for which they paid thirty francs a month.

At the time when this story begins, the lodging-house contained seven inmates. The best rooms in the house were on the first story, Mme. Vauquer herself occupying the least important, while the rest were let to a Mme. Couture, the widow of a commissary-general in the service of the Republic. With her lived Victorine Taillefer, a schoolgirl, to whom she filled the place of mother. These two ladies paid eighteen hundred francs a year.

The two sets of rooms on the second floor were respectively occupied by an old man named Poiret and a man of forty or thereabouts, the wearer of a black wig and dyed whiskers, who gave out that he was a retired merchant, and was addressed as M. Vautrin. Two of the four rooms on the third floor were also let – one to an elderly spinster, a Mlle. Michonneau, and the other to a retired manufacturer of vermicelli, Italian paste and starch, who allowed the others to address him as "Father Goriot." The remaining rooms were allotted to various birds of passage, to impecunious students, who like "Father Goriot" and Mlle. Michonneau, could only muster forty-five francs a month to pay for their board and lodging. Mme. Vauquer had little desire for lodgers of this sort; they ate too much bread, and she only took them in default of better.

At that time one of the rooms was tenanted by a law student, a young man from the neighborhood of Angouleme, one of a large family who pinched and starved themselves to spare twelve hundred francs a year for him. Misfortune had accustomed Eugene de Rastignac, for that was his name, to work. He belonged to the number of young men who know as children that their parents' hopes are centered on them, and deliberately prepare themselves for a great career, subordinating their studies from the first to this end, carefully watching the indications of the course of events, calculating the probable turn that affairs will take, that they may be the first to profit by them. But for his observant curiosity, and the skill with which he managed to introduce himself into the salons of Paris, this story would not have been colored by the tones of truth which it certainly owes to him, for they are entirely due to his penetrating sagacity and desire to fathom the mysteries of an appalling

condition of things, which was concealed as carefully by the victim as by those who had brought it to pass.

Above the third story there was a garret where the linen was hung to dry, and a couple of attics. Christophe, the man-of-all-work, slept in one, and Sylvie, the stout cook, in the other. Beside the seven inmates thus enumerated, taking one year with another, some eight law or medical students dined in the house, as well as two or three regular comers who lived in the neighborhood. There were usually eighteen people at dinner, and there was room, if need be, for twenty at Mme. Vauquer's table; at breakfast, however, only the seven lodgers appeared. It was almost like a family party. Every one came down in dressing-gown and slippers, and the conversation usually turned on anything that had happened the evening before; comments on the dress or appearance of the dinner contingent were exchanged in friendly confidence.

These seven lodgers were Mme. Vauquer's spoiled children. Among them she distributed, with astronomical precision, the exact proportion of respect and attention due to the varying amounts they paid for their board. One single consideration influenced all these human beings thrown together by chance. The two second-floor lodgers only paid seventy-two francs a month. Such prices as these are confined to the Faubourg Saint-Marcel and the district between La Bourbe and the Salpetriere; and, as might be expected, poverty, more or less apparent, weighed upon them all, Mme. Couture being the sole exception to the rule.

The dreary surroundings were reflected in the costumes of the inmates of the house; all were alike threadbare. The color of the men's coats were problematical; such shoes, in more fashionable quarters, are only to be seen lying in the gutter; the cuffs and collars were worn and frayed at the edges; every limp article of clothing looked like the ghost of its former self. The women's dresses were faded, old-fashioned, dyed and re-dyed; they wore gloves that were glazed with hard wear, much-mended lace, dingy ruffles, crumpled muslin fichus. So much for their clothing; but, for the most part, their frames were solid enough; their constitutions had weathered the storms of life; their cold, hard faces were worn like coins that have been withdrawn from circulation, but there were greedy teeth behind the withered lips. Dramas brought to a close or still in progress are foreshadowed by the sight of such actors as these, not the dramas that are played before the footlights and against a background of painted canvas, but dumb dramas of life, frost-bound dramas that sere hearts like fire, dramas that do not end with the actors' lives.

Mlle. Michonneau, that elderly young lady, screened her weak eyes from the daylight by a soiled green silk shade with a rim of brass, an object fit to scare away the Angel of Pity himself. Her shawl, with its scanty, draggled fringe, might have covered a skeleton, so meagre and angular was the form beneath it. Yet she must have been pretty and shapely once. What corrosive had destroyed the feminine outlines? Was it trouble, or vice, or greed? Had she loved too well? Had she been a second-hand clothes dealer, a frequenter of the backstairs of great houses, or had she been merely a courtesan? Was she expiating the flaunting triumphs of a youth overcrowded with pleasures by an old age in which she was shunned by every passer-by? Her vacant gaze sent a chill through you; her shriveled face seemed like a menace. Her voice was like the shrill, thin note of the grasshopper sounding from the thicket when winter is at hand. She said that she had nursed an old gentleman, ill of catarrh of the bladder, and left to die by his children, who thought that he had nothing left. His bequest to her, a life annuity of a thousand francs, was periodically disputed by his heirs, who mingled slander with their persecutions. In spite of the ravages of conflicting passions, her face retained some traces of its former fairness and fineness of tissue, some vestiges of the physical charms of her youth still survived.

M. Poiret was a sort of automaton. He might be seen any day sailing like a gray shadow along the walks of the Jardin des Plantes, on his head a shabby cap, a cane with an old yellow ivory handle in the tips of his thin fingers; the outspread skirts of his threadbare overcoat failed to conceal his meagre figure; his breeches hung loosely on his shrunken limbs; the thin, blue-stockinged legs trembled like

those of a drunken man; there was a notable breach of continuity between the dingy white waistcoat and crumpled shirt frills and the cravat twisted about a throat like a turkey gobbler's; altogether, his appearance set people wondering whether this outlandish ghost belonged to the audacious race of the sons of Japhet who flutter about on the Boulevard Italien. What devouring kind of toil could have so shriveled him? What devouring passions had darkened that bulbous countenance, which would have seemed outrageous as a caricature? What had he been? Well, perhaps he had been part of the machinery of justice, a clerk in the office to which the executioner sends in his accounts, – so much for providing black veils for parricides, so much for sawdust, so much for pulleys and cord for the knife. Or he might have been a receiver at the door of a public slaughter-house, or a sub-inspector of nuisances. Indeed, the man appeared to have been one of the beasts of burden in our great social mill; one of those Parisian Ratons whom their Bertrands do not even know by sight; a pivot in the obscure machinery that disposes of misery and things unclean; one of those men, in short, at sight of whom we are prompted to remark that, "After all, we cannot do without them."

Stately Paris ignores the existence of these faces bleached by moral or physical suffering; but, then, Paris is in truth an ocean that no line can plumb. You may survey its surface and describe it; but no matter how numerous and painstaking the toilers in this sea, there will always be lonely and unexplored regions in its depths, caverns unknown, flowers and pearls and monsters of the deep overlooked or forgotten by the divers of literature. The Maison Vauquer is one of these curious monstrosities.

Two, however, of Mme. Vauquer's boarders formed a striking contrast to the rest. There was a sickly pallor, such as is often seen in anaemic girls, in Mlle. Victorine Taillefer's face; and her unvarying expression of sadness, like her embarrassed manner and pinched look, was in keeping with the general wretchedness of the establishment in the Rue Nueve-Saint-Genevieve, which forms a background to this picture; but her face was young, there was youthfulness in her voice and elasticity in her movements. This young misfortune was not unlike a shrub, newly planted in an uncongenial soil, where its leaves have already begun to wither. The outlines of her figure, revealed by her dress of the simplest and cheapest materials, were also youthful. There was the same kind of charm about her too slender form, her faintly colored face and light-brown hair, that modern poets find in mediaeval statuettes; and a sweet expression, a look of Christian resignation in the dark gray eyes. She was pretty by force of contrast; if she had been happy, she would have been charming. Happiness is the poetry of woman, as the toilette is her tinsel. If the delightful excitement of a ball had made the pale face glow with color; if the delights of a luxurious life had brought the color to the wan cheeks that were slightly hollowed already; if love had put light into the sad eyes, then Victorine might have ranked among the fairest; but she lacked the two things which create woman a second time – pretty dresses and love-letters.

A book might have been made of her story. Her father was persuaded that he had sufficient reason for declining to acknowledge her, and allowed her a bare six hundred francs a year; he had further taken measures to disinherit his daughter, and had converted all his real estate into personalty, that he might leave it undivided to his son. Victorine's mother had died broken-hearted in Mme. Couture's house; and the latter, who was a near relation, had taken charge of the little orphan. Unluckily, the widow of the commissary-general to the armies of the Republic had nothing in the world but her jointure and her widow's pension, and some day she might be obliged to leave the helpless, inexperienced girl to the mercy of the world. The good soul, therefore, took Victorine to mass every Sunday, and to confession once a fortnight, thinking that, in any case, she would bring up her ward to be devout. She was right; religion offered a solution of the problem of the young girl's future. The poor child loved the father who refused to acknowledge her. Once every year she tried to see him to deliver her mother's message of forgiveness, but every year hitherto she had knocked at that door in vain; her father was inexorable. Her brother, her only means of communication, had not come to see her for four years, and had sent her no assistance; yet she prayed to God to unseal her father's

eyes and to soften her brother's heart, and no accusations mingled with her prayers. Mme. Couture and Mme. Vauquer exhausted the vocabulary of abuse, and failed to find words that did justice to the banker's iniquitous conduct; but while they heaped execrations on the millionaire, Victorine's words were as gentle as the moan of the wounded dove, and affection found expression even in the cry drawn from her by pain.

Eugene de Rastignac was a thoroughly southern type; he had a fair complexion, blue eyes, black hair. In his figure, manner, and his whole bearing it was easy to see that he had either come of a noble family, or that, from his earliest childhood, he had been gently bred. If he was careful of his wardrobe, only taking last year's clothes into daily wear, still upon occasion he could issue forth as a young man of fashion. Ordinarily he wore a shabby coat and waistcoat, the limp black cravat, untidily knotted, that students affect, trousers that matched the rest of his costume, and boots that had been resoled.

Vautrin (the man of forty with the dyed whiskers) marked a transition stage between these two young people and the others. He was the kind of man that calls forth the remark: "He looks a jovial sort!" He had broad shoulders, a well-developed chest, muscular arms, and strong square-fisted hands; the joints of his fingers were covered with tufts of fiery red hair. His face was furrowed by premature wrinkles; there was a certain hardness about it in spite of his bland and insinuating manner. His bass voice was by no means unpleasant, and was in keeping with his boisterous laughter. He was always obliging, always in good spirits; if anything went wrong with one of the locks, he would soon unscrew it, take it to pieces, file it, oil and clean and set it in order, and put it back in its place again; "I am an old hand at it," he used to say. Not only so, he knew all about ships, the sea, France, foreign countries, men, business, law, great houses and prisons, – there was nothing that he did not know. If any one complained rather more than usual, he would offer his services at once. He had several times lent money to Mme. Vauquer, or to the boarders; but, somehow, those whom he obliged felt that they would sooner face death than fail to repay him; a certain resolute look, sometimes seen on his face, inspired fear of him, for all his appearance of easy good-nature. In the way he spat there was an imperturbable coolness which seemed to indicate that this was a man who would not stick at a crime to extricate himself from a false position. His eyes, like those of a pitiless judge, seemed to go to the very bottom of all questions, to read all natures, all feelings and thoughts. His habit of life was very regular; he usually went out after breakfast, returning in time for dinner, and disappeared for the rest of the evening, letting himself in about midnight with a latch key, a privilege that Mme. Vauquer accorded to no other boarder. But then he was on very good terms with the widow; he used to call her "mamma," and put his arm round her waist, a piece of flattery perhaps not appreciated to the full! The worthy woman might imagine this to be an easy feat; but, as a matter of fact, no arm but Vautrin's was long enough to encircle her.

It was a characteristic trait of his generously to pay fifteen francs a month for the cup of coffee with a dash of brandy in it, which he took after dinner. Less superficial observers than young men engulfed by the whirlpool of Parisian life, or old men, who took no interest in anything that did not directly concern them, would not have stopped short at the vaguely unsatisfactory impression that Vautrin made upon them. He knew or guessed the concerns of every one about him; but none of them had been able to penetrate his thoughts, or to discover his occupation. He had deliberately made his apparent good-nature, his unfailing readiness to oblige, and his high spirits into a barrier between himself and the rest of them, but not seldom he gave glimpses of appalling depths of character. He seemed to delight in scourging the upper classes of society with the lash of his tongue, to take pleasure in convicting it of inconsistency, in mocking at law and order with some grim jest worthy of Juvenal, as if some grudge against the social system rankled in him, as if there were some mystery carefully hidden away in his life.

Mlle. Taillefer felt attracted, perhaps unconsciously, by the strength of the one man, and the good looks of the other; her stolen glances and secret thoughts were divided between them; but neither of them seemed to take any notice of her, although some day a chance might alter her position, and

she would be a wealthy heiress. For that matter, there was not a soul in the house who took any trouble to investigate the various chronicles of misfortunes, real or imaginary, related by the rest. Each one regarded the others with indifference, tempered by suspicion; it was a natural result of their relative positions. Practical assistance not one could give, this they all knew, and they had long since exhausted their stock of condolence over previous discussions of their grievances. They were in something the same position as an elderly couple who have nothing left to say to each other. The routine of existence kept them in contact, but they were parts of a mechanism which wanted oil. There was not one of them but would have passed a blind man begging in the street, not one that felt moved to pity by a tale of misfortune, not one who did not see in death the solution of the all-absorbing problem of misery which left them cold to the most terrible anguish in others.

The happiest of these hapless beings was certainly Mme. Vauquer, who reigned supreme over this hospital supported by voluntary contributions. For her, the little garden, which silence, and cold, and rain, and drought combined to make as dreary as an Asian *steppe*, was a pleasant shaded nook; the gaunt yellow house, the musty odors of a back shop had charms for her, and for her alone. Those cells belonged to her. She fed those convicts condemned to penal servitude for life, and her authority was recognized among them. Where else in Paris would they have found wholesome food in sufficient quantity at the prices she charged them, and rooms which they were at liberty to make, if not exactly elegant or comfortable, at any rate clean and healthy? If she had committed some flagrant act of injustice, the victim would have borne it in silence.

Such a gathering contained, as might have been expected, the elements out of which a complete society might be constructed. And, as in a school, as in the world itself, there was among the eighteen men and women who met round the dinner table a poor creature, despised by all the others, condemned to be the butt of all their jokes. At the beginning of Eugene de Rastignac's second twelvemonth, this figure suddenly started out into bold relief against the background of human forms and faces among which the law student was yet to live for another two years to come. This laughing-stock was the retired vermicelli-merchant, Father Goriot, upon whose face a painter, like the historian, would have concentrated all the light in his picture.

How had it come about that the boarders regarded him with a half-malignant contempt? Why did they subject the oldest among their number to a kind of persecution, in which there was mingled some pity, but no respect for his misfortunes? Had he brought it on himself by some eccentricity or absurdity, which is less easily forgiven or forgotten than more serious defects? The question strikes at the root of many a social injustice. Perhaps it is only human nature to inflict suffering on anything that will endure suffering, whether by reason of its genuine humility, or indifference, or sheer helplessness. Do we not, one and all, like to feel our strength even at the expense of some one or of something? The poorest sample of humanity, the street arab, will pull the bell handle at every street door in bitter weather, and scramble up to write his name on the unsullied marble of a monument.

In the year 1813, at the age of sixty-nine or thereabouts, "Father Goriot" had sold his business and retired – to Mme. Vauquer's boarding house. When he first came there he had taken the rooms now occupied by Mme. Couture; he had paid twelve hundred francs a year like a man to whom five louis more or less was a mere trifle. For him Mme. Vauquer had made various improvements in the three rooms destined for his use, in consideration of a certain sum paid in advance, so it was said, for the miserable furniture, that is to say, for some yellow cotton curtains, a few chairs of stained wood covered with Utrecht velvet, several wretched colored prints in frames, and wall papers that a little suburban tavern would have disdained. Possibly it was the careless generosity with which Father Goriot allowed himself to be overreached at this period of his life (they called him Monsieur Goriot very respectfully then) that gave Mme. Vauquer the meanest opinion of his business abilities; she looked on him as an imbecile where money was concerned.

Goriot had brought with him a considerable wardrobe, the gorgeous outfit of a retired tradesman who denies himself nothing. Mme. Vauquer's astonished eyes beheld no less than eighteen

cambric-fronted shirts, the splendor of their fineness being enhanced by a pair of pins each bearing a large diamond, and connected by a short chain, an ornament which adorned the vermicelli-maker's shirt front. He usually wore a coat of corn-flower blue; his rotund and portly person was still further set off by a clean white waistcoat, and a gold chain and seals which dangled over that broad expanse. When his hostess accused him of being "a bit of a beau," he smiled with the vanity of a citizen whose foible is gratified. His cupboards (*ormoires*, as he called them in the popular dialect) were filled with a quantity of plate that he brought with him. The widow's eyes gleamed as she obligingly helped him to unpack the soup ladles, table-spoons, forks, cruet-stands, tureens, dishes, and breakfast services – all of silver, which were duly arranged upon shelves, besides a few more or less handsome pieces of plate, all weighing no inconsiderable number of ounces; he could not bring himself to part with these gifts that reminded him of past domestic festivals.

"This was my wife's present to me on the first anniversary of our wedding day," he said to Mme. Vauquer, as he put away a little silver posset dish, with two turtle-doves billing on the cover. "Poor dear! she spent on it all the money she had saved before we were married. Do you know, I would sooner scratch the earth with my nails for a living, madame, than part with that. But I shall be able to take my coffee out of it every morning for the rest of my days, thank the Lord! I am not to be pitied. There's not much fear of my starving for some time to come."

Finally, Mme. Vauquer's magpie's eye had discovered and read certain entries in the list of shareholders in the funds, and, after a rough calculation, was disposed to credit Goriot (worthy man) with something like ten thousand francs a year. From that day forward Mme. Vauquer (*nee* de Conflans), who, as a matter of fact, had seen forty-eight summers, though she would only own to thirty-nine of them – Mme. Vauquer had her own ideas. Though Goriot's eyes seemed to have shrunk in their sockets, though they were weak and watery, owing to some glandular affection which compelled him to wipe them continually, she considered him to be a very gentlemanly and pleasant-looking man. Moreover, the widow saw favorable indications of character in the well-developed calves of his legs and in his square-shaped nose, indications still further borne out by the worthy man's full-moon countenance and look of stupid good-nature. This, in all probability, was a strongly-build animal, whose brains mostly consisted in a capacity for affection. His hair, worn in *ailes de pigeon*, and duly powdered every morning by the barber from the Ecole Polytechnique, described five points on his low forehead, and made an elegant setting to his face. Though his manners were somewhat boorish, he was always as neat as a new pin and he took his snuff in a lordly way, like a man who knows that his snuff-box is always likely to be filled with maccaboy, so that when Mme. Vauquer lay down to rest on the day of M. Goriot's installation, her heart, like a larded partridge, sweltered before the fire of a burning desire to shake off the shroud of Vauquer and rise again as Goriot. She would marry again, sell her boarding-house, give her hand to this fine flower of citizenship, become a lady of consequence in the quarter, and ask for subscriptions for charitable purposes; she would make little Sunday excursions to Choisy, Soissy, Gentilly; she would have a box at the theatre when she liked, instead of waiting for the author's tickets that one of her boarders sometimes gave her, in July; the whole Eldorado of a little Parisian household rose up before Mme. Vauquer in her dreams. Nobody knew that she herself possessed forty thousand francs, accumulated *sou by sou*, that was her secret; surely as far as money was concerned she was a very tolerable match. "And in other respects, I am quite his equal," she said to herself, turning as if to assure herself of the charms of a form that the portly Sylvie found moulded in down feathers every morning.

For three months from that day Mme. Veuve Vauquer availed herself of the services of M. Goriot's coiffeur, and went to some expense over her toilette, expense justifiable on the ground that she owed it to herself and her establishment to pay some attention to appearances when such highly-respectable persons honored her house with their presence. She expended no small amount of ingenuity in a sort of weeding process of her lodgers, announcing her intention of receiving henceforward none but people who were in every way select. If a stranger presented himself, she

let him know that M. Goriot, one of the best known and most highly-respected merchants in Paris, had singled out her boarding-house for a residence. She drew up a prospectus headed MAISON VAUQUER, in which it was asserted that hers was "*one of the oldest and most highly recommended boarding-houses in the Latin Quarter*." "From the windows of the house," thus ran the prospectus, "there is a charming view of the Vallee des Gobelins (so there is – from the third floor), and a *beautiful* garden, *extending* down to *an avenue of lindens* at the further end." Mention was made of the bracing air of the place and its quiet situation.

It was this prospectus that attracted Mme. la Comtesse de l'Ambermesnil, a widow of six and thirty, who was awaiting the final settlement of her husband's affairs, and of another matter regarding a pension due to her as the wife of a general who had died "on the field of battle." On this Mme. Vauquer saw to her table, lighted a fire daily in the sitting-room for nearly six months, and kept the promise of her prospectus, even going to some expense to do so. And the Countess, on her side, addressed Mme. Vauquer as "my dear," and promised her two more boarders, the Baronne de Vaumerland and the widow of a colonel, the late Comte de Picquoisie, who were about to leave a boarding-house in the Marais, where the terms were higher than at the Maison Vauquer. Both these ladies, moreover, would be very well to do when the people at the War Office had come to an end of their formalities. "But Government departments are always so dilatory," the lady added.

After dinner the two widows went together up to Mme. Vauquer's room, and had a snug little chat over some cordial and various delicacies reserved for the mistress of the house. Mme. Vauquer's ideas as to Goriot were cordially approved by Mme. de l'Ambermesnil; it was a capital notion, which for that matter she had guessed from the very first; in her opinion the vermicelli maker was an excellent man.

"Ah! my dear lady, such a well-preserved man of his age, as sound as my eyesight – a man who might make a woman happy!" said the widow.

The good-natured Countess turned to the subject of Mme. Vauquer's dress, which was not in harmony with her projects. "You must put yourself on a war footing," said she.

After much serious consideration the two widows went shopping together – they purchased a hat adorned with ostrich feathers and a cap at the Palais Royal, and the Countess took her friend to the Magasin de la Petite Jeannette, where they chose a dress and a scarf. Thus equipped for the campaign, the widow looked exactly like the prize animal hung out for a sign above an a la mode beef shop; but she herself was so much pleased with the improvement, as she considered it, in her appearance, that she felt that she lay under some obligation to the Countess; and, though by no means open-handed, she begged that lady to accept a hat that cost twenty francs. The fact was that she needed the Countess' services on the delicate mission of sounding Goriot; the countess must sing her praises in his ears. Mme. de l'Ambermesnil lent herself very good-naturedly to this manoeuvre, began her operations, and succeeded in obtaining a private interview; but the overtures that she made, with a view to securing him for herself, were received with embarrassment, not to say a repulse. She left him, revolted by his coarseness.

"My angel," said she to her dear friend, "you will make nothing of that man yonder. He is absurdly suspicious, and he is a mean curmudgeon, an idiot, a fool; you would never be happy with him."

After what had passed between M. Goriot and Mme. de l'Ambermesnil, the Countess would no longer live under the same roof. She left the next day, forgot to pay for six months' board, and left behind her wardrobe, cast-off clothing to the value of five francs. Eagerly and persistently as Mme. Vauquer sought her quondam lodger, the Comtesse de l'Ambermesnil was never heard of again in Paris. The widow often talked of this deplorable business, and regretted her own too confiding disposition. As a matter of fact, she was as suspicious as a cat; but she was like many other people, who cannot trust their own kin and put themselves at the mercy of the next chance comer – an odd but common phenomenon, whose causes may readily be traced to the depths of the human heart.

Perhaps there are people who know that they have nothing more to look for from those with whom they live; they have shown the emptiness of their hearts to their housemates, and in their secret selves they are conscious that they are severely judged, and that they deserve to be judged severely; but still they feel an unconquerable craving for praises that they do not hear, or they are consumed by a desire to appear to possess, in the eyes of a new audience, the qualities which they have not, hoping to win the admiration or affection of strangers at the risk of forfeiting it again some day. Or, once more, there are other mercenary natures who never do a kindness to a friend or a relation simply because these have a claim upon them, while a service done to a stranger brings its reward to self-love. Such natures feel but little affection for those who are nearest to them; they keep their kindness for remoter circles of acquaintance, and show most to those who dwell on its utmost limits. Mme. Vauquer belonged to both these essentially mean, false, and execrable classes.

"If I had been there at the time," Vautrin would say at the end of the story, "I would have shown her up, and that misfortune would not have befallen you. I know that kind of phiz!"

Like all narrow natures, Mme. Vauquer was wont to confine her attention to events, and did not go very deeply into the causes that brought them about; she likewise preferred to throw the blame of her own mistakes on other people, so she chose to consider that the honest vermicelli maker was responsible for her misfortune. It had opened her eyes, so she said, with regard to him. As soon as she saw that her blandishments were in vain, and that her outlay on her toilette was money thrown away, she was not slow to discover the reason of his indifference. It became plain to her at once that there was *some other attraction*, to use her own expression. In short, it was evident that the hope she had so fondly cherished was a baseless delusion, and that she would "never make anything out of that man yonder," in the Countess' forcible phrase. The Countess seemed to have been a judge of character. Mme. Vauquer's aversion was naturally more energetic than her friendship, for her hatred was not in proportion to her love, but to her disappointed expectations. The human heart may find here and there a resting-place short of the highest height of affection, but we seldom stop in the steep, downward slope of hatred. Still, M. Goriot was a lodger, and the widow's wounded self-love could not vent itself in an explosion of wrath; like a monk harassed by the prior of his convent, she was forced to stifle her sighs of disappointment, and to gulp down her craving for revenge. Little minds find gratification for their feelings, benevolent or otherwise, by a constant exercise of petty ingenuity. The widow employed her woman's malice to devise a system of covert persecution. She began by a course of retrenchment – various luxuries which had found their way to the table appeared there no more.

"No more gherkins, no more anchovies; they have made a fool of me!" she said to Sylvie one morning, and they returned to the old bill of fare.

The thrifty frugality necessary to those who mean to make their way in the world had become an inveterate habit of life with M. Goriot. Soup, boiled beef, and a dish of vegetables had been, and always would be, the dinner he liked best, so Mme. Vauquer found it very difficult to annoy a boarder whose tastes were so simple. He was proof against her malice, and in desperation she spoke to him and of him slightingly before the other lodgers, who began to amuse themselves at his expense, and so gratified her desire for revenge.

Towards the end of the first year the widow's suspicions had reached such a pitch that she began to wonder how it was that a retired merchant with a secure income of seven or eight thousand livres, the owner of such magnificent plate and jewelry handsome enough for a kept mistress, should be living in her house. Why should he devote so small a proportion of his money to his expenses? Until the first year was nearly at an end, Goriot had dined out once or twice every week, but these occasions came less frequently, and at last he was scarcely absent from the dinner-table twice a month. It was hardly expected that Mme. Vauquer should regard the increased regularity of her boarder's habits with complacency, when those little excursions of his had been so much to her interest. She attributed the change not so much to a gradual diminution of fortune as to a spiteful wish to annoy

his hostess. It is one of the most detestable habits of a Liliputian mind to credit other people with its own malignant pettiness.

Unluckily, towards the end of the second year, M. Goriot's conduct gave some color to the idle talk about him. He asked Mme. Vauquer to give him a room on the second floor, and to make a corresponding reduction in her charges. Apparently, such strict economy was called for, that he did without a fire all through the winter. Mme. Vauquer asked to be paid in advance, an arrangement to which M. Goriot consented, and thenceforward she spoke of him as "Father Goriot."

What had brought about this decline and fall? Conjecture was keen, but investigation was difficult. Father Goriot was not communicative; in the sham countess' phrase he was "a curmudgeon." Empty-headed people who babble about their own affairs because they have nothing else to occupy them, naturally conclude that if people say nothing of their doings it is because their doings will not bear being talked about; so the highly respectable merchant became a scoundrel, and the late beau was an old rogue. Opinion fluctuated. Sometimes, according to Vautrin, who came about this time to live in the Maison Vauquer, Father Goriot was a man who went on 'Change and *dabbled* (to use the sufficiently expressive language of the Stock Exchange) in stocks and shares after he had ruined himself by heavy speculation. Sometimes it was held that he was one of those petty gamblers who nightly play for small stakes until they win a few francs. A theory that he was a detective in the employ of the Home Office found favor at one time, but Vautrin urged that "Goriot was not sharp enough for one of that sort." There were yet other solutions; Father Goriot was a skinflint, a shark of a money-lender, a man who lived by selling lottery tickets. He was by turns all the most mysterious brood of vice and shame and misery; yet, however vile his life might be, the feeling of repulsion which he aroused in others was not so strong that he must be banished from their society – he paid his way. Besides, Goriot had his uses, every one vented his spleen or sharpened his wit on him; he was pelted with jokes and belabored with hard words. The general consensus of opinion was in favor of a theory which seemed the most likely; this was Mme. Vauquer's view. According to her, the man so well preserved at his time of life, as sound as her eyesight, with whom a woman might be very happy, was a libertine who had strange tastes. These are the facts upon which Mme. Vauquer's slanders were based.

Early one morning, some few months after the departure of the unlucky Countess who had managed to live for six months at the widow's expense, Mme. Vauquer (not yet dressed) heard the rustle of a silk dress and a young woman's light footstep on the stair; some one was going to Goriot's room. He seemed to expect the visit, for his door stood ajar. The portly Sylvie presently came up to tell her mistress that a girl too pretty to be honest, "dressed like a goddess," and not a speck of mud on her laced cashmere boots, had glided in from the street like a snake, had found the kitchen, and asked for M. Goriot's room. Mme. Vauquer and the cook, listening, overheard several words affectionately spoken during the visit, which lasted for some time. When M. Goriot went downstairs with the lady, the stout Sylvie forthwith took her basket and followed the lover-like couple, under pretext of going to do her marketing.

"M. Goriot must be awfully rich, all the same, madame," she reported on her return, "to keep her in such style. Just imagine it! There was a splendid carriage waiting at the corner of the Place de l'Estrapade, and *she* got into it."

While they were at dinner that evening, Mme. Vauquer went to the window and drew the curtain, as the sun was shining into Goriot's eyes.

"You are beloved of fair ladies, M. Goriot – the sun seeks you out," she said, alluding to his visitor. "*Peste!* you have good taste; she was very pretty."

"That was my daughter," he said, with a kind of pride in his voice, and the rest chose to consider this as the fatuity of an old man who wishes to save appearances.

A month after this visit M. Goriot received another. The same daughter who had come to see him that morning came again after dinner, this time in evening dress. The boarders, in deep discussion

in the dining-room, caught a glimpse of a lovely, fair-haired woman, slender, graceful, and much too distinguished-looking to be a daughter of Father Goriot's.

"Two of them!" cried the portly Sylvie, who did not recognize the lady of the first visit.

A few days later, and another young lady – a tall, well-moulded brunette, with dark hair and bright eyes – came to ask for M. Goriot.

"Three of them!" said Sylvie.

Then the second daughter, who had first come in the morning to see her father, came shortly afterwards in the evening. She wore a ball dress, and came in a carriage.

"Four of them!" commented Mme. Vauquer and her plump handmaid. Sylvie saw not a trace of resemblance between this great lady and the girl in her simple morning dress who had entered her kitchen on the occasion of her first visit.

At that time Goriot was paying twelve hundred francs a year to his landlady, and Mme. Vauquer saw nothing out of the common in the fact that a rich man had four or five mistresses; nay, she thought it very knowing of him to pass them off as his daughters. She was not at all inclined to draw a hard-and-fast line, or to take umbrage at his sending for them to the Maison Vauquer; yet, inasmuch as these visits explained her boarder's indifference to her, she went so far (at the end of the second year) as to speak of him as an "ugly old wretch." When at length her boarder declined to nine hundred francs a year, she asked him very insolently what he took her house to be, after meeting one of these ladies on the stairs. Father Goriot answered that the lady was his eldest daughter.

"So you have two or three dozen daughters, have you?" said Mme. Vauquer sharply.

"I have only two," her boarder answered meekly, like a ruined man who is broken in to all the cruel usage of misfortune.

Towards the end of the third year Father Goriot reduced his expenses still further; he went up to the third story, and now paid forty-five francs a month. He did without snuff, told his hairdresser that he no longer required his services, and gave up wearing powder. When Goriot appeared for the first time in this condition, an exclamation of astonishment broke from his hostess at the color of his hair – a dingy olive gray. He had grown sadder day by day under the influence of some hidden trouble; among all the faces round the table, his was the most woe-begone. There was no longer any doubt. Goriot was an elderly libertine, whose eyes had only been preserved by the skill of the physician from the malign influence of the remedies necessitated by the state of his health. The disgusting color of his hair was a result of his excesses and of the drugs which he had taken that he might continue his career. The poor old man's mental and physical condition afforded some grounds for the absurd rubbish talked about him. When his outfit was worn out, he replaced the fine linen by calico at fourteen *sous* the ell. His diamonds, his gold snuff-box, watch-chain and trinkets, disappeared one by one. He had left off wearing the corn-flower blue coat, and was sumptuously arrayed, summer as well as winter, in a coarse chestnut-brown coat, a plush waistcoat, and doeskin breeches. He grew thinner and thinner; his legs were shrunken, his cheeks, once so puffed out by contented bourgeois prosperity, were covered with wrinkles, and the outlines of the jawbones were distinctly visible; there were deep furrows in his forehead. In the fourth year of his residence in the Rue Neuve-Sainte-Genevieve he was no longer like his former self. The hale vermicelli manufacturer, sixty-two years of age, who had looked scarce forty, the stout, comfortable, prosperous tradesman, with an almost bucolic air, and such a brisk demeanor that it did you good to look at him; the man with something boyish in his smile, had suddenly sunk into his dotage, and had become a feeble, vacillating septuagenarian.

The keen, bright blue eyes had grown dull, and faded to a steel-gray color; the red inflamed rims looked as though they had shed tears of blood. He excited feelings of repulsion in some, and of pity in others. The young medical students who came to the house noticed the drooping of his lower lip and the conformation of the facial angle; and, after teasing him for some time to no purpose, they declared that cretinism was setting in.

One evening after dinner Mme. Vauquer said half banteringly to him, “So those daughters of yours don’t come to see you any more, eh?” meaning to imply her doubts as to his paternity; but Father Goriot shrank as if his hostess had touched him with a sword-point.

“They come sometimes,” he said in a tremulous voice.

“Aha! you still see them sometimes?” cried the students. “Bravo, Father Goriot!”

The old man scarcely seemed to hear the witticisms at his expense that followed on the words; he had relapsed into the dreamy state of mind that these superficial observers took for senile torpor, due to his lack of intelligence. If they had only known, they might have been deeply interested by the problem of his condition; but few problems were more obscure. It was easy, of course, to find out whether Goriot had really been a vermicelli manufacturer; the amount of his fortune was readily discoverable; but the old people, who were most inquisitive as to his concerns, never went beyond the limits of the Quarter, and lived in the lodging-house much as oysters cling to a rock. As for the rest, the current of life in Paris daily awaited them, and swept them away with it; so soon as they left the Rue Neuve-Sainte-Genevieve, they forgot the existence of the old man, their butt at dinner. For those narrow souls, or for careless youth, the misery in Father Goriot’s withered face and its dull apathy were quite incompatible with wealth or any sort of intelligence. As for the creatures whom he called his daughters, all Mme. Vauquer’s boarders were of her opinion. With the faculty for severe logic sedulously cultivated by elderly women during long evenings of gossip till they can always find an hypothesis to fit all circumstances, she was wont to reason thus:

“If Father Goriot had daughters of his own as rich as those ladies who came here seemed to be, he would not be lodging in my house, on the third floor, at forty-five francs a month; and he would not go about dressed like a poor man.”

No objection could be raised to these inferences. So by the end of the month of November 1819, at the time when the curtain rises on this drama, every one in the house had come to have a very decided opinion as to the poor old man. He had never had either wife or daughter; excesses had reduced him to this sluggish condition; he was a sort of human mollusk who should be classed among the capulidoe, so one of the dinner contingent, an *employe* at the Museum, who had a pretty wit of his own. Poiret was an eagle, a gentleman, compared with Goriot. Poiret would join the talk, argue, answer when he was spoken to; as a matter of fact, his talk, arguments, and responses contributed nothing to the conversation, for Poiret had a habit of repeating what the others said in different words; still, he did join in the talk; he was alive, and seemed capable of feeling; while Father Goriot (to quote the Museum official again) was invariably at zero degrees – Reaumur.

Eugene de Rastignac had just returned to Paris in a state of mind not unknown to young men who are conscious of unusual powers, and to those whose faculties are so stimulated by a difficult position, that for the time being they rise above the ordinary level.

Rastignac’s first year of study for the preliminary examinations in law had left him free to see the sights of Paris and to enjoy some of its amusements. A student has not much time on his hands if he sets himself to learn the repertory of every theatre, and to study the ins and outs of the labyrinth of Paris. To know its customs; to learn the language, and become familiar with the amusements of the capital, he must explore its recesses, good and bad, follow the studies that please him best, and form some idea of the treasures contained in galleries and museums.

At this stage of his career a student grows eager and excited about all sorts of follies that seem to him to be of immense importance. He has his hero, his great man, a professor at the College de France, paid to talk down to the level of his audience. He adjusts his cravat, and strikes various attitudes for the benefit of the women in the first galleries at the Opera-Comique. As he passes through all these successive initiations, and breaks out of his sheath, the horizons of life widen around him, and at length he grasps the plan of society with the different human strata of which it is composed.

If he begins by admiring the procession of carriages on sunny afternoons in the Champs-Elysees, he soon reaches the further stage of envying their owners. Unconsciously, Eugene had served his apprenticeship before he went back to Angouleme for the long vacation after taking his degrees as bachelor of arts and bachelor of law. The illusions of childhood had vanished, so also had the ideas he brought with him from the provinces; he had returned thither with an intelligence developed, with loftier ambitions, and saw things as they were at home in the old manor house. His father and mother, his two brothers and two sisters, with an aged aunt, whose whole fortune consisted in annuities, lived on the little estate of Rastignac. The whole property brought in about three thousand francs; and though the amount varied with the season (as must always be the case in a vine-growing district), they were obliged to spare an unvarying twelve hundred francs out of their income for him. He saw how constantly the poverty, which they had generously hidden from him, weighed upon them; he could not help comparing the sisters, who had seemed so beautiful to his boyish eyes, with women in Paris, who had realized the beauty of his dreams. The uncertain future of the whole family depended upon him. It did not escape his eyes that not a crumb was wasted in the house, nor that the wine they drank was made from the second pressing; a multitude of small things, which it is useless to speak of in detail here, made him burn to distinguish himself, and his ambition to succeed increased tenfold.

He meant, like all great souls, that his success should be owing entirely to his merits; but his was pre-eminently a southern temperament, the execution of his plans was sure to be marred by the vertigo that seizes on youth when youth sees itself alone in a wide sea, uncertain how to spend its energies, whither to steer its course, how to adapt its sails to the winds. At first he determined to fling himself heart and soul into his work, but he was diverted from this purpose by the need of society and connections; then he saw how great an influence women exert in social life, and suddenly made up his mind to go out into this world to seek a protectress there. Surely a clever and high-spirited young man, whose wit and courage were set off to advantage by a graceful figure and the vigorous kind of beauty that readily strikes a woman's imagination, need not despair of finding a protectress. These ideas occurred to him in his country walks with his sisters, whom he had once joined so gaily. The girls thought him very much changed.

His aunt, Mme. de Marcillac, had been presented at court, and had moved among the brightest heights of that lofty region. Suddenly the young man's ambition discerned in those recollections of hers, which had been like nursery fairy tales to her nephews and nieces, the elements of a social success at least as important as the success which he had achieved at the Ecole de Droit. He began to ask his aunt about those relations; some of the old ties might still hold good. After much shaking of the branches of the family tree, the old lady came to the conclusion that of all persons who could be useful to her nephew among the selfish genus of rich relations, the Vicomtesse de Beauseant was the least likely to refuse. To this lady, therefore, she wrote in the old-fashioned style, recommending Eugene to her; pointing out to her nephew that if he succeeded in pleasing Mme. de Beauseant, the Vicomtesse would introduce him to other relations. A few days after his return to Paris, therefore, Rastignac sent his aunt's letter to Mme. de Beauseant. The Vicomtesse replied by an invitation to a ball for the following evening. This was the position of affairs at the Maison Vauquer at the end of November 1819.

A few days later, after Mme. de Beauseant's ball, Eugene came in at two o'clock in the morning. The persevering student meant to make up for the lost time by working until daylight. It was the first time that he had attempted to spend the night in this way in that silent quarter. The spell of a factitious energy was upon him; he had beheld the pomp and splendor of the world. He had not dined at the Maison Vauquer; the boarders probably would think that he would walk home at daybreak from the dance, as he had done sometimes on former occasions, after a fete at the Prado, or a ball at the Odeon, splashing his silk stockings thereby, and ruining his pumps.

It so happened that Christophe took a look into the street before drawing the bolts of the door; and Rastignac, coming in at that moment, could go up to his room without making any noise, followed

by Christophe, who made a great deal. Eugene exchanged his dress suit for a shabby overcoat and slippers, kindled a fire with some blocks of patent fuel, and prepared for his night's work in such a sort that the faint sounds he made were drowned by Christophe's heavy tramp on the stairs.

Eugene sat absorbed in thought for a few moments before plunging into his law books. He had just become aware of the fact that the Vicomtesse de Beauseant was one of the queens of fashion, that her house was thought to be the pleasantest in the Faubourg Saint-Germain. And not only so, she was, by right of her fortune, and the name she bore, one of the most conspicuous figures in that aristocratic world. Thanks to the aunt, thanks to Mme. de Marcillac's letter of introduction, the poor student had been kindly received in that house before he knew the extent of the favor thus shown to him. It was almost like a patent of nobility to be admitted to those gilded salons; he had appeared in the most exclusive circle in Paris, and now all doors were open for him. Eugene had been dazzled at first by the brilliant assembly, and had scarcely exchanged a few words with the Vicomtesse; he had been content to single out a goddess among this throng of Parisian divinities, one of those women who are sure to attract a young man's fancy.

The Comtesse Anastasie de Restaud was tall and gracefully made; she had one of the prettiest figures in Paris. Imagine a pair of great dark eyes, a magnificently moulded hand, a shapely foot. There was a fiery energy in her movements; the Marquis de Ronquerolles had called her "a thoroughbred," "a pure pedigree," these figures of speech have replaced the "heavenly angel" and Ossianic nomenclature; the old mythology of love is extinct, doomed to perish by modern dandyism. But for Rastignac, Mme. Anastasie de Restaud was the woman for whom he had sighed. He had contrived to write his name twice upon the list of partners upon her fan, and had snatched a few words with her during the first quadrille.

"Where shall I meet you again, Madame?" he asked abruptly, and the tones of his voice were full of the vehement energy that women like so well.

"Oh, everywhere!" said she, "in the Bois, at the Bouffons, in my own house."

With the impetuosity of his adventurous southern temper, he did all he could to cultivate an acquaintance with this lovely countess, making the best of his opportunities in the quadrille and during a waltz that she gave him. When he told her that he was a cousin of Mme. de Beauseant's, the Countess, whom he took for a great lady, asked him to call at her house, and after her parting smile, Rastignac felt convinced that he must make this visit. He was so lucky as to light upon some one who did not laugh at his ignorance, a fatal defect among the gilded and insolent youth of that period; the coterie of Maulincourts, Maximes de Trailles, de Marsays, Ronquerolles, Ajuda-Pintos, and Vandenesses who shone there in all the glory of coxcombry among the best-dressed women of fashion in Paris – Lady Brandon, the Duchesse de Langeais, the Comtesse de Kergarouet, Mme. de Serizy, the Duchesse de Carigliano, the Comtesse Ferraud, Mme. de Lanty, the Marquise d'Aiglemont, Mme. Firmiani, the Marquise de Listomere and the Marquise d'Espard, the Duchesse de Maufrigneuse and the Grandlieus. Luckily, therefore, for him, the novice happened upon the Marquis de Montriveau, the lover of the Duchesse de Langeais, a general as simple as a child; from him Rastignac learned that the Comtesse lived in the Rue du Helder.

Ah, what it is to be young, eager to see the world, greedily on the watch for any chance that brings you nearer the woman of your dreams, and behold two houses open their doors to you! To set foot in the Vicomtesse de Beauseant's house in the Faubourg Saint-Germain; to fall on your knees before a Comtesse de Restaud in the Chaussee d'Antin; to look at one glance across a vista of Paris drawing-rooms, conscious that, possessing sufficient good looks, you may hope to find aid and protection there in a feminine heart! To feel ambitious enough to spurn the tight-rope on which you must walk with the steady head of an acrobat for whom a fall is impossible, and to find in a charming woman the best of all balancing poles.

He sat there with his thoughts for a while, Law on the one hand, and Poverty on the other, beholding a radiant vision of a woman rise above the dull, smouldering fire. Who would not have

paused and questioned the future as Eugene was doing? who would not have pictured it full of success? His wondering thoughts took wings; he was transported out of the present into that blissful future; he was sitting by Mme. de Restaud's side, when a sort of sigh, like the grunt of an overburdened St. Joseph, broke the silence of the night. It vibrated through the student, who took the sound for a death groan. He opened his door noiselessly, went out upon the landing, and saw a thin streak of light under Father Goriot's door. Eugene feared that his neighbor had been taken ill; he went over and looked through the keyhole; the old man was busily engaged in an occupation so singular and so suspicious that Rastignac thought he was only doing a piece of necessary service to society to watch the self-styled vermicelli maker's nocturnal industries.

The table was upturned, and Goriot had doubtless in some way secured a silver plate and cup to the bar before knotting a thick rope round them; he was pulling at this rope with such enormous force that they were being crushed and twisted out of shape; to all appearance he meant to convert the richly wrought metal into ingots.

"*Peste!* what a man!" said Rastignac, as he watched Goriot's muscular arms; there was not a sound in the room while the old man, with the aid of the rope, was kneading the silver like dough. "Was he then, indeed, a thief, or a receiver of stolen goods, who affected imbecility and decrepitude, and lived like a beggar that he might carry on his pursuits the more securely?" Eugene stood for a moment revolving these questions, then he looked again through the keyhole.

Father Goriot had unwound his coil of rope; he had covered the table with a blanket, and was now employed in rolling the flattened mass of silver into a bar, an operation which he performed with marvelous dexterity.

"Why, he must be as strong as Augustus, King of Poland!" said Eugene to himself when the bar was nearly finished.

Father Goriot looked sadly at his handiwork, tears fell from his eyes, he blew out the dip which had served him for a light while he manipulated the silver, and Eugene heard him sigh as he lay down again.

"He is mad," thought the student.

"*Poor child!*" Father Goriot said aloud. Rastignac, hearing those words, concluded to keep silence; he would not hastily condemn his neighbor. He was just in the doorway of his room when a strange sound from the staircase below reached his ears; it might have been made by two men coming up in list slippers. Eugene listened; two men there certainly were, he could hear their breathing. Yet there had been no sound of opening the street door, no footsteps in the passage. Suddenly, too, he saw a faint gleam of light on the second story; it came from M. Vautrin's room.

"There are a good many mysteries here for a lodging-house!" he said to himself.

He went part of the way downstairs and listened again. The rattle of gold reached his ears. In another moment the light was put out, and again he distinctly heard the breathing of two men, but no sound of a door being opened or shut. The two men went downstairs, the faint sounds growing fainter as they went.

"Who is there?" cried Mme. Vauquer out of her bedroom window.

"I, Mme. Vauquer," answered Vautrin's deep bass voice. "I am coming in."

"That is odd! Christophe drew the bolts," said Eugene, going back to his room. "You have to sit up at night, it seems, if you really mean to know all that is going on about you in Paris."

These incidents turned his thought from his ambitious dreams; he betook himself to his work, but his thought wandered back to Father Goriot's suspicious occupation; Mme. de Restaud's face swam again and again before his eyes like a vision of a brilliant future; and at last he lay down and slept with clenched fists. When a young man makes up his mind that he will work all night, the chances are that seven times out of ten he will sleep till morning. Such vigils do not begin before we are turned twenty.

The next morning Paris was wrapped in one of the dense fogs that throw the most punctual people out in their calculations as to the time; even the most business-like folk fail to keep their appointments in such weather, and ordinary mortals wake up at noon and fancy it is eight o'clock. On this morning it was half-past nine, and Mme. Vauquer still lay abed. Christophe was late, Sylvie was late, but the two sat comfortably taking their coffee as usual. It was Sylvie's custom to take the cream off the milk destined for the boarders' breakfast for her own, and to boil the remainder for some time, so that madame should not discover this illegal exaction.

"Sylvie," said Christophe, as he dipped a piece of toast into the coffee, "M. Vautrin, who is not such a bad sort, all the same, had two people come to see him again last night. If madame says anything, mind you say nothing about it."

"Has he given you something?"

"He gave me a five-franc piece this month, which is as good as saying, 'Hold your tongue.'"

"Except him and Mme. Couture, who doesn't look twice at every penny, there's no one in the house that doesn't try to get back with the left hand all that they give with the right at New Year," said Sylvie.

"And, after all," said Christophe, "what do they give you? A miserable five-franc piece. There is Father Goriot, who has cleaned his shoes himself these two years past. There is that old beggar Poiret, who goes without blacking altogether; he would sooner drink it than put it on his boots. Then there is that whipper-snapper of a student, who gives me a couple of francs. Two francs will not pay for my brushes, and he sells his old clothes, and gets more for them than they are worth. Oh! they're a shabby lot!"

"Pooh!" said Sylvie, sipping her coffee, "our places are the best in the Quarter, that I know. But about that great big chap Vautrin, Christophe; has any one told you anything about him?"

"Yes. I met a gentleman in the street a few days ago; he said to me, 'There's a gentleman in your place, isn't there? a tall man that dyes his whiskers?' I told him, 'No, sir; they aren't dyed. A gay fellow like him hasn't the time to do it.' And when I told M. Vautrin about it afterwards, he said, 'Quite right, my boy. That is the way to answer them. There is nothing more unpleasant than to have your little weaknesses known; it might spoil many a match.'"

"Well, and for my part," said Sylvie, "a man tried to humbug me at the market wanting to know if I had seen him put on his shirt. Such bosh! There," she cried, interrupting herself, "that's a quarter to ten striking at the Val-de-Grace, and not a soul stirring!"

"Pooh! they are all gone out. Mme. Couture and the girl went out at eight o'clock to take the wafer at Saint-Etienne. Father Goriot started off somewhere with a parcel, and the student won't be back from his lecture till ten o'clock. I saw them go while I was sweeping the stairs; Father Goriot knocked up against me, and his parcel was as hard as iron. What is the old fellow up to, I wonder? He is as good as a plaything for the rest of them; they can never let him alone; but he is a good man, all the same, and worth more than all of them put together. He doesn't give you much himself, but he sometimes sends you with a message to ladies who fork out famous tips; they are dressed grandly, too."

"His daughters, as he calls them, eh? There are a dozen of them."

"I have never been to more than two – the two who came here."

"There is madame moving overhead; I shall have to go, or she will raise a fine racket. Just keep an eye on the milk, Christophe; don't let the cat get at it."

Sylvie went up to her mistress' room.

"Sylvie! How is this? It's nearly ten o'clock, and you let me sleep like a dormouse! Such a thing has never happened before."

"It's the fog; it is that thick, you could cut it with a knife."

"But how about breakfast?"

"Bah! the boarders are possessed, I'm sure. They all cleared out before there was a wink of daylight."

"Do speak properly, Sylvie," Mme. Vauquer retorted; "say a blink of daylight."

"Ah, well, madame, whichever you please. Anyhow, you can have breakfast at ten o'clock. La Michonnette and Poiret have neither of them stirred. There are only those two upstairs, and they are sleeping like the logs they are."

"But, Sylvie, you put their names together as if – "

"As if what?" said Sylvie, bursting into a guffaw. "The two of them make a pair."

"It is a strange thing, isn't it, Sylvie, how M. Vautrin got in last night after Christophe had bolted the door?"

"Not at all, madame. Christophe heard M. Vautrin, and went down and undid the door. And here are you imagining that – ?"

"Give me my bodice, and be quick and get breakfast ready. Dish up the rest of the mutton with the potatoes, and you can put the stewed pears on the table, those at five a penny."

A few moments later Mme. Vauquer came down, just in time to see the cat knock down a plate that covered a bowl of milk, and begin to lap in all haste.

"Mistigris!" she cried.

The cat fled, but promptly returned to rub against her ankles.

"Oh! yes, you can wheedle, you old hypocrite!" she said. "Sylvie! Sylvie!"

"Yes, madame; what is it?"

"Just see what the cat has done!"

"It is all that stupid Christophe's fault. I told him to stop and lay the table. What has become of him? Don't you worry, madame; Father Goriot shall have it. I will fill it up with water, and he won't know the difference; he never notices anything, not even what he eats."

"I wonder where the old heathen can have gone?" said Mme. Vauquer, setting the plates round the table.

"Who knows? He is up to all sorts of tricks."

"I have overslept myself," said Mme. Vauquer.

"But madame looks as fresh as a rose, all the same."

The door bell rang at that moment, and Vautrin came through the sitting-room, singing loudly:

> "'Tis the same old story everywhere,
> A roving heart and a roving glance..

"Oh! Mamma Vauquer! good-morning!" he cried at the sight of his hostess, and he put his arm gaily round her waist.

"There! have done – "

"'Impertinence!' Say it!" he answered. "Come, say it! Now, isn't that what you really mean? Stop a bit, I will help you to set the table. Ah! I am a nice man, am I not?

> "For the locks of brown and the golden hair
> A sighing lover…

"Oh! I have just seen something so funny —

> … led by chance."

"What?" asked the widow.

"Father Goriot in the goldsmith's shop in the Rue Dauphine at half-past eight this morning. They buy old spoons and forks and gold lace there, and Goriot sold a piece of silver plate for a good round sum. It had been twisted out of shape very neatly for a man that's not used to the trade."

"Really? You don't say so?"

"Yes. One of my friends is expatriating himself; I had been to see him off on board the Royal Mail steamer, and was coming back here. I waited after that to see what Father Goriot would do; it is a comical affair. He came back to this quarter of the world, to the Rue des Gres, and went into a money-lender's house; everybody knows him, Gobseck, a stuck-up rascal, that would make dominoes out of his father's bones, a Turk, a heathen, an old Jew, a Greek; it would be a difficult matter to rob *him*, for he puts all his coin into the Bank."

"Then what was Father Goriot doing there?"

"Doing?" said Vautrin. "Nothing; he was bent on his own undoing. He is a simpleton, stupid enough to ruin himself by running after – "

"There he is!" cried Sylvie.

"Christophe," cried Father Goriot's voice, "come upstairs with me."

Christophe went up, and shortly afterwards came down again.

"Where are you going?" Mme. Vauquer asked of her servant.

"Out on an errand for M. Goriot."

"What may that be?" said Vautrin, pouncing on a letter in Christophe's hand. "*Mme. la Comtesse Anastasie de Restaud*," he read. "Where are you going with it?" he added, as he gave the letter back to Christophe.

"To the Rue du Helder. I have orders to give this into her hands myself."

"What is there inside it?" said Vautrin, holding the letter up to the light. "A banknote? No." He peered into the envelope. "A receipted account!" he cried. "My word! 'tis a gallant old dotard. Off with you, old chap," he said, bringing down a hand on Christophe's head, and spinning the man round like a thimble; "you will have a famous tip."

By this time the table was set. Sylvie was boiling the milk, Mme. Vauquer was lighting a fire in the stove with some assistance from Vautrin, who kept humming to himself:

"The same old story everywhere,
A roving heart and a roving glance."

When everything was ready, Mme. Couture and Mlle. Taillefer came in.

"Where have you been this morning, fair lady?" said Mme. Vauquer, turning to Mme. Couture.

"We have just been to say our prayers at Saint-Etienne du Mont. To-day is the day when we must go to see M. Taillefer. Poor little thing! She is trembling like a leaf," Mme. Couture went on, as she seated herself before the fire and held the steaming soles of her boots to the blaze.

"Warm yourself, Victorine," said Mme. Vauquer.

"It is quite right and proper, mademoiselle, to pray to Heaven to soften your father's heart," said Vautrin, as he drew a chair nearer to the orphan girl; "but that is not enough. What you want is a friend who will give the monster a piece of his mind; a barbarian that has three millions (so they say), and will not give you a dowry; and a pretty girl needs a dowry nowadays."

"Poor child!" said Mme. Vauquer. "Never mind, my pet, your wretch of a father is going just the way to bring trouble upon himself."

Victorine's eyes filled with tears at the words, and the widow checked herself at a sign from Mme. Couture.

"If we could only see him!" said the Commissary-General's widow; "if I could speak to him myself and give him his wife's last letter! I have never dared to run the risk of sending it by post; he knew my handwriting – "

"'Oh woman, persecuted and injured innocent!'" exclaimed Vautrin, breaking in upon her. "So that is how you are, is it? In a few days' time I will look into your affairs, and it will be all right, you shall see."

"Oh! sir," said Victorine, with a tearful but eager glance at Vautrin, who showed no sign of being touched by it, "if you know of any way of communicating with my father, please be sure and tell him that his affection and my mother's honor are more to me than all the money in the world. If you can induce him to relent a little towards me, I will pray to God for you. You may be sure of my gratitude – "

"*The same old story everywhere*," sang Vautrin, with a satirical intonation. At this juncture, Goriot, Mlle. Michonneau, and Poiret came downstairs together; possibly the scent of the gravy which Sylvie was making to serve with the mutton had announced breakfast. The seven people thus assembled bade each other good-morning, and took their places at the table; the clock struck ten, and the student's footstep was heard outside.

"Ah! here you are, M. Eugene," said Sylvie; "every one is breakfasting at home to-day."

The student exchanged greetings with the lodgers, and sat down beside Goriot.

"I have just met with a queer adventure," he said, as he helped himself abundantly to the mutton, and cut a slice of bread, which Mme. Vauquer's eyes gauged as usual.

"An adventure?" queried Poiret.

"Well, and what is there to astonish you in that, old boy?" Vautrin asked of Poiret. "M. Eugene is cut out for that kind of thing."

Mlle. Taillefer stole a timid glance at the young student.

"Tell us about your adventure!" demanded M. Vautrin.

"Yesterday evening I went to a ball given by a cousin of mine, the Vicomtesse de Beauseant. She has a magnificent house; the rooms are hung with silk – in short, it was a splendid affair, and I was as happy as a king – "

"Fisher," put in Vautrin, interrupting.

"What do you mean, sir?" said Eugene sharply.

"I said 'fisher,' because kingfishers see a good deal more fun than kings."

"Quite true; I would much rather be the little careless bird than a king," said Poiret the ditto-ist, "because – "

"In fact" – the law-student cut him short – "I danced with one of the handsomest women in the room, a charming countess, the most exquisite creature I have ever seen. There was peach blossom in her hair, and she had the loveliest bouquet of flowers – real flowers, that scented the air – but there! it is no use trying to describe a woman glowing with the dance. You ought to have seen her! Well, and this morning I met this divine countess about nine o'clock, on foot in the Rue de Gres. Oh! how my heart beat! I began to think – "

"That she was coming here," said Vautrin, with a keen look at the student. "I expect that she was going to call on old Gobseck, a money-lender. If ever you explore a Parisian woman's heart, you will find the money-lender first, and the lover afterwards. Your countess is called Anastasie de Restaud, and she lives in the Rue du Helder."

The student stared hard at Vautrin. Father Goriot raised his head at the words, and gave the two speakers a glance so full of intelligence and uneasiness that the lodgers beheld him with astonishment.

"Then Christophe was too late, and she must have gone to him!" cried Goriot, with anguish in his voice.

"It is just as I guessed," said Vautrin, leaning over to whisper in Mme. Vauquer's ear.

Goriot went on with his breakfast, but seemed unconscious of what he was doing. He had never looked more stupid nor more taken up with his own thoughts than he did at that moment.

"Who the devil could have told you her name, M. Vautrin?" asked Eugene.

"Aha! there you are!" answered Vautrin. "Old Father Goriot there knew it quite well! and why should I not know it too?"

"M. Goriot?" the student cried.

"What is it?" asked the old man. "So she was very beautiful, was she, yesterday night?"

"Who?"

"Mme. de Restaud."

"Look at the old wretch," said Mme. Vauquer, speaking to Vautrin; "how his eyes light up!"

"Then does he really keep her?" said Mlle. Michonneau, in a whisper to the student.

"Oh! yes, she was tremendously pretty," Eugene answered. Father Goriot watched him with eager eyes. "If Mme. de Beauseant had not been there, my divine countess would have been the queen of the ball; none of the younger men had eyes for any one else. I was the twelfth on her list, and she danced every quadrille. The other women were furious. She must have enjoyed herself, if ever creature did! It is a true saying that there is no more beautiful sight than a frigate in full sail, a galloping horse, or a woman dancing."

"So the wheel turns," said Vautrin; "yesterday night at a duchess' ball, this morning in a money-lender's office, on the lowest rung of the ladder – just like a Parisienne! If their husbands cannot afford to pay for their frantic extravagance, they will sell themselves. Or if they cannot do that, they will tear out their mothers' hearts to find something to pay for their splendor. They will turn the world upside down. Just a Parisienne through and through!"

Father Goriot's face, which had shone at the student's words like the sun on a bright day, clouded over all at once at this cruel speech of Vautrin's.

"Well," said Mme. Vauquer, "but where is your adventure? Did you speak to her? Did you ask her if she wanted to study law?"

"She did not see me," said Eugene. "But only think of meeting one of the prettiest women in Paris in the Rue des Gres at nine o'clock! She could not have reached home after the ball till two o'clock this morning. Wasn't it queer? There is no place like Paris for this sort of adventures."

"Pshaw! much funnier things than *that* happen here!" exclaimed Vautrin.

Mlle. Taillefer had scarcely heeded the talk, she was so absorbed by the thought of the new attempt that she was about to make. Mme. Couture made a sign that it was time to go upstairs and dress; the two ladies went out, and Father Goriot followed their example.

"Well, did you see?" said Mme. Vauquer, addressing Vautrin and the rest of the circle. "He is ruining himself for those women, that is plain."

"Nothing will ever make me believe that that beautiful Comtesse de Restaud is anything to Father Goriot," cried the student.

"Well, and if you don't," broke in Vautrin, "we are not set on convincing you. You are too young to know Paris thoroughly yet; later on you will find out that there are what we call men with a passion – "

Mlle. Michonneau gave Vautrin a quick glance at these words. They seemed to be like the sound of a trumpet to a trooper's horse. "Aha!" said Vautrin, stopping in his speech to give her a searching glance, "so we have had our little experiences, have we?"

The old maid lowered her eyes like a nun who sees a statue.

"Well," he went on, "when folk of that kind get a notion into their heads, they cannot drop it. They must drink the water from some particular spring – it is stagnant as often as not; but they will sell their wives and families, they will sell their own souls to the devil to get it. For some this spring is play, or the stock-exchange, or music, or a collection of pictures or insects; for others it is some woman who can give them the dainties they like. You might offer these last all the women on earth – they would turn up their noses; they will have the only one who can gratify their passion. It often happens that the woman does not care for them at all, and treats them cruelly; they buy their morsels of satisfaction very dear; but no matter, the fools are never tired of it; they will take their last blanket

to the pawnbroker's to give their last five-franc piece to her. Father Goriot here is one of that sort. He is discreet, so the Countess exploits him – just the way of the gay world. The poor old fellow thinks of her and of nothing else. In all other respects you see he is a stupid animal; but get him on that subject, and his eyes sparkle like diamonds. That secret is not difficult to guess. He took some plate himself this morning to the melting-pot, and I saw him at Daddy Gobseck's in the Rue des Gres. And now, mark what follows – he came back here, and gave a letter for the Comtesse de Restaud to that noodle of a Christophe, who showed us the address; there was a receipted bill inside it. It is clear that it was an urgent matter if the Countess also went herself to the old money lender. Father Goriot has financed her handsomely. There is no need to tack a tale together; the thing is self-evident. So that shows you, sir student, that all the time your Countess was smiling, dancing, flirting, swaying her peach-flower crowned head, with her gown gathered into her hand, her slippers were pinching her, as they say; she was thinking of her protested bills, or her lover's protested bills."

"You have made me wild to know the truth," cried Eugene; "I will go to call on Mme. de Restaud to-morrow."

"Yes," echoed Poiret; "you must go and call on Mme. de Restaud."

"And perhaps you will find Father Goriot there, who will take payment for the assistance he politely rendered."

Eugene looked disgusted. "Why, then, this Paris of yours is a slough."

"And an uncommonly queer slough, too," replied Vautrin. "The mud splashes you as you drive through it in your carriage – you are a respectable person; you go afoot and are splashed – you are a scoundrel. You are so unlucky as to walk off with something or other belonging to somebody else, and they exhibit you as a curiosity in the Place du Palais-de-Justice; you steal a million, and you are pointed out in every salon as a model of virtue. And you pay thirty millions for the police and the courts of justice, for the maintenance of law and order! A pretty slate of things it is!"

"What," cried Mme. Vauquer, "has Father Goriot really melted down his silver posset-dish?"

"There were two turtle-doves on the lid, were there not?" asked Eugene.

"Yes, that there were."

"Then, was he fond of it?" said Eugene. "He cried while he was breaking up the cup and plate. I happened to see him by accident."

"It was dear to him as his own life," answered the widow.

"There! you see how infatuated the old fellow is!" cried Vautrin. "The woman yonder can coax the soul out of him."

The student went up to his room. Vautrin went out, and a few moments later Mme. Couture and Victorine drove away in a cab which Sylvie had called for them. Poiret gave his arm to Mlle. Michonneau, and they went together to spend the two sunniest hours of the day in the Jardin des Plantes.

"Well, those two are as good as married," was the portly Sylvie's comment. "They are going out together to-day for the first time. They are such a couple of dry sticks that if they happen to strike against each other they will draw sparks like flint and steel."

"Keep clear of Mlle. Michonneau's shawl, then," said Mme. Vauquer, laughing; "it would flare up like tinder."

At four o'clock that evening, when Goriot came in, he saw, by the light of two smoky lamps, that Victorine's eyes were red. Mme. Vauquer was listening to the history of the visit made that morning to M. Taillefer; it had been made in vain. Taillefer was tired of the annual application made by his daughter and her elderly friend; he gave them a personal interview in order to arrive at an understanding with them.

"My dear lady," said Mme. Couture, addressing Mme. Vauquer, "just imagine it; he did not even ask Victorine to sit down, she was standing the whole time. He said to me quite coolly, without putting himself in a passion, that we might spare ourselves the trouble of going there; that the young

lady (he would not call her his daughter) was injuring her cause by importuning him (*importuning!* once a year, the wretch!); that as Victorine's mother had nothing when he married her, Victorine ought not to expect anything from him; in fact, he said the most cruel things, that made the poor child burst out crying. The little thing threw herself at her father's feet and spoke up bravely; she said that she only persevered in her visits for her mother's sake; that she would obey him without a murmur, but that she begged him to read her poor dead mother's farewell letter. She took it up and gave it to him, saying the most beautiful things in the world, most beautifully expressed; I do not know where she learned them; God must have put them into her head, for the poor child was inspired to speak so nicely that it made me cry like a fool to hear her talk. And what do you think the monster was doing all the time? Cutting his nails! He took the letter that poor Mme. Taillefer had soaked with tears, and flung it on to the chimney-piece. 'That is all right,' he said. He held out his hands to raise his daughter, but she covered them with kisses, and he drew them away again. Scandalous, isn't it? And his great booby of a son came in and took no notice of his sister."

"What inhuman wretches they must be!" said Father Goriot.

"And then they both went out of the room," Mme. Couture went on, without heeding the worthy vermicelli maker's exclamation; "father and son bowed to me, and asked me to excuse them on account of urgent business! That is the history of our call. Well, he has seen his daughter at any rate. How he can refuse to acknowledge her I cannot think, for they are as alike as two peas."

The boarders dropped in one after another, interchanging greetings and empty jokes that certain classes of Parisians regard as humorous and witty. Dulness is their prevailing ingredient, and the whole point consists in mispronouncing a word or a gesture. This kind of argot is always changing. The essence of the jest consists in some catchword suggested by a political event, an incident in the police courts, a street song, or a bit of burlesque at some theatre, and forgotten in a month. Anything and everything serves to keep up a game of battledore and shuttlecock with words and ideas. The diorama, a recent invention, which carried an optical illusion a degree further than panoramas, had given rise to a mania among art students for ending every word with *rama*. The Maison Vauquer had caught the infection from a young artist among the boarders.

"Well, Monsieur-r-r Poiret," said the *employe* from the Museum, "how is your health-orama?" Then, without waiting for an answer, he turned to Mme. Couture and Victorine with a "Ladies, you seem melancholy."

"Is dinner ready?" cried Horace Bianchon, a medical student, and a friend of Rastignac's; "my stomach is sinking *usque ad talones*."

"There is an uncommon *frozerama* outside," said Vautrin. "Make room there, Father Goriot! Confound it, your foot covers the whole front of the stove."

"Illustrious M. Vautrin," put in Bianchon, "why do you say *frozerama*? It is incorrect; it should be *frozenrama*."

"No, it shouldn't," said the official from the Museum; "*frozerama* is right by the same rule that you say 'My feet are *froze*.'"

"Ah! ah!"

"Here is his Excellency the Marquis de Rastignac, Doctor of the Law of Contraries," cried Bianchon, seizing Eugene by the throat, and almost throttling him.

"Hallo there! hallo!"

Mlle. Michonneau came noiselessly in, bowed to the rest of the party, and took her place beside the three women without saying a word.

"That old bat always makes me shudder," said Bianchon in a low voice, indicating Mlle. Michonneau to Vautrin. "I have studied Gall's system, and I am sure she has the bump of Judas."

"Then you have seen a case before?" said Vautrin.

"Who has not?" answered Bianchon. "Upon my word, that ghastly old maid looks just like one of the long worms that will gnaw a beam through, give them time enough."

"That is the way, young man," returned he of the forty years and the dyed whiskers:

"The rose has lived the life of a rose —
A morning's space."

"Aha! here is a magnificent *soupe-au-rama*," cried Poiret as Christophe came in bearing the soup with cautious heed.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Mme. Vauquer; "it is *soupe aux choux*."

All the young men roared with laughter.

"Had you there, Poiret!"

"Poir-r-r-rette! she had you there!"

"Score two points to Mamma Vauquer," said Vautrin.

"Did any of you notice the fog this morning?" asked the official.

"It was a frantic fog," said Bianchon, "a fog unparalleled, doleful, melancholy, sea-green, asthmatical – a Goriot of a fog!"

"A Goriorama," said the art student, "because you couldn't see a thing in it."

"Hey! Milord Gaoriotte, they air talking about yoo-o-ou!"

Father Goriot, seated at the lower end of the table, close to the door through which the servant entered, raised his face; he had smelt at a scrap of bread that lay under his table napkin, an old trick acquired in his commercial capacity, that still showed itself at times.

"Well," Madame Vauquer cried in sharp tones, that rang above the rattle of spoons and plates and the sound of other voices, "and is there anything the matter with the bread?"

"Nothing whatever, madame," he answered; "on the contrary, it is made of the best quality of corn; flour from Etampes."

"How could you tell?" asked Eugene.

"By the color, by the flavor."

"You knew the flavor by the smell, I suppose," said Mme. Vauquer. "You have grown so economical, you will find out how to live on the smell of cooking at last."

"Take out a patent for it, then," cried the Museum official; "you would make a handsome fortune."

"Never mind him," said the artist; "he does that sort of thing to delude us into thinking that he was a vermicelli maker."

"Your nose is a corn-sampler, it appears?" inquired the official.

"Corn *what*?" asked Bianchon.

"Corn-el."

"Corn-et."

"Corn-elian."

"Corn-ice."

"Corn-ucopia."

"Corn-crake."

"Corn-cockle."

"Corn-orama."

The eight responses came like a rolling fire from every part of the room, and the laughter that followed was the more uproarious because poor Father Goriot stared at the others with a puzzled look, like a foreigner trying to catch the meaning of words in a language which he does not understand.

"Corn?.." he said, turning to Vautrin, his next neighbor.

"Corn on your foot, old man!" said Vautrin, and he drove Father Goriot's cap down over his eyes by a blow on the crown.

The poor old man thus suddenly attacked was for a moment too bewildered to do anything. Christophe carried off his plate, thinking that he had finished his soup, so that when Goriot had pushed back his cap from his eyes his spoon encountered the table. Every one burst out laughing. "You are a disagreeable joker, sir," said the old man, "and if you take any further liberties with me – "

"Well, what then, old boy?" Vautrin interrupted.

"Well, then, you shall pay dearly for it some day – "

"Down below, eh?" said the artist, "in the little dark corner where they put naughty boys."

"Well, mademoiselle," Vautrin said, turning to Victorine, "you are eating nothing. So papa was refractory, was he?"

"A monster!" said Mme. Couture.

"Mademoiselle might make application for aliment pending her suit; she is not eating anything. Eh! eh! just see how Father Goriot is staring at Mlle. Victorine."

The old man had forgotten his dinner, he was so absorbed in gazing at the poor girl; the sorrow in her face was unmistakable, – the slighted love of a child whose father would not recognize her.

"We are mistaken about Father Goriot, my dear boy," said Eugene in a low voice. "He is not an idiot, nor wanting in energy. Try your Gall system on him, and let me know what you think. I saw him crush a silver dish last night as if it had been made of wax; there seems to be something extraordinary going on in his mind just now, to judge by his face. His life is so mysterious that it must be worth studying. Oh! you may laugh, Bianchon; I am not joking."

"The man is a subject, is he?" said Bianchon; "all right! I will dissect him, if he will give me the chance."

"No; feel his bumps."

"Hm! – his stupidity might perhaps be contagious."

The next day Rastignac dressed himself very elegantly, and about three o'clock in the afternoon went to call on Mme. de Restaud. On the way thither he indulged in the wild intoxicating dreams which fill a young head so full of delicious excitement. Young men at his age take no account of obstacles nor of dangers; they see success in every direction; imagination has free play, and turns their lives into a romance; they are saddened or discouraged by the collapse of one of the visionary schemes that have no existence save in their heated fancy. If youth were not ignorant and timid, civilization would be impossible.

Eugene took unheard-of pains to keep himself in a spotless condition, but on his way through the streets he began to think about Mme. de Restaud and what he should say to her. He equipped himself with wit, rehearsed repartees in the course of an imaginary conversation, and prepared certain neat speeches a la Talleyrand, conjuring up a series of small events which should prepare the way for the declaration on which he had based his future; and during these musings the law student was bespattered with mud, and by the time he reached the Palais Royal he was obliged to have his boots blacked and his trousers brushed.

"If I were rich," he said, as he changed the five-franc piece he had brought with him in case anything might happen, "I would take a cab, then I could think at my ease."

At last he reached the Rue du Helder, and asked for the Comtesse de Restaud. He bore the contemptuous glances of the servants, who had seen him cross the court on foot, with the cold fury of a man who knows that he will succeed some day. He understood the meaning of their glances at once, for he had felt his inferiority as soon as he entered the court, where a smart cab was waiting. All the delights of life in Paris seemed to be implied by this visible and manifest sign of luxury and extravagance. A fine horse, in magnificent harness, was pawing the ground, and all at once the law student felt out of humor with himself. Every compartment in his brain which he had thought to find so full of wit was bolted fast; he grew positively stupid. He sent up his name to the Countess, and waited in the ante-chamber, standing on one foot before a window that looked out upon the court; mechanically he leaned his elbow against the sash, and stared before him. The time seemed long;

he would have left the house but for the southern tenacity of purpose which works miracles when it is single-minded.

"Madame is in her boudoir, and cannot see any one at present, sir," said the servant. "She gave me no answer; but if you will go into the dining-room, there is some one already there."

Rastignac was impressed with a sense of the formidable power of the lackey who can accuse or condemn his masters by a word; he coolly opened the door by which the man had just entered the ante-chamber, meaning, no doubt, to show these insolent flunkeys that he was familiar with the house; but he found that he had thoughtlessly precipitated himself into a small room full of dressers, where lamps were standing, and hot-water pipes, on which towels were being dried; a dark passage and a back staircase lay beyond it. Stifled laughter from the ante-chamber added to his confusion.

"This way to the drawing-room, sir," said the servant, with the exaggerated respect which seemed to be one more jest at his expense.

Eugene turned so quickly that he stumbled against a bath. By good luck, he managed to keep his hat on his head, and saved it from immersion in the water; but just as he turned, a door opened at the further end of the dark passage, dimly lighted by a small lamp. Rastignac heard voices and the sound of a kiss; one of the speakers was Mme. de Restaud, the other was Father Goriot. Eugene followed the servant through the dining-room into the drawing-room; he went to a window that looked out into the courtyard, and stood there for a while. He meant to know whether this Goriot was really the Goriot that he knew. His heart beat unwontedly fast; he remembered Vautrin's hideous insinuations. A well-dressed young man suddenly emerged from the room almost as Eugene entered it, saying impatiently to the servant who stood at the door: "I am going, Maurice. Tell Madame la Comtesse that I waited more than half an hour for her."

Whereupon this insolent being, who, doubtless, had a right to be insolent, sang an Italian trill, and went towards the window where Eugene was standing, moved thereto quite as much by a desire to see the student's face as by a wish to look out into the courtyard.

"But M. le Comte had better wait a moment longer; madame is disengaged," said Maurice, as he returned to the ante-chamber.

Just at that moment Father Goriot appeared close to the gate; he had emerged from a door at the foot of the back staircase. The worthy soul was preparing to open his umbrella regardless of the fact that the great gate had opened to admit a tilbury, in which a young man with a ribbon at his button-hole was seated. Father Goriot had scarcely time to start back and save himself. The horse took fright at the umbrella, swerved, and dashed forward towards the flight of steps. The young man looked round in annoyance, saw Father Goriot, and greeted him as he went out with constrained courtesy, such as people usually show to a money-lender so long as they require his services, or the sort of respect they feel it necessary to show for some one whose reputation has been blown upon, so that they blush to acknowledge his acquaintance. Father Goriot gave him a little friendly nod and a good-natured smile. All this happened with lightning speed. Eugene was so deeply interested that he forgot that he was not alone till he suddenly heard the Countess' voice.

"Oh! Maxime, were you going away?" she said reproachfully, with a shade of pique in her manner. The Countess had not seen the incident nor the entrance of the tilbury. Rastignac turned abruptly and saw her standing before him, coquettishly dressed in a loose white cashmere gown with knots of rose-colored ribbon here and there; her hair was carelessly coiled about her head, as is the wont of Parisian women in the morning; there was a soft fragrance about her – doubtless she was fresh from a bath; – her graceful form seemed more flexible, her beauty more luxuriant. Her eyes glistened. A young man can see everything at a glance; he feels the radiant influence of woman as a plant discerns and absorbs its nutriment from the air; he did not need to touch her hands to feel their cool freshness. He saw faint rose tints through the cashmere of the dressing gown; it had fallen slightly open, giving glimpses of a bare throat, on which the student's eyes rested. The Countess had no need of the adventitious aid of corsets; her girdle defined the outlines of her slender waist; her

throat was a challenge to love; her feet, thrust into slippers, were daintily small. As Maxime took her hand and kissed it, Eugene became aware of Maxime's existence, and the Countess saw Eugene.

"Oh! is that you M. de Rastignac? I am very glad to see you," she said, but there was something in her manner that a shrewd observer would have taken as a hint to depart.

Maxime, as the Countess Anastasie had called the young man with the haughty insolence of bearing, looked from Eugene to the lady, and from the lady to Eugene; it was sufficiently evident that he wished to be rid of the latter. An exact and faithful rendering of the glance might be given in the words: "Look here, my dear; I hope you intend to send this little whipper-snapper about his business."

The Countess consulted the young man's face with an intent submissiveness that betrays all the secrets of a woman's heart, and Rastignac all at once began to hate him violently. To begin with, the sight of the fair carefully arranged curls on the other's comely head had convinced him that his own crop was hideous; Maxime's boots, moreover, were elegant and spotless, while his own, in spite of all his care, bore some traces of his recent walk; and, finally, Maxime's overcoat fitted the outline of his figure gracefully, he looked like a pretty woman, while Eugene was wearing a black coat at half-past two. The quick-witted child of the Charente felt the disadvantage at which he was placed beside this tall, slender dandy, with the clear gaze and the pale face, one of those men who would ruin orphan children without scruple. Mme. de Restaud fled into the next room without waiting for Eugene to speak; shaking out the skirts of her dressing-gown in her flight, so that she looked like a white butterfly, and Maxime hurried after her. Eugene, in a fury, followed Maxime and the Countess, and the three stood once more face to face by the hearth in the large drawing-room. The law student felt quite sure that the odious Maxime found him in the way, and even at the risk of displeasing Mme. de Restaud, he meant to annoy the dandy. It had struck him all at once that he had seen the young man before at Mme. de Beauseant's ball; he guessed the relation between Maxime and Mme. de Restaud; and with the youthful audacity that commits prodigious blunders or achieves signal success, he said to himself, "This is my rival; I mean to cut him out."

Rash resolve! He did not know that M. le Comte Maxime de Trailles would wait till he was insulted, so as to fire first and kill his man. Eugene was a sportsman and a good shot, but he had not yet hit the bulls's eye twenty times out of twenty-two. The young Count dropped into a low chair by the hearth, took up the tongs, and made up the fire so violently and so sulkily, that Anastasie's fair face suddenly clouded over. She turned to Eugene, with a cool, questioning glance that asked plainly, "Why do you not go?" a glance which well-bred people regard as a cue to make their exit.

Eugene assumed an amiable expression.

"Madame," he began, "I hastened to call upon you – "

He stopped short. The door opened, and the owner of the tilbury suddenly appeared. He had left his hat outside, and did not greet the Countess; he looked meditatively at Rastignac, and held out his hand to Maxime with a cordial "Good morning," that astonished Eugene not a little. The young provincial did not understand the amenities of a triple alliance.

"M. de Restaud," said the Countess, introducing her husband to the law student.

Eugene bowed profoundly.

"This gentleman," she continued, presenting Eugene to her husband, "is M. de Rastignac; he is related to Mme. la Vicomtesse de Beauseant through the Marcillacs; I had the pleasure of meeting him at her last ball."

Related to Mme. la Vicomtesse de Beauseant through the Marcillacs! These words, on which the countess threw ever so slight an emphasis, by reason of the pride that the mistress of a house takes in showing that she only receives people of distinction as visitors in her house, produced a magical effect. The Count's stiff manner relaxed at once as he returned the student's bow.

"Delighted to have an opportunity of making your acquaintance," he said.

Maxime de Trailles himself gave Eugene an uneasy glance, and suddenly dropped his insolent manner. The mighty name had all the power of a fairy's wand; those closed compartments in the

southern brain flew open again; Rastignac's carefully drilled faculties returned. It was as if a sudden light had pierced the obscurity of this upper world of Paris, and he began to see, though everything was indistinct as yet. Mme. Vauquer's lodging-house and Father Goriot were very far remote from his thoughts.

"I thought that the Marcillacs were extinct," the Comte de Restaud said, addressing Eugene.

"Yes, they are extinct," answered the law student. "My great-uncle, the Chevalier de Rastignac, married the heiress of the Marcillac family. They had only one daughter, who married the Marechal de Clarimbault, Mme. de Beauseant's grandfather on the mother's side. We are the younger branch of the family, and the younger branch is all the poorer because my great-uncle, the Vice-Admiral, lost all that he had in the King's service. The Government during the Revolution refused to admit our claims when the Compagnie des Indes was liquidated."

"Was not your great-uncle in command of the *Vengeur* before 1789?"

"Yes."

"Then he would be acquainted with my grandfather, who commanded the *Warwick*."

Maxime looked at Mme. de Restaud and shrugged his shoulders, as who should say, "If he is going to discuss nautical matters with that fellow, it is all over with us." Anastasie understood the glance that M. de Trailles gave her. With a woman's admirable tact, she began to smile and said:

"Come with me, Maxime; I have something to say to you. We will leave you two gentlemen to sail in company on board the *Warwick* and the *Vengeur*."

She rose to her feet and signed to Maxime to follow her, mirth and mischief in her whole attitude, and the two went in the direction of the boudoir. The *morganatic* couple (to use a convenient German expression which has no exact equivalent) had reached the door, when the Count interrupted himself in his talk with Eugene.

"Anastasie!" he cried pettishly, "just stay a moment, dear; you know very well that – "

"I am coming back in a minute," she interrupted; "I have a commission for Maxime to execute, and I want to tell him about it."

She came back almost immediately. She had noticed the inflection in her husband's voice, and knew that it would not be safe to retire to the boudoir; like all women who are compelled to study their husbands' characters in order to have their own way, and whose business it is to know exactly how far they can go without endangering a good understanding, she was very careful to avoid petty collisions in domestic life. It was Eugene who had brought about this untoward incident; so the Countess looked at Maxime and indicated the law student with an air of exasperation. M. de Trailles addressed the Count, the Countess, and Eugene with the pointed remark, "You are busy, I do not want to interrupt you; good-day," and he went.

"Just wait a moment, Maxime!" the Count called after him.

"Come and dine with us," said the Countess, leaving Eugene and her husband together once more. She followed Maxime into the little drawing-room, where they sat together sufficiently long to feel sure that Rastignac had taken his leave.

The law student heard their laughter, and their voices, and the pauses in their talk; he grew malicious, exerted his conversational powers for M. de Restaud, flattered him, and drew him into discussions, to the end that he might see the Countess again and discover the nature of her relations with Father Goriot. This Countess with a husband and a lover, for Maxime clearly was her lover, was a mystery. What was the secret tie that bound her to the old tradesman? This mystery he meant to penetrate, hoping by its means to gain a sovereign ascendency over this fair typical Parisian.

"Anastasie!" the Count called again to his wife.

"Poor Maxime!" she said, addressing the young man. "Come, we must resign ourselves. This evening – "

"I hope, Nasie," he said in her ear, "that you will give orders not to admit that youngster, whose eyes light up like live coals when he looks at you. He will make you a declaration, and compromise you, and then you will compel me to kill him."

"Are you mad, Maxime?" she said. "A young lad of a student is, on the contrary, a capital lightning-conductor; is not that so? Of course, I mean to make Restaud furiously jealous of him."

Maxime burst out laughing, and went out, followed by the Countess, who stood at the window to watch him into his carriage; he shook his whip, and made his horse prance. She only returned when the great gate had been closed after him.

"What do you think, dear?" cried the Count, her husband, "this gentleman's family estate is not far from Verteuil, on the Charente; his great-uncle and my grandfather were acquainted."

"Delighted to find that we have acquaintances in common," said the Countess, with a preoccupied manner.

"More than you think," said Eugene, in a low voice.

"What do you mean?" she asked quickly.

"Why, only just now," said the student, "I saw a gentleman go out at the gate, Father Goriot, my next door neighbor in the house where I am lodging."

At the sound of this name, and the prefix that embellished it, the Count, who was stirring the fire, let the tongs fall as though they had burned his fingers, and rose to his feet.

"Sir," he cried, "you might have called him 'Monsieur Goriot'!"

The Countess turned pale at first at the sight of her husband's vexation, then she reddened; clearly she was embarrassed, her answer was made in a tone that she tried to make natural, and with an air of assumed carelessness:

"You could not know any one who is dearer to us both…"

She broke off, glanced at the piano as if some fancy had crossed her mind, and asked, "Are you fond of music, M. de Rastignac?"

"Exceedingly," answered Eugene, flushing, and disconcerted by a dim suspicion that he had somehow been guilty of a clumsy piece of folly.

"Do you sing?" she cried, going to the piano, and, sitting down before it, she swept her fingers over the keyboard from end to end. R-r-r-rah!

"No, madame."

The Comte de Restaud walked to and fro.

"That is a pity; you are without one great means of success. —*Ca-ro, ca-a-ro, ca-a-a-ro, non du-bi-ta-re*," sang the Countess.

Eugene had a second time waved a magic wand when he uttered Goriot's name, but the effect seemed to be entirely opposite to that produced by the formula "related to Mme. de Beauseant." His position was not unlike that of some visitor permitted as a favor to inspect a private collection of curiosities, when by inadvertence he comes into collision with a glass case full of sculptured figures, and three or four heads, imperfectly secured, fall at the shock. He wished the earth would open and swallow him. Mme. de Restaud's expression was reserved and chilly, her eyes had grown indifferent, and sedulously avoided meeting those of the unlucky student of law.

"Madame," he said, "you wish to talk with M. de Restaud; permit me to wish you good-day – "

The Countess interrupted him by a gesture, saying hastily, "Whenever you come to see us, both M. de Restaud and I shall be delighted to see you."

Eugene made a profound bow and took his leave, followed by M. de Restaud, who insisted, in spite of his remonstrances, on accompanying him into the hall.

"Neither your mistress nor I are at home to that gentleman when he calls," the Count said to Maurice.

As Eugene set foot on the steps, he saw that it was raining.

"Come," said he to himself, "somehow I have just made a mess of it, I do not know how. And now I am going to spoil my hat and coat into the bargain. I ought to stop in my corner, grind away at law, and never look to be anything but a boorish country magistrate. How can I go into society, when to manage properly you want a lot of cabs, varnished boots, gold watch chains, and all sorts of things; you have to wear white doeskin gloves that cost six francs in the morning, and primrose kid gloves every evening? A fig for that old humbug of a Goriot!"

When he reached the street door, the driver of a hackney coach, who had probably just deposited a wedding party at their door, and asked nothing better than a chance of making a little money for himself without his employer's knowledge, saw that Eugene had no umbrella, remarked his black coat, white waistcoat, yellow gloves, and varnished boots, and stopped and looked at him inquiringly. Eugene, in the blind desperation that drives a young man to plunge deeper and deeper into an abyss, as if he might hope to find a fortunate issue in its lowest depths, nodded in reply to the driver's signal, and stepped into the cab; a few stray petals of orange blossom and scraps of wire bore witness to its recent occupation by a wedding party.

"Where am I to drive, sir?" demanded the man, who, by this time, had taken off his white gloves.

"Confound it!" Eugene said to himself, "I am in for it now, and at least I will not spend cab-hire for nothing! – Drive to the Hotel Beauseant," he said aloud.

"Which?" asked the man, a portentous word that reduced Eugene to confusion. This young man of fashion, species incerta, did not know that there were two Hotels Beauseant; he was not aware how rich he was in relations who did not care about him.

"The Vicomte de Beauseant, Rue – "

"De Grenelle," interrupted the driver, with a jerk of his head. "You see, there are the hotels of the Marquis and Comte de Beauseant in the Rue Saint-Dominique," he added, drawing up the step.

"I know all about that," said Eugene, severely. – "Everybody is laughing at me to-day, it seems!" he said to himself, as he deposited his hat on the opposite seat. "This escapade will cost me a king's ransom, but, at any rate, I shall call on my so-called cousin in a thoroughly aristocratic fashion. Goriot has cost me ten francs already, the old scoundrel. My word! I will tell Mme. de Beauseant about my adventure; perhaps it may amuse her. Doubtless she will know the secret of the criminal relation between that handsome woman and the old rat without a tail. It would be better to find favor in my cousin's eyes than to come in contact with that shameless woman, who seems to me to have very expensive tastes. Surely the beautiful Vicomtesse's personal interest would turn the scale for me, when the mere mention of her name produces such an effect. Let us look higher. If you set yourself to carry the heights of heaven, you must face God."

The innumerable thoughts that surged through his brain might be summed up in these phrases. He grew calmer, and recovered something of his assurance as he watched the falling rain. He told himself that though he was about to squander two of the precious five-franc pieces that remained to him, the money was well laid out in preserving his coat, boots, and hat; and his cabman's cry of "Gate, if you please," almost put him in spirits. A Swiss, in scarlet and gold, appeared, the great door groaned on its hinges, and Rastignac, with sweet satisfaction, beheld his equipage pass under the archway and stop before the flight of steps beneath the awning. The driver, in a blue-and-red greatcoat, dismounted and let down the step. As Eugene stepped out of the cab, he heard smothered laughter from the peristyle. Three or four lackeys were making merry over the festal appearance of the vehicle. In another moment the law student was enlightened as to the cause of their hilarity; he felt the full force of the contrast between his equipage and one of the smartest broughams in Paris; a coachman, with powdered hair, seemed to find it difficult to hold a pair of spirited horses, who stood chafing the bit. In Mme. de Restaud's courtyard, in the Chaussee d'Antin, he had seen the neat turnout of a young man of six-and-twenty; in the Faubourg Saint-Germain he found the luxurious equipage of a man of rank; thirty thousand francs would not have purchased it.

"Who can be here?" said Eugene to himself. He began to understand, though somewhat tardily, that he must not expect to find many women in Paris who were not already appropriated, and that the capture of one of these queens would be likely to cost something more than bloodshed. "Confound it all! I expect my cousin also has her Maxime."

He went up the steps, feeling that he was a blighted being. The glass door was opened for him; the servants were as solemn as jackasses under the curry comb. So far, Eugene had only been in the ballroom on the ground floor of the Hotel Beauseant; the fete had followed so closely on the invitation, that he had not had time to call on his cousin, and had therefore never seen Mme. de Beauseant's apartments; he was about to behold for the first time a great lady among the wonderful and elegant surroundings that reveal her character and reflect her daily life. He was the more curious, because Mme. de Restaud's drawing-room had provided him with a standard of comparison.

At half-past four the Vicomtesse de Beauseant was visible. Five minutes earlier she would not have received her cousin, but Eugene knew nothing of the recognized routine of various houses in Paris. He was conducted up the wide, white-painted, crimson-carpeted staircase, between the gilded balusters and masses of flowering plants, to Mme. de Beauseant's apartments. He did not know the rumor current about Mme. de Beauseant, one of the biographies told, with variations, in whispers, every evening in the salons of Paris.

For three years past her name had been spoken of in connection with that of one of the most wealthy and distinguished Portuguese nobles, the Marquis d'Ajuda-Pinto. It was one of those innocent *liaisons* which possess so much charm for the two thus attached to each other that they find the presence of a third person intolerable. The Vicomte de Beauseant, therefore, had himself set an example to the rest of the world by respecting, with as good a grace as might be, this morganatic union. Any one who came to call on the Vicomtesse in the early days of this friendship was sure to find the Marquis d'Ajuda-Pinto there. As, under the circumstances, Mme. de Beauseant could not very well shut her door against these visitors, she gave them such a cold reception, and showed so much interest in the study of the ceiling, that no one could fail to understand how much he bored her; and when it became known in Paris that Mme. de Beauseant was bored by callers between two and four o'clock, she was left in perfect solitude during that interval. She went to the Bouffons or to the Opera with M. de Beauseant and M. d'Ajuda-Pinto; and M. de Beauseant, like a well-bred man of the world, always left his wife and the Portuguese as soon as he had installed them. But M. d'Ajuda-Pinto must marry, and a Mlle. de Rochefide was the young lady. In the whole fashionable world there was but one person who as yet knew nothing of the arrangement, and that was Mme. de Beauseant. Some of her friends had hinted at the possibility, and she had laughed at them, believing that envy had prompted those ladies to try to make mischief. And now, though the bans were about to be published, and although the handsome Portuguese had come that day to break the news to the Vicomtesse, he had not found courage as yet to say one word about his treachery. How was it? Nothing is doubtless more difficult than the notification of an ultimatum of this kind. There are men who feel more at their ease when they stand up before another man who threatens their lives with sword or pistol than in the presence of a woman who, after two hours of lamentations and reproaches, falls into a dead swoon and requires salts. At this moment, therefore, M. d'Ajuda-Pinto was on thorns, and anxious to take his leave. He told himself that in some way or other the news would reach Mme. de Beauseant; he would write, it would be much better to do it by letter, and not to utter the words that should stab her to the heart.

So when the servant announced M. Eugene de Rastignac, the Marquis d'Ajuda-Pinto trembled with joy. To be sure, a loving woman shows even more ingenuity in inventing doubts of her lover than in varying the monotony of his happiness; and when she is about to be forsaken, she instinctively interprets every gesture as rapidly as Virgil's courser detected the presence of his companion by snuffing the breeze. It was impossible, therefore, that Mme. de Beauseant should not detect that involuntary thrill of satisfaction; slight though it was, it was appalling in its artlessness.

Eugene had yet to learn that no one in Paris should present himself in any house without first making himself acquainted with the whole history of its owner, and of its owner's wife and family, so that he may avoid making any of the terrible blunders which in Poland draw forth the picturesque exclamation, "Harness five bullocks to your cart!" probably because you will need them all to pull you out of the quagmire into which a false step has plunged you. If, down to the present day, our language has no name for these conversational disasters, it is probably because they are believed to be impossible, the publicity given in Paris to every scandal is so prodigious. After the awkward incident at Mme. de Restaud's, no one but Eugene could have reappeared in his character of bullock-driver in Mme. de Beauseant's drawing-room. But if Mme. de Restaud and M. de Trailles had found him horribly in the way, M. d'Ajuda hailed his coming with relief.

"Good-bye," said the Portuguese, hurrying to the door, as Eugene made his entrance into a dainty little pink-and-gray drawing-room, where luxury seemed nothing more than good taste.

"Until this evening," said Mme. de Beauseant, turning her head to give the Marquis a glance. "We are going to the Bouffons, are we not?"

"I cannot go," he said, with his fingers on the door handle.

Mme. de Beauseant rose and beckoned to him to return. She did not pay the slightest attention to Eugene, who stood there dazzled by the sparkling marvels around him; he began to think that this was some story out of the Arabian Nights made real, and did not know where to hide himself, when the woman before him seemed to be unconscious of his existence. The Vicomtesse had raised the forefinger of her right hand, and gracefully signed to the Marquis to seat himself beside her. The Marquis felt the imperious sway of passion in her gesture; he came back towards her. Eugene watched him, not without a feeling of envy.

"That is the owner of the brougham!" he said to himself. "But is it necessary to have a pair of spirited horses, servants in livery, and torrents of gold to draw a glance from a woman here in Paris?"

The demon of luxury gnawed at his heart, greed burned in his veins, his throat was parched with the thirst of gold.

He had a hundred and thirty francs every quarter. His father, mother, brothers, sisters, and aunt did not spend two hundred francs a month among them. This swift comparison between his present condition and the aims he had in view helped to benumb his faculties.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.