HONORÉ DE BALZAC

GAMBARA

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Gambara:

Содержание

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DEDICATION

To Monsieur le Marquis de Belloy

It was sitting by the fire, in a mysterious and magnificent retreat, – now a thing of the past but surviving in our memory, – whence our eyes commanded a view of Paris from the heights of Belleville to those of Belleville, from Montmartre to the triumphal Arc de l'Etoile, that one morning, refreshed by tea, amid the myriad suggestions that shoot up and die like rockets from your sparkling flow of talk, lavish of ideas, you tossed to my pen a figure worthy of Hoffmann, – that casket of unrecognized gems, that pilgrim seated at the gate of Paradise with ears to hear the songs of the angels but no longer a tongue to repeat them, playing on the ivory keys with fingers crippled by the stress of divine inspiration, believing that he is expressing celestial music to his bewildered listeners.

It was you who created GAMBARA; I have only clothed him. Let me render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, regretting only that you do not yourself take up the pen at a time when

gentlemen ought to wield it as well as the sword, if they are to save their country. You may neglect yourself, but you owe your talents to us.

GAMBARA

New Year's Day of 1831 was pouring out its packets of sugared almonds, four o'clock was striking, there was a mob in the Palais-Royal, and the eating-houses were beginning to fill. At this moment a coupe drew up at the *perron* and a young man stepped out; a man of haughty appearance, and no doubt a foreigner; otherwise he would not have displayed the aristocratic *chasseur* who attended him in a plumed hat, nor the coat of arms which the heroes of July still attacked.

This gentleman went into the Palais-Royal, and followed the crowd round the galleries, unamazed at the slowness to which the throng of loungers reduced his pace; he seemed accustomed to the stately step which is ironically nicknamed the ambassador's strut; still, his dignity had a touch of the theatrical. Though his features were handsome and imposing, his hat, from beneath which thick black curls stood out, was perhaps tilted a little too much over the right ear, and belied his gravity by a too rakish effect. His eyes, inattentive and half closed, looked down disdainfully on the crowd.

"There goes a remarkably good-looking young man," said a girl in a low voice, as she made way for him to pass.

"And who is only too well aware of it!" replied her companion aloud – who was very plain.

After walking all round the arcades, the young man looked by

turns at the sky and at his watch, and with a shrug of impatience went into a tobacconist's shop, lighted a cigar, and placed himself in front of a looking-glass to glance at his costume, which was rather more ornate than the rules of French taste allow. He pulled down his collar and his black velvet waistcoat, over which hung many festoons of the thick gold chain that is made at Venice; then, having arranged the folds of his cloak by a single jerk of his left shoulder, draping it gracefully so as to show the velvet lining, he started again on parade, indifferent to the glances of the vulgar.

As soon as the shops were lighted up and the dusk seemed to him black enough, he went out into the square in front of the Palais-Royal, but as a man anxious not to be recognized; for he kept close under the houses as far as the fountain, screened by the hackney-cab stand, till he reached the Rue Froid-Manteau, a dirty, poky, disreputable street – a sort of sewer tolerated by the police close to the purified purlieus of the Palais-Royal, as an Italian major-domo allows a careless servant to leave the sweepings of the rooms in a corner of the staircase.

The young man hesitated. He might have been a bedizened citizen's wife craning her neck over a gutter swollen by the rain. But the hour was not unpropitious for the indulgence of some discreditable whim. Earlier, he might have been detected; later, he might find himself cut out. Tempted by a glance which is encouraging without being inviting, to have followed a young and pretty woman for an hour, or perhaps for a day, thinking of

her as a divinity and excusing her light conduct by a thousand reasons to her advantage; to have allowed oneself to believe in a sudden and irresistible affinity; to have pictured, under the promptings of transient excitement, a love-adventure in an age when romances are written precisely because they never happen; to have dreamed of balconies, guitars, stratagems, and bolts, enwrapped in Almaviva's cloak; and, after inditing a poem in fancy, to stop at the door of a house of ill-fame, and, crowning all, to discern in Rosina's bashfulness a reticence imposed by the police – is not all this, I say, an experience familiar to many a man who would not own it?

The most natural feelings are those we are least willing to confess, and among them is fatuity. When the lesson is carried no further, the Parisian profits by it, or forgets it, and no great harm is done. But this would hardly be the case with this foreigner, who was beginning to think he might pay too dearly for his Paris education.

This personage was a Milanese of good family, exiled from his native country, where some "liberal" pranks had made him an object of suspicion to the Austrian Government. Count Andrea Marcosini had been welcomed in Paris with the cordiality, essentially French, that a man always finds there, when he has a pleasant wit, a sounding name, two hundred thousand francs a year, and a prepossessing person. To such a man banishment could but be a pleasure tour; his property was simply sequestrated, and his friends let him know that after an absence

of two years he might return to his native land without danger.

After rhyming *crudeli affanni* with *i miei tiranni* in a dozen or so of sonnets, and maintaining as many hapless Italian refugees out of his own purse, Count Andrea, who was so unlucky as to be a poet, thought himself released from patriotic obligations. So, ever since his arrival, he had given himself up recklessly to the pleasures of every kind which Paris offers *gratis* to those who can pay for them. His talents and his handsome person won him success among women, whom he adored collectively as beseemed his years, but among whom he had not as yet distinguished a chosen one. And indeed this taste was, in him, subordinate to those for music and poetry which he had cultivated from his childhood; and he thought success in these both more difficult and more glorious to achieve than in affairs of gallantry, since nature had not inflicted on him the obstacles men take most pride in defying.

A man, like many another, of complex nature, he was easily fascinated by the comfort of luxury, without which he could hardly have lived; and, in the same way, he clung to the social distinctions which his principles contemned. Thus his theories as an artist, a thinker, and a poet were in frequent antagonism with his tastes, his feelings, and his habits as a man of rank and wealth; but he comforted himself for his inconsistencies by recognizing them in many Parisians, like himself liberal by policy and aristocrats by nature.

Hence it was not without some uneasiness that he found

himself, on December 31, 1830, under a Paris thaw, following at the heels of a woman whose dress betrayed the most abject, inveterate, and long-accustomed poverty, who was no handsomer than a hundred others to be seen any evening at the play, at the opera, in the world of fashion, and who was certainly not so young as Madame de Manerville, from whom he had obtained an assignation for that very day, and who was perhaps waiting for him at that very hour.

But in the glance at once tender and wild, swift and deep, which that woman's black eyes had shot at him by stealth, there was such a world of buried sorrows and promised joys! And she had colored so fiercely when, on coming out of a shop where she had lingered a quarter of an hour, her look frankly met the Count's, who had been waiting for her hard by! In fact, there were so many *buts* and *ifs*, that, possessed by one of those mad temptations for which there is no word in any language, not even in that of the orgy, he had set out in pursuit of this woman, hunting her down like a hardened Parisian.

On the way, whether he kept behind or ahead of this damsel, he studied every detail of her person and her dress, hoping to dislodge the insane and ridiculous fancy that had taken up an abode in his brain; but he presently found in his examination a keener pleasure than he had felt only the day before in gazing at the perfect shape of a woman he loved, as she took her bath. Now and again, the unknown fair, bending her head, gave him a look like that of a kid tethered with its head to the ground, and finding

herself still the object of his pursuit, she hurried on as if to fly. Nevertheless, each time that a block of carriages, or any other delay, brought Andrea to her side, he saw her turn away from his gaze without any signs of annoyance. These signals of restrained feelings spurred the frenzied dreams that had run away with him, and he gave them the rein as far as the Rue Froid-Manteau, down which, after many windings, the damsel vanished, thinking she had thus spoilt the scent of her pursuer, who was, in fact, startled by this move.

It was now quite dark. Two women, tattooed with rouge, who were drinking black-currant liqueur at a grocer's counter, saw the young woman and called her. She paused at the door of the shop, replied in a few soft words to the cordial greeting offered her, and went on her way. Andrea, who was behind her, saw her turn into one of the darkest yards out of this street, of which he did not know the name. The repulsive appearance of the house where the heroine of his romance had been swallowed up made him feel sick. He drew back a step to study the neighborhood, and finding an ill-looking man at his elbow, he asked him for information. The man, who held a knotted stick in his right hand, placed the left on his hip and replied in a single word:

"Scoundrel!"

But on looking at the Italian, who stood in the light of a street-lamp, he assumed a servile expression.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said he, suddenly changing his tone. "There is a restaurant near this, a sort of table-d'hote, where the

cooking is pretty bad and they serve cheese in the soup. Monsieur is in search of the place, perhaps, for it is easy to see that he is an Italian – Italians are fond of velvet and of cheese. But if monsieur would like to know of a better eating-house, an aunt of mine, who lives a few steps off, is very fond of foreigners."

Andrea raised his cloak as high as his moustache, and fled from the street, spurred by the disgust he felt at this foul person, whose clothes and manner were in harmony with the squalid house into which the fair unknown had vanished. He returned with rapture to the thousand luxuries of his own rooms, and spent the evening at the Marquise d'Espard's to cleanse himself, if possible, of the smirch left by the fancy that had driven him so relentlessly during the day.

And yet, when he was in bed, the vision came back to him, but clearer and brighter than the reality. The girl was walking in front of him; now and again as she stepped across a gutter her skirts revealed a round calf; her shapely hips swayed as she walked. Again Andrea longed to speak to her – and he dared not, he, Marcosini, a Milanese nobleman! Then he saw her turn into the dark passage where she had eluded him, and blamed himself for not having followed her.

"For, after all," said he to himself, "if she really wished to avoid me and put me off her track, it is because she loves me. With women of that stamp, coyness is a proof of love. Well, if I had carried the adventure any further, it would, perhaps, have ended in disgust. I will sleep in peace."

The Count was in the habit of analyzing his keenest sensations, as men do involuntarily when they have as much brains as heart, and he was surprised when he saw the strange damsel of the Rue Froid-Manteau once more, not in the pictured splendor of his dream but in the bare reality of dreary fact. And, in spite of it all, if fancy had stripped the woman of her livery of misery, it would have spoilt her for him; for he wanted her, he longed for her, he loved her – with her muddy stockings, her slipshod feet, her straw bonnet! He wanted her in the very house where he had seen her go in.

"Am I bewitched by vice, then?" he asked himself in dismay. "Nay, I have not yet reached that point. I am but three-and-twenty, and there is nothing of the senile fop about me."

The very vehemence of the whim that held possession of him to some extent reassured him. This strange struggle, these reflections, and this love in pursuit may perhaps puzzle some persons who are accustomed to the ways of Paris life; but they may be reminded that Count Andrea Marcosini was not a Frenchman.

Brought up by two abbes, who, in obedience to a very pious father, had rarely let him out of their sight, Andrea had not fallen in love with a cousin at the age of eleven, or seduced his mother's maid by the time he was twelve; he had not studied at school, where a lad does not learn only, or best, the subjects prescribed by the State; he had lived in Paris but a few years, and he was still open to those sudden but deep impressions against

which French education and manners are so strong a protection. In southern lands a great passion is often born of a glance. A gentleman of Gascony who had tempered strong feelings by much reflection had fortified himself by many little recipes against sudden apoplexies of taste and heart, and he advised the Count to indulge at least once a month in a wild orgy to avert those storms of the soul which, but for such precautions, are apt to break out at inappropriate moments. Andrea now remembered this advice.

"Well," thought he, "I will begin to-morrow, January 1st."

This explains why Count Andrea Marcosini hovered so shyly before turning down the Rue Froid-Manteau. The man of fashion hampered the lover, and he hesitated for some time; but after a final appeal to his courage he went on with a firm step as far as the house, which he recognized without difficulty.

There he stopped once more. Was the woman really what he fancied her? Was he not on the verge of some false move?

At this juncture he remembered the Italian table d'hote, and at once jumped at the middle course, which would serve the ends alike of his curiosity and of his reputation. He went in to dine, and made his way down the passage; at the bottom, after feeling about for some time, he found a staircase with damp, slippery steps, such as to an Italian nobleman could only seem a ladder.

Invited to the first floor by the glimmer of a lamp and a strong smell of cooking, he pushed a door which stood ajar and saw a room dingy with dirt and smoke, where a wench was busy laying

a table for about twenty customers. None of the guests had yet arrived.

After looking round the dimly lighted room where the paper was dropping in rags from the walls, the gentleman seated himself by a stove which was roaring and smoking in the corner.

Attracted by the noise the Count made in coming in and disposing of his cloak, the major-domo presently appeared. Picture to yourself a lean, dried-up cook, very tall, with a nose of extravagant dimensions, casting about him from time to time, with feverish keenness, a glance that he meant to be cautious. On seeing Andrea, whose attire bespoke considerable affluence, Signor Giardini bowed respectfully.

The Count expressed his intention of taking his meals as a rule in the society of some of his fellow-countrymen; he paid in advance for a certain number of tickets, and ingenuously gave the conversation a familiar bent to enable him to achieve his purpose quickly.

Hardly had he mentioned the woman he was seeking when Signor Giardini, with a grotesque shrug, looked knowingly at his customer, a bland smile on his lips.

"*Basta*!" he exclaimed. "*Capisco*. Your Excellency has come spurred by two appetites. La Signora Gambara will not have wasted her time if she has gained the interest of a gentleman so generous as you appear to be. I can tell you in a few words all we know of the woman, who is really to be pitied.

"The husband is, I believe, a native of Cremona and has just

come here from Germany. He was hoping to get the Tedeschi to try some new music and some new instruments. Isn't it pitiable?" said Giardini, shrugging his shoulders. "Signor Gambara, who thinks himself a great composer, does not seem to me very clever in other ways. An excellent fellow with some sense and wit, and sometimes very agreeable, especially when he has had a few glasses of wine – which does not often happen, for he is desperately poor; night and day he toils at imaginary symphonies and operas instead of trying to earn an honest living. His poor wife is reduced to working for all sorts of people – the women on the streets! What is to be said? She loves her husband like a father, and takes care of him like a child.

"Many a young man has dined here to pay his court to madame; but not one has succeeded," said he, emphasizing the word. "La Signora Marianna is an honest woman, monsieur, much too honest, worse luck for her! Men give nothing for nothing nowadays. So the poor soul will die in harness.

"And do you suppose that her husband rewards her for her devotion? Pooh, my lord never gives her a smile! And all their cooking is done at the baker's; for not only does the wretched man never earn a sou; he spends all his wife can make on instruments which he carves, and lengthens, and shortens, and sets up and takes to pieces again till they produce sounds that will scare a cat; then he is happy. And yet you will find him the mildest, the gentlest of men. And, he is not idle; he is always at it. What is to be said? He is crazy and does not know his business. I

have seen him, monsieur, filing and forging his instruments and eating black bread with an appetite that I envied him – I, who have the best table in Paris.

"Yes, Excellenza, in a quarter of an hour you shall know the man I am. I have introduced certain refinements into Italian cookery that will amaze you! Excellenza, I am a Neapolitan – that is to say, a born cook. But of what use is instinct without knowledge? Knowledge! I have spent thirty years in acquiring it, and you see where it has left me. My history is that of every man of talent. My attempts, my experiments, have ruined three restaurants in succession at Naples, Parma, and Rome. To this day, when I am reduced to make a trade of my art, I more often than not give way to my ruling passion. I give these poor refugees some of my choicest dishes. I ruin myself! Folly! you will say? I know it; but how can I help it? Genius carries me away, and I cannot resist concocting a dish which smiles on my fancy.

"And they always know it, the rascals! They know, I can promise you, whether I or my wife has stood over the fire. And what is the consequence? Of sixty-odd customers whom I used to see at my table every day when I first started in this wretched place, I now see twenty on an average, and give them credit for the most part. The Piedmontese, the Savoyards, have deserted, but the connoisseurs, the true Italians, remain. And there is no sacrifice that I would not make for them. I often give them a dinner for five and twenty sous which has cost me double."

Signore Giardini's speech had such a full flavor of Neapolitan

cunning that the Count was delighted, and could have fancied himself at Gerolamo's.

"Since that is the case, my good friend," said he familiarly to the cook, "and since chance and your confidence have let me into the secret of your daily sacrifices, allow me to pay double."

As he spoke Andrea spun a forty-franc piece on the stove, out of which Giardini solemnly gave him two francs and fifty centimes in change, not without a certain ceremonious mystery that amused him hugely.

"In a few minutes now," the man added, "you will see your *donnina*. I will seat you next the husband, and if you wish to stand in his good graces, talk about music. I have invited every one for the evening, poor things. Being New Year's Day, I am treating the company to a dish in which I believe I have surpassed myself."

Signor Giardini's voice was drowned by the noisy greetings of the guests, who streamed in two and two, or one at a time, after the manner of tables-d'hote. Giardini stayed by the Count, playing the showman by telling him who the company were. He tried by his witticisms to bring a smile to the lips of a man who, as his Neapolitan instinct told him, might be a wealthy patron to turn to good account.

"This one," said he, "is a poor composer who would like to rise from song-writing to opera, and cannot. He blames the managers, music-sellers, – everybody, in fact, but himself, and he has no worse enemy. You can see – what a florid complexion, what self-conceit, how little firmness in his features! he is made to

write ballads. The man who is with him and looks like a match-hawker, is a great music celebrity – Gigelmi, the greatest Italian conductor known; but he has gone deaf, and is ending his days in penury, deprived of all that made it tolerable. Ah! here comes our great Ottoboni, the most guileless old fellow on earth; but he is suspected of being the most vindictive of all who are plotting for the regeneration of Italy. I cannot think how they can bear to banish such a good man."

And here Giardini looked narrowly at the Count, who, feeling himself under inquisition as to his politics, entrenched himself in Italian impassibility.

"A man whose business it is to cook for all comers can have no political opinions, Excellenza," Giardini went on. "But to see that worthy man, who looks more like a lamb than a lion, everybody would say what I say, were it before the Austrian ambassador himself. Besides, in these times liberty is no longer proscribed; it is going its rounds again. At least, so these good people think," said he, leaning over to speak in the Count's ear, "and why should I thwart their hopes? I, for my part, do not hate an absolute government. Excellenza, every man of talent is for depotism!

"Well, though full of genius, Ottoboni takes no end of pains to educate Italy; he writes little books to enlighten the intelligence of the children and the common people, and he smuggles them very cleverly into Italy. He takes immense trouble to reform the moral sense of our luckless country, which, after all, prefers pleasure to freedom, – and perhaps it is right."

The Count preserved such an impenetrable attitude that the cook could discover nothing of his political views.

"Ottoboni," he ran on, "is a saint; very kind-hearted; all the refugees are fond of him; for, Excellenza, a liberal may have his virtues. Oho! Here comes a journalist," said Giardini, as a man came in dressed in the absurd way which used to be attributed to a poet in a garret; his coat was threadbare, his boots split, his hat shiny, and his overcoat deplorably ancient. "Excellenza, that poor man is full of talent, and incorruptibly honest. He was born into the wrong times, for he tells the truth to everybody; no one can endure him. He writes theatrical articles for two small papers, though he is clever enough to work for the great dailies. Poor fellow!

"The rest are not worth mentioning, and Your Excellency will find them out," he concluded, seeing that on the entrance of the musician's wife the Count had ceased to listen to him.

On seeing Andrea here, Signora Marianna started visibly and a bright flush tinged her cheeks.

"Here he is!" said Giardini, in an undertone, clutching the Count's arm and nodding to a tall man. "How pale and grave he is poor man! His hobby has not trotted to his mind to-day, I fancy."

Andrea's prepossession for Marianna was crossed by the captivating charm which Gambara could not fail to exert over every genuine artist. The composer was now forty; but although his high brow was bald and lined with a few parallel, but not deep, wrinkles; in spite, too, of hollow temples where the blue veins

showed through the smooth, transparent skin, and of the deep sockets in which his black eyes were sunk, with their large lids and light lashes, the lower part of his face made him still look young, so calm was its outline, so soft the modeling. It could be seen at a glance that in this man passion had been curbed to the advantage of the intellect; that the brain alone had grown old in some great struggle.

Andrea shot a swift look at Marianna, who was watching him. And he noted the beautiful Italian head, the exquisite proportion and rich coloring that revealed one of those organizations in which every human power is harmoniously balanced, he sounded the gulf that divided this couple, brought together by fate. Well content with the promise he inferred from this dissimilarity between the husband and wife, he made no attempt to control a liking which ought to have raised a barrier between the fair Marianna and himself. He was already conscious of feeling a sort of respectful pity for this man, whose only joy she was, as he understood the dignified and serene acceptance of ill fortune that was expressed in Gambara's mild and melancholy gaze.

After expecting to see one of the grotesque figures so often set before us by German novelists and writers of *libretti*, he beheld a simple, unpretentious man, whose manners and demeanor were in nothing strange and did not lack dignity. Without the faintest trace of luxury, his dress was more decent than might have been expected from his extreme poverty, and his linen bore witness to the tender care which watched over every detail

of his existence. Andrea looked at Marianna with moistened eyes; and she did not color, but half smiled, in a way that betrayed, perhaps, some pride at this speechless homage. The Count, too thoroughly fascinated to miss the smallest indication of complaisance, fancied that she must love him, since she understood him so well.

From this moment he set himself to conquer the husband rather than the wife, turning all his batteries against the poor Gambara, who quite guilelessly went on eating Signor Giardini's *bocconi*, without thinking of their flavor.

The Count opened the conversation on some trivial subject, but at the first words he perceived that this brain, supposed to be infatuated on one point, was remarkably clear on all others, and saw that it would be far more important to enter into this very clever man's ideas than to flatter his conceits.

The rest of the company, a hungry crew whose brain only responded to the sight of a more or less good meal, showed much animosity to the luckless Gambara, and waited only till the end of the first course, to give free vent to their satire. A refugee, whose frequent leer betrayed ambitious schemes on Marianna, and who fancied he could establish himself in her good graces by trying to make her husband ridiculous, opened fire to show the newcomer how the land lay at the table-d'hote.

"It is a very long time since we have heard anything about the opera on 'Mahomet'!" cried he, with a smile at Marianna. "Can it be that Paolo Gambara, wholly given up to domestic cares,

absorbed by the charms of the chimney-corner, is neglecting his superhuman genius, leaving his talents to get cold and his imagination to go flat?"

Gambara knew all the company; he dwelt in a sphere so far above them all that he no longer cared to repel an attack. He made no reply.

"It is not given to everybody," said the journalist, "to have an intellect that can understand Monsieur Gambara's musical efforts, and that, no doubt, is why our divine maestro hesitates to come before the worthy Parisian public."

"And yet," said the ballad-monger, who had not opened his mouth but to swallow everything that came within his reach, "I know some men of talent who think highly of the judgments of Parisian critics. I myself have a pretty reputation as a musician," he went on, with an air of diffidence. "I owe it solely to my little songs in *vaudevilles*, and the success of my dance music in drawing-rooms; but I propose ere long to bring out a mass composed for the anniversary of Beethoven's death, and I expect to be better appreciated in Paris than anywhere else. You will perhaps do me the honor of hearing it?" he said, turning to Andrea.

"Thank you," said the Count. "But I do not conceive that I am gifted with the organs needful for the appreciation of French music. If you were dead, monsieur, and Beethoven had composed the mass, I would not have failed to attend the performance."

This retort put an end to the tactics of those who wanted to set Gambara off on his high horse to amuse the new guest. Andrea was already conscious of an unwillingness to expose so noble and pathetic a mania as a spectacle for so much vulgar shrewdness. It was with no base reservation that he kept up a desultory conversation, in the course of which Signor Giardini's nose not infrequently interposed between two remarks. Whenever Gambara uttered some elegant repartee or some paradoxical aphorism, the cook put his head forward, to glance with pity at the musician and with meaning at the Count, muttering in his ear, "*E matto*!"

Then came a moment when the *chef* interrupted the flow of his judicial observations to devote himself to the second course, which he considered highly important. During his absence, which was brief, Gambara leaned across to address Andrea.

"Our worthy host," said he, in an undertone, "threatens to regale us to-day with a dish of his own concocting, which I recommend you to avoid, though his wife has had an eye on him. The good man has a mania for innovations. He ruined himself by experiments, the last of which compelled him to fly from Rome without a passport – a circumstance he does not talk about. After purchasing the good-will of a popular restaurant he was trusted to prepare a banquet given by a lately made Cardinal, whose household was not yet complete. Giardini fancied he had an opportunity for distinguishing himself – and he succeeded! for that same evening he was accused of trying to poison the

whole conclave, and was obliged to leave Rome and Italy without waiting to pack up. This disaster was the last straw. Now," and Gambara put his finger to his forehead and shook his head.

"He is a good fellow, all the same," he added. "My wife will tell you that we owe him many a good turn."

Giardini now came in carefully bearing a dish which he set in the middle of the table, and he then modestly resumed his seat next to Andrea, whom he served first. As soon as he had tasted the mess, the Count felt that an impassable gulf divided the second mouthful from the first. He was much embarrassed, and very anxious not to annoy the cook, who was watching him narrowly. Though a French *restaurateur* may care little about seeing a dish scorned if he is sure of being paid for it, it is not so with an Italian, who is not often satiated with praises.

To gain time, Andrea complimented Giardini enthusiastically, but he leaned over to whisper in his ear, and slipping a gold piece into his hand under the table, begged him to go out and buy a few bottles of champagne, leaving him free to take all the credit of the treat.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.