

**HONORÉ DE
BALZAC**

JUANA

Оноре де Бальзак
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Honoré de Balzac

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CHAPTER I. EXPOSITION

Notwithstanding the discipline which Marechal Suchet had introduced into his army corps, he was unable to prevent a short period of trouble and disorder at the taking of Tarragona. According to certain fair-minded military men, this intoxication of victory bore a striking resemblance to pillage, though the marechal promptly suppressed it. Order being re-established, each regiment quartered in its respective lines, and the commandant of the city appointed, military administration began. The place assumed a mongrel aspect. Though all things were organized on a French system, the Spaniards were left free to follow "in petto" their national tastes.

This period of pillage (it is difficult to determine how long it lasted) had, like all other sublunary effects, a cause, not so difficult to discover. In the marechal's army was a regiment, composed almost entirely of Italians and commanded by a certain Colonel Eugene, a man of remarkable bravery, a second Murat, who, having entered the military service too late, obtained neither a Grand Duchy of Berg nor a Kingdom of Naples, nor balls at the Pizzo. But if he won no crown he had

ample opportunity to obtain wounds, and it was not surprising that he met with several. His regiment was composed of the scattered fragments of the Italian legion. This legion was to Italy what the colonial battalions are to France. Its permanent cantonments, established on the island of Elba, served as an honorable place of exile for the troublesome sons of good families and for those great men who have just missed greatness, whom society brands with a hot iron and designates by the term “mauvais sujets”; men who are for the most part misunderstood; whose existence may become either noble through the smile of a woman lifting them out of their rut, or shocking at the close of an orgy under the influence of some damnable reflection dropped by a drunken comrade.

Napoleon had incorporated these vigorous beings in the sixth of the line, hoping to metamorphose them finally into generals, – barring those whom the bullets might take off. But the emperor’s calculation was scarcely fulfilled, except in the matter of the bullets. This regiment, often decimated but always the same in character, acquired a great reputation for valor in the field and for wickedness in private life. At the siege of Tarragona it lost its celebrated hero, Bianchi, the man who, during the campaign, had wagered that he would eat the heart of a Spanish sentinel, and did eat it. Though Bianchi was the prince of the devils incarnate to whom the regiment owed its dual reputation, he had, nevertheless, that sort of chivalrous honor which excuses, in the army, the worst excesses. In a word, he would have been,

at an earlier period, an admirable pirate. A few days before his death he distinguished himself by a daring action which the marechal wished to reward. Bianchi refused rank, pension, and additional decoration, asking, for sole recompense, the favor of being the first to mount the breach at the assault on Tarragona. The marechal granted the request and then forgot his promise; but Bianchi forced him to remember Bianchi. The enraged hero was the first to plant our flag on the wall, where he was shot by a monk.

This historical digression was necessary, in order to explain how it was that the 6th of the line was the regiment to enter Tarragona, and why the disorder and confusion, natural enough in a city taken by storm, degenerated for a time into a slight pillage.

This regiment possessed two officers, not at all remarkable among these men of iron, who played, nevertheless, in the history we shall now relate, a somewhat important part.

The first, a captain in the quartermaster's department, an officer half civil, half military, was considered, in soldier phrase, to be fighting his own battle. He pretended bravery, boasted loudly of belonging to the 6th of the line, twirled his moustache with the air of a man who was ready to demolish everything; but his brother officers did not esteem him. The fortune he possessed made him cautious. He was nicknamed, for two reasons, "captain of crows." In the first place, he could smell powder a league off, and took wing at the sound of a musket; secondly, the nickname

was based on an innocent military pun, which his position in the regiment warranted. Captain Montefiore, of the illustrious Montefiore family of Milan (though the laws of the Kingdom of Italy forbade him to bear his title in the French service) was one of the handsomest men in the army. This beauty may have been among the secret causes of his prudence on fighting days. A wound which might have injured his nose, cleft his forehead, or scarred his cheek, would have destroyed one of the most beautiful Italian faces which a woman ever dreamed of in all its delicate proportions. This face, not unlike the type which Girodet has given to the dying young Turk, in the "Revolt at Cairo," was instinct with that melancholy by which all women are more or less duped.

The Marquis de Montefiore possessed an entailed property, but his income was mortgaged for a number of years to pay off the costs of certain Italian escapades which are inconceivable in Paris. He had ruined himself in supporting a theatre at Milan in order to force upon a public a very inferior prima donna, whom he was said to love madly. A fine future was therefore before him, and he did not care to risk it for the paltry distinction of a bit of red ribbon. He was not a brave man, but he was certainly a philosopher; and he had precedents, if we may use so parliamentary an expression. Did not Philip the Second register a vow after the battle of Saint Quentin that never again would he put himself under fire? And did not the Duke of Alba encourage him in thinking that the worst trade in the world was the

involuntary exchange of a crown for a bullet? Hence, Montefiore was Philippiste in his capacity of rich marquis and handsome man; and in other respects also he was quite as profound a politician as Philip the Second himself. He consoled himself for his nickname, and for the disesteem of the regiment by thinking that his comrades were blackguards, whose opinion would never be of any consequence to him if by chance they survived the present war, which seemed to be one of extermination. He relied on his face to win him promotion; he saw himself made colonel by feminine influence and a carefully managed transition from captain of equipment to orderly officer, and from orderly officer to aide-de-camp on the staff of some easy-going marshal. By that time, he reflected, he should come into his property of a hundred thousand scudi a year, some journal would speak of him as "the brave Montefiore," he would marry a girl of rank, and no one would dare to dispute his courage or verify his wounds.

Captain Montefiore had one friend in the person of the quartermaster, – a Provencal, born in the neighborhood of Nice, whose name was Diard. A friend, whether at the galleys or in the garret of an artist, consoles for many troubles. Now Montefiore and Diard were two philosophers, who consoled each other for their present lives by the study of vice, as artists soothe the immediate disappointment of their hopes by the expectation of future fame. Both regarded the war in its results, not its action; they simply considered those who died for glory fools. Chance had made soldiers of them; whereas their natural proclivities

would have seated them at the green table of a congress. Nature had poured Montefiore into the mould of a Rizzio, and Diard into that of a diplomatist. Both were endowed with that nervous, feverish, half-feminine organization, which is equally strong for good or evil, and from which may emanate, according to the impulse of these singular temperaments, a crime or a generous action, a noble deed or a base one. The fate of such natures depends at any moment on the pressure, more or less powerful, produced on their nervous systems by violent and transitory passions.

Diard was considered a good accountant, but no soldier would have trusted him with his purse or his will, possibly because of the antipathy felt by all real soldiers against the bureaucrats. The quartermaster was not without courage and a certain juvenile generosity, sentiments which many men give up as they grow older, by dint of reasoning or calculating. Variable as the beauty of a fair woman, Diard was a great boaster and a great talker, talking of everything. He said he was artistic, and he made prizes (like two celebrated generals) of works of art, solely, he declared, to preserve them for posterity. His military comrades would have been puzzled indeed to form a correct judgment of him. Many of them, accustomed to draw upon his funds when occasion obliged them, thought him rich; but in truth, he was a gambler, and gamblers may be said to have nothing of their own. Montefiore was also a gambler, and all the officers of the regiment played with the pair; for, to the shame of men be it said, it is not a rare

thing to see persons gambling together around a green table who, when the game is finished, will not bow to their companions, feeling no respect for them. Montefiore was the man with whom Bianchi made his bet about the heart of the Spanish sentinel.

Montefiore and Diard were among the last to mount the breach at Tarragona, but the first in the heart of the town as soon as it was taken. Accidents of this sort happen in all attacks, but with this pair of friends they were customary. Supporting each other, they made their way bravely through a labyrinth of narrow and gloomy little streets in quest of their personal objects; one seeking for painted madonnas, the other for madonnas of flesh and blood.

In what part of Tarragona it happened I cannot say, but Diard presently recognized by its architecture the portal of a convent, the gate of which was already battered in. Springing into the cloister to put a stop to the fury of the soldiers, he arrived just in time to prevent two Parisians from shooting a Virgin by Albano. In spite of the moustache with which in their military fanaticism they had decorated her face, he bought the picture. Montefiore, left alone during this episode, noticed, nearly opposite the convent, the house and shop of a draper, from which a shot was fired at him at the moment when his eyes caught a flaming glance from those of an inquisitive young girl, whose head was advanced under the shelter of a blind. Tarragona taken by assault, Tarragona furious, firing from every window, Tarragona violated, with dishevelled hair, and half-naked, was

indeed an object of curiosity, – the curiosity of a daring Spanish woman. It was a magnified bull-fight.

Montefiore forgot the pillage, and heard, for the moment, neither the cries, nor the musketry, nor the growling of the artillery. The profile of that Spanish girl was the most divinely delicious thing which he, an Italian libertine, weary of Italian beauty, and dreaming of an impossible woman because he was tired of all women, had ever seen. He could still quiver, he, who had wasted his fortune on a thousand follies, the thousand passions of a young and blase man – the most abominable monster that society generates. An idea came into his head, suggested perhaps by the shot of the draper-patriot, namely, – to set fire to the house. But he was now alone, and without any means of action; the fighting was centred in the market-place, where a few obstinate beings were still defending the town. A better idea then occurred to him. Diard came out of the convent, but Montefiore said not a word of his discovery; on the contrary, he accompanied him on a series of rambles about the streets. But the next day, the Italian had obtained his military billet in the house of the draper, – an appropriate lodging for an equipment captain!

The house of the worthy Spaniard consisted, on the ground-floor, of a vast and gloomy shop, externally fortified with stout iron bars, such as we see in the old storehouses of the rue des Lombards. This shop communicated with a parlor lighted from an interior courtyard, a large room breathing the very spirit of

the middle-ages, with smoky old pictures, old tapestries, antique "brazero," a plumed hat hanging to a nail, the musket of the guerrillas, and the cloak of Bartholo. The kitchen adjoined this unique living-room, where the inmates took their meals and warmed themselves over the dull glow of the brazier, smoking cigars and discoursing bitterly to animate all hearts with hatred against the French. Silver pitchers and precious dishes of plate and porcelain adorned a buttery shelf of the old fashion. But the light, sparsely admitted, allowed these dazzling objects to show but slightly; all things, as in pictures of the Dutch school, looked brown, even the faces. Between the shop and this living-room, so fine in color and in its tone of patriarchal life, was a dark staircase leading to a ware-room where the light, carefully distributed, permitted the examination of goods. Above this were the apartments of the merchant and his wife. Rooms for an apprentice and a servant-woman were in a garret under the roof, which projected over the street and was supported by buttresses, giving a somewhat fantastic appearance to the exterior of the building. These chambers were now taken by the merchant and his wife who gave up their own rooms to the officer who was billeted upon them, – probably because they wished to avoid all quarrelling.

Montefiore gave himself out as a former Spanish subject, persecuted by Napoleon, whom he was serving against his will; and these semi-lies had the success he expected. He was invited to share the meals of the family, and was treated with the respect

due to his name, his birth, and his title. He had his reasons for capturing the good-will of the merchant and his wife; he scented his madonna as the ogre scented the youthful flesh of Tom Thumb and his brothers. But in spite of the confidence he managed to inspire in the worthy pair the latter maintained the most profound silence as to the said madonna; and not only did the captain see no trace of the young girl during the first day he spent under the roof of the honest Spaniard, but he heard no sound and came upon no indication which revealed her presence in that ancient building. Supposing that she was the only daughter of the old couple, Montefiore concluded they had consigned her to the garret, where, for the time being, they made their home.

But no revelation came to betray the hiding-place of that precious treasure. The marquis glued his face to the lozenge-shaped leaded panes which looked upon the black-walled enclosure of the inner courtyard; but in vain; he saw no gleam of light except from the windows of the old couple, whom he could see and hear as they went and came and talked and coughed. Of the young girl, not a shadow!

Montefiore was far too wary to risk the future of his passion by exploring the house nocturnally, or by tapping softly on the doors. Discovery by that hot patriot, the mercer, suspicious as a Spaniard must be, meant ruin infallibly. The captain therefore resolved to wait patiently, resting his faith on time and the imperfection of men, which always results – even with scoundrels, and how much more with honest men! – in the

neglect of precautions.

The next day he discovered a hammock in the kitchen, showing plainly where the servant-woman slept. As for the apprentice, his bed was evidently made on the shop counter. During supper on the second day Montefiore succeeded, by cursing Napoleon, in smoothing the anxious forehead of the merchant, a grave, black-visaged Spaniard, much like the faces formerly carved on the handles of Moorish lutes; even the wife let a gay smile of hatred appear in the folds of her elderly face. The lamp and the reflections of the brazier illumined fantastically the shadows of the noble room. The mistress of the house offered a “cigarrito” to their semi-compatriot. At this moment the rustle of a dress and the fall of a chair behind the tapestry were plainly heard.

“Ah!” cried the wife, turning pale, “may the saints assist us! God grant no harm has happened!”

“You have some one in the next room, have you not?” said Montefiore, giving no sign of emotion.

The draper dropped a word of imprecation against the girls. Evidently alarmed, the wife opened a secret door, and led in, half fainting, the Italian’s madonna, to whom he was careful to pay no attention; only, to avoid a too-studied indifference, he glanced at the girl before he turned to his host and said in his own language:

“Is that your daughter, signore?”

Perez de Lagounia (such was the merchant’s name) had large

commercial relations with Genoa, Florence, and Livorno; he knew Italian, and replied in the same language: —

“No; if she were my daughter I should take less precautions. The child is confided to our care, and I would rather die than see any evil happen to her. But how is it possible to put sense into a girl of eighteen?”

“She is very handsome,” said Montefiore, coldly, not looking at her face again.

“Her mother’s beauty is celebrated,” replied the merchant, briefly.

They continued to smoke, watching each other. Though Montefiore compelled himself not to give the slightest look which might contradict his apparent coldness, he could not refrain, at a moment when Perez turned his head to expectorate, from casting a rapid glance at the young girl, whose sparkling eyes met his. Then, with that science of vision which gives to a libertine, as it does to a sculptor, the fatal power of disrobing, if we may so express it, a woman, and divining her shape by inductions both rapid and sagacious, he beheld one of those masterpieces of Nature whose creation appears to demand as its right all the happiness of love. Here was a fair young face, on which the sun of Spain had cast faint tones of bistre which added to its expression of seraphic calmness a passionate pride, like a flash of light infused beneath that diaphanous complexion, — due, perhaps, to the Moorish blood which vivified and colored it. Her hair, raised to the top of her head, fell thence with black

reflections round the delicate transparent ears and defined the outlines of a blue-veined throat. These luxuriant locks brought into strong relief the dazzling eyes and the scarlet lips of a well-arched mouth. The bodice of the country set off the lines of a figure that swayed as easily as a branch of willow. She was not the Virgin of Italy, but the Virgin of Spain, of Murillo, the only artist daring enough to have painted the Mother of God intoxicated with the joy of conceiving the Christ, – the glowing imagination of the boldest and also the warmest of painters.

In this young girl three things were united, a single one of which would have sufficed for the glory of a woman: the purity of the pearl in the depths of ocean; the sublime exaltation of the Spanish Saint Teresa; and a passion of love which was ignorant of itself. The presence of such a woman has the virtue of a talisman. Montefiore no longer felt worn and jaded. That young girl brought back his youthful freshness.

But, though the apparition was delightful, it did not last. The girl was taken back to the secret chamber, where the servant-woman carried to her openly both light and food.

“You do right to hide her,” said Montefiore in Italian. “I will keep your secret. The devil! we have generals in our army who are capable of abducting her.”

Montefiore’s infatuation went so far as to suggest to him the idea of marrying her. He accordingly asked her history, and Perez very willingly told him the circumstances under which she had become his ward. The prudent Spaniard was led to make

this confidence because he had heard of Montefiore in Italy, and knowing his reputation was desirous to let him see how strong were the barriers which protected the young girl from the possibility of seduction. Though the good-man was gifted with a certain patriarchal eloquence, in keeping with his simple life and customs, his tale will be improved by abridgment.

At the period when the French Revolution changed the manners and morals of every country which served as the scene of its wars, a street prostitute came to Tarragona, driven from Venice at the time of its fall. The life of this woman had been a tissue of romantic adventures and strange vicissitudes. To her, oftener than to any other woman of her class, it had happened, thanks to the caprice of great lords struck with her extraordinary beauty, to be literally gorged with gold and jewels and all the delights of excessive wealth, – flowers, carriages, pages, maids, palaces, pictures, journeys (like those of Catherine II.); in short, the life of a queen, despotic in her caprices and obeyed, often beyond her own imaginings. Then, without herself, or any one, chemist, physician, or man of science, being able to discover how her gold evaporated, she would find herself back in the streets, poor, denuded of everything, preserving nothing but her all-powerful beauty, yet living on without thought or care of the past, the present, or the future. Cast, in her poverty, into the hands of some poor gambling officer, she attached herself to him as a dog to its master, sharing the discomforts of the military life, which indeed she comforted, as content under the roof of a garret

as beneath the silken hangings of opulence. Italian and Spanish both, she fulfilled very scrupulously the duties of religion, and more than once she had said to love: —

“Return to-morrow; to-day I belong to God.”

But this slime permeated with gold and perfumes, this careless indifference to all things, these unbridled passions, these religious beliefs cast into that heart like diamonds into mire, this life begun, and ended, in a hospital, these gambling chances transferred to the soul, to the very existence, — in short, this great alchemy, for which vice lit the fire beneath the crucible in which fortunes were melted up and the gold of ancestors and the honor of great names evaporated, proceeded from a *cause*, a particular heredity, faithfully transmitted from mother to daughter since the middle ages. The name of this woman was La Marana. In her family, existing solely in the female line, the idea, person, name and power of a father had been completely unknown since the thirteenth century. The name Marana was to her what the designation of Stuart is to the celebrated royal race of Scotland, a name of distinction substituted for the patronymic name by the constant heredity of the same office devolving on the family.

Formerly, in France, Spain, and Italy, when those three countries had, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, mutual interests which united and disunited them by perpetual warfare, the name Marana served to express in its general sense, a prostitute. In those days women of that sort had a certain rank in the world of which nothing in our day can give an idea. Ninon de

l'Enclos and Marian Delorme have alone played, in France, the role of the Imperias, Catalinas, and Maranas who, in preceding centuries, gathered around them the cassock, gown, and sword. An Imperia built I forget which church in Rome in a frenzy of repentance, as Rhodope built, in earlier times, a pyramid in Egypt. The name Marana, inflicted at first as a disgrace upon the singular family with which we are now concerned, had ended by becoming its veritable name and by ennobling its vice by incontestable antiquity.

One day, a day of opulence or of penury I know not which, for this event was a secret between herself and God, but assuredly it was in a moment of repentance and melancholy, this Marana of the nineteenth century stood with her feet in the slime and her head raised to heaven. She cursed the blood in her veins, she cursed herself, she trembled lest she should have a daughter, and she swore, as such women swear, on the honor and with the will of the galleys – the firmest will, the most scrupulous honor that there is on earth – she swore, before an altar, and believing in that altar, to make her daughter a virtuous creature, a saint, and thus to gain, after that long line of lost women, criminals in love, an angel in heaven for them all.

The vow once made, the blood of the Maranas spoke; the courtesan returned to her reckless life, a thought the more within her heart. At last she loved, with the violent love of such women, as Henrietta Wilson loved Lord Ponsonby, as Mademoiselle Dupuis loved Bolingbroke, as the Marchesa Pescara loved her

husband – but no, she did not love, she adored one of those fair men, half women, to whom she gave the virtues which she had not, striving to keep for herself all that there was of vice between them. It was from that weak man, that senseless marriage unblessed by God or man which happiness is thought to justify, but which no happiness absolves, and for which men blush at last, that she had a daughter, a daughter to save, a daughter for whom to desire a noble life and the chastity she had not. Henceforth, happy or not happy, opulent or beggared, she had in her heart a pure, untainted sentiment, the highest of all human feelings because the most disinterested. Love has its egotism, but motherhood has none. La Marana was a mother like none other; for, in her total, her eternal shipwreck, motherhood might still redeem her. To accomplish sacredly through life the task of sending a pure soul to heaven, was not that a better thing than a tardy repentance? was it not, in truth, the only spotless prayer which she could lift to God?

So, when this daughter, when her Marie-Juana-Pepita (she would fain have given her all the saints in the calendar as guardians), when this dear little creature was granted to her, she became possessed of so high an idea of the dignity of motherhood that she entreated vice to grant her a respite. She made herself virtuous and lived in solitude. No more fetes, no more orgies, no more love. All joys, all fortunes were centred now in the cradle of her child. The tones of that infant voice made an oasis for her soul in the burning sands of her existence.

That sentiment could not be measured or estimated by any other. Did it not, in fact, comprise all human sentiments, all heavenly hopes? La Marana was so resolved not to soil her daughter with any stain other than that of birth, that she sought to invest her with social virtues; she even obliged the young father to settle a handsome patrimony upon the child and to give her his name. Thus the girl was not known as Juana Marana, but as Juana di Mancini.

Then, after seven years of joy, and kisses, and intoxicating happiness, the time came when the poor Marana deprived herself of her idol. That Juana might never bow her head under their hereditary shame, the mother had the courage to renounce her child for her child's sake, and to seek, not without horrible suffering, for another mother, another home, other principles to follow, other and saintlier examples to imitate. The abdication of a mother is either a revolting act or a sublime one; in this case, was it not sublime?

At Tarragona a lucky accident threw the Lagounias in her way, under circumstances which enabled her to recognize the integrity of the Spaniard and the noble virtue of his wife. She came to them at a time when her proposal seemed that of a liberating angel. The fortune and honor of the merchant, momentarily compromised, required a prompt and secret succor. La Marana made over to the husband the whole sum she had obtained of the father for Juana's "dot," requiring neither acknowledgment nor interest. According to her own code of honor, a contract,

a trust, was a thing of the heart, and God its supreme judge. After stating the miseries of her position to Dona Lagounia, she confided her daughter and her daughter's fortune to the fine old Spanish honor, pure and spotless, which filled the precincts of that ancient house. Dona Lagounia had no child, and she was only too happy to obtain one to nurture. The mother then parted from her Juana, convinced that the child's future was safe, and certain of having found her a mother, a mother who would bring her up as a Mancini, and not as a Marana.

Leaving her child in the simple modest house of the merchant where the burgher virtues reigned, where religion and sacred sentiments and honor filled the air, the poor prostitute, the disinherited mother was enabled to bear her trial by visions of Juana, virgin, wife, and mother, a mother throughout her life. On the threshold of that house Marana left a tear such as the angels garner up.

Since that day of mourning and hope the mother, drawn by some invincible presentiment, had thrice returned to see her daughter. Once when Juana fell ill with a dangerous complaint: "I knew it," she said to Perez when she reached the house.

Asleep, she had seen her Juana dying. She nursed her and watched her, until one morning, sure of the girl's convalescence, she kissed her, still asleep, on the forehead and left her without betraying whom she was. A second time the Marana came to the church where Juana made her first communion. Simply dressed, concealing herself behind a column, the exiled mother

recognized herself in her daughter such as she once had been, pure as the snow fresh-fallen on the Alps. A courtesan even in maternity, the Marana felt in the depths of her soul a jealous sentiment, stronger for the moment than that of love, and she left the church, incapable of resisting any longer the desire to kill Dona Lagounia, as she sat there, with radiant face, too much the mother of her child. A third and last meeting had taken place between mother and daughter in the streets of Milan, to which city the merchant and his wife had paid a visit. The Marana drove through the Corso in all the splendor of a sovereign; she passed her daughter like a flash of lightning and was not recognized. Horrible anguish! To this Marana, surfeited with kisses, one was lacking, a single one, for which she would have bartered all the others: the joyous, girlish kiss of a daughter to a mother, an honored mother, a mother in whom shone all the domestic virtues. Juana living was dead to her. One thought revived the soul of the courtesan – a precious thought! Juana was henceforth safe. She might be the humblest of women, but at least she was not what her mother was – an infamous courtesan.

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