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读

这个“鬼东西”叫查理，正是巴黎的葛朗台之子，长得眉清目秀，一表人才。就在几天前，他的父亲让他去索莫城的伯父家住几个月，而查理首次来到外省，也想炫耀一下作为时尚青年的优越感。

然而查理万万没想到，伯父就住在索莫城。但他仍以为伯父家会是城里的一处豪华公馆，所以基于礼貌，特地请图尔的理发师为他重新整烫了他那头漂亮的栗色短发，衬衣圆领和黑缎子领带相得益彰，灰色的长裤有着精细的黑色丝绣图案。

现在您就会明白，为什么当那几位索莫城的人和巴黎青年相见时，彼此都大吃一惊了。请您看看远道而来的客人那高雅的风度，再想象一下三位克洛肖的情形吧。他们那棕红色的衬衫领子皱巴巴的，因为半年才洗一次而早已失去光泽。欧也妮却从来没有见过如此完美无瑕的人，当她闻到那漂亮而闪闪发亮的鬃发散发出的香味时，不由得春情萌动。

大家都在审视着查理，无须担心会惹主人生气。因为葛朗台正在专心阅读查理带来的那封信，甚至拿去了桌子上仅有的一根蜡烛。

葛朗台太太和娜依去帮查理铺床了。当她们认为一切都妥了的时候，欧也妮却对她们说要重新再来。她要求娜依用暖炉把被褥烘热，还瞒着父亲偷偷抱来一大堆木柴，接着跑回大厅，拿来一只六角形的水晶杯和一把快生锈的镀金小勺，得意地把这些宝贝放在壁炉边。在这短短的时间内，她想到的主意比出生以来想到的主意的总和更多。

就在欧也妮和母亲千方百计地布置房间时，葛朗台仍然在聚精会神地看信，他的神情没有逃过公证人和庭长的眼睛。信上的内容是这样的：

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一表人才的查理

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“家兄：我们分别已经二十年了。当你收到这封信时，我已经不在人世了。我不愿意忍受破产的耻辱，我有将近四百万的欠债，而我库存的葡萄酒却卖不出去，这是因为你的葡萄丰收的缘故。但是，我疼爱的儿子却对此全然不知。家兄，您是我的兄长，我现在是为了我的儿子向您祈求！可怜的孩子从未品尝过贫穷的滋味，可是他现在已倾家荡产，孤身一人……我将他交给你，希望你将来用适当的方式，将我的死和他的未来的命运告诉他，让他认你为慈父。但是别让他骤然失去悠闲自在的生活！长兄啊！如果你给他一批远销海外的货物，他一定会将资金如数归还给你。葛朗台，你一定会给他资金的吧！如果我的儿子得不到你的救助，我将无止境地祈求上帝降罪于你。永别了大哥，我将儿子托付于你。”

葛朗台将信折好，压抑着内心的激情，装出一副担心的神态看了看侄子。

客人们见状，都知趣地告辞了。

*N*anon took one of the candles and went to open the door, followed by her master.

“Grandet! Grandet!” cried his wife, moved by a sudden impulse of fear, and running to the door of the room.

All the players looked at each other.

“Suppose we all go?” said Monsieur des Grassins; “that knock strikes me as evil-intentioned.”

Hardly was Monsieur des Grassins allowed to see the figure of a young man, accompanied by a porter from the coach-office carrying two large trunks and dragging a carpet-bag after him, than Monsieur Grandet turned roughly on his wife and said,—

“Madame Grandet, go back to your lot; leave me to speak with monsieur.”

Then he pulled the door quickly to, and the excited players returned to their seats, but did not continue the game.

“Is it any one belonging to Saumur, Monsieur des Grassins?” asked his wife.

“No, it is a traveller.”

“He must have come from Paris.”

“Just so,” said the notary, pulling out his watch, which was two inches thick and looked like a Dutch man-of-war; “it’s nine o’clock; the diligence of the Grand Bureau is never late.”

“Is the gentleman young?” inquired the Abbe Cruchot.

“Yes,” answered Monsieur des Grassins, “and he has brought luggage which must weigh nearly three tons.”

“Nanon does not come back,” said Eugenie.

“It must be one of your relations,” remarked the president.

“Let us go on with our game,” said Madame Grandet gently. “I know from Monsieur Grandet’s tone of voice that he is annoyed; perhaps he would not like to find us talking of his affairs.”

“Mademoiselle,” said Adolphe to his neighbor, “it is no doubt your cousin Grandet,—a very good-looking young man; I met him at the ball of Monsieur de Nucingen.” Adolphe did not go on, for his mother trod on his toes; and then, asking him aloud for two sous to put on her stake, she whispered: “Will you hold your tongue, you great goose!”

At this moment Grandet returned, without la Grande Nanon, whose steps, together with those of the porter, echoed up the staircase; and he was followed by the traveller who had excited such curiosity and so filled the lively imaginations of those present that his arrival at this dwelling, and his sudden fall into the midst of this assembly, can only be likened to that of a snail into a beehive, or the introduction of a peacock into some village poultry-yard.

“Sit down near the fire,” said Grandet.

Before seating himself, the young stranger saluted the assembled company very gracefully. The men rose to answer by a courteous inclination, and the women made a ceremonious bow.

“You are cold, no doubt, monsieur,” said Madame Grandet; “you have, perhaps, travelled from—”

“Just like all women!” said the old wine-grower, looking up from a letter he was reading. “Do let monsieur rest himself!”

“But, father, perhaps monsieur would like to take something,” said Eugenie.

“He has got a tongue,” said the old man sternly.

The stranger was the only person surprised by this scene; all the others were well-used to the despotic ways of the master. However, after the two questions and the two replies had been exchanged, the newcomer rose, turned his back towards the fire, lifted one foot so as to warm the sole of its boot, and said to Eugenie,—

“Thank you, my cousin, but I dined at Tours. And,” he added, looking at Grandet, “I need nothing; I am not even tired.”

“Monsieur has come from the capital?” asked Madame des Grassins.

Monsieur Charles,—such was the name of the son of Monsieur Grandet of Paris,—hearing himself addressed, took a little eye-glass, suspended by a chain from his neck, applied it to his right eye to examine what was on the table, and also the persons sitting round it. He ogled Madame des Grassins with much impertinence, and said to her, after he had observed all he wished,—

“Yes, madame. You are playing at loto, aunt,” he added. “Do not let me interrupt you, I beg; go on with your game: it is too amusing to leave.”

“I was certain it was the cousin,” thought Madame des Grassins, casting repeated glances at him.

“Forty-seven!” cried the old abbe. “Mark it down, Madame des Grassins. Isn’t that your number?”

Monsieur des Grassins put a counter on his wife’s card, who sat watching first the cousin from Paris and then Eugenie, without thinking of her loto, a prey to mournful presentiments. From time to time the young the heiress glanced furtively at her cousin, and the banker’s wife easily detected a *crescendo* of surprise and curiosity in her mind.

Monsieur Charles Grandet, a handsome young man of twenty-two, presented at this moment a singular contrast to the worthy provincials, who, considerably disgusted by his aristocratic manners, were all studying him with sarcastic intent. This needs an explanation. At twenty-two, young people are still so near childhood that they often conduct themselves childishly. In all probability, out of every hundred of them fully ninety-nine would have behaved precisely as Monsieur Charles Grandet was now behaving.

Some days earlier than this his father had told him to go and spend several

months with his uncle at Saumur. Perhaps Monsieur Grandet was thinking of Eugenie. Charles, sent for the first time in his life into the provinces, took a fancy to make his appearance with the superiority of a man of fashion, to reduce the whole arrondissement to despair by his luxury, and to make his visit an epoch, importing into those country regions all the refinements of Parisian life. In short, to explain it in one word, he mean to pass more time at Saumur in brushing his nails than he ever thought of doing in Paris, and to assume the extra nicety and elegance of dress which a young man of fashion often lays aside for a certain negligence which in itself is not devoid of grace. Charles therefore brought with him a complete hunting-costume, the finest gun, the best hunting-knife in the prettiest sheath to be found in all Paris. He brought his whole collection of waistcoats. They were of all kinds,—gray, black, white, scarabaeus-colored: some were shot with gold, some spangled, some *chined*; some were double-breasted and crossed like a shawl, others were straight in the collar; some had turned-over collars, some buttoned up to the top with gilt buttons. He brought every variety of collar and cravat in fashion at that epoch. He brought two of Buisson's coats and all his finest linen He brought his pretty gold toilet-set,—a present from his mother. He brought all his dandy knick-knacks, not forgetting a ravishing little desk presented to him by the most amiable of women,—amiable for him, at least,—a fine lady whom he called Annette and who at this moment was travelling, matrimonially and wearily, in Scotland, a victim to certain suspicions which required a passing sacrifice of happiness; in the desk was much pretty note-paper on which to write to her once a fortnight.

In short, it was as complete a cargo of Parisian frivolities as it was possible for him to get together,—a collection of all the implements of husbandry with which the youth of leisure tills his life, from the little whip which helps to begin a duel, to the handsomely chased pistols which end it. His father having told him to travel alone and modestly, he had taken the coupe of the diligence all to himself, rather pleased at not having to damage a delightful travelling-carriage ordered for a journey on which he was to meet his Annette, the great lady who, etc.,—whom he intended to rejoin at Baden in the following June. Charles expected to meet scores of people at his uncle's house,

to hunt in his uncle's forests,—to live, in short, the usual chateau life; he did not know that his uncle was in Saumur, and had only inquired about him incidentally when asking the way to Froidfond. Hearing that he was in town, he supposed that he should find him in a suitable mansion.

In order that he might make a becoming first appearance before his uncle either at Saumur or at Froidfond, he had put on his most elegant travelling attire, simple yet exquisite,—“adorable,” to use the word which in those days summed up the special perfections of a man or a thing. At Tours a hairdresser had re-curled his beautiful chestnut locks; there he changed his linen and put on a black satin cravat, which, combined with a round shirt-collar, framed his fair and smiling countenance agreeably. A travelling great-coat, only half buttoned up, nipped in his waist and disclosed a cashmere waistcoat crossed in front, beneath which was another waistcoat of white material. His watch, negligently slipped into a pocket, was fastened by a short gold chain to a buttonhole. His gray trousers, buttoned up at the sides, were set off at the seams with patterns of black silk embroidery. He gracefully twirled a cane, whose chased gold knob did not mar the freshness of his gray gloves. And to complete all, his cap was in excellent taste. None but a Parisian, and a Parisian of the upper spheres, could thus array himself without appearing ridiculous; none other could give the harmony of self-conceit to all these fopperies, which were carried off, however, with a dashing air,—the air of a young man who has fine pistols, a sure aim, and Annette.

Now if you wish to understand the mutual amazement of the provincial party and the young Parisian; if you would clearly see the brilliance which the traveller's elegance cast among the gray shadows of the room and upon the faces of this family group,—endeavor to picture to your minds the Cruchots. All three took snuff, and had long ceased to repress the habit of snivelling or to remove the brown blotches which strewed the frills of their dingy shirts and the yellowing creases of their crumpled collars. Their flabby cravats were twisted into ropes as soon as they wound them about their throats. The enormous quantity of linen which allowed these people to have their clothing washed only once in six months, and to keep it during that time in the depths of their closets, also enabled time to lay its grimy and decaying stains upon it. There

was perfect unison of ill-grace and senility about them; their faces, as faded as their threadbare coats, as creased as their trousers, were worn-out, shrivelled-up, and puckered. As for the others, the general negligence of their dress, which was incomplete and wanting in freshness,—like the toilet of all country places, where insensibly people cease to dress for others and come to think seriously of the price of a pair of gloves,—was in keeping with the negligence of the Cruchots. A horror of fashion was the only point on which the Grassinists and the Cruchotines agreed.

When the Parisian took up his eye-glass to examine the strange accessories of this dwelling,—the joists of the ceiling, the color of the woodwork, and the specks which the flies had left there in sufficient number to punctuate the “Moniteur” and the “Encyclopaedia of Sciences,”—the loto-players lifted their noses and looked at him with as much curiosity as they might have felt about a giraffe. Monsieur des Grassins and his son, to whom the appearance of a man of fashion was not wholly unknown, were nevertheless as much astonished as their neighbors, whether it was that they fell under the indefinable influence of the general feeling, or that they really shared it as with satirical glances they seemed to say to their compatriots,—

“That is what you see in Paris!”

They were able to examine Charles at their leisure without fearing to displease the master of the house. Grandet was absorbed in the long letter which he held in his hand; and to read it he had taken the only candle upon the card-table, paying no heed to his guests or their pleasure. Eugenie, to whom such a type of perfection, whether of dress or of person, was absolutely unknown, thought she beheld in her cousin a being descended from seraphic spheres. She inhaled with delight the fragrance wafted from the graceful curls of that brilliant head. She would have liked to touch the soft kid of the delicate gloves. She envied Charles his small hands, his complexion, the freshness and refinement of his features. In short,—if it is possible to sum up the effect this elegant being produced upon an ignorant young girl perpetually employed in darning stockings or in mending her father’s clothes, and whose life flowed on beneath these unclean rafters, seeing none but occasional passers along the silent street,—this vision of her cousin roused in her soul an emotion of

delicate desire like that inspired in a young man by the fanciful pictures of women drawn by Westall for the English “Keepsakes,” and that engraved by the Findens with so clever a tool that we fear, as we breathe upon the paper, that the celestial apparitions may be wafted away. Charles drew from his pocket a handkerchief embroidered by the great lady now travelling in Scotland. As Eugenie saw this pretty piece of work, done in the vacant hours which were lost to love, she looked at her cousin to see if it were possible that he meant to make use of it. The manners of the young man, his gestures, the way in which he took up his eye-glass, his affected superciliousness, his contemptuous glance at the coffer which had just given so much pleasure to the rich heiress, and which he evidently regarded as without value, or even as ridiculous,—all these things, which shocked the Cruchots and the des Grassins, pleased Eugenie so deeply that before she slept she dreamed long dreams of her phoenix cousin.

The loto-numbers were drawn very slowly, and presently the game came suddenly to an end. La Grand Nanon entered and said aloud: “Madame, I want the sheets for monsieur’s bed.”

Madame Grandet followed her out. Madame des Grassins said in a low voice: “Let us keep our sous and stop playing.” Each took his or her two sous from the chipped saucer in which they had been put; then the party moved in a body toward the fire.

“Have you finished your game?” said Grandet, without looking up from his letter.

“Yes, yes!” replied Madame des Grassins, taking a seat near Charles.

Eugenie, prompted by a thought often born in the heart of a young girl when sentiment enters it for the first time, left the room to go and help her mother and Nanon. Had an able confessor then questioned her she would, no doubt, have avowed to him that she thought neither of her mother nor of Nanon, but was pricked by a poignant desire to look after her cousin’s room and concern herself with her cousin; to supply what might be needed, to remedy any forgetfulness, to see that all was done to make it, as far as possible, suitable and elegant; and, in fact, she arrived in time to prove to her mother and Nanon that everything still remained to be done. She put into Nanon’s head the notion of passing a warming-pan between the sheets. She herself covered the old table

with a cloth and requested Nanon to change it every morning; she convinced her mother that it was necessary to light a good fire, and persuaded Nanon to bring up a great pile of wood into the corridor without saying anything to her father. She ran to get, from one of the corner-shelves of the hall, a tray of old lacquer which was part of the inheritance of the late Monsieur de la Bertelliere, catching up at the same time a six-sided crystal goblet, a little tarnished gilt spoon, an antique flask engraved with cupids, all of which she put triumphantly on the corner of her cousin's chimney-piece. More ideas surged through her head in one quarter of an hour than she had ever had since she came into the world.

"Mamma," she said, "my cousin will never bear the smell of a tallow candle; suppose we buy a wax one?" And she darted, swift as a bird, to get the five-franc piece which she had just received for her monthly expenses. "Here, Nanon," she cried, "quick!"

"What will your father say?" This terrible remonstrance was uttered by Madame Grandet as she beheld her daughter armed with an old Sevres sugar-basin which Grandet had brought home from the chateau of Froidfond. "And where will you get the sugar? Are you crazy?"

"Mamma, Nanon can buy some sugar as well as the candle."

"But your father?"

"Surely his nephew ought not to go without a glass of *eau sucrée*? Besides, he will not notice it."

"Your father sees everything," said Madame Grandet, shaking her head.

Nanon hesitated; she knew her master.

"Come, Nanon, go,—because it is my birthday."

Nanon gave a loud laugh as she heard the first little jest her young mistress had ever made, and then obeyed her.

While Eugenie and her mother were trying to embellish the bedroom assigned by Monsieur Grandet for his nephew, Charles himself was the object of Madame des Grassins' attentions; to all appearances she was setting her cap at him.

"You are very courageous, monsieur," she said to the young dandy, "to leave the pleasures of the capital at this season and take up your abode in

Saumur. But if we do not frighten you away, you will find there are some amusements even here.”

She threw him the ogling glance of the provinces, where women put so much prudence and reserve into their eyes that they impart to them the prudish concupiscence peculiar to certain ecclesiastics to whom all pleasure is either a theft or an error. Charles was so completely out of his element in this abode, and so far from the vast chateau and the sumptuous life with which his fancy had endowed his uncle, that as he looked at Madame des Grassins he perceived a dim likeness to Parisian faces. He gracefully responded to the species of invitation addressed to him, and began very naturally a conversation, in which Madame des Grassins gradually lowered her voice so as to bring it into harmony with the nature of the confidences she was making. With her, as with Charles, there was the need of conference; so after a few moments spent in coquettish phrases and a little serious jesting, the clever provincial said, thinking herself unheard by the others, who were discussing the sale of wines which at that season filled the heads of every one in Saumur,—

“Monsieur if you will do us the honor to come and see us, you will give as much pleasure to my husband as to myself. Our salon is the only one in Saumur where you will find the higher business circles mingling with the nobility. We belong to both societies, who meet at our house simply because they find it amusing. My husband—I say it with pride—is as much valued by the one class as by the other. We will try to relieve the monotony of your visit here. If you stay all the time with Monsieur Grandet, good heavens! what will become of you? Your uncle is a sordid miser who thinks of nothing but his vines; your aunt is a pious soul who can’t put two ideas together; and your cousin is a little fool, without education, perfectly common, no fortune, who will spend her life in darning towels.”

“She is really very nice, this woman,” thought Charles Grandet as he duly responded to Madame des Grassins’ coquetries.

“It seems to me, wife, that you are taking possession of monsieur,” said the stout banker, laughing.

On this remark the notary and the president said a few words that were more or less significant; but the abbe, looking at them slyly, brought their

thoughts to a focus by taking a pinch of snuff and saying as he handed round his snuff-box: "Who can do the honors of Saumur for monsieur so well as madame?"

"Ah! what do you mean by that, monsieur l'abbe?" demanded Monsieur des Grassins.

"I mean it in the best possible sense for you, for madame, for the town of Saumur, and for monsieur," said the wily old man, turning to Charles.

The Abbe Cruchot had guessed the conversation between Charles and Madame des Grassins without seeming to pay attention to it.

"Monsieur," said Adolphe to Charles with an air which he tried to make free and easy, "I don't know whether you remember me, but I had the honor of dancing as your *vis-a-vis* at a ball given by the Baron de Nucingen, and—"

"Perfectly; I remember perfectly, monsieur," answered Charles, pleased to find himself the object of general attention.

"Monsieur is your son?" he said to Madame des Grassins.

The abbe looked at her maliciously.

"Yes, monsieur," she answered.

"Then you were very young when you were in Paris?" said Charles, addressing Adolphe.

"You must know, monsieur," said the abbe, "that we send them to Babylon as soon as they are weaned."

Madame des Grassins examined the abbe with a glance of extreme penetration.

"It is only in the provinces," he continued, "that you will find women of thirty and more years as fresh as madame, here, with a son about to take his degree. I almost fancy myself back in the days when the young men stood on chairs in the ball-room to see you dance, madame," said the abbe, turning to his female adversary. "To me, your triumphs are but of yesterday—"

"The old rogue!" thought Madame Grassins; "can he have guessed my intentions?"

"It seems that I shall have a good deal of success in Saumur," thought Charles as he unbuttoned his great-coat, put a hand into his waistcoat, and cast a glance into the far distance, to imitate the attitude which Chantrey has given

to Lord Byron.

The inattention of Pere Grandet, or, to speak more truly, the preoccupation of mind into which the reading of the letter had plunged him, did not escape the vigilance of the notary and the president, who tried to guess the contents of the letter by the almost imperceptible motions of the miser's face, which was then under the full light of the candle. He maintained the habitual calm of his features with evident difficulty; we may, in fact, picture to ourselves the countenance such a man endeavored to preserve as he read the fatal letter which here follows:—

*My Brother,—It is almost twenty-three years since we have seen each other. My marriage was the occasion of our last interview, after which we parted, and both of us were happy. Assuredly I could not then foresee that you would one day be the prop of the family whose prosperity you then predicted.*

*When you hold this letter within your hands I shall be no longer living. In the position I now hold I cannot survive the disgrace of bankruptcy. I have waited on the edge of the gulf until the last moment, hoping to save myself. The end has come, I must sink into it. The double bankruptcies of my broker and of Roguin, my notary, have carried off my last resources and left me nothing.*

*I have the bitterness of owing nearly four millions, with assets not more than twenty-five per cent in value to pay them. The wines in my warehouses suffer from the fall in prices caused by the abundance and quality of your vintage. In three days Paris will cry out: "Monsieur Grandet was a knave!" and I, an honest man, shall be lying in my winding-sheet of infamy. I deprive my son of a good name, which I have stained, and the fortune of his mother, which I have lost. He knows nothing of all this,—my unfortunate child whom I idolize! We parted tenderly. He was ignorant, happily, that the last beatings of my heart were spent in that farewell. Will he not some day curse me? My brother, my brother!*

*the curses of our children are horrible; they can appeal against ours, but theirs are irrevocable. Grandet, you are my elder brother, you owe me your protection; act for me so that Charles may cast no bitter words upon my grave! My brother, if I were writing with my blood, with my tears, no greater anguish could I put into this letter,—nor as great, for then I should weep, I should bleed, I should die, I should suffer no more, but now I suffer and look at death with dry eyes.*

*From henceforth you are my son's father; he has no relations, as you well know, on his mother's side. Why did I not consider social prejudices? Why did I yield to love? Why did I marry the natural daughter of a great lord? Charles has no family. Oh, my unhappy son! my son! Listen, Grandet! I implore nothing for myself,—besides, your property may not be large enough to carry a mortgage of three millions,—but for my son! Brother, my suppliant hands are clasped as I think of you; behold them! Grandet, I confide my son to you in dying, and I look at the means of death with less pain as I think that you will be to him a father. He loved me well, my Charles; I was good to him, I never thwarted him; he will not curse me. Ah, you see! he is gentle, he is like his mother, he will cause you no grief. Poor boy! accustomed to all the enjoyments of luxury, he knows nothing of the privations to which you and I were condemned by the poverty of our youth. And I leave him ruined! alone! Yes, all my friends will avoid him, and it is I who have brought this humiliation upon him! Would that I had the force to send him with one thrust into the heavens to his mother's side! Madness! I come back to my disaster—to his. I send him to you that you may tell him in some fitting way of my death, of his future fate. Be a father to him, but a good father. Do not tear him all at once from his idle life, it would kill him. I beg him on my knees to renounce all rights that, as his mother's heir, he may have on my estate. But the prayer is superfluous; he is*

*honorable, and he will feel that he must not appear among my creditors. Bring him to see this at the right time; reveal to him the hard conditions of the life I have made for him: and if he still has tender thoughts of me, tell him in my name that all is not lost for him. Yes, work, labor, which saved us both, may give him back the fortune of which I have deprived him; and if he listens to his father's voice as it reaches him from the grave, he will go the Indies. My brother, Charles is an upright and courageous young man; give him the wherewithal to make his venture; he will die sooner than not repay you the funds which you may lend him. Grandet! if you will not do this, you will lay up for yourself remorse. Ah, should my child find neither tenderness nor succor in you, I would call down the vengeance of God upon your cruelty!*

*If I had been able to save something from the wreck, I might have had the right to leave him at least a portion of his mother's property; but my last monthly payments have absorbed everything. I did not wish to die uncertain of my child's fate; I hoped to feel a sacred promise in a clasp of your hand which might have warmed my heart: but time fails me. While Charles is journeying to you I shall be preparing my assignment. I shall endeavor to show by the order and good faith of my accounts that my disaster comes neither from a faulty life nor from dishonesty. It is for my son's sake that I strive to do this.*

*Farewell, my brother! May the blessing of God be yours for the generous guardianship I lay upon you, and which, I doubt not, you will accept. A voice will henceforth and forever pray for you in that world where we must all go, and where I am now as you read these lines.*

*Victor-Ange-Guillaume Grandet.*

“So you are talking?” said Pere Grandet as he carefully folded the letter in its original creases and put it into his waistcoat-pocket. He looked at his nephew with a humble, timid air, beneath which he hid his feelings and his calculations. “Have you warmed yourself?” he said to him.

“Thoroughly, my dear uncle.”

“Well, where are the women?” said his uncle, already forgetting that his nephew was to sleep at the house. At this moment Eugenie and Madame Grandet returned.

“Is the room all ready?” said Grandet, recovering his composure.

“Yes, father.”

“Well then, my nephew, if you are tired, Nanon shall show you your room. It isn't a dandy's room; but you will excuse a poor wine-grower who never has a penny to spare. Taxes swallow up everything.”

“We do not wish to intrude, Grandet,” said the banker; “you may want to talk to your nephew, and therefore we will bid you good-night.”

At these words the assembly rose, and each made a parting bow in keeping with his or her own character. The old notary went to the door to fetch his lantern and came back to light it, offering to accompany the des Grassins on their way. Madame des Grassins had not foreseen the incident which brought the evening prematurely to an end, her servant therefore had not arrived.

“Will you do me the honor to take my arm, madame?” said the abbe.

“Thank you, monsieur l'abbe, but I have my son,” she answered dryly.

“Ladies cannot compromise themselves with me,” said the abbe.

“Take Monsieur Cruchot's arm,” said her husband.

The abbe walked off with the pretty lady so quickly that they were soon some distance in advance of the caravan.

“That is a good-looking young man, madame,” he said, pressing her arm. “Good-by to the grapes, the vintage is done. It is all over with us. We may as well say adieu to Mademoiselle Grandet. Eugenie will belong to the dandy. Unless this cousin is enamoured of some Parisian woman, your son Adolphe will find another rival in—”

“Not at all, monsieur l'abbe. This young man cannot fail to see that Eugenie is a little fool,—a girl without the least freshness. Did you notice her

to-night? She was as yellow as a quince.”

“Perhaps you made the cousin notice it?”

“I did not take the trouble—”

“Place yourself always beside Eugenie, madame, and you need never take the trouble to say anything to the young man against his cousin; he will make his own comparisons, which—”

“Well, he has promised to dine with me the day after to-morrow.”

“Ah! if you only *would*, madame—” said the abbe.

“What is it that you wish me to do, monsieur l’abbe? Do you mean to offer me bad advice? I have not reached the age of thirty-nine, without a stain upon my reputation, thank God! to compromise myself now, even for the empire of the Great Mogul. You and I are of an age when we both know the meaning of words. For an ecclesiastic, you certainly have ideas that are very incongruous. Fie! it is worthy of Faublas!”

“You have read Faublas?”

“No, monsieur l’abbe; I meant to say the *Liaisons dangereuses*.”

“Ah! that book is infinitely more moral,” said the abbe, laughing. “But you make me out as wicked as a young man of the present day; I only meant—”

“Do you dare to tell me you were not thinking of putting wicked things into my head? Isn’t it perfectly clear? If this young man—who I admit is very good-looking—were to make love to me, he would not think of his cousin. In Paris, I know, good mothers do devote themselves in this way to the happiness and welfare of their children; but we live in the provinces, monsieur l’abbe.”

“Yes, madame.”

“And,” she continued, “I do not want, and Adolphe himself would not want, a hundred millions brought at such a price.”

“Madame, I said nothing about a hundred millions; that temptation might be too great for either of us to withstand. Only, I do think that an honest woman may permit herself, in all honor, certain harmless little coquetries, which are, in fact, part of her social duty and which—”

“Do you think so?”

“Are we not bound, madame, to make ourselves agreeable to each other?—Permit me to blow my nose.—I assure you, madame,” he resumed,

“that the young gentleman ogled you through his glass in a more flattering manner than he put on when he looked at me; but I forgive him for doing homage to beauty in preference to old age—”

“It is quite apparent,” said the president in his loud voice, “that Monsieur Grandet of Paris has sent his son to Saumur with extremely matrimonial intentions.”

“But in that case the cousin wouldn’t have fallen among us like a cannon-ball,” answered the notary.

“That doesn’t prove anything,” said Monsieur des Grassins; “the old miser is always making mysteries.”

“Des Grassins, my friend, I have invited the young man to dinner. You must go and ask Monsieur and Madame de Larsonniere and the du Hautoys, with the beautiful demoiselle du Hautoy, of course. I hope she will be properly dressed; that jealous mother of hers does make such a fright of her! Gentlemen, I trust that you will all do us the honor to come,” she added, stopping the procession to address the two Cruchots.

“Here you are at home, madame,” said the notary.

After bowing to the three des Grassins, the three Cruchots returned home, applying their provincial genius for analysis to studying, under all its aspects, the great event of the evening, which undoubtedly changed the respective positions of Grassinists and Cruchotines. The admirable common-sense which guided all the actions of these great machinators made each side feel the necessity of a momentary alliance against a common enemy. Must they not mutually hinder Eugenie from loving her cousin, and the cousin from thinking of Eugenie? Could the Parisian resist the influence of treacherous insinuations, soft-spoken calumnies, slanders full of faint praise and artless denials, which should be made to circle incessantly about him and deceive him?