

HONORÉ DE BALZAC

THE GIRL WITH THE
GOLDEN EYES

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The Girl with the Golden Eyes

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The Girl with the Golden Eyes

THE GIRL WITH THE GOLDEN EYES

One of those sights in which most horror is to be encountered is, surely, the general aspect of the Parisian populace – a people fearful to behold, gaunt, yellow, tawny. Is not Paris a vast field in perpetual turmoil from a storm of interests beneath which are whirled along a crop of human beings, who are, more often than not, reaped by death, only to be born again as pinched as ever, men whose twisted and contorted faces give out at every pore the instinct, the desire, the poisons with which their brains are pregnant; not faces so much as masks; masks of weakness, masks of strength, masks of misery, masks of joy, masks of hypocrisy; all alike worn and stamped with the indelible signs of a panting cupidity? What is it they want? Gold or pleasure? A few observations upon the soul of Paris may explain the causes of its cadaverous physiognomy, which has but two ages – youth and decay: youth, wan and colorless; decay, painted to seem young. In looking at this excavated people, foreigners, who are not prone to reflection, experience at first a movement of disgust

towards the capital, that vast workshop of delights, from which, in a short time, they cannot even extricate themselves, and where they stay willingly to be corrupted. A few words will suffice to justify physiologically the almost infernal hue of Parisian faces, for it is not in mere sport that Paris has been called a hell. Take the phrase for truth. There all is smoke and fire, everything gleams, crackles, flames, evaporates, dies out, then lights up again, with shooting sparks, and is consumed. In no other country has life ever been more ardent or acute. The social nature, even in fusion, seems to say after each completed work: "Pass on to another!" just as Nature says herself. Like Nature herself, this social nature is busied with insects and flowers of a day – ephemeral trifles; and so, too, it throws up fire and flame from its eternal crater. Perhaps, before analyzing the causes which lend a special physiognomy to each tribe of this intelligent and mobile nation, the general cause should be pointed out which bleaches and discolors, tints with blue or brown individuals in more or less degree.

By dint of taking interest in everything, the Parisian ends by being interested in nothing. No emotion dominating his face, which friction has rubbed away, it turns gray like the faces of those houses upon which all kinds of dust and smoke have blown. In effect, the Parisian, with his indifference on the day for what the morrow will bring forth, lives like a child, whatever may be his age. He grumbles at everything, consoles himself for everything, jests at everything, forgets, desires, and tastes

everything, seizes all with passion, quits all with indifference – his kings, his conquests, his glory, his idols of bronze or glass – as he throws away his stockings, his hats, and his fortune. In Paris no sentiment can withstand the drift of things, and their current compels a struggle in which the passions are relaxed: there love is a desire, and hatred a whim; there's no true kinsman but the thousand-franc note, no better friend than the pawnbroker. This universal toleration bears its fruits, and in the salon, as in the street, there is no one *de trop*, there is no one absolutely useful, or absolutely harmful – knaves or fools, men of wit or integrity. There everything is tolerated: the government and the guillotine, religion and the cholera. You are always acceptable to this world, you will never be missed by it. What, then, is the dominating impulse in this country without morals, without faith, without any sentiment, wherein, however, every sentiment, belief, and moral has its origin and end? It is gold and pleasure. Take those two words for a lantern, and explore that great stucco cage, that hive with its black gutters, and follow the windings of that thought which agitates, sustains, and occupies it! Consider! And, in the first place, examine the world which possesses nothing.

The artisan, the man of the proletariat, who uses his hands, his tongue, his back, his right arm, his five fingers, to live – well, this very man, who should be the first to economize his vital principle, outruns his strength, yokes his wife to some machine, wears out his child, and ties him to the wheel. The manufacturer – or I know not what secondary thread which sets in motion all

these folk who with their foul hands mould and gild porcelain, sew coats and dresses, beat out iron, turn wood and steel, weave hemp, festoon crystal, imitate flowers, work woolen things, break in horses, dress harness, carve in copper, paint carriages, blow glass, corrode the diamond, polish metals, turn marble into leaves, labor on pebbles, deck out thought, tinge, bleach, or blacken everything – well, this middleman has come to that world of sweat and good-will, of study and patience, with promises of lavish wages, either in the name of the town's caprices or with the voice of the monster dubbed speculation. Thus, these *quadrumanes* set themselves to watch, work, and suffer, to fast, sweat, and bestir them. Then, careless of the future, greedy of pleasure, counting on their right arm as the painter on his palette, lords for one day, they throw their money on Mondays to the *cabarets* which gird the town like a belt of mud, haunts of the most shameless of the daughters of Venus, in which the periodical money of this people, as ferocious in their pleasures as they are calm at work, is squandered as it had been at play. For five days, then, there is no repose for this laborious portion of Paris! It is given up to actions which make it warped and rough, lean and pale, gush forth with a thousand fits of creative energy. And then its pleasure, its repose, are an exhausting debauch, swarthy and black with blows, white with intoxication, or yellow with indigestion. It lasts but two days, but it steals to-morrow's bread, the week's soup, the wife's dress, the child's wretched rags. Men, born doubtless to be beautiful – for all creatures have a

relative beauty – are enrolled from their childhood beneath the yoke of force, beneath the rule of the hammer, the chisel, the loom, and have been promptly vulcanized. Is not Vulcan, with his hideousness and his strength, the emblem of this strong and hideous nation – sublime in its mechanical intelligence, patient in its season, and once in a century terrible, inflammable as gunpowder, and ripe with brandy for the madness of revolution, with wits enough, in fine, to take fire at a captious word, which signifies to it always: Gold and Pleasure! If we comprise in it all those who hold out their hands for an alms, for lawful wages, or the five francs that are granted to every kind of Parisian prostitution, in short, for all the money well or ill earned, this people numbers three hundred thousand individuals. Were it not for the *cabarets*, would not the Government be overturned every Tuesday? Happily, by Tuesday, this people is glutted, sleeps off its pleasure, is penniless, and returns to its labor, to dry bread, stimulated by a need of material procreation, which has become a habit to it. None the less, this people has its phenomenal virtues, its complete men, unknown Napoleons, who are the type of its strength carried to its highest expression, and sum up its social capacity in an existence wherein thought and movement combine less to bring joy into it than to neutralize the action of sorrow.

Chance has made an artisan economical, chance has favored him with forethought, he has been able to look forward, has met with a wife and found himself a father, and, after some years of hard privation, he embarks in some little draper's business, hires

a shop. If neither sickness nor vice blocks his way – if he has prospered – there is the sketch of this normal life.

And, in the first place, hail to that king of Parisian activity, to whom time and space give way. Yes, hail to that being, composed of saltpetre and gas, who makes children for France during his laborious nights, and in the day multiplies his personality for the service, glory, and pleasure of his fellow-citizens. This man solves the problem of sufficing at once to his amiable wife, to his hearth, to the *Constitutionnel*, to his office, to the National Guard, to the opera, and to God; but, only in order that the *Constitutionnel*, his office, the National Guard, the opera, his wife, and God may be changed into coin. In fine, hail to an irreproachable pluralist. Up every day at five o'clock, he traverses like a bird the space which separates his dwelling from the Rue Montmartre. Let it blow or thunder, rain or snow, he is at the *Constitutionnel*, and waits there for the load of newspapers which he has undertaken to distribute. He receives this political bread with eagerness, takes it, bears it away. At nine o'clock he is in the bosom of his family, flings a jest to his wife, snatches a loud kiss from her, gulps down a cup of coffee, or scolds his children. At a quarter to ten he puts in an appearance at the *Mairie*. There, stuck upon a stool, like a parrot on its perch, warmed by Paris town, he registers until four o'clock, with never a tear or a smile, the deaths and births of an entire district. The sorrow, the happiness, of the parish flow beneath his pen – as the essence of the *Constitutionnel* traveled before upon his shoulders. Nothing weighs upon him!

He goes always straight before him, takes his patriotism ready made from the newspaper, contradicts no one, shouts or applauds with the world, and lives like a bird. Two yards from his parish, in the event of an important ceremony, he can yield his place to an assistant, and betake himself to chant a requiem from a stall in the church of which on Sundays he is the fairest ornament, where his is the most imposing voice, where he distorts his huge mouth with energy to thunder out a joyous *Amen*. So is he chorister. At four o'clock, freed from his official servitude, he reappears to shed joy and gaiety upon the most famous shop in the city. Happy is his wife, he has no time to be jealous: he is a man of action rather than of sentiment. His mere arrival spurs the young ladies at the counter; their bright eyes storm the customers; he expands in the midst of all the finery, the lace and muslin kerchiefs, that their cunning hands have wrought. Or, again, more often still, before his dinner he waits on a client, copies the page of a newspaper, or carries to the doorkeeper some goods that have been delayed. Every other day, at six, he is faithful to his post. A permanent bass for the chorus, he betakes himself to the opera, prepared to become a soldier or an arab, prisoner, savage, peasant, spirit, camel's leg or lion, a devil or a genie, a slave or a eunuch, black or white; always ready to feign joy or sorrow, pity or astonishment, to utter cries that never vary, to hold his tongue, to hunt, or fight for Rome or Egypt, but always at heart – a huckster still.

At midnight he returns – a man, the good husband, the tender

father; he slips into the conjugal bed, his imagination still afire with the illusive forms of the operatic nymphs, and so turns to the profit of conjugal love the world's depravities, the voluptuous curves of Taglioni's leg. And finally, if he sleeps, he sleeps apace, and hurries through his slumber as he does his life.

This man sums up all things – history, literature, politics, government, religion, military science. Is he not a living encyclopaedia, a grotesque Atlas; ceaselessly in motion, like Paris itself, and knowing not repose? He is all legs. No physiognomy could preserve its purity amid such toils. Perhaps the artisan who dies at thirty, an old man, his stomach tanned by repeated doses of brandy, will be held, according to certain leisured philosophers, to be happier than the huckster is. The one perishes in a breath, and the other by degrees. From his eight industries, from the labor of his shoulders, his throat, his hands, from his wife and his business, the one derives – as from so many farms – children, some thousands of francs, and the most laborious happiness that has ever diverted the heart of man. This fortune and these children, or the children who sum up everything for him, become the prey of the world above, to which he brings his ducats and his daughter or his son, reared at college, who, with more education than his father, raises higher his ambitious gaze. Often the son of a retail tradesman would fain be something in the State.

Ambition of that sort carries on our thought to the second Parisian sphere. Go up one story, then, and descend to the

entresol: or climb down from the attic and remain on the fourth floor; in fine, penetrate into the world which has possessions: the same result! Wholesale merchants, and their men – people with small banking accounts and much integrity – rogues and catspaws, clerks old and young, sheriffs' clerks, barristers' clerks, solicitors' clerks; in fine, all the working, thinking, and speculating members of that lower middle class which honeycombs the interests of Paris and watches over its granary, accumulates the coin, stores the products that the proletariat have made, preserves the fruits of the South, the fishes, the wine from every sun-favored hill; which stretches its hands over the Orient, and takes from it the shawls that the Russ and the Turk despise; which harvests even from the Indies; crouches down in expectation of a sale, greedy of profit; which discounts bills, turns over and collects all kinds of securities, holds all Paris in its hand, watches over the fantasies of children, spies out the caprices and the vices of mature age, sucks money out of disease. Even so, if they drink no brandy, like the artisan, nor wallow in the mire of debauch, all equally abuse their strength, immeasurably strain their bodies and their minds alike, are burned away with desires, devastated with the swiftness of the pace. In their case the physical distortion is accomplished beneath the whip of interests, beneath the scourge of ambitions which torture the educated portion of this monstrous city, just as in the case of the proletariat it is brought about by the cruel see-saw of the material elaborations perpetually required from

the despotism of the aristocratic "*I will.*" Here, too, then, in order to obey that universal master, pleasure or gold, they must devour time, hasten time, find more than four-and-twenty hours in the day and night, waste themselves, slay themselves, and purchase two years of unhealthy repose with thirty years of old age. Only, the working-man dies in hospital when the last term of his stunted growth expires; whereas the man of the middle class is set upon living, and lives on, but in a state of idiocy. You will meet him, with his worn, flat old face, with no light in his eyes, with no strength in his limbs, dragging himself with a dazed air along the boulevard – the belt of his Venus, of his beloved city. What was his want? The sabre of the National Guard, a permanent stock-pot, a decent plot in Pere Lachaise, and, for his old age, a little gold honestly earned. *HIS* Monday is on Sunday, his rest a drive in a hired carriage – a country excursion during which his wife and children glut themselves merrily with dust or bask in the sun; his dissipation is at the restaurateur's, whose poisonous dinner has won renown, or at some family ball, where he suffocates till midnight. Some fools are surprised at the phantasmagoria of the monads which they see with the aid of the microscope in a drop of water; but what would Rabelais' Gargantua, – that misunderstood figure of an audacity so sublime, – what would that giant say, fallen from the celestial spheres, if he amused himself by contemplating the motions of this secondary life of Paris, of which here is one of the formulæ? Have you seen one of those little constructions –

cold in summer, and with no other warmth than a small stove in winter – placed beneath the vast copper dome which crowns the Halle-auble? Madame is there by morning. She is engaged at the markets, and makes by this occupation twelve thousand francs a year, people say. Monsieur, when Madame is up, passes into a gloomy office, where he lends money till the week-end to the tradesmen of his district. By nine o'clock he is at the passport office, of which he is one of the minor officials. By evening he is at the box-office of the Theatre Italien, or of any other theatre you like. The children are put out to nurse, and only return to be sent to college or to boarding-school. Monsieur and Madame live on the third floor, have but one cook, give dances in a salon twelve foot by eight, lit by argand lamps; but they give a hundred and fifty thousand francs to their daughter, and retire at the age of fifty, an age when they begin to show themselves on the balcony of the opera, in a *fiacre* at Longchamps; or, on sunny days, in faded clothes on the boulevards – the fruit of all this sowing. Respected by their neighbors, in good odor with the government, connected with the upper middle classes, Monsieur obtains at sixty-five the Cross of the Legion of Honor, and his daughter's father-in-law, a parochial mayor, invites him to his evenings. These life-long labors, then, are for the good of the children, whom these lower middle classes are inevitably driven to exalt. Thus each sphere directs all its efforts towards the sphere above it. The son of the rich grocer becomes a notary, the son of the timber merchant becomes a magistrate. No link is wanting in the

chain, and everything stimulates the upward march of money.

Thus we are brought to the third circle of this hell, which, perhaps, will some day find its Dante. In this third social circle, a sort of Parisian belly, in which the interests of the town are digested, and where they are condensed into the form known as *business*, there moves and agitates, as by some acrid and bitter intestinal process, the crowd of lawyers, doctors, notaries, councillors, business men, bankers, big merchants, speculators, and magistrates. Here are to be found even more causes of moral and physical destruction than elsewhere. These people – almost all of them – live in unhealthy offices, in fetid ante-chambers, in little barred dens, and spend their days bowed down beneath the weight of affairs; they rise at dawn to be in time, not to be left behind, to gain all or not to lose, to overreach a man or his money, to open or wind up some business, to take advantage of some fleeting opportunity, to get a man hanged or set him free. They infect their horses, they overdrive and age and break them, like their own legs, before their time. Time is their tyrant: it fails them, it escapes them; they can neither expand it nor cut it short. What soul can remain great, pure, moral, and generous, and, consequently, what face retain its beauty in this depraving practice of a calling which compels one to bear the weight of the public sorrows, to analyze them, to weigh them, estimate them, and mark them out by rule? Where do these folk put aside their hearts?.. I do not know; but they leave them somewhere or other, when they have any, before they descend

each morning into the abyss of the misery which puts families on the rack. For them there is no such thing as mystery; they see the reverse side of society, whose confessors they are, and despise it. Then, whatever they do, owing to their contact with corruption, they either are horrified at it and grow gloomy, or else, out of lassitude, or some secret compromise, espouse it. In fine, they necessarily become callous to every sentiment, since man, his laws and his institutions, make them steal, like jackals, from corpses that are still warm. At all hours the financier is trampling on the living, the attorney on the dead, the pleader on the conscience. Forced to be speaking without a rest, they all substitute words for ideas, phrases for feelings, and their soul becomes a larynx. Neither the great merchant, nor the judge, nor the pleader preserves his sense of right; they feel no more, they apply set rules that leave cases out of count. Borne along by their headlong course, they are neither husbands nor fathers nor lovers; they glide on sledges over the facts of life, and live at all times at the high pressure conducted by business and the vast city. When they return to their homes they are required to go to a ball, to the opera, into society, where they can make clients, acquaintances, protectors. They all eat to excess, play and keep vigil, and their faces become bloated, flushed, and emaciated.

To this terrific expenditure of intellectual strength, to such multifold moral contradictions, they oppose – not, indeed pleasure, it would be too pale a contrast – but debauchery, a debauchery both secret and alarming, for they have all means

at their disposal, and fix the morality of society. Their genuine stupidity lies hid beneath their specialism. They know their business, but are ignorant of everything which is outside it. So that to preserve their self-conceit they question everything, are crudely and crookedly critical. They appear to be sceptics and are in reality simpletons; they swamp their wits in interminable arguments. Almost all conveniently adopt social, literary, or political prejudices, to do away with the need of having opinions, just as they adapt their conscience to the standard of the Code or the Tribunal of Commerce. Having started early to become men of note, they turn into mediocrities, and crawl over the high places of the world. So, too, their faces present the harsh pallor, the deceitful coloring, those dull, tarnished eyes, and garrulous, sensual mouths, in which the observer recognizes the symptoms of the degeneracy of the thought and its rotation in the circle of a special idea which destroys the creative faculties of the brain and the gift of seeing in large, of generalizing and deducing. No man who has allowed himself to be caught in the revolutions of the gear of these huge machines can ever become great. If he is a doctor, either he has practised little or he is an exception – a Bichat who dies young. If a great merchant, something remains – he is almost Jacques Coeur. Did Robespierre practise? Danton was an idler who waited. But who, moreover has ever felt envious of the figures of Danton and Robespierre, however lofty they were? These men of affairs, *par excellence*, attract money to them, and hoard it in order to ally themselves with aristocratic

families. If the ambition of the working-man is that of the small tradesman, here, too, are the same passions. The type of this class might be either an ambitious bourgeois, who, after a life of privation and continual scheming, passes into the Council of State as an ant passes through a chink; or some newspaper editor, jaded with intrigue, whom the king makes a peer of France – perhaps to revenge himself on the nobility; or some notary become mayor of his parish: all people crushed with business, who, if they attain their end, are literally *killed* in its attainment. In France the usage is to glorify wigs. Napoleon, Louis XVI., the great rulers, alone have always wished for young men to fulfil their projects.

Above this sphere the artist world exists. But here, too, the faces stamped with the seal of originality are worn, nobly indeed, but worn, fatigued, nervous. Harassed by a need of production, outrun by their costly fantasies, worn out by devouring genius, hungry for pleasure, the artists of Paris would all regain by excessive labor what they have lost by idleness, and vainly seek to reconcile the world and glory, money and art. To begin with, the artist is ceaselessly panting under his creditors; his necessities beget his debts, and his debts require of him his nights. After his labor, his pleasure. The comedian plays till midnight, studies in the morning, rehearses at noon; the sculptor is bent before his statue; the journalist is a marching thought, like the soldier when at war; the painter who is the fashion is crushed with work, the painter with no occupation, if he feels himself to be a

man of genius, gnaws his entrails. Competition, rivalry, calumny assail talent. Some, in desperation, plunge into the abyss of vice, others die young and unknown because they have discounted their future too soon. Few of these figures, originally sublime, remain beautiful. On the other hand, the flagrant beauty of their heads is not understood. An artist's face is always exorbitant, it is always above or below the conventional lines of what fools call the *beau-ideal*. What power is it that destroys them? Passion. Every passion in Paris resolves into two terms: gold and pleasure. Now, do you not breathe again? Do you not feel air and space purified? Here is neither labor nor suffering. The soaring arch of gold has reached the summit. From the lowest gutters, where its stream commences, from the little shops where it is stopped by puny coffer-dams, from the heart of the counting-houses and great workshops, where its volume is that of ingots – gold, in the shape of dowries and inheritances, guided by the hands of young girls or the bony fingers of age, courses towards the aristocracy, where it will become a blazing, expansive stream. But, before leaving the four territories upon which the utmost wealth of Paris is based, it is fitting, having cited the moral causes, to deduce those which are physical, and to call attention to a pestilence, latent, as it were, which incessantly acts upon the faces of the porter, the artisan, the small shopkeeper; to point out a deleterious influence the corruption of which equals that of the Parisian administrators who allow it so complacently to exist!

If the air of the houses in which the greater proportion of

the middle classes live is noxious, if the atmosphere of the streets belches out cruel miasmas into stuffy back-kitchens where there is little air, realize that, apart from this pestilence, the forty thousand houses of this great city have their foundations in filth, which the powers that be have not yet seriously attempted to enclose with mortar walls solid enough to prevent even the most fetid mud from filtering through the soil, poisoning the wells, and maintaining subterraneously to Lutetia the tradition of her celebrated name. Half of Paris sleeps amidst the putrid exhalations of courts and streets and sewers. But let us turn to the vast saloons, gilded and airy; the hotels in their gardens, the rich, indolent, happy moneyed world. There the faces are lined and scarred with vanity. There nothing is real. To seek for pleasure is it not to find *ennui*? People in society have at an early age warped their nature. Having no occupation other than to wallow in pleasure, they have speedily misused their sense, as the artisan has misused brandy. Pleasure is of the nature of certain medical substances: in order to obtain constantly the same effects the doses must be doubled, and death or degradation is contained in the last. All the lower classes are on their knees before the wealthy, and watch their tastes in order to turn them into vices and exploit them. Thus you see in these folk at an early age tastes instead of passions, romantic fantasies and lukewarm loves. There impotence reigns; there ideas have ceased – they have evaporated together with energy amongst the affectations of the boudoir and the cajolements of women. There are fledglings

of forty, old doctors of sixty years. The wealthy obtain in Paris ready-made wit and science – formulated opinions which save them the need of having wit, science, or opinion of their own. The irrationality of this world is equaled by its weakness and its licentiousness. It is greedy of time to the point of wasting it. Seek in it for affection as little as for ideas. Its kisses conceal a profound indifference, its urbanity a perpetual contempt. It has no other fashion of love. Flashes of wit without profundity, a wealth of indiscretion, scandal, and above all, commonplace. Such is the sum of its speech; but these happy fortunates pretend that they do not meet to make and repeat maxims in the manner of La Rochefoucauld as though there did not exist a mean, invented by the eighteenth century, between a superfluity and absolute blank. If a few men of character indulge in witticism, at once subtle and refined, they are misunderstood; soon, tired of giving without receiving, they remain at home, and leave fools to reign over their territory. This hollow life, this perpetual expectation of a pleasure which never comes, this permanent *ennui* and emptiness of soul, heart, and mind, the lassitude of the upper Parisian world, is reproduced on its features, and stamps its parchment faces, its premature wrinkles, that physiognomy of the wealthy upon which impotence has set its grimace, in which gold is mirrored, and whence intelligence has fled.

Such a view of moral Paris proves that physical Paris could not be other than it is. This coroneted town is like a queen, who, being always with child, has desires of irresistible fury. Paris is

the crown of the world, a brain which perishes of genius and leads human civilization; it is a great man, a perpetually creative artist, a politician with second-sight who must of necessity have wrinkles on his forehead, the vices of a great man, the fantasies of the artist, and the politician's disillusionments. Its physiognomy suggests the evolution of good and evil, battle and victory; the moral combat of '89, the clarion calls of which still re-echo in every corner of the world; and also the downfall of 1814. Thus this city can no more be moral, or cordial, or clean, than the engines which impel those proud leviathans which you admire when they cleave the waves! Is not Paris a sublime vessel laden with intelligence? Yes, her arms are one of those oracles which fatality sometimes allows. The *City of Paris* has her great mast, all of bronze, carved with victories, and for watchman – Napoleon. The barque may roll and pitch, but she cleaves the world, illuminates it through the hundred mouths of her tribunes, ploughs the seas of science, rides with full sail, cries from the height of her tops, with the voice of her scientists and artists: "Onward, advance! Follow me!" She carries a huge crew, which delights in adorning her with fresh streamers. Boys and urchins laughing in the rigging; ballast of heavy *bourgeoisie*; working-men and sailor-men touched with tar; in her cabins the lucky passengers; elegant midshipmen smoke their cigars leaning over the bulwarks; then, on the deck, her soldiers, innovators or ambitious, would accost every fresh shore, and shooting out their bright lights upon it, ask for glory which is pleasure, or for love

which needs gold.

Thus the exorbitant movement of the proletariat, the corrupting influence of the interests which consume the two middle classes, the cruelties of the artist's thought, and the excessive pleasure which is sought for incessantly by the great, explain the normal ugliness of the Parisian physiognomy. It is only in the Orient that the human race presents a magnificent figure, but that is an effect of the constant calm affected by those profound philosophers with their long pipes, their short legs, their square contour, who despise and hold activity in horror, whilst in Paris the little and the great and the mediocre run and leap and drive, whipped on by an inexorable goddess, Necessity – the necessity for money, glory, and amusement. Thus, any face which is fresh and graceful and reposeful, any really young face, is in Paris the most extraordinary of exceptions; it is met with rarely. Should you see one there, be sure it belongs either to a young and ardent ecclesiastic or to some good abbe of forty with three chins; to a young girl of pure life such as is brought up in certain middle-class families; to a mother of twenty, still full of illusions, as she suckles her first-born; to a young man newly embarked from the provinces, and intrusted to the care of some devout dowager who keeps him without a sou; or, perhaps, to some shop assistant who goes to bed at midnight wearied out with folding and unfolding calico, and rises at seven o'clock to arrange the window; often again to some man of science or poetry, who lives monastically in the embrace of a fine idea, who

remains sober, patient, and chaste; else to some self-contented fool, feeding himself on folly, reeking of health, in a perpetual state of absorption with his own smile; or to the soft and happy race of loungers, the only folk really happy in Paris, which unfolds for them hour by hour its moving poetry.

Nevertheless, there is in Paris a proportion of privileged beings to whom this excessive movement of industries, interests, affairs, arts, and gold is profitable. These beings are women. Although they also have a thousand secret causes which, here more than elsewhere, destroy their physiognomy, there are to be found in the feminine world little happy colonies, who live in Oriental fashion and can preserve their beauty; but these women rarely show themselves on foot in the streets, they lie hid like rare plants who only unfold their petals at certain hours, and constitute veritable exotic exceptions. However, Paris is essentially the country of contrasts. If true sentiments are rare there, there also are to be found, as elsewhere, noble friendships and unlimited devotion. On this battlefield of interests and passions, just as in the midst of those marching societies where egoism triumphs, where every one is obliged to defend himself, and which we call *armies*, it seems as though sentiments liked to be complete when they showed themselves, and are sublime by juxtaposition. So it is with faces. In Paris one sometimes sees in the aristocracy, set like stars, the ravishing faces of young people, the fruit of quite exceptional manners and education. To the youthful beauty of the English stock they unite the firmness of Southern traits. The fire

of their eyes, a delicious bloom on their lips, the lustrous black of their soft locks, a white complexion, a distinguished caste of features, render them the flowers of the human race, magnificent to behold against the mass of other faces, worn, old, wrinkled, and grimacing. So women, too, admire such young people with that eager pleasure which men take in watching a pretty girl, elegant, gracious, and embellished with all the virginal charms with which our imagination pleases to adorn the perfect woman. If this hurried glance at the population of Paris has enabled us to conceive the rarity of a Raphaelesque face, and the passionate admiration which such an one must inspire at the first sight, the prime interest of our history will have been justified. *Quod erat demonstrandum*— if one may be permitted to apply scholastic formulae to the science of manners.

Upon one of those fine spring mornings, when the leaves, although unfolded, are not yet green, when the sun begins to gild the roofs, and the sky is blue, when the population of Paris issues from its cells to swarm along the boulevards, glides like a serpent of a thousand coils through the Rue de la Paix towards the Tuileries, saluting the hymeneal magnificence which the country puts on; on one of these joyous days, then, a young man as beautiful as the day itself, dressed with taste, easy of manner – to let out the secret he was a love-child, the natural son of Lord Dudley and the famous Marquise de Vordac – was walking in the great avenue of the Tuileries. This Adonis, by name Henri de Marsay, was born in France, when Lord

Dudley had just married the young lady, already Henri's mother, to an old gentleman called M. de Marsay. This faded and almost extinguished butterfly recognized the child as his own in consideration of the life interest in a fund of a hundred thousand francs definitively assigned to his putative son; a generosity which did not cost Lord Dudley too dear. French funds were worth at that time seventeen francs, fifty centimes. The old gentleman died without having ever known his wife. Madame de Marsay subsequently married the Marquis de Vordac, but before becoming a marquise she showed very little anxiety as to her son and Lord Dudley. To begin with, the declaration of war between France and England had separated the two lovers, and fidelity at all costs was not, and never will be, the fashion of Paris. Then the successes of the woman, elegant, pretty, universally adored, crushed in the Parisienne the maternal sentiment. Lord Dudley was no more troubled about his offspring than was the mother, – the speedy infidelity of a young girl he had ardently loved gave him, perhaps, a sort of aversion for all that issued from her. Moreover, fathers can, perhaps, only love the children with whom they are fully acquainted, a social belief of the utmost importance for the peace of families, which should be held by all the celibate, proving as it does that paternity is a sentiment nourished artificially by woman, custom, and the law.

Poor Henri de Marsay knew no other father than that one of the two who was not compelled to be one. The paternity of M. de Marsay was naturally most incomplete. In the natural

order, it is but for a few fleeting instants that children have a father, and M. de Marsay imitated nature. The worthy man would not have sold his name had he been free from vices. Thus he squandered without remorse in gambling hells, and drank elsewhere, the few dividends which the National Treasury paid to its bondholders. Then he handed over the child to an aged sister, a Demoiselle de Marsay, who took much care of him, and provided him, out of the meagre sum allowed by her brother, with a tutor, an abbe without a farthing, who took the measure of the youth's future, and determined to pay himself out of the hundred thousand livres for the care given to his pupil, for whom he conceived an affection. As chance had it, this tutor was a true priest, one of those ecclesiastics cut out to become cardinals in France, or Borgias beneath the tiara. He taught the child in three years what he might have learned at college in ten. Then the great man, by name the Abbe de Maronis, completed the education of his pupil by making him study civilization under all its aspects: he nourished him on his experience, led him little into churches, which at that time were closed; introduced him sometimes behind the scenes of theatres, more often into the houses of courtesans; he exhibited human emotions to him one by one; taught him politics in the drawing-rooms, where they simmered at the time, explained to him the machinery of government, and endeavored out of attraction towards a fine nature, deserted, yet rich in promise, virilely to replace a mother: is not the Church the mother of orphans? The

pupil was responsive to so much care. The worthy priest died in 1812, a bishop, with the satisfaction of having left in this world a child whose heart and mind were so well moulded that he could outwit a man of forty. Who would have expected to have found a heart of bronze, a brain of steel, beneath external traits as seductive as ever the old painters, those naive artists, had given to the serpent in the terrestrial paradise? Nor was that all. In addition, the good-natured prelate had procured for the child of his choice certain acquaintances in the best Parisian society, which might equal in value, in the young man's hand, another hundred thousand invested livres. In fine, this priest, vicious but politic, sceptical yet learned, treacherous yet amiable, weak in appearance yet as vigorous physically as intellectually, was so genuinely useful to his pupil, so complacent to his vices, so fine a calculator of all kinds of strength, so profound when it was needful to make some human reckoning, so youthful at table, at Frascati, at – I know not where, that the grateful Henri de Marsay was hardly moved at aught in 1814, except when he looked at the portrait of his beloved bishop, the only personal possession which the prelate had been able to bequeath him (admirable type of the men whose genius will preserve the Catholic, Apostolic, and Roman Church, compromised for the moment by the feebleness of its recruits and the decrepit age of its pontiffs; but if the church likes!).

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