

THE MISER'S DAUGHTER

By HONRE DE BALZAC

CHAPTER IV—(Continued.) "Mamma," she began, "he will never be able to bear the smell of a tallow candle. Suppose that we buy a wax candle?"

She fled, lightly as a bird, to find her purse, and drew thence the five francs which she had received for the month's expenses.

"Here, Nanon, be quick."

"But what will your father say?"

This dreadful objection was raised by Mme. Grandet when she saw her daughter with an old Sevres china sugar basin which Grandet had brought back with him from the chateau at Froifroid.

"And where is the sugar to come from?" she went on. "Are you mad?"

"Nanon can easily buy it when she goes for the candle, mamma. Is it a right thing that his nephew should not have sugar if he happens to want it? Besides, he will not notice it."

"Your father always notices things," said Mme. Grandet, shaking her head. "While Eugenie and her mother were doing their best to adorn the room which M. Grandet had allotted to his nephew, Eugenie was bestowing her attention on Charles, and making abundant use of her eyes as she did so.

"You are very brave," she said, "to leave the pleasures of the capital in winter in order to come to stay in Saumur. But if you are not frightened away at first sight of us, you shall see that even here we can amuse ourselves." And she gave him a languishing glance, in true provincial style.

Women in the provinces are wont to affect a demure and staid demeanor, which gives a furtive and eager eloquence to their eyes. Charles was thoroughly glad of his element in this room, it was all so far removed from the great chateau and the splendid surroundings in which he had thought to find his uncle, that, on paying closer attention to Mme. des Grassins, she almost reminded him of the Parisian faces he had observed already in these strange, new impressions. He responded graciously to the advances which had been made to him, and naturally they fell into conversation.

Mme. des Grassins gradually lowered her voice to tones suited to the nature of her confidences. Both she and Charles Grandet felt a need of mutual confidence, of explanations and an understanding, so after a few minutes spent in coquetish chatter and jests that covered a serious purpose, the wily provincial dame felt free to converse without fear of being overheard, under cover of conversation on the sale of the vintage, the one all-absorbing topic at that moment in Saumur.

"If you will honor us with a visit," she said, "you will certainly do us a pleasure; my husband and I shall be very glad to see you. Our salon is the only one in Saumur, where you will meet both the wealthy merchant society and the noblesse. We ourselves belong in a manner to both. My husband, I am proud to say, is very highly thought of in both circles. So we will do our best to be the guide of the tedium of your stay. If you are going to remain with the Grandets, what will become of you? Your uncle is a miser, his mind runs on nothing but his vine cuttings; your aunt is a saint who cannot put two ideas together; and your cousin is a will-o'-the-wisp, a mad moon sort of girl, who spends her life in mending dishcloths."

"It seems to me that you mean to monopolize the gentleman," said the big banker, laughing, to his wife, an unlooked observation, followed by remarks more or less spiteful from the notary and the president; but the Abbe gave them a shrewd glance, while he gave expression to their thoughts. "Where could the gentleman have found any one better qualified to do the honors of Saumur?" he said.

Adolphe des Grassins spoke at last, with what was meant to be an offhand manner. "I do not know," he said, addressing Charles, "whether you have any recollection of me; I once had the pleasure of dancing in the same quadrille at a ball given by M. le Baron de Nivernois."

"I remember," answered Charles, surprised to find himself the object of general attention. "Is this gentleman your son?" he asked of Mme. des Grassins.

"Yes, I am his mother," she answered. "You must have been very young when you came to Paris?" Charles went on, speaking to Adolphe.

"We cannot help ourselves, sir," said the Abbe. "Our babes are scarcely weaned before we send them to Babylon. You must go into the country if you want to find women not much on the other side of thirty, with a grown-up son a licensee of law, who look as fresh and youthful as Mme. des Grassins. It only seems like the other day when the young men and the ladies stood on chairs to see you dance, madame," the Abbe added, turning toward his fair antagonist; "your triumphs are as fresh in my memory as if they had happened yesterday."

"It looks as though I should have a great success in Saumur," thought Charles. He unbuttoned his overcoat and stood with his hand in his waistcoat pocket, gazing into space, striking the attitude which Chantrey thought fit to give to Byron in his statue of that poet. Meanwhile Grandet's precautions during the reading of his letter had escaped neither the notary nor the magistrate. Both of them tried to guess at the contents by watching the almost imperceptible changes in the worthy man's face. The vine grower was hard put to it to preserve his wonted composure. His expression must be left to the imagination, but here is the fatal letter:

"My Brother—It is nearly twenty-three years now since we saw each other. The last time we met it was to make arrangements for my marriage, and we parted in high spirits. Little did I then think, when you were congratulating yourself on our prosperity, that one day you would be the sole hope and stay of our family. By the time that this letter reaches your hands, I shall be no more. In my position, I could not survive the disgrace of bankruptcy; I have put up my head above the surface till the last moment, hoping to weather the storm; it is all of no use, I must sink now. Just after the failure of my stock broker came the failure of my notary; my last resources have been swept away, and I have nothing left. It is my heavy misfortune to owe nearly four millions. I hold heavy stocks of wine, and owing to the abundance and good quality of your vineyards, they have fallen ruinously in value. In three days' time all Paris will say, 'M. Grandet was a rogue,' and I, honest though I am, shall lie wrapped in a winding sheet of infamy. I have despoiled my own son of his mother's fortunes and of the spotless name on which I have brought disgrace. He knows nothing of all this—the unhappy child whom I have idolized. Happily for him, he did not know when we bade each other good, and my heart overladen with tenderness for him, how soon it should cease to beat. You, therefore,

are Charles' father, now! He has no relations on his mother's side. He is alone in the world. Oh, my unhappy boy, my son! Listen, Grandet, I am asking nothing for myself, and you could scarcely satisfy my creditors if you would; it is for my son's sake that I write. You must know, my brother, that as I think of you my petition is made with clasped hands; that this my dying prayer to you, Grandet, I know that you will be a father to him; I know that I shall not ask in vain, and the sight of my pistols does not cause me a pang. To go back to my misfortunes and Charles' share in them, I have sent him to you so that you may break the news of my death and explain to him what his future must be. Be a father to him; be more than that, be an indulgent father! Do not expect him to give up his life's work all at once; it would kill him. And you must buy everything before him, Grandet—the struggle and the hardships that he will have to face in the life that I have spoiled for him. Work, which was our salvation, can restore the fortune which I have lost; and if he will follow his father's will, let him leave this country and go to the Indies! And, brother, Charles is honest and energetic; you will help him with his first trading venture, I know you will; he would sooner die than not repay you. Even while Charles is on his way I am compelled to file my schedule. My affairs are all in order; I am endeavoring now to arrange everything that it will be evident that my failure is due neither to carelessness nor to dishonesty, but simply to disasters which I could not help. Is it not for Charles' sake that I take these pains? Farewell, my brother. May heaven bless you in every way for the generosity with which you will accept and fulfill this trust.

"VICTORANGE-GUILLAUME GRANDET."

"So you are having a chat?" said old Grandet, frowning up the letter as he read the original creases and putting it into his waistcoat pocket. He looked at his nephew in a shy and embarrassed way, seeking to dissemble his feelings and his calculations. "Do you feel warmer?"

"I am very comfortable, my dear uncle."

"Well, whatever are the women after?" his uncle went on. Eugenie and Mme. Grandet came into the room as he spoke. "Is everything ready upstairs?"

"Yes, father."

"Very well, then, nephew, if you are feeling tired, Nanon will show you to your room. There is nothing very smart in it, but you will overlook that here among poor vine growers, who never have a penny to bless themselves with. The taxes swallow up everything we have."

"We don't want to be intrusive, Grandet," said the banker. "You and your nephew may have some things to talk over; we will wish you good evening. Good-by till to-morrow."

Every one rose at this and took leave after their several fashions.

CHAPTER V. Early rising is the rule in the country, so, like most other girls, Eugenie was up betimes in the morning; this morning she rose earlier than usual, her toilette was henceforth to possess an interest unknown before. She began by brushing her chestnut hair, and wound the heavy plaits about her head, careful that no loose end should escape from the braided coronet which made an appropriate setting for a face both frank and shy.

As she washed her hands again and again, she coldly sprang water that roughened and reddened the skin, she looked down at her pretty rounded arms and wondered what her cousin did to have hands so soft and so white, and nails so shapely. She put on a pair of new stockings, and her best shoes, and looked herself carefully, without passing over a single eyelid. For the first time in her life, in fact, she wished to look her best, and felt that it was pleasant to have a pretty new dress to wear, a becoming dress, which was nicely made. She opened her door, went out on to the landing, and bent over the staircase to hear the sounds in the house.

"He is not getting up yet," she thought. She heard Nanon's morning cough as the good woman went to and fro, swept out the dining room, lit the kitchen fire, chained up the dog, and talked to her friends the brutes in the stable. Eugenie fled down the staircase, and ran over to Nanon, who was milking the cow.

"Nanon," she cried, "do let us have some cream for my cousin's coffee, there's a dear."

"But, mademoiselle, you can't have cream off this morning's milk," said Nanon, as she burst out laughing. "I can't make cream for you. Your cousin is as charming as charming can be, that he is. You haven't seen him in that silk night rail of his, all flowers and gold? I did, though! The linen he wears is every bit as fine as M. le Cure's surplice."

"Nanon, make some cake for us."

"And who is to find the wood to heat the oven and the flour and the butter?" asked Nanon, who in her capacity of Grandet's prime minister was a person of immense importance in Eugenie's eyes, and even in Eugenie's mother's. "Is he to be robbed to make a feast for your cousin? Ask for the butter and the flour and the firewood; he is your father, go and ask him, he may give them to you. There's, there he is, just coming downstairs to see after the provisions—"

But Eugenie had escaped into the garden: the sound of her father's footsteps on the creaking staircase terrified her. She was conscious of a happiness that shrunk from the observation of others, a happiness which, as we are apt to think, and perhaps not without reason, shines from our eyes, and is written at large upon our foreheads.

For the first time in her life the sight of her father struck a sort of terror into her heart; she felt that she was the master of her fate, and that she was guiltily hiding some of her thoughts from him. She began to walk hurriedly up and down, wondering how it was that the air was so fresh; there was a reviving force in the sunlight, it was as if a new life had begun. While she was still thinking how to gain her end concerning the cake, a quarrel came to pass between Nanon and Grandet, a thing rare as a winter swallow. The good man had just taken his keys, and was about to dole out the provisions required for the day.

"Is there any bread left over from yesterday?" he asked Nanon.

"Not a crumb, sir."

Grandet took up a large loaf, round in form and close in consistence, shaped in one of the flat baskets which they use for making in Anjou, and was about to cut it, when Nanon broke in upon him with:

"These young fellows from Paris never touch bread, as you will soon see."

Having put down the day's rations to the lowest possible point, the miser was about to go to his fruit loft, first carefully locking up the euphorbia of his storeroom, when Nanon stopped him.

"Just give me some flour and butter, sir," she said, "and I will make a cake for the children."

"Are you going to turn the house upside down because my nephew is here?"

"Your nephew was no more in my mind than your dog, no more than he was in yours. * * * There, now, you have only put out six lumps of sugar, and I want eight."

"Come, come, Nanon; I have never seen you like this before. What has come over you? Are you mistress here? You will have six lumps of sugar and no more."

In spite of the low price of sugar, it was, in Grandet's eyes, the most precious of all colonial produce. But every woman, no matter how simple she may be, can devise some shift to gain her ends; and Nanon allowed the question of the sugar to drop, in order to have her way about the cake.

"Mademoiselle," she called through the window, "wouldn't you like some cake?"

"No, no," answered Eugenie.

"Stay, Nanon," said Grandet as he heard his daughter's voice; "there!"

He opened the flour bin, measured out some flour and added a few ounces of butter to the piece which he had already cut.

"And firewood; I shall want firewood to heat the oven," said the inexorable Nanon.

"Ah! well, you can take what you want," he answered ruefully; "but you will make a fruit tart at the same time, and you must have the dinner in the oven, that will save lighting another fire."

Grandet got the fruit and set a plateful on the kitchen table. Then, having no further order to give, he drew out his watch, and finding that there was yet half an hour to spare before breakfast, took up his hat, gave his daughter a kiss and said, "Would you like to take a walk along the Loire? I have something to see after in the meadows down there."

Eugenie put on her straw hat lined with rose-colored silk, and then father and daughter went down the crooked street toward the market place.

"Where are you off to so early this morning?" said the notary Crochot, as he met the Grandets.

"We are going to take a look at something," responded his friend, in nowise deceived by this early move on the notary's part.

Whenever Grandet was about to "take a look at something" the notary knew by experience that there was something to be gained by going with him. With him, therefore, he went.

(To be continued.)

MOTHER PAWNED HER SON.

Method Employed by a Woman of Mexico to Raise Funds.

That human beings can be pawned the same as a pair of shoes has been demonstrated by a woman named Elena Davalos, who, whenever she was short of funds—and this happened very frequently—pawned her 8-year-old son, Francisco, for sums ranging between \$5 and \$8.

For a time she used to pawn her offspring with some neighbors, who used the little boy as a servant until he was redeemed. They paid nothing for his services, but exacted a high interest for their money invested in the operation. More recently she found a Spanish pawnbroker who lent her money on her son and also used him as a clerk in his shop.

A few days ago the woman redeemed her son from the pawnbroker, but subsequently found herself without money again, and pawned the boy with a woman named Dolores Garcia, who loaned the mother \$10. With this Elena went to visit a number of pulque shops and taverns, and when she had spent one-half of the money she called upon Dolores and urged that her son be given back to her. A quarrel ensued, a gendarme intervened, and the whole affair was disclosed at the police station.

Now the two women are in Belem and the boy has been sent to an orphan asylum. She opened her door, went out on to the landing, and bent over the staircase to hear the sounds in the house.

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