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Les Misérables

VICTOR HUGO



VOLUME TWO

LES MISÉRABLES

VOLUME 2

Victor Hugo

*The second part of a novel
bound in two volumes*



WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

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This edition published 1994 by Wordsworth Editions Limited
8B East Street, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 9ET

ISBN 1 85326 050 9

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Typeset by Antony Gray
Printed and bound in Great Britain by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

LES MISÉRABLES



PART THREE: MARIUS

continued



BOOK 8: THE NOXIOUS POOR

I. *Marius, looking for a girl with a hat,
meets a man with a cap*

SUMMER PASSED, then autumn; winter came. Neither M. Leblanc nor the young girl had set foot in the Luxembourg. Marius had now but one thought, to see that sweet, that adorable face again. He searched continually; he searched everywhere: he found nothing. He was no longer Marius the enthusiastic dreamer, the resolute man, ardent yet firm, the bold challenger of destiny, the brain which projected and built future upon future, the young heart full of plans, projects, prides, ideas, and desires; he was a lost dog. He fell into a melancholy. It was all over with him. Work disgusted him, walking fatigued him, solitude wearied him, vast nature, once so full of forms, of illuminations, of voices, of counsels, of perspectives, of horizons, of teachings, was now a void before him. It seemed to him that everything had disappeared.

He was still full of thought, for he could not be otherwise; but he no longer found pleasure in his thoughts. To all which they were silently but incessantly proposing to him, he answered in the gloom: What is the use?

He reproached himself a hundred times. Why did I follow her? I was so happy in seeing her only! She looked upon me; was not that infinite? She had the appearance of loving me. Was not that everything? I desired to have what? There is nothing more after that. I was a fool. It is my fault, etc., etc. Courfeyrac, to whom he confided nothing; that was his nature; but who found out a little of everything; that was his nature also; had begun by felicitating him upon being in love, and wondering at it withal; then seeing Marius fallen into this melancholy, he had at last said to him: 'I see that you have been nothing but an animal. Here, come to the Cabin.'

Once, confiding in a beautiful September sun, Marius allowed himself to be taken to the Bal de Sceaux,¹¹⁸ by Courfeyrac, Bossuet, and Grantaire, hoping, what a dream! that he might possibly find her there. We need not say that he did not see her whom he sought. 'But yet it is here that all the lost women are to be found,' muttered Grantaire aside. Marius left his friends at the ball, and went back on foot, alone, tired, feverish, with sad and troubled eyes, in the night, overcome by the noise and dust of the joyous coaches full of singing parties who passed by him returning from the festival, while he, discouraged, was breathing in the pungent odour of the walnut trees by the wayside, to restore his brain.

He lived more and more alone, bewildered, overwhelmed, given up to his inward anguish, walking to and fro in his grief like a wolf in a cage, seeking everywhere for the absent, stupefied with love.

At another time, an accidental meeting produced a singular effect upon him. In one of the little streets in the neighbourhood of the Boulevard des Invalides, he saw a man dressed like a labourer, wearing a cap with a long visor, from beneath which escaped a few locks of very white hair. Marius was struck by the beauty of this white hair, and noticed the man who was walking with slow steps and seemed absorbed in painful meditation. Strangely enough, it appeared to

him that he recognised M. Leblanc. It was the same hair, the same profile, as far as the cap allowed him to see, the same manner, only sadder. But why these working-man's clothes? what did that mean? what did this disguise signify? Marius was astounded. When he came to himself, his first impulse was to follow the man; who knows but he had at last caught the trace which he was seeking? At all events, he must see the man again nearer, and clear up the enigma. But this idea occurred to him too late, the man was now gone. He had taken some little side-street, and Marius could not find him again. This adventure occupied his mind for a few days, and then faded away. 'After all,' said he to himself, 'it is probably only a resemblance.'

2. *A waif*

MARIUS STILL LIVED in the Gorbeau tenement. He paid no attention to anybody there.

At this time, it is true, there were no occupants remaining in the house but himself and those Jondrettes whose rent he had once paid, without having ever spoken, however, either to the father, or to the mother, or to the daughters. The other tenants had moved away or died, or had been turned out for not paying their rent.

One day, in the course of this winter, the sun shone a little in the afternoon, but it was the second of February, that ancient Candlemas day whose treacherous sun, the precursor of six weeks of cold, inspired Matthew Laensberg¹¹⁹ with these two lines, which have deservedly become classic:

Qu'il luise ou qu'il luiserne,
L'ours rentre en sa caverne.*

Marius had just left his; night was falling. It was his dinner hour; for it was still necessary for him to go to dinner, alas! oh, infirmity of the ideal passions.

He had just crossed his door-sill which Ma'am Bougon was sweeping at that very moment, muttering at the same time this memorable monologue:

'What is there that is cheap now? everything is dear. There is nothing but people's trouble that is cheap; that comes for nothing, people's trouble.'

Marius went slowly up the boulevard towards the barrière, on the way to the Rue Saint Jacques. He was walking thoughtfully, with his head down.

Suddenly he felt that he was elbowed in the dusk; he turned, and saw two young girls in rags, one tall and slender, the other a little shorter, passing rapidly by, breathless, frightened, and apparently in flight; they had met him, had not seen him, and had jostled him in passing. Marius could see in the twilight their livid faces, their hair tangled and flying, their frightful bonnets, their tattered skirts, and their naked feet. As they ran they were talking to each other. The taller one said in a very low voice:

'The *cognes* came. They just missed *pincer* me at the *demi-cercle*.'

The other answered: 'I saw them. I *cavalé, cavalé, cavalé*.'

* Let it gleam or let it glitter,
The bear returns into his cave.

Marius understood, through this dismal argot, that the gendarmes, or the city police, had not succeeded in seizing these two girls, and that the girls had escaped.

They plunged in under the trees of the boulevard behind him, and for a few seconds made a kind of dim whiteness in the obscurity which soon faded out.

Marius stopped for a moment.

He was about to resume his course when he perceived a little greyish packet on the ground at his feet. He stooped down and picked it up. It was a sort of envelope which appeared to contain papers.

'Good,' said he, 'those poor creatures must have dropped this!'

He retraced his steps, he called, he did not find them; he concluded they were already beyond hearing, put the packet in his pocket, and went to dinner.

On his way, in an alley on the Rue Mouffetard, he saw a child's coffin covered with a black cloth, placed upon three chairs and lighted by a candle. The two girls of the twilight returned to his mind.

'Poor mothers,' thought he. 'There is one thing sadder than to see their children die – to see them lead evil lives.'

Then these shadows which had varied his sadness went out from his thoughts, and he fell back into his customary train. He began to think of his six months of love and happiness in the open air and the broad daylight under the beautiful trees of the Luxembourg.

'How dark my life has become!' said he to himself. 'Young girls still pass before me. Only formerly they were angels; now they are ghouls.'

3. Quadrifrons¹²⁰

IN THE EVENING, as he was undressing to go to bed, he happened to feel in his coat-pocket the packet which he had picked up on the boulevard. He had forgotten it. He thought it might be well to open it, and that the packet might perhaps contain the address of the young girls, if, in reality, it belonged to them, or at all events the information necessary to restore it to the person who had lost it.

He opened the envelope.

It was unsealed and contained four letters, also unsealed.

The addresses were upon them.

All four exhaled an odour of wretched tobacco.

The first letter was addressed: *To Madame, Madame the Marchioness de Grucherau, Square opposite the Chamber of Deputies, No. —.*

Marius said to himself that he should probably find in this letter the information of which he was in search, and that, moreover, as the letter was not sealed, probably it might be read without impropriety.

It was in these words:

MADAME THE MARCHIONESS:

The virtue of kindness and piety is that which binds society most closely. Call up your christian sentiment, and cast a look of compassion upon this unfortunate Spanish victim of loyalty and attachment to the sacred cause of legitimacy, which he has paid for with his blood, consecrated his fortune,

wholly, to defend this cause, and today finds himself in the greatest misery. He has no doubt that your honourable self will furnish him assistance to preserve an existence extremely painful for a soldier of education and of honour full of wounds, reckons in advance upon the humanity which animates you and upon the interest which Madame the Marchioness feels in a nation so unfortunate. Their prayer will not be in vain, and their memory will retain her charming souvenir.

From my respectful sentiments with which I have the honour to be
Madame,

DON ALVERES, Spanish captain of cavalry, royalist refuge in France,
who finds himself traveling for his country and resources fail him to
continue his travels.'

No address was added to the signature. Marius hoped to find the address in the second letter the superscription of which ran: *To Madame, Madame the Comtess de Montvernet, Rue Cassette, No. 9.* Marius read as follows:

MADAME THE COMTESS,

It is an unfortunate mother of a family of six children the last of whom is only eight months old. Me sick since my last lying-in, abandoned by my husband for five months having no resource in the world the most frightful indigence.

In the hope of Madame the Comtesse, she has the honour to be, Madame,
with a profound respect,

MOTHER BALIZARD.

Marius passed to the third letter, which was, like the preceding, a begging one; it read:

MONSIEUR PABOURGEOT, elector, wholesale merchant-milliner, Rue Saint Denis, corner of the Rue aux Fers.

I take the liberty to address you this letter to pray you to accord me the precious favour of your sympathies and to interest you in a man of letters who has just sent a drama to the Théâtre Français. Its subject is historical, and the action takes place in Auvergne in the time of the empire: its style, I believe, is natural, laconic, and perhaps has some merit. There are verses to be sung in four places. The comic, the serious, the unforeseen, mingle themselves with the variety of the characters and with a tint of romance spread lightly over all the plot which advances mysteriously, and by striking turns, to a denouement in the midst of several hits of splendid scenes.

My principal object is to satisfy the desire which animates progressively the man of our century, that is to say, fashion, that capricious and grotesque weathercock which changes almost with every new wind.

In spite of these qualities I have reason to fear that jealousy, the selfishness of the privileged authors, may secure my exclusion from the theatre, for I am not ignorant of the distaste with which newcomers are swallowed.

Monsieur Pabourgeot, your just reputation as an enlightened protector of literary fakes emboldens me to send my daughter to you, who will expose to you our indignant situation, wanting bread and fire in this winter season. To

tell you that I pray you to accept the homage which I desire to offer you in my drama and in all those which I make, is to prove to you how ambitious I am of the honour of sheltering myself under your aegis, and of adorning my writings with your name. If you deign to honour me with the most modest offering, I shall occupy myself immediately in making a piéce of verse for you to pay my tribut of recognition. This piéce, which I shall endeavour to render as perfect as possible, will be sent to you before being inserted in the beginning of the drama and given upon the stage.

To Monsieur and Madam Pabourgeot,
My most respectful homage,

GENFLOT, man of letters.

P.S. Were it only forty sous.

Excuse me for sending my daughter and for not presenting myself, but sad motives of dress do not permit me, alas! to go out –

Marius finally opened the fourth letter. There was on the address: *To the beneficent gentleman of the church Saint Jaques du Haut Pas*. It contained these few lines:

BENEFICENT MAN,

If you will deign to accompany my daughter, you will see a misérable calamity, and I will show you my certificates.

At the sight of these writings your generous soul will be moved with a sentiment of lively benevolence, for true philosophers always experience vivid emotions.

Agree, compassionate man, that one must experience the most cruel necessity, and that it is very painful, to obtain relief, to have it attested by authority as if we were not free to suffer and to die of inanition while waiting for someone to relieve our misery. The fates are very cruel to some and too lavish or too careful to others.

I await your presence or your offering, if you deign to make it, and I pray you to have the kindness to accept the respectful sentiments with which I am proud to be,

Truly magnanimous man,
Your very humble
And very obedient servant,

P. FABANTOU, dramatic artist.

After reading these four letters, Marius did not find himself much wiser than before.

In the first place none of the signers gave his address.

Then they seemed to come from four different individuals, Don Alvarès, Mother Balizard, the poet Genflot, and the dramatic artist Fabantou; but, strangely enough, these letters were all four written in the same hand.

What was the conclusion from that, unless that they came from the same person?

Moreover, and this rendered the conjecture still more probable, the paper, coarse and yellow, was the same in all four, the odour of tobacco was the same, and although there was an evident endeavour to vary the style, the same faults of

orthography were reproduced with a very quiet certainty, and Genflot, the man of letters, was no more free from them than the Spanish captain.

To endeavour to unriddle this little mystery was a useless labour. If it had not been a waif, it would have had the appearance of a mystification. Marius was too sad to take a joke kindly even from chance, or to lend himself to the game which the street pavement seemed to wish to play with him. It appeared to him that he was like Colin Maillard among the four letters, which were *mocking him*.

Nothing, however, indicated that these letters belonged to the girls whom Marius had met on the boulevard. After all, they were but waste paper evidently without value.

Marius put them back into the envelope, threw it into a corner, and went to bed.

About seven o'clock in the morning, he had got up and breakfasted, and was trying to set about his work when there was a gentle rap at his door.

As he owned nothing, he never locked his door, except sometimes, and that very rarely, when he was about some pressing piece of work. And, indeed, even when absent, he left his key in the lock. 'You will be robbed,' said Ma'am Bougon. 'Of what?' said Marius. The fact is, however, that one day somebody had stolen an old pair of boots, to the great triumph of Ma'am Bougon.

There was a second rap, very gentle like the first.

'Come in,' said Marius.

The door opened.

'What do you want, Ma'am Bougon?' asked Marius, without raising his eyes from the books and papers which he had on his table.

A voice, which was not Ma'am Bougon's, answered:

'I beg your pardon, Monsieur -'

It was a hollow, cracked, smothered, rasping voice, the voice of an old man, roughened by brandy and by liquors.

Marius turned quickly and saw a young girl.

4. *A rose in misery*

A GIRL WHO WAS QUITE YOUNG, was standing in the half-opened door. The little round window through which the light found its way into the garret was exactly opposite the door, and lit up this form with a pallid light. It was a pale, puny, meagre creature, nothing but a chemise and a skirt covered a shivering and chilly nakedness. A string for a belt, a string for a headdress, sharp shoulders protruding from the chemise, a blonde and lymphatic pallor, dirty shoulder-blades, red hands, the mouth open and sunken, some teeth gone, the eyes dull, bold, and drooping, the form of an unripe young girl and the look of a corrupted old woman; fifty years joined with fifteen; one of those beings who are both feeble and horrible at once, and who make those shudder whom they do not make weep.

Marius arose and gazed with a kind of astonishment upon this being, so much like the shadowy forms which pass across our dreams.

The most touching thing about it was that this young girl had not come into the world to be ugly. In her early childhood, she must have even been pretty. The grace of her youth was still struggling against the hideous old age brought

on by debauchery and poverty. A remnant of beauty was dying out upon this face of sixteen, like the pale sun which is extinguished by frightful clouds at the dawn of a winter's day.

The face was not absolutely unknown to Marius. He thought he remembered having seen it somewhere.

'What do you wish, mademoiselle?' asked he.

The young girl answered by her voice like a drunken galley-slave's:

'Here is a letter for you, Monsieur Marius.'

She called Marius by his name; he could not doubt that her business was with him; but what was this girl? how did she know his name?

Without waiting for an invitation, she entered. She entered resolutely, looking at the whole room and the unmade bed with a sort of assurance which chilled the heart. She was barefooted. Great holes in her skirt revealed her long limbs and her sharp knees. She was shivering.

She had really in her hand a letter which she presented to Marius.

Marius, in opening this letter, noticed that the enormously large wafer was still wet. The message could not have come far. He read:

MY AMIABLE NEIGHBOUR, YOUNG MAN!

I have lerned your kindness towards me, that you have paid my rent six months ago. I bless you, young man. My eldest daughter will tell you that we have been without a morsel of bread for two days, four persons, and my spouse sick. If I am not desseived by my thoughts, I think I may hope that your generous heart will soften at this exposure and that the desire will subjugate you of being propitious to me by deigning to lavish upon me some light gift.

I am with the distinguished consideration which is due to the benefactors of humanity,

JONDRETTE.

P.S. My daughter will await your orders, dear Monsieur Marius.

This letter, in the midst of the obscure accident which had occupied Marius's thoughts since the previous evening, was a candle in a cave. Everything was suddenly cleared up.

This letter came from the same source as the other four. It was the same writing, the same style, the same orthography, the same paper, the same odour of tobacco.

There were five missives, five stories, five names, five signatures, and a single signer. The Spanish Captain Don Alvarès, the unfortunate mother Balizard, the dramatic poet Genflot, the old comedy writer Fabantou, were all four named Jondrette, if indeed the name of Jondrette himself was Jondrette.

During the now rather long time that Marius had lived in the tenement, he had had, as we have said, but very few opportunities to see, or even catch a glimpse of his very poor neighbours. His mind was elsewhere, and where the mind is, thither the eyes are directed, He must have met the Jondrettes in the passage and on the stairs, more than once, but to him they were only shadows; he had taken so little notice that on the previous evening he had brushed against the Jondrette girls upon the boulevard without recognising them; for it was evidently they; and it was with great difficulty that this girl, who had just come

into his room, had awakened in him, beneath his disgust and pity, a vague remembrance of having met with her elsewhere.

Now he saw everything clearly. He understood that the occupation of his neighbour Jondrette in his distress was to work upon the sympathies of benevolent persons; that he procured their addresses, and that he wrote under assumed names letters to people whom he deemed rich and compassionate, which his daughters carried, at their risk and peril; for this father was one who risked his daughters; he was playing a game with destiny, and he put them into the stake. Marius understood, to judge by their flight in the evening, by their breathlessness, by their terror, by those words of argot which he had heard, that probably these unfortunate things were carrying on also some of the secret trades of darkness, and that from all this the result was, in the midst of human society constituted as it is, two miserable beings who were neither children, nor girls, nor women, a species of impure yet innocent monsters produced by misery.

Sad creatures without name, without age, without sex, to whom neither good nor evil were any longer possible, and for whom, on leaving childhood, there is nothing more in this world, neither liberty, nor virtue, nor responsibility. Souls blooming yesterday, faded today, like those flowers which fall in the street and are bespattered by the mud before a wheel crushes them.

Meantime, while Marius fixed upon her an astonished and sorrowful look, the young girl was walking to and fro in the room with the boldness of a spectre. She bustled about regardless of her nakedness. At times, her chemise, unfastened and torn, fell almost to her waist. She moved the chairs, she disarranged the toilet articles on the bureau, she felt of Marius' clothes, she searched over what there was in the corners.

'Ah,' said she, 'you have a mirror!'

And she hummed, as if she had been alone, snatches of songs, light refrains which were made dismal by her harsh and guttural voice. Beneath this boldness could be perceived an indescribable constraint, restlessness, and humility. Effrontery is a shame.

Nothing was more sorrowful than to see her amusing herself, and, so to speak, fluttering about the room with the movements of a bird which is startled by the light, or which has a wing broken. You feel that under other conditions of education and of destiny, the gay and free manner of this young girl might have been something sweet and charming. Never among animals does the creature which is born to be a dove change into an osprey. That is seen only among men.

Marius was reflecting, and let her go on.

She went to the table.

'Ah!' said she, 'books!'

A light flashed through her glassy eye. She resumed, and her tone expressed that happiness of being able to boast of something, to which no human creature is insensible:

'I can read, I can.'

She hastily caught up the book which lay open on the table, and read fluently:

'— General Bauduin received the order to take five battalions of his brigade and carry the chateau of Hougomont, which is in the middle of the plain of Waterloo —'

She stopped:

'Ah, Waterloo! I know that. It is a battle in old times. My father was there; my father served in the armies. We are jolly good Bonapartists at home, that we are. Against English, Waterloo is.'

She put down the book, took up a pen, and exclaimed:

'And I can write, too!'

She dipped the pen in the ink, and turning towards Marius:

'Would you like to see? Here, I am going to write a word to show.'

And before he had had time to answer, she wrote upon a sheet of blank paper which was on the middle of the table: '*The Cognes are here.*'

Then, throwing down the pen:

'There are no mistakes in spelling. You can look. We have received an education, my sister and I. We have not always been what we are. We were not made -'

Here she stopped, fixed her faded eye upon Marius, and burst out laughing, saying in a tone which contained complete anguish stifled by complete cynicism:

'Bah!'

And she began to hum these words, to a lively air:

J'ai faim, mon père.

Pas de fricot.

J'ai froid, ma mère.

Pas de tricot.

Grelotte

Lolotte!

Sariglote,

Jacquot¹²¹

Hardly had she finished this stanza when she exclaimed:

'Do you ever go to the theatre, Monsieur Marius? I do. I have a little brother who is a friend of some artists, and who gives me tickets sometimes. Now, I do not like the seats in the galleries. You are crowded, you are uncomfortable. There are sometimes coarse people there; there are also people who smell bad.'

Then she looked at Marius, put on a strange manner, and said to him:

'Do you know, Monsieur Marius, that you are a very pretty boy?'

And at the same time the same thought occurred to both of them, which made her smile and made him blush.

She went to him, and laid her hand on his shoulder: 'You pay no attention to me, but I know you, Monsieur Marius. I meet you here on the stairs, and then I see you visiting a man named Father Mabeuf, who lives out by Austerlitz, sometimes, when I am walking that way. That becomes you very well, your tangled hair.'

Her voice tried to be very soft, but succeeded only in being very low. Some of her words were lost in their passage from the larynx to the lips, as upon a keyboard in which some notes are missing.

Marius had drawn back quietly.

'Mademoiselle,' said he, with his cold gravity, 'I have here a packet, which is yours, I think. Permit me to return it to you.'

And he handed her the envelope, which contained the four letters.

She clapped her hands and exclaimed:

'We have looked everywhere!'

Then she snatched the packet, and opened the envelope, saying:

'Lordy, Lordy, haven't we looked, my sister and I? And you have found it! on the boulevard, didn't you? It must have been on the boulevard? You see, this dropped when we ran. It was my brat of a sister who made the stupid blunder. When we got home, we could not find it. As we did not want to be beaten, since that is needless, since that is entirely needless, since that is absolutely needless, we said at home that we had carried the letters to the persons, and that they told us: Nix! Now here they are, these poor letters. And how did you know they were mine? Ah, yes! by the writing! It was you, then, that we knocked against last evening. We did not see you, really! I said to my sister: Is that a gentleman? My sister said - I think it is a gentleman!'

Meanwhile, she had unfolded the petition addressed 'to the beneficent gentleman of the church Saint Jacques du Haut Pas'.

'Here!' said she, 'this is for the old fellow who goes to mass. And this too is the hour. I am going to carry it to him. He will give us something perhaps for breakfast.'

Then she began to laugh, and added:

'Do you know what it will be if we have breakfast today? It will be that we shall have had our breakfast for day before yesterday, our dinner for day before yesterday, our breakfast for yesterday, our dinner for yesterday, all that at one time this morning. Yes! zounds! if you're not satisfied, stuff till you burst, dogs!'

This reminded Marius of what the poor girl had come to his room for.

He felt in his waistcoat, he found nothing there.

The young girl continued, seeming to talk as if she were no longer conscious that Marius was there present.

'Sometimes I go away at night. Sometimes I do not come back. Before coming to this place, the other winter, we lived under the arches of the bridges. We hugged close to each other so as not to freeze. My little sister cried. How chilly the water is! When I thought of drowning myself, I said: No; it is too cold. I go all alone when I want to, I sleep in the ditches sometimes. Do you know, at night, when I walk on the boulevards I see the trees like gibbets, I see all the great black houses like the towers of Notre Dame, I imagine that the white walls are the river, I say to myself: Here, there is water there! The stars are like illumination lamps, one would say that they smoke, and that the wind blows them out, I am confused, as if I had horses breathing in my ear; though it is night, I hear hand-organs and spinning wheels, I don't know what. I think that somebody is throwing stones at me, I run without knowing it, it is all a whirl, all a whirl. When one has not eaten, it is very queer.'

And she looked at him with a wandering eye.

After a thorough exploration of his pockets, Marius had at last got together five francs and sixteen sous. This was at the time all that he had in the world. 'That is enough for my dinner today,' thought he, 'tomorrow we will see.' He took the sixteen sous, and gave the five francs to the young girl.

She took the piece eagerly.

'Good,' said she, 'there is some sunshine!'

And as if the sun had had the effect to loosen an avalanche of argot in her brain, she continued:

'Five francs! a shiner! a monarch! in this *piolle!* it is *chenâtre!* You are a good

mion. I give you my *palpitant*. Bravo for the *fanandels*! Two days of *pivois*! and of *viande-muche*! and of *fricotmar*! we shall *pitancer chenuement*! and *bonne mouise*!"

She drew her chemise up over her shoulders, made a low bow to Marius, then a familiar wave of the hand, and moved towards the door, saying:

'Good morning, monsieur. It is all the same. I am going to find my old man.'

On her way she saw on the bureau a dry crust of bread moulding there in the dust; she sprang upon it, and bit it, muttering:

'That is good! it is hard! it breaks my teeth!'

Then she went out.

5. *The Judas of providence*

FOR FIVE YEARS Marius had lived in poverty, in privation, in distress even, but he perceived that he had never known real misery. Real misery he had just seen. It was this sprite which had just passed before his eyes. In fact, he who has seen the misery of man only has seen nothing, he must see the misery of woman; he who has seen the misery of woman only has seen nothing, he must see the misery of childhood.

When man has reached the last extremity, he comes, at the same time, to the last expedients. Woe to the defenceless beings who surround him! Work, wages, bread, fire, courage, willingness, all fail him at once. The light of day seems to die away without, the moral light dies out within; in this gloom, man meets the weakness of woman and childhood, and puts them by force to ignominious uses.

Then all horrors are possible. Despair is surrounded by fragile walls which all open into vice or crime.

Health, youth, honour, the holy and passionate delicacies of the still tender flesh, the heart, virginity, modesty, that epidermis of the soul, are fatally disposed of by that blind groping which seeks for aid, which meets degradation, and which accommodates itself to it. Fathers, mothers, children, brothers, sisters, men, women, girls, cling together, and almost grow together like a mineral formation, in that dark promiscuity of sexes, of relationships, of ages, of infancy, of innocence. They crouch down, back to back, in a kind of fate-hovel. They glance at one another sorrowfully. Oh, the unfortunate! how pallid they are! how cold they are! It seems as though they were on a planet much further from the sun than we.

This young girl was to Marius a sort of messenger from the night.

She revealed to him an entire and hideous aspect of the darkness.

Marius almost reproached himself with the fact that he had been so absorbed in his reveries and passion that he had not until now cast a glance upon his neighbours. Paying their rent was a mechanical impulse; everybody would have had that impulse; but he, Marius, should have done better. What! a mere wall separated him from these abandoned beings, who lived by groping in the night without the pale of the living; he came in contact with them, he was in some sort the last link of the human race which they touched, he heard them live or rather breathe beside him, and he took no notice of them! every day at every moment, he heard them through the wall, walking, going, coming, talking, and he did not lend his ear! and in these words there were groans, and he did not even listen, his thoughts were elsewhere, upon dreams, upon impossible glimmerings, upon

loves in the sky, upon infatuations; and all the while human beings, his brothers in Jesus Christ, his brothers in the people, were suffering death agonies beside him! agonising uselessly; he even caused a portion of their suffering, and aggravated it. For had they had another neighbour, a less chimerical and more observant neighbour, an ordinary and charitable man, it was clear that their poverty would have been noticed, their signals of distress would have been seen, and long ago perhaps they would have been gathered up and saved! Undoubtedly they seemed very depraved, very corrupt, very vile, very hateful, even, but those are rare who fall without becoming degraded; there is a point, moreover, at which the unfortunate and the infamous are associated and confounded in a single word, a fatal word, *Les Misérables*; whose fault is it? And then, is it not when the fall is lowest that charity ought to be greatest?

While he thus preached to himself, for there were times when Marius, like all truly honest hearts, was his own monitor, and scolded himself more than he deserved, he looked at the wall which separated him from the Jondrettes, as if he could send his pitying glance through that partition to warn those unfortunate beings. The wall was a thin layer of plaster, upheld by laths and joists, through which, as we have just seen, voices and words could be distinguished perfectly. None but the dreamer, Marius, would not have perceived this before. There was no paper hung on this wall, either on the side of the Jondrettes, or on Marius' side; its coarse construction was bare to the eye. Almost unconsciously, Marius examined this partition; sometimes reverie examines, observes, and scrutinises, as thought would do. Suddenly he arose, he noticed towards the top, near the ceiling, a triangular hole, where three laths left a space between them. The plaster which should have stopped this hole was gone, and by getting upon the bureau he could see through that hole into the Jondrettes' garret. Pity has and should have its curiosity. This hole was a kind of Judas. It is lawful to look upon misfortune like a betrayer for the sake of relieving it. 'Let us see what these people are,' thought Marius, 'and to what they are reduced.'

He climbed upon the bureau, put his eye to the crevice, and looked.

6. *The wild man in his lair*

CITIES, like forests, have their dens in which hide all their vilest and most terrible monsters. But in cities, what hides thus is ferocious, unclean, and petty, that is to say, ugly; in forests, what hides is ferocious, savage, and grand, that is to say, beautiful. Den for den, those of beasts are preferable to those of men. Caverns are better than the wretched holes which shelter humanity.

What Marius saw was a hole.

Marius was poor and his room was poorly furnished, but even as his poverty was noble, his garret was clean. The den into which his eyes were at that moment directed, was abject, filthy, fetid, infectious, gloomy, unclean. All the furniture was a straw chair, a rickety table, a few old broken dishes, and in two of the corners two indescribable pallets; all the light came from a dormer window of four panes, curtained with spiders' webs. Just enough light came through that loophole to make a man's face appear like the face of a phantom. The walls had a leprous look, and were covered with seams and scars like a face disfigured by some horrible malady; a putrid moisture oozed from them. Obscene pictures