

"Lucien loves you; he wrote the note. Your Préfet is his greatest foe; how can he speak in his presence?"

The stranger moved off, leaving Madame d'Espard a prey to a double surprise. The Marquise knew no one in the world who was capable of playing the part assumed by this mask; she suspected a snare, and went to sit down out of sight. The Comte Sixte du Châtelet—whom Lucien had abridged of his ambitions *du* with an emphasis that betrayed long meditated revenge—followed the handsome dandy, and presently met a young man to whom he thought he could speak without reserve.

"Well, Rastignac, have you seen Lucien? He has come out in a new skin."

"If I were half as good looking as he is, I should be twice as rich," replied the fine gentleman, in a light but meaning tone, expressive of keen raillery.

"No!" said the fat mask in his ear, repaying a thousand ironies in one by the accent he lent the monosyllable.

Rastignac, who was not the man to swallow an affront, stood as if struck by lightning, and allowed himself to be led into a recess by a grasp of iron which he could not shake off.

"You young cockerel, hatched in Mother Vanquer's coop—you, whose heart failed you to clutch old Taillefer's millions when the hardest part of the business was done—let me tell you, for your personal safety, that if you do not treat Lucien like the brother you love, you are in our power, while we are no, in yours. Silence and submission! or I shall join your game and upset the skittles. Lucien de Rubempré is under the protection of the strongest power of the day—the Church. Choose between life and death.—Answer."

Rastignac felt giddy, like a man who has slept in a forest and wakes to see by his side a famishing lioness. He was frightened, and there was no one to see him; the boldest men yield to fear under such circumstances.

"No one but *he* can know—or would dare——" he murmured to himself.