

The Ladies' Paradise



INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ÉMILE ZOLA

Although born in Paris, Émile Zola spent his childhood in Aix-en-Provence. When Zola was seven, his father died, and Zola and his mother moved back to Paris. Zola's mother raised him to pursue law, but Zola flunked his exam twice and worked instead as a clerk at a shipping firm. In 1865, Zola started an affair with a seamstress named Alexandrine, whom he later married in 1870. Although they had no children, they cared for Zola's mother, who lived with them. In 1888, Zola started another affair with another seamstress named Jeanne with whom Zola had two children. Zola visited his two children in secret until Alexandrine discovered their existence and—after nearly divorcing Zola—decided to allow him to support them. Zola's first novel—an autobiography that alerted the police to the corruption in the shipping industry—got him fired from his company. After that, he published many serial novels and criticisms in local newspapers. After his novel *Therese Raquin* acquired him some publicity, he started on his major life's work: the twenty-volume novel series *Les Rougon-Macquart*, of which *The Ladies' Paradise* is the 11th volume. After the seventh volume of the series was published in 1877, Zola secured a publishing contract and became wealthy, earning more than many other prominent writers of his time. As well as being a major literary influence, Zola was also active politically. In 1898, he published an open letter called *J'Accuse...!* (I accuse...!), in which he accused prominent members of the French army of wrongfully convicting Alfred Dreyfus—a French soldier—on antisemitic grounds. Although Zola's outspokenness led to a year's exile in the United Kingdom, Dreyfus was ultimately acquitted, an event which proved the power of writers to shape public opinion. In 1902, Zola died of carbon monoxide poisoning from a blocked chimney. Some of the thousands of people who attended his funeral believed that Zola had been murdered by his enemies in the Dreyfus trial (who had made previous attempts to kill him), but no evidence was ever found.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Ladies' Paradise responds to the class conflicts that characterized France in the mid-19th century. This class conflict caused a turning point in literary style, replacing Romanticism with Realism. Whereas Romantic literature idealized the individual and explored emotion, Realism was characterized by an objective style that uniquely addressed poverty and the experience of the lower class. While both Romanticism and Realism were responses to industrialization, Realism uniquely addressed the class struggle by depicting

mundane and everyday experience. In adopting the Realist style, Zola describes industrialization and the class conflict objectively, relying on descriptions of these processes to paint a picture of life during late 19th-century France.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Émile Zola's work spearheaded naturalism—a literary movement in which authors held that ancestry and environment determined the fate of their characters. Many of Zola's French contemporaries were also influential to this movement, such as Victor Hugo with his seminal works *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. Outside of France, Zola's work heavily influenced authors who strove to mimic his style of conveying the truth about contemporary society through literature. Among the works influenced are John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath* and his other works, Charles Dickens's novels, and Joan Didion's autobiographies. Upton Sinclair's novel *Oil!* about the boom in the California oil industry explores similar themes of greed and consumerism to *The Ladies' Paradise*. *The Ladies' Paradise* is also the 11th book of Zola's 20-volume series *Les Rougon-Macquart*. This series, containing over 300 characters and following the lives of the descendants of two families during the Second French Empire, situates *The Ladies' Paradise* among Zola's other influential works.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Ladies' Paradise
- **When Written:** 1883
- **Where Written:** France
- **When Published:** 1883
- **Literary Period:** Naturalism
- **Genre:** Fiction
- **Setting:** 19th-century Paris
- **Climax:** Genevieve's death
- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

Famous Friendship. Émile Zola was childhood friends with the famous French painter Paul Cézanne. They were inseparable until Zola wrote *The Masterpiece*, in which a fictionalized version of Cézanne appeared. Something about Zola's portrayal of the bohemian life of artists must have offended his friend.

Personal Interest. The protagonist of *The Ladies' Paradise* and Zola's daughter share the name Denise. This detail suggests

that Zola created the character Denise in the image of his own daughter and reveals his preference for this particular heroine out of the many that were included in the *Rougon-Macquart* series.



PLOT SUMMARY

Denise and her brothers, Pépé and Jean, arrive in Paris. Their father and mother have recently died, and they are going to stay with their uncle Baudu, who owns a drapery shop called the Vieil Elbeuf. As they walk to his shop, they pass **the Ladies' Paradise**—a huge, enchanting department store. Denise and her brothers discover that the Baudus are sinking towards bankruptcy. Their customers have been driven away by the Ladies' Paradise—a store that has multiple departments, a captivating atmosphere, and cheap prices. Baudu has no job for Denise, so she decides to apply at the Ladies' Paradise—a decision that offends the Baudus, who hate modern business.

The story leaves Denise to follow Octave Mouret—the owner of the Ladies' Paradise—arriving in his office after a night of partying. He looks in gratitude at the portrait of his late wife, Madame Hédouin, and then goes on his daily inspection of his store, the great “machine.” Mouret decides to sell a fancy silk at a loss to himself to ensure customer trust. He founds his store on the principle of exploiting the universal desires of all women. This has proved wildly successful, even though Bourdoncle warns him that women will “have their revenge” one day. Mouret comes upon Denise, who is at that moment applying to work in the ladieswear department. Madame Aurélie—the buyer of the department—thinks that Denise is too shy and skinny, but Mouret takes a liking to her and has Madame Aurélie hire her. Denise, who had seen Mouret earlier on the street, feels the same inexplicable fear around him that she had felt earlier.

That weekend at Madame Desforges's house, a group of aristocratic ladies—Madame de Boves, Madame Guibal, and Madame Marty—gather for tea. They are joined by Vallagnosc, Mouret, and Baron Hartmann. Mouret persuades Baron to sell him property adjacent to the Ladies' Paradise for an expansion plan. He talks up the Ladies' Paradise, and the ladies get excited. The following Monday, the ladies attend a sale at the Ladies' Paradise—an event that seduces rich and poor women alike with grandiose displays and emotional tricks—and become entranced by it in their own ways.

Meanwhile, the salesgirls bully Denise out of sales, and she struggles to pay Pépé's room and board and the money to cover Jean's constant affairs. Pauline—her one friend at the Ladies Paradise—suggests that Denise make extra money by taking a lover, but Denise is naturally disinclined to a sexual lifestyle. She goes on a day trip to the country with Pauline and her boyfriend, where she is distraught to see Hutin—a salesman at

the Ladies' Paradise whom she has a crush on—acting obscene in a bar. She also runs into Deloche—a salesman at the Ladies' Paradise. He confesses his love for Denise, but she thinks of him only as a friend. The slow season at the Paradise starts, and all the salespeople live in fear of being fired. One day, Jouve—who has a vendetta against Denise because she physically rejected his predatory advances—catches Denise in the basement talking to Jean, and, believing Jean to be Denise's lover, has Denise fired immediately. He doesn't consult Mouret, who has since developed feelings for Denise.

Denise then lives through a period of intense poverty. She and Pépé rent a dingy room above a small umbrella shop owned by Bourras. Denise refuses to make money as a prostitute like the other poor women around her, and instead makes a little money working for Bourras, who rants constantly about the obscenity of the Ladies' Paradise. Finally, Denise gets a job working for Robineau—the buyer of the silk department who was also recently fired—in his new drapery shop. Denise likes the Robineaus, but when she runs into Mouret in a park, they have an impassioned discussion in which she shares her preference for modern business. Robineau and the Baudus (whom Denise has reconciled with) refuse to join what she calls “the natural development of business.” Denise is distraught that the small businessowners are letting themselves be ruined, and that her cousin Geneviève—whose fiancé Colombar is in love with Paradise salesgirl Clara—is dying of heartbreak.

Denise accepts an invitation from Mouret to return to the Ladies' Paradise. There is another big sale, and Mouret intentionally disorganizes the store so as to make his female customers get lost and thus spend more. Madame Marty goes into a fever of spending while Madame de Boves feels tempted to shoplift. After the sale, Mouret promotes Denise to assistant buyer of the ladieswear department. Soon after this, Denise gets a letter from Mouret asking her to dine with him—something he has asked of many salesgirls, including Clara, who afterwards become his mistresses. Although Denise has since realized she loves Mouret, she doesn't want to be his mistress. While the news of the letter circulates through the staff, Mouret finds Denise counting stock in the pattern room. He begs her to accept him and confesses he loves her, but she rejects him.

Soon after, Madame Desforges—who could tell at the sale that Mouret loves Denise—jealously invites Mouret to a tea party and sends for Denise at the same time to fit a coat for her. Madame Desforges bosses Denise around and humiliates her by flaunting her relationship with Mouret. Finally, Denise breaks her calm, insinuating that Madame Desforges is overweight. Mouret defends Denise and breaks his ties with Madame Desforges. At the same tea party, Mouret persuades Baron to support his expanding the Ladies' Paradise onto an entire street—the Rue du Dix-December. He also fires Bouthemont—who has since befriended Madame

Desforges—and Madame Desforges takes him under her wing to finance his own department store.

Construction starts on expanding the Ladies Paradise onto the Rue du Dix-Decembre. Despite his dreams being realized, Mouret feels that his power and money are meaningless since he can't have Denise. Bourdoncle—who is worried that Denise is “the revenge” he has been warning Mouret about—tells Mouret that Denise has been having relations with Deloche. Furious with jealousy, Mouret again confesses his love to Denise. She rejects him again but assures him that she has no lovers. After this, Denise becomes buyer of a new department for children and uses her position to make changes to the Ladies' Paradise: she opens a school for employees and a maternity ward for the pregnant salesgirls like Pauline, who has since married Baugé.

When Colomban runs off with Clara, Geneviève becomes seriously ill and soon passes away. The small tradespeople—all dismal in their bankrupt state—gather for **her funeral**. Shortly after, Madame Baudu passes away. Robineau goes bankrupt, fails an attempt at suicide, and then retires to the country with his wife. Bourras goes bankrupt and Mouret demolishes his shop, expanding the Ladies' Paradise into its space. Baudu and Bourras both refuse Denise's offers of help. Denise is distraught by the suffering of the small businessowners but sees their demise as necessary for the progress of modern business.

The new Rue du Dix-Decembre opens and is inaugurated by a “white sale” in which the store is decorated like a wedding. Tired of all the rumors circulating about her and Mouret, Denise plans to leave the Ladies' Paradise after this sale. Jean (who is now married) and Pépé (who goes to school in Paris) visit Denise in the children's department. Mouret, making his usual inspection, is touched by Denise's love for her brothers, and asks Denise to come to his office after the sale. Meanwhile, Madame Desforges, Madame de Boves, and Madame Marty (whose husband went crazy after she spent all his money) shop in all the departments. Jouve catches Madame de Boves stealing some lace, and she is taken to Bourdoncle's office and searched. Mouret observes all these women who are at his mercy and feels suddenly that he wants to surrender to Denise. After the sale, the money bags are brought to Mouret's desk, but he is indifferent to the new record of one million dollars that they contain. Denise comes to his office, and Mouret proposes to her. Denise accepts, and they fall into each other's arms while Madame Hédouin seems to smile in her portrait above them.

unremarkable—pale, skinny, and plain. Her one attractive feature is her long mane of thick blonde hair. When the story begins, she is 20 years old and is arriving jobless in Paris with her two brothers Pépé and Jean. Although she is young and shy, she right away feels an attraction towards **the Ladies' Paradise**—the big department store across from her uncle Baudu's—that makes her feel a confidence and excitement for life. When she first starts working at the Ladies' Paradise, she is bullied mercilessly and struggles to support her family financially. Throughout this time—and after she is briefly fired and lives in dire poverty—she maintains courageous hope, and refuses to take a lover or lead a sexual lifestyle for money. Her timidity and plainness slowly develop into a dignity and charm which deeply affect Mouret, and eventually win over everyone at the Ladies' Paradise. Moreover, she has an intelligence and aptitude for modern business, talking at length about the “natural development” of business, and voicing her own ideas for its future to her family and Mouret. She feels pity for the small businessowners—the Baudus, Bourras, and Robineau—who stick stubbornly to tradition. However, she also feels that their suffering is necessary in order to pave the way for the future, realizing that every change requires sacrifice. Although Denise bridges the gap between the traditional businessowners and modern business, she is unable to reconcile the tradesmen to modernity and thus save their lives. Instead, she makes changes at the Ladies' Paradise, opening a school and a maternity ward for the employees. Both these changes help to create more mobility between the ranks of class and gender, allowing the working class the chance to educate themselves and allowing women to be a part of the working class. In this way, Denise, although moral and reserved in an old-fashioned way, is also modern in her championing of big business and equality. Moreover, in winning over Mouret and getting him to propose to her, Denise gets the best of both worlds: the power to make changes at the Ladies' Paradise, and a respectable relationship with the man she loves.

Octave Mouret – Octave Mouret is the handsome young owner of **the Ladies' Paradise**—the new department store in Paris. He had been an “adventurer” with no wealth or remarkable family connections until he married Madame Hédouin—the previous owner of the Ladies' Paradise. When Madame Hédouin died (some believe that Mouret killed her), Mouret transformed the Ladies' Paradise from a small drapery shop into the first department store in Paris. As a widower, he lives a promiscuous bachelor's lifestyle. He also acts recklessly in his business matters, spending all of his money on new departments and goods to lure his customers. He explains that this dangerous yet successful business model comes from his love for life—his desire to suffer, act, and create. He also founds his business on the exploitation of women's “universal desires.” In his personal life, Mouret is a womanizer who knows how to make women obsessed with him. Likewise, in business, he appeals to female desires essentially to trap women and keep



CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Denise Baudu – Denise is an orphan who at first appears

them as his loyal customers. When Mouret walks around his store inspecting it, he feels that it is a well-oiled “machine;” he also feels that it is a battleground on which women lie vanquished. Mouret also successfully exploits Madame Desforges’s affections in order to get close to Baron Hartmann, a man with the power to leverage Mouret’s business expansions. But despite his confidence that he can control women, Bourdoncle—his business assistant—warns him that women will “have their revenge.” This revenge occurs when Mouret falls in love with Denise, but she refuses his invitation to be his mistress. Mouret then falls from his position of power into a feeling of powerlessness in which he realizes that his money and authority are useless since he can’t get Denise. After a long struggle against his pride, Mouret proposes to Denise, realizing that—in this case—he can acquire what he wants through surrendering rather than conquering. In this way, Mouret grows over the course of the story to realize that his greatest power is not in exploitation.

Baudu – Baudu is Denise’s uncle and the owner of a small drapery shop called the Vieil Elbeuf. He is loyal to his traditional ways of business, so when **the Ladies’ Paradise** starts to attract business across the street, Baudu clings to his old-fashioned drapery shop. He bands together with other small businessowners like Bourras and Robineau in believing that it is ludicrous that the Ladies’ Paradise sells more than one good. He thinks that Mouret’s success is an illusion that is bound to fail. At first, when the success of the Ladies’ Paradise is tenuous, it is unclear whether Baudu’s opinion is rational or irrational. However, as the Ladies’ Paradise becomes more established, Baudu’s hatred towards it becomes more fanatical. His obsessive hatred causes him not to see the non-financial consequences of his contest with the Ladies’ Paradise. He doesn’t notice that Colomban is enthralled with the Ladies’ Paradise and believes that he is a loyal, hardworking relic of the old days instead. Also, he doesn’t see that Geneviève is suffering as a result of Colomban’s disloyalty. He sticks to the idea that he can get the Vieil Elbeuf on good standing for Colomban and Geneviève—an idea that becomes more and more senseless in the midst of progress. When Geneviève and Madame Baudu die and the Vieil Elbeuf goes bankrupt, Baudu—too embarrassed to accept Denise’s offer of a job at the Ladies’ Paradise—goes to a home for the elderly.

Madame Baudu – Madame Baudu is Baudu’s wife. She is pale and quiet, and these qualities increase as her family sinks closer to bankruptcy. Unlike her husband, Madame Baudu is perceptive of Colomban’s betrayal and Geneviève’s suffering. After Geneviève dies, Madame Baudu’s health worsens quickly. She passes away after several weeks of lying motionless and staring at **the Ladies’ Paradise**—her family’s enemy—through her window.

Geneviève Baudu – Geneviève is Baudu’s daughter. She is pale and thin, with a thick mane of black hair. Per tradition, she has

been engaged for 10 years to her father’s shop assistant, Colomban, who will take over her father’s shop when they marry. As Colomban grows increasingly allured by Clara Prunaire (who he can see through the window at **the Ladies’ Paradise** across the street), Geneviève’s spirits start to suffer. This leads her health to suffer too, as she grows so thin and sickly that her body no longer looks like a woman’s. Shortly after Colomban runs away with Clara, Geneviève dies, and the local tradespeople gather for **her funeral**—an event which symbolizes the death of small business.

Colomban – Colomban is Baudu’s shop assistant and Geneviève’s fiancé. Baudu thinks that Colomban is the last survivor of the old ways of business—loyal, hardworking, and traditional. In reality, Colomban lusts after Clara Prunaire (whom he can see through the window across the street at **the Ladies’ Paradise**) and is not sensitive to the sacrifices that Baudu and Geneviève are making for him. Colomban eventually runs away with Clara, following in the footsteps of his father, who led an infamously promiscuous life.

Bourdoncle – Bourdoncle is Mouret’s business partner. Bourdoncle is more intelligent and less distracted than Mouret, but he lacks the genius that makes Mouret the true master of **the Ladies’ Paradise**. Mouret and Bourdoncle both like to exploit women, but Bourdoncle goes as far as to beat his mistresses because he views women as wicked. Bourdoncle is more conservative in business matters than Mouret and warns him that the women whom Mouret exploits with his tactics will one day “have their revenge.” Due to this belief, Bourdoncle is wary of Mouret’s feelings for Denise and tries to keep her away from the Ladies’ Paradise. However, as Mouret gets more obsessed with Denise, Bourdoncle starts to imagine the possibility of usurping Mouret’s position and so encourages Mouret to marry Denise. However, Mouret ultimately decides that Bourdoncle was wrong to view women as a threat to business. Mouret’s decision to marry Denise doubly proves that Bourdoncle’s opinion of women—which Mouret used to partially share—was incomplete.

Madame Aurélie – Madame Aurélie is the buyer in the ladieswear department at **the Ladies’ Paradise**. She is stout and majestic, with an aging face that looks like an ancient mask. When Denise first arrives at the Ladies’ Paradise, Madame Aurélie is severe with her. She is part of the “Lhomme dynasty,” the succession people from her family who have been powerful at the Ladies’ Paradise. Despite her authority, however, her home life is lacking. Her husband Lhomme and her son Albert have little to no relationship with each other and spend time pursuing their own interests. The Lhommes buy Baudu’s country house, and Madame Aurélie spends most of her free time there in the company of other women. Madame Aurélie uses her prestige to save her son from being fired for his countless mistakes, but when he is caught aiding and abetting thefts at the Ladies’ Paradise, he is finally fired. Madame

Aurélie privately recognizes this as a consequence of the Lhommes' bad home life. In her fear that the "Lhomme dynasty" is crumbling, Madame Aurélie becomes affectionate towards Denise whom she realizes has sway over Mouret.

Bourras – Bourras is the owner of a small umbrella shop next to **the Ladies' Paradise**. He is old and fiery, with white hair and eyebrows. While Denise is staying above his shop when she has no job, he rants to her about the Ladies' Paradise while carving umbrella handles. Despite his abrasive personality, he has a fondness for Pépé and takes care of him while Denise works at Robineau's. Bourras despises the Ladies' Paradise and does everything he can to resist being put out of business by it. Bourras is obstinate to the point of his own demise, refusing to let go of his shop for the enormous sums of money that Mouret offers him. Mouret then expands the Ladies' Paradise around Bourras's shop, dwarfing it and making it look even more decrepit. When Bourras is driven to bankruptcy and Mouret buys his shop for a meager 500 francs, the police are forced to physically remove Bourras from his store. Even once he is homeless and bankrupt, he refuses Denise's offer to help him. His character exemplifies the stubbornness of the small tradesmen in refusing to break with tradition.

Robineau – Robineau is the buyer of the silk department at **the Ladies' Paradise**. After his department conspires against him, hoping to usurp his job, he is fired by Mouret. He goes to set up his own small drapery shop with his wife's—Madame Robineau's—family money. In an attempt to succeed, he joins forces with Gaujean and other small business owners in the area. However, he soon goes bankrupt. Distraught to have wasted his wife's money, Robineau tries to kill himself by throwing himself under a bus. However, he only breaks one of his legs, and then he and his wife—who is by that time pregnant—decide to retire to the country. Throughout the novel, Robineau shows unprecedented kindness to Denise, first helping her get a job at the Ladies' Paradise, then helping her make some extra money on the side, and finally employing her at his drapery shop when she is fired from the Ladies' Paradise.

Vinçard – Vinçard is one of the independent shop owners who shares the street with Baudu's drapery shop and **the Ladies' Paradise**. He owns a fabric manufacturing shop, which he ultimately sells to Robineau and Robineau's wife. Though he insists he does so because he's in poor health, Vinçard starts a restaurant after selling the shop because the restaurant business is more lucrative—and it means he doesn't have to compete with the Ladies' Paradise.

Jean – Jean is Denise's younger brother. He is very handsome, with delicate, feminine features. He lives and works at an ivory carving shop in Paris. Throughout the novel, he causes Denise much anxiety by having affairs that incur the jealousy and wrath of the husbands and fathers of his mistresses. Denise is forced to give him her hard-earned money to hush up these affairs. At the end of the novel, he marries Therese.

Pépé – Pépé is Denise's youngest brother. When the siblings arrive in Paris at the beginning of *The Ladies' Paradise*, Pépé is five years old. While she works at **the Ladies' Paradise**, Denise keeps Pépé in a boardinghouse for small children. Eventually, she sends him to school in Paris. When the novel ends, Pépé is 12 years old.

Pauline— Pauline is a salesgirl at **the Ladies' Paradise**. She becomes close with Denise and tries to convince her to solve her financial troubles by getting a lover to support her. Pauline herself has a lover—Baugé—and she maintains that her sexual lifestyle is not indecent. After Baugé starts working at the Ladies' Paradise, he and Pauline marry and Pauline becomes pregnant. Pauline fears being fired and tries to hide her pregnancy, thus endangering her baby. Her plight moves Denise to enact new laws that allow pregnancy among employees and opens a maternity ward at the Ladies' Paradise.

Clara Prunaire – Clara Prunaire is a salesgirl at **the Ladies' Paradise**. She has red hair and a "horse-like" face. She leads a promiscuous lifestyle and doesn't care about anyone's feelings. She bullies Denise mercilessly and has an affair with Mouret after Denise rejects him. When she discovers that Colombar lusting after her, she decides to inveigle him away from Geneviève just for fun, and then later rejects him. She ultimately leaves her job at the Ladies' Paradise; some people believe she becomes a prostitute.

Madame Desforges – Madame Desforges is a widowed aristocrat and Mouret's mistress. She is 35 years old, but, in her fear of aging and losing her attractiveness to men, she pretends that she is only 29. She increasingly fears that Mouret is only interested in her because he wants to get close to Baron Hartmann, her wealthy benefactor whom she often persuades to finance her younger lovers. Madame Desforges pretends that she is above **the Ladies' Paradise**—a place where high- and low-class women shop together—but goes to every sale and makes surreptitious purchases. She grows incredibly jealous when she discovers that Mouret has feelings for Denise and stages a meeting between Mouret and Denise at her house in which she embarrasses them both. However, she embarrasses herself most of all, and Mouret terminates his relationship with her. She then starts up a relationship with Bouthemont and persuades Baron to finance his department store, the Quatre Saisons. For a time, it seems probable that Madame Desforges will be the woman whom Bourdoncle warns will get her "revenge" against Mouret, but she only amounts to what she was in the beginning—a woman who finances young men's business ideas to get them to sleep with her.

Madame de Boves – Madame de Boves—or Countess de Boves—is one of Madame Desforges's aristocratic friends. Throughout the novel, she patronizes **the Ladies' Paradise** but claims not to desire anything enough to buy it. However, during the white sale at the Ladies' Paradise, Madame de Boves is

caught stuffing lace up her sleeve by Jouve. It comes to light that Madame de Boves has made a habit of robbing from the shop, finding theft perversely more titillating since it risks her important reputation.

Madame Marty – Madame Marty is one of Madame Desforges’s friends and is the first of the aristocratic ladies to start shopping at **the Ladies’ Paradise**. Throughout the novel, she and her daughter Valentine show themselves to be utterly incapable of resisting the appeals of the Ladies’ Paradise. She goes into fevers of excessive spending, making fewer and fewer excuses as the story goes on. Her spending makes Monsieur Marty go broke and drives him into a fit of mania. Despite this, Madame Marty goes to live with an uncle and continues to shop, presumably spending the uncle’s money.

Monsieur Marty – Monsieur Marty is a professor and Madame Marty’s husband. Madame Marty’s excessive spending at **the Ladies’ Paradise** forces Monsieur Marty to seek financial help from Madame Desforges, and to take on some shady teaching jobs that jeopardize his main position. Ultimately, Madame Marty’s habits drive him into a fit of mania in which he behaves like a tyrant, and she goes to live with her uncle.

Baron Hartmann – Baron Hartmann works for a big Credit Union in Paris. He becomes acquainted with Mouret through Madame Desforges, his mistress and benefactor. Through the Credit Union, Baron owns most of the buildings on a street onto which Mouret hopes to expand **the Ladies’ Paradise**. Charmed by Mouret’s youthful passion for business, Baron paves the way for the Ladies’ Paradise to occupy the entire street. At Madame Desforges’s request, Baron also funds Bouthemont’s department store, the Quatre Saisons.

Vallagnosc – Vallagnosc is an acquaintance of Madame Desforges’s and an old school friend of Mouret’s. Throughout *The Ladies’ Paradise*, Vallagnosc’s temperament and beliefs are contrasted against Mouret’s. Unlike Mouret, Vallagnosc got good grades in school and went on to pursue a life of academia. However, as an adult he holds a minor position in government and lives at home with his mother. Vallagnosc is pessimistic and bored, believing that there is no point in striving for anything when life always fails to live up to one’s expectations. He marries Blanche as part of an arrangement and without having any interest in her. However, when his mother-in-law Madame de Boves creates a scandal by robbing from **the Ladies’ Paradise**, Vallagnosc is embarrassed, proving that he does care about misfortune—that is, when it befalls him.

Hutin – Hutin is a salesman in the silk department at **the Ladies’ Paradise**. Denise initially has a crush on Hutin, believing him to be kind even though he insults her behind her back. Although Hutin spends all his wages at bars and on girls, his sole mission is to supplant those higher than him in his department so he can climb the ladder himself. To this end, he conspires to have Robineau fired, and then Bouthemont. In this

way, Hutin attains to the position of buyer, but then faces the prospect of himself being fired and replaced by Favier.

Jouve – Jouve is the watchman at **the Ladies’ Paradise**, responsible for catching customers robbing the store, and employees engaging in affairs or conspiracies. Many of the salesgirls avoid him, knowing that he has invited girls to his apartment and sexually assaulted them in the past. At one point, he corners Denise and tries to make her accept such an invitation. At the end of *The Ladies’ Paradise*, he catches Madame de Boves stealing from the store.

Henri Deloche – Henri Deloche is a salesman at **the Ladies’ Paradise** who applies for his job at the same time that Denise does. He and Denise become friends and discover that they grew up in the same rural village. Deloche develops feelings for Denise, but she only ever considers him a friend. At the end of the novel, Deloche is fired for incompetence.

Madame Hédouin – Madame Hédouin was the original owner of **the Ladies’ Paradise** and Mouret’s late wife. Many people—especially Mouret’s enemies—believe that Mouret killed Madame Hédouin by pushing her into the foundation of the new Ladies’ Paradise building, “staining it with her blood.” However, her portrait hangs above Mouret’s desk, and he often looks at it in gratitude. When Mouret and Denise get together, the portrait of Madame Hédouin seems to smile in approval.

Bouthemont – Bouthemont is the assistant buyer of the silk department at **the Ladies’ Paradise**. When Hutin pushes Robineau out of his position as buyer, Bouthemont is promoted to buyer. When Bouthemont doesn’t sell enough silk one year, Mouret fires him, too. Bouthemont then consults Madame Desforges, and she persuades Baron Hartmann to fund Bouthemont’s own department store, the Quatre Saisons. Just before the big white sale at the Ladies’ Paradise, the Quatre Saisons burns to the ground, sending all its potential customers back to the Ladies’ Paradise.

Lhomme – Lhomme is Madame Aurélie’s husband. He has one arm, but he likes to play the horn in a chamber music group. He defers to Madame Aurélie’s authority since she makes the higher salary. At the end of every sale at **the Ladies’ Paradise**, he brings the money bags to Mouret and announces the day’s takings.

Albert Lhomme – Albert Lhomme is Lhomme and Madame Aurélie’s son. He often makes errors at the cash desk at **the Ladies’ Paradise** where he works, and only his mother’s prestige protects him from being fired. The Lhommes’ family life is non-existent, so he receives no guidance and lives a dissolute lifestyle. When it is discovered that he has been aiding and abetting thefts at the Ladies’ Paradise, he is finally fired.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Madame Robineau – Madame Robineau is Robineau’s wife.

She doesn't understand business but supports her husband's attempt to build a successful drapery shop. Madame Robineau is pregnant when Robineau goes bankrupt and decides to give up small business altogether.

Madame Guibal – Madame Guibal is one of Madame Desforges's friends. She engages in a long-term affair with Monsieur de Boves. As a shopper at **the Ladies' Paradise**, she likes to take full advantage of the return feature, buying whatever she wants and then returning it after using it.

Favier – Favier is a salesman in the silk department at **the Ladies' Paradise**. He pretends to be deferential to Hutin, who has plotted his way to position of buyer, but is really undermining Hutin for his position just as Hutin undermined those before him.

Mademoiselle Fontenailles – Mademoiselle Fontenailles is a protégé of Madame Desforges's and works at **the Ladies' Paradise**. She is an orphan but has aristocratic ancestors. Therefore, Madame Desforges is appalled when Mouret encourages her to marry a porter at the Ladies' Paradise.

Marguerite – Marguerite is a salesgirl in the ladieswear department at **the Ladies' Paradise**. She originally came to Paris to conceal an accidental pregnancy. When Denise first arrives, Marguerite is mean to her along with the other salesgirls, but later on when Denise becomes assistant buyer, Marguerite defends her.

Mignot – Mignot is a glove salesman at **the Ladies' Paradise**. Near the end of *The Ladies' Paradise*, he is fired after he is caught assisting a customer in a theft by pretending to help her try on gloves while she stuffs them in her clothes.

Gaujean – Gaujean is a local silk manufacturer. He tries to organize a union of small tradespeople in Paris, working closely with Robineau to start a small drapery business, but is unable to prevail against the effective modern methods of **the Ladies' Paradise**.

Blanche – Blanche is Madame de Boves and Monsieur de Boves's daughter. Her parents arrange for her to marry Vallagnosc.

Valentine – Valentine is Madame Marty's daughter.

Baugé – Baugé is Pauline's long-term boyfriend. He eventually comes to work at **the Ladies' Paradise**, and he and Pauline get married and conceive a baby.

Therese – Therese is the woman Jean marries near the end of *The Ladies' Paradise*.

a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



CONSUMERISM AND EXCESS

The Ladies' Paradise explores the rise of the department store model in the late 19th century. Mouret's big department store, **the Ladies'**

Paradise, brings together under one roof all the goods that previously, one had to visit multiple small shops to purchase. So, instead of visiting a fabric seller, a glovemaker, and a perfume shop separately, shoppers—who are overwhelmingly female—can now find all those items (and countless others) in one place. This business model, *The Ladies' Paradise* shows, forms the beginning of modern consumerist culture by glorifying excess and turning the shopping experience into an emotional event, rather than the simple acquisition of supplies.

To create such an environment, Mouret arranges his wares in colorful displays that draw shoppers in and highlight just how much he has to offer. Additionally, he rearranges the store so that customers have to traverse the entire store in order to find everything they came for—which leads to shoppers wandering into departments they never planned to visit and purchasing more items than they intended to. Finally, Mouret makes shopping an emotionally charged event by hosting sales, where women fight over bargain items and buy excessive amounts of merchandise because they see their peers doing the same. He also serves refreshments, offers free items like flowers and letter paper, and even sells the store's signature silk fabric at a loss, all to make his customers feel like they—rather than Mouret—are the ones coming out ahead. Of course, this isn't actually the case: several regular customers spend so much money in the Ladies' Paradise that their husbands can barely support their wives' shopping habits, while Mouret rakes in a million dollars during the novel's final sale. With this, *The Ladies' Paradise* illustrates how changing the shopping experience from a dull affair into one that's emotional, exciting, and full of surprises creates a culture of excessive spending and consumption. Moreover, the contrast between Mouret's success and his customers' financial strain suggests that this type of overconsumption isn't sustainable and doesn't bring consumers genuine happiness—it only really benefits business moguls.



WOMEN, EXPLOITATION, AND POWER

The Ladies' Paradise explores the various ways in which men can exploit women. However, it also suggests that women can gain power by refusing to play men's games, while also keeping their sights set on goals that help women. Mouret founds his big department store, **the Ladies' Paradise**, on the very idea that women are subservient to him. His store is “a temple to Woman” that, by offering every



THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have

product a woman could ever want, causes female customers to spend wildly. In this way, Mouret seems to cater to women while actually exploiting them financially, to ensure his store's success. Additionally, he exploits Madame Desforges for her important friends who help him expand the Ladies' Paradise.

However, Mouret's associate Bourdoncle warns ominously that women "will have their revenge." Mouret disregards this until Denise, a chaste and dignified salesgirl, rejects his romantic advances. He pursues Denise as he would any other mistress and is utterly bewildered when she refuses him, for no woman has yet refused the powerful businessman. He offers her money and even an exclusive relationship, but although she privately loves him, Denise refuses to be treated like a commodity. Distraught that he cannot buy the woman he loves, Mouret starts to feel that his power—which takes the form of exploiting women financially—is empty and useless. As Mouret feels increasingly impotent due to Denise's rejection, Denise becomes the most powerful person at the Ladies' Paradise, unwittingly exploiting Mouret's deference toward her to make improvements to his system. These changes, importantly, largely benefit female employees Mouret previously wrote off, such as those who fall pregnant (Denise sets up a paid leave system for them). As a result, Mouret fears that Denise is "the revenge" that will undermine his power. However, after a wildly successful sale at the Ladies' Paradise, Mouret realizes that his victory over women feels incomplete if he can't have Denise. This leads him to propose to Denise, essentially surrendering to her—while also giving Denise exactly what she wants (marriage) and putting Denise in a powerful position where she can continue to advocate for Mouret's female employees.



TRADITION VS. MODERNITY

In *The Ladies' Paradise*, small shops battle for survival against Mouret's big department store, **the Ladies' Paradise**. The small shops represent "old Paris," following traditional business methods in which they sell a small, specialized range of products at a high price. In contrast, the Ladies' Paradise—which represents "new Paris"—ignores traditional business models, instead sourcing hundreds of different goods to sell at low prices and creating an overwhelming and intoxicating atmosphere to draw the public. The small tradespeople try to defend their traditional methods, as when Bourras claims that his trade—selling hand-carved umbrellas—is about true art. However, The Ladies Paradise never fails to succeed, instead taking over small business after small business until the department store takes up an entire city block.

The department store's success is something that Mouret and even Denise suggest is inevitable: customers love the bright colors in the displays and the variety of objects for sale. Some even experience "fits" of joy as they spend money. Large stores like the Ladies' Paradise, the novel suggests, are the way of the

future. Denise, who's sympathetic toward the small tradesmen's struggle but a proponent of big business, tries to protect the tradesmen from failure by urging them to conform to the changing times. However, she's ultimately unsuccessful, and she even sees that the Ladies' Paradise does far more than just bankrupt the small businesses. Her cousin Geneviève **dies** of heartbreak because Colomban—Baudu's shop assistant to whom she was engaged—runs off with a salesgirl from the Ladies' Paradise, suggesting that even a person raised in a traditional shop environment can fall prey to the allure of modernity. Later, Bourras's umbrella shop is taken in his bankruptcy, making way for the Ladies' Paradise to dominate the entire street. The demolition of Bourras's shop and Geneviève's burial are framed as funerals for Old Paris, leading to Denise's painful realization that the progress occurs "over the bodies of the dead." Put simply, *The Ladies' Paradise* depicts the transition from the old into the new as inevitable and, moreover, suggests that those who refuse to adapt will pay a steep cost.



CLASS AND MOBILITY

Set in late 19th-century Paris, *The Ladies' Paradise* portrays a society made up of distinct social classes. Denise and her brothers arrive in Paris in "the third-class carriage," with no money or importance. Above them, there are small businessowners like the Baudus, and finally the remnants of the aristocracy, such as Madame Desforges and Madame de Boves. In this highly stratified society, **the Ladies' Paradise**—Mouret's big department store—brings all the classes together and begins to dissolve the distinctions between them. The Ladies' Paradise, in appealing to what Mouret suggests are women's universal desires, creates a space in which high- and low-class ladies shop together. In particular, the novel describes the upper-class ladies as being unable to resist a sale or a deal—and so those ladies often end up buying the same things as their lower-class counterparts, further muddying the distinctions between classes.

Additionally, the Ladies' Paradise provides employees a new opportunity to rise in class. Denise, who begins the novel impoverished, ultimately rises to the prestigious position of buyer in the ladieswear department, defying both the restrictions of her class and gender. Mouret himself, as founder of the Ladies' Paradise, was nothing but "an adventurer" when he arrived in Paris and became wealthy through work alone. In his store, he creates an environment that enables others to enjoy the same kind of growth. His commission-based system recreates "the struggle for existence," in which his salespeople—men and women, rich and poor—compete with one another to earn the most and rise to the most prominent positions. However, those who stubbornly stick to their class fail. The Baudus refuse to be flexible in their position in society

and refuse to embrace modern business models, which do away with class distinctions altogether—so ultimately, they *lower* their class when they become poor. *The Ladies' Paradise* thus suggests that dissolving rigid class distinctions is how 19th-century Parisians of all classes are able to find success that previous generations never dreamed of. On the other hand, clinging tightly to outdated ideas about class and mobility will likely lead to failure.



SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



THE LADIES' PARADISE

The Ladies' Paradise—Mouret's big department store—is a symbol of consumerism. As the first department store in 19th-century Paris, the Ladies' Paradise offers its customers everything they need and want in one place. This encourages an excess of spending as customers buy more than they need and indulge their many wants. The Ladies' Paradise store also encourages excess consumption by creating a shopping experience for its customers, appealing to them sensually and emotionally through enchanting displays. Furthermore, the Ladies' Paradise sells everything cheaply so that the customer always feels they are getting a deal. All in all, these features of the Ladies' Paradise creates an environment in which people buy more than they need and spend to excess, sending a wave of consumerism over Paris.

The Ladies' Paradise is also a symbol of the changes in the class system and gender roles of 19th-century Paris. Through appealing to the consumer tendency, which Mouret says is universal to all women, the Ladies' Paradise equalizes its customers. Since rich and poor women alike love a good deal, the higher and lower classes of women are found shopping together in the Ladies' Paradise. Furthermore, the Ladies' Paradise enables some of the lower class to rise in status through employment in the store. Denise, who arrives in Paris “in the third-class carriage,” finds herself in an important position at the Ladies' Paradise by the end of the novel, making enough money to support her younger brothers. In this way, the Ladies' Paradise also symbolizes an increasingly less class-conscious society and a new mobility in the lower class.



GENEVIÈVE'S FUNERAL

Taking place near the end of *The Ladies' Paradise*, Geneviève's funeral symbolizes the final end of traditional business methods. Geneviève's death is essentially caused by **the Ladies' Paradise**—the big department store that is competing with the small local businesses and driving away

their customers. Geneviève's engagement to Colomban—Baudu's shop assistant—was a traditional feature of the small business: the businessowner trains the assistant in the ways of his business, and then marries the assistant to his daughter in order to officially pass the business on. However, Colomban runs off with a salesgirl from the Ladies' Paradise, betraying both Geneviève and Baudu's drapery shop. Geneviève soon dies of a broken heart, an event which symbolizes the tragic consequences the Ladies' Paradise inflicts on the world of small business.

Up until Geneviève's funeral, the Ladies' Paradise has been causing the slow death of small local businesses. As a massive shopping experience in which customers can find everything they need and want at a cheap price, the Ladies' Paradise drives the public away from small shops. As well as ruining the small businesses financially, the Ladies' Paradise has been offending their values and traditions. Therefore, when all the small tradespeople gather for Geneviève's funeral—whose death was caused by the betrayal of a tradition—they seem to be acknowledging the death of the tradition of small business altogether. What is more, the funeral is extremely sordid. The local businessowners tromp through the mud to the grave, where one attendee suggests that they might as well all jump in the grave with the casket. This suggests that the solidarity of the small businesses has only led to their unified death.



QUOTES


Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Oxford University Press edition of *The Ladies' Paradise* published in 2008.

Chapter 1 Quotes

●● The laces shivered, then dropped again, concealing the depths of the shop with an exciting air of mystery; even the lengths of cloth, thick and square, were breathing, exuding a tempting odor, while the overcoats were throwing back their shoulders still more on the dummies, which were acquiring souls, and the huge velvet coat was billowing out, supple and warm, as if on the shoulders of flesh and blood, with a heaving breast and quivering hips.

Related Characters: Denise Baudu, Jean, Pépé

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis



This passage appears when Denise and her brothers are first arriving in Paris, and they pass by the Ladies' Paradise for the first time. This passage personifies the Ladies' Paradise in a way that reveals how seductive it is to the public. The motion of the lace reveals and then conceals the interior of the store, creating an air of mystery. This alludes to the sensual fact that covering excites more interest than bare transparency would, especially when there is a tempting hint of what lies behind the covering.


Furthermore, the fabrics in the display window exude an odor which draws the customer as a person is drawn to a nice-smelling flower. In this way, the animated qualities of motion and smell that the Ladies' Paradise employs in its display window sensually tempt the customer by appealing to their senses of sight and smell.

In the second part of this quote, the mannequins are explicitly described as alive. The dummies acquire souls, shoulders of flesh and blood, and have heaving breasts and quivering hips. More important than the actual overcoat or the velvet coat is the sense that these clothes are dressing something living. In this way, the Ladies' Paradise animates clothes themselves so as to tempt customers as a seductive woman might flirt with a man. Imbuing the mannequins, and therefore the coats, with "souls," the Ladies' Paradise makes its merchandise irresistible; resisting it would not be to pass up a mere object, but would be to pass up a living, breathing being. All in all, this passage describes the modern techniques that the Ladies' Paradise employs to create a culture of consumerism.

☝ "Has anyone ever seen such a thing? A draper's shop which sold everything! Just a big bazaar! And a fine staff too: a lot of dandies who pushed things about like porters at a railway station, who treated the goods and the customers like parcels, dropping their employer or being dropped by him at a moment's notice. No affection, no manners, no art!"

Related Characters: Baudu (speaker), Denise Baudu

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is spoken by Baudu when he vents his feelings about the Ladies' Paradise to Denise. The quote expresses

that Baudu's primary complaint against the Ladies' Paradise is that, although it is a "draper's shop," it has multiple departments. By definition, a drapery shop is a shop that sells fabric and sewing materials. While Baudu's drapery shop adheres to this definition, Baudu feels that it is a disgrace for the Ladies' Paradise to exceed the bounds of this definition and become instead a "bazaar"—a large market full of a variety of vendors. Therefore, Baudu's complaint is that the Ladies' Paradise is not really a shop (and certainly not a drapery shop) but is essentially a marketplace.

In the second part of this quote, Baudu expresses his disapproval of the efficient and inhuman way that the Ladies' Paradise conducts its staff and business. He calls the staff "dandies"—people too concerned with appearances and fashion, and yet compares them to the porters who load and unload luggage onto trains. Because the staff at the Ladies' Paradise are vain, they treat customers the way they treat the store's merchandise, thus taking all human care out of the business. Baudu concludes his speech by saying that the Ladies' Paradise lacks affection, manners, and art: since the Ladies' Paradise is concerned only with appearances, it does not sell true art, and their customer service model is impersonal and merely efficient.

Chapter 2 Quotes

☝ "You know, they'll have their revenge."

"Who will?"

"The women, of course."

[...] With a shrug of his shoulders [Mouret] seemed to declare that he would throw them all away like empty sacks on the day when they had finished helping him make his fortune.

Related Characters: Bourdoncle, Octave Mouret (speaker), Madame Desforges

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

This exchange occurs between Mouret and Bourdoncle after Mouret has expressed ideas to further exploit women in his store. Beginning this exchange, Bourdoncle warns Mouret that women will have their revenge. By "the women," Bourdoncle means Mouret's female customer base, and the women whom he exploits to benefit the Ladies' Paradise, such as Madame Desforges. Bourdoncle

vaguely yet ominously refers to revenge, a comment that he and others make several times throughout the novel. Although it is not clear what form Bourdoncle thinks this revenge will take, it is clear that he thinks Mouret's female customers are intelligent enough to one day realize that Mouret's business deceives and exploits them, and that they will insist on payback.

Mouret's nonverbal response to Bourdoncle's ominous warning reveals his opinion about women. He shrugs his shoulders, an attitude which reveals that he thinks of women like he would think of empty sacks to be tossed aside once what is useful inside the sacks has been spent. Therefore, at this point in the novel, Mouret does not view women as human beings. Rather, he sees them as resources to be put towards his future success and then thrown away. Mouret is insensitive to Bourdoncle's warning because his warning rests on the notion that women are intelligent, emotional, and capable of revenge—that they are human. Mouret's present ignorance of this fact makes him unafraid of upsetting his female customers by exploiting them for his own success.


the salesmen to sell the most in order to earn the most through percentages. Therefore, fueled by the incentive to make extra money and to make more than one's neighbor, the salesmen work harder than they normally would.

This quote also reveals that Mouret is kind of tricking his employees into working harder, when really, he's the one who gets most of the benefits. The struggle for survival is a system that has "caused a revolution" in the drapery trade, not in the life of employees. Although the salesmen feel that they have a share in the business (a percentage), they are only being given one in order for them to work harder for Mouret's benefit. The more the salesmen sell, the more profit Mouret makes overall, and the less consequential the percentage he has to take out for each employee. This quote portrays Mouret as akin to a cruel observer of a war which he doesn't have to fight yet which he benefits from: he creates conflict and "grows fat" off of it. This conflict—fueled by the desire for money—becomes ruthless, the strong devouring the weak, and yet, despite the triumph of the strong, they are still subservient to the big business owners.

☝ He would give [his salesmen] a percentage on [...] the smallest article they sold: a system which had caused a revolution in the drapery trade by creating among the assistants a struggle for survival from which the employers reaped the benefit. [...] [Mouret] unleashed passions, brought different forces into conflict, let the strong devour the weak, and grew fat on this battle of interests.

Related Characters: Octave Mouret

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 35

Explanation and Analysis


This passage occurs before Mouret goes on his daily inspection of the Ladies' Paradise and is inspired to introduce new techniques into his business. This passage explains how Mouret thinks about indirect ways to profit from his business. Instead of simply charging high prices (a direct but probably unsuccessful way of making more money), Mouret realizes that he needs to sell a lot, and therefore he needs to give his salesmen an incentive to sell. Mouret explains that this system creates the "the struggle for survival"; in other words, it creates competition among

Chapter 3 Quotes

☝ Of supreme importance [...] was the exploitation of Woman. Everything else led up to it, the ceaseless renewal of capital, the system of piling up goods, the low prices which attracted people, the marked prices which reassured them. It was Woman the shops were competing for so fiercely, it was Woman they were continually snaring with their bargains, after dazing her with their displays. They had awoken new desires in her weak flesh.

Related Characters: Octave Mouret (speaker), Baron Hartmann

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 76

Explanation and Analysis



This passage appears during Mouret's conversation with Baron Hartmann and summarizes Mouret's philosophy of success with the Ladies' Paradise. In this quote, "Woman" is capitalized to indicate that Mouret is referring to the universal form of woman—all women in general. In this way, his sales techniques exploit all women universally, and not just one sect, class, or type of woman. In his opinion,


ceaselessly renewing capital, having an enormous stock of goods, and pricing things affordably all appeal to the universal woman. In other words, Mouret believes that the universal woman is a woman who likes excess—that is, she likes to buy as much as she can for the lowest price possible.

To describe how Mouret and the Ladies' Paradise use the understanding of Woman, this quote uses negative language. Instead of satisfying or fulfilling them, Mouret "exploits," "snares," and "dazes" women through their universal desires. Furthermore, Mouret and other department store owners also create new desire within women by understanding women as having "weak flesh." This quote expresses Mouret's opinion that women are weak, gullible creatures who can not only be exploited by department stores but can also be manipulated into becoming the department store's perfect customer.

Chapter 4 Quotes

☛ It was a secret war, in which the girls themselves participated with as much ferocity as [the men] did; and, in their common fatigue, always on their feet as they were, dead tired, differences of sex disappeared and nothing remained but opposing interests inflamed by the fever of business.

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 111-112



Explanation and Analysis


This passage appears during the first big sale at the Ladies' Paradise and describes the dynamic between salespeople there. This quote describes the dynamic between salespeople—whether male or female—as a "secret war" in which everyone participates equally. Everyone participates equally because the differences between the sexes have nearly disappeared, simply due to the physical demands of being a salesperson at the Ladies' Paradise. All the salespeople, whether male or female, are always on their feet, making them all equally tired.

This quote also explains that, once the distinctions of sex have been removed from a person, what is left is a person's self-interest "inflamed by the fever of business." Everyone, in other words, wants to get ahead, regardless of their sex. In this way, this quote asserts that business, in inspiring interest in it across the lines of sex, is a uniquely equalizing enterprise. In exhausting each person who participates in it

equally, business brings out the equal "ferocity" and "inflamed fever" that every person has.

☛ Furs littered the floor, ready-made clothes were heaped up like the greatcoats of disabled soldiers, the lace and underclothes, unfolded, crumpled, thrown about everywhere, gave the impression that an army of women had undressed there haphazardly in a wave of desire.

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis



This quote appears after the first sale at the Ladies' Paradise. In this quote, the mess that is left after the customers leave the shop is compared to the aftermath of a battle. The clothes are piled up like the "greatcoats of disabled soldiers," suggesting either that the clothes themselves are like soldiers that the customers wounded, or that the *customers* were the vanquished soldiers who left their greatcoats in a massive heap. Either way, the sale at the Ladies' Paradise left destruction in its wake, suggesting that shopping is akin to plundering a territory, and the Ladies' Paradise itself is akin to a battlefield.


The second half of this quote paints the picture of an army of women undressing in a wave of desire. Significantly, this image connects war imagery with imagery of intense desire. While war imagery is stereotypically masculine and "undressing in a wave of desire" is stereotypically feminine, this quote brings the two together to describe the actions of the customers (of whom the majority are women). In this way, this quote describes the female customers both as ransacking the Ladies' Paradise as a conquering army would, and as submitting to it as women overcome by a wave of desire. Furthermore, through war imagery, this quote suggests that "a wave of desire"—as a force that overtakes a person and causes them undress in a frenzy, creating a mess—is akin to a powerful, vanquishing army.

Chapter 5 Quotes

☛ They were all nothing but cogs, caught up in the workings of the machine, surrendering their personalities, merely adding their strength to the mighty common whole of the phalanstery.

Related Characters: Octave Mouret

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 134

Explanation and Analysis



This quote appears during the summer slow season at the Ladies' Paradise when all the employees fear that they will lose their jobs. This quote explains how the Ladies' Paradise turns its human employees into parts of an inhuman machine. Rather than making use of a staff member's personality, the Paradise makes use simply of their strength suggesting that it judges an employee based on their physical usefulness rather than their mental abilities or their human qualities. In describing the employees as cogs that are "caught up" in the working of the machine, this quote illustrates how the employees are all interconnected. Cogs fit together, and each cog moves because of the movement of the cog to which it is joined, and the whole machine moves because of the joint movements of all the cogs. In this way, the individual employee has no value, but all the employees combined power the machine.

While in the first part of this quote the collective value of the employees is compared to an inhuman machine, the second part of the quote calls this collective a "phalanstery"—a community of people working in a single structure for their common benefit. Although a phalanstery requires the surrendering of personal property and individual aims, it can have a positive connotation if the common aim of the people in the community is for their benefit. In this way, this quote suggests that the Ladies' Paradise has potential to be an establishment that benefits its community of workers, if it were not that the workers were cogs in a machine that serves the public and, ultimately, Mouret.

Chapter 7 Quotes

☞ It was easy; they said everyone did it in the end because in Paris a woman could not live on what she earned. But her whole being revolted against it; she felt no indignation against others for giving in, but simply an aversion to anything dirty or senseless. She considered life a matter of logic, good conduct, and courage.

Related Characters: Denise Baudu

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 185

Explanation and Analysis


This quote appears when Denise has been fired from the Ladies' Paradise, and she is living in extreme poverty. The first part of this quote establishes that—as Parisian society stands—a woman cannot earn a living. The quote states this as a fact, and therefore claims that "it was easy," the "it" implying that women ultimately turn to sex work to make ends meet. In this way, this quote shows how the limitations that keep people during this time stuck in a certain class—such as the convention that a woman could not earn a living like a man—force people not only to stay in the class they are in, but also to resort to behaviors they wouldn't otherwise in order to survive.

The second part of this quote shows how Denise's qualities of character help her rise above the pitfalls of her class. Her "aversion" to sex work comes from her qualities of logic, good conduct, and courage, all of which enable her to resist embracing a promiscuous lifestyle that is—in being one of the only ways to survive—a defining characteristic of women of her class. Significantly, despite her personal views, Denise feels no "indignation" against others for giving in. Her lack of judgement about how people choose to conduct themselves and survive shows her general lack of a classist mindset. She neither looks down on others, nor puts herself down on the basis of what is or is not appropriate for one's class.

☞ The manufacturers could no longer exist without the big shops, for as soon as one of them lost their custom, bankruptcy became inevitable; in short, it was a natural development of business, it was impossible to stop things going the way they ought to, when everyone was working for it whether they liked it or not.

Related Characters: Denise Baudu (speaker), Robineau , Baudu , Gaujean

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 194

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is a summary of the views that Denise shares

with the small businessowners Robineau, Baudu, and Gaujean. In the first part of this quote, Denise explains the true nature of the small businessman's choice to join forces with big stores like the Ladies' Paradise. By "custom," Denise means the patronage of regular customers, and so she claims that when the small manufacturers lose their regular customers, they will have no source of income. In this way, Denise explains that the choice to join forces with the big shops is not actually a choice; if the small manufacturers want to survive, it is essential that they work with the big shops, because the big shops now have all the custom. Denise redefines the nature of the small businessowners' choice: the big shops are not causing the small shops to fail, but rather the small shops need the big shops in order to succeed.


In redefining the choice, Denise illustrates how the rise of the big shops is a natural as opposed to an unnatural development of business. She explains that everyone is working with business, and therefore they are working with its natural change whether they like this or not. This points out that the small businessowners' resistance is unnatural and retrogressive; business as an entity develops naturally beyond the control of its individual proponents, and so even these proponents—whether or not they like it or realize it—are working for this collective, naturally developing whole.

Chapter 8 Quotes

☛ It was true, it was stealing everything from them: from the father, his money; from the mother, her dying child; from the daughter, a husband for whom she had waited ten years.

Related Characters: Geneviève Baudu , Baudu , Madame Baudu , Colomban , Clara Prunaire

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 231

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs when the Baudus are sinking closer towards bankruptcy, and when Colomban is straying away from Geneviève in his lust for Clara. This quote lays out every way in which the Ladies' Paradise has ruined the Baudus, and, by extension, small businesses and businessowners in general. First, and most obviously, the Ladies' Paradise takes money from the small


businessowners, taking their customers and therefore their sole source of income. More indirectly, the Ladies' Paradise takes children from the mothers of small business families (that is, children go to work for the Paradise rather than staying to run the family business). In this way, the Ladies' Paradise has the unexpected power to break up families, and, in a broader sense, to destroying family values and solidarity.

Lastly, the Ladies' Paradise takes away a girl's fiancé of 10 years. In this theft, the Ladies' Paradise shows its power to disrupt the deep-seated values of the traditional business world and of society in general. Geneviève's long engagement represents the traditions of arranged marriages and marriage for the purpose of business succession, and also the habits of chastity before marriage. In destroying the tradition and the bond of Geneviève's engagement, the Ladies' Paradise ends a traditional sexual culture and begins a modern one. All in all, this quote shows how big business thwarts tradition through financial, familial, and ethical schemes.

Chapter 9 Quotes

☛ By this time, there were thirty-nine departments and eighteen hundred employees, of whom two hundred were women. A whole world was springing up amidst the life echoing beneath the high metal naves.

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis


This quote appears just before the second major sale at the Ladies' Paradise and gives an update as to how it has expanded. In stating the number of departments and then the number of employees now employed and how many are women, this quote shows how the Ladies' Paradise creates opportunity and makes progress in society. By simply having so many departments, the Ladies' Paradise is able to open a huge number of jobs to the public. And in opening so many jobs to the public, many women as well as men are able to work. In this way, in being a department store, the Ladies' Paradise indirectly opens the horizons of the working class to women. Although of the 1800 employees only 200 are women, the tone of this quote declares that this is a very progressive state, suggesting that, before the Ladies'


Paradise, hardly any women were gainfully employed in such jobs.

Because of the number of its employees and its combination of male and female employees, the Ladies' Paradise becomes a world of its own. That this life echoes beneath one set of "naves"—a high ceiling, typically of a church, built to accommodate the entire congregation—suggests that the employees at the Ladies' Paradise constitute a tight-knit community that resembles a community as tight-knit as a religious one. The fact that this community becomes a "whole world" suggests that, as a whole, it is self-sufficient and independent of the outside world.

●● Mouret's sole passion was the conquest of Woman. He wanted her to be queen in his shop; he had built this temple for her in order to hold her at his mercy. His tactics were to intoxicate her with amorous attentions, to trade on her desires, and to exploit her excitement.

Related Characters: Octave Mouret

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis


This quote occurs just before the second big sale at the Ladies' Paradise and restates Mouret's business model, which is founded on discovering new ways to exploit women. This quote explains how in this instance, the worship of something is the same as holding this thing hostage. Mouret is passionate about conquering women, an attitude which allows him to appear as though he is celebrating women while in fact he is holding them in his power. He sets up his shop as a temple to women, so that the female customers feels that Mouret and his store are bowing down to them. Moreover, the female customers are "queen" in Mouret's shop, feeling that they are the ones in the highest position of power instead of Mouret.

In treating women as sacred in this way, Mouret conceals the fact that he is actually exploiting and overpowering women. The attention that he gives to women goes so far as to become negative, intoxicating them. Once his female customers are in this state of intoxication, Mouret then "trades on her desires" and "exploits her excitement," revealing his transactional rather than purely reverential

intentions with women; he essentially trades his female customer's desires and excitement for his own money and success. In this way, this quote shows how the Ladies' Paradise—under this principle of the exploitation of women—has a two-faced nature; it appears to love and worship women, but really it exploits them and holds them captive.

●● In this final hour, in the midst of the overheated air, the women reigned supreme. They had taken the shop by storm, camping in it as in conquered territory, like an invading horde which had settled among the devastation of the goods. The salesmen, deafened and exhausted, had become their slaves, whom they treated with sovereign tyranny.

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 265

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears after the second big sale at the Ladies' Paradise. This quote compares the aftermath of the sale to the aftermath of a battle, in which the premises of the Ladies' Paradise are devastated and in the hands of the triumphant enemy—in this case, the female customers. The female customers leave "reigning supreme," as the righteous winners of a vicious battle between them and the employees. The women are also compared to "an invading horde," illustrating them as barbaric army that pillaged and looted a victim's territory rather than royalty who won territory justly through war. Also contributing to their barbaric and tyrannical description, the female customers are said to have made the employees their "slaves," suggesting that they viewed their shopping experience as a mastery over the store and its staff.



Although this quote solely describes how the female customers overpowered the Ladies' Paradise and its staff, the overall sense that the quote gives is that the female customers—in thinking they were the conquerors—were actually the victims. Amidst "overheated air," the women took the store "by storm," suggesting that they were worked up into a madness of shopping; moreover, the women "camp" in the store and "settle among the devastation"—descriptions which both conjure the image of vagrant barbarians that are so triumphant at having won a battle that they do not notice the wreckage and squalor they created and in which they now live. In this way, this

quote—in describing how the female customers are overcome with the love of mastery—subject themselves to the mastery of greedy vices.

Chapter 10 Quotes

💡 She was deeply disturbed: it was strange that a moment ago she had found the strength to repulse a man whom she adored, whereas in the past she had felt such weakness in the presence of that wretched boy, whose love she had only dreamed about!

Related Characters: Denise Baudou , Octave Mouret , Hutin

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 301

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs just after Denise has rejected Mouret's invitation to be his lover. In this quote, Denise lays out the various ways she's behaved towards men whom she feels very differently about. She notices the irony that she has "repulsed," or rejected, a man she adores (Mouret) when she had so nearly accepted a truly detestable man (Hutin) weeks earlier. This irony is enough to make her "deeply disturbed"; at first her actions seem irrational and counterintuitive in both cases. She perversely rejected a man she adored, and perversely nearly accepts a man she hates, actions which strike her as disturbing and "strange."


However, a deeper look into this quote reveals that Denise's actions towards each man actually made sense in terms of how she felt towards each. In the case of Mouret, Denise felt the "strength" to repulse him; in Hutin's case, she felt such "weakness" that she nearly accepted him. In this way, the more genuine Denise's feelings toward a man, the more admirable a quality is brought out in her. Because she genuinely loves Mouret, she acts out of strength towards him. And because her love for Hutin wasn't true, she acted out of weakness around him. In this way, this quote draws a connection between resistance and true value. Resistance, rather than indicating that the thing one resists is without value, actually indicates the opposite.

Chapter 11 Quotes

💡 There were all sorts, hussies as well as decent girls. What is more, their moral standard was rising. In the past they had had nothing but the dregs of the trade, poor distracted girls who just drifted into the drapery business; [...] in short, when they wanted to behave properly, they could; [...] The worst thing of all was their neutral, ill-defined position, somewhere between shopkeepers and ladies. Plunged into the midst of luxury, often without any previous education, they formed an anonymous class apart.

Related Characters: Bouthemont (speaker), Madame Desforges

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 311

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is a summary of Bouthemont's assessment of the lives of the girls who work at the Ladies' Paradise in response to Madame Desforges and her friends' inquiries. First, Bouthemont establishes that the female staff at the Ladies' Paradise is made up of "hussies" and "decent girls"; in other words, girls of all different classes. With this mixture as its foundation, their "moral standard" is nonetheless rising. Bouthemont attributes this moral improvement to modernity, pointing to how, in the past, these girls had nothing but "the dregs of the trade," or the remnants of the dying drapery business. Bouthemont adds that the female employees at the Paradise don't always behave properly but emphasizes that they have the choice to behave properly if they wish to. In this way, Bouthemont asserts that the modern environment of the Ladies Paradise, while not eliminating poor behavior, gives the opportunity for improvement to everyone; a person is not limited to the class they are in or the behavior they have displayed in the past, but can improve and move upward of their own free will.


In the second part of this quote, Bouthemont gives a more negative description of the position of employees at the Ladies' Paradise. He describes their position as uncomfortable, "neutral" and "ill-defined." This is because the employees do not fit into any of the well-defined classes of society. The girls at the Paradise have "luxury" but no "education," while the high-class outside of the Paradise is defined by both its luxury and its high education. In placing its female employees between "shopkeepers" and "ladies,"

they form an “anonymous,” or nameless, class. In other words, the class of the employees at the Paradise is only uncomfortable if one cares about class names, and about fitting into one of the rigidly defined classes of outer society. If Bouthemont’s condescending tone is removed from this quote, the “anonymous” class of the employees at The Paradise reads as progressive and positive (and Bouthemont is known to hate women regardless, so his condescension makes sense—and is worth looking past).

☛ “I want her, and I’ll get her! And if she escapes me, you’ll see what a place I’ll build to cure myself. It’ll be quite superb! You don’t understand this language, old fellow: otherwise, you’d know that action contains its own reward. To act, to create, to fight against facts, to overcome them or be overcome by them—the whole human health and happiness is made up of that!”

Related Characters: Octave Mouret (speaker), Denise Baudu, Madame Desforges, Vallagnosc

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 322

Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears after Mouret has defended Denise in front of Madame Desforges when he is telling Vallagnosc about his plans to get Denise. In the first part of this quote, Mouret explains how his method for life is to make wonderful successes even out of failures. Saying that he will get Denise because he wants her suggests that he plans to put everything he has into pursuing her. If, after he has done everything he can, she still gets away, then he will build a huge place (presumably, an expanded the Ladies’ Paradise) to “cure” himself. In this way, Mouret suggests that he gets added vigor for his projects from his disappointments and failures.

Mouret goes on to explain that this plan is a “language,” or a philosophy for life. He says that action contains its own reward, meaning that a person should not be focused on the future success or failure of their endeavors but rather that they should pursue all their dreams with the utmost passion; the very action of pursuing one’s wants is the satisfaction of those wants. Mouret then says that a person should fight against “facts.” By “facts,” Mouret seems to mean the invincibility of the way things are, and, in urging

people to fight against these facts, suggests that their invincibility is only an illusion. Significantly, Mouret adds that a person should—if they can’t overcome these facts—be overcome *by* them. In either overpowering or surrendering to facts in this way, a person gets “human health” and “happiness.” Therefore, although Mouret has not yet surrendered to a fact, it is within his philosophy of life to do so. This foreshadows his eventual choice to cave and ask Denise to marry him, which is his version of giving in to Denise’s power and giving up his own.

Chapter 12 Quotes

☛ His master’s business faculties must surely founder, he thought, in the midst of such idiotic love: what had been won through women would be lost through this woman.

Related Characters: Bourdoncle, Octave Mouret, Denise Baudu

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 330

Explanation and Analysis


This quote appears after Denise has rejected Mouret; it summarizes Bourdoncle’s feelings about how this affects Mouret. In the first part of this quote, Bourdoncle asserts that love and business are incompatible pursuits. He contrasts Mouret’s “business faculties” with his “idiotic love,” suggesting that while aptitude for business comes from intelligent faculties, love comes from the *lack* of intelligence. In this way, Bourdoncle thinks that Mouret’s business sense will “founder” in his love for Denise—that his business sense will break down.

In the second part of this quote, Bourdoncle expresses the irony that a venture that was made possible by women will be thwarted by a woman. Significantly, Bourdoncle makes a clear distinction between the plurality (the women, Mouret’s many female customers) that made the Ladies’ Paradise possible, and the singularity (Denise) that threatens it. This points out that the Ladies’ Paradise was successful because it was “won” through a very general understanding of the universal woman, a general understanding which ignored any one woman in particular and excluded the possibility of unique cases of women. Therefore, the Ladies’ Paradise relied on triumphing over the many, forgetting the possibility that a single person can be powerful enough to change everything.

His obsession pursued him everywhere, and as his power unfolded before him, as the mechanism of the departments and the army of employees passed before his gaze, he felt the indignity of his powerlessness more keenly than ever. Orders from the whole of Europe were flowing in [...] and yet she said no, she still said no.

Related Characters: Octave Mouret , Denise Baudu

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 337

Explanation and Analysis


This passage occurs after Denise has rejected Mouret, and he is giving one of his usual inspections of the Ladies' Paradise. This quote first mentions Mouret's "obsession," referring to his obsession with Denise. This harkens back to the way everyone in Paris is obsessed with the Ladies' Paradise, even if they detest it, and thus draws attention to how Mouret—as the creator of the thing that causes obsession—is now gripped by an obsession of his own. The quote goes on to explain the irony of Mouret's powerlessness in the face of his great power. Mouret is the creator of a brilliant machine—the "mechanism of the departments"—and the master of an army—his "army of employees"—and yet this great power only serves to magnify his powerlessness in a different area of his life. His power makes him feel the "indignity"—the shame—of his powerlessness.

The final sentence of this quote explains two different scopes of power. On the one hand, Mouret has power over the entirety of Europe—an enormous population of people. On the other hand, he does not have power over one person among this crowd, Denise. The fact that Mouret's power over many feels inconsequential in the face of his powerlessness over one suggests that Mouret's special feelings towards Denise mean a lot more to him than his feelings for a faceless crowd. Put simply, his priorities are changing.

Was it humane or right, this appalling consumption of human flesh every year by the big shops? She would plead the cause of the cogs in this great machine, but with arguments based on the employers' own interests. When one wants a sound machine, one uses good metal; if the metal breaks or is broken there's a stoppage of work, repeated expense in getting it started again, a considerable wastage of energy.

Related Characters: Denise Baudu (speaker), Octave Mouret

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 355

Explanation and Analysis

This quote is a summary of the ideas Denise shares with Mouret when they start discussing modern business ideas together. In this quote, Denise combines the language of the modern business owner and the language of the employees' rights advocate. She first reintroduces the notion of what is "humane" and "right," and says that it is appalling that the big stores consume so much "human flesh" every year. In using the phrase "human flesh," Denise uses the language of the humanitarian, calling employees what they are—living beings who can feel pain—as opposed to what the modern business owner would call them: parts without emotions.


In order to get her point across, Denise changes her language, illustrating the same humanitarian idea with the image of the machine, and in terms of its benefit to the businessowner. She reverts to calling employees cogs, and—as an analogy for their feelings—refers to them as breakable. In this way, Denise explains that, although the business owner might not care about the wellbeing of their employees, their employees are not indestructible as workers, just as a piece of metal is not indestructible without care and attention. Denise explains that the modern businessowner's "machine" is not supernatural; it can still decay, break, and stop working. To conserve energy and time, the businessowner must care for his machine, and therefore for his staff. In this way, Denise satisfies both the desires of the businessowner and the workers' rights advocate by incorporating their aims into a single working whole.

Chapter 13 Quotes

She seemed to hear the trampling of a herd of cattle being led to the slaughterhouse, the destruction of the shops of a whole district, the small traders squelching along in their down-at-heel shoes, trailing ruin through the black mud of Paris.

Related Characters: Denise Baudu , Baudu , Bourras , Geneviève Baudu

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 371


Explanation and Analysis


This quote appears during Geneviève's funeral when Denise is watching the small businessowners who make up the funeral procession. Denise compares the procession of dejected tradespeople to a herd of cattle being led to the slaughterhouse. This first suggests that the small tradespeople—like the cattle about to be slaughtered—do not know the death that is in store for them at the end of their path. The death that they are travelling towards—symbolized by Geneviève's death—is the destruction of their livelihoods and their shops. In seeing this group as a herd of cattle, Denise sees that this destruction happens on a massive scale, that it wipes out a “whole district” like a whole herd of cattle at once.

The small tradespeople are also “squelching through the mud” to the funeral in “down-at-heel” shoes. This image emphasizes the lowliness of the small tradespeople in their current circumstances. They are walking close to the dirty ground and wearing shoes that sink them even deeper into the dirtiness. Finally, the small tradespeople “trail ruin through the black mud of Paris,” suggesting that they contribute filth and sadness to the already depressing image of a muddy Paris.

☝☝ What tortures! Weeping families, old men thrown out into the street, all the poignant dramas associated with ruin! And she could not save anyone; she was even aware that it was a good thing: this manure of distress was necessary to the health of the Paris of the future.

Related Characters: Denise Baudu (speaker), Geneviève Baudu

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 375

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Geneviève's funeral when Denise is mourning for the small tradespeople and trying to think how she can help them. She lists several “tortures” which illuminate the nature of the tradespeople's suffering.


Families are reduced to weeping, suggesting that the modern era breaks up families and accounts for familial loss. Also, old men are thrown out into the street, suggesting that the modern era also dispossesses people of their livelihoods and belongings, and also rejects the elderly from society. Denise lists these “poignant dramas” as sufferings “associated” with ruin. In putting it this way, she explains that this ruin is comprised of many instances of suffering but implies that it itself is not a tragedy.

In the second part of this quote, Denise reinforces her implication that ruin itself is not a tragedy. Not only can ruin not be avoided—it cannot be saved—but Denise also finds herself unable to deny that ruin is a “good thing.” She then gives an image of society as a garden in which the past year's yield (the traditional) decomposes with manure that fertilizes the future yield (modernity). In the same way that a garden cannot operate without this cycle of death and rebirth, society cannot move forward without the same cycle. Therefore, the “poignant dramas”—while sad in themselves—as a whole become the fertilizer that is necessary to ensure future health.

☝☝ Why should her small hand suddenly become such a powerful part of the monster's work? And the force which was carrying everything before it was carrying her away too, she whose coming was to be a revenge. Mouret had invented this mechanism for crushing people, and its brutal operation shocked her. He had strewn the neighborhood with ruins, he had despoiled some and killed others; yet she loved him for the grandeur of his achievement.

Related Characters: Denise Baudu (speaker), Octave Mouret, Geneviève Baudu

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 389

Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs after Geneviève's funeral when Denise is reflecting on the widespread effect of the Ladies' Paradise. First, she remarks how unbelievable it is that a single “small hand” could have so much influence on the work of an immense operation—a “monster.” She goes on to explain how she had not willingly chosen to be so influential at the Ladies' Paradise, but that she—just like everyone else—has been caught up in the Paradise's powerful “force” which

sweeps people away like the current of a river.

Denise goes on to explain her surprising feelings toward Mouret. She acknowledges that Mouret's invention wreaks havoc, and uses horrific images to describe it, such as its ability to crush people, despoil, kill, and strew ruins everywhere. This image paints Mouret's machine as a barbaric monster. However, Denise loves Mouret despite the destruction he causes, or even because of it. The sheer size of Mouret's power—its "grandeur"—is enough to neutralize the destruction that accounts for it. These destructive acts get lost within the word grandeur; and through the word grandeur, Denise's horror transforms into love.


As an aside, this quote reveals that Denise is in fact that "revenge" that everyone has been warning Mouret about, and that the consummation of the revenge is yet to come. In this way, although Denise feels like she is caught up against her will in the force of the Ladies' Paradise, she will actually end up changing it in some way with her "small hand."

Chapter 14 Quotes

☛ Faced with Paris devoured and Woman conquered, he experienced a sudden weakness, a failure of his will by which he was being overthrown in his turn as if by a superior force. In his victory he felt an irrational need to be conquered; it was the irrationality of a warrior yielding on the morrow of his conquest to the whim of a child.

Related Characters: Octave Mouret , Denise Baudu

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 429

Explanation and Analysis


This quote occurs after the final sale at the Ladies' Paradise when Mouret is about to decide to propose to Denise. The quote first establishes that Mouret has just won the ultimate victory: he has conquered all of Paris and all of women—the ideal "Woman." Surprisingly, however, this ultimate triumph does not bring him the expected feeling of strength but rather its opposite, "weakness." This weakness is described as a "failure of the will," as though to suggest that Mouret's will—which he has used to craft the Ladies' Paradise—has broken down.


Along with his will, the rationality of his feelings also

disappears: he suddenly has the "irrational" desire to be conquered. This is an irrational desire because, just a moment before, he was the conqueror—a position that he has much enjoyed in the past. This quote describes this irrational need as the whim to betray one's grand success over something trivial. Whereas moments before Mouret was a warrior with lofty dreams of success and power, he is now a child with trivial whims. In this way, this quote suggests that, in reverting to the whims of a child, Mouret will squander all of his hard work; however, it may be that this "irrational need" is the last thing necessary to complete Mouret's moral development.

☛ "Listen, we were stupid to have that superstition that marriage would ruin us. After all, isn't it the health necessary to life, its very strength and order?"

Related Characters: Octave Mouret (speaker), Bourdoncle , Denise Baudu

Related Themes: 

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 431

Explanation and Analysis

Mouret speaks this quote to Bourdoncle just before he proposes to Denise. In this quote, Mouret expresses how his thoughts on women have changed since the beginning of the novel. He describes his and Bourdoncle's earlier fear that love was a threat to business as a "superstition" that they were "stupid" to make. This suggests that the fear of love and marriage is unintelligent and unfounded. Mouret and Bourdoncle thought that marriage would "ruin" their business just as the traditions—of which marriage was one—that the small tradespeople clung to ruined them. In asserting that marriage will not ruin the Ladies' Paradise, Mouret embraces a traditional convention for the benefit of modern progress.

Mouret goes on to assert that marriage is the "health," "strength," and "order" that are necessary to life. In describing it this way, he paints marriage as something that gives solidity, stability, and organization to life. Without saying it, he harkens back to his frequent descriptions of the creative, active, and passionate attitude he applied to life and business to its great success. In contrasting the qualities of marriage with these business-savvy qualities, Mouret suggests that marriage, contrary to being the ruin

of business, is the core and foundation needed to make it

truly thrive.



SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Denise and her brothers P  p   and Jean walk into Paris after arriving on a train (in the third-class carriage) from rural France. Denise is 20 and thin, Jean is 16 and handsome, and P  p   is five. They are frightened and lost. They stop pedestrians to ask for directions to the Rue de la Michodi  re—the street where their uncle Baudu lives. They are wearing mourning clothes because their father has recently died.

Suddenly, Denise stops on the corner of the Rue de la Michodi  re. They are standing in front of a drapery shop, and the windows burst with color. It is 8 a.m. and the streets are empty, but the drapery shop buzzes “like a beehive.” Above the huge glass doors, two gilded women with bare breasts unfurl a scroll that reads “**the Ladies’ Paradise.**” Jean comments that this shop is grander than the drapery shop in Valognes where Denise worked for two years.

A lump rises in Denise’s throat and she feels excited. **The Ladies’ Paradise** occupies five storefronts and a second floor where salesgirls are bustling about. Furs and fabrics are piled at the front door. Under a lean-to of umbrellas in a display window, silk stockings and gloves are strewn among roses. A brilliant spectrum of silks, satins, and velvets is arranged in another window. Denise exclaims at the low price of the beautiful goods. She stares at this “chapel of woman’s beauty:” a display of mannequins in fur- and feather-lined outfits with price tags stuck in the mannequins’ necks. The stylish outfits are multiplied at every angle in mirrors placed behind them.

Jean gazes at **the Ladies’ Paradise** and blushes. P  p   clings to Denise, anxious for affection. A white-haired man staring angrily at the Ladies’ Paradise glares at them. Denise and Jean, remembering their uncle, look up and notice that this man is standing before a shop named *Au Vieil Elbeuf*—the name of Uncle Baudu’s shop. It is a low-ceilinged shop with dingy paint and prison-like windows. Denise, Jean, and P  p   approach their uncle’s shop. After their mother and father died in quick succession from a fever, Baudu wrote to Denise that she and her siblings could stay with him. However, this was over a year ago and Denise now feels bad to spring a visit on her uncle unannounced.

Denise and her brothers rode into Paris in the third-class carriage of the train, revealing not only that they are poor, but that they are the poorest of the poor. Their arrival in Paris in mourning clothes shows that with their father dead, they had nothing to keep them in rural France.



When Denise sees the Ladies’ Paradise, she stops in her tracks, an action that reveals how immediately captivating the Ladies’ Paradise is. Her attraction to it is counter-intuitive; the nudity of the gilded statues holding the sign suggests immodesty and promiscuity—qualities that can’t be ascribed to Denise.



The Ladies’ Paradise is a place of abundance. It occupies a huge amount of space, has piles of goods, and multiplies the mannequins with mirrors behind them. Denise’s excitement—which is enough to make a lump rise in her throat—might seem inconsistent with her character in the sense that she is not one to be materialistic or caught up with appearances. Rather, the Ladies’ Paradise seems to signify opportunity, perhaps in terms of employment.



The striking contrast between the Ladies’ Paradise and Au Vieil Elbeuf right across the street immediately introduces the opposition of the old and the new. The Ladies’ Paradise exudes wealth, whereas Baudu’s shop is on the verge of bankruptcy. Furthermore, the Ladies’ Paradise represents modern values, or at least a doing away with modesty and tradition. Baudu’s shop and Baudu himself—as an older, white-haired man—represent the past and tradition.



Denise approaches the white-haired man and introduces herself. Baudu is stunned, and repeatedly asks why they have come. Denise explains that her father left them no money, having spent it all on his dye shop. She and Jean worked for a year but were unable to scrape by. However, Jean developed a skill for ivory carving and has an internship lined up in Paris that offers room and board. Denise does not mention that they left partly because Jean was having an affair with a nobleman's daughter. Baudu comments that he had warned Denise's father that the dye shop would fail. He casts another angry glance at **the Ladies' Paradise** and then welcomes his niece and nephews inside.

Denise, Jean, and P  p   hesitate in the threshold of Baudu's shop, unsettled by the gloom inside. The shop is blackened by smoke, stacked with dark piles of fabric, and smells of chemicals. Baudu introduces his wife, Madame Baudu, and his daughter Genevi  ve. Genevi  ve stares at Denise's small parcel, and Denise explains that she left their trunk at the train station. Bluntly, Baudu explains that business is not going well. The Baudus raised five boys, three of whom died and two of whom left home, leaving only Genevi  ve to help with the store. Moreover, Baudu has invested all his money in a dilapidated house in the country. Baudu says that he has nothing for Denise. Denise says that they will go away, but Baudu softens and says they can spend the night.

Madame Baudu says that P  p   can stay with Madame Gras, a woman who runs a children's boarding house. Baudu plans to take Denise to Vin  ard—a man who is looking to hire a salesgirl—after lunch. Meanwhile, no customers come into the shop. Denise caresses P  p   and assures Madame Baudu that P  p   is well-behaved. A maid appears and Baudu calls everyone to lunch, including his assistant Colomban. Baudu serves veal in exactly equal portions. Denise finds the gloomy dining room depressing.

Baudu asks why Denise didn't marry anyone in her hometown. Denise laughs at the idea, thinking how she has no money, has two siblings to care for, and is not pretty. Baudu says that Genevi  ve and Colomban will be married in the spring when business is better. It is tradition in his family for the girls to marry an assistant who takes over the business. Baudu says that, although Colomban's father drank and chased women, Colomban is a hard worker.

When Baudu wrote to Denise a year ago, his business must have been stable enough to assure him that he could support guests. His obvious consternation that Denise and her brothers have shown up suggests that a lot has changed with his business in a very short amount of time. However, Denise's father left his children no money and no business, suggesting that small businesses have been struggling to make it under present conditions for at least a few years.



Business has been so bad for the Baudus that their quality of life has severely declined. As well as the conditions of poverty, Denise finds the very structure of the small drapery shop depressing. The smell of chemicals and dye and the stacks of fabric—which are normal things for a drapery shop and not just consequences of their poverty—add to the gloom. In this way, the Baudu's life is depressing to an outsider's perspective not only because of their financial hardship, but also because of their old-fashioned way of business.



In the traditional business model, sales assistants live and dine where they work. This is how Denise plans to support herself, by finding a job as a salesgirl and living onsite. However, Denise is depressed by the Baudu's dining room—the home side of their home-business environment—and is turned off by the traditional shop model altogether. This suggests that Denise dreams of a different future for herself.



Baudu follows social traditions in addition to the traditional small business model. Instead of passing his shop on to his female heir, he is marrying his daughter so that he can pass the shop onto a male heir. Denise, in laughing at the idea of marrying to get out of her poverty, reveals that she's not a social climber—at least if she has to marry to ascend the ladder.



Denise looks at Geneviève and Colomban sitting close together. The inevitability of their marriage meant that they don't desire each other. Instead, they fell in love "like a flower in a cellar" from being cramped in the shop together their whole lives, and eventually Geneviève will realize this. Denise says that love makes everything possible, and then Baudu passes around jam—a luxury saved for guests.

After lunch, Denise stands in the door and watches **the Ladies' Paradise** open. A mob has gathered in front. As people begin to shop, the outfits and materials seem to come to life. The bustle of sales at the counter seems to create heat and light, and the buyers move as if caught in the wheels of a machine. Denise feels both afraid and tempted by the Ladies' Paradise and is repulsed by Baudu's old-fashioned shop. She remarks at the success of the Ladies' Paradise, and Madame Baudu turns white. Geneviève looks suspiciously at Colomban, who is slyly enraptured by the Paradise. Baudu changes the subject by leaving with Denise for Vinçard's. He sends an assistant for Denise's trunk.

Denise and Baudu find Vinçard in his shop conversing with two men, Robineau—an assistant from **the Ladies' Paradise**—and Gaujean, a silk manufacturer. Vinçard, who's trying to sell Robineau his shop, blames how slow business has been recently merely on his health. Robineau interrupts him to say small shops are being ruined by the presence of the Ladies' Paradise. Gaujean rejoins that big stores are ruining France's textile industry, and that the Ladies' Paradise is exploiting people: they promised Robineau a promotion and never gave it to him. Insulted, Robineau says he'll think about Vinçard's offer.

Baudu asks Vinçard if he is hiring a salesgirl. Vinçard says he hired someone two hours ago. Feigning apology, Robineau chimes in that they are hiring at **the Ladies' Paradise** and advises Denise to visit Madame Aurélie, the Paradise's buyer, in the morning. Baudu exclaims against it, but Denise feels a mixture of fear and pride. She thanks Robineau, and she and Baudu leave. Baudu mutters that it is Denise's choice.

On the way back to Baudu's shop, Baudu and Denise pass Bourras, an umbrella carver with a tiny, dilapidated shop squashed between **the Ladies' Paradise** and a tall mansion. Bourras tells Baudu that someone from the Paradise wrote his landlord requesting to buy his shop. Furious, Bourras swears that this man will never take his shop from him. Trembling, Baudu leads Denise back to The Vieil Elbeuf. There, Denise's trunk has arrived but Jean has disappeared. The Baudus are appalled to hear that Denise was offered a job in the Ladies' Paradise.

Geneviève and Colomban's arranged marriage has no chemistry. Their relationship, like Baudu's dying business, is sick, like a flower growing in the dark. This suggests that all things traditional—whether business or conventions of marriage—have no life, at least not in the modern times.



The Ladies' Paradise has the look of a machine to Denise, suggesting that its energy and activity has an impersonal air. Baudu's traditional shop is the opposite: small and personal, and the suffering of the people who work there is palpable. Denise feels excited by the impersonality of the Ladies' Paradise and repulsed by the opposite nature of the Vieil Elbeuf, again suggesting that she identifies more with modern business practices. However, she is also afraid of the Ladies' Paradise, highlighting that encountering a modern business is a new experience for Denise.



The Ladies' Paradise is revolutionizing the whole mode of trade in Paris by removing the need for small shops and middle-man manufacturers. In considering Vinçard's offer to buy his small shop, Robineau is going backwards towards the traditional ways—which are proving outdated—instead of continuing to move forward and essentially sell out to a bigger business.



Denise is torn between two lifestyles and value systems: she is related to Baudu who sticks to traditional business, but she is drawn to the Ladies' and the opportunities there. Her interest in the Ladies' Paradise draws her out of the class she was born into, but she remains connected to the troubles of the lower shopkeeping class.



The fact that the Ladies' Paradise has offered to buy Bourras's shop suggests that it plans to expand not only its customer base, but also its footprint. This foreshadows its future physical as well as monetary growth. The small old-fashioned shops are being threatened financially by the Ladies' Paradise, and also territorially. Not only will some of them lose business, but the shop owners themselves could become homeless.



The Baudus and Denise sit down for dinner. Baudu tells Denise the story of **the Ladies' Paradise**. Octave Mouret—an adventurer and womanizer—showed up in Paris and married Caroline Hédouin, the widowed daughter of the Deleuze brothers, who founded the Ladies' Paradise. Madame Baudu says that Mouret killed Madame Hédouin; she fell in a hole on the building site, staining the foundation of the Ladies' Paradise with her blood. Baudu explains that when Caroline was alive, Mouret persuaded her to buy up all the storefronts. Mouret wants to overturn all of Paris, but Baudu thinks that he invested too much money and is heading for a terrible crash.

Baudu speaks disdainfully of how **the Ladies' Paradise** carries everything, like a bazaar, and how it treats their customers and employees like commodities. In contrast, Colomban knows the art of the old trade: one should not sell a lot but instead should sell at a high price. The people at the Ladies' Paradise have no love of family, and they always eat out. Privately, Baudu is afraid that the Ladies' Paradise will force him to leave his tiny world where he is comfortable. Baudu insists that it is unfair for a shop to start selling everything, and to put small, specialized shops out of business. It is appalling that the Paradise sells gloves *and* umbrellas.

Baudu confesses that, if Vinçard sells his shop, they all may as well leave. He dreams briefly of starting a union of small retailers. Then he boasts that, although **the Ladies' Paradise** has taken some of his business, he doesn't need to use tricks to sell. Geneviève names Baudu's loyal customers. Madame Baudu explains how the Paradise grew overnight, whereas Baudu's has been the same for generations. Denise can see that Madame Baudu has tied her life to the little shop.

Baudu lapses into silence, regretting his outburst. He feels that his family, unlike Mouret, has never had any luck. Also, he bought a retirement house in the country that cost him more to repair than it earned him from renters. Baudu presses Denise about working at **the Ladies' Paradise**. She deflects and goes to stand in the doorway. It is dark and the rain makes muddy water flow right into the gloomy shop. This image of "old Paris" depresses Denise.

Marrying Madame Hédouin allowed Mouret to rise in class, since before his marriage to her he was nothing but "an adventurer" with no money or remarkable familial connections. In this way, marrying Madame Hédouin and thus becoming an heir—although a traditional move—led to success that was unprecedented for someone born outside of the high class in a society where class divisions are rigid and stratified.



Baudu makes complaints against the Ladies' Paradise on a variety of different grounds: taste, tradition, and values. However, his main complaint is that the Ladies' Paradise sells more than one item, that it has become a "bazaar" or marketplace. This complaint has no real grounds other than the fact that it is "unfair," and that it has put the small shops out of business. Baudu feels that his way of life and business is comfortable, and so is appalled by the innovations of The Paradise.



The Vieil Elbeuf's selling points are all based on the assumption that people are modest, honest, and endowed with integrity. Baudu counts on his customers' loyalty and on their disinclination to be seduced by beauty and excess. The Ladies' Paradise holds a lower view of people, knowing it can manipulate them into being consumers.



Baudu believes that his misfortune has to do with bad luck, when really his hardship has to do with the way he does business—a traditional model that, the novel shows, is quickly becoming outdated and not profitable. Denise separates Paris into the old and the new; Baudu's shop and everything stands for represents the old while the Ladies' Paradise represents the new.



Across the street, the lamps at **the Ladies' Paradise** are being lit. Denise is drawn towards the humming "machine." She sees the salesclerks counting money among a profusion of lace. Against the "chapel-like" background, the merchandise seems to clothe women hurrying through the rain to festivities. Denise is seduced, and she dreams of a future full of unimaginable things. She feels hope and joy. Behind her, Baudu points at Bourras, who is standing in the rain staring at the Ladies' Paradise. All the Baudus gather and watch the Ladies' Paradise—the thing that is destroying them. Baudu guesses that Denise will go in the morning to ask for a job, and Denise says she will.

Whether they're for or against the Ladies' Paradise, everyone is obsessed with it. The chapel-like atmosphere suggests that the Paradise has a religious effect on people, and the machine-like quality has the effect of pulling everyone towards it. In this way, the Ladies' Paradise ensures that it is the center of attention, even if this means it is the center of negative attention. The Baudus, in watching what destroys them, are pitiful, whereas Denise appears pragmatic as she decides to ask for a job at a business that seems to be booming.



CHAPTER 2

At 7:30 the next morning, Denise waits outside of **the Ladies' Paradise**. The shop assistants are just arriving, hurrying into the store, their collars turned up against the cold wind. Several men stare at Denise as they pass, and she walks around the block, too timid to enter with them. A man who is also waiting outside the Paradise asks Denise if she is a salesgirl. They discover that they are both applying for jobs, and they blush and separate. Sales assistants continue to pass, and Denise feels conspicuous. A tall man with gold eyes glances at her as he enters the Paradise, and his look disturbs her. She walks around the block again.

Denise is outnumbered by the male salesmen entering the Ladies' Paradise. This suggests that, although the retail world is co-ed, it is still a male-dominated field. A pattern develops in which Denise's timidity and fear coexist alongside more positive emotions, such as excitement. For instance, her fear of the Ladies' Paradise made her excited to join its world.



The man with gold eyes is Octave Mouret, the owner of **the Ladies' Paradise**. He spent the night at a stockbroker's house after a party and is wearing dress clothes under his coat. After entering the Paradise, he washes his face and goes to his big office. He looks at a portrait of Madame Hédouin on the wall and thanks her for giving him the Paradise through marriage. There is a knock and a man named Bourdoncle enters. Bourdoncle started at the Paradise when Mouret took over and eventually became the overall supervisor. Bourdoncle teases Mouret for his partying, and Mouret teases Bourdoncle for being boring.

Mouret is a mixture of serious and unserious qualities. He spends his free time partying, which suggests that he lives a self-indulgent lifestyle and doesn't take anything too seriously. On the other hand, he is grateful to his late wife, suggesting that he understands how fortunate he's been and will work hard to live up to the opportunities he was given. This dichotomy in his character makes it unclear whether Mouret is a protagonist or an antagonist.



Bourdoncle used to have mistresses. Now, he hates women and pours his energy into **the Ladies' Paradise**, where he can exploit customers instead. Mouret, on the other hand, loves women and sleeps with them to get them to come to the Ladies' Paradise. While he signs bills, Mouret raves about Madame Desforges, a woman he saw at a ball the night before. Bourdoncle warns Mouret that the women will get their revenge—that one woman will avenge the rest. Mouret brushes him off.

Mouret and Bourdoncle both exploit women, but the attitude in which they exploit them is very different. Mouret has a natural affection for women whereas Bourdoncle hates women and exploits them out of hatred. However, despite his hatred, Bourdoncle thinks of women as capable of revenge, whereas Mouret does not. In this way, Bourdoncle sees women as powerful—where Mouret does not.



After a silence, Bourdoncle mentions the winter sale starting Monday. For this sale, Mouret spent all his money and yet is guaranteed to make millions, a method that makes Bourdoncle nervous. Mouret says that the store is still too small and alludes to a plan involving Madame Desforges. He laughs at Bourdoncle's reluctance. Mouret tells Bourdoncle that he plans to offer a commission for every error that clerks find in the sales book. This is in keeping with Mouret's sales method: offering commissions that evoke a "struggle for survival," exploiting people's passions to make them work hard.

Bourdoncle and Mouret go down to the receiving room in the basement, where packages of goods are streaming in on silver chutes. Mouret watches the "flood" and reflects on his task of launching these goods all around Paris. A gang of men receive the packages and go through the contents while the heads of the departments check invoices. Mouret asks Bouthemont, a successful buyer at the Paradise who started a rivalry with his father when he left his drapery shop, about the new goods.

Bourdoncle picks up a piece of new silk and examines it. Bouthemont, who visits factories throughout Paris and negotiates with manufacturers every month, explains that the manufacturer charged extra for this fine design. Mouret suggests they price the silk just under cost, and Bouthemont agrees. Bourdoncle (whose commission is based on total profits) is wary of Bouthemont (whose commission is based on total sales) lowering the prices to increase sales. Getting angry, Mouret says he wants to give the silk away to his customers to gain their absolute trust. He wants all of Paris to be talking about his cheap silk.

The assistants smile to hear Mouret talk. Bouthemont says that the manufacturers are upset and claim that **the Ladies' Paradise** is running them out of business. Mouret says that the manufacturers should be pleased. The assistants go back to checking the invoices while Mouret watches. Then, he and Bourdoncle continue through the basement, passing the stock room and cafeteria before coming to the dispatch room, where there are cubbyholes for the districts of Paris. Mouret asks the dispatch supervisor about an order that was not delivered. The man replies that the cash desk wrote the address down incorrectly.

Mouret's method of making millions involves him spending everything he has so that, on the surface, it looks as though he is risking total bankruptcy. This, combined with his plan to offer extra commissions for the clerks, suggests that he follows the business model that suggests one has to spend money to make money. This is, interestingly, the exact opposite of how Baudu runs his shop: he refuses to spend any extra money on it and just hopes his customers will keep coming.



The comparison of the influx and outflux of packages from the Ladies' Paradise to a flood reveals Mouret's method at work on an enormous scale: he buys a huge amount of goods, but also sells a huge amount of goods. Also, he talks of launching his goods all through Paris, showing that the Paradise's customer base is not local, but comprised of the whole city.



The contention between Bourdoncle and Bouthemont puts into play Mouret's method of creating a struggle for survival among his staff. Since Bourdoncle and Bouthemont's commissions are based on opposing goals, they are both motivated to work harder towards their goal. Mouret again explains how what appears like a plan to lose money is actually intended to buy him something way more profitable in the long run: customer trust.



Mouret's comment that the manufacturers should be pleased shows that there are two ways of looking at the failure of small businesses. While the small businesses and manufacturers complain that the Ladies' Paradise is robbing their business, Mouret claims that the manufacturers and small businesses are failing only because they refuse to join the Paradise—something that would actually make them thrive.



Before going to the cash desk, Mouret and Bourdoncle go upstairs to the mail room. When Mouret asks one of many clerks opening letters, the man replies that they received 534 letters that morning. Mouret and Bourdoncle go downstairs to the counting office (one of a network of offices that deals with payouts), where a huge safe is built into the wall. Mouret tells some laughing cashiers about the new commission for detecting errors, and they suddenly get serious. Bourdoncle and Mouret then go to the cash desk to see Albert Lhomme, the son of the ladieswear buyer Madame Aurélie.

Bourdoncle reprimands Albert for making a mistake with the address, so Albert calls on another cashier and tries to make the man blame the customer. Bourdoncle chastises Albert again, but then Lhomme—Albert’s father—runs up and asks what is wrong. Mouret wants to look magnanimous, so he brushes aside Albert’s mistake and then engages Lhomme in a discussion about a concert that Mouret had given him tickets to go see.

Mouret and Bourdoncle move on through the silk and linens departments. They stop in the wool department, where one boy is being reprimanded for being tired and another is being scolded for coming to work late. In the glove department, a boy complains about the cafeteria’s food. Mouret—who knows that the chef cuts corners to make a profit out of his small allowance for groceries—gives an empty promise to talk to the chef about the food.

At this point, the man at the door clocking in the employees puts away his book. The salesmen finish dusting and uncover their displays of merchandise. At the silk counter, a young man named Hutin whispers to a man named Favier that Favier should hit Robineau—the assistant buyer whose job Hutin covets. Hutin tries to pit the whole department against Robineau; he even brought in someone to take the vacancy that was promised to Robineau.

Mouret comes up to Hutin, who is now arranging a display of silks. Mouret asks Hutin why he is making the display “easy on the eyes.” He takes the silks and jumbles the colors into a dazzling display. As opposed to Hutin’s symmetrical display, Mouret’s is an avalanche to make customer’s eyes “sore.”

Mouret and Bourdoncle’s tour of the offices and departments at The Paradise reveals how sprawling and intricate the store is. The quantity of various offices, tasks, and appointed staff makes the Paradise seem like a bustling city in which there is a post office, bank, and other fixtures of a town. Readers also see here how Mouret’s commission system works in his favor: the cashiers are instantly willing to work harder the moment they hear that there’s money involved. Paying them more will ultimately benefit Mouret, as the cashiers may find expensive errors in the reports.



Mouret conceals his ruthlessness by acting friendly. In this way, he deceives his staff like he deceives his customers. He ensnares his customers by getting them to think that he’s giving them amazing deals, and he ensnares his employees by leading them to believe he is kind and generous (such as with concert tickets and extra commissions).



Mouret’s concern for the health and well-being of his employees is all an appearance. On the surface, the Ladies’ Paradise seems like an equal-opportunity employer that provides its employees with benefits and opportunities. However, Mouret is only willing to do just enough to keep his employees working (like write them bigger checks), not enough to keep them truly happy (like by improving the food situation).



The Ladies’ Paradise—being a large-scale business with a hierarchy of employees—offers the opportunity to rise to a higher position. Getting more in the employees’ minds here shows that Mouret is successfully creating an environment where employees fight with and deceive each other to try to improve their positions. And all of this ultimately benefits Mouret, as his employees seem willing to stick around, play the game, and continue working hard.



Mouret’s business model is based not on making things easy for his customers, but rather on overwhelming and seducing them. He wants to make their eyes “sore,” suggesting he wants to put them in a position where they feel they must buy things in order to relieve discomfort.



Just then, Denise appears, having finally worked up the courage to enter **the Ladies' Paradise**. Mouret's silk display arouses her, and her cheeks flush. Mouret is touched by Denise's reaction. Denise goes up to Hutin, who recognizes her as the "tart" he saw earlier in the street, and asks where Madame Aurélie is. Hutin gallantly leads Denise up the stairs to the ladieswear department. Denise is moved by Hutin's gentlemanliness. Hutin goes back downstairs and jokes to Favier about Denise's skinniness.

In the ladieswear department, Denise goes up to one of the salesgirls and asks for Madame Aurélie. The salesgirl asks the other salesgirls, and they all tell Denise she'll have to wait. Denise waits, looking out the window at the depressing sight of the Vieil Elbeuf. The salesgirls—whose names are Clara Prunaire and Marguerite Vadon—whisper about Denise's shabby boots and say that she won't make it long.

Suddenly, Madame Aurélie, a majestic woman in a black dress, appears. She rebukes Madame Frédéric, another saleswoman, about something, and then, noticing Denise, asks what she wants. Shaking, Denise gives her name and age, and says that she's strong despite her frail appearance. Madame Aurélie sends Clara for the application book.

Mouret and Bourdoncle appear and talk to Madame Aurélie about her son Albert's mistake. Mouret, surprised to see Denise, asks Madame Aurélie what she's doing there. Bourdoncle then says that Denise is too ugly to work at the Paradise as Clara Prunaire comes back with the book. Denise explains that she has no previous experience in retail in Paris, but Mouret is pleased to hear the name of the store she worked at in Valognes. When asked, Denise says she lives across the street at Baudu's. She laughs, and her whole being lights up. Mouret whispers to Bourdoncle that she is pretty. Mouret says that he respects Baudu and hopes that Denise will tell him he'll ruin himself by sticking to old-fashioned business.

Denise realizes that this man—the same one she saw in the street—is Mouret. She feels she can see the dead Madame Hédouin in his eyes and feels a complicated emotion akin to fear. Madame Aurélie says she will contact Denise, knowing privately she will hire her just to please Mouret. Denise thanks Madame Aurélie and turns to leave, wondering if she should feel excited or afraid. She has two lasting impressions from her visit to the Paradise: her uneasy feeling around Mouret, and the pleasure she felt at Hutin's kindness.

Denise's reaction to the silk display illustrates Mouret's purpose in rearranging it, revealing that Mouret gains more customers by arousing them and making them a bit uncomfortable than by making things simple and comfortable. Denise is touched by Hutin because of his obvious kindness, but this—like Mouret's kindness towards his employees—is only a front meant to deceive.



Denise gets confidence by reminding herself of how depressing Baudu's is. The salesgirls pick on Denise's shabbiness, suggesting that the working class salespeople at the Ladies' Paradise are more sophisticated than the working class shopkeepers, like the Baudus. By taking a job at the Paradise, Denise would begin to transcend her class.



Madame Aurélie—a woman in a high position—is impressive in that she is so powerful in a society where women often don't enjoy professional power like this. In The Ladies' Paradise, a person gets to high positions by proving themselves, so Denise insists she is stronger than she looks.



Mouret seems to see something of value in Denise that underlies her appearance. Denise's lack of physical beauty—which Bourdoncle notes—makes her appear useless to the Ladies' Paradise, a place that trades in superficial beauty. Mouret's perception of something deeper in Denise suggests that he is not simply a heartless business owner who believes in and exploits female superficiality. It also suggests that Denise has something beyond looks to offer Mouret and his business.



Denise's uncertainty as to whether she should feel excited or afraid indicates that her experience at the Ladies' Paradise will be both good and bad. Her lasting impressions—that Hutin was kind and that Mouret was frightening—are mixed up, though Denise doesn't realize this yet. Hutin had been kind on the surface but cruel in private, and Mouret—frightening on the surface—had seen true beauty in Denise.



Outside the Paradise, Denise runs into the shy man she waited with earlier. As they chat, they discover that they both applied and are both waiting to hear the verdict. They blush. The man introduces himself as Henri Deloche, and they wish each other good luck.

Denise has a lot in common with Deloche. She reacts to three men in this chapter—Hutin, Mouret, and Deloche—and she will later have to sort out how she feels about each.



CHAPTER 3

That Sunday, Madame Desforges serves tea to friends in her flat. Mouret is about to enter her drawing room when he notices Madame Desforges crossing the hall. Mouret goes up to her and kisses her hand. Madame Desforges tells him to be discrete, and then assures him that Baron Hartmann—the director of a bank—will be arriving soon. Baron was Madame Desforges' financial advisor, and after her husband passed away, the two continued an affair. Madame Desforges is also having an affair with Mouret and has fallen in love with him, though she's afraid that Mouret is only associating with her because he wants to connect with Baron. Mouret follows Madame Desforges into the drawing room.

It's possible that Mouret is only having an affair with Madame Desforges because she has wealthy and powerful connections, such as Baron Hartmann. Mouret's lifestyle and business model suggest that he views women as means to an end: he exploits them for their money, whether they are spending it at the Ladies' Paradise or using their connections to help fund his business endeavors. Even Mouret's marriage to Madame Hédouin was a marriage of utility, suggesting that Mouret is not concerned with love.



Madame Desforges shows her guests the fan she bought. Mouret follows her and bows to the guests, all of whom are women. One of the guests compliments the lace of the fan. Madame Desforges says she spent 25 francs on the lace and 200 francs on the engraved mount. The ladies pass around the fan. Another guest, Madame de Boves, shows the fan to her daughter Blanche. Madame de Boves then asks Mouret if 225 francs is a fair price for the fan.

Madame Desforges's friends are interested in the quality of the fan for the price that Madame Desforges paid. Their interest makes them the perfect future customers for the Ladies' Paradise: they want the newest fashions, but at the fairest price—a desire that the Ladies' Paradise appeals to in order to gain loyal customers.



Before Mouret can answer, the door opens and another guest—Madame Marty—enters. Madame Marty apologizes for bringing in her red bag and says that it contains some purchases she made at **the Ladies' Paradise** that she doesn't want stolen. Excited, the ladies ask Madame Marty what she bought. Madame Marty is known for her spending, a habit that is ruining her husband (who's a teacher). Madame Marty is about to open her bag when two more guests are announced. Afraid her husband is one of them, Madame Marty hides the bag under her chair. The guests turn out to be Monsieur de Boves and Vallagnosc, a childhood classmate of Mouret's. Mouret and Vallagnosc shake hands and go into the small drawing room to talk.

Madame Marty is the first of Madame Desforges's friends to cave to the enticements of the Ladies' Paradise because she already has a tendency to spend wildly. Because she loves to shop, the Ladies' Paradise appeals to her since it is piled full of things to buy, and because it offers everything at a low price. Madame Marty—although high class—is on the verge of bankrupting her husband, showing that the Ladies' Paradise can create a downward as well as upward mobility: as the lower classes rise through employment, the higher classes sink through excessive spending.



Mouret and Vallagnosc sit laughing and reminiscing about their mischievous school days. Vallagnosc was always top of the class, whereas Mouret barely passed. Mouret asks Vallagnosc what he has been up to, and Vallagnosc replies that he has done nothing; he lives with his widowed mother and has a minor job in law, making 3,000 francs a year. Shocked, Mouret remarks that Vallagnosc's aptitude for school never got him anywhere. Mouret adds that the idea of being a lawyer or doctor always frightened him, so he went into business instead.

Vallagnosc says that Mouret's diploma must be of no use in his drapery business. Mouret says it is obvious that Vallagnosc's diplomas never made him happy. He then says that many of the people he employs have no education at all, and yet they are making millions. Mouret says that anyone with practical intelligence can make a fortune in these modern times. Vallagnosc insists that effort is useless. He once had lofty dreams, but life never lived up to his expectations. Indignant, Mouret says that he always enjoys himself. Not only does he have many affairs with women, but he acts, creates, and lives with passion. He dislikes those who don't employ themselves in a world that is "pressing forward into the future." Vallagnosc maintains that life's only pleasure is in yawning at others.

Mouret laughs and says that Vallagnosc hasn't changed. He promises to show Vallagnosc his "machine" in action and asks if Vallagnosc is still engaged to be married. Vallagnosc glances at Blanche and whispers that nothing is settled yet. Madame de Boves and Blanche are always hard up for money because Monsieur de Boves is always having affairs. Mouret watches Monsieur de Boves flirt with Madame Guibal, another of Madame Desforges's guests. Mouret and Vallagnosc laugh at the scene. Madame Desforges—who loves to play matchmaker—set up Vallagnosc and Blanche, as well as Monsieur de Boves and Madame Guibal.

Madame Desforges comes into the small drawing room followed by an old man. She comes up to Mouret and introduces the man as Baron Hartmann. Baron greets Mouret with a friendly but guarded air. Madame Desforges then escorts Vallagnosc back into the big drawing room. Mouret praises Baron's work at the bank and then opens the subject of the new street near **the Ladies' Paradise**; Baron's firm financed the bank's purchase of the street and the buildings. Mouret has always dreamed of expanding the Ladies' Paradise, and so he wants to establish a connection with Baron. He hopes that their common interest in Madame Desforges will solidify their relationship.

Mouret and Vallagnosc's conversation proves that education is not necessary to financial or social success. Mouret—as someone who was bad in school—became a wealthy businessman whereas Vallagnosc—who did well—has been unsuccessful. A lack of education—which used to confine a person to a lower class—does not prevent a person from achieving success in the business world.



Mouret and Vallagnosc's conversation lays down a distinction between practical and scholarly education. Many of Mouret's uneducated staff are rich because they have practical intelligence, suggesting that practical intelligence is more useful than formal education, and that it can't be taught in school. Vallagnosc's disappointment in life seems to stem from his lack of practical education: life fails to live up to his expectations because he has lofty notions—ideas that are not practical and were likely instilled in him in school.



Although Madame Desforges's friends are of the aristocracy, this doesn't make them morally upstanding people. Some are going bankrupt because they shop too much, and Monsieur de Boves—a count—is going bankrupt because he is having an extramarital affair. Madame Desforges lowers herself by indiscriminately matchmaking, helping her friend's husband cheat. In this way, the novel shows that people are aristocrats due to their birth and tradition, not because of their work or behavior.



The fact that Mouret has to charm Baron Hartmann into funding his expansion of the Ladies' Paradise is a reminder that Mouret has gotten around the limitations of his class and his wealth in order to become successful. Mouret has no rich family from whom he can borrow money, and therefore must succeed through his charm instead. In this way, Mouret's character suggests that a person can get around the limitations of their class through work and personality.



Laughing good-naturedly, Mouret describes **the Ladies' Paradise** to Baron, explaining how it puts all its money into the business and gets back massive profits. He then suggests a partnership between the Ladies' Paradise and Baron's firm, which would provide space for an expansion of the Ladies' Paradise. He wants to create a "shopping arcade" and can't do it without Baron's buildings. Baron compliments Mouret's imagination but refuses to partner with him; he believes that Mouret's gigantic drapery shop is a rash idea. Baron asks Mouret where he will get customers. In response, Mouret points to the drawing room. There, the ladies are busy discussing the latest fashions and deals.

Mouret tells Baron how he plans to increase his initial capital tenfold. He explains that, although his profit on individual goods is small, his net profit is enormous because of how much he sells. Baron asks again where the customers will come from. Mouret remains silent so that Baron can hear the ladies in the drawing room talking about dressmaking. Mouret explains how, at **the Ladies' Paradise**, he arranges various goods so as to ensnare his customers and make them buy more. He also displays his low prices in the window so as to make his customers feel that they are not being cheated.

Mouret explains that **the Ladies' Paradise** is based on "the flesh and blood of Woman." He exclaims that he understands women and has them at his mercy. Baron hushes him, but the ladies in the drawing room are busy talking fashion and prices. Mouret whispers in Baron's ear that big business is about exploiting women. Big stores arouse desires in women and force them to buy. With the Ladies' Paradise, Mouret has built a temple to women. Baron is moved by Mouret's speech but warns him that the women will "have their revenge." Mouret shrugs; he feels that women are his property. Mouret asks Baron again for a partnership. Before Baron can answer, the ladies call Mouret.

Mouret walks gallantly into the drawing room. The ladies gather around him and ask him about the big sale at **the Ladies' Paradise** on Monday; they all say that they plan to come. They collaborate in pouring him tea and then they surround him with their skirts, asking questions. Mouret assures them that his silk is lovely and cheap and that he owns the exclusive rights to the design. The four ladies—who represent four different kinds of shoppers—have been speculating about the famous silk at the Ladies' Paradise for weeks.

Mouret wants to turn The Paradise into a "shopping arcade," conjuring the image of the modern-day mall where one goes to have an entire shopping experience, not just on a practical mission to obtain something they need. Baron compliments Mouret's imagination for this idea: nothing like the modern-day shopping mall yet existed during this time, and so, even though Mouret shows impressive perception of the future of shopping, none of his contemporaries understand him.



Mouret—in pointing to the ladies in the drawing room chatting non-stop about fashions and prices—indicates that The Paradise's projected customer base is all women. It is obvious to him that fashion and deals are central to the female experience, seeing as they spend their time discussing these matters. In appealing to what he believes are universal female interests, he obtains half of Paris's population as his customer base.



Mouret understands women's shopping habits, so he sets up The Paradise to make them feel understood and satisfied. However, Mouret does all this for his own benefit, using his understanding of what women want to exploit them, therefore demeaning them. He champions the feminine, but he does not think of women as people—as entities capable of disillusionment and revenge. Rather, they're just profits to him.



Madame Desforges's friends feel that they can trust Mouret because they feel he understands exactly what they want. They are right that Mouret does understand what they want—good deals, exclusive fashions—but what they do not realize is that he is understanding only in order to trap them, causing them to spend faithfully at the Ladies' Paradise and getting rich off of them.



Mouret tells the ladies about other wonderful materials at **the Ladies' Paradise**. The ladies gather closer and listen in awe. Baron is impressed by Mouret's seductiveness. Mouret informs Madame Desforges—who still buys her dresses from a local dressmaker—that this dressmaker buys her materials from the Ladies' Paradise. He adds that this is because the Ladies' Paradise sells things at a loss. The ladies, who love bargains, are won over by this fact. Mouret picks up Madame Desforges's fan and tells her that the seller robbed her: he would sell the same fan for 90 francs.

The ladies pass around the fan again, this time less impressed by its beauty. Blanche remarks that the black lace is depressing, and Madame Guibal complains that fans like these always break. Unable to contain herself any longer, Madame Marty opens her red bag. With “the modesty of a woman undressing,” she shows the ladies the lace she bought from **the Ladies' Paradise**. Madame Marty's husband watches in dread, feeling that every piece of lace is destroying him. Mouret says that new shops improve the lives of the middle class, and Monsieur Marty glares at him.

The ladies unwrap Madame Marty's lace purchases, becoming enraptured by them. They keep Mouret ensconced among them, as they feel that he has a sensitive understanding of their true selves. Their modesty disappears, and Mouret feels triumphant that he has them at his mercy. The sun sets and the white lace glows in the darkened room.

Observing that Madame Desforges has been taken in by Mouret, Baron privately warns the woman not to let Mouret “eat her up.” Madame Desforges guesses that Mouret is only using her to get closer to Baron, and she vows to make Mouret fall in love with her. Baron wonders if Madame Desforges is the woman who will “avenge the others.” Before leaving, Mouret pulls Baron aside to ask his verdict on their partnership. Baron says that if the sale at **the Ladies' Paradise** goes well on Monday, then they have a deal.

As Baudou once explained, the local tradesman's business model is to sell high quality items at a high price. Mouret realizes that this model doesn't necessarily give people what they want, which is a deal. Therefore, Mouret's modern approach to business is to profit from his customers by appealing to them and making them feel like they're winning over the vendor—this is why Mouret makes a point to note that he sells merchandise at a loss.



Before Mouret told the ladies that the fan was overpriced, they had all thought it beautiful. As soon as he tells them that The Paradise would sell the same fan for cheaper, they all complain about the fan. This shows that Mouret's pricing tends to manipulate a person's taste; a cheap fan is beautiful whereas an expensive fan is not. Therefore, Mouret gets to his customers through price rather than quality.



Mouret feels that the ladies are at his mercy when they are no longer being modest—that is, when they give in to their desires. This shows that a woman's desires make her vulnerable to exploitation, while modesty—refusing to give into desire—may protect one from exploitation.



Baron's fear that some woman will avenge the others (that is, get revenge on behalf of all the women Mouret has exploited) echoes Bourdoncle's earlier warning that the women will one day get their revenge. All of this implies that someday, Mouret won't be in such a powerful position over women—at some point, they'll somehow gain the upper hand. For now, it's not clear how this might work out, especially as Mouret seems poised for even bigger and better things with the proposed shop expansion.



CHAPTER 4

That Monday, the sun finally shines after a weekend of rain. By 8 a.m., the windows of **the Ladies' Paradise** are shining with colorful merchandise, and flags announcing the sale are waving in the breeze. The local tradesmen gather in their doorways and glare at four delivery vans leaving the Paradise. These vans are painted with bright colors and advertise the Monday sale. At this time of the morning, only a few customers enter the store. The customers are greeted by a huge display of antique carpets arranged by the door. This "oriental hall" was Mouret's idea—a "harem scene" of vibrant goods from all over Eastern Europe, Asia, and the Middle East.

Meanwhile, Denise is beginning her first day of work at **the Ladies' Paradise**. She is shown her cubicle room in the attic where the other salesgirls sleep. There she finds her uniform—a black silk dress—and puts it on. Not noticing that her hair is messy and her dress too big, she runs downstairs to the ladieswear department where Clara and Marguerite are arguing about the order of their names on the selling roster. They laugh when they see Denise's messy appearance. Denise notices that the salesgirls all have pencils shoved in their bodices, and that they try to distinguish themselves with their hairdos.

Madame Aurélie pulls Denise to a mirror and tweaks at her appearance. She comments that Denise's hair—ankle-length and blonde—could be beautiful if she didn't just pile it in a messy bun. Clara tries to insult Denise to a girl from the lingerie department, but this girl defends Denise, remembering her own first day. Madame Aurélie tells Denise to look better tomorrow, and to spend her first day learning the ways of the shop. Denise hopes she can prove herself; she wants to earn 1,200 francs a year so she can support her brothers. Since there are no customers, she tries to look busy. By lunchtime, several employees murmur that the sale has been a failure.

At 11 o'clock, a few customers appear. Madame Aurélie greets one of the ladies and calls for her salesgirls. Denise and Clara jump forward. Denise insists that it is her turn, but Madame Aurélie snaps at her to hold back till she knows what to do. Tears welling in her eyes, Denise retreats to the window. She looks down at the Vieil Elbeuf, wishing that she had begged Baudu to employ her there; she is afraid for her future, and feels lost and alone. Madame Aurélie chastises Denise for doing nothing, and orders her to fold the clothes that the salesgirls pulled out for customers earlier.

The fact that the day of the sale dawns sunny draws an association between the Ladies' Paradise and cheerfulness. When Denise was at the Baudus', it rained the entire weekend, flooding the street outside Baudu's shop. This vision depressed Denise and reminded her of "old Paris." By contrast, the sunny morning that provides the context for the sale suggests that the Ladies' Paradise represents "new Paris"—a Paris of uplifted spirits.



Working at the Ladies' Paradise immediately makes a person resemble someone of a higher class thanks to the silk dress, which is luxurious (though the pencils in the salesladies' bodices suggest that they're here to work and take notes, not shop themselves). At this point, Denise isn't used to navigating such a high-class environment, so she's struggling to read social cues and conform. This highlights how naïve she is at this point—she's totally blind to the fact that she doesn't fit in. This then becomes the starting point from which Denise can mature throughout the rest of the novel.



Denise is excited to work at the Ladies' Paradise not because of its flashy environment but because she sees it as the place where she can make the most money. From what she witnessed at Baudu's, the small shops are only barely scraping by, and the people who work there live practically in squalor. Denise does not have fancy tastes, but she has two brothers whom she wants to support, and she sees The Paradise as capable of giving her this opportunity.



Although Denise found Baudu's unbearably depressing, she longs for it when she witnesses the hostile and competitive environment of the Ladies' Paradise. This suggests that Baudu's—with its traditional ways—is, although gloomy, at least comfortable; it is the norm that Denise is used to. The dynamics of the Ladies' Paradise—although it offers the prospect of wealth and success—are so new and modern that it scares Denise.



Suddenly, Mouret appears in the ladieswear department. Denise feels afraid, but Mouret doesn't notice her. He has been surveying the empty store, and he fears that his sale will be a failure. Mouret watches the customer leave the ladieswear department without buying anything. He exchanges a few urgent words with Madame Aurélie, telling her to make use of Denise if the store gets busy. Mouret goes to the balustrade, avoiding Bourdoncle (whose pessimistic comments irritate him), and looks down over his empty store. The silence breaks his heart, and he feels that his "great machine" is coming to a standstill.

Downstairs, Hutin points out Mouret standing at the balustrade to Favier. Hutin then tells Favier that he needs to have 100 francs by Sunday, and that he's counting on this sale. He lost a bet last week and now needs to take five people out to dinner. Favier and Hutin chat about gambling; they are both driven by the need for money and compete with each other and Robineau—the buyer of their department—for sales.

A customer comes in, and Hutin—guessing she is not the type to buy anything—hides behind the counter so as to forego his turn and get the next customer, a woman he knows. Robineau notices this trick and gives the next customer to Favier instead. When Favier's customer leaves, Hutin asks him how the "tart" was. Favier says that she spent 293 francs, and Hutin suppresses his rage. Hutin and Favier have an ongoing rivalry; Favier pretends to be Hutin's inferior so that, when he makes a big sale, Hutin is particularly humiliated.

Meanwhile, Mouret still stands at the upstairs balustrade where he can survey the whole store. Mouret's faith in his sale is restored when he sees that the store is becoming more crowded by the minute. He can hear the rattle of coins at the cash-desk, and senses that his machine is coming back to life. Mouret spots Vallagnosc, greets him, and begins to give him a tour.

A moment ago, Denise felt afraid of the Ladies' Paradise, and now, she feels fear in Mouret's presence. Denise's fear in regard to The Paradise is also mixed with a feeling of excitement, suggesting that her feeling of fear around Mouret conceals excitement too. Mouret is afraid that his sale is failing, a fear that coexists alongside the rash excitement that it will succeed. In this way, fear is an important element in going after success.



In contrast to Denise—who needs the money she earns to take care of her brothers—Hutin and Favier want money so they can party and gamble. Although of a different order, the desire for money motivates each to sell, engaging in Mouret's intended "struggle for existence."



The Ladies' Paradise creates hostility between coworkers. Hutin and Favier can see that there's an opportunity to move up in their department, and this motivates them to compete with each other to climb to the highest places. In this way, the Ladies' Paradise—in providing opportunity—creates hostility but also brings out each person's natural ability for success. Notice too that Hutin echoes Bourdoncle's dim view of women when he calls the customer a "tart," an unflattering term suggesting the woman is promiscuous.



Mouret's description of the Ladies' Paradise as a machine illustrates it as a modern operation. It also suggests the store is somewhat impersonal: the customers feed the store in an unwilling, automatic way. In contrast, the small shops operate on a few customer interactions, and don't resemble machines.



Downstairs, Hutin becomes enraged as Favier takes more of his sales. He notices Madame Desforges, whom he knows is Mouret's girlfriend, trying on gloves with Mignot, an assistant with whom Hutin has a rivalry. Egged on by Favier, Hutin decides to usurp Madame Desforges soon. Meanwhile, Madame Desforges holds out her hand aloofly as Mignot puts gloves on for her. She can't smell the leather and feels disconnected from the gloves. However, she sends several to the cash-desk to purchase. Then she goes to the wool department for material for a dress for her cook. There, middle-class women are sifting through piles of wool.

In the wool department, Madame Desforges approaches Lienard, a salesman who tries to work as little as possible. Lienard suggests a few wools on the lowest shelves, but Madame Desforges is unsatisfied. Lienard is forced to take down heavy bolts from the top shelves, but, to his chagrin, Madame Desforges sends Lienard to the cash-desk with the first wool she looked at. Madame Desforges notices Madame Marty, and the two rave about the "oriental hall." Madame Marty is looking for material for a coat. Her daughter Valentine thinks the materials are "common," but Madame Desforges persuades them to look at the silk. They go to the silk department where colorful silks cascade from every shelf.

In the silk department, Madame Desforges and Madame Marty find Madame Bourdelais, another of Madame Desforges' friends. Madame Bourdelais raves about the "oriental hall," then says she's needed at home. She departs, first giving her address to Albert Lhomme for a delivery of a quantity of Paris-Paradise—the famous Ladies' Paradise silk.

Back in the silk department, Madame Desforges and Madame Marty can't find an available assistant. The department is filled with ladies poring over the Paris-Paradise. Assistants swiftly cut lengths of the silk as it sells. Madame Desforges declares that the silk is a bargain, but Madame Marty and Valentine are disappointed. Bouthemont comes up to Madame Desforges and acts outraged that she hasn't been served. Hutin, furious at a customer who wasted his time, hands his customer to Robineau and hurries over to Madame Desforges and Madame Marty. He asserts that he knows just what Madame Marty wants and unrolls a bolt of the Paris-Paradise. Madame Marty examines the silk, offering a few complaints.

Madame Desforges's experience buying gloves shows that the customer's obsession with the Ladies' Paradise is not based on the quality or artistry of the goods. Madame Desforges feels disconnected from the making of the gloves and is not impressed with the leather they are made from. However, she buys the gloves anyway, proving that the shopping environment and the prices of the Ladies' Paradise are seductive enough to make quality inconsequential. Noting that there are middle-class women shopping in the wool department also highlights that the Paradise brings women of all classes together, as seemingly women of all classes can't pass up a bargain.



The aristocratic ladies slowly become seduced by the Ladies' Paradise. Although Valentine's first impression is that the goods are "common," she is soon persuaded to go take a closer look, proving that the environment and low prices of the Paradise make up for the lack of quality. Madame Desforges tries to conceal her unsophisticated interest in the Paradise by talking down to the staff. However, it is clear that The Paradise has the equalizing effect of bringing aristocrats down to a pedestrian level.



The Ladies' Paradise gains popularity through word of mouth. As the ladies encounter each other while shopping, they affirm each other's enthusiasm for what they have seen, thereby accelerating their collective slide into a consumer culture.



This scene illustrates how as more customers decide to buy the Paris-Paradise, exponentially more customers who were on the fence move closer to buying it too. In this way, Mouret's business model plays off of people's tendency to go with the herd. Because of this universal tendency in people, the key to Mouret's success is simple: the more customers he gets, the many more customers he gets soon after. This illustrates why Mouret focuses on selling as much as possible, instead of charging high prices.



Madame Guibal spots Madame Desforges and Madame Marty examining the Paris-Paradise. They chat about the great crowd, and then Madame Guibal wanders off. Returning to the subject of the Paris-Paradise, Madame Desforges advises Madame Marty to get a pre-made coat from the ladieswear department and she agrees. Incensed to lose another sale, Hutin escorts Madame Desforges and Madame Marty upstairs.

Hutin leads Madame Desforges and Madame Marty through the “commercial battle” in which salesmen are holding the “army of women” at their mercy. **The Ladies’ Paradise** is so packed with the commotion of shopping that it is hard to move. Looking up, Madame Desforges notices Mouret standing at the balustrade. She smiles, but Mouret is busy giving Vallagnosc a tour. By the time they get upstairs, Mouret has disappeared. In the lace department, they run into Madame de Boves and Blanche. The ladies remark on the “dazzling” spectacle. Madame de Boves is plunging her hands into piles of lace, even though she only has money for a cab in her purse.

The ladies continue to chat. Finally, Madame de Boves and Blanche break off, planning to meet Madame Marty and Madame Desforges later in the “oriental hall.” The latter two continue towards the ladieswear department with Hutin, who is silently fuming; there is a rivalry between the ladieswear department and the materials departments as they always take each other’s customers, and he’s missing sales downstairs. In the ladieswear department, Hutin calls for Clara and Marguerite, but both are busy. Even though they are girls, Hutin hates Marguerite and Clara just as he hates the salesmen who take his sales.

Catching sight of Denise, Hutin brings Madame Desforges and Madame Marty to her. He takes vindictive pleasure in burdening the new girl with difficult customers. Denise thinks he is being kind to give her customers and watches him go tenderly. When Madame Marty asks to see Denise’s selection of coats, Denise does not know where to look. Madame Aurélie sees that Denise is neglecting the ladies and sends Marguerite for coats. Marguerite convinces Madame Marty that the coats in her budget are cheap and brings out an expensive silk coat lined with fur. Madame Aurélie snaps at Denise to do something useful and makes her model the coat.

This scene shows how the department store model is lucrative. Because Madame Marty didn’t like the silk, she thinks of another way to fulfill her wants and finds other possibilities in the other departments. In this way, the Ladies’ Paradise ensures that its customers buy by providing them with endless alternatives to satisfy their unique wants.



There is a reciprocal power dynamic between the salespeople and the customers at The Paradise. The salesmen hold the women at their mercy, but the women also constitute an attacking army. The customers believe they are outsmarting the salespeople by resisting spending or getting deals, and the salespeople know they are profiting off the customers. Madame de Boves also highlights that shopping here has a sinister, almost addictive underbelly: she’s going to spend money she doesn’t have because it makes her feel good.



The competitive dynamic between the employees at the Ladies’ Paradise creates an unusual equality between the sexes. Since the employees equally want money and therefore the most sales, the differences in their sex, previously defined by the different roles in society for the different genders, disappear. Still, this doesn’t make sexism disappear—Hutin looks down on women all the time, and this doesn’t stop when it comes to his female colleagues.



At this early stage, Denise can’t see what’s really going on at the Ladies’ Paradise. She doesn’t see the competitive hostility between the employees, and so mistakes Hutin’s sabotage for generosity. Moreover, she doesn’t yet know how to lie to customers to make them buy more or buy something more expensive (which is what Marguerite does when she insists the coats in Madame Marty’s budget are too cheap). Denise has a lot to learn about how the Paradise functions—and she may find some of what she learns morally objectionable, given her honest nature.



Just then, Mouret comes into the ladieswear department with Vallagnosc. Madame Desforges and Madame Marty congratulate Mouret on his sale. Then they look at Denise, who is being made to spin around in the coat. Madame Marty voices her complaints about the coat, and Madame Aurélie says that Denise's bad figure makes the coat look bad. Madame Desforges adds that the coat would look better if Denise's dress weren't so ill-fitting. Mouret, who wants to please Madame Desforges, says that Denise should have combed her hair. The salesgirls giggle. Denise feels violated and humiliated. She is hurt most by Mouret and Madame Desforges's comments because she feels that they are intelligent people.

Bourdoncle tells Madame Aurélie to make sure that Denise looks better tomorrow. Holding back her tears, Denise goes back to folding clothes. The girl from the lingerie department who defended Denise earlier introduces herself as Pauline, and she tells Denise it will get better with time. Madame Aurélie puts the coat on Madame Marty, and everyone exclaims at its beauty. Mouret leaves, and Vallagnosc joins Blanche. The ladies meet in the "oriental hall" then depart. The crowd ebbs away, leaving the store looking "like a battlefield," in which an army of women had undressed "in a wave of desire." In commissions, Favier made 15 francs and Hutin only made 13.

Mouret stands at the balustrade and looks down over the ravaged store. He is triumphant that he has conquered his competitors and Baron Hartmann. He listens to the sound of clerks counting coins and feels **the Ladies' Paradise** expanding already. Bourdoncle congratulates Mouret. Lhomme, who is coming up the stairs with the money bags in his one arm, tells them that the store made 8,742 francs.

That evening, Denise throws herself on her bed. She feels that she doesn't have the courage to work another day at **the Ladies' Paradise**. She puts on her old wool dress, then bursts into tears of despair.

Although Denise expects hostility from some, she does not forgive it from people she knows are intelligent. She does not go so far as to embrace the idea that hostile competition—which the Ladies' Paradise operates on—is the way the world should work. In this way, Denise is both attracted to and repulsed by the Ladies' Paradise, a combination which suggests that Denise will either not succeed in the environment of The Paradise, or that she will try to change how it operates.



After the sale, the Ladies' Paradise looks both like a battlefield, and the interior of a woman's unkempt bedroom. This draws a comparison between defeated soldiers and women overcome with desire, suggesting that desire, like an enemy army, comes over a woman and defeats her. This comparison also reveals the intention of the Ladies' Paradise isn't just to satisfy women but to overpower them and force them to surrender. In this way, The Paradise is like a powerful master forcing its customers into consumerism.



The wild success of Mouret's sale means that Baron—to fulfill his end of the deal—will fund Mouret's expansion plan. In this way, quantity of sales again secures Mouret's success. The more he sells, the more powerful financiers respect him, and the more they are willing to help further his business.



Denise puts on her old wool dress, taking comfort in her traditional self after suffering the pain of trying to become someone new at the Paradise.



CHAPTER 5

The next morning, Madame Aurélie sends Denise to Mouret's office. When Denise walks in, Mouret feels a mixture of anger and sympathy towards her. He starts to reprimand her, but then notices that she is standing straight, her dress fitting and her hair combed into thick braids. Mouret sighs in relief and gets up to smooth a few loose pieces of her hair. Despite his gentle touch, Denise still feels afraid of him. Not wanting to lose his authority, Mouret goes back behind his desk and warns her to continue attending to her appearance. Denise notices the portrait of Madame Hédouin, the woman everyone accuses him of murdering. Mouret dismisses Denise.

From then on, Denise has more courage. However, it takes her a long time to get used to the physical demands of her job. Her arms ache from carrying heavy boxes of clothes, and her feet swell with blisters. Many salesgirls get sick and leave the job, but Denise's grace keeps her going. Clara and Marguerite call her names and play mean tricks on her. Madame Aurélie disdains her, upset that Denise does not suck up to her authority. While Mouret ignores her, Jouve—the store watchman—treats her with a creepy kindness. Denise puts on a smile during the day but cries at night in her ice-cold room.

One night after dinner, Jean calls on Denise at the front door of the shop, even though she forbade him from doing so. He demands 10 francs and tells her that he met the beautiful sister of a friend; he wants to take her out. Denise tries to refuse, saying she had barely enough to pay for Pépé's room and board. Jean's eyes fill with tears. She gives him 10 francs and he runs off, kissing her cheek before he goes.

That night, Denise can't sleep. She doesn't have a salary yet, and since the salesgirls don't let her sell much, she is making barely anything. She stays up all night mending her few pieces of clothing and patching her heavy, worn out shoes. The next day, all she can think about is how she will get the 10 francs she needs for Pépé's room and board. While she helps a customer buy a coat, she regrets that she took Pépé out last Sunday and bought him treats.

Under her professional smile, Denise worries about money. In general, she spends no money at all. In the evenings, she takes a short walk by herself and then goes to bed early. The other salesgirls come home late from promiscuous excursions and gossip with each other in the hall. Denise has no friends, and the only girl who is nice to her is Pauline.

Mouret's desire to appear authoritative causes him to resist his natural instinct to be gentle towards Denise. He wants to exploit women rather than make himself vulnerable to them. Denise feels afraid of Mouret because there is a lot of mystery surrounding who he really is around women. Although the reader knows that Mouret honors and feels gratitude towards his late wife, his gruff and calculating exterior conceals this softness and perpetuates the rumor that he is a murderer.



The work of a salesperson at the Ladies' Paradise is particularly unforgiving for women. The physical demands are to such a degree that many girls get sick, and they have to put up with unwanted attention from male coworkers. Although this work puts women on an equal playing field with the men in some ways, it also doesn't offer modern protections, like workplace harassment laws. Instead, women just have to make do, as Denise is doing.



Through Jean, Denise witnesses how love threatens a person's financial stability—in this case her own. From his experiences and Bourdoncle's warning, Mouret has the similar fear that love threatens his business. In this way, both Mouret and Denise separately view love as undesirable.



When Denise starts working at the Ladies' Paradise, she doesn't prosper immediately. However, her stressful poverty causes her to continue working hard at The Paradise despite the grueling working conditions. This shows that The Paradise provides a person the hope for upward mobility out of poverty—though it's still to be seen if Denise will actually be able to move up.



Denise is unlike the other salesgirls at the Ladies' Paradise who, like their loyal customers, are obsessed with appearances and immodesty. This suggests that Denise's presence at The Paradise will be revolutionary in some way.



One night, Denise mends her shoes again. She is afraid that they won't last her until the end of the month. Around 11 o'clock, Pauline knocks on her door. The girls are forbidden to visit each other at night, so Denise lets Pauline in quickly. Pauline says that she's wanted to talk to Denise for a while, and then notices the clothes Denise has been mending. Pauline expresses her sympathy and says that she was in the same position as Denise when she first started. She was sent to Paris after her family's mill went bankrupt and worked in several shops before coming to **the Ladies' Paradise**. After barely scraping by for months, she now makes 200 francs a month.

In Pauline's comforting presence, Denise opens up about her hardships and money problems. Starting to cry, Denise laments that no one at **the Ladies' Paradise** is nice to her, except Jouve. Pauline warns Denise not to trust Jouve, then assures her that the salesgirls are treating Denise how they treat every newcomer. Pauline grasps Denise's hands kindly and tries to help her figure out her money problems. She tells Denise that she should get a lover to help provide for her, but Denise pulls her hands away and shakes her head. Pauline says that there is no other way that Denise will be able to make ends meet.

Pauline tells Denise about her lovers. Currently, she is seeing a nice salesman. Pauline maintains that there is nothing wrong with what she does and that she is a decent girl. Denise says shyly that she'd have to like someone first. Pauline laughs and asks Denise if she'd like her boyfriend to introduce Denise to one of his friends. Denise gently refuses. Pauline loans Denise six francs and then slips out quietly. Before going to bed, Denise reflects that she is not shocked by Pauline's lifestyle; she thinks everyone should do as they please, but her "healthy nature" is not suited to it. Besides, there's no one she loves.

After talking to Pauline, Denise takes an interest in the love affairs at **the Ladies' Paradise**. Clara is a scandal and has three boyfriends plus a trail of casual lovers. Marguerite has no lovers, which is surprising because she is rumored to have had a baby out of wedlock. The girls make up stories about Madame Aurélie's affairs with submissive young men. At the end of every day, there is a stampede as all the girls meet their lovers waiting for them outside the door. Denise is upset to discover that Colomban—who watches the girls in the ladieswear department through the glass—is clearly lusting after Clara. Denise feels bad for Geneviève, and wonders if love is always so stupid.

Pauline's story shows how a person can rise out of poverty through working at the Ladies' Paradise. Unlike a small family business, the Ladies' Paradise—which hires hundreds of employees—allows those who are poor and without family businesses to work for success. This offers Denise some hope that things will turn around for her soon.



In one way, Pauline sets an example of a modern woman: one who can make her own money and lift herself out of poverty. However, her outlook still includes the traditional idea that women are dependent on men, and that Denise should enter a relationship with a man for his money. Denise, however, wants to be able to go it alone and be independent, something that, while radical, looks ridiculous to someone like Pauline.



Denise's instinct to recoil from Pauline's advice suggests that she holds a mixture of modern and traditional views. She believes that love should come before desire, an attitude that runs contrary to the modern consumer culture in which desire is primary. However, her disinterest in Pauline's lifestyle shows a belief in her ability to support herself as a woman—a modern notion. In this way, Denise both critiques and advances what it means to be a modern woman.



Denise might think love is "stupid," but she also finds that other people's affairs are wildly entertaining. In this way, her coworkers' affairs become like any other product that the Ladies' Paradise sells: it's interesting and seductive, even if it's not great quality. The fact that even Colomban is interested in Clara, rather than his fiancée, suggests that he's not immune to the draw of modernity, even though he was basically raised in a traditional shop model.



In the evenings, Denise daydreams while the girls go off with their lovers. She likes to watch them return the next day smelling like the outside world. Denise doesn't envy the girls but is filled with curiosity about Paris life and the unknown. She tries to picture the restaurants and theaters that the girls talk about.

During the workday, the male and female workers are so competitive that there is no room for desire. They are all simply cogs in a machine. However, Denise sees Albert Lhomme slip a note to a girl in the lingerie department one day. And, during the winter off-season, the salesmen and salesgirls flirt more regularly. Deloche often smiles shyly at Denise. Although her femininity is aroused by all this activity, only Hutin excites her. She makes detours throughout her day so as to walk by his desk. Hutin, however, does not notice Denise. He despises the salesgirls and brags that he sleeps with the affluent female customers. In reality, he picks up girls in bars where he spends all his money and makes scenes brawling.

In the spring, Denise is given a salary of 300 francs. She buys new shoes, surprising the salesgirls who had made fun of her clunky boots. Denise's friendship with Pauline exacerbates the ongoing rivalry between the ladieswear and lingerie departments. Madame Aurélie remains neutral until her son Albert is caught kissing a girl from the lingerie department in the basement. She accuses the lingerie department of making it up, and a huge scandal erupts. The girl from the lingerie department is fired.

Madame Aurélie resents Denise for fraternizing with Pauline. To show her displeasure, she invites all the ladieswear department girls except Denise on a trip to her country house. Madame Aurélie bought this house so that she could avoid ever spending time with her husband and son, whose company makes her uncomfortable. For weeks, the girls talk about the trip and Denise feels left out. Pauline invites Denise to accompany her and her boyfriend to the country. When Pauline promises not to bring anyone else, Denise accepts. She longs to be in nature again.

In daydreaming about love but not participating in affairs, Denise is the opposite of a consumer. The consumer buys whatever they want, always turning desire into possession, while Denise resists any desire she feels. In this way, Denise is a revolutionary character.



The work environment of the Ladies' Paradise fosters such equality between the sexes that sexual relationships are not present during the workday. This shows how equality has the effect of stunting love for a time: in changing the role that women play in society, work also changes the dependent role that women previously played in relationships. In this way, the Ladies' Paradise not only changes the system of classes and gender roles, but also changes conventional sexual relations.



Getting new, more refined shoes symbolizes that Denise is moving up the social ladder at work—now, she has the money to make herself fit in better. The workplace environment, though, remains ruthless. Though women can climb the ladder at work, the fact that Albert's girlfriend, rather than Albert, is fired as a result of this scandal suggests that they're still far more vulnerable to foul play in the workplace. Albert, of course, also has his powerful mother to protect him, something the salesgirl doesn't have.



Madame Aurélie might be married with a son—a traditional setup—but she remains a modern woman who would prefer to support herself and make sure she has what she needs to be comfortable. That Madame Aurélie is helping to stir up drama in the ladieswear department shows just how insidious Mouret's plan to cause strife among employees to make them work hard is. Denise, for her part, isn't willing to work hard in the way Madame Aurélie wants, so she's left out.



On Sunday, Denise and Pauline meet Pauline's boyfriend, Baugé. Denise wears her old wool dress and a bonnet trimmed with a blue ribbon, while Pauline wears a flashy silk dress. It's a beautiful day and Denise starts to smile, feeling the weight of **the Ladies' Paradise** fall away. While the three are in a cab, they spot Lhomme running down the street with an instrument under his arm (he plays in a chamber music group). Denise and Pauline hope that the day is sunny for them and rainy for Madame Aurélie and the other girls.

Denise, Pauline, and Baugé take a train to the country. They boat out to an island and stroll under poplar trees. Denise walks behind Pauline and Baugé, who have their arms around each other. Baugé kisses Pauline's neck, and Denise wants to cry. The countryside suddenly makes her sad. They order lunch at an outdoor table, and Pauline's laughter annoys Denise. Pauline orders tons of sweets, while Denise limits her order to keep the bill down. After lunch, they walk along the river, watching the sun go down. Two boats full of shouting pub-crawlers go by, and Pauline exclaims that she sees Hutin. Denise looks, but all she sees is a woman in white with a red hat.

That evening, Denise, Pauline and Baugé go again to the restaurant on the island. The place is noisy and crowded and lit only by candles. Pauline points out Albert Lhomme, who is sitting with two underage girls and an older woman—all of whom are behaving vulgarly. From the next room, they hear the same shouts Denise heard earlier from the boat of pub-crawlers. Hutin suddenly appears, his arm around the girl with the red hat. Hutin swaggers as people applaud, flaunting a bruise on his cheek. Apparently, Hutin fought with someone over the girl on his arm. Denise feels cold, and a lump rises in her throat.

Hutin sits down next to their table. Recognizing Baugé, he teases him for working at a shop that only hires virgins. Lienard, a young man with Hutin, joins in. Baugé retorts that **the Ladies' Paradise** fires people for the slightest wrong, but Hutin is no longer listening; he is insulting Robineau and boasting that he makes more money than Favier. Seeing that Denise has turned pale, Baugé calls for the bill and they leave. Denise finds the cool air a relief after the hot pub.

Even though Denise has started to make a salary at the Ladies' Paradise, she still dresses modestly. This contrasts with Pauline, who embraces the flashy, seductive fashions that The Paradise promotes. In this way, Denise stands out as someone who is drawn to The Paradise but not for the same consumerist reasons that everyone else is. Presumably, her role will be one that revolutionizes The Paradise in some way.



Although Denise refuses to engage in love affairs, her feelings during the excursion to the country suggest that she is lonely. She does not want the kind of love that she sees—a kind that mostly expresses itself superficially and excessively—but she longs for love in some form. In this attitude, she again shows herself as opposite of the consumer. While the consumer wants what is advertised to them, Denise wants something only her instincts guide her to.



Denise thought Hutin was kind and honorable, and this fueled her crush on him—now, though, her feelings are changing as she sees who he really is. This reveal of Hutin's true character and the change in Denise's feelings towards him suggests that she might have been wrong about Mouret too (whom she fears and dislikes, perhaps erroneously) and foreshadows a change in her feelings towards him as well.



This scene at the bar reveals to Denise what the salespeople at the Ladies' Paradise are really like beneath their guises of kindness. This idea that everyone is two-faced is central to the Ladies' Paradise, which purports to serve women while Mouret actually sees them as weak and manipulable.



Outside, Henri Deloche appears and wishes them good evening. Denise, feeling the need for support, takes his arm and asks him to walk with them. They walk under the poplars, Baugé and Pauline going out in front. Denise and Deloche are quiet at first, calming themselves from the clamor of the pub. At last, Deloche confesses that he loves Denise. Denise does not reply and starts to cry. She wishes Deloche were Hutin. Gently, she tells Deloche that she thinks of him only as a friend. Deloche feels heartbroken and cries. As Denise comforts him, she discovers that Deloche is from the same part of the countryside as her. They share their mutual memories, and they part as friends.

Denise, Pauline and Baugé take the train back to Paris. In response to Pauline's teasing, Denise assures her that she and Deloche are only friends. Denise accompanies Pauline and Baugé to Baugé's apartment and is shocked to discover that Pauline plans to spend the night there. Denise forces Baugé to accept her share of the day's expenses, and then she lingers awkwardly at Pauline's insistence. When Denise is finally ready to leave, Pauline insinuates that she and Baugé will have a very good night, and Denise feels humiliated.

Denise goes to the entrance that leads to the staff rooms and Mouret's apartment. As she is entering the hall, Denise sees a man pass through a door. Fearing that it is Mouret, she opens a door and finds herself in the store. She makes her way to the other stairway that leads to the bedrooms, passing through shadowy piles of merchandise. She dodges the snoring porter and a light in the ladieswear department. In the lace department, she encounters Deloche, who sleeps there on a cot. She runs back to the hallway.

On the stairs, Denise runs into Mouret. Mouret questions Denise kindly, and she tells him that she went to the country with a girlfriend. Denise looks prettier than usual and Mouret is distressed to think that she must have a lover. Denise murmurs goodnight, and Mouret watches her go up the stairs.

After of one example of false love (Denise's love for Hutin), Henri Deloche presents Denise with another. Whereas Hutin and Denise are very dissimilar, Deloche and Denise have a lot in common. However, Deloche and Denise's similarity is only enough to make them friends and doesn't change Denise's feelings about Deloche into love. This shows that true love is not about similarity or dissimilarity, but about something more below the surface.



Denise is appalled by Pauline's overtly sexual lifestyle. In some ways, this makes Denise seem prudish, but it also shows that she has a desire for depth in a relationship. In opposing casual sex and fancy clothes, Denise presents herself as someone who can resist the superficial temptations of a sexually liberal, consumerist society.



Denise goes out of her way to avoid Mouret. This irrational determination to avoid interacting with him suggests something profound about her feelings towards him. Her avoidance contrasts against her feelings towards Hutin (whom she now knows she doesn't love): she would go out of her way to walk by Hutin's desk, whereas she goes out of her way to avoid Mouret.



The fact that Mouret thinks about Denise's lovers suggests that he has feelings for her. Denise makes a point of clarifying that she was out with a girlfriend, suggesting that it is important to her to either assure him that she is single or that she's morally upstanding (or, perhaps, both).



CHAPTER 6

The summer slow season comes, and all the workers at **the Ladies' Paradise** fear losing their jobs. Every morning, Mouret and Bourdoncle urge the heads of departments to fire a number of their staff. Bourdoncle invents random workers' misdeeds and fires them by yelling, "go and collect your wages!" Some favored staff are given holidays without pay, but most are cast off like "useless cogs." The staff fearfully count the names of those fired like the casualties of an epidemic. Workers are wrongfully accused by customers and fired immediately, and everyone fears that they will be next.

Every night, Denise cries in her room, feeling insignificant in the huge machine. She knows that if the ladieswear department is told to fire someone, it will be her; everyone hates her even more since she went to the country with Pauline. The girls gossip about her, saying that she has a baby and a lover. Denise tries to explain that the girls are seeing her with her brothers, but they don't believe her. When Deloche hears the rumor, he wants to punch the girls; he has become very protective of Denise. Denise just stares calmly at the girls when they insult her.

Jean continually writes to Denise, begging for money and exaggerating dire situations involving his affairs. Through Robineau, Denise gets a side job mending neckties. She stays up late sewing, but when she takes the neckties to the seller the next day, the woman has gone out business. That day, Jean writes begging for money to appease his lover's jealous husband. He says he will die if she doesn't give him money. Denise tries to get the money she lost on the neckties from Robineau, but he is on holiday.

Noticing Denise's distress, Pauline pulls her aside to talk. Jouve walks by, and Pauline starts to hide. When Denise asks what there is to fear, Pauline says that Jouve sometimes asks the girls for "gratitude" for his kindness. Pauline then tells Denise that Robineau is back. Denise goes downstairs to look for him.

Downstairs, Hutin is helping a customer when Denise walks by. Hutin asks insultingly if she'd like to see Robineau. Denise blushes. She feels hurt and is unsure whether she is still in love with Hutin. Favier tells Denise that Robineau will be back after lunch. Denise goes back up to the ladieswear department, where Madame Aurélie rebukes her for disappearing. If she doesn't find Robineau today, all will be lost.

The Ladies' Paradise holds so strict a principle of efficiency that they don't treat their employees like human beings. In likening The Paradise is a machine, the employees are cogs, and employers only care about them insofar as they serve the machine's operation. This highlights that the staff are exploited the same way that the store's customers are: there's no thought for the staff or customers' humanity or needs, beyond keeping the store running.



The fact that the Ladies' Paradise makes Denise feel worthless reveals that while it appears to serve the public, in reality it doesn't care about anyone. Similarly, Mouret's love of women is utilitarian for the benefit of his business and is actually founded on his disrespect of women. In this way, The Paradise is in many ways an illusion: it appears to serve the many while only serving itself.



Like many of the customers at The Paradise, Jean spends money on his desires. On the other hand, Denise wants money for practical reasons. Denise finds it impossible to get ahead with Jean's constant spending on frivolous matters, revealing how the consumerist tendency to spend money on needless things leads quickly to financial hardship.



Pauline insinuates that Jouve sexually harasses the female employees. This detail is another example of how The Paradise pretends to care about women but is founded on misogynistic principles.



Hutin and Favier constantly insult their female customers and coworkers. This crude environment suggests that the level of equality women have attained through working like men at The Paradise has only allowed men greater freedom to express their misogynistic opinions.



Robineau's return causes unrest in the silk department. While he was gone, Hutin did his best to damage Robineau's reputation in hopes of supplanting him. Now, all of the staff want to remove Robineau, believing that his departure will allow them to climb the ladder of power. Some defend Robineau, but the coup against him is so great that the management decides to discuss whether or not to fire him.

The meal bell rings, and Hutin and Favier go down to the basement. A line of staff forms at the cafeteria hatch, where the cook stands by big pots. In turn, the cook dishes up beef with mustard sauce, and stinky fish that no one except Favier asks for. Each person gets a small bottle of wine before going to sit at tables covered with wet oil cloth and set with loaves of bread. The basement is damp and moldy, with small windows just above street level.

Hutin and Favier sit down at one of the tables and complain about the poor quality of the food. In response to an inquiry, Hutin says that Robineau is back. He complains again about the beef and jokes about giving it to Deloche, who has a huge appetite.

A whistle blows, signaling the arrival of Mouret and Bourdoncle. In response to complaints, Mouret and Bourdoncle often come down to pretend to judge the food. Bourdoncle declares the beef excellent, while Mouret gives a passionate speech swearing to improve the food for his employees. The cafeteria staff bring out pans of rice. Hutin barter his rice for dessert, then everyone hushes to eavesdrop on Mouret and Bourdoncle, who are talking with Bouthemont in the hall.

Bouthemont is telling Mouret and Bourdoncle about the unrest in the silk department. Robineau has been at **the Ladies' Paradise** for seven years, and Mouret doesn't want to fire him. However, he and Bourdoncle are angry to hear that Robineau helped a salesgirl get a second job, an act which they feel is disrespectful to the Ladies' Paradise. However, when Mouret hears that the girl was Denise, he suggests forgiving the whole thing. Bourdoncle looks at Mouret with contempt. Bouthemont tells Mouret that Robineau considered betraying the Ladies' Paradise and starting his own business. Mouret avoids a decision and starts joking about Bouthemont's old-fashioned father.

At the Ladies' Paradise, where everyone is treated with equal indifference, there is "a ladder of power" that the employees see as feasible for them to climb. However, this equal opportunity—which is a newfound positivity in this society—necessarily comes with contentious competition.



Interestingly, though the Paradise is overwhelmingly portrayed as a bright and shiny establishment in Paris, the dining hall seems just as disgusting and depressing as Baudu's dining room. In this regard, modernity certainly has its downsides, or at least is on equal footing with the antiquated shop system it's trying to replace.



Although the employees resent the bad food, they seem to enjoy the informal environment of the modern department store where they act raucously and insult each other freely.



Mouret show of concern for his employees suggests that he treats his staff like dispensable commodities for the purpose of increasing his sales. In line with his efficiency principles, he wants to spend as little on them as possible, and this means not actually caring that their meals are almost inedible. The Ladies' Paradise is a "machine," and concerns of employee well-being are not part of its operation.



Despite his often heartless nature, Mouret seems more concerned with employee rights than his associates. He wants to give Robineau special treatment because of his seniority at The Paradise, suggesting that he believes in appropriate compensation for hard work. Moreover, he shows an irrational softness for Denise that goes against principle of "efficiency at all costs," suggesting that he is not the ruthless businessman he often appears to be.



Robineau enters the dining hall. Mouret says they will decide later, and he and Bourdoncle leave. The silk department staff speculates as to what management might have decided. The cafeteria staff come around with coffee for purchase, and everyone lingers. The bell rings and the cafeteria staff start wiping down the tables.

As Hutin and Favier are leaving the cafeteria, they pass Denise coming down. Hutin mockingly tells her that Robineau is in the cafeteria. Denise wants to speak to Robineau but goes to the room where the girls eat separately. Unlike the men, the girls are served their food. While they eat, Clara tells the girls about a man who slit his mistress's throat with a razor when he found her cheating. Noticing that Denise turns pale, Clara speculates that Denise is cheating on her lover and fears his revenge. Pauline declares she can't eat the beef and has the cafeteria make her an omelet.

The cafeteria staff brings out rice. Someone says that the management promised to improve the food, but everyone else laughs. The girls tuck napkins under their chins to protect their dresses and open a window. Jouve—who likes to supervise the girls during meals—walks by. When the girls go back upstairs, Denise lags behind, hoping to talk to Robineau.

When Denise is alone, Jouve comes up to her and smiles paternally. Jouve says that he spotted Denise talking with Pauline earlier, and he asks why the two girls are so fond of each other. Denise shrinks away and tells Jouve to leave her alone. Jouve steps closer and tells Denise not to be ungrateful. He urges her to come to his apartment later for bread and butter. Denise panics and pushes Jouve away from her. Jouve falls into a chair, spilling wine on his necktie. Denise flees while Jouve yells that she'll be sorry.

Denise runs upstairs to the ladieswear department. Later in the afternoon, when Madame Aurélie nods off, she goes back downstairs to look for Robineau. There, Jean accosts her and demands 15 francs. He says that his lover is waiting outside. Noticing that salesmen are looking at them suspiciously, Denise pushes Jean through a door and down to the basement. She hushes him until they are in the stock room.

Jean says dramatically that his lover's husband has a knife. He says that he's really in love this time and describes the way he kissed his lover. Denise loses her temper and tells him to keep his disgusting behavior private. Jean starts to cry. He tells her not to give him anything, and that if the husband kills him, it will be a relief to her.

Unlike at a small, traditional business, the staff and the management are entirely separate at the Ladies' Paradise. This creates gossip and a competitive environment in which the management and the staff attempt to overpower the other.



Clara is an example of how the modern world has sexually liberated women, doing away with traditional feminine ideals such as loyalty and chastity. In this way, Denise's character—defined by traditional values—makes her incomprehensible to the girls working at the Ladies' Paradise. On the other hand, Denise's determination to work to support herself rather than to enjoy herself makes her even more modern than someone like Clara.



The women seem far more good-natured about the terrible food and the dank cafeteria than the men; they open a window rather than complaining. But Jouve lurking around reminds readers that the female employees are constantly at risk of harassment—recall that Jouve isn't trustworthy at all.



Women might be allowed to earn their livings like men, and the sexes compete as equals for sales, but women are still treated as men's property. Jouve—as a fixture of a traditional, sexist society—uses women's equality as an opportunity to take advantage of them. This creates tension, as Jouve has the upper hand—he can make life miserable for Denise if he wants to.



Denise's position at the Ladies' Paradise is threatened because she doesn't comply with its principles. The Paradise doesn't value family, and so does not understand Denise's relationship with her brother. The Paradise's impersonality and efficiency do not accommodate Denise's kindness.



Denise feels that love—at least the kind of love that Jean is talking about—threatens her chance of achieving stability. She uses this opinion she forms of love as a reason to stay away from matters of love herself.



Denise hears footsteps and sees Jouve coming over to them. Panicking, Denise pushes Jean up the basement steps and out of the shop, yelling that she'll send him 15 francs. Jouve comes up from the basement and tells Denise that he won't tolerate "nice things" in the basement. Distraught, Denise goes up to the ladieswear department. Jouve goes to Mouret's office and, while Mouret is busy speaking with Robineau, tells Bourdoncle of Denise's misconduct.

Without consulting Mouret, Bourdoncle goes up to the ladieswear department. He confers with Madame Aurélie, who then turns around and tells Denise to go and collect her wages. When Denise insists that Jean is her brother, Clara and Marguerite start laughing. Denise looks at them and gives up fighting.

Denise leaves the department. She thinks of Mouret and suddenly wants to tell him that she had not been with a man in the basement. She runs to his office but then stops, feeling suddenly sad; Mouret would laugh at her. She collects her wages and leaves without saying goodbye. On her way out, she runs into Robineau, who promises to find the necktie seller.

That night, Robineau gets a letter from the management, firing him. The ladieswear department celebrates Denise's dismissal while the silk department celebrates Robineau's. Mouret is furious when he hears that Denise was fired. He finds out that Jean really was Denise's brother, and he considers asking her to come back. Bourdoncle tells Mouret knowingly that it's better for everyone that Denise is gone.

CHAPTER 7

Denise stands on the sidewalk, dazed at having been dismissed so suddenly. She starts walking, wondering how it is possible that she suddenly has no place to sleep. She finds herself in front of **the Ladies' Paradise** again, unable to stop being obsessed with it. She can't go to Baudu's; he ignores her now when he sees her. Then she sees a "room to let" sign at Bourras's umbrella shop.

When Denise inquires after the room, Bourras says it won't suit her; he recognizes her as a salesgirl from **the Ladies' Paradise**. Denise asks to see the room anyway, so Bourras takes a key from the wall and leads her up a dark, dirty staircase. He leads her to a back room with a view onto the street. The room is tiny and decrepit, but Denise says she'll take it.

Significantly, Jouve intentionally tells Bourdoncle and not Mouret about Denise's rule breaking. This suggests both that Mouret is more soft-hearted than Bourdoncle, and that Mouret is starting to have a particular softness for Denise. All in all, Mouret is not always the merciless businessowner that he appears.



Denise feels that she is fighting a losing battle at The Paradise because no one will even believe her explanations. The impersonal business model of The Paradise leads to heartlessness among the staff as well.



Just like when she ran into Mouret coming back from the country, Denise wants to assure Mouret that she is single. This suggests that she has feelings for Mouret that her fear of him have kept her from admitting to herself.



Usually, The Ladies Paradise fires its employees without thinking twice, as though they are not real people. While Mouret consents to this with Robineau—who worked at The Paradise for seven years—he resents that Denise was treated this way. In considering her as a person with feelings, Mouret reveals that he is not universally heartless.



Even after she is fired from the Ladies' Paradise, Denise is drawn to it just as she was when she walked by it the first time. This suggests that, even though The Paradise is soul-crushing in many ways, it has never ceased to provide Denise with the hope for a better future.



Bourras thinks that since she worked at The Paradise, Denise will have high standards. This shows that Denise is an exception to the kind of person The Paradise creates: one obsessed with material things.



Denise is unable to pay for P  p  's room and board, so she brings him to live with her. She finds the necktie seller and gets her money back, but then is unable to find a job. She often skips dinner herself so that P  p   can eat. When Jean shows up in another predicament, Denise gives him what money she can. She never cries in front of P  p   or Jean but lies awake all night anxious and afraid. The girl renting the room next to hers welcomes male visitors at night, and sometimes these men bang on Denise's door.

One night, Denise slams her door in the face of a man who is pursuing her. She has nothing for P  p   to eat that night and thinks of the women who avoid poverty by sleeping with men. But no matter how desperate she is, her good conduct and courage keep her from this lifestyle. She feels that her bravery comes from some love in her heart. She sometimes sees Hutin pass by and is hurt by his vanity. When Mouret passes, Denise hides, her heart beating. Occasionally she runs into Pauline and Deloche, but she keeps both of them from seeing where she lives. Colombar often visits Denise, asking for details about Clara.

At the end of the summer, P  p   catches a cold. One night, Bourras takes pity on Denise and comes up with broth to stop P  p   from crying. The next day, even though he has no business and no staff, Bourras gives Denise some mending and pays her two francs a day. While she works, Bourras sits in the doorway carving umbrella handles and gesturing angrily at the big stores and their customers. With the pride of an artist, Bourras shouts insults at the big stores.

Bourras loves children and lets Denise bring P  p   to work with her. He rants about how long he's been at his shop and how he will hold out for a while yet, pausing to show P  p   the animals he has carved. Sometimes, Denise remarks that **the Ladies' Paradise** has made Bourras a reasonable offer for his lease. Bourras shouts that he won't sell for any amount of money and won't leave, even if his landlord sells. He shakes his fist at the sounds of the Paradise coming through his wall. He rejoices when he hears silence and foreshadows the fall of the Paradise. He repeatedly asks Denise to recount how badly she was treated in the ladieswear department.

Denise sinks into a life of poverty that makes her life at the Ladies' Paradise—although still one in which she experienced financial hardship—seem like a life of luxury. The contrast of her life living alone without a job shows that The Paradise provides a certain level of sophistication and stability to even its poorest employees.



After making the connection between her refusal to resort to sex work and the presence of "some love in her heart," Hutin and Mouret walk by. This raises the possibility that her feelings for one of these men keep her going. In the past, Denise found herself moved to assure Mouret that she leads a chaste life. In this instance, it seems likely that her feelings for Mouret reinforce her determination not to sleep with anyone even if she is desperate.



Whereas at The Paradise Denise made commission on sales, at Bourras's she is paid a small salary to do unnecessary work. In this way, the Paradise's modern model allows the opportunity for success while the traditional model provides no opportunity for growth.



In contrast to The Paradise, which sells mass-produced goods, Bourras's shop sells one-of-a-kind pieces. Moreover, while Mouret's one goal in life is to make money, Bourras operates his business on other principles, refusing to sell no matter the price. However, although Bourras's umbrellas are beautiful and his non-mercenary principles admirable, his business is still failing. This suggests that only a concern for money leads to success in these modern times.



Denise is grateful to Bourras for giving her a job, but she wants to find better-paying work. One day, Deloche suggests she work for Robineau, who has bought Vinçard's business. He did so with the support of Gaujean, who hopes to form an alliance of small manufacturers. Gaujean is unable to meet the demand of big shops like **the Ladies' Paradise** because he is a small manufacturer with only a few looms. Denise calls on Robineau's shop and finds Robineau's wife, Madame Robineau, who hires Denise immediately. Denise tells Bourras the news, and he offers to watch Pépé while Denise is at work.

At Robineau's, Denise gets a salary and meals but not commission. Everyone treats her kindly, especially Madame Robineau. One day, Gaujean comes for lunch and complains about how **the Ladies' Paradise** reserves the rights to fabric from big manufacturers who can supply their demand, making it impossible for smaller manufacturers to compete. Robineau says that the Paradise's low prices are the death of small businesses. Madame Robineau, who doesn't understand business, looks at her husband tenderly.

Denise, who has "an instinctive love of logic and life," remarks that the public doesn't complain. Pretending to joke, she illustrates the natural development of business: if small manufacturers want to survive, they will work for the big businesses whether they like it or not. When Gaujean and Robineau accuse her of siding with the enemy, Denise denies the accusation. Robineau thinks privately that it might not be wise to resist the powerful current that Denise is talking about. Gaujean says he is making a silk for Robineau to sell just under the price of **the Ladies' Paradise's** Paris-Paradise. Gaujean shows the table a sample, and everyone declares it nicer than the Paris-Paradise.

Vinçard arrives, and he also praises the silk. After selling his business to Robineau, Vinçard started a restaurant, a business that allowed him to profit from rich people. Vinçard is privately happy to have foisted his business on the Robineaus, but he continues to pretend that his bad health had forced him to sell.

Two weeks later, a battle starts between Robineau's and **the Ladies' Paradise**. Robineau puts ads in the newspaper and prices his silk lower than the silk at the Ladies' Paradise. The first few days, he has a rush of customers. Then, Mouret lowers the price of his silk. Robineau responds by lowering his price, and this continues until Robineau surrenders and prices his equal to Mouret's. Every day, Robineau loses more customers and slips closer to bankruptcy.

Although Denise likes Bourras and appreciates his kindness, she is motivated by her need for more money to find another job. This shows that the need for money overrides all the other virtues that come along with a small business. In this way, as society moves towards bigger businesses that provide more financial opportunity, all other virtues besides the virtue of making money become worthless—they become antiquated qualities of the past.



At Robineau's, Denise gets something she didn't get at the Ladies' Paradise: kindness, and the feeling of a family. However, she doesn't get commission at the Robineau's, a fact which the warm, familial atmosphere does not seem to make up for. Moreover, the Robineau's conversation about immanent failure is identical to the conversations the Baudu's had which depressed Denise and led her to The Paradise.



Denise's support of The Paradise comes from her love of logic and life, suggesting that the small businessowners' loyalty to the old-fashioned ways is both illogical and contrary to the facts of life. Denise makes the argument that the change in business is part of a natural development, insinuating that the small businessowners are not embracing change (loving life). She also insinuates that their obstinance is illogical. In keeping themselves behind the changes, they are creating their own failure.



Vinçard's transition into a more lucrative business shows that the traditional retail business is disappearing, and not just because of the Ladies' Paradise; many tradesmen seek the opportunity to make more money.



Mouret wins the battle of lowering prices because he has a huge customer base. The sheer size of the Ladies' Paradise and the amount that it sells ensures that Mouret makes a net profit even if he sells some items at a loss. On the other hand, Robineau's small customer base causes him to rely on profit from every item.



One day, Madame de Boves shops at Robineau's. She examines a coat and remarks that the Paris-Paradise is stronger than Robineau's silk. Robineau made his coats from Paris-Paradise, removing the distinctive trim so as to conceal the trick. Losing his temper, Robineau tells Madame de Boves that the coat is Paris-Paradise. Madame de Boves spreads the story, and Robineau loses more customers. Robineau feels bad for investing his wife's money in a failing business, but she tells him that she loves him no matter what.

Denise grows fond of the Robineaus. However, she feels excited about the new business methods that are transforming Paris. She is maturing from a child into a woman. On Sundays, she cleans her room and then takes P  p   for a walk. When Jean stops by, Denise gives him a little money. He starts to tell her of his affairs, but she hushes him. Pauline tells Denise she's thinking of marrying Baug  , while Colombar begs Denise to ask Clara if she'll marry him. Denise thinks these stories are silly and is glad she isn't in love.

One day, Bourras tells Denise that **the Ladies' Paradise** has bought the old hotel on the other side of his shop from Baron Hartmann. Bourras raves and gesticulates, saying that he is being surrounded by "the colossus." Mouret starts proposing Bourras with more offers to buy his store. Bourras refuses to sell, and instead he pays to remodel his shop. He invents a new ruffled umbrella, but the Ladies' Paradise steals the idea and sells it for a cheaper price.

One day, Denise is walking in a park with P  p   when she sees Mouret walking towards her, on his way to Madame Desforges's. Denise tries to avoid him, but he sees her and greets her. Mouret asks polite questions then apologizes for how hastily he fired her. He says that he knows that the teenager in the basement was her brother. Denise is overjoyed that Mouret knows she had not been romantically involved with anyone. Mouret offers Denise her job back, but she says that she has another job.

Mouret walks with Denise and P  p   under some trees. Mouret knows that Denise is working for Robineau. He commends Robineau's character, but he says that his business will fail. Denise agrees, and she starts talking enthusiastically of the new business methods. Mouret is delighted by her sensibility and passion. He says that Bourras is a madman for resisting big business and asks Denise to urge him to accept Mouret's offer. She agrees and they fall silent. They say goodnight but Mouret lingers, wondering why he is attracted to Denise, who is skinny compared to Madame Desforges. He says goodnight again and walks away.

This scene shows it is not the particular product (in this case the Paris-Paradise silk) but the low prices that the customers are after. Madame de Boves does not want to buy the Paris-Paradise at Robineau's but rather at the Ladies' Paradise where it is cheaper, and more vibrantly displayed. This shows that a consumer culture is created not from a love of things, but from a love of low prices and advertising.



Although Denise has been forced to backtrack into the traditional business world, she continues to support the development of big business. She also maintains her modern independence even while in the traditional world. She doesn't start looking for someone to marry, and instead continues to find all the expressions of love around her frivolous.



Bourras calls the Ladies' Paradise a "colossus," meaning that it is larger than life. In planning to expand beyond a row of storefronts into an entire street front, The Paradise is becoming larger than any store ever before. Moreover, in expanding, The Paradise physically threatens the territory of the small shops.



Denise's joy suggests strongly that she has feelings for Mouret. Significantly, these feelings are expressed in an attitude of fidelity, something which stands out in the current society of sexual liberation in which everyone is engaging in casual affairs. This suggests that Denise has feelings of true love for Mouret, the kind which he never feels towards women.



Combined with Denise's outlook, Mouret's pressure on the small tradespeople to sell their businesses and join the department stores comes off as compassionate rather than cruel. Both Mouret and Denise see that the development of business is natural and unstoppable. While Mouret appears to want to defeat the small shops for his benefit, his and Denise's agreement suggests that he would ideally like to save the small businessman from inevitable bankruptcy like she does.



After Mouret leaves, Denise's heart pounds. She sits down on a bench, and P  p   falls asleep in her lap. When they return, Bourras says that his landlord sold the building to Mouret, using Bourras's renovation to get more money. Denise listens to Bourras rave, then tells him that Mouret plans to offer him a huge sum for his lease and advises him to accept it.

The door opens and Baudu comes in. Bourras tells Baudu the news, and yells that he'll never leave his shop. Denise says that he'll be forced to leave when his lease is up. Bourras tells Baudu that his niece has sided with the enemy. Denise starts to cry but realizes that Baudu feels remorse for not helping her. He invites Denise over for lunch the next day. She kisses him and he leaves, saying to Bourras that they will be buried in their fallen-down houses soon.

CHAPTER 8

Everyone talks about the huge new street—the Rue du Dix-D  cembre—that is being opened. Meanwhile, **the Ladies' Paradise** starts building new storefronts following the deal Mouret made with Baron Hartmann. Bourras's shop remains, sandwiched between towering buildings. Soon, the streets are full of workmen, plaster dust, and carts of bricks.

Arriving at Baudu's, Denise feels that the little store looks dirtier than usual. Inside, the atmosphere is also sadder. Madame Baudu and Genevi  ve stand motionless until Denise kisses them, asking them to forgive her. Baudu asks where Jean is, and Denise lies that he has been detained at work. The family moves into the gloomy dining room and Genevi  ve closes the window to keep out the stench. Since there are no customers, Baudu invites Colombar to eat with them.

Over lunch, Denise confesses that she believes the development of business is natural and that it improves the well-being of the public. Baudu says that it is an illusion; thieves are profiting while honest people starve to death. He says that the Vieil Elbeuf will never sink to the level of the big stores the way Bourras did when he painted his shop flashy colors. Baudu tries to change the subject but keeps coming back to **the Ladies' Paradise**. He says that it is unbelievable that the Paradise has increased its capital fivefold, and that it keeps adding more departments.

Denise advised Bourras to accept the money because she believes that, at the end of the day, money means more than one's principles. Clearly, if Bourras sticks to his traditions, he will soon become homeless and bankrupt.



Denise's kindness bridges the gap between the small businesses and the big businesses. She understands the obstinance of the small tradespeople and empathizes with their suffering, while still believing in big business. Her compassion for both sides reveals the lack of a clear answer as to who—the big or small shops—is in the right or wrong.



In preventing the Ladies' Paradise from completely dominating the street, Bourras's shop represents the obstinance of the small tradespeople and the traditional model of business trying to stand its ground against the modern.



Even though the Ladies' Paradise (Clara, in particular) has turned Colombar away from the Baudus, the family is still unaware of this and continue to treat him as one of the family. This shows that the Ladies' Paradise disrupts traditional family values. Denise shows that she, however, values morals and a more traditional mode of conduct when she lies for Jean, who is almost certainly with a lover.



Denise suggests that the Paradise is doing a good thing by making shopping easier for customers; now, they only have to go one place to get everything they need. Baudu, however, fixates on the fact that big business are putting small family shops like his out of business, something he sees as cruel. However, in being unable to not talk about The Paradise, Baudu unwittingly confirms its eminence.



Baudu stops his rant, saying that he doesn't want to have another falling out with Denise. After a silence, he tells Denise to ask Colomban and Geneviève how they feel about **the Ladies' Paradise**; they have had to postpone their marriage yet again. Colomban says that he hates the Paradise, but Geneviève eyes him with suspicion. Baudu commends Colomban as one of "the last."

After lunch, the family disperses. Denise stands at the kitchen window while Geneviève remains at the table. When Denise asks her what's wrong, Geneviève's head falls forward on the table and she starts sobbing. Geneviève tells Denise not to alert anyone and continues to cry. Denise pins up Geneviève's falling hair and notices that she has become very thin.

When Geneviève slows her crying, she asks Denise if Colomban loves Clara. Denise insists that Colomban loves Geneviève, but Geneviève says she knows the truth. She has been engaged to Colomban for so long that it feels like she is already married to him; now, her heart is breaking. She feels like she is dying, and her father is making it worse by postponing the wedding. Denise and Geneviève are interrupted by Jean's arrival. The rest of the evening passes slowly.

For the next few months, Denise visits Geneviève regularly, trying to cheer her up. The Baudus become more depressed as the construction at **the Ladies' Paradise** takes over the entire street. An underground well is installed, and the walls of the houses are broken down to connect them. In September, the construction continues through the night in an effort to finish on time. The Baudus lie awake while outside the window the Ladies' Paradise blazes like "a colossal forge." Each time the Ladies' Paradise opens a new department, more small stores face ruin.

During the day, the line of employees going to work at **the Ladies' Paradise** extends around the block. The news spreads that the Ladies' Paradise turned over 40 million dollars that year. However, Baudu still tries to compete. Since no customers come to him, he tries to get his goods to customers through agents who are now in high demand. He loses his money to bad agents and is finally forced to sell his country house. He sells it for less than he had spent on it, killing the "only dream of his life." The Baudus invite the buyers—the Lhommes—over for an awkward dinner.

Baudu thinks that Colomban is "the last," implying that he is the only young person left who appreciates traditional trade. However, unknown to Baudu, Colomban is drawn to the Paradise due to his crush on one of its flashy salesgirls, suggesting that Baudu is wrong to think young people still support the old business model.



Geneviève's increasing decrepitude is a physical representation of the slow death of traditional business, which is being caused by the Ladies' Paradise. Not only are the Baudus suffering emotionally and financially, but they are physically losing their health.



Geneviève and Colomban's engagement is a relic of traditional business values. They were engaged with the understanding that they would eventually take over Baudu's store and have waited forever for that inevitable day. In pursuing Clara, Colomban becomes more like a modern consumer who wants instant gratification, not someone who's going to nobly carry the torch for his father in law.



Resembling a "colossal forge," the Ladies' Paradise is like a gigantic, industrial pit of fire. It rises up in front of the Baudus' windows, ceaselessly affronting them with its dominance. This puts enormous pressure on them to abandon their way of life and join its power, but also creates a terrifying presence that makes them shrink further into their own safe yet depressive ways.



The fact that the Lhommes buy the Baudu's house adds insult to the injury of them having to sell it. The Lhommes—as important employees at The Paradise—have indirectly taken the Baudus' dream by being a part of the colossus that is driving them to ruin. When they buy the Baudus' country house, they reveal how those involved in big business benefit off the ruin of the traditional businessowners.



That evening, Madame Baudu lies in bed while Baudu paces the bedroom. He says that although the Lhommes have lots of money, they have no family structure and must be unhappy. He rants about how big business is ruining family. Madame Baudu waits until he is finished and then says she is worried about Geneviève's health; she thinks she and Colomban should marry right away. Baudu is upset by the news of Geneviève's bad health and says he will talk to Colomban the next day. He continues to pace, looking out at the glare from the construction workers' lamps.

The next day, Baudu pulls Colomban aside. Baudu tells him that he has been postponing Colomban and Geneviève's marriage because he doesn't want to pass the Vieil Elbeuf onto them in state of failure. Baudu starts to cry and asks Colomban why he isn't saying anything. Colomban—who lusts after Clara every night—is privately afraid that Baudu will make him marry Geneviève immediately. However, Baudu, wrestling with his conscience, decides to put off the marriage again, saying that he will work extra hard to give Colomban a shop that will not ruin him.

Baudu goes on, talking confusedly. He expects Colomban to let out a heartfelt cry and offer to take the Vieil Elbeuf out of Baudu's tired hands, but Colomban says nothing. When Baudu asks him to say something, Colomban says that he and Geneviève will wait if that's what Baudu thinks is best.

That night in their bedroom, Baudu reiterates his determination to save the Vieil Elbeuf for Colomban. Madame Baudu says that postponing the wedding will be the death of Geneviève. Baudu gets angry, wondering why his daughter is adding to his difficulties. Madame Baudu knows why Geneviève suffers, but she doesn't tell her husband.

Meanwhile, Denise decides to go back to **the Ladies' Paradise**. She feels that the Robineaus can no longer afford her. The Robineaus understand her decision, but Bourras is crushed. Recently, the Paradise was planning to create a passage underneath Bourras's shop, but he shut out the workers. He now prepares to go to court over it.

One evening, Denise runs into Deloche. He says that he is happy that she's coming back, and then tells her that Clara and Mouret have started a relationship. When Denise gets up to her room, she starts crying. She feels that she hates **the Ladies' Paradise** and misses her rural hometown of Valognes.

Baudu tries to assert his superiority over the Lhommes by claiming that his family has a better family structure than theirs. What he does not know is that his good family structure is in jeopardy due to Colomban's obsession with Clara at The Paradise. In this way, the modern business not only represents a lack of family value, but also works to remove this value from society.



Baudu is looking for Colomban to be self-sacrificial and generous—qualities that a person raised with traditional values possesses. However, in his obsession with Clara, Colomban has become a model of the modern consumerist values instead: he is out to seek his own pleasure. In this way, the changes in business create a society that is pleasure-seeking and individualistic.



Colomban's silence represents the unwillingness of the younger generation to get into traditional business. The fact that the next generation sees opportunity with modern business instead suggests that traditional business is in its final phase.



Baudu seems to think that Madame Baudu means only figuratively that The Paradise is taking Geneviève's life when really, she means it literally. This shows that Baudu has not yet realized the power of The Paradise to cause his family harm, and perhaps even literal death.



Denise—who stands between the big shops and the small shops—goes back to the Ladies' Paradise because she knows they can afford to hire her. This shows that the comfort she felt with the Robineaus is not enough to override her desire to be paid well.



Since Denise's nature is not suited to the Ladies' Paradise, her continual interest in it has been mysterious. Her reaction on hearing of Mouret and Clara's relationship reveals that she is drawn to it, in part, because she likes Mouret.



The next day when Denise is passing the Vieil Elbeuf, she sees Colomban alone inside. She walks in and tells Colomban that his actions are killing Geneviève. Colomban says that he doesn't notice a change in Geneviève's health, and that it is her father who is putting off the wedding. Denise says that Colomban is giving up Geneviève for someone who dates everyone and doesn't care about him. Losing her composure, Denise shouts that Clara is with Mouret anyway. Colomban goes pale and says that he loves Clara. Suddenly, Geneviève appears in the doorway.

Having heard Colomban, Geneviève turns pale. Just then, Madame Bourdelais, Baudu's last faithful customer, walks into the store. Geneviève and Colomban wait on her together. Baudu comes in and shows Madame Bourdelais some silk. She remarks that a stronger silk is cheaper at **the Ladies' Paradise**. If Baudu has nothing better, she'll go across the road. Baudu loses his temper, and yells at her to go. Offended, Madame Bourdelais leaves.

The family watch Madame Bourdelais walk away, taking all their hope with her. Denise whispers to Geneviève that Colomban still loves her, but Geneviève says there's no need to lie. **The Ladies' Paradise** has taken everything from the Baudus: it took Baudu's money, Madame Baudu's daughter, and Geneviève's fiancé of 10 years. Denise wonders if she should feel remorse for joining the "machine" that is crushing the poor. Outside, the scaffolding had been removed and the new "colossal edifice" dazzles in the sun. Madame Baudu is blinded by tears. Baudu tries to cheer up his family, but he can't.

CHAPTER 9

On a cold Monday in March, **the Ladies' Paradise** opens its new building and hosts a sale of summer fashions. The small tradesmen stand in their doorways and look at the new gilded awning of the Ladies' Paradise and the mounds of goods visible through its glass walls. The new building has a long gallery with iron staircases up to the second floor, with iron bridges connecting the left and right sides. It is a "cathedral of modern business," a space equipped for massive crowds. The Ladies' Paradise now has 39 departments and 1800 employees, 200 of whom are women.

Denise's explosion reveals her disgust at the frivolity of everyone's relationships. She tries to urge Colomban to stay with Geneviève instead of running off with a girl who clearly doesn't love anyone deeply. In this way, while she has modern opinions about business, Denise's opinion about love is more traditional: she finds greater value in the long-term commitment between Colomban and Geneviève.



In the midst of the official crumbling of Colomban and Geneviève's relationship, Baudu loses his last faithful customer. In this way, this scene recaps how the Ladies' Paradise is not only taking the Baudu's business, but also destroying their values and compromising the well-being of Baudu's family.



In taking Baudu's money, The Paradise shows how it ruins small businesses financially; in taking Geneviève, it shows how it destroys families and wastes away a person's physical health; in taking Colomban, it shows how it creates a culture of casual love and consumerism that makes more traditional romance impossible. In thus completely upending the Baudus, the Ladies' Paradise creates a new world.



The Ladies' Paradise—which resembles the modern-day shopping mall—is such a new phenomenon during this time that it doesn't have a proper name. Instead, people call it "a cathedral of modern business," comparing it to a church which single-handedly serves an entire community. The sheer amount of people The Paradise employs shows how the workforce of Paris is becoming consolidated under this one employer.



Mouret wants women to be “queen” in **the Ladies’ Paradise**. He exploits women’s desires so as to have them at his mercy. To this end, he built velvet-lined elevators, a buffet room serving cordial and biscuits, and a reading room. He also plans to hand out balloons to kids so as to get to women through their maternal instincts. Mouret spent thousands on ads for the Ladies’ Paradise and also invented the concept of returns: in assuring women that they can return what they don’t like, he leaves them no excuse not to buy whatever they want. Mouret leaves no corner empty in the shop and arranges it so as to create crowds.

The weekend before Monday’s sale, Mouret is suddenly inspired to rearrange **the Ladies’ Paradise**. Currently, the shop is arranged logically, with like departments together so that everything is easy to find. Mouret orders all the departments to be moved, creating such an upheaval that things are still being moved Monday morning. When Bourdoncle questions this, Mouret shouts that he wants his customers to get lost, passing through the whole shop to get where they need to go, and being waylaid by other departments on the way. Bourdoncle laughs at Mouret’s delight.

Just then, Mouret sees Denise, who had been back at **the Ladies’ Paradise** since February. To Mouret’s amusement, Denise looks astonished by the new arrangement of the store. Denise notices Mouret and blushes, thinking of what Pauline told her about his relationships with Madame Desforges and Clara. Mouret asks Denise to come to his office after the sale. As she walks away, Bourdoncle, who worries about Denise’s influence on Mouret, tells Mouret to be careful. Mouret says that no woman can catch him.

Mouret goes downstairs and shouts at some assistants who arranged the parasol display differently than he asked them to. Then, the doors open. A mob forms at the door where Mouret had stacked bargain materials. A few people scream that they are suffocating.

Outside, Madame de Boves and Blanche run into Madame Marty and Valentine. Madame Marty says she is only going in for a piece of braid. Madame de Boves says that she had only come out for some fresh air, and that she is not going to the sale; the crowd scares her anyway. However, she and Blanche are swept into the current and they all enter the shop, moving with the crowd. They feel enlivened by the color and excitement of the store and gaze in wonder at the vibrant parasols, which are arranged in cascading pinwheels. Madame Marty starts to look for the braid she came for and Madame de Boves follows her.

Mouret finds more ways to exploit female desires to his advantage. Instead of creating a neutral shop where he provides a service in response to a woman’s expressed need, Mouret persuades his female customers to buy things by appealing to them through their desires, instinct, and sentimental weaknesses. This system creates the foundation of a consumer culture—a culture in which people buy things they don’t need.



Mouret’s decision to confuse his customers and cause them to get lost seems counter-intuitive at first but is actually in line with his business model. An organized store would appeal to a customer’s logic and would help them find the thing they need. However, the Ladies’ Paradise’s success relies on its customers acting emotionally rather than logically and buying things they do not need.



Mouret thinks that no woman can catch him, but he has already compromised some of his business principles because of his feelings for Denise. For instance, he broke his code of impersonality by hiring her back. Mouret’s choice to reevaluate some of his policies because of a woman will either be the ruin of him—as Bourdoncle suggests—or it will change his business for the better.



The huge crowd that forms at the door by the bargain goods proves that the customers of the Ladies’ Paradise come for the low prices above any other reason.



This conversation foreshadows the sale’s complete undoing of all the ladies’ excuses. The Paradise appeals to its customers against their better judgement. Instead of being a practical place, it is a place where women indulge in their vices. The aristocratic ladies discuss their practical reasons for attending the sale at the Ladies’ Paradise and assure each other (and themselves) that they are not that excited for it in an attempt to conceal their undignified excitement.



As soon as the ladies step away from the door, they are lost. After searching for the braid, they wind up back at the entrance. Jouve finally directs them to the right department, but meanwhile Valentine has gone to look at a table of scarves. The salesman at the table says that these scarves are a rare bargain, and Madame Marty, convinced, buys two of them.

This scene puts Mouret's scheme of disorganization to the test, and it passes. If the Paradise had been organized, Madame Marty would have found her braid right away and left without spending more. But since she got lost, she has time to shop spontaneously.



As Madame Marty again hurries off to find her braid, she is seduced by a display of gloves arranged to look like a Swiss chalet. When pressed by Mignot, she buys a pair. Madame Marty wails to Madame de Boves that she is lost. They run into Madame Bourdelais who, not being a shopper, has come to show her children the spectacle. They finally find the braid department, but it is so crowded that they can't find help. Madame Marty buys a red parasol. Madame Bourdelais says that the real bargains will be in a few months and then takes her children upstairs.

Madame Marty is an example of how Mouret gets customers by first confusing them, and then appealing to their emotions. Madame Bourdelais is an example of how Mouret appeals to female customers through their instincts, in this case, her maternal instinct. While Madame Marty had only wanted braid, and Madame Bourdelais doesn't have interest in the shop herself, they both patronize the Ladies' Paradise because of Mouret's unique schemes.



While Madame de Boves and Blanche stay downstairs, Madame Bourdelais and Madame Marty take one of the elevators upstairs. Madame Marty and Valentine start buying petticoats. Madame Bourdelais finds the buffet room and feeds her children cordial and biscuits. Then she takes them to the reading room, where people are lounging and writing letters on provided paper. Madame Bourdelais sees and greets Madame Guibal, who seems annoyed to have been spotted. She says haughtily that she only came to return something. She says that she returns most of the things she buys after keeping them a few days.

Mouret adds amenities to The Paradise that ensure that even the women who don't like shopping patronize his store. He makes the Paradise more than a store: he makes it an experience in which there is something for every kind of person—every kind of consumer. Although Madame Bourdelais doesn't buy anything, and Madame Guibal abuses the return policy, their patronage of the Paradise advertises it, and therefore increases its popularity.



Monsieur de Boves comes in with Vallagnosc. Madame Guibal pretends not to notice Monsieur de Boves. Mouret comes in and greets Vallagnosc as Monsieur de Boves says that Madame de Boves is home sick, and then he makes a show of noticing Madame Guibal and going up to chat. Vallagnosc whispers to Mouret that Monsieur de Boves has been going to meet Madame Guibal frequently under the pretense of travelling. When Mouret asks, Vallagnosc says that he and Blanche are waiting to marry until his rich aunt dies. They watch Monsieur de Boves slip Madame Guibal an address.

The Ladies' Paradise exposes the frivolity of the upper-class aristocrats: Madame Guibal and Monsieur de Boves's affair is brought into the open in its communal space. In this way, while The Paradise raises its employees to a higher class—or at least an undefined but not lower class—it lowers the upper class by exposing their vices and hypocrisies. In this way, The Paradise evens the playing field between the upper and lower classes.



Downstairs, Madame Desforges makes her way through the crowd and gazes around. The downstairs architecture is undecorated so as not to outshine the merchandise, but the ceiling is adorned with painted sculptures and gilded chandeliers. At the top, the bedroom department displays dangling beds made up with lacy linens. Madame Desforges is struck by the diverse crowd: people of all classes and ages throng together among balloons and mannequins with price tags sticking out of red necks.

As Mouret once stated, The Paradise appeals to women's universal desires. The result is a muddling of the class distinctions that were typically rigid in this society. In muddling these distinctions in this way, The Paradise opens the possibility of mobility among the classes, or at least a redefining of what constitutes upper and lower class.



Several salesmen approach Madame Desforges, but she ignores them. When Bouthemont sees her, he tells her it was bold of her to come. Bouthemont had become an acquaintance of Madame Desforges's and recently told her of Mouret's affair with Clara, without giving Clara's name. Madame Desforges asks to see some silk. Hutin—who has become tyrannical since taking Robineau's place—yells at Favier, who is helping a lady dressed in mourning clothes. While Favier is measuring her choice of silk, Madame Desforges tries to get Bouthemont to tell her the name of the girl Mouret is having an affair with.

Before Bouthemont can answer, Denise walks by. To thwart Favier, Hutin hands Madame Desforges over to Denise. Madame Desforges recognizes Denise as the girl who had been fired, and decides that, since Mouret clearly hired her back, she must be the girl he is sleeping with. Denise leads Madame Desforges upstairs, where they are assaulted by an even larger crowd. When she closes her eyes, Madame Desforges can smell "the odour of Woman."

Meanwhile, Mouret tells Vallagnosc how ladies are at home at **the Ladies' Paradise**; all they can't do here is go to bed. Vallagnosc smiles but feels privately annoyed that Mouret is so enlivened by foolish women. When Denise and Madame Desforges come up the stairs, Mouret talks louder. He lays out the different types of women who have stolen from the Ladies' Paradise and points at Jouve, who is pursuing a pregnant woman whom he suspects of stealing. Mouret turns to greet Madame Desforges, and she notices the longing way he looks at Denise.

Denise takes Madame Desforges to the ladieswear department, where everyone is in uproar since the assistant buyer suddenly quit. While Denise goes to get coats for her to look at, Madame Desforges sits in front of a mirror and contemplates her aging appearance. Behind her, Clara and Marguerite gossip about the assistant buyer. Denise returns and shows coats to Madame Desforges. The older woman starts comparing herself to Denise, wondering how anyone could prefer such an "insignificant" peasant girl. Madame Desforges criticizes every coat Denise shows her and declares there's nothing she wants.

Madame Desforges was clearly upset to learn that Mouret started an affair with another girl and seems to be setting out to thwart the new relationship. This suggests that Madame Desforges could be the woman that Bourdoncle once warned Mouret would "get her revenge" on him for exploiting women. Whether or not she will be this revenge, Madame Desforges does not appreciate being used by Mouret and then tossed aside.



The "odour of Woman" that the Ladies' Paradise exudes illustrates it as an environment in which the most intimate desires of the universal woman are being allowed to express themselves. These desires are being expressed and indulged in to such an extreme degree that Madame Desforges can sense it in the air.



Mouret's statement that the only thing women can't do at The Paradise is go to bed reveals how he feels about women. In making them feel at home, he leads women to believe that he understands them and validates them. However, at the end of the day, he doesn't truly care about them. He uses them for the benefit of his store, and nothing else.



This scene reveals that Madame Desforges's anger at Mouret for starting another relationship does not come from a place of love for him, but rather from a place of vanity. Knowing that her physical beauty is fading as she ages, she feels that her position of power over men is threatened by younger women. Thus, Madame Desforges is concerned merely with appearances—a quality which makes her the perfect customer for the Ladies' Paradise.



Suddenly, Madame Marty appears. Behind her, a salesman drags a chair piled with her purchases. Madame Marty greets Madame Desforges and then buys a striped coat. Madame Marty whispers to Madame Desforges that Clara is the girl Mouret is sleeping with. Madame Desforges says it is Denise—and anyone else who is willing. She meets Denise's dignified gaze and feels ashamed. Marguerite then leads Madame Marty and Madame Desforges to the suits department, dragging Madame Marty's chair of purchases.

As they walk through the store, Madame Desforges complains about how big it is. However, she is happy that Denise has to stand behind them, waiting. Madame Marty worries what her husband will say but keeps shopping. At one point, her chair can't pass through a narrow display and has to be carried by two porters. In the furniture department, they run into Madame Guibal, who is returning curtains. The salesman, upset to be losing on his percentage, insinuates that Madame Guibal is dishonestly using the return feature to avoid renting curtains for a party. He tries to make her buy something else, but she refuses.

Seeing Madame Marty considering a table, Madame Guibal tells her that she can always return it. With this assurance, Madame Marty starts buying everything she wants, knowing she won't return anything. They reach the suit department where Madame Desforges decides she wants a coat after all, forcing Denise to wait to take her back downstairs. Madame Guibal explains how she buys clothes, copies the patterns, and then returns them. Leaving the chair at the cash-desk, the ladies revisit all the departments and find Madame Bourdelais, who complains about the shop's traps for children. Mouret—who overhears—smiles. Madame Desforges notices Mouret look at Denise, and she plots how she will get her revenge on him.

Meanwhile, Monsieur de Boves and Vallagnosc go to the lace department. Vallagnosc, feigning surprise, points out Madame de Boves, who is nearby. Madame de Boves leans against a pillar, exhausted from resisting buying anything. As they go up to her, Vallagnosc catches her trying to slip some lace up her sleeve. Dropping the lace, Madame de Boves straightens up haughtily when she sees that her husband is with Madame Guibal. The other ladies arrive, accompanied by Mouret, who is saying that Jouve had searched the pregnant woman only to find that her friend had done the stealing and left with the goods. Vallagnosc says that Mouret tempts customers to steal by filling the store with so much merchandise.

When Madame Desforges and Denise make eye contact, something shifts between them. Madame Desforges—although Denise's superior in terms of class—feels ashamed as she insults Denise, suggesting that, from the standpoint of moral goodness, Denise is Madame Desforges's superior. In this way, the feud between Denise and Madame Desforges reveals that moral superiority has nothing to do with class.



Madame Marty's principles and sanity have been completely undone by the Ladies' Paradise. She makes a ridiculous spectacle of herself, forcing a salesperson to drag a chair behind her that is so loaded with her purchases that it can't be steered. This demise of Madame Marty shows that The Paradise—while pretending to cherish women—actually is the ruin of them: it turns them into consumers who cannot control themselves.



While Madame Guibal abuses the return policy to profit at the business's expense, Madame Marty falls for the return policy, believing it to be for her benefit, but really falling into a trap in which the business profits. The ladies complain about The Paradise's "traps," but willingly fall into them. Madame Desforges plots to get her revenge on Mouret, again suggesting that she might be the woman who "avenges" the rest. However, she wants to avenge herself for losing Mouret to Denise, not to avenge all women for being deceived by The Paradise.



Madame de Boves is one of many customers who are tempted to steal from the countless enchanting goods piled around them. In this way, instead of encouraging good qualities, the Ladies' Paradise unleashes vices. The universal "Woman"—whom Mouret exploits with his store's schemes, claiming to know her perfectly—is either inherently full of vice, or Mouret has the wrong idea of women. His store nurtures the person with vices, but also creates new vices where none existed before.



By four o'clock, the late afternoon sun pours into **the Ladies' Paradise**. The women devastated the store like "conquered territory." Before departing, Madame Bourdelais goes to the buffet room again, and Madame Desforges plots to humiliate Denise somehow. Monsieur de Boves goes off with Madame Guibal while Madame de Boves departs, first getting a red balloon. At five o'clock, Madame Marty is still shopping, unable to tear herself away. When she finally leaves, she feels unhinged by the madness that came over her.

That night, a porter reminds Denise to go to Mouret's office. When she enters, Mouret says that he's very pleased with her and offers her the position of assistant buyer. Denise is confused but thrilled, and Mouret smiles at her reaction. As Denise thanks him, Lhomme and Albert walk in, lugging the day's money bags containing 87,210 francs. Delighted, Mouret has them set the bags on his desk.

When Lhomme and Albert leave, Mouret tells Denise to take a handful of money, as much as she can hold. Underneath Mouret's joke, Denise can read that Mouret loves her. She steps back, her heart beating fast. Mouret comes closer, still joking. Bourdoncle appears, so Denise thanks Mouret again and leaves.

CHAPTER 10

One day in August, **the Ladies' Paradise** closes while the staff count the stock. Denise, although recovering from a sprained ankle, decides to go to work. She walks around her room—which she has decorated since becoming assistant buyer—to test her ankle. She is glad that she declined an invitation to dine at Baudu's that night with Pépé and Jean. Just then, the housekeeper knocks on her door and hands her a letter from Mouret, asking Denise to dine with him that evening. Denise knows what this means: Mouret has asked Clara and other girls to dine with him before. She drops the letter and falls into a chair. Recently, she confessed to herself that she loves Mouret and has ever since she first saw him.

There is a knock on Denise's door, and Pauline enters. Since the girls are forbidden to talk in their rooms, Denise and Pauline go to the common room. Noticing that Denise is upset, Pauline presses her until she tells her about the letter from Mouret. Pauline, who knows that Denise likes Mouret, gives her a kiss on the cheek. Pauline is surprised when Denise bursts into tears and says that the letter upsets her very much.

*Although this description of the aftermath of the sale makes the women seem like the conquerors of *The Paradise*, in reality, they go away having been completely conquered by it. This is evidenced by Madame Marty, who has been driven crazy by the *Paradise* as though she is its torture victim. In this way, *The Paradise* hides its conquering of women by making them feel like the masters.*



*Denise—who is disliked by everyone in the ladieswear department—would never have been promoted if it wasn't for Mouret's preference for her. In this way, Denise becomes powerful at *The Paradise* not by being Mouret's version of the exploitable woman, but by being something else entirely.*



Although he is joking, Mouret's comment suggests that he likes Denise enough to throw money away on her. For the first time, Mouret feels that his money doesn't matter because what he wants—at least in this moment—is to make Denise happy.



Although Denise loves Mouret, she is distraught rather than thrilled to receive his letter. She recognizes the letter as the same one that Mouret has sent to other salesgirls he has had affairs with, so Denise believes he's offering her the same casual love he offers to women in general. This suggests that Mouret—although he has genuine feelings for Denise—is not yet willing to elevate his expression of love to a higher form. For her part, Denise is not willing to lower herself to the level of Mouret's love, so the two are at an impasse.



From an outside perspective, it is illogical that Denise is upset by Mouret's letter. However, the fact that she loves Mouret at all makes her desire a deeper expression of love than the one he is willing to give her. In general, Denise views love as typically silly and destructive, and Mouret's letter doesn't change this impression.



Pauline assures Denise that Mouret is no longer seeing Clara or Madame Desforges. Denise, hurt by the thought of Clara and Madame Desforges, says that when a man loves a woman, he marries her, like Baugé is doing with Pauline. Pauline says that it would not make sense for Mouret to marry Denise since he is her superior. Denise starts crying again. Pauline, not understanding why Denise is so upset, lectures her kindly, saying that many girls would love to be in Denise's place and that Denise might lose her job if she refuses. They hear Madame Aurélie coming. Denise dries her eyes and goes downstairs with Madame Aurélie.

When Denise approaches on Madame Aurélie's arm, the ladieswear department salesgirls flock around her, asking how her ankle is. Over the past few weeks, Denise had used her charm to win over the department. The salesgirls initially complained about the injustice of Denise's promotion, but they are now respectful of her, and Madame Aurélie is affectionate. Only Clara continues to despise her and believes that Denise robbed her of the assistant buyer position.

Denise sits on a chair, writing down the numbers of goods as the salesgirls call them out. Clara gossips about how much money Denise will likely make after the raises are announced the next day. Clara—who made the least sales in the ladieswear department that year—says she doesn't care, and that she will retire when her father dies. Madame Aurélie snaps at Clara and she returns to counting silks. Then, Mignot comes up to Clara and borrows 10 francs from her.

Mignot then goes to Lhomme and borrows another 10 francs. Madame Aurélie yells at everyone to get back to work and rebukes her husband for being too weak to refuse Mignot money. Clara starts teasing Joseph, a salesman, for having a crush on Mademoiselle Fontenailles, a 28-year-old orphan and protegee of Madame Desforges, whom Mouret hired just to please her. Joseph blushes and casts glances at Mademoiselle Fontenailles. Clara drops a pile of clothes, and Madame Aurélie snaps at her. Mouret and Bourdoncle appear, conducting an inspection. Everyone hastens to look busy. Denise pretends not to notice Mouret and keeps writing down numbers.

Meanwhile, Pauline tells Deloche that Mouret asked Denise to dinner. Deloche then tells Lienard, with whom he had become friends since he moved into Hutin's old room in the hotel where Lienard lived. Lienard spreads the news to several others, along with the story of what happened the night before: Lienard and Deloche went to a café, where Deloche overheard Favier saying insulting things about Denise sleeping with Mouret. Deloche, who's still in love with Denise, called Favier a liar and said that Denise only had eyes for Hutin.

Pauline's advice does not satisfy Denise because it is both too modern and too old-fashioned. Denise is not ready to lead a sexually liberated lifestyle like her female coworkers are, but she also despairs that it is still inappropriate—as per the traditions of the class system—for a man to marry beneath his class. Denise—as a combination of modern and traditional values—wants Mouret to want to marry her, an act that would be both progressive and traditional.



Despite her ascendance to a high position for no apparent reason, no one in the ladieswear department harbors bad feelings towards Denise. This suggests that Denise is very likable on a genuine rather than a superficial level; it takes a while for her to win everyone over (especially in a place like The Paradise), but she is respected once she does.



Clara's gossiping about money reveals that many people at The Paradise who care about money have no need for it. Clara seems to care that Denise will make more money than she will out of jealousy and vanity, but not because she needs the money.



Madame Desforges's chosen orphan with wealthy ancestors is nothing special to Mouret; he usually hires whoever will work hard. In this way, class distinctions disappear at The Paradise: a lower-class person can become working class, and an upper-class person might find themselves with no opportunities. Denise, for her part, is a testament to the opportunities the Paradise offers poor women, as she began the novel poor and is now in a powerful position.



Even though Denise is now respected by most of the people at the Ladies' Paradise, she is still the subject of racy gossip. This has less to do with Denise and more to do with what people are interested in talking about, especially at The Paradise: everyone is interested in crude, meaningless gossip suggesting that, along with a culture of consumerism, a culture of superficiality has begun.



In the silk department, Favier counts silk while complaining about being shut inside on a beautiful sunny day. There is tension in the silk department: now that Hutin has gotten Robineau's job, he is after Bouthemont's position, while Favier is after Hutin's. Favier tells Hutin about his encounter with Deloche in the café and says that Denise received a letter from Mouret asking her to dinner. He mentions that everyone knows she led a "loose life" at Bourras's house. Mignot comes by and slips 10 francs to Albert. Favier tells Hutin what Deloche said about Denise liking him. Hutin is privately flattered, but he pretends to be scornful.

The lunch bell rings, and the assistants go to the new cafeteria, now equipped with huge appliances made for turning out thousands of meals per day. Mouret recently improved the food, deciding that the better his staff were fed, the harder they would work. Favier, Mignot, Lienard, and Deloche line up at the hatch and ask for chicken. They wait while one of the kitchen staff deals with a cut finger that is bleeding on the food. Finally, they get their plates and go to the dining room, which is now a large hall with windows.

The assistants pass around the loaf of bread and complain that they all got chicken legs. Deloche, who is always hungry, picks at his chicken neck and stares at Favier. Favier is talking about the various clubs that the shop assistants have formed, all of them steadily rising above the bawdy life of music halls and bars. They then get on the subject of the stock-counting; it has been a good year, and they all hope to get raises. The waiters bring artichokes and peaches.

The assistants get on the subject of Denise and Mouret. Looking at Deloche, Favier says that Mouret is not the first person Denise has been with. Deloche throws his wine at Favier, splattering the nearby assistants. Everyone decides that, since Deloche got so upset, Denise must be his mistress. Everyone laughs and makes fun of Deloche, who now feels terrible for giving everyone the wrong impression of Denise with his outburst. Deloche reproaches Lienard for telling everyone about the letter. The bell rings, and the assistants slowly leave the dining hall.

Everyone finds it inconceivable in this day and age that Denise could be chaste and respectable, and so they come up with evidence that suggests she is not. Moreover, Hutin pretends to be scornful as if showing his genuine feelings would be looked down upon in this environment. This culture of insulting others is exacerbated by the competitive nature of the Ladies' Paradise. Because they know there is the opportunity to rise, everyone goes after each other's jobs.



Mouret did not improve the quality of the food because he cares about his employees, but because he wants to give them the strength to work as hard as they can—an action that benefits him in the end. In this way, although the employees might benefit indirectly from improved conditions at The Paradise, the motivation for these conditions is still for the benefit of the businessowner.



The detail that the employees at have formed clubs illustrates how being employed at The Paradise has the effect of raising a lower-class person to a higher class—or at least to a respectable class of their own. Moreover, since The Paradise is steadily growing, the money they earn is steadily growing as well, giving them hope for a continuously improving future.



In this gossipy environment, it is impossible to convince anyone of the truth. In the past, Denise was unable to convince Jouve and everyone else that Jean was her brother and not her lover; and now, Deloche is unable to convince everyone that Denise is not his lover. The Paradise—in promoting instant gratification—creates a culture so obsessed with sex that anyone who does not lead a sexually liberated lifestyle is not understood.



Baugé goes to meet Pauline in their secret meeting place. There, Denise comes upon them kissing, and Pauline asks her not to tell anyone. Leaving the dining hall last, Deloche comes up to Pauline, Baugé, and Denise and scolds Pauline for telling Lienard about Mouret's letter to Denise. Denise then realizes that everyone knows about Mouret's letter, which she still hasn't answered. Realizing that Denise is considering accepting Mouret's invitation, Deloche goes away depressed. Denise and Pauline have lunch, then return to counting stock. Outside, pedestrians peer curiously through the windows of the locked store.

Denise and Madame Aurélie go to the pattern room to cross-check their two lists of stock. Madame Aurélie leaves the door open, and snaps at the other salesgirls when they start talking too loudly. After they cross-check the lists, Madame Aurélie leaves Denise to add up the numbers, sending Mademoiselle Fontenailles, who is being ruthlessly made fun of, to help her.

Under the pretext of inspecting inventory, Mouret comes by to look for Denise. Madame Aurélie takes him to the pattern room so he can look over their lists. Outside, the salesgirls increase their gossip. Denise watches Mouret as he looks at the lists. Madame Aurélie sends Mademoiselle Fontenailles on an errand, then looks for an excuse to leave herself. Finally, Marguerite fetches her, and Mouret and Denise are left alone.

Mouret asks Denise if she will dine with him that night. Denise refuses, saying that she has plans to dine with her brothers at her uncle Baudu's. Shocked by her calm refusal, Mouret insists, then asks if she will come tomorrow. When she refuses, he asks what she is afraid of. Denise says that she's not afraid, she just doesn't want to.

Jouve, who is passing by, closes the door, drowning out the sound of the gossiping assistants. His voice shaking, Mouret says that he loves Denise and begs her to accept him. He offers her money, but she refuses, saying she's known how to earn her own living since she was 11. Mouret is being refused by a woman for the first time, and he feels frantic. Tears come to his eyes, and he cries that he is suffering. He seizes her hands, and she feels her resolve soften. She wants to throw her arms around his neck, but she pulls her hands away. Denise says she is not Clara, and she doesn't share people's affections. Mouret is bewildered and doesn't know what she wants. At her request, Mouret opens the door.

As Denise considers whether or not to reply to Mouret's letter, her character is at a turning point. Just as she had once debated whether to betray the Baudus and the traditional business model altogether and finally decided to join The Paradise (the modern world), she now debates whether she should accept a more modern version of love. On the other hand, she wonders if it is still against her nature to be casual with love.



When Denise first arrived at the Ladies' Paradise, Madame Aurélie—the woman with the highest authority at The Paradise—was mean to her. Now, Madame Aurélie values Denise and is kind to her, suggesting that Denise too is becoming a powerful woman at The Paradise.



Mouret pretends to inspect the stock-taking so as to talk to Denise, revealing that he is thinking more about her than he is about work matters. This suggests that Mouret is breaking his own rules: he used to patrol the store in ecstasy over its efficiency and believed that love would threaten his power.



Mouret's confidence is completely rocked by Denise's refusal because he is used to being so powerful that he gets whatever he wants. He is used to getting women to accept his advances without having to sacrifice any of his power.



Denise's lack of regard for Mouret's money also shocks Mouret. Through creating the Ladies' Paradise, Mouret learned that people were consumerists: they want money and material goods above all else. He also looks down on women and sees them as easy to manipulate. Therefore, Denise's refusal challenges the validity of Mouret's central principles. She does not fulfill Mouret's perfect equation for putting himself in the ultimate position of power, causing him to start to question whether this equation is in fact foolproof.



Mouret starts yelling at everyone about the stock counting. Bourdoncle, who had been upset to hear that Mouret was alone with Denise, alerts him to the overstock of silks, and Mouret goes to yell at Bouthemont. By six o'clock, the stock counting is finished and all the departments clean up. Madame Aurélie announces that the store earned 10 million more than it did last year. Denise then excuses herself to go get ready for dinner at her uncle's. Everyone is shocked to learn that she declined Mouret's invitation. Deloche is relieved, but Pauline can't believe that Denise turned down her fortune.

As Denise is passing by the silk department, she overhears Favier say to Hutin that Denise wants to take him by force. Denise can't believe that she had just had the courage to turn down the man she loved when a few months ago, she would have been weak enough to be with Hutin—a man she now despises. She hurries from the store, looking up to see Mouret standing at the banister. He forgets his "empire" as he watches her go, leaving darkness behind her.

CHAPTER 11

The next day, Bouthemont goes to Madame Desforges's for tea. Bouthemont, who is a confidant of both Mouret and Madame Desforges, assures Madame Desforges that Mouret will come, especially since he heard that Baron Hartmann would be there. Madame Desforges wishes that Bouthemont had brought Mouret with him so she could be sure he would come; lately, she rarely sees Mouret. Bouthemont also fears losing his friendship with Mouret. After the disaster with the excess stock of silk, **the Ladies' Paradise** is trying to push Bouthemont out, and only Mouret claims to be on his side.

Madame Desforges tells Bouthemont her plan: Denise is coming at five to fit a coat, and Madame Desforges will then bring her and Mouret face to face to humiliate them. Bouthemont tells Madame Desforges that nothing has happened between Mouret and Denise. Madame Desforges argues that Mouret clearly loves Denise. Since Denise rejected him, he has been "ruining himself" with other girls. She chokes back tears, afraid of getting older and losing her chance at love. Bouthemont holds her hands while she swears to get her revenge on Mouret.

Madame Desforges asks Bouthemont why he doesn't set up his own shop. Bouthemont says that he would need a lot of capital, and also that he'd have to pick a region where the people are not loyal customers of **the Ladies' Paradise**. Furthermore, his father refused to help fund "a brothel of business." Madame Desforges hints that she'd be willing to fund him.

Mouret is put into a bad temper, showing that his confidence and certainty were compromised by Denise's surprising refusal. Up until this point, Mouret has held power over everyone: the small tradespeople, women, and all of Paris as his customers. In the singular instance of Denise's refusal, Mouret is forced to realize that he is not all-powerful. He can't figure out why Denise doesn't bow to him like everyone else.



This scene makes a connection between true love and refusal. Denise refuses Mouret because she loves him, suggesting that resistance (in a consumerist society of casual possession and instant gratification) indicates true value and love. For Mouret's part, he feels that his consumerist empire falls because Denise refused what it stands for.



Bouthemont and Madame Desforges are simultaneously realizing that they are being used by Mouret. Bouthemont even admits that Mouret is only claiming to be on his side. This suggests that Mouret never actually takes sides with anyone, supporting only whoever benefits him, and dropping these people as soon as they cause him difficulties. This general utilitarianism emphasizes, by contrast, how uncharacteristic it is for Mouret to express such interest in Denise.



Madame Desforges is particularly jealous of Denise precisely because nothing has happened between Denise and Mouret. Since nothing has happened, Madame Desforges knows that Mouret really loves Denise. In the modern society, refusal indicates love, whereas consumption and casual sex mean the mere fulfillment of desire. Mouret is "ruining himself" on meaningless relationships because he can't have what's real: Denise.



The phrase "brothel of business" suggests that department stores like the Ladies' Paradise sell pleasure in much the same way a brothel sells pleasure. This negative description of the department store paints it as a place of moral depravity.



The bell rings, and soon Mouret and Vallagnosc enter. Madame Desforges is privately angry that Mouret brought his friend, but she only rebukes him flirtatiously for never coming to see her. Mouret compliments her appearance. She says that he looks ill and overworked. Mouret tells Bouthemont that they need to have a talk later. Mouret then says he hoped Baron would be here, which offends Madame Desforges. A servant comes in and announces the arrival of a salesgirl for a fitting. Madame Desforges says to make her wait in the hall.

Madame Marty and Madame de Boves come in, saying that they recognize the salesgirl in the hall from **the Ladies' Paradise**. Mouret looks at Madame Desforges, becoming suspicious. Madame Desforges says that she bought a coat from the Ladies' Paradise, but that she is unsatisfied with the fit. Bouthemont defends the Ladies' Paradise, and the ladies discuss clothes and Monsieur de Boves and Madame Guibal's simultaneous trips. Madame Marty says that her husband, who recently took shady side jobs to support her shopping sprees, might lose his job. Madame Desforges promises to find him new work. Madame de Boves says that Mouret looks ill, and Mouret says that he's been working hard. Baron comes in, and Mouret shakes his hand warmly.

Baron left the door open, revealing Denise standing in the hall; she proudly refused to sit. Everyone looks at her and gossips. Mouret tries to change the subject, but Baron asks him if the morals of his salesgirls are as bad as everyone says. Mouret defends his salesgirls, saying that **the Ladies' Paradise** has allowed them to rise up in the world and live decent lives. The ladies disagree. Madame Desforges says the salesgirls are for sale, just like the goods. Mouret tries to smile, and Baron graciously changes the subject. Madame Desforges goes to meet Denise, and Mouret and Baron go into another room to talk.

Mouret tells Baron about his dream of installing **the Ladies' Paradise** in an entire block. To do this, he needs the entrance lot that Baron's company plans to turn into a hotel. Baron tells Mouret that his company won't sell the entrance because they see it as only an advertisement for Mouret's shop. Mouret says that the entrance would increase his capital tenfold, but Baron argues that his company thinks the idea is too risky.

Mouret raises his voice, explaining how minimal increases in his capital has produced millions. Baron says that Mouret can't keep expanding, and Mouret asks why not. Mouret says he wants all of Paris's money because it belongs to women, and women belong to him. Baron pats Mouret's shoulder in a fatherly way and says he will try to convince his company. Feeling dispirited, Mouret thanks him.

Madame Desforges—as a member of the old aristocratic class—conceals her true emotions under a polite mask. On the other hand, Mouret—as a man who became rich thanks to his modern business—is more open. This contrast between their characters reveals the difference between the stiffness of the old class system and the freedom of the modern businessman.



The Ladies' Paradise is starting to take its toll on the ladies as evidenced by Madame Marty's situation. Although the Paradise claims to be for the benefit of the public, in actuality it impoverishes the richest class of people. Also significant during this scene is Mouret's noticeably bad health. While he was recklessly gambling his capital on the success of his store, he was vibrant and healthy. This suggests that his health is suffering now not from his stressful business, but from his unrequited feelings for Denise.



The aristocratic ladies believe that the Ladies' Paradise lowers the class of the girls who work there, but it seems that this opinion is founded in their general distaste of anyone who does not lead the traditional life that they lead. Mouret, on the other hand, sees the Ladies' Paradise as an instrument that elevates the employee's class. While the ladies think that nothing can improve a person's standing if they're born into the lower classes, Mouret believes that work can.



No one besides Mouret can comprehend how the Ladies' Paradise can physically expand any further. Mouret sees expansion as a way to essentially spend money to make more money—a modern idea that the more traditional businessman, such as Baron, does not understand.



Although he is a modern businessman, Mouret's notion that women belong to him appeals to a traditional masculine view. This suggests that Mouret's opinion of women might actually be holding him back from modernity, instead of leading him into it, as he believes.



Vallagnosc comes in as Baron jokes to Mouret that the women will have their revenge. Disconcerted, Mouret asks what he means. Baron says that women will want “a fair exchange” and that they will exploit him more than he has exploited them. Mouret says he isn’t afraid to lose money. Looking sad, Baron says that there are more ways to suffer besides losing money. Mouret says that he doesn’t suffer like that, but Baron tells him not to pretend he is more heartless than he is. Joking again, he insinuates that heartbreak can happen, and Vallagnosc, also chuckling, agrees.

Just then, the door opens and Madame Desforges calls for Mouret. She says that the salesgirl knows nothing, so she wants Mouret’s opinion. Mouret—who thinks of Denise all the time and loves her more than he has ever loved anyone—is glad he is here to protect her from Madame Desforges’s cruel jealousy. He follows Madame Desforges into her dressing room where Denise stands, modest and composed.

On Madame Desforges’ orders, Denise helps the lady into the coat. Mouret, wanting to cut things short, says that the coat doesn’t fit, and that **the Ladies’ Paradise** will make her another one. Madame Desforges insists that she wants this coat and orders Denise to start pinning, criticizing her every move.

Mouret tries to intervene. His heart pounds at Denise’s humiliation and the dignity she maintains. Seeing that she can’t break Denise this way, Madame Desforges starts flirting with Mouret. She sends him to her jewelry box for more pins, insinuating that he is comfortable in her bedroom. Denise trembles when Madame Desforges asks Mouret to touch her back. Mouret wishes he could make Madame Desforges be quiet. Denise wonders if Mouret is punishing her for rejecting him and summons all her courage to endure the pain and humiliation.

When Madame Desforges orders her to fit the coat again, Denise says that Madame Desforges is plump, and that she can’t make her thinner. Madame Desforges tosses aside the coat, Denise tosses aside her pins, and they glare at each other. Madame Desforges calls Denise insolent. Denise says that as long as Mouret is pleased with her work, she won’t apologize. Madame Desforges calls Denise a “tart” that Mouret picked off the street. At this, two big tears fall from Denise’s eyes. Mouret grabs Denise’s hands and reassures her tenderly of his high opinion of her. He escorts her to the door, and she leaves, now crying with joy.

In this passage, the ominous concept of women’s revenge is subtly connected with heartbreak. Mouret because he believes that women only care about material things. So, he assumes money is the only thing a woman would want to take from him. However, Baron points out that this revenge isn’t necessarily transactional or material; instead, it could involve something more emotional, such as heartbreak.



Just after Baron insinuated that heartbreak could be women’s revenge, Mouret is drawn to protect Denise. In this moment, he is not thinking practically of how his actions will benefit him. In this way, heartbreak is a kind of revenge because it is forcing Mouret to take his mind off exploitation.



This scene is a battle of the traditional classes. Madame Desforges tries to lord her power over Denise by making her do tailoring work, whereas Mouret—in trying to give this job to the appropriate person at the Paradise—stands up for Denise’s dignity.



Although Madame Desforges is—in the traditional sense—in a higher class than Denise, her actions in this scene put her far below Denise morally, while Denise’s actions morally elevate her above Madame Desforges. In this way, Denise’s dignity—a quality that doesn’t come from any particular class or material advantage—defies distinctions of class and elevates Denise beyond them.



In Madame Desforges and Denise’s confrontation, the question becomes: is Madame Desforges better because she’s an aristocrat, or is Denise superior because she’s worked hard? For his part, Mouret sides with Denise, suggesting that work can indeed elevate a person beyond the class they were born into. Denise implicitly agrees with him when she insists that she doesn’t actually care what Madame Desforges thinks—she cares what her employer thinks.



Humiliated, Madame Desforges buries her face in her handkerchief. She asks Mouret if Denise is the girl he loves, and he says she is. Madame Desforges throws herself in a chair and calls herself miserable. Mouret stares at her for a moment and then leaves the room.

Mouret goes back to the small drawing room and finds Vallagnosc by himself. Vallagnosc asks sarcastically if Mouret is enjoying himself. With tears in his eyes, Mouret says that he has never lived so intensely and that he loves life. He will get Denise in the end, and that will make up for his suffering. Mouret says that he would rather die of passion than boredom; he likes to create and overcome “facts” because “action is its own reward.” Vallagnosc says that there is no point in wanting anything when nothing ever ends up how he wants. He is bored, and the only reason he doesn’t kill himself is because he is lazy. Vallagnosc and Mouret laugh together over their longstanding disagreement.

Feeling better after talking to Vallagnosc, Mouret returns to the drawing room. He tells everyone that the coat can’t be fixed. Then he sits down next to Bouthemont and dismisses him from **the Ladies’ Paradise**, pretending that he’d been unable to fight against Bourdoncle and the rest of the staff. Madame Desforges reappears, having resumed the “mask of her society charm,” and says that the coat will work fine.

The ladies start talking again of big stores. Mouret pitches **the Ladies’ Paradise** and gets the ladies interested. He says that he hopes to marry Mademoiselle Fontenailles to a porter soon. The ladies think that this is a low-class marriage for someone who has high-class ancestors, but Mouret preaches the “aristocracy of labor.” Monsieur Marty arrives and thanks Madame Desforges for helping him find new work. He then responds to Mouret that economy, as well as work, amounts to success.

While the rest are talking, Bouthemont tells Madame Desforges that he is ready to start his own shop. Madame Desforges tells him to come see her that evening, and then tells Baron about Bouthemont—the next promising young man she wants him to finance. Baron agrees, then watches in admiration as Mouret charms the ladies into forgiving him for “ruining” them with clothes and sales. Mouret has beaten Madame Desforges, but will he beat Denise, the girl who is “formidable in her gentleness”?

Through her actions, Madame Desforges has lowered herself beneath Denise’s level. Her humiliation has nothing to do with material circumstances, but rather with her character.



In the same way that Mouret loves the thrill of dangerously gambling his entire savings in hopes of earning more, he loves the suffering of not getting Denise because of the hope that he will one day get her. He loves overcoming “facts,” meaning that he is constantly redefining his own principles. Where he once defined for himself the way to get to women through his store, he must now redefine this “fact” to include how he can get Denise—a woman who has refused what Mouret’s original “Woman” wanted.



Madame Desforges’s resumed “mask of society charm” reveals that the righteous attitude of the higher classes is often fake. Having just humiliated herself, Madame Desforges has nothing to look haughty about. The masks that the classes wear conceal their character—the thing that really defines who they are.



Mouret claims that “the aristocracy of labor” justifies the marriage of a traditionally high-class woman to a traditionally low-class man. Whereas the traditional aristocracy is defined by birth and wealth, the new aristocracy—since it is defined by labor—can be made up of anyone who works. In this way, labor raises a person to a high class in the modern world.



The fact that Denise is “formidable in her gentleness” explains that she is powerful in a very unforeseen way. Her power is subtle and gentle—two qualities which stand opposite the qualities that define the modern consumerist society in its flashiness and immodesty. In this way, Denise might be undefeatable because she doesn’t fit the mold of Mouret’s ideal customer.



CHAPTER 12

In September, Baron's company sells the property to Mouret, and construction starts on the new entrance for **the Ladies' Paradise**. One day in the ladieswear department, Clara makes fun of the Baudus. She recently found out that Colomban has a crush on her, and she jokes about stealing him from his fiancée just for fun. Denise is upset, but commands Clara to get back to work. Clara obeys, unable to resist Denise's calm authority.

Pauline comes by and notices that Denise is losing her temper. Denise explains that she can't manage the girls, but Pauline says that Denise can be queen over whomever she wants. Pauline can't understand why Denise refused Mouret. She recently married Baugé, and Bourdoncle—who believes that love is a threat to business—is threatening to fire them both. Jouve comes by, suspicious of Pauline, but goes away when he sees Denise. Pauline goes back to her department.

The "reign" of Denise has begun. Bourdoncle—who hates women and beats all his mistresses—feels that if Denise had accepted Mouret, Mouret would have forgotten about her. Instead, her refusal is tearing Mouret apart. He thinks Denise is a "vampire" who could destroy the well-oiled machine, so he looks for a reason to have her fired. Rumors circulate that Deloche and Hutin were once Denise's lovers, and Bourdoncle tries to make Jouve—who is now protective of Denise—catch her with one of them.

Meanwhile, Mouret lives in agony. Denise, who arrived at **the Ladies' Paradise** in big boots and an ill-fitting dress, is now "surrounded by radiance" in his eyes. He feels that his life began that day when he walked with her in the park, and that he belongs to her. Her charm—comprised of courage and simplicity—overpowers him. Moreover, she has formed liberal commercial ideas like his own. He can't comprehend her refusal, and thinks that if he offers her more, she will eventually yield.

Mouret thinks about Denise all day and dreams of her at night. He puts on a smile during business meetings, but privately asks himself what the point of his wealth is when he can't have Denise. His daily inspections, which used to delight him, now make him miserable. In the delivery room, where goods pour into the store like a river, he feels chagrined that he can buy any product in the world, but not the woman he loves. He feels privately angry at how well his "perfect machine" runs. His powerfulness in business makes him acutely aware of his powerlessness in love.

In her position of authority at The Paradise, Denise works on changing how the traditional is being defeated by the modern. Clara wants to destroy the Baudus principles just for fun, but Denise—while she might recognize the inevitable death of tradition—at least sympathizes with the suffering it causes.



In believing that love is a threat to business, Bourdoncle makes the claim that marriage and business—two major institutions of life—are unsuited to each other. Ideally, he'd prefer employees to choose business over marriage so that the business can continue to run smoothly. However, he's also being a bit hypocritical, given how sexually active the employee base seems—is marriage really any more distracting than the constant boyfriends and romantic intrigue?



Denise's influence at the Ladies' Paradise is called her "reign," suggesting that she has inadvertently become the most powerful person instead of Mouret. If she had accepted Mouret, she would have made herself a commodity that Mouret currently views all women to be. In refusing, Denise not only makes Mouret feel powerless, but she upends the very principles of his business.



Significantly, Denise's radiance is not connected with her appearance at face value. Whereas the Ladies' Paradise is radiant in its flashy displays of superficial beauty and material goods, Denise's beauty comes from some depth in her. Mouret feels that he belongs to Denise, which shows a complete reversal from his usual opinion that all women belong to him.



Business stands opposed to love in this passage: the more Mouret feels his power in business, the more he feels his powerlessness in love. This suggests either that business is a superficial power whereas love is genuine power, or that success in business is insufficient without success in love—a matter outside of the business world. Mouret is realizing that the perfection of his machine is actually a sign of its insufficiency.



Mouret walks around the departments but feels no interest in his usual dreams of expansion. The rise and fall of the store's daily earnings, which he used to watch with interest, now makes him contemptuous of money. Then, Bourdoncle tells him that Denise is having affairs with Hutin and Deloche. Mouret tells Bourdoncle that he needs proof, pretending only to care about keeping peace among the staff. However, his peace of mind is utterly destroyed by Bourdoncle's news, and he determines to fire Hutin and Deloche.

One day, Mignot is caught helping a woman steal by pretending to help her try on gloves while she stuffs them into her clothes. Staff thefts happen often, but the management usually deals with it quietly. Today however, Mouret shouts at Mignot, threatening to call the police. Bourdoncle runs over, and ushers everyone into an office. After questioning, Mignot confesses that Albert has helped her with a series of thefts. The Lhommes are brought into the office. Mignot is fired, and Albert is let go two days later.

A few days later, Mouret catches Favier lowering prices in the silk department and shouts at him. Favier, who has been deliberately lowering prices in plain sight to implicate Hutin, blames Hutin. Mouret accosts Hutin and berates him for going behind his back. He tells Hutin not to do this again and walks away. Hutin vents his rage to Favier, who pretends to be innocent. Favier wonders why Mouret is so angry lately, and Hutin says it's because of Denise.

Two days later, Hutin catches Denise and Deloche standing by an open window in a manufacturing room. He withdraws quietly, and alerts Bourdoncle and Jouve. Denise often finds Deloche at this window, which is beside a huge cistern of water. They look out over the rooftops and reminisce about their childhoods in the country. Today, they reminisce as usual while listening to the "machine" vibrating through the walls. Suddenly, Deloche starts to cry. He says that he loves Denise, and that they have so much to talk about since they came from the same place.

Denise hushes Deloche, thinking she hears footsteps. When no one comes, Deloche continues confessing his feelings. Eventually, Denise stops listening, letting her eyes roam over the industrial infrastructure of Paris she can see through the window. Deloche takes her hand. Feeling sorry for him, Denise lets him kiss her hand. He laments that he has been at **the Ladies' Paradise** for four years but is still in the lowest position. He tells Denise to find someone else, because he will be happy if she is happy.

Mouret's money no longer makes him feel powerful because he realizes that money can only go so far. While it can buy almost everything, it is absolutely useless when it comes to buying love. He even finds himself jealous of his employees because he feels for the first time that they have access to something he doesn't: while he has money and a huge business, they have Denise.



Mouret's public displays of his emotion suggest that he is tiring of the superficiality of his business. Usually, Mouret pretends that he is more tolerant than he is, and that he values women more than he in fact does. Along with Mouret's break with inauthenticity, other inauthentic fixtures are done away with, such as the superficial power of the Lhommes.



Before Denise refused him, Mouret would have been unbothered by his staff's schemes to work their way to the top. He was assured of his authority and would have watched them struggle, knowing that this struggle benefitted him. Now, Mouret feels powerless to the point that even his employees see him as a threat.



The peaceful atmosphere of Valognes appeals to Denise and Deloche more than the industrial, competitive setting of The Paradise. However, the comforting love that Deloche proposes between two people who have a lot in common is not appealing to Denise. In the same way that the traditional pales in comparison to the modern, a rural place and comfortable form of love—while nice to daydream about—pale in comparison to modernity and a different love.



Although Deloche and Denise were in a similar position when they started and have much in common in terms of where they come from, Denise has been successful in The Paradise's setting whereas Deloche has not been. This suggests that some people in the old-fashioned world are able to move forward with modernity while some people inevitably do not.



Suddenly, Mouret is standing in in the doorway. Jouve had gone to get him at the new storefront space where he liked to oversee the construction. When Jouve told him about Denise and Deloche, he came immediately, consumed by jealous passion. Deloche flees, and Mouret asks Denise to come to his office. Once there, he rebukes her sternly. Denise feels that Madame Hédouin, whose picture both intimidates and comforts her, is protecting her. She calmly apologizes for socializing during work hours.

Mouret loses his temper violently, asking Denise if she is ashamed for giving herself to worthless men. Denise is shocked by Mouret's accusations, and wonders if he really thinks she is immoral. She says that if he feels this way about her, she doesn't want to work for him. She starts to leave, but he demands that she defend herself, praying that the rumors of her affairs are false. She stands, silent and dignified.

Mouret bursts out that he loves Denise and begs to know what she wants. He gave up Madame Desforges and Clara and all other affairs; he has offered her everything she could ever want, hoping to please her. Denise tells Mouret that she has no lovers. He asks why she rejects him and says that there must be someone she loves. Denise says there *is* someone she loves. But her dignity and reason cause her to conceal her love, not wanting to agree to an affair when she doesn't know what might come from it.

Mouret makes a gesture of despair. Denise implores him to believe that she is respectable, as most women are. Mouret is reminded of Madame Hédouin's values and feels that Denise, in her goodness, is a resurrection of his late wife. He says that he belongs to Denise, and she jokes that he'll become a decent man in her hands. Mouret escorts her to the door.

The next day, the ladieswear department is split in two, and Denise is promoted to position of buyer for the children's section. Madame Aurélie fears that she will eventually lose her job to Denise. The Lhommes' power has fallen, and Madame Aurélie privately feels that this is because of their bad family life at home. In her new position, Denise commands respect from men and women alike. Bourdoncle gives up his resistance, feeling that the women have won. The only person Denise dislikes is Clara, who has gone through with her threat and started an affair with Colomban.

Madame Hédouin's portrait protects Denise, suggesting that Mouret's late wife would have defended Denise against Mouret's accusations. Mouret believes that Denise is having casual affairs with her coworkers, but Denise and Madame Hédouin seem to band together to claim that Mouret's bad opinion of women is blinding him to the good nature of many women.



Denise and Mouret don't understand each other here because Mouret assumes Denise is like the women he knows who are superficial and exploitable. Denise's refusal to be with Mouret and her refusal to defend herself demand that he reassess his opinion of women.



Mouret offers Denise money and exclusivity, but she still refuses. Although Denise has not said so, even to herself, it seems that she is holding out against Mouret because she wants him to propose to her. Her dignity and her reason make her conceal that Mouret is the person she loves, making herself the invulnerable one while Mouret is beginning to surrender his authority.



Denise implicitly sets Mouret an ultimatum. She requires that he learn to think of women not as resources to exploit for his benefit. Madame Hédouin apparently required the same of Mouret once, suggesting that Mouret once had a higher opinion of women.



Denise—who has a strong sense of devotion to her brothers—is starting to surpass Madame Aurélie in authority, suggesting that family values are necessary to ensure a person's true success. This further implies that Bourdoncle's opinion that love and marriage are a threat to a successful business is false. Marriage—as a family value—might actually be essential to a successful business.



Denise, who loves children, runs her department excellently. She helps young girls find dresses that they love and keeps sweets in her pockets for the kids. She has friendly conversations with Mouret in which she tells him her modern business ideas. She campaigns to improve the poor working conditions that lead employees to get sick or be unfairly fired. She says that Mouret has to use “good metal” to make his machine run well. Mouret cheerfully accuses her of socialism but follows her advice, creating a mutual aid society that promises pensions.

Denise organizes a band, led by Lhomme, and hosts a big festival for employees and customers. She sets up a school that teaches evening classes to employees, and she campaigns to get doctors and hairdressers on site. These actions bend everyone in favor of Denise. Bourdoncle is defeated, realizing that a woman has come along who has Mouret at her mercy. Denise can hardly believe her power: she used to feel like she was nothing, and now she feels that she is the “soul of the world.” She has claimed authority not with her beauty, but with her gentleness and simplicity.

Some time later, Pauline becomes pregnant. Employees aren’t allowed to keep working if they get pregnant, and many salesgirls have had stillborn children from trying to conceal their stomachs with corsets. Before Bourdoncle can fire Pauline, Denise establishes that all pregnant salesgirls should be assigned midwives and leaves of absence.

Denise visits Pauline in the infirmary, and Pauline and Baugé thank her for the great changes she has made. Baugé leaves, and Pauline asks Denise what is going on between her and Mouret. Denise confesses that she loves Mouret. Pauline urges her to accept him, and, when Denise shakes her head, asks if Denise is trying to get Mouret to propose. Although Denise feels that marriage is the proper expression of love, she has no schemes against Mouret. Denise feels that no one understands her, and Pauline comforts her.

Meanwhile, Mouret visits his new building. It is the realization of his dream, but it makes him feel “the vanity of his fortune.” Only Denise’s acceptance can fill his empty heart. He weeps with frustration. The vague idea of marriage starts to occur to him.

This passage exemplifies that Denise’s character—defined by her familial tendencies—and her growing intimacy with Mouret are not a threat to the Ladies’ Paradise. In fact, the closer Mouret and Denise become, the more Mouret’s business benefits, suggesting that, if a future marriage were to occur between them, it would not be the death of the Paradise as Bourdoncle fears.



After the changes that Denise makes at The Paradise, the lives of the employees are improved not just incidentally but intentionally. Moreover, employees experience growth in deep ways—such as through education and creative expression—rather than simply superficial ways. In this way, Denise makes The Paradise a place that’s genuinely beneficial for all.



Denise also makes the Paradise supportive of women. Before, while women were treated as equals in terms of sales, they were still subject to misogynistic views. In protecting women’s rights, Denise enables women to engage truly in the workforce.



Denise claims that she has no schemes against Mouret. In this, she shows an entirely different approach to the one Mouret uses with women and has been trying to use with her. While Mouret has tried to exploit women and manipulate Denise into being with him, Denise’s complete absence of these methods promotes a more genuine way of relating to people.



Mouret feels that his success is vanity because it was obtained through holding power over others. In contemplating marriage, Mouret wonders if real happiness can come from surrendering his power to Denise.



CHAPTER 13

One day in November, the Baudus' servant finds Denise at work and tells her that Geneviève wants to see her. Recently, Colomban ran off with Clara, leaving a fake suicide note for the Baudus. His disappearance made Geneviève's condition worse. Denise leaves work and goes to the Vieil Elbeuf. Baudu had recently mortgaged the building, and it is in such a state of disrepair that it looks ready to collapse. Denise finds Madame Baudu sitting in the shop, her eyes glazed with tears. Madame Baudu says that Baudu is upstairs with Geneviève.

Baudu comes downstairs and says that Geneviève is sleeping. He sits down and silence falls. Then he starts muttering, saying that he raised Colomban as his own son, and that he was excellent salesman. Colomban betraying him for a dreadful woman is like someone telling him that God doesn't exist. Baudu blames himself for Colomban's demise, saying that he should have married him and Geneviève right away. Denise tells him not to blame himself, confessing that Colomban had been ready to run away for a long time. Baudu says that **the Ladies' Paradise** has killed his business and is now killing his daughter.

Geneviève wails that she is afraid of being left alone, and Denise and Baudu hurry upstairs. Geneviève lies in bed, her thin body wasted away by consumptive fever. She is in the room in the back so she can't see **the Ladies' Paradise**. She lights up when she sees Denise, who embraces her and asks if she needs anything. Geneviève stares at Baudu until he leaves the room. Geneviève then clasps Denise's hand and asks if Colomban is still with Clara. Denise says that Colomban now stalks Clara, who has grown tired of him. Trying to give hope, Denise says that Colomban might come back to Geneviève.

Geneviève says that she knows it is all over. She throws off her blankets and shows Denise her thin, naked body. She says that she is no longer a woman, and that it would be wrong to want Colomban. She asks Denise to tell Colomban that she forgives him. Denise kisses her and tells her not to lose heart. Baudu comes back upstairs, and Denise leaves.

The next morning, Geneviève dies. **Her funeral** is held on a gloomy day. Her child-sized coffin is covered with white roses. The small tradespeople—the “monster's victims”—attend, walking through the mud past **the Ladies' Paradise**, dressed in black. Jean also attends and seems struck with grief by the tragedy. Denise leaves Pépé with his caretaker.

Colomban's departure and Baudu's recent mortgaging of his building indicate that tradition is barely hanging on in the face of the modern world. Baudu has lost all of his customers and therefore cannot afford to keep running his small business. What is more, the modern ways of casual relationships and self-interest are ruining traditions such as arranged marriages and business partnerships.



In comparing Colomban's departure to learning that God might not exist, Baudu explains that his whole belief system has collapsed. His traditional business model rested on the virtues of goodness and loyalty, but he cannot rely on these during the current times. What's more, Baudu never realized that the Ladies' Paradise would kill not only his business but his family as well.



Geneviève's illness symbolizes the slow death that the Ladies' Paradise and big business is causing to small businesses. Significantly, Geneviève suffers a life-threatening illness over Colomban's obsession with a flashy girl—a relationship that is superficial and perhaps even temporary. This is similar to the way the Ladies' Paradise ruins its customers financially all for their obsession with its flashy, yet low-quality merchandise.



In this passage, Geneviève gives up and essentially declares that the old traditional ways are dead. She's no longer desirable sexually or romantically, and this is because modernity—and the Ladies' Paradise—has robbed her of her health and femininity.



The small tradespeople who attend Geneviève's funeral mourn her death as a symbol of everything The Paradise (the monster) has cruelly taken from them. In this way, Geneviève's funeral culminates the financial, emotional, and moral ruin of small businessowners.



While everyone waits for the hearse to arrive, Denise hears Bourras ask another tradesman to look over his shop while he attends the funeral. Denise notices that his shop has fallen into a state of decrepitude, crushed between **the Ladies' Paradise** and displaying a few rotten umbrellas. Bourras grumbles as he watches the hearse bump into one of the **Ladies' Paradise's** vans trying to get to the coffin. The procession starts, leading the coffin past the Ladies' Paradise to the service, and then back past it to the cemetery. Baudu follows the hearse with heavy, mechanical steps.

Tired and depressed, Denise gets into a funeral carriage. When the carriages halt, struggling to get around **the Ladies' Paradise's** scaffolding, Bourras climbs in beside her. He complains about the crowded street and the rumored 100-million-dollar turnover of the Paradise. He comments that **Geneviève's funeral** is nothing but a "string of failures;" the tradesmen are defeated, and even Robineau is almost bankrupt. Bourras thinks the world is going mad because many stores are now selling a variety of things.

Denise feels that **the funeral** procession is like a herd of cattle tramping towards a slaughterhouse. Bourras says that, after many lawsuits, he has kept **the Ladies' Paradise** at bay. Mouret is still after him, but he won't stop resisting, even though he has fallen into poverty. Denise tries to convince Bourras to accept Mouret's offer, but Bourras tells her to mind her own business.

The carriages stop at the cemetery, and Denise and Bourras get out. After a brief ceremony, the coffin is lowered into the grave. Bourras looks at the crowd of sickly tradespeople and says they should all jump in the grave too. Denise takes the Baudus and Jean back to Baudu's, where she hears that Jean is in the throes of despair over a woman. Denise chokes back tears at the sight of Madame Baudu and Baudu sitting in their crumbling shop, crushed by grief.

That evening, Mouret sends for Denise to talk about children's fashion. Trembling with pity and grief, Denise tells him about her day. On hearing Bourras's name, Mouret rants about Bourras' filthy hovel, and his foolishness for rejecting Mouret's generous offers. Denise stays quiet, thinking of sentimental rather than practical things. Mouret offers his condolences to the Baudus but says that they brought their troubles on themselves. If it wasn't **the Ladies' Paradise** that ruined them, it would have been another big shop, for the idea is now popular. Mouret says that "the corpse of old-fashioned business" must be swept out of the "sunny streets of modern Paris."

Geneviève's funeral procession cannot avoid passing in front of the Ladies' Paradise two times. Its mocking presence rubs salt in the local businessowners' wounds, but it also redoubles The Paradise's claim to popularity. Whether welcome or unwelcome, the Ladies' Paradise is in everyone's mind and in front of everyone's eyes—a fact which solidifies its fixed position as the future of business.



Although Bourras's sorrow is justified, his complaints don't all make sense. His claim that the world is going mad because many stores are becoming department stores simply makes him look old and out of touch with where the world is headed. In this way, allow the death of small business is sad, it is also a natural consequence of the progression of time.



In Denise's image of the funeral, the procession is all the small businessowners and the slaughterhouse is the ways of modern business that will ruin them once and for all. Like cows being led to the slaughterhouse, their death is necessary and unavoidable, if tragic.



Bourras's dark joke reveals something of the willingness with which the small businessowners are going to their death at the hands of modern business. The local tradesmen had the opportunity to join with the Ladies' Paradise, but their choice to stick stubbornly to the old ways was akin to them jumping into their own graves.



Mouret's practical explanation is that the death of the traditional is necessary for the modern era to dawn. He draws a contrast between the traditional as a corpse and the modern as "the sunny streets of Paris," illustrating the past as cumbersome and depressing and the future as bright and cheerful. Moreover, his modern perspective claims that everyone is responsible for their own success or failure, just as he was responsible for getting rich after being poor.



That night, Denise barely sleeps. She wonders whether death is an essential part of life. She dreams of Geneviève's grave and the small shops crumbling to the ground. She feels an immense sorrow but knows that every revolution involves sacrifice, and that all progress occurs over "the bodies of the dead." However, she wants to alleviate her family's suffering and decides to ask Mouret for help; although he is a womanizer, she believes that under his exploitative affections is a true warmth. The next day, Mouret agrees to compensate the Baudus and Bourras when they finally surrender to **the Ladies' Paradise**. In the meantime, Denise visits the Baudus often, trying to cheer up Madame Baudu, who seems to be dying.

One day, Denise is leaving the Baudus when she sees a crowd gathering in panic. An omnibus had just run into a man. The anxious driver says that the collision wasn't his fault; the man walked into the street and threw himself under the wheels. Denise approaches the man—who is still alive—and recognizes Robineau. Denise gives the police Robineau's information. A stretcher is sent for. Denise goes on ahead, hoping to warn Madame Robineau of the shock in store for her.

Denise finds Madame Robineau, who is pregnant and looks tired. Recently, the Paris-Paradise outshone all rival silks and ruined Robineau's business. Madame Robineau tells Denise that Gaujean had just showed Robineau some overdue bills earlier that morning. Denise then tells her about the accident and says that Robineau is being brought on a stretcher.

Madame Robineau rushes to the door just as Robineau is being brought in on the stretcher. He has regained consciousness, and he weeps when he sees his wife. Denise closes the shutters to give them privacy. They embrace each other, and Robineau confesses his attempted suicide; he felt defeated after Gaujean showed him the bills. Robineau loses consciousness again and Madame Robineau grasps Denise, weeping that Robineau wanted to take his life because he failed her. Robineau opens his eyes, and Madame Robineau says that she doesn't care about money. She cares only that they are together.

A doctor comes and determines that one of Robineau's legs is broken. Gaujean appears and tells Robineau that he is officially bankrupt. Robineau says that he and Gaujean, both being young, should have accepted modern business. Robineau is carried to the bedroom and Madame Robineau kisses Denise, glad to be done with business altogether. Gaujean admits to Denise that she was right about modern business, and says he is trying to get back in with **the Ladies' Paradise**.

Denise feels sorrow over the suffering of the small businessowners, but she does not necessarily feel that it is an injustice—so long as the small businessowners are compensated fairly for their businesses when their shops do finally fail. That Mouret is so willing to agree to Denise's request suggests that her influence is making him more humane, as he's not normally been enthusiastic about quality of life improvements for employees or for anyone else.



Robineau's attempted suicide points out the extreme emotional pain that the Ladies' Paradise causes to small businessowners. Not only has Robineau suffered materially, but he now sees no point in trying to stay alive and fight for his life or business. In this way, daring to compete with the Paradise results in an exaggerated attempt to defeat oneself.



Robineau attempts suicide during Madame Robineau's pregnancy, revealing how the stress caused by business threatens the security of one's family. In this way, the small businessowners threaten their own values in competing with the Paradise.



Madame Robineau's simple declaration sheds light on the death and ruin that the small businessowners are bringing on themselves in trying to compete with the Ladies' Paradise for money. In saying that she doesn't care about money, Madame Robineau makes the whole competition appear meaningless, and suggests that love of money—rather than one's values—is really responsible for this death struggle.



After Robineau's attempted suicide, he and Gaujean seem to realize that there is more at stake in their competition with the Paradise besides the loss of traditional businesses' values. They each speak of acceptance and humility, suggesting that the death struggle between big and small business had been about their wounded pride rather than right and wrong.



One day in January, Madame Baudu dies. For the last few days of her life, she sat motionless in bed. She hadn't let Baudu draw the curtains but had stared at **the Ladies' Paradise** with her eyes full of tears. The ruined tradespeople gather again for a funeral. Baudu follows the hearse with the same mechanical walk.

Denise is overwhelmed by these tragedies. On top of it all, Jean is immersed in another affair, and she had to send Pépé away to school. Then, Bourras goes bankrupt and is forced to give Mouret his shop for 500 francs after having refused the 100,000. When the demolition begins, the police are forced to remove Bourras, who refuses to leave.

The next morning, Denise finds Bourras standing outside his shop. She can see her old room through the window and is filled with pity for all the suffering in the world. There is a terrible cracking noise and the shop collapses. Bourras cries out and gapes at the debris. **The Ladies' Paradise** had gained its ultimate triumph. Denise gently assures Bourras that he will be taken care of. Bourras draws himself up proudly and says he won't accept charity from his murderer. He says goodbye and walks away through the crowd.

Denise watches him go, and then goes to see Baudu who now spends his days pacing the mildewed and deserted Vieil Elbeuf. Denise asks Baudu if he heard Bourras's house collapse. Baudu nods, gazing at the empty bench where his wife and daughter used to sit. Denise says that Baudu can't stay here, and that he must figure out what to do. Baudu continues to pace. Denise says that **the Ladies' Paradise** has a job for him. Baudu pitifully asks how he could do such a thing. Denise pictures Baudu working in the Ladies' Paradise and feels sick with pity. She asks him to forgive her, then leaves him to his weary pacing.

That night, Denise can't sleep. She is moved to tears by the suffering around her but accepts it as a part of the struggle for existence. She shudders to think how she has become a powerful part of the "monster." Despite the destruction that his "brutal mechanism" causes, its grandeur makes her love Mouret more.

Madame Baudu's death and funeral reiterates what Geneviève's death and funeral symbolized. The fate of small business unfolds at a rapid rate as each small businessowner comes to terms with their complete failure.



Bourras's obstinate fight against the Ladies' Paradise actually contributed to the extent of his failure. In refusing Mouret all his offers, Bourras ultimately gives up his shop for nothing. In sticking to traditional values, Bourras brought about his own destruction.



The collapse of Bourras's shop symbolizes the final triumph of the Ladies' Paradise. After financially triumphing over Robineau and emotionally wrecking Baudu, the Paradise now territorially dominates Bourras. In refusing charity from Denise and Mouret, Bourras sticks to his values—an action which perversely exacerbates his own failure.



In this scene, Denise is forced to confront the fact that there is no way of creating peace between the traditional and the modern. Baudu would be utterly humiliated to work at the place that ruined him, a fact which points out the unavoidable sacrifice that the Ladies' Paradise costs. Denise realizes that there is an antipathy caused by pride between the old and the new and gives up trying to change this.



In calling it a "brutal" "monster," Denise reveals that she is still afraid of and repulsed by the Ladies' Paradise. In the same way, she is afraid of Mouret. However, to her, this fear indicates what is great, powerful, and full of promise.



CHAPTER 14

In February, the new Rue du Dix-Decembre—made up entirely of **the Ladies' Paradise**—opens. A huge crowd gathers at the entrance for the inaugural “white sale.” The new buildings are made of black and green marble at the base and decorated high up with bright mosaics. The central door’s arch is a scene of gilded women being dressed by cupids. The “wound” where Bourras’ hovel was is now filled in. Across the way, Mouret used Baudu’s empty shop (Baudu has gone to a home for the elderly) to hang a huge flag with an old-fashioned depiction of Paris diminished behind an illustration of the massive Paradise.

The Ladies' Paradise had spent 600,000 francs on advertising. An enormous crowd gathers for the sale amid blaring trumpets and fluttering streamers. Flags of the provinces of France and foreign nations fly from flagpoles. Everything in the display windows is white. The Ladies' Paradise is even more popular today because the Quatre Saisons, the big rival department store that Bouthemont had just started, burned to the ground a few weeks ago. Mouret, who was jealous that Bouthemont had had the great idea of having the Quatre Saisons blessed by a vicar, now has no competition for his customers.

By three o'clock, the Rue du Dix-Decembre is packed. Madame de Boves and Madame Guibal, who are now friends since Madame de Boves decided she wanted her husband’s affair to take place at home, look at a display of children’s clothes in one of the windows. They decide to go inside, and Blanche says that Vallagnosc (whom she married a few weeks ago) is meeting them in the reading room.

Just then, Madame Desforges arrives in a carriage. She greets her friends and says, feigning nonchalance, that she and Mouret are still friends and she wants to see his expansion. However, she can’t forgive him for marrying Mademoiselle Fontenailles to a porter. The ladies are swept into the store along with the crowd. They hope to find Madame Marty, who recently went to live with an uncle after Monsieur Marty became tyrannical in a spell of mania.

The ladies are amazed by the interior of **the Ladies' Paradise**. There are now fifty departments and 3,045 employees. There is nothing but “an orgy of white” as far as their eyes can see. White linens tumble like snow, and white silk scarves encircle the bannisters. Shafts of light cause the white goods to shine like light. An altar of “virginal whiteness” is made from curtains. This display of white was Mouret’s genius idea, and everyone is enchanted by it.

This sale at the Ladies' Paradise heralds the final defeat of old-fashioned Paris and the traditional business model. With Bourras's shop gone, there's now little indication that the old ever existed—it's being totally consumed by the modern. Mouret's advertisements for The Paradise are advertisements for a modern Paris as opposed to a traditional Paris. In this way, the Ladies' Paradise symbolizes modernity, and ushers it forth by dominating an entire street.



The Ladies' Paradise is so powerful that it not only defeats small, traditional businesses, but also big department stores like itself. This shows how the department store model completely dominates, centralizing all of a city's needs in one place and amassing all the city's workers and customers. In this way, the Ladies' Paradise represents the centralized consumer retail businesses seen in modern times.



Although much of the hypocrisy of the higher classes has been revealed, this class of people continues to maintain the mask of sophistication and normalcy. However, the sale at the Ladies' Paradise—as it has in the past—might bring out more of the true nature of the aristocratic class.



The Paradise promotes behaviors that the traditional aristocracy doesn't—such as marriage between a high-class orphan and a porter—and forces the aristocrats to act unsuited for their class—such as so seducing Madame Marty that she drives her husband broke and insane. In seducing the aristocracy despite the conflicting values, The Paradise brings the aristocracy down a peg.



Although the proliferation of white is compared to an orgy, the pureness of white is virginal. To appeal to his female customers as always, Mouret combines the usual seductive, immodest atmosphere with a new chasteness, suggesting that he is reevaluating his opinion of women and what tempts them.



Among all the white, the customers look like black spots on Alpine slopes. As soon as Madame de Boves enters the store, Jouve starts following her. The ladies stop to admire the bunches of white violets being handed out for free with every purchase. As they move on, they hear two salesmen wondering whether the violets foreshadow a wedding between Mouret and Denise. Madame Desforges pretends to be indifferent. Madame de Boves and Blanche go up to the first floor, Jouve following them covertly.

A few weeks ago, Denise announced her plan to leave the Paradise for Valognes after the white sale. Some people think that Denise is forcing Mouret to propose by threatening to leave, so people are making bets that she will come back married to Mouret. Denise has no scheme to make Mouret marry her. She wants to leave because she is afraid of giving into Mouret's advances and regretting it. She is pained to leave him but feels that her courage and resolve will bring her peace.

When Denise told Mouret she would be leaving, he tried to reason with her, telling her not to throw away all she achieved. He offered to give her whatever advantages another job might give her. When she refused, he decided that she must be meeting the person she said she loved. This knowledge pains him. During her last week, Mouret walked through the store feeling the uselessness of his power and money. He was afraid to ask Denise to marry him in case she was "the revenge" that would ruin his business success. Sometimes he feels like surrendering to Denise, but he's worried she will still say no.

On the day of the sale, Bourdoncle finds Mouret crying in his office. Bourdoncle shakes Mouret's hand and tells him to marry Denise. Recently, Bourdoncle decided that if Mouret married Denise, his charm would be weakened enough that Bourdoncle could usurp his powerful position. Mouret brushes off Bourdoncle and the two start their daily inspection.

Meanwhile in the children's department, Denise helps Madame Bourdelais find clothes for her kids. Just then, Jean appears. He has just married and will go with Denise to Valognes with his new wife Therese. He came to make an exchange for Therese and brought P  p  , who is now 12 and goes to school in Paris. Denise's brothers are still her world. She gave half her savings to Jean to set up his house and the other half for P  p  's school.

The fact that everything at the Paradise is white also suggests that Mouret has marriage on his mind. Whereas before in his displays he had confused his customers with explosions of color, he now wants to enchant them with simplicity. This shows that Mouret's business schemes have changed to become more humane as a result of his feelings for Denise.



Throughout the story, Mouret has used nothing but schemes to ensnare his customers and his lovers. In contrast to this, Denise employs no schemes to get Mouret, and only tries to act out of qualities that are good in themselves—courage and resolve. This demonstrates how Mouret's exploitative schemes have their limits.



Denise and Mouret are in a standoff because Mouret refuses to relinquish the last bit of his power and ask her to marry him. He fears that Denise will ruin his business, not realizing that not having her has already ruined his energy for business and his enjoyment in the result. Whereas before it seemed that surrender would weaken Mouret, it now seems that surrender—if it gets him Denise—is the only thing that will restore his power.



Like others at the Paradise, Bourdoncle sees opportunity to rise in power, and sets about scheming his way to the top. In this way, The Paradise brings out each person's ambition, but also brings out their cruelest instincts.



Jean and P  p  's situations reveal how Denise has not only raised herself out of poverty, but also her brothers. Denise took advantage of modern opportunities to improve her family's life, but she also guarded against the bad influences of modernity, ultimately protecting Jean from a life of promiscuity.



While making his rounds, Mouret notices Denise scolding her brothers in her gentle, motherly way. He remarks that her brothers are a lot like her, and she jokes that they are better-looking. Unable to resist her love for her brothers, Mouret asks Denise to come to his office after the sale. He goes back to his rounds, and Denise resumes helping Madame Bourdelais.

Mouret is particularly touched by Denise's love for her brothers, suggesting that what truly made him fall in love with her was not her beauty or anything material but rather her genuine character and values, exemplified by her concern for her family.



Then, Denise leads Jean and P  p   to the ladieswear department so Jean can make Therese's exchanges. Clara has disappeared—some saying to become a sex worker—and Marguerite has put in her notice. Madame Aur  lie fears losing her job, knowing that Albert's extravagance and their lack of a family life is putting an end to the "Lhomme dynasty." Madame Aur  lie greets Denise warmly and begs her not to leave, saying everyone will miss her too much.

In contrast to the power and admiration Denise receives due to her strong family values, Madame Aur  lie's lack of family values has ultimately led to her downfall at The Paradise. This suggests that the love of family—a traditional value—is vital to success, even in new modern conditions.



Denise then leads Jean and P  p   through the other departments. They pass the dressing rooms, little stalls of frosted glass where salesgirls are helping women try on clothes. Outside, a man is losing his temper over his wife undressing without him. Denise and her brothers pass through the corset, petticoat, and underclothes departments. Passing through these successive departments, a person witnesses the gradual undressing of women down to their chemises, strewing white garments.

The successive undressing that one witnesses as they pass through the departments is an analogy for the deeper understanding Mouret has gained of women throughout the story. While he first had a shallow understanding of female superficiality, he now seems to have a more intimate knowledge of women, exemplified by the undressing right down to underclothes.



In the linen department, Pauline—who has had her baby—runs up to Denise and tells her she can't leave before she helps Pauline get promoted to assistant buyer. Denise laughs and promises to get Pauline promoted. Denise, Jean, and P  p   continue downstairs. Salesmen quickly stop gossiping about Denise when they see her pass. P  p   and Jean are intimidated by the massive shop and stick close to their sister.

Denise has become vital to the Paradise in her devotion to securing employee rights and helping out her coworkers. In this way, Denise has injected warmth and humanity into the store's operation, which before had operated impersonally, like a machine. She has made it a place of genuine human improvement.



Mouret, Denise, and Madame Desforges pass each other. They all look coldly at one other and then move on. Venting her feelings to Madame Guibal, Madame Desforges says it is shameful that Mouret married a marchioness (Mademoiselle Fontenailles) to a porter. They then go to the silk department, which is like a "huge bedroom dedicated to love."

Significantly, the silk department is like a bedroom dedicated to love rather than to sex. This suggests that Mouret is now appealing to the deeper female instinct of love (which he has learned since liking Denise) instead of their superficial desire for sex.



In the silk department, Favier helps a pretty customer and speculates to Hutin about her life. Hutin stays quiet. The management is displeased with his turnover in the silk department, and his job is now in jeopardy. He can sense that Favier will overthrow him just as Hutin overthrew Robineau. Favier gossips about Denise, and Hutin blurts out that he should have slept with Denise to climb his way to the top. Seeing Madame Desforges, Hutin starts a whispered conversation with her about leaving **the Ladies' Paradise**. Madame Desforges promises to get him a job at the Quatre Saisons when it reopens. Hutin offers her a bunch of violets, but she refuses, saying she wants no part in that wedding.

Madame Desforges rejoins Madame Guibal, who has met up with Madame Marty and Valentine. They have been in the store two hours and have purchased heavily from all the departments. Behind them, a salesman drags a chair piled with purchases. Madame Desforges asks Madame Marty about Monsieur Marty. Thrown off from her fit of spending, Madame Marty answers cursorily. The ladies go to the flower department, and Madame Marty buys a branch of silk apple blossoms. The ladies then go upstairs.

On the way to the perfume department, the ladies pass through the buffet room where assistants are weaning a crowd of customers off the sweets. Madame Marty purchases heavily from the perfume department and then the ladies go to the Japanese display, where Madame Desforges discreetly buys a carved ivory piece. While Madame Marty and Valentine look at china, Madame Desforges and Madame Guibal go to the reading room where they find Vallagnosc. He informs them that Madame de Boves and Blanche are in the lace department and goes to fetch them.

The lace department—"a white chapel"—is very crowded. Madame de Boves, after walking around for a while with Blanche, commands Deloche to pile the finest lace on the counter. Blanche sees Madame de Boves plunge her hands deep in the lace and make some disappear up her sleeve.

Jouve—who has still been spying—whispers for Madame de Boves to follow him. Madame de Boves looks anguished but composes a haughty expression and follows Jouve to Bourdoncle's office. Blanche lingers outside, torn in her loyalties. In his office, Bourdoncle asks Madame de Boves to return the stolen lace. Madame de Boves puffs up indignantly and accuses Bourdoncle of accusing the wife of a count of theft. She threatens legal action, but Bourdoncle sends for two salesgirls to search her.

Hutin realizes that his efforts to climb the ladder of success at the Paradise were in vain. No matter what, the success he gained through overthrowing others would never last, because there will always be others below him to overthrow him. This constant cycle of succession of employees is simply part of the efficient and impersonal machine that the Paradise is. On the other hand, those who are in Denise's favor will be truly successful, her influence at the Paradise seeming to have introduced more of a merit system.



Although Madame Marty's feverish spending at the Ladies' Paradise led to her husband's bankruptcy and his mental break, she continues to buy, presumably now spending the money of the uncle she is living with. This illustrates how the consumerism that the Paradise inspires is an uncontrollable madness that—while it appears to benefit them at first—really only destroys the customer.



Even Madame Desforges—whose high-class airs make her too proud to openly support the Ladies' Paradise—buys something at the sale. Her secrecy in buying the figurine shows how the sophistication that distinguishes the aristocracy is only a disguise; really, Madame Desforges is just like everyone else who is gathered at the Paradise to shop—a mix of all classes pursuing the same desires.



Describing the lace department as a "white chapel" again suggests that Mouret is going for an innocent, yet reverent vibe. Madame de Boves's attempted theft reveals that class has nothing to do with a person's character.



This scene reveals that, in this modern society—or at least in the Ladies' Paradise—a person of high class does not receive special treatment. Although Bourdoncle is perhaps gentler to Madame de Boves than he would be with someone of a different class, his accusation and search of her shows a new disregard for class in favor of equality.



Jouve and Bourdoncle go to a different room while the salesgirls search Madame de Boves. They find 14,000 francs worth of items stuffed in her clothes. She has been stealing like this for a year, her enjoyment increased by the knowledge that she is risking her husband's reputation. Madame de Boves falls into a chair, screaming that someone has set her up. Bourdoncle tells her she must sign a paper that says she stole from **the Ladies' Paradise**, and that he will keep it under threat of publishing until she brings him 2,000 francs. Madame de Boves cries and throws insults, but she eventually signs the paper. She leaves in a huff while Bourdoncle prepares to fire Deloche.

Meanwhile, Blanche finds Vallagnosc and tells him that Madame de Boves was caught stealing. Vallagnosc is shocked by this news and by the fact that Blanche was an accomplice. Seeing Mouret go by, he runs up to him and they go to Mouret's office. Mouret assures Vallagnosc that the de Boves will face no penalties. In a manner uncharacteristic of his usual boredom, Vallagnosc laments that he has married into a family of thieves. He usually scoffs at suffering, but not when it befalls him. They return to the store, where Madame de Boves takes Vallagnosc's arm, lying that **the Ladies' Paradise** had offered her an apology. Vallagnosc and the de Boves leave.

Mouret walks through the store, observing the "nation" of women at his mercy. It is six o'clock, and the white merchandise glows like moonlight. The displays are like curtains concealing "the white nudity of the bride." **the Ladies' Paradise** is becoming a "new religion" of beauty.

Mouret watches his customers leave, knowing that he possesses them all—Madame Marty, Madame Guibal, Madame de Boves, Blanche, Vallagnosc, and even Madame Desforges. He listens to the sounds outside of his customers returning to their homes, and "the soul of Paris" disappearing into the night. Mouret feels something change within him. In his victorious state of having conquered "Woman," he feels the irrational need to be conquered himself.

That evening, Mouret waits in his office. He is about to stake his life's happiness, and he trembles with anxiety. He hears footsteps approach and Lhomme and Joseph appear, dragging the enormous money bags. Lhomme announces the day's takings: over 1 million—a new record. Bourdoncle enters and exclaims over the money piled on Mouret's desk. Mouret shrugs with indifference, and Bourdoncle again tells him to propose to Denise. Mouret says he knows Bourdoncle only wants his job, and then says that he was wrong that marriage would ruin the business; marriage is "the health necessary to life." He dismisses Bourdoncle coldly.

Madame de Boves is held accountable for her attempted theft, showing that her high class means nothing at the Ladies' Paradise. Her success or failure to pay for what she did wrong will determine her reputation henceforward, suggesting that only actions—rather than one's given class—serve to establish a person's place in the world in these times. In general, a person's class is no longer immutable, and mobility up and down from one's born class occurs through action and character.



In realizing that a person's reputation cannot protect them when a person commits a crime, Vallagnosc can no longer sit comfortably and laugh at others' misfortune. He is forced to see that life is not a matter of fortune and misfortune, but instead that a person's actions and character define their place in the world. This at last jolts him from his boredom as he realizes that there is mobility both ways between the classes: just as others can rise to better positions, he can easily fall into misfortune himself.



The Paradise—which tempts through mystery and concealment—now hides "a bride." This image suggests that what Mouret and his business have been missing all along is matrimony.



In the very height of his triumph, Mouret feels incomplete without also surrendering himself. This suggests that an essential part of triumph is one's own surrender. Mouret's mastery of Paris has made him feel powerful, but it has also made him feel lonely, vain, and disgusted with his own power.



Up until this point, Mouret has always staked his entire capital in his store's success, but now he is staking something immaterial—his happiness in a different kind of effort. Mouret realizes that marriage—which he can't buy—is necessary to life. Ironically, just as he has this realization that money is not what really matters (that happiness is a much more valuable and therefore risky thing to risk for something), the Ladies' Paradise earns a million francs.



Just then, Denise appears. Having just heard of Deloche's dismissal, she is sad and is worried that she won't be brave enough to resist Mouret. Mouret seizes Denise's hands and asks if she will stay if he marries her. Denise begs him to stop, reminding him of her brothers. Mouret says that they can be his brothers too, but Denise again refuses.

Mouret feels driven mad by the irony of Denise's refusal and the million dollars sitting on his desk. He yells at Denise to go and be with the man she loves. Astonished by his despair, Denise flings her arms around his neck, and says that *he* is the man she loves. Mouret collapses onto his desk, not noticing the million dollars. He and Denise clutch each other and plan their marriage, while Madame Hédouin smiles in her portrait above them.

When Mouret surrenders and proposes to Denise, she continues to resist him, even though marriage gives her the certainty in love she has been seeking. This shows that Denise has become obstinate in her ideals, and now she too may have to surrender.



Madame Hédouin's portrait smiles as if to sanction Denise and Mouret's eventual marriage. This suggests that the Ladies' Paradise was initially founded on principles of true love and—after having strayed away from these principles into a culture of consumerism and excess—it found its way back to this principle, a reversion which actually promises to reinforce rather than destroy the progressive changes the Ladies' Paradise made.





HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Clark, Cora. "The Ladies' Paradise." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 12 Aug 2022. Web. 12 Aug 2022.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Clark, Cora. "The Ladies' Paradise." LitCharts LLC, August 12, 2022. Retrieved August 12, 2022. <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-ladies-paradise>.

To cite any of the quotes from *The Ladies' Paradise* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Zola, Émile. *The Ladies' Paradise*. Oxford University Press. 2008.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Zola, Émile. *The Ladies' Paradise*. Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press. 2008.