

ACT ONE**PROLOGUE**

In darkness, church bells strike.
Lights up on GORIOT, aged but
robust, on his knees.

GORIOT

Dear God, thank you for all these many
blessings: for this room to shelter me, for
my daily bread, and above all, for my two
angels. I cherish them both. I beg you,
Lord, bring them back into my life or strike
me dead! I cannot bear this torment. Dear
Lord, bless the day, a new dawn in the
miracle of life. Amen.

SCENE 1: MADAME BEAUSEANT'S BALLROOM.

Cross fade to ENSEMBLE dancing.
The women are beautiful, the men
are handsome. They sing.

ENSEMBLE

AH, LIFE!
THAT'S WHAT I CALL THIS.
LOST IN THE MOMENT,
ENCHANTED BY YOU.

ONE SPECIAL HOUR
THE STARS WILL ALL LINE UP
FOR SOMEONE TO MAKE HIS DEBUT.

The ensemble breaks away from
dancing as the music continues.

EUGENE enters at one end. He is
boyish and looks out of place.

ANASTASIE, young and ravishing,
enters with suitors at other end.

BEAUSEANT enters. She is like
royalty and all take notice.

BEAUSEANT

Eugene, my dear cousin. Just because you
are new to Paris does not make you a
wallflower.

EUGENE

I can't believe me eyes.

BEAUSEANT

Don't you care for dancing?

EUGENE

Oh, I'm a dancer, all right. Who is she?

BEAUSEANT

The Countess Anastasie de Restaud. Why not dance with the Countess herself?

EUGENE

I'm not sure this is the right time.

BEAUSEANT

Eugene, if you want the best in life, you must act like you deserve it. Straighten up and I will have you dancing in moments. If you want it, that is.

EUGENE

I want it. More than anything.

BEAUSEANT

Then kiss me.

EUGENE

Kiss you?

BEAUSEANT

If she sees that you are close to me, she will want to get close to you. Go ahead, Eugene. Kiss me.

(Eugene goes to kiss Beauseant)

Slow down! You are making a statement.

(he kisses her softly on one cheek)

Very nice. And now my dear boy,

(she kisses him on both cheeks)

I hope you know how to waltz.

BEAUSEANT exits. ANASTASIE sheds the men and slowly approaches EUGENE. She extends her hand, EUGENE takes it and bows. They dance.

ENSEMBLE

AH LIFE!

YOU KNOW WHEN YOU'RE LIVING

WHENEVER YOU FEEL

YOUR PULSE RUSH TO THE BEAT

AND THE TASTE OF THE SWEAT ON YOUR LIP

IS SWEET.

ANASTASIE

What is your name?

EUGENE

Eugene de Rastignac.

ANASTASIE

You know Madame de Beauseant?

EUGENE

I am her cousin.

ANASTASIE

It is a pleasure to make your acquaintance.

EUGENE

Thank you for the dance.

ANASTASIE

You are welcome. You will always be welcome.

ANASTASIE exits. Lights fade.

SCENE 2: THE NEXT MORNING. MADAME VAUQUER'S BOARDING HOUSE

VAUQUER enters.

VAUQUER

LAST ONE TO BED AND THE FIRST ONE TO RISE
IS THE PRIVILEGE I TOOK ON MY HUSBAND'S DEMISE
WHEN HE LEFT ME THIS HOUSE
AND THE RIGHT TO TAKE RENT.
I'M SURE WITH THE KINDEST INTENT.

I CLEAN AWAY GRIME JUST AS FAST AS I MIGHT
TO MAKE ROOM FOR THE GRIME THAT BUILDS UP EVERY NIGHT
UNTIL ONE OF THESE DAYS,
SHOULD I BREAK DOWN AND FALL,
I'LL BE BURIED IN NO TIME AT ALL.

ACH, LIFE!
IF THAT'S WHAT YOU CALL THIS.
ANOTHER DAY PASSES AND I'M STILL ALIVE.
EACH WAKING HOUR,
MY CHORES ARE ALL LINED UP
AND IF THEY GET DONE
THEN WE MAY WELL SURVIVE.

MULTIPLY THREE HUNDRED SIXTY FIVE DAYS
BY THE THIRTY ODD YEARS I'VE BEEN RUNNING THIS HOUSE
AND YOU'LL THEN REALIZE
WHY I CHERISH AND PRIZE
THESE QUIET FEW MOMENTS
AT THE START OF THE DAY,
WHEN I'M ABLE TO HEAR MYSELF PRAY.

Pause. VAUQUER takes a deep breath
and then a bucket falls, offstage

VAUQUER (cont'd)

(Rolling her eyes)

Good morning, Christophe!

CHRISTOPHE enters

CHRISTOPHE
I hope that didn't wake anybody up.

VAUQUER
I'm sure most lodgers were asleep anyway.

CHRISTOPHE
Oh, good.

VAUQUER
I'm going across the street to get the
bread. I'll be right back.

CHRISTOPHE
I'll mop up quick.

VAUQUER exits. CHRISTOPHE mops.

CHRISTOPHE (cont'd)
THE FIRST OF THE MONTH IS MY FAVORITE DAY
BECAUSE THAT'S WHEN ALL GUESTS ARE REQUIRED TO PAY
FOR THEIR LODGINGS AND MEALS
AND AS SOON AS THEY DO
I GET PAID TOO!

I'M ALL RIGHT.
JUST A BIT TIGHT
AT THE END OF THE MONTH JUST LIKE ANYONE GETS.
I'M ALWAYS ON TIME,
I MIND MY OWN BUSINESS,
I DO WHAT I SAY AND I DON'T CARRY DEBTS.

THE DAY THAT I FIND THAT I'M GETTING AHEAD
IS THE DAY THAT I'LL THINK ABOUT TAKING A CHANCE
OR JUST TAKE THE VACATION I NEVER HAVE KNOWN
OR FIND SOMEWHERE SAFE
WHERE I CAN BE ON MY OWN
WHERE PEOPLE WILL LEAVE ME ALONE.
(he sighs)

SYLVIE (OFF)
Christophe!

CHRISTOPHE drops his mop. SYLVIE
the cook enters.

SYLVIE (cont'd)
What did I tell you last night about the
coffee this morning?

CHRISTOPHE
Yipes, I forgot to make the coffee!

SYLVIE

How can I run a kitchen when I have to give the same orders over and over again.

CHRISTOPHE

You don't need to tell me. I'm done here.

SYLVIE

Well, hurry up.

CHRISTOPHE

All right, all right. I'm going.

CHRISTOPHE exits.

SYVLIE

SAY THE NAME "NAPOLEON"
AND IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN THAT NO ONE WOULD GIVE A HOOT
FOR THERE WOULD BE NO NAPOLEON
IF THE ARMY THAT HE LED
DIDN'T KNOW HOW TO SHOOT.

SYVLIE (cont'd)

I told Christophe to put these napkins on the side table, not the dining tables.

VAUQUER enters.

VAUQUER

The nerve of that baker!

SYLVIE

What is it, madame?

VAUQUER

She has hired new help. If he can afford more help, she must certainly be charging too much for the bread.

SYLVIE

Perhaps I should start baking it myself.

VAUQUER

That's all right. Starting tomorrow, we get a five percent discount.

SYLVIE

Well done, madame.

VAUQUER

PAY THE SAME AS ANYONE
AND YOU MIGHT AS WELL DELIVER AN OPEN PURSE.
FOR YOU CAN'T TRUST JUST ANYONE
TO DETERMINE WHAT TO TAKE
IN ORDER TO REIMBURSE HERSELF.

SYLVIE
UNLESS YOU WANT TO CURSE YOURSELF!

TOGETHER
GIVE A THIEF A KEY TO THE DOOR
IS ALL THAT COULD BE WORSE!

A knock at the door.

VAUQUER
Who could that be?

SYLVIE
It's so early!

ANASTASIE enters.

VAUQUER
May I help you?

ANASTASIE
Monsieur Goriot, if you please.

VAUQUER
May I tell him who is here?

ANASTASIE
The Countess de Restaud.

VAUQUER
Christophe! (to Anastasie) You can sit
over there.

ANASTASIE
Thank you.

CHRISTOPHE enters, stares at
ANASTASIE.

CHRISTOPHE
She's back!

VAUQUER
(to Christophe)
Christophe, close your mouth and go get
Goriot.

CHRISTOPHE exits, upstairs

SYLVIE
The dirty old man! He must have three dozen
mistresses.

VAUQUER
Where's he getting the money?

SYLVIE

I wish I had money to throw around like that.

VAUQUER

Her wig has seen more perfume this morning than I have in my life.

TOGETHER

WAS THERE A LINE WHEN THEY HANDED OUT LUCK?
 WHAT WAS I DOING THAT DAY?
 WHO WAS THE DEALER WHO SHUFFLED THE CARDS?
 WHOEVER SAID I WOULD PLAY?
 I LOOK AT HER
 THEN LOOK AT MYSELF;
 IT CUTS ME TO THE CORE AS DEEP AS A KNIFE
 TO SEE THAT THIS IS MY LIFE.

VAUTRIN enters.

VAUTRIN

Good morning, Madame. How about a big hug?

VAUQUER

(resisting, without much vigor)
 This is not a brothel, you know!

VAUTRIN

Thank goodness for that. Allow me to settle my monthly charges.

VAUQUER

Thank you. You're so very reliable.

SYLVIE

(to Vautrin) Sit down, spendthrift. Your coffee is ready.

VAUTRIN

Did you pour the cream first?

SYLVIE

As always.

VAUQUER

Monsieur Vautrin, you're a sophisticated man. You tell me. As owner of this house, am I not entitled to know what goes on in it?

VAUTRIN

That sounds like a legal question. Ask Eugene.

SYLVIE

He was out all night. Don't expect him up anytime soon.

VAUTRIN

What's the problem, Mama?

VAUQUER

That old man Goriot hides away upstairs all day and night, and he won't tell me what he's doing!

VAUTRIN

Do you really care?

VAUQUER

I think I have a right to know!

SYLVIE

He's got another trollop waiting for him.

VAUTRIN

It's not the same one as last time?

SYLVIE

No! Last time it was a blonde.

VAUTRIN

An easy disguise, Sylvie. Who is she?

VAUQUER

A "Countess!"

VAUTRIN

Royalty to see old Goriot?

SYLVIE

He claims it's his daughter.

VAUQUER

He better not be breaking the law in my house!

GORIOT enters

GORIOT

Anastasie, my dear. I'm so sorry to keep you waiting. At last a private moment with you.

ANASTASIE

It's hardly private. I can hear every word those vulgar people are saying about me.

GORIOT

Why if they've cast a single hurtful word --

ANASTASIE

No matter, Papa. I'm in a hurry. Did you have any success?

GORIOT

Yes. My silver fetched a decent sum considering its condition. But I separated the trinkets and polished each one and with each tiny trinket, I then . . .

ANASTASIE

(taking envelope)

Thank you, Papa. You're such a dear, but I must be going.

GORIOT

Of course. But you are still expecting me this afternoon?

ANASTASIE

Four o'clock sharp. You will walk me to the door?

GORIOT

Certainly, dear.

VAUTRIN

(to Anastasie) Have a good day, my lady.

GORIOT

Just ignore them, my sweet. I'll walk you to your carriage.

ANASTASIE

No need, Papa. Good day.

ANASTASIE exits

VAUTRIN

(to Goriot)

Come now, monsieur, who was that really?

GORIOT

She's my daughter.

SYLVIE

Another daughter?

VAUQUER

She's no Goriot. She calls herself "Restaud."

VAUTRIN

As in the Count de Restaud?

GORIOT

That's her husband.

SYLVIE

Just how many daughters do you have, anyway?

GORIOT

Two. Two angels.

VAUQUER

Then who are all these women? We can see you are giving them money.

GORIOT

Why am I wasting my time? I have to get back to work.

GORIOT exits.

VAUQUER

Work? He has no work. You see why I am suspicious?

Enter VICTORINE, young and pretty,
MICHONNEAU, aged and mousey, and
POIRET, old and frail.

VAUTRIN

Ah, Monsieur, ladies. Welcome. And tell us Victorine, how many daughters does your father have?

VICTORINE

(suspiciously) Just me.

VAUTRIN

Ah yes, but you have the misfortune that your father also has a son.

VICTORINE

That's my father's good fortune.

VAUQUER

That man has plenty of fortune, all right.

MICHONNEAU

Leave dear Victorine alone about her father, especially on the day we return to see him.

SYLVIE

(to Victorine) Only six months ago, you were turned away like a street peddler!

MICHONNEAU

And the visit before that, her father took all her mother's letters and threw them in the fire! Can you imagine? Destroying everything the girl had left to remember her mother.

VAUQUER

She's shaking like a leaf.

POIRET

Like a little bird!

VAUQUER

Have some cocoa, dear. It will warm you.

VICTORINE

This morning at church, I will pray that my father will receive me this time.

VAUQUER

(to Michonneau) I still cannot figure it out; I have a lodger who is the daughter of the richest man in Paris, but she can only afford my cheapest room.

MICHONNEAU

Disgraceful. (to Poiret) Isn't it?

POIRET

Who? Oh, yes. If I were her father . . .

MICHONNEAU

Of course, when I was little girl, my father was hard on me too. Oh, the rage if I didn't do my nightly course work! But I always knew that he loved me. Victorine's father, on the other hand; How can a man be that way to a child?

VAUTRIN

If I were you, Victorine, I'd supplement those prayers with a little planning.

MICHONNEAU

Prayers are more than sufficient.

VAUTRIN

To get to your father, you have get past the front door.

VICTORINE

If it pleases God.

VAUTRIN

Does your misery please God as much it does your brother? We remember what you heard last time as you were sent away.

VICTORINE

That was last time; this is a new day.

VAUTRIN

You've been sent to live in this slum with barely a centime in your purse, and as the butler slams the door on you, your brother is heard laughing.

(MORE)