

**THE LADIES'
PARADISE, VOL. III**

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The Ladies' Paradise, Vol. III by Émile Zola & Frank Belmont

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ÉMILE ZOLA & FRANK BELMONT

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PARADISE, VOL. III**

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THE LADIES' PARADISE.

BY
ÉMILE ZOLA.

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FRANK BELMONT.
(WITH THE AUTHOR'S SPECIAL PERMISSION.)

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THE LADIES' PARADISE.



CHAPTER I.

THAT day, Bouthemont was the first to arrive at Mrs. Desforges' five o'clock tea. Still alone in her large Louis XVI. drawing-room, the brasses and brocatelle of which shone out with a clear gaiety, the latter rose with an air of impatience, saying :

“ Well ? ”

“ Well ? ” replied the young man, “ when I told him I should doubtless call on you, he formally promised me to come.”

“ You made him thoroughly understand that I counted on the Baron to-day ? ”

“ Certainly. It's that that appeared to decide him.”

They were speaking of Mouret, who last year had suddenly taken such a liking to Bouthemont that he had admitted him to share his pleasures, and had even introduced him to Henrietta, glad

to have an agreeable fellow at hand to enliven a *liaison* of which he was getting tired. It was thus that Bouthemont had ultimately become the confidant of his governor and of the handsome widow; he did their little errands, talked of the one to the other, and sometimes reconciled them. Henrietta, in her jealous fits, abandoned herself to a familiarity which sometimes surprised him, for she lost all her lady-like prudence, using all her art to save appearances.

She resumed, violently :

“You ought to have brought him. I should have been sure then.”

“Well,” said he, with a good-natured laugh, “it isn't my fault if he escapes so frequently, lately. Oh, he's very fond of me, all the same. Were it not for him, I should be in a bad way in the shop.”

His situation at The Ladies' Paradise was really menaced since the last stock-taking. It was in vain that he adduced the rainy season; they could not overlook the considerable stock of fancy silks; and as Hutin was improving the occasion, undermining him with the governors with a sly rage, he felt the ground cracking under him. Mouret had condemned him, weary, no doubt, of this witness which prevented him breaking with Henrietta, tired of a familiarity

which was profitless. But, in accordance with his usual tactics, he was pushing Bourdoncle forward; "it was Bourdoncle and the other partners," said he, "who insisted on his dismissal at each board meeting, whilst he resisted still, defending his friend energetically, at the risk of getting into serious trouble with the others."

"Well, I shall wait," resumed Mrs. Desforges. "You know this girl is coming here at five o'clock, I want to see them face to face. I must discover their secret."

And she returned to this long-meditated plan. She repeated, in her fever, that she had requested Madame Aurelie to send her Denise for a mantle which fitted badly. When she had once got the young girl in her room, she would find a means of calling Mouret, and could then act.

Bouthemont, who had sat down opposite her, was gazing at her with his fine laughing eyes, which he endeavoured to render grave. This jovial dissipated fellow, with his coal-black beard, whose warm Gascon blood empurpled his cheeks, was thinking that these fine ladies were not much good, and that they let out a nice lot of secrets, when they opened their hearts. Certainly his friend's mistresses, simple shop-girls, could never make any more complete confessions.

"Come," he ventured to say, at last, "what