

Au Bonheur Des Dames = the Ladies' Delight Study Guide

Au Bonheur Des Dames = the Ladies' Delight by Émile Zola

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Quotes

"Here, there was the continuous purring of a machine at work, the customers shovelled in, heaped in front of the displays and dazzled by the goods, before being hurled against the cash desks. And it was all organized and regulated with mechanical precision, a whole nation of women caught up in the power and logic of the turning cogs." (Chapter 1, p. 16)

"And his passions were like an advertisement for the shop: you might have thought that he was embracing the whole of the fair sex in a single caress, the better to bewitch them and keep them at his mercy." (Chapter 2, p. 33)

"A shrug of the shoulders seemed to indicate that he would discard them all like empty wrapping paper, once they had helped him to make his fortune." (Chapter 2, p. 34)

"We'll lose a few centimes on each item, I admit. So what? A fine disaster that will be if we attract all those women and have them at our mercy, enthralled, driven crazy by the profusion of merchandise and emptying their purses, without pausing to count. All that matters, my dear friend, is to excite them, and for that we need one item which cajoles them and causes a stir. After that, you can sell the rest as dear as it is elsewhere and they'll still think they are getting it cheaper from you..." (Chapter 2, p. 39)

"The ordinary sales staff in the firm make three or four thousand francs, more than you do, and their education never cost anything, unlike yours, they were never sent out into the world with a signed guarantee that they would conquer it. Of course, earning money is not everything. All I can say, though is that between the poor devils with a veneer of education who clutter up the liberal professions and don't have enough to fill their bellies, and practical chaps, well prepared for life, who know their job from top to bottom—darn it, I know which I'd choose: I'm for the second against the first, because I think these are the ones who really understand the times we live in." (Chapter 3, p. 65)

"Woman was what the shops were fighting over when they competed, it was woman whom they ensnared with the constant trap of their bargains, after stunning her with their displays. They had aroused new desires in her flesh, they were a huge temptation to which she must fatally succumb, first of all giving in to the purchases of a good housewife, then seduced by vanity and finally consumed." (Chapter 3, p. 75)

"The idea of having the merchandise at a loss stirred the callous side of their feminine nature, which means that a woman's pleasure in buying something is doubled when she thinks she is robbing the person who sells it to her." (Chapter 3, p. 80)

"He was Woman: they felt penetrated and possessed by that delicate sense he had of their innermost beings, and they abandoned themselves, seduced by him; while he, now certain that he had them at his mercy, enthroned as conqueror above them, seemed like the despotic clothing king." (Chapter 3, p. 83)



"This was her life now. She had to smile, put a brave and pleasant face on everything, in a silk dress that did not belong to her, and she ached with tiredness, was ill-fed, badly treated, constantly under threat of summary dismissal." (Chapter 5, p. 121)

"Was love so stupid then? What! Here was a young man who had such happiness within his grasp yet was ruining his life, worshipping this hussy as though she were the holy sacrament!" (Chapter 5, p. 131)

"Mixing daily with the customers, almost all the assistants took on airs and ended up in an indistinct social class, somewhere between the workers and the bourgeoisie; but beneath their skill in dressing, beneath the manners and ways of speaking they had acquired, there was often only a superficial learning, picked up through reading the popular newspapers, from speeches in the theatre and all the nonsense going the rounds on the streets of Paris." (Chapter 6, p. 152)

"As a matter of fact, everyone in the department, from the new recruit aspiring to become a salesman, to the chief salesman coveting a managerial post, had only one obsession, which was to unseat the colleague above him in order to move up one step, and to devour him if he became an obstacle. And this clash of desires, with each one pushing against the next, was central to the smooth running of the machine which stimulated sales and lit a flame of success that amazed the whole of Paris." (Chapter 6, p. 158)

"Yes, count on it—and live on hot air! Oh, they're not sparing when it comes to fine words. If you want promises, here's plenty! Then they feed you old leather and kick you out of the door like a dog!" (Chapter 6, p. 162)

"And yet, she only had to agree. Her poverty would be over, she would have money, dresses and a fine room. It was easy: they said that all women came to that eventually, because in Paris a woman could not live from her work alone. But something in her being revolted against it, without any indignation against other women, but simply rejecting what was demeaning and unreasonable. Her concept of life was logic, wisdom and courage." (Chapter 7, p. 182)

"One can be respectable wherever one lives, and there is even greater merit in being so when you are not wealthy." (Chapter 7, p. 201)

"This is why everything was falling apart, the family no longer existed, people lived in hotels, instead of eating their soup decently in their own homes." (Chapter 8, p. 218)

"In short, if they wanted to behave, they could, because unlike the working girls on the streets of Paris they did not have to feed and house themselves: they had their meals and a bed, so their lives were assured, hard though they were. The worst thing was their vague, indeterminate situation, between shop girls and ladies. Thrown into all that luxury, without any basic education, they formed a nameless class apart: this was the source of their misfortunes and their vices." (Chapter 11, p. 306)



"They tore each other to pieces behind the counters, one woman devouring another, in a bitter rivalry of money and beauty. There was this surly jealousy of the salesgirls towards well-dressed customers, the ladies whose manners they tried to copy and a still greater jealousy of badly dressed, petty bourgeois customers against the salesgirls, with their silk dresses, whom they expected to humble themselves like servants for a purchase of ten sous." (Chapter 11, p. 306)

"Take everything from a woman, exploit her like a coal mine, because afterwards she'll be the one who exploits you and makes you cough up! Be careful, because she'll get more blood and money out of you than you ever did out of her." (Chapter 11, p. 310)

"This dog's life made the best of them bad and the sad procession began: all of them eaten up by the job before the age of forty, disappearing into the unknown, several of them dying, consumptive or anaemic, killed by exhaustion or the bad air, some ending on the streets, the luckiest married and buried in some little shop in the provinces. Was it human, was it right, this appalling consumption of flesh by the department stores every year?" (Chapter 12, p. 348)

"One should always believe women to be respectable, Monsieur. I can assure you, there are many who are." (Chapter 12, p. 345)

"You could not cling to your dead, you had to bury them—and with a gesture he dispatched underground, swept aside and cast into the paupers' grave the corpse of old-fashioned trade, the mouldy, diseased remains of which were becoming a blot on the sunny streets of the new Paris. No, no, he felt no remorse, he was simply doing the work of his time, as she very well knew, being someone who loved life and had a passion for grand schemes carried out in the full light of publicity." (Chapter 13, p. 367)

"And she could not save any of them; she knew that it was good and that this dunghill of miseries was essential to the health of the Paris of tomorrow. When day came, she grew calmer, a great sorrowful sense of resignation keeping her eyes open and turned towards the slowly lightened window panes. Yes, it was the debt of blood: every revolution needed martyrs and one could only go forward over the dead. Her fear of having been a bane to them, of having participated in the murder of those close to her, now dissolved into a pitying sense of regret at these unavoidable ills which are the birth pangs of every generation." (Chapter 13, p. 368)

"Mouret had invented this machine for crushing people, the brutal operation of which outraged her. He had strewn the neighborhood with ruins, dispossessing some and killing others; and she loved him despite it all for the greatness of what he was doing, she loved him more and more at each excess of his power, despite the flood of tears that swept over her when she witnessed the sacred suffering of the vanquished." (Chapter 13, p. 380)

"It was as though the colossus, after its successive expansions, seized by shame and repugnance for the dingy district in which it had its humble birth—and which it subsequently slaughtered—had just turned its back, leaving behind the mud of these



narrow streets, and offering its parvenu's face to the noisy, sunlit avenue of the New Paris." (Chapter 14, p. 382)