



La Vieille Fille (French Edition)

Honoré de Balzac

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En 1816, à Alençon, Rose Cormon, quarante ans, attend toujours le mari digne de son rang. Issue de la bonne bourgeoisie, elle est parmi les plus riches personnes de la ville. La description minutieuse de sa maison et de la vie qu'elle y mène sont typiques de la manière balzacienne.

Autour de Rose s'agitent deux prétendants : le chevalier de Valois, vieux beau qui a gardé les manières de l'Ancien Régime, et Monsieur du Bousquier, ancien agioteur du Directoire. L'un, royaliste ultra, est d'une grande distinction ; l'autre, vulgaire au physique comme au moral, est un libéral. Tous deux convoitent la main et la fortune de Rose Cormon, le premier afin de retrouver son train de vie d'avant la Révolution, le second afin d'investir dans l'industrie du département. Les deux prétendants incarnent l'antithèse entre passé et futur, et se livrent une sourde lutte. Du Bousquier calomnie le chevalier en prétendant qu'il a secrètement épousé la blanchisseuse Césarine, sa logeuse. Pour se venger, le chevalier lui adresse la jolie Suzanne (future Madame du Val-Noble) qui se dit enceinte de du Bousquier afin de le faire chanter. Aux deux rivaux s'ajoute Athanase Granson, bien plus jeune que Rose et réellement amoureux d'elle, et qui se suicidera de chagrin.

Désespérée par la nouvelle que le vicomte de Troisville, sur lequel elle avait mis ses espérances, est déjà marié, Rose Cormon finit par arrêter son choix sur du Bousquier. La déception sera vive pour celle qui attendait tant des joies du mariage et qui aurait « acheté un enfant par cent années d'enfer » : la dernière ligne du roman confirme brutalement ce que laissaient attendre de nombreuses allusions tout au long du récit, du Bousquier est impuissant.

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