

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen  
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac  
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
Burroughs Verne  
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Whitman  
Darwin Thoreau Twain  
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott  
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte  
London Descartes Cervantes Wells Hesse  
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# **The Stepmother, A Drama in Five Acts**

Honoré de Balzac

# Imprint

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## **PERSONS OF THE PLAY**

Comte de Grandchamp, a Napoleonic General

Eugene Ramel, a State's Attorney

Ferdinand Marcandal

Doctor Vernon

Godard

An Investigating Magistrate

Felix, servant to General de Grandchamp

Champagne, a foreman

Baudrillon, a druggist

Napoleon, son to General de Grandchamp by his second wife

Gertrude, second wife to General de Grandchamp

Pauline, daughter to General de Grandchamp by his first wife

Marguerite, maid to Pauline

Gendarmes, Sheriff's Officer, the Clergy

**SCENE: Chateau of the General de Grandchamp, near  
Louviers, Normandy**

**TIME: 1829**

# THE STEPMOTHER

## ACT I

### SCENE FIRST

(A richly decorated drawing-room; on the walls are portraits of Napoleon I. and his son. The entry is by a large double glass door, which opens on a roofed veranda and leads by a short stairway to a park. The door of Pauline's apartments are on the right; those of the General and his wife are on the left. On the left side of the central doorway is a table, and on the right is a cabinet. A vase full of flowers stands by the entrance to Pauline's room. A richly carved marble mantel, with a bronze clock and candelabras, faces these apartments. In the front of the stage are two sofas, one on the left, the other on the right. Gertrude enters, carrying the flowers which she has just plucked, and puts them in the vase.)

Gertrude and the General.

Gertrude I assure you, my dear, that it would be unwise to defer any longer giving your daughter in marriage. She is now twenty-two. Pauline has been very slow in making her choice; and, in such a case, it is the duty of parents to see that their children are settled. Moreover, I am very much interested in her.

The General  
In what way?

Gertrude The position of stepmother is always open to suspicion; and for some time it has been rumored in Louviers that I am the person who throws obstacles in the way of Pauline's marriage.

The General That is merely the idle gossip of little towns. I should like to cut out some of those silly tongues. And to think that they should attack you of all people, Gertrude, who have been a real mother to Pauline—whom you have educated most excellently!

Gertrude It is the way of the world! They will never forgive us for living so close to the town, yet never entering it. The society of the place revenges itself upon us for slighting it. Do you think that our happiness can escape envy? Even our doctor—

The General  
Do you mean Vernon?

Gertrude Yes, Vernon is very envious of you; he is vexed to think that he has never been able to inspire any woman with such affection as I have for you. Moreover, he pretends that I am merely playing a part,—as if I could do it for twelve years! Rather unlikely, I should think.

The General No woman could keep up the pretence for twelve years without being found out. The idea is absurd! And Vernon also is—

Gertrude Oh, he is only joking! And so, as I told you before, you had better see Godard. I am astonished that he has not yet arrived. He is so rich that it would be folly to refuse him. He is in love with Pauline, and although he has his faults, and is somewhat provincial, he is quite able to make her happy.

The General  
I have left Pauline quite free to choose a husband for herself.

Gertrude There is no cause for anxiety. A girl so gentle, so well brought up, so well behaved, is sure to do right.

The General  
Gentle, did you say? She is headstrong, like her father.

Gertrude

She, headstrong? And you, come now, do you not always act as I wish?

The General You are no angel, and always wish what pleases me!  
By the bye, Vernon takes dinner with us after his autopsy.

Gertrude

Was it necessary to tell me that?

The General

I only told you, in order that he might have his favorite wines.

Felix (enters, announcing)

Monsieur de Rimonville!

The General

Ask him in.

Gertrude (making a sign to Felix to arrange the vase of flowers) I will go to Pauline's room, while you are talking business. I should like to superintend the arrangement of her toilet. Young people do not always understand what is most becoming to them.

The General She has no expense spared her! During the last eighteen months her dress has cost twice as much as it previously did; after all, poor girl, it is the only amusement she has.

Gertrude How can you say it is her only amusement while she has the privilege of living with us! If it were not my happy lot to be your wife, I should like to be your daughter. I will never leave you, not I! Did you say for the last eighteen months? That is singular! Well, when I come to think of it, she has begun to care more about laces, jewels, and other pretty things.

The General

She is quite rich enough to indulge her tastes.

Gertrude And she is now of age. (Aside) Her fondness of dress is the smoke. Can there be any fire? (Exit.)

## SCENE SECOND

The General (alone) What a pearl among women! Thus I am made happy after twenty-six campaigns, a dozen wounds, and the death of an angel, whose place she has taken in my heart; truly a kind Providence owed me some such recompense as this, if it were only to console me for the death of the Emperor.

## SCENE THIRD

Godard and the General.

Godard (entering)  
Well, General!

The General  
Ah! good day, Godard! I hope you are come to spend the day with us?

Godard I thought perhaps I might spend the week, General, if you should regard favorably the request which I shall venture to make of you.

The General  
Go in and win! I know what request you mean—My wife is on your side.  
Ah, Godard, you have attacked the fortress at its weak point!

Godard

General, you are an old soldier, and have no taste for mere phrases. In all your undertakings you go straight ahead, as you did when under fire.

The General

Straight and facing the whole battery.

Godard

That suits me well, for I am rather timid.

The General You! I owe you, my dear friend, an apology; I took you for a man who was too well aware of his own worth.

Godard You took me to be conceited! But General, as a matter of fact, I intend to marry because I don't know how to pay any court to women.

The General (aside) What a civilian! (Aloud) How is this? You talk like an old man, and – that is not the way to win my daughter.

Godard Do not misunderstand me. I have a warm heart; I wish only to feel sure that I shall be accepted.

The General

That means that you don't mind attacking unwalled towns.

Godard

That is not it at all, General. You quite alarm me, with your banter.

The General

What do you mean then?

Godard I understand nothing about the tricks of women. I know no more when their yes means no, than when their no means yes; and when I am in love, I wish to be loved in return.

The General (aside)

With such ideas as those he has precious little chance.

Godard There are plenty of men like me, men who are supremely bored by this little warfare of manners and whims.

The General But there is something also delightful in it,—I mean in the feminine show of resistance, which gives one the pleasure of overcoming it.

Godard Thank you, nothing of that sort for me! When I am hungry, I do not wish to coquette with my soup. I like to have things decided, and care very little how the decision is arrived at, although I do come from Normandy. In the world, I see coxcombs who creep into the favor of women by saying to them, "Ah! madame, what a pretty frock you have on. Your taste is perfect. You are the only person who could wear that," and starting from such speeches as that they go on and on—and gain their end. They are wonderful fellows, upon my honor! I don't see how they reach success by such idle talk. I should beat about the bush through all eternity before I could tell a pretty woman the effect she had made on me.

The General

The men of the Empire were not of that sort.

Godard It is on account of that, that I put on a bold face! This boldness when backed by an income of forty thousand francs is accepted without protest, and wins its way to the front. That is why you took me for a good match. So long as there are no mortgages on the rich pasture lands of the Auge Valley, so long as one possesses a fine chateau, well furnished—for my wife need bring with her nothing but her trousseau, since she will find there even the cashmeres and laces of my late mother—when a man has all that, General, he has got all the courage he need have. Besides, I am now Monsieur de Rimonville.

The General

No, you're only Godard.

Godard  
Godard de Rimonville.

The General  
Godard for short.

Godard  
General, you are trying my patience.

The General As for me, it would try my patience to see a man, even if he were my son-in-law, deny his father; and your father, a right honest man, used himself to drive his bees from Caen to Poissy, and all along the road was known as Godard—Father Godard.

Godard  
He was highly thought of.

The General He was, in his own class. But I see what's the matter; as his cattle provided you with an income of forty thousand francs, you are counting upon other animals to give you the name of De Rimonville.

Godard Now come, General, you had better consult Mlle. Pauline; she belongs to her own epoch—that she does. We are now in the year 1829 and Charles X. is king. She would sooner hear the valet call out, as she left a ballroom, "the carriage of Madame de Rimonville," than, "the carriage of Madame Godard."

The General Well, if such silliness as this pleases my daughter, it makes no difference to me. For, after all, you would be the one they'd poke fun at, my dear Godard.

Godard  
De Rimonville.

The General Godard, you are a good fellow, you are young, you are rich, you say that you won't pay your court to women, but that your wife shall be the queen of your house. Well, if you gain her

consent you can have mine; for bear in mind, Pauline will only marry the man she loves, rich or poor. There may be one exception, but that doesn't concern you. I would prefer to attend her funeral rather than take her to the registry office to marry a man who was a son, grandson, brother, nephew, cousin or connection of one of the four or five wretches who betrayed — you know what my religion is —

Godard

Betrayed the Emperor. Yes, everyone knows your creed, General.

The General God, first of all; then France or the Emperor — It is all the same to me. Lastly, my wife and children! Whoever meddles with my gods becomes my enemy; I would kill him like a hare, remorselessly. My catechism is short, but it is good. Do you know why, in the year 1816, after their cursed disbanding of the army of the Loire, I took my little motherless child and came here, I, colonel of the Young Guard, wounded at Waterloo, and became a cloth manufacturer of Louviers?

Godard

I suppose you didn't wish to hold office under them.

The General

No, because I did not wish to die as a murderer on the scaffold.

Godard

What do you mean?

The General If I had met one of those traitors, I should have finished his business for him. Even to-day, after some fifteen years, my blood boils if I read their names in the newspaper or anyone mentions them in my presence. And indeed, if I should meet one of them, nothing would prevent me from springing at his throat, tearing him to pieces, strangling him —

Godard

You would do right. (Aside) I must humor him.

The General Yes, sir, I would strangle him! And if my son-in-law were to ill-treat my dear child, I would do the same to him.

Godard  
Ah!

The General I shouldn't wish him to be altogether under her thumb. A man ought to be king in his own house, as I am here.

Godard (aside)  
Poor man! How he deceives himself!

The General  
Did you speak?

Godard I said, General, that your threat had no terrors for me! When one has nothing but a wife to love, he loves her well.

The General Quite right, my dear Godard. And now with regard to the marriage settlement?

Godard  
Oh, yes!

The General  
My daughter's portion consists of—

Godard  
Consists of—

The General It comprises her mother's fortune and the inheritance of her uncle Boncoeur. It will be undivided, for I give up my rights to it. This will amount to three hundred and fifty thousand francs and a year's interest, for Pauline is twenty-two.

Godard This will make up three hundred and sixty-seven thousand five hundred francs.

The General  
No.

Godard  
Why not?

The General  
It will be more!

Godard  
More?

The General  
Four hundred thousand francs. (Godard seems astonished.) I make up the difference! But when I die there will be nothing more coming to her. Do you understand?

Godard  
I do not understand.

The General  
I am very much attached to little Napoleon.

Godard  
You mean the young Duke of Reichstadt?

The General No, my son whom they would enter in the register only under the name of Leon; but I had inscribed here (he places his hand upon his heart) the name of Napoleon! Do you see I must provide for him and his mother?

Godard (aside)  
Especially for his mother; she'll take care of that!

The General

What are you saying? If you don't agree with me, out with it!

Godard (aside) If I did so, we should find ourselves in the law courts. (Aloud) I agree, and will back you in everything, General.

The General

Good for you! And I'll tell you why, my dear Godard.

Godard

De Rimonville.

The General Godard, I prefer Godard. I'll tell you why. After having commanded the grenadiers of the Young Guard, I, General Comte de Grandchamp, now weave the cloth for their uniforms.

Godard This is very commendable! You should keep on storing up, General, so that your widow may not be left without a fortune.

The General

She is an angel, Godard!

Godard

De Rimonville.

The General Godard, she is an angel, to whom you are indebted for the education of your intended, whom she has moulded after her own image. Pauline is a pearl, a jewel; she has never left this home; she is as pure and innocent as she was in her cradle.

Godard

General, let me admit that Mlle. Pauline is beautiful!

The General

I am quite sure of that.

Godard She is very beautiful; but there are numbers of beautiful girls in Normandy, some of them very rich, much richer than she is.

Well now, you'll scarcely believe how the mothers and fathers of these heiresses run after me! It is scarcely decent. But it amuses me immensely; I visit their chateaus; they overwhelm me with attentions—

The General

I said he was conceited!

Godard Oh, I am quite aware that it is not for my sake! I don't delude myself as to that; it is for my unmortgaged pastures; for my savings, and for my habit of living within my income. Do you know what it is that makes me seek an alliance with you above all others?

The General

No.

Godard

There are certain rich would-be fathers-in-law who promise to obtain from his Majesty a decree, by which I shall be created Comte de Rimonville and Peer of France.

The General

You?

Godard

Yes, I.

The General Have you won any battles? Have you saved your country? Have you added to its glory? This is pitiful!

Godard Pitiful? (Aside) What shall I say? (Aloud) We differ in our views on this subject, but do you know why I prefer your adorable Pauline?

The General

I suppose it is because you love her.

Godard That is a matter of course; but it is also on account of the harmony, the tranquillity, the happiness which reign here! It is so delightful to enter a family of high honor, of pure, sincere, patriarchal manners! I am a man of observation.

The General

That is to say, you are inquisitive.

Godard Curiosity, General, is the mother of observation. I know the seamy side of the whole department.

The General

Really?

Godard Yes, really! In all the families of which I have spoken to you, I have seen some shabbiness or other. The public sees the decent exterior of irreproachable mothers of family, of charming young persons, of good fathers, of model uncles; they are admitted to the sacrament without confession, they are entrusted with the investments of others. But just learn their inner side, and it is enough to startle a police magistrate.

The General Ah! That is the way you look at the world, is it? For my part, I try to keep up the illusions in which I have lived. To peer into the inner life of people in that way is the business of priests and magistrates; I have no love for the black robed gentlemen, and I hope to die without ever having seen them! But the sentiment which you express with regard to my house is more pleasing to me than all your fortune. Stick to that point, and you will win my esteem, something which I lightly bestow on no one.

Godard Thank you, General. (Aside) I have won over the father-in-law at any rate.

## SCENE FOURTH

The same persons, Pauline and Gertrude.

The General (catching sight of Pauline)  
Ah! Here you are, darling.

Gertrude  
Doesn't she look beautiful?

Godard  
Madame.

Gertrude  
Forgive me, sir. I had no eyes excepting for my handiwork.

Godard  
Mademoiselle is radiant!

Gertrude We have some people to dinner to-day, and I am something more than a stepmother to her; I love to deck her out, for she is to me like my own daughter.

Godard (aside)  
They were evidently expecting me!

Gertrude (aside to Godard) I am going to leave you alone with her. Now is the time for your declaration. (To the General) My dear, let us go out on the veranda and see if our friend the doctor is coming.

The General  
I am at your service, as usual. (To Pauline) Good-bye, my pet. (To Godard) I shall see you later.

(Gertrude and the General go to the veranda, but Gertrude keeps her eye on Godard and Pauline. Ferdinand shows his head at the door of Pauline's chamber, but at a quick sign from her, he hurriedly withdraws it unobserved.)