



Rise and Fall of Cesar Birotteau

By Honore de Balzac

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During winter nights noise never ceases in the Rue Saint-Honore except for a short interval. Kitchen-gardeners carrying their produce to market continue the stir of carriages returning from theatres and balls. Near the middle of this sustained pause in the grand symphony of Parisian uproar, which occurs about one o'clock in the morning, the wife of Monsieur Cesar Birotteau, a perfumer established near the Place Vendome, was startled from her sleep by a frightful dream. She had seen her double. She had appeared to herself clothed in rags, turning with a shrivelled, withered hand the latch of her own shop-door, seeming to be at the threshold, yet at the same time seated in her armchair behind the counter. She was asking alms of herself, and heard herself speaking from the doorway and also from her seat at the desk. She tried to grasp her husband, but her hand fell on a cold place. Her terror became so intense that she could not move her neck, which stiffened as if petrified; the membranes of her throat became glued together, her voice failed...



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