

**Excerpt from *What Horizon*, a stage adaptation of *Les Misérables* by Percy Liftin-Harris**

*Morning, June 5, 1832. Relentlessly lighthearted companions JOLY and BOSSUET, two young women of the revolutionary society Les Amis de l'ABC, dine at the Café Corinthe before joining their friends at the riot.*

BOSSUET

Hm! These oysters are— you know, with the meal we had last week, you wouldn't think it would be possible for the oysters to be *even worse* than they were.

JOLY

And yet! Madame Hucheloup's culinary achievements continue to astound!

BOSSUET

She ought to be given some sort of award.

JOLY

Named a great heroine of our age!

BOSSUET

Given a personal commendation by the king himself!

JOLY

Speaking of which...

BOSSUET

(wincing)

Right...

JOLY

We really *should* be at the funeral.

BOSSUET

Ah, what is it? Ten? Ten-thirty? They probably haven't even started walking yet. I'm *sure* we're fine.

JOLY

What if we miss it! Imagine if we missed the entire revolution! "Well, hello there, Joly and Bossuet, we've just had a splendid gunfight on the barricades, France is now a democracy with equal rights for every citizen and peace with all other nations, where have you been?" "Oh, well, we've been having an absolutely mediocre breakfast! Care for some cheese?"

BOSSUET

Hey! Mediocre? This breakfast is at *least* tolerable.

JOLY

You yourself said that the oysters—

BOSSUET

Oh yes, but the wine makes up for it.

JOLY

Does it?

BOSSUET

And the company.

JOLY

(*affectionate*)

Oh, you.

*She looks out the window.*

Look at that. Rain. Well, that settles it. I've sworn to go through fire, not water. I don't want to catch a cold.

BOSSUET

And I've sworn never to miss breakfast, so there we are. We'll join them once we hear the riot start.

*Clatter from the stairs outside. GRANTAIRE – social, skeptical, purposefully obnoxious, an absolute mess of a person – enters with no small amount of noise.*

JOLY

Grantaire?

BOSSUET

Grantaire!

GRANTAIRE

Finally! By God! You don't know what torment I've suffered! My coat dripping wet, my coiffure attacked by the wind, my shoes pillaged by gutter filth! You devils! I've been wandering the whole of Paris looking for y— a— a café with half-decent oysters!

*Pulling up a chair*

Oh, and I suppose you ladies happen to be here also. Ugh, just my luck.

BOSSUET

I thought you said you were staying home today!

GRANTAIRE

Today? The dawn of revolution? I wish I had.

BOSSUET

Oh, hush.

## GRANTAIRE

Don't think I don't mean it, Bossuet, philosopher, funeral orator for the Royalists and the clergymen! What a state the world is in! We break our necks simply living; we drink down our sorrows and call it a cure; we wake up to see the sunrise and all it does is rain; and *by God these oysters are terrible*. I hate the human race. History repeats itself with vicious irony; we cycle through the same story over and over and nothing changes but that the second time around we make fun of ourselves a bit more. Sarcasm! How cheap! If we joke about the Fall of Rome maybe this time it won't hurt. A king, a revolution, a king, a revolution, a king, repeat steps one through four until farcical. I tell you, the gods are running out of new material. If *I* were in charge, now, I'd keep things running smoothly! But no, another revolution is our only recourse. How foolish! They ought to be skipping through a field with a lover on their arm, and instead these imbeciles run off to get themselves killed, to massacre each other. And no one will care. To hell with the lot of it. Yes, I'm miserable again, but that's what comes of swallowing an oyster and a revolution the wrong way. What a frightful old world! We strive and we fail and we beg and we steal and we kill — and we get used to it!

## JOLY

Speaking of revolutions — you remember Marius Pontmercy? Courfeyrac's friend?

## GRANTAIRE

Yes?

## JOLY

It seems he won't be joining the fight — because he's madly in love!

## BOSSUET

Do we know with whom?

## JOLY

Not a clue!

## GRANTAIRE

Oh, how quaint! Marius, a diffident fog, comes across a demure vapor. They float about, never quite touching, and in that reach the poetic ideal. A love that consummates itself is obscene, but the orbit of a planet around a star? That's true devotion. I can imagine what it's like. Ecstasies of silence. Fingertips almost brushing, they forget to kiss, chaste on earth, but coupling in the infinite. They sleep together in the stars.

*As he finishes speaking, the lights lower, transitioning to a flashback. Café Corinthe, 1828. The Saint-Merry church bells toll softly.*

*The rest of the insurgents, including COMBEFERRE and COURFEYRAC, join the three already there, pulling GRANTAIRE's table to the side to center ENJOLRAS, the solemn, vigilant leader of the revolution. GRANTAIRE, suddenly very quiet, watches him pensively.*

## ENJOLRAS

Our country hangs suspended in its course; the formidable surge of progress slowed by Bonaparte's coup, and brought to a standstill by the return of another monarch of the Bourbon line. Under Charles X, the old order reasserts itself with a vengeful severity, and the radiance of the Revolution is overshadowed by the specter of the guillotine. But the people grow restless. Their stillness must not be mistaken for stagnation. And so we are gathered here.

## GRANTAIRE

To make damn sure they go back to sleep and forget all about it!

## JOLY

Grantaire—

## GRANTAIRE

A few barrels of wine to seduce Argos into slumber, what?

BOSSUET

Look, if you're going to keep interrupting—

GRANTAIRE

Dim the radiance in a smoking den, and smother the outcry with // mouthfuls of food—

COMBEFERRE

*(to ENJOLRAS, loudly and pointedly)*

// Our primary effort must be to bring the ideals of the Revolution back to the forefront of people's minds—

GRANTAIRE

—and then you'll have me for your revolution, yes, I'll take a revolution of the palette, // but this talk of kings—

BOSSUET

// Grantaire!

COURFEYRAC

// Please, let's keep things civil!

COMBEFERRE

—which we can best accomplish by distributing pamphlets among the contacts established when—

ENJOLRAS

One moment, please, Combeferre.

*Everyone goes silent when ENJOLRAS speaks. GRANTAIRE freezes mid-gesture, eyes fixed upon him.*

*ENJOLRAS walks slowly to GRANTAIRE's table and stands facing him directly.*

ENJOLRAS

Why are you here?

*GRANTAIRE gives no reply.*

ENJOLRAS

This is a radical political organization, not a social group. Our discussions are illegal. Our materials are banned. Revolution *is* brewing, and Charles X will suppress it by any means necessary. The simple fact of being present at this gathering could have you imprisoned.

*No response.*

And yet you are here every night. You do not make meaningful contributions to our discussions; you hardly pay attention. You do not offer to help distribute materials. You interrupt our proceedings and mock our ideals. You eat, and you speak at length on irrelevant topics, and you drink, all of which are activities more easily and less dangerously done in any other circumstances. Why did you come here? Why do you keep coming back?

GRANTAIRE

You're kicking me out.

ENJOLRAS

Is that what you want?

GRANTAIRE

I don't think you care what *I* want. But you want me gone, don't you?

ENJOLRAS

I did not say that.

GRANTAIRE

Oh, it's clear enough. So say it. Tell me to leave and I will. Say you never want to see me back here again. I'll comply. I swear. And I wouldn't blame you, not in the slightest. Just say it now.

ENJOLRAS

You mistake my purpose. I intended to begin a conversation. I am not asking you to leave.

GRANTAIRE

But you *want* me to.

ENJOLRAS

If you are prepared to comply with a request of mine, then I ask that you stop intentionally hindering our process. Though we all engage in our share of casual talk, your frequent interruptions are making it difficult to work. Stay, dine, speak if you must, but do not deliberately tear us away from the important tasks at hand. Do you understand this?

GRANTAIRE

You— well, if— I— I... yeah. I do.

ENJOLRAS

You did not answer my original question.

GRANTAIRE

Ah... I—

*He stares at ENJOLRAS a moment. Quickly glances around the room.*

Maybe I just like the... uh. Well. It's not like I have anything better to do.

*ENJOLRAS waits for further clarification, but GRANTAIRE bows his head, silent.*

*ENJOLRAS turns back to COMBEFERRE. Lights dim.*