Thérèse Raquin

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ÉMILE ZOLA

Émile Zola was born in Paris in 1840, but his family moved three years later to Aix-en-Provence, in southern France. He grew up in Aix-en-Provence, where he became lifelong friends with the painter Paul Cézanne. When his father died in 1847, the family was left with very little money. A little more than a decade later, Zola and his mother moved to Paris, where they lived in poverty. Zola eventually started working in the sales department of Hachette (a publishing house), but he left that job in 1866 to devote himself to writing. His first notable work was *Thérèse Raquin*, in which he began to develop his ideas about human behavior and disposition—ideas he would explore in more depth in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, a series of 20 novels considered to be some of the foundational works of the Naturalist literary movement. Zola is also famous for *J'Accuse…!*, the open letter he penned in defense of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish officer in the French army who was wrongfully accused of treason and sentenced to life in prison. The letter led to uproar throughout France, as people rallied against the wrongful conviction. The influence of this open letter signaled a shift in French society, making it clear that the country's prominent artists and intellectuals possessed the power to sway the general public against the government and the Catholic Church. By the time Zola wrote *J'Accuse!* (in 1898), the majority of his celebrated literary career was already behind him. He died four years later of carbon monoxide poisoning due to a poorly ventilated chimney.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Before the serialized publication of *Thérèse Raquin* in 1867, the literary scene in Paris was accustomed to tales that avoided straightforward examinations of misery, violence, and sexual excitement. But Émile Zola was interested in establishing Naturalism, a literary movement that grew out of Realism but was much more concerned with things like science, objectivity, and determinism (or the idea that everything is determined by preexisting causes). He wanted to represent his characters with the same indifferent objectivity that a scientist or doctor might use when observing subjects in an experiment, so he didn't shy away from telling a very dark tale in *Thérèse Raquin*—so dark, in fact, that it unsettled the general public. Zola was cast as an immoral writer of pornography, but he didn't shy away from the public uproar. To the contrary, he *indulged* the scandal, and some historians believe that he even encouraged certain critics to write scathing reviews of the book, thus giving him the opportunity to publish his own thoughts about the novel in a preface that was included in the second edition. This preface helped define the overall goals of Naturalism, which Zola championed as a "methodical" and unflinching way of exploring human life and reality through a scientific lens. Naturalism thus stood in stark contrast to Romanticism, which was more florid, fanciful, and focused on the idea of transcendence.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Émile Zola was particularly interested in exploring the ways in which "temperament"—or certain inherent traits and dispositions—impacts how people lead their lives. He first explored temperament in *Thérèse Raquin* and then went on to do the same in his 20-novel series *Les Rougon-Macquart*, which bears the subtitle *Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire*—or "Natural and social history of a family under the Second Empire." The seventh novel in this series, *L'Assommoir*, is worth mentioning in relation to *Thérèse Raquin*, since both books examine how a single trait or flaw (alcoholism in *L'Assommoir* and murderous passion in *Thérèse Raquin*) can lead to ruin and unhappiness. Zola, who considered himself the foremost leader of the literary movement known as French Naturalism, was heavily influenced by the historian and literary critic Hippolyte Taine, as well as the physiologist Claude Bernard—Zola drew on the ideas these intellectuals set forth about the importance of social environment and heredity, which ultimately informed Zola's thoughts about what drives people to behave in certain ways. In terms of his writing style, Zola took cues from realist authors like Honoré de Balzac, whose most famous work is *La Comédie humaine*, a multi-volume collection of stories, novels, and essays about French life. Similarly, Zola drew inspiration from the realist author Gustave Flaubert, best known for his novel *Madame Bovary*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Thérèse Raquin
- **When Written:** The 1860s
- **When Published:** The novel was published in 1868, though it appeared in a serialized form in the magazine *L'Artiste* in 1867.
- **Literary Period:** Naturalism
- **Genre:** Naturalism, Psychological Novel
- **Setting:** Paris in the 1860s
- **Climax:** At their wits' end after killing Camille, Laurent and Thérèse separately decide to murder each other in the hopes of leading a more peaceful life. But when they catch each other in the act, they break down in tears and then willingly

decide to die together.

- **Antagonist:** Laurent and Thérèse

EXTRA CREDIT

Thérèse in the Theater. There have been many theatrical adaptations of *Thérèse Raquin*, including Zola's own adaptation, which premiered in 1873 but didn't make it to London until 1891. The London debut was staged by the Independent Theatre Society, a subscription-based theater organization that was willing to put on controversial plays, which was crucial for the adaptation of *Thérèse Raquin*, since it was quite divisive.

The Big Screen. The 13 film adaptations of *Thérèse Raquin* include the 2013 movie *In Secret*, which stars Elizabeth Olsen (of *Avengers* fame), Oscar Isaac (of *Star Wars* fame), and Tom Felton (of *Harry Potter* fame).

PLOT SUMMARY

Thérèse has lived with her aunt, Madame Raquin, and cousin, Camille, since she was two years old. Her father took her to Madame Raquin shortly after her mother died. Thérèse thus grew up alongside Camille outside of Paris, where Madame Raquin owned a haberdashery. Because Camille was always sick, Madame Raquin doted on him. Thérèse slept in the same bed as her cousin, and though she adopted a passive attitude, she yearned for a more exciting life. But she knew that was impossible: Madame Raquin expected her and Camille to marry.

Shortly after the wedding, Camille announces that he wants to move to Paris. Madame Raquin has sold her haberdashery but decides to open a new store in Paris. In this way, she's able to financially help Camille and Thérèse while also keeping them in her life. The store Madame Raquin finds is in a depressing alleyway, but she doesn't care because it was cheap—so cheap that she hardly has to dip into her savings. Both Camille and Thérèse are disappointed by the store and the apartment above it, which is where they'll live. However, Camille doesn't mind: he dreams of working in a large office and plans to spend most of his time there.

It isn't long before Camille finds a job and settles into his new life, but Thérèse is still unhappy. She particularly hates it when Camille and Madame Raquin host friends every Thursday night to play dominoes. Each week, Madame Raquin's old friend Michaud—who used to work for the police—comes with his son, Olivier (who *currently* works for the police) and Olivier's wife, Suzanne. Camille also invites his older coworker, Grivet, a man he respects because he earns a high salary. Thérèse suffers quietly through Thursday evenings, finding the gatherings dreadfully boring.

One day, though, Camille brings home a new coworker. His name is Laurent, and he used to play with Camille when he was a boy. Madame Raquin and Camille are delighted to have him, especially because he earns a high salary. But Laurent quickly shocks them by talking about how he doesn't care about his job—he just wants to lead an "idle" life of painting nude women and satisfying his desires. Camille is scandalized by what he says, but Thérèse feels suddenly awoken by Laurent's presence. He's powerful and strong, and she's fiercely attracted to him. As he talks about the nude models he used to paint, he makes direct eye contact with Thérèse.

Laurent offers to paint Camille's portrait. Madame Raquin and Camille are delighted and arrange for him to come each day after work. As he paints, he can feel Thérèse smoldering with desire behind him. He considers starting an affair with her and decides to do it—he can tell she wants to, and he has no reason to hold back, since he's always looking for pleasure. On the evening he finishes the portrait, he and Thérèse finally have a moment alone. He grabs her and plants a ferocious kiss on her lips. She protests for a moment but then gives herself over to his embrace.

Thérèse and Laurent embark on a passion-filled affair. Laurent makes excuses to leave work and then sneaks over to the haberdashery, where he comes up a rear staircase that leads into Thérèse's room. The two lovers have never felt such intense desire, and Thérèse makes no effort to be quiet, despite the fact that Madame Raquin is just downstairs in the haberdashery. When Laurent worries about getting caught, Thérèse tells him not to worry—Madame Raquin and Camille are oblivious. Still, Laurent is almost frightened by the intensity of his passion for Thérèse, since he has never desired anyone quite so much. His insatiable yearning for her becomes especially problematic when his boss tells him that if he leaves work one more time during the day, he'll lose his job. Suddenly, he and Thérèse have no way of seeing each other, which makes their passion feel all the more overwhelming.

Laurent keeps visiting the haberdashery and attending the Thursday evening gatherings, even after he and Thérèse stop seeing each other. Finally, after an agonizing period, Thérèse makes up an excuse to leave home one evening, claiming that she needs to collect an outstanding payment. She rushes to Laurent's apartment, where they feverishly make love and lie in each other's arms. As Thérèse prepares to leave, she and Laurent talk about how they can't bear the thought of not continuing their affair. They *need* to be together. If only Camille were out of the picture, they'd be able to live happily and get married—a thought that leads them to contemplate how they could get rid of Camille. It's possible, they note, to murder someone without leaving a trace. Laurent then assures Thérèse that he'll figure everything out. If she doesn't hear from him for a while, she should rest assured that he's working on making it possible for them to be together.

One day, weeks later, Camille, Thérèse, and Laurent do a

daytrip to Saint-Ouen on the outskirts of Paris. In the evening, they stop at a crowded restaurant that also rents out rowboats for people to take onto the Seine. Laurent suggests that they go for a row before dinner, and as they get in the boat, he whispers to Thérèse that he's going to push Camille overboard. She hesitates for a moment but then gets in when Camille—who's afraid of water—makes fun of her for being nervous. When nobody can see them, Laurent grabs Camille, strangles him, and tosses him into the river, though not before Camille **bites out a chunk of his neck**. Laurent then capsizes the boat and swims to Thérèse, who has fainted. A group of rowers come to their rescue, and Laurent says Camille was dancing in the boat and tipped it over—an account that the rowers, who didn't actually see what happened, not only accept but also perpetuate, telling everyone on land that they watched as Camille capsized the boat and Laurent saved Thérèse.

Thérèse is beside herself. She pretends to feel sick so she doesn't have to talk to anyone, but her thoughts about what happened legitimately give her a fever. The owners of the restaurant let her lie in bed while Laurent goes back to Paris to break the news. He goes to Michaud and Olivier first, wanting to appear innocent and forthcoming to the two policemen. They believe him without reservation and offer to go tell Madame Raquin themselves, which relieves Laurent because he doesn't think he could muster the appropriate tears to tell the old woman.

In the coming days, both Thérèse and Madame Raquin stay in bed. Thérèse puts off seeing Madame Raquin, dreading the moment she has to face her aunt's grief—and for good reason, too, since Madame Raquin can hardly function due to sadness. Finally, though, Thérèse gets out of bed and encourages her aunt to do the same. The next day, they reopen the haberdashery, and life eventually goes back to normal, though now Madame Raquin is saddled with a heavy grief. Laurent and Thérèse, on the other hand, pass the days without remorse. Sometimes they think about Camille, but for the most part they focus on their daily lives. They don't rush into getting married, since that would look suspicious. In fact, they don't even see much of each other, though Laurent visits the haberdashery to stay on Madame Raquin's good side. He also starts a relationship with a young nude model, not feeling bad about betraying Thérèse; they'll get married eventually, he knows, but for now he's just enjoying a bit of pleasure. But then the model leaves him.

Because his lust has been reawakened, Laurent asks Thérèse if they can sleep together, but she refuses, saying they have to be careful. He points out that they've waited 15 months, so Thérèse agrees to get married. To make this happen, she acts depressed around Madame Raquin, prompting the old woman to ask for advice from Michaud, who says Thérèse clearly needs a new husband. Madame Raquin objects at first but soon agrees, though she doesn't want to bring a stranger into her life. Around this time, Laurent makes a point of attentively asking Thérèse how she's doing in front of everyone. Michaud sees him treat her kindly and pulls Madame Raquin aside: Laurent would be the perfect new husband, he says. Madame Raquin loves the idea. She already trusts him and sees him as a son, so she consents. The arrangements are made.

While waiting for their wedding day, both Laurent and Thérèse find themselves unable to sleep, but not because they're excited. Rather, they both feel terrified at night. Ever since they decided to go through with getting married, they've been haunted by thoughts of Camille. Thinking they'll be able to sleep better when they're together, they look forward to their first night as newlyweds. However, when the time comes, they find that their nerves are even worse when they're around each other. They can't touch without seeing images of Camille's drowned corpse. For the first few nights, they don't even lie down. When they finally do, they feel as if Camille's bloated body is between them. Distressed, they begin to resent each other. Laurent starts renting an apartment just to get away from Thérèse in the daytime. He spends his time painting, but soon realizes that every face he paints looks like Camille, so he stops.

Meanwhile, Madame Raquin's health declines. One evening, she has some sort of "attack" that leaves her paralyzed. The murderers are greatly upset, not because they care about her, but because she's the only buffer between them. They take to propping her up in the room and shining the light in her face to feel less alone. But soon they forget she's there and, in the midst of an argument, reveal that they killed Camille. Nothing could hurt Madame Raquin more, so she tries to communicate what she has learned at the next Thursday evening gathering, somehow managing to move her hand to spell out a sentence. But she's unable to finish, so everyone thinks she's just saying how good Laurent and Thérèse have been to her.

As time passes, Thérèse and Laurent become increasingly unhinged. They start arguing and fighting every night. Laurent beats Thérèse, who provokes him because fighting like this is the only way they can tire themselves out enough to sleep. Madame Raquin, for her part, decides to die by refusing food, but then realizes that doing so might make the murderers' lives a little easier, so she decides to hold on, sensing that something bad will happen to Laurent and Thérèse very soon. And she's right: shortly thereafter, they both make plans to kill each other, but they end up catching each other in the act. As Laurent poisons Thérèse's drink and Thérèse pulls out a knife to stab Laurent, they turn and lock eyes. Then, after a moment, they embrace each other and sob. Knowing they'll never be happy, they both drink the poison and collapse on each other.

CHARACTERS

Thérèse Raquin – Thérèse is a nervous, quiet woman who grew

up in the care of her aunt, Madame Raquin. She was born in Algeria, but when her mother—an Algerian woman—died, her father brought her to his native France and left her with Madame Raquin, who raised her alongside her own son, Camille. Because Camille was always sick in childhood, Madame Raquin fawned over him and forced Thérèse to do the same. She always felt held back by Camille and dreamt of leading a more exciting life, but she adopted a passive, acquiescent attitude instead, eventually marrying Camille at the behest of Madame Raquin. The family moves to Paris after the wedding, and Thérèse passes her time in idle boredom at a haberdashery that she runs with Madame Raquin. She's depressed by her circumstances but resigns herself to her bleak existence—until, that is, Laurent comes along. Attracted to Laurent's strength and power, Thérèse feels emboldened by passion for the first time in her life. She eagerly embarks on an affair with him and is so swept up in their fiery desire for one another that she doesn't care about deceiving Camille. In fact, the intensity of her passion even *scares* Laurent, ultimately foreshadowing the way the couple's yearning for each other drives them out of control. They end up murdering Camille so they can get married, but their plan goes awry in the aftermath of the crime. Thérèse's nervous disposition comes back in full force, as she can't stop thinking about Camille's corpse when she's alone with Laurent. She tries everything to make herself feel better, but nothing works. Overwhelmed and desperate, she decides to stab Laurent to death, but just as she's about to do so, she catches him poisoning her drink. After a pause, she embraces him. They weep together and then both drink the poison.

Laurent – Laurent is a young man with an insatiable appetite for pleasure. Originally from the same small town as Camille and Thérèse, he now lives in Paris because his father sent him there for law school. But Laurent hates law, instead preferring to lounge around all day and paint nude models. He and Camille become reacquainted as coworkers at the Orleans Railway—a job Laurent doesn't care about. When he sees Thérèse, he realizes she's attracted to him and fantasizes about sleeping with her. Considering the pros and cons, he decides to go through with it because he has nothing to lose: the affair will bring him pleasure, and he has no moral qualms about deceiving Camille. As he sees more of Thérèse, though, Laurent feels overtaken by his desire for her and is astounded by her intensity. He sneaks away from work to have sex with Thérèse, unable to keep himself from seeking out her touch. But when his boss tells him he'll lose his job if he keeps leaving, he has no way of seeing her, which just makes him more desperate for her embrace. His yearning for Thérèse becomes crazed and feverish, which is why he and Thérèse eventually decide to murder Camille, thinking they'll be able to get married once he's out of the way. With this in mind, Laurent drowns Camille, though not before Camille bites a chunk out of his neck, leaving a **scar** that haunts him for the rest of his life. After the murder, Laurent has night terrors featuring Camille's drowned corpse. In response to his guilt, he also starts resenting Thérèse and beating her in the evenings. Hoping that killing her will help him find peace, he poisons her drink. As he does so, though, he sees her advancing on him with a knife. They hold each other and cry for a moment, and then they drink the poison together.

Madame Raquin – Madame Raquin is an old woman who has lived outside of Paris for many years. After running a haberdashery, she sells the business and saves the profits, planning to live out her old age alongside her son, Camille, and her niece, Thérèse. Madame Raquin has devoted her life to Camille, who was constantly sick as a child. She also took in Thérèse and raised her alongside her son, but she always prioritizes Camille's needs over all else, assuming Thérèse will help her ensure Camille's happiness. She even arranges for Camille and Thérèse to get married, thinking the couple will live with her. Plans change, however, when Camille decides—in the aftermath of his marriage to Thérèse—to move to Paris. Madame Raquin is upset, but she decides to move with them and open a new haberdashery. She's so attached to Camille that she doesn't even entertain the idea of staying behind. Later, she's utterly distraught when she learns that he has drowned, but she's not suspicious of Laurent or Thérèse. To the contrary, she comes to see Laurent as a son of her own, since he makes a point of taking good care of her. After some initial hesitation, she even helps arrange Thérèse and Laurent's marriage, thinking that—of all people—Laurent is the best person to take Camille's place. As the newlyweds descend into despair, they depend on Madame Raquin's presence, since they feel less afraid and guilty when they're not alone. But then Madame Raquin has a medical event that leaves her paralyzed, at which point the newlyweds reveal in her presence that they killed Camille. Madame Raquin is thus forced to lead a miserable existence in which she has no choice but to live with the two people she hates most: her son's murderers.

Camille – Camille is a frail, sickly young man who grows up alongside his cousin, Thérèse. His mother, Madame Raquin, smothers him with attention, constantly worrying about his health and wellbeing. Tired of living a sheltered life, Camille decides after marrying Thérèse to move to Paris, but his dreams are humorously small in scale, as he fantasizes about simply working in a large office, romanticizing the idea of a life that the novel casts as rather mundane. He's especially preoccupied with the notion that earning lots of money makes a person dignified and respectable, which is why he admires Grivet, an older man who makes a decent amount of money at the Orleans Railway, which is where Camille eventually finds a job after moving to Paris. Camille also works with Laurent, whom he thinks is impressive for making a fairly high salary for his age. He brings Laurent home for a weekly game of dominoes, introducing him to Thérèse and failing to notice the obvious sexual tension between them. Camille remains

completely oblivious throughout Thérèse and Laurent's affair—right up until they murder him by throwing him into the Seine.

Michaud – Michaud is Madame Raquin's old friend. He lived in the same town outside of Paris, where he worked in the police station. After moving to Paris in his retirement, he runs into Madame Raquin and happily accepts an invitation for dinner, bringing along his son, Olivier, and his daughter-in-law, Suzanne. Michaud continues to come to the Raquin household each Thursday, enjoying the time he spends there playing dominoes and telling the same stories about policework. When Laurent and Thérèse hatch a plan to marry each other after Camille's death, they trick Michaud into thinking that the match is *his* idea, thus avoiding any suspicion about why they want to be together.

Grivet – Grivet is an older employee at the Orleans Railway, which is where Camille and Laurent work. Camille admires him for making a decent salary, so he invites him to the weekly Thursday gatherings at the Raquin household, where Grivet bores both Laurent and Thérèse with his inane chitchat. When Madame Raquin becomes paralyzed, Grivet boasts that he can tell exactly what she's thinking. Of course, he's always wrong about what she wants, which is fortunate for Thérèse and Laurent, since Grivet makes it all but impossible for Madame Raquin to communicate to the others when she discovers that the couple killed Camille.

Olivier – Olivier is Michaud's son. Along with his father and wife, Suzanne, he attends the weekly gatherings at the Raquin household. Because he works for the police, Laurent and Thérèse are somewhat nervous around him, though it soon becomes clear that he's completely oblivious to the fact that they murdered Camille.

Suzanne – Suzanne is Olivier's wife. She attends the weekly gatherings at the Raquin household with her husband, though she doesn't talk much when she's around others. Thérèse finds her unintelligent and boring, but she ends up befriending her after killing Camille, apparently taking a small amount of comfort in spending time with Suzanne so she doesn't have to be alone during the daytime.

François – François is the Raquins' cat. He often watches Thérèse and Laurent as they make love in secret, and though Thérèse thinks it's funny that the cat knows more about their relationship than Camille and Madame Raquin, Laurent finds the animal's presence disturbing. After they murder Camille, François is yet another reminder of what they've done. In a fit of rage and fear, Laurent grabs François one day and hurls him out the window—the cat breaks his back against the opposite wall of the alley and spends the rest of the night moaning in pain.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

PASSION AND PLEASURE

Émile Zola's novel *Thérèse Raquin* examines the misery that befalls two lovers who prioritize passion and pleasure above all else—including morality. The novel spotlights the fact that Thérèse and Laurent allow their desires to guide them through life. Laurent, for instance, is described as someone who has "full-blooded appetites and a pronounced desire for easy and long-lasting pleasures." Thérèse, on the other hand, is desperate for pleasure because she's led an unsatisfying life alongside her sickly cousin, Camille, whom she eventually has no choice but to marry. At first, Thérèse and Laurent's secret love affair is full of passion and tense anticipation, as they revel in their budding romance—a romance based on little more than physical satisfaction. Their desire is so strong that they have no remorse about deceiving Camille, who is not only Thérèse's husband but also Laurent's loyal friend. Soon enough, though, their passion becomes so all-consuming that they murder Camille, thinking this will enable them to lead a happy life of shameless pleasure. However, what they soon discover is that the weight of their crime is too much for their feeble relationship to bear. After all, their bond isn't actually that strong, since it's mostly built on their feverish longing to satiate their sexual appetites. Whenever they try to become intimate in the aftermath of Camille's murder, it's impossible for them to derive any kind of pleasure; instead they're haunted by what they've done and no longer able to find satisfaction. And it's not just sex or romance that they come to find dissatisfying—slowly but surely, *everything* in life becomes unbearable. By closely following Thérèse and Laurent's transition from giddy romance to extreme unhappiness, then, the novel implies that satisfying selfish pleasures doesn't necessarily lead to lasting contentment, especially when chasing those pleasures means committing heinous, unjustifiable acts.

Throughout the novel, pleasure and passion take precedent over all other considerations. Both Thérèse and Laurent know that sleeping with each other is unfair to Camille, but they let their desires override this consideration. Because Thérèse has led a mundane, miserable life and has never been attracted to Camille (who is, to be fair, her *cousin*), her connection with Laurent feels like a sudden rush of thrilling pleasure, as if she's "emerging from a dream and awakening to passion"—a passion that completely overtakes her. Laurent, for his part, is simply the kind of person who wants to satisfy his desires no matter

what. His first thought is always about how to maximize enjoyment, so he naturally gravitates toward Thérèse and isn't terribly bothered by the fact that she's married. Still, he *does* weigh the possible consequences of having an affair, deciding that he should only go through with it if he's confident that he has "something to gain" from sleeping with Thérèse. Eventually, though, he decides he has nothing to lose. He realizes that he doesn't *care* if Camille finds out, since Camille is weak and could never hurt him. His decision is therefore based on his own wellbeing, not whether or not it's fair or moral to sleep with Camille's wife. Accordingly, it's quite clear that he really only thinks about himself, allowing his cravings to guide him even when he's thinking rationally and not currently experiencing the throes of passion.

Indulging their desires doesn't make it easier for Thérèse and Laurent to think clearly, nor does it allow them to go back to their normal lives—to the contrary, chasing pleasure just makes them spin even more out of control. Whereas Laurent at least *tried* to levelheadedly consider the pros and cons of having an affair with Thérèse, he now throws himself with reckless abandon into their relationship. Soon enough, his desires become much more than mere cravings—they become actual *needs* that he feels obligated to fulfill. In turn, it's agonizing when his employer tells him he can't leave work anymore, making it impossible for him and Thérèse to continue their romantic visitations. Suddenly, Laurent realizes the depths of his desire: "He needed this woman to live, as one needs food and drink." If desire took precedent over rationality *before* Laurent and Thérèse began their affair, it now completely overshadows their ability to make good—and moral—decisions, which is what leads them to murder Camille. They're no longer merely looking for an enjoyable experience to satisfy their sexual cravings. Rather, they're *compelled* to preserve their relationship at all costs because they've come to see passion as an absolute necessity for survival.

But the novel illustrates that fixating so much on pleasure can have adverse effects on a person's ability to even *feel* pleasure in the first place. Both Laurent and Thérèse are often referred to as "animals," suggesting that they chase satisfaction without possessing any kind of foresight. For instance, when they talk about murdering Camille, they don't consider that committing such an atrocious crime might leave them emotionally scarred—which, of course, is exactly what happens. Their relationship suffers as a result of their crime, since they can't even touch each other without thinking about Camille's drowned corpse. In fact, they can hardly do *anything* they used to enjoy. Laurent seeks refuge in painting, only to discover with horror that he's only capable of painting Camille's face. In terms of their relationship, their passion ultimately transforms into something bitter and ugly, since they take out their unhappiness on each other by constantly fighting. In a way, then, they *do* maintain the passion in their relationship, but now there's a crucial difference: it's torturous instead of pleasurable. The novel therefore demonstrates that there really *can* be too much of a good thing, highlighting just how destructive it can be to impulsively pursue pleasure without taking anything else into account.

CONSEQUENCES AND DELUSION

Thérèse Raquin is a novel about what it's like to commit a terrible act of violence and then live with the consequences. But what makes the story unique is that there *aren't* any consequences, or at least not the kind that usually come along with cold-blooded murder. Laurent and Thérèse aren't arrested for killing Camille, nor does anyone suspect them of foul play. In fact, for an entire year after Camille's death, not much happens to either of them: they simply go about their lives, biding their time until they can get married. Despite this lack of punishment, though, their lives start to change. The novel suggests that they aren't wracked with guilt, explicitly noting that Laurent doesn't "in the least regret having killed Camille," but there's no denying that their lives—and emotional states—get worse after the murder. Neither of them, for example, can sleep through the night on their own, so they delude themselves with the thought that they'll protect each other from their night terrors when they're married. However, their nights become even *more* torturous after they get married. Although they originally thought being together would calm their minds, they realize that they only remind each other of what they've done. Accordingly, they try to distance themselves from each other, but that doesn't work, either: nothing they do will allow them to move on. It therefore becomes clear that it was delusional for them to think they could commit such a significant act of violence and then lead a carefree life. Though the book avoids making explicit moral judgments, the fact that Laurent and Thérèse come to such a tragic end illustrates the grave psychological consequences of cruel and immoral behavior.

One of the most surprising aspects of Laurent and Thérèse's story is that they don't experience guilt—at least not in the way most people would likely experience it. In the immediate aftermath of Camille's death, for example, the novel makes it quite clear that Laurent doesn't feel bad about what he's done. In fact, he'd readily do it again if it were necessary. Although he was often "choked" with "panic" *before* killing Camille, his fears seem to recede after he actually goes through with the plan. He even feels like a "weight" has been "lifted from his chest," as if the thing that bothered him was merely the "anticipation" of carrying out the murder, not the actual immorality of the act. Thérèse is a bit more unsettled in the days after the murder, but even she manages to go back to normal before too long. Both Thérèse and Laurent spend the 15 months after the murder leading fairly untroubled lives, worrying more about getting caught than about the moral implications of what

they've done. They don't, in other words, feel particularly guilty about committing murder.

Eventually, though, Thérèse and Laurent's crime *does* begin to take a toll on their lives, suggesting that even people with no concern for morality find it difficult to completely ignore the consequences of their own wretched behavior. After finally deciding to start planning the wedding, they spend many sleepless nights writhing in fear because they can't stop thinking about Camille—reestablishing their connection (after 15 months of avoiding each other) awakens troubling memories of the murder. To make themselves feel better, they take comfort in the idea that getting married and spending time together will banish their night terrors. But such an idea is delusional. The (obvious) reason they're struggling emotionally isn't that they sleep alone, but that they *killed a human being*. And yet, they're unwilling to admit to themselves that they feel remorseful for murdering Camille, so they optimistically assume that being together will solve their problems and make them forget about the entire incident. Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth, since they wind up reminding each other of what they've done. Consequently, they come to fiercely resent each other after getting married. They resent each other so much, in fact, that their relationship fills with a violent "hatred," as they actively seek out ways to enrage and hurt each other. Needless to say, the quality of their lives plummets, so although they might not care about the moral implications of committing murder, it's evident that they still have to live with the messy consequences of behaving so unconscionably.

More than making any sort of moral statement, though, the novel is mainly focused on illustrating how one tragedy can lead to another. In the novel's preface, the author, Émile Zola, announces his disinterest in making moral judgments, implying that *Thérèse Raquin* is like a scientific study of Laurent and Thérèse—it simply explores their wretched tendencies and, more importantly, the terrible situations that come about *because* of those tendencies. It doesn't necessarily matter, then, whether or not Laurent or Thérèse feel guilty for murdering Camille. Instead, what matters is that the murder creates more and more misery. By the end of the novel, Thérèse and Laurent are so distraught that they plan to kill each other, suggesting that their initial act of violence only leads to more violence. Regardless of the characters' own moral outlooks, then, the novel outlines a simple, straightforward idea—namely, that immorality just ends up creating *more* immorality.

DEPENDENCY AND RESENTMENT

Thérèse Raquin explores the things that—for better or worse—bind people together. In Thérèse and Laurent's case, an intense physical intimacy draws them together, as they each depend on the other to give them something they need. For Thérèse, Laurent helps her feel free from the oppressive, depressing life she has been forced to live with Camille. Laurent, on the other hand, looks to Thérèse as someone who can satisfy his sexual desires. As their relationship develops, though, the ways in which they depend on each other become more complex. After they murder Camille, for instance, they turn to each other for emotional support. But because they're both haunted by murdering Camille, they end up *tormenting* each other instead of offering solace or consolation. Because they remind each other of what they've done, a strong feeling of resentment takes hold of their relationship, infusing it with bitterness and—eventually—outright hatred. Locked in a loveless relationship that only exacerbates their struggle to move on, they experience feelings of helplessness, as if they can't escape the past—or, for that matter, their relationship. In a strange way, the tortured existence they share actually binds them together in a kind of intimacy that, although distorted by hatred, actually resembles the intensity of their initial sexual connection. By the end of the novel, their hatred for one another is so strong that it's almost unifying, as if their original romantic bond has simply transformed into something more sinister. Consequently, the novel indicates that people can come to depend on each other in unexpected and even destructive ways, suggesting that it's just as possible for people to be bound by hatred and resentment as it is for them to be bound by love.

Thérèse and Laurent's relationship is somewhat transactional—it's not about a mutual feeling of love, but about satisfying certain needs. Laurent, for example, is mainly interested in fulfilling his sexual desires. Having lived the life of a freewheeling artist for a brief time, he has become accustomed to sexual pleasures that have left him with "compelling needs of the flesh." The word "needs" is crucial here, as it highlights the fact that Laurent pursues an affair not just because he thinks it might be enjoyable, but because he has come to depend on a certain level of sexual gratification in his life. To fulfill his sexual needs, he has been paying sex workers to sleep with him. Once it becomes clear that Thérèse would eagerly take him as a lover, though, he realizes that he could stop paying sex workers if he and Thérèse were to start an affair. It's evident, then, that he doesn't gravitate toward Thérèse because he loves her, but because he sees her as a convenient way to satisfy his needs. And Thérèse, for her part, views Laurent as a perfect way to escape the crushing boredom and monotony of her life with Camille. Just *looking* at Laurent gives her a thrill, lending her life a sense of vibrancy and excitement that she's never experienced before. In turn, the two lovers embark on a relationship based not on purely romantic feelings but on the fact that they have mutual needs.

To that end, *Thérèse Raquin* is less about a romantic relationship than it is about a fierce, all-consuming dependency between two people. When his boss tells him he'll get fired if he keeps

sneaking away from work, Laurent is distraught because his and Thérèse's affair grinds to a halt. The ensuing months are full of agony and despair, as if the two lovers are addicted to a drug they can no longer take. But their dependency on one another isn't necessarily tied to feelings of love, as evidenced by the fact that they continue to depend on each other even after hatred and resentment overtake their relationship. At the beginning of their relationship, they're connected because of the ways in which their sexual bond fulfills their needs—later, though, they're connected by the horrifying fact that they worked together to kill Camille. Because they both shoulder the burden of this secret, a new kind of dependency takes hold of them. They come to resent each other, but they also still *need* each other. For instance, because they experience night terrors that keep them from sleeping, they count on having scathing, violent arguments each night, knowing these brawls are the only way to tire themselves out enough to finally fall asleep. The novel therefore illustrates the enduring strength of certain forms of dependency, which are often capable of existing in even the most troubled, spiteful relationships (or perhaps *especially* in such relationships).

A downside of developing such a strong dependency on another person, the novel suggests, is that it can trap people in terrible situations. Although Thérèse and Laurent are never discovered by law enforcement and thrown in jail, they still experience a feeling of imprisonment. After all, their dependency on one another keeps them trapped in their toxic, violent relationship. The novel actually explores this feeling of being trapped in terrible situations in a variety of ways. Take, for instance, the fact that Thérèse is forced as a helpless baby to depend on Madame Raquin to house her and raise her, eventually making her feel trapped in a mundane, joyless life. Furthermore, after becoming paralyzed and learning that Thérèse and Laurent killed Camille, Madame Raquin has to depend on her son's murderers to feed, clothe, and carry her—a terrible form of psychological torture. In all of these cases, overreliance on another person leads to fierce resentment, and though the novel shies away from making an explicit argument about the downsides of human dependency, it certainly highlights the potential dangers of needing other people.

MONEY, GREED, AND CLASS

The characters in *Thérèse Raquin* are very focused on money and social class. Camille, for example, goes "pink with pleasure" at the mere idea of himself sitting at a desk with "shiny artificial cuffs" and a fancy pen behind his ear. Of course, he doesn't seem to care *what*, exactly, he does for work, as long as he can sit in a "huge office" and feel like a respectable employee. The novel subtly mocks his conventional attitude, hinting that he's overly impressed by something as unremarkable as existing as a "small cog" in the "big machine" of the working world. He frequently talks about his salary, comparing himself to his colleagues in ways that suggest he thinks people who earn more money are superior to everyone else. And Camille isn't the only one who thinks this way; his colleague Grivet and his friends Michaud and Olivier all seem to hold the same values. Laurent, however, does not. Instead of valorizing the idea of being seen as a wealthy, successful man, Laurent is only interested in money insofar as he needs it to live how he wants. Unlike Camille, who finds inherent value in work, Laurent would rather live an "idle," carefree life of unemployment. But this is impossible without sufficient funds, which is one of the reasons he decides to kill Camille, knowing he'll then be able to marry Thérèse and live off Camille's inheritance. Later, when he's dreadfully unhappy with Thérèse, her money—and in particular, its promise of material comfort and security—is one of the only things that keeps him from leaving. Although he never cared about work or social status as much as Camille, then, it becomes clear that Laurent does, in fact, care about money, suggesting that greed can manifest itself in many different ways.

The novel subtly presents people who are obsessed with money and status as small-minded and even somewhat conceited. Camille is a perfect example of the kind of money-minded, status-obsessed person the book underhandedly mocks. Although it might *seem* like his strong desire to work in a large office hints at a certain ambition, the fact that he doesn't even care what he does for work—as long as he has a respectable job—undercuts any admiration readers might feel for his work ethic. After all, his vague fantasies about office life indicate that what he *really* cares about is his image: he wants to be seen as an important man who works at an impressive company and earns a good salary. He wants, in other words, to become Grivet, an older employee at the Orleans Railway who makes a fair amount of money and is in a position of power at the company. However, the novel depicts Grivet as a laughable and rather intolerable idiot—someone who thinks he knows everything but, in reality, is capable of little more than repeating the same boring stories and assuming that everyone respects him. Both Thérèse and Laurent are very aware of just how ridiculous and unimpressive Grivet is, but Camille—and even Madame Raquin—are enchanted by him simply because he has a good job, thus illustrating the extent to which arbitrary things like money and social status can impact how people view others.

What's more, the novel also suggests that people like Grivet are quite oblivious, regardless of their supposed respectability and power in society. For instance, Camille and Madame Raquin hold Michaud and Olivier in the same high esteem as they hold Grivet, but these men—both trained in police work—completely fail to see that a murder has taken place in their own small social group. Even though they're respected members of the police force, neither Michaud nor Olivier has the *slightest* idea that Thérèse and Laurent viciously murdered Camille. In fact,

Michaud even plays a significant role in arranging the wedding of the two murderers, believing that Laurent is a wonderful person who deserves to take Camille's place as Thérèse's husband. The implication, then, is that the people Camille respected so much when he was alive are, in reality, fairly oblivious and ignorant. The only thing they have going for them is their respectable status in society, which—the novel implies—says nothing about who they really are or whether or not they're worthy of admiration.

And yet, the fact that Laurent remains unimpressed by wealth and class doesn't mean he has the luxury of never worrying about money. Indeed, Laurent actually thinks about money a fair amount, but not because he cares about becoming rich or earning a good reputation in society. Rather, he thinks about money simply because he yearns to live a carefree life—his dream, in other words, is to live like a rich person who doesn't have to work. In a way, his desire to be "idle" is one of the things that drives him to murder Camille, since he's well aware that he would have access to Madame Raquin's savings if he were to marry Thérèse. Although his motivations are different than those of Camille or Grivet, then, he moves through life with a similar kind of greed (or, in reality, a much more violent and unrelenting form of greed). He ends up paying dearly for this greed, since he stays in a wretched and miserable relationship with Thérèse in order to keep drawing on her family money. Long after it has become clear that their marriage makes him deeply unhappy, he sticks around because he can't imagine having to go back to work to support himself. He therefore prioritizes money just as much (or perhaps even *more* than) Grivet and Camille do, effectively demonstrating the many different ways in which fixating on wealth can corrupt people and negatively impact their lives.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE BITEMARK SCAR

The scar that Camille leaves on Laurent's neck symbolizes how hard it is to move on after committing a deeply immoral act. Laurent doesn't feel guilty for murdering Camille, but he *does* find it impossible to forget about the incident and live in peace. The scar he receives when Camille bites a chunk out of his neck while wrestling in the rowboat is a reminder of what he's done, and though he ignores it at first, the wound is a constant source of pain—both physical and emotional. Whenever he gets dressed, for instance, his collar brushes the scar and sends a jolt of discomfort through his body, causing him to think about Camille's drowned corpse. Even Thérèse recognizes the symbolic aspect of the scar, seeing it as the "gaping wound in their relationship," or the thing that makes it so hard for them to lead a happy life as newlyweds. When she tries to "cauterize" it—or seal it shut—by kissing it, though, both she and Laurent feel intense pain. Of course, what Thérèse experiences is clearly *psychological* pain, but that makes it no less real than Laurent's discomfort, which is both psychological and physical. The only time the scar doesn't cause them pain is when they finally kill themselves, as Thérèse comes to a rest—in death—with her mouth positioned over the scar, ultimately representing the fact that they're only able to escape the memory of their crime by embracing death themselves.

THE MORGUE

Laurent's habit of visiting the morgue comes to represent the ways in which murdering Camille causes him to lead a depressing, grotesque life. In the weeks after killing his friend, he goes to the morgue every morning to look for Camille's body. The task involves walking through rows and rows of dead bodies and examining all of the drowning victims at great length—a gruesome endeavor that gives Laurent terrible nightmares. At the same time, though, Laurent also seems to get a perverse thrill out of looking at some of the corpses, taking special note of the nude female bodies, which fill him with a strange feeling of "fearful lust." His trips to the morgue thus take on an even more disturbing quality, suggesting that Laurent has conflated death and violence with sexual arousal. More broadly, though, the fact that he goes to the morgue so much is symbolic of the unsettling trajectory his life has taken in the aftermath of the murder, as he finds himself surrounded by death and unable to stop obsessively thinking about it at all times.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Oxford University Press edition of *Thérèse Raquin* published in 2008.

Chapter 2 Quotes

By then Camille was twenty. His mother still treated him like a spoilt little boy. She adored him because she had struggled to keep him alive through a youth full of pain and sickness. The child had had every imaginable type of fever and illness, one after the other, and Madame Raquin had put up a fifteen-year fight against the sequence of fearful maladies which had threatened to snatch her son from her. She had overcome them all with her patience, care, and adoring devotion.

Related Characters: Camille, Madame Raquin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

For the entirety of Camille's childhood, Madame Raquin focuses on one thing and one thing only: his health. Because he has always been sickly, she has devoted herself to keeping him alive. Consequently, she has become very attached to him, pampering him even once he's reached the age of 20—he's a grown man, but she *still* treats him like a "spoilt little boy." In a sense, she has invested herself in his life more than the average parent, since she has had to actively work to keep him in good health, using all of her "patience, care, and adoring devotion" in order to make sure he survives. By outlining the history of Camille's childhood illnesses, the novel hints at an interesting dynamic between him and his mother: he depends on her to keep him healthy, but as she cares for him, she becomes so attached that she ends up depending on *him*, too, which is why his death affects her so profoundly later in the novel.

> This life of enforced convalescence made her turn in on herself; she developed a habit of speaking in an undertone, walking about the house without making any noise, and sitting silent and motionless on a chair with a vacant look in her eyes. Yet whenever she lifted an arm or moved a foot forward, it was apparent that she had all the litheness of a cat, with taut, powerful muscles and a store of passion and energy which lay dormant in her inert body.

Related Characters: Thérèse Raquin, Camille

Related Themes:

Page Number: 13

Explanation and Analysis

As a child, Thérèse is forced to lead a sheltered life alongside Camille. Because her cousin is often unwell, he's unable to lead an adventurous, exciting existence, which means that Thérèse—who is made to do everything Camille does—also doesn't get to experience the various thrills that most children seek out. Instead of rebelling against this lack of excitement, though, she resigns herself to a "life of enforced convalescence," meaning that she essentially lives like someone with a chronic illness even though she's perfectly healthy. In other words, she develops a passive attitude toward life, spending the majority of her time deferring to her cousin and aunt or "sitting silent and motionless on a chair with a vacant look in her eyes." However, none of this means that she doesn't still yearn for excitement and freedom—to the contrary, she secretly harbors a "store of passion and energy" that is just waiting to be ignited.

> Camille was irritated by his mother's constant fussing; he had rebellious moments when he wanted to rush about and make himself ill, just to escape from her cloying attentions which were starting to make him feel sick. Then he would drag Thérèse off and challenge her to wrestle with him in the grass. One day he gave his cousin a push and she fell over; she leapt up at once like a wild animal, with her cheeks red and eyes blazing with anger, and threw herself on him with both fists raised. Camille slid to the ground. He was scared.

Related Characters: Thérèse Raquin, Camille

Related Themes:

Page Number: 16

Explanation and Analysis

Because Thérèse hides her inner passion and intensity, Camille assumes that he can dominate her in a friendly game of wrestling. But he's gravely mistaken. Thérèse might *act* passive and subdued, but she secretly possesses a burning desire to live a much more wild, enthusiastic lifestyle. Because she bottles these feelings up, they come rushing out all at once when Camille tackles her. In a way, this moment of playful aggression is something she has been waiting for, since it finally gives her the opportunity to show her true intensity. The fact that she frightens Camille emphasizes just how overwhelming her inner passion is. Indeed, the novel presents her as a "wild animal" here and notes that her eyes are "blazing with anger." Although she normally holds back, she suddenly can't contain herself, ultimately foreshadowing her eventual outburst of passion when she meets Laurent—an event that awakens the same kind of "blazing" intensity that suddenly surfaces in this scene.

Chapter 3 Quotes

The truth was that only stupid ambition had driven Camille to think of leaving. He wanted to be an employee in some large administration, and would go pink with pleasure at the thought of himself sitting in the middle of a huge office, wearing shiny artificial cuffs and with a quill pen tucked behind his ear.

Related Characters: Camille, Thérèse Raquin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

After marrying Thérèse, Camille decides that he wants to move to Paris so that he can find a job. He doesn't actually care *what* he does, though—he just wants any job that will allow him to "be an employee in some large administration." His ambition is therefore vague and not necessarily as admirable as it might seem at first, since it's not as if he's motivated by a solid work ethic or a specific passion. Rather, he merely likes the idea that he could become someone who others see as important, hence his fantasy about wearing "shiny" shirt cuffs and using a fancy pen. The novel subtly mocks his dream by suggesting that he goes "pink with pleasure" when he thinks of himself working in what is really a rather mundane, unremarkable setting. Whereas Thérèse has an inherent sense of passion for life itself, Camille is only passionate about improving his social status, suggesting that he is somewhat narrow-minded and self-obsessed.

Chapter 5 Quotes

Thérèse, who had not yet said a word, looked at the newcomer. She had never seen a real man before. Laurent, tall, strong, and fresh-faced, filled her with astonishment. She stared with a kind of wonder at the low forehead, from which sprung black bushy hair, the full cheeks, red lips, and regular features which made up his handsome, full-blooded face. Her gaze lingered for a while on his neck, which was broad and short, thick and powerful. Then she became lost in contemplation of the huge hands, which he kept spread across his knees as he sat there; their fingers were square and his clenched fist must be enormous, capable of felling an ox.

Related Characters: Thérèse Raquin, Laurent

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

When Laurent comes to the haberdashery for the first time, Thérèse is shocked by how striking he looks. She's used to looking at men like Camille, whom the novel describes as weak and rather lazy. Laurent, in contrast, is described as a "real man." The implication here is that masculinity is related to strength, as the passage goes on to detail Laurent's "thick and powerful" "neck" and his "huge hands." What's most interesting about this initial description of his physical features, though, is that there's a certain sense of violence lurking in the details. After all, Thérèse looks at Laurent's large hands and loses herself in deep "contemplation" about how mighty they are, noting that his fists must be "capable of felling an ox." Although thinking about the size of somebody's hand isn't all that strange, it *is* somewhat out of the ordinary to immediately imagine that person beating a large animal with their bare hands. Right from the very beginning, then, Thérèse and Laurent's relationship has violent undertones, subtly hinting at the violence they themselves will eventually perpetrate against Camille.

Laurent spoke quite unemotionally. In a few words, he had just told a story which summed him up perfectly. He was basically lazy by temperament, with full-blooded appetites and a pronounced desire for easy and long-lasting pleasures.

Related Characters: Laurent

Related Themes:

Page Number: 27

Explanation and Analysis

When Laurent first has dinner with Camille, Thérèse, and Madame Raquin, he explains that he went to law school but didn't end up finishing because he didn't care for it. Instead, he likes lounging around and living the life of an uninhibited painter, which—to him—means painting attractive nude models. He's very straightforward about his desires, apparently feeling no shame about his apathy toward work. His "lazy" attitude stands in stark contrast to Camille's respect for any kind of work that might make someone look important. For Laurent, work and money are mere necessities. Rather than focusing on securing a good job, he wants to satisfy his "appetites," since he has a strong "desire for easy and long-lasting pleasures." The words "easy" and "long-lasting" are particularly important here, as they suggest that Laurent is especially interested in finding ways of putting in minimal effort to reap long-term rewards. It's

not that he impulsively looks for satisfactions that will only last for a short time, then, but that he thoughtfully seeks out pleasures that will continue to delight him.

Chapter 6 Quotes

It is true that he found Thérèse plain and did not love her, but then she would not cost him anything; the women he usually picked up cheaply were certainly no prettier, nor any better loved. On grounds of economy alone, it was a good idea to take his friend's wife. [...] Then again, when he came to think about it, an affair like this could hardly lead to any trouble: it would be in Thérèse's interests to cover it up, and he could easily jilt her when he felt like it; even if Camille did find out and get annoyed, he would just thump him if he started to throw his weight around. Whichever way he looked at it, the prospect seemed an easy and alluring one to Laurent.

Related Characters: Laurent, Thérèse Raquin, Camille

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 33

Explanation and Analysis

When it first occurs to Laurent that he could easily start an affair with Thérèse, he weighs the pros and cons of doing so. He readily admits to himself that he doesn't "love her," but that doesn't concern him very much. Rather, he's focused on whether or not starting a romantic relationship with her will "cost him anything." He thinks this way because he has become accustomed to paying sex workers to satisfy his sexual desires. He also simply wants to determine whether or not anything *bad* could come from sleeping with Thérèse. Throughout all of his considerations, though, he never stops to think in terms of morality. He doesn't consider the fact that it would be unkind and unfair to sleep with his friend's wife, instead focusing solely on the ways in which doing so would enhance his own life. As such, it becomes overwhelmingly clear that Laurent always prioritizes his own desires over all else.

Chapter 7 Quotes

When he left her he was tottering like a drunkard. The next day, once he had regained his caution and his rather forced composure, he asked himself whether or not to go back to this lover whose kisses so inflamed his passions. At first he firmly resolved to stay at home. Then he began to weaken. He wanted to forget Thérèse, the sight of her naked body and her sweet but brutal caresses, yet there she still was, implacable, holding her arms out to him. The physical pain which this vision caused him soon became unbearable.

Related Characters: Laurent, Thérèse Raquin

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 36

Explanation and Analysis

Even though Laurent sincerely enjoys sleeping with Thérèse, he has some reservations at the beginning of their relationship. He's unnerved by the extent to which she "inflame[s] his passions," meaning that her ability to make him feel so intensely desirous of her is unsettling to him. It's a little surprising that he feels uncomfortable in this regard, since he's someone who always seeks to satisfy his sexual desires. But it's clear that he likes to maintain a sense of control over his own feelings, which is why he tries to make himself "forget Thérèse" whenever he leaves her apartment, trying to force himself to stay home instead of rushing back to her for another session of lovemaking. And yet, he's incapable of resisting her, and though the intensity of their bond causes him "physical pain," he keeps coming back for more. Their connection is so all-consuming, then, that it's capable of driving him to behave in ways that reach beyond his better judgment—something that will influence their eventual decision to kill Camille.

I don't know how I can have loved you; actually, it was more like hate. The sight of you irritated me, I couldn't stand it; when you were there, my nerves were stretched to breaking-point, my mind went blank, and I saw red. Oh, how I suffered! Yet I wanted my suffering and longed for you to come; [...]

Related Characters: Thérèse Raquin (speaker), Laurent

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

Once Thérèse and Laurent start sleeping with each other on a regular basis, Thérèse tells him that she loves him. In fact, she says she felt strong feelings for him as soon as he came to the haberdashery for the first time, though she isn't sure how, exactly, that's the case. After all, when she first laid eyes on him, the emotion she felt seemed more akin to hatred than anything else, since the "sight of [him] irritated" her. The idea that Laurent's physical presence "irritated" Thérèse suggests that she was so flustered by the experience of setting eyes on an attractive man that her first reaction was to draw away; she was so overwhelmed that she felt as if her "nerves were stretched to [a] breaking-point." These descriptions illustrate the raw intensity of her attraction to Laurent, but they also hint at the violent undertones lurking in their bond. She even says that she "saw red," as if Laurent's mere presence might have thrown her into a rage. By conflating romantic feelings with such an aggressive reaction, the novel alerts readers to the fact that Thérèse and Laurent's relationship has a sinister element to it, ultimately foreshadowing the way their passion goes from romance to hatred and resentment in the aftermath of murdering Camille.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ But, unbeknown to him, desire had worked away deep inside him until it had finally delivered him, bound hand and foot, into the wild embrace of Thérèse. Now he was afraid he would cast prudence aside altogether, and did not dare go to the Passage du Pont-Neuf of an evening for fear of committing some act of folly. He was no longer in control of his actions; his mistress, with her cat-like suppleness and nervous sensitivity, had slowly insinuated herself into every fibre of his body. He needed this woman to live, as one needs food and drink.

Related Characters: Laurent, Thérèse Raquin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 48

Explanation and Analysis

Once Laurent's boss tells him that he'll lose his job if he keeps sneaking away, he and Thérèse are no longer able to see each other. Suddenly, Laurent realizes just how much he has come to depend on the satisfaction and pleasure he derives from his relationship with Thérèse. His desire has "worked away deep inside him," a phrase that frames his yearning for sexual pleasure as if it's some kind of sickness that has infected him. Now that he has had a taste of what it's like to be with Thérèse, he can't go on without it. And yet, he has also lost any sense of control, as evidenced by the fact that he doesn't want to visit the haberdashery because he's afraid he will do something stupid (like passionately kiss Thérèse in front of Madame Raquin or Camille). As he considers just how upset he is about not being able to see his lover, he realizes that he has developed an intense dependency. There is a sense of desperation here, as he thinks he needs Thérèse in order to survive. And it is this desperation, of course, that later drives him to do anything he can to ensure that she remains in his life—including murdering Camille.

❝ Before Thérèse had come he had not had any thought of murdering Camille; then, under the pressure of events and in exasperation at the thought that he would not see his lover ever again, he had talked of his death. Thus a new corner of his unconscious nature had revealed itself: carried away by his adultery, he had started dreaming of murder.

Related Characters: Laurent, Thérèse Raquin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 51

Explanation and Analysis

After not being able to sleep with each other for several weeks, Thérèse finally finds a way to visit Laurent at his apartment for a brief evening of lovemaking. Instead of satisfying their desires and making them feel content, though, their time together only exacerbates their fervent need to find a way to keep seeing each other in a romantic capacity. Before Thérèse came over, Laurent would never have considered doing something as extreme as killing Camille just to ensure that their relationship could go on. Now, though, he has been reminded of what it's like to sleep with his lover, causing him to entertain *any* idea that will ensure the continuation of their relationship. The novel examines his mindset before and after seeing Thérèse as a way of highlighting the gradual way that the idea of murdering Camille develops. It's not as if Laurent and Thérèse suddenly decide to kill him—rather, the idea emerges out of a prolonged sense of desperation and feverish longing, both of which distort Thérèse and Laurent's ability to think clearly.

Chapter 12 Quotes

He had decided to go there to cover himself in case anyone should suspect him, and to avoid having to break the dreadful news to Madame Raquin in person. That was something he felt peculiarly loath to do, for he fully expected her to be so grief-stricken that he would be unable to summon sufficient tears to act his own part credibly; moreover, he found the thought of her maternal anguish oppressive, although he didn't really care about it otherwise.

Related Characters: Laurent, Madame Raquin, Camille, Michaud, Olivier

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

After Laurent and Thérèse murder Camille, Laurent travels back to Paris to break the news of what happened. But he doesn't go directly to Madame Raquin. Instead, he goes to Michaud's house because he wants to make sure the old man—who used to work for the police—is on his side. There's also another benefit to going to Michaud's house first: it means Laurent can put off telling Madame Raquin. It's not terribly surprising that Laurent dreads watching Madame Raquin react to the horrible news, since witnessing her grief would surely be heart-wrenching, not to mention that the experience would most likely make the average person feel extraordinarily guilty for murdering Madame Raquin's son. But Laurent doesn't "really care" about that. He wants to avoid Madame Raquin not because her reaction will make him feel bad about killing Camille, but because he worries that he won't be able to act upset enough to convince her he had nothing to do with the incident. He therefore thinks only of himself, demonstrating to readers just how little empathy he has for others and the extent to which he lacks the capacity to feel true remorse.

He was relieved to have committed his crime at last. He had killed Camille and now the whole thing was over and done with; nothing more would ever be said. From now on he was going to live in peace and quiet, until it was time to take possession of Thérèse. The thought of committing a murder had choked him at times with panic; now that he had succeeded, a weight had been lifted from his chest, he could breathe easily again, and he was free of the anxiety which fear and hesitation had inflicted.

Related Characters: Laurent, Camille

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

In the days following Camille's death, Laurent doesn't feel guilty or upset. To the contrary, he feels *good*—he's "relieved to have committed his crime at last." The entire prospect of going through with the murder seems to have stressed him out more than the actual act of going through with it. Because he and Thérèse appear to have gotten away with their crime, Laurent no longer feels the "anxiety which fear and hesitation had inflicted" on him *before* the murder. It thus becomes overwhelmingly clear that he has very little regard for human life, since he's able to take comfort in the fact that he committed murder and got away with it.

However, Laurent's viewpoint in this period is also extremely naïve. He thinks that "the whole thing [is] over and done with" and that "nothing more [will] ever be said" about it, but these are absurd assumptions. As the rest of the novel will illustrate, the worst is yet to come for Laurent, who will continue to turn the crime over in his mind until both he and Thérèse are utterly miserable. The idea that he'll now "live in peace and quiet" is humorously misguided, as Camille's death ends up haunting him and eventually driving him to take his own life.

Chapter 13 Quotes

He turned down his shirt-collar and studied the wound in a cheap, tarnished mirror on the wall. It was a red gash the size of a two-sous coin; the skin had been torn away to expose the pinkish flesh, which had black spots in it; trickles of blood had run down as far as the shoulder, leaving congealed trails which were now flaking off. Against the white of the neck, the bite stood out a deep and powerful brown; it was on the right, below the ear. Laurent stooped forward and stretched his neck out to see, and the greenish mirror distorted his expression into an atrocious grimace.

Related Characters: Laurent, Camille

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 73

Explanation and Analysis

Even though Laurent feels pretty good after murdering Camille, he isn't fully able to banish the disturbing thoughts that come along with murdering another human being. He's especially unable to ignore the gravity of what he's done whenever he accidentally touches the bitemark scar that Camille left on his neck: a constant reminder of his horrible violence and immoral behavior. As he looks at the scar in the mirror for the first time, he studies it in great detail—so much detail, in fact, that this passage is fairly revolting. The description of the "pinkish flesh," the "black spots," and the "congealed trails" of blood are especially graphic and disturbing. Moreover, the unrelenting description is in keeping with the novel's attempt to observe its characters with the same objectivity as one might observe a science experiment, never shying away from things that are disgusting or unsettling. There's also a subtle conflation between the repulsive scar and Laurent himself, as his face contorts in the mirror "into an atrocious grimace," ultimately hinting that the murder has turned him into a grotesque, frightening figure.

> His visits to the Morgue gave him nightmares and fits of shuddering which left him panting for breath. He shook off his fears and told himself not to act like a child; he wanted to be strong, but, despite himself, his body refused, and his whole being was overcome by revulsion and horror as soon as he found himself in the damp, sickly-smelling atmosphere of the mortuary.

Related Characters: Laurent, Camille

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

Every morning after murdering Camille, Laurent goes to the morgue to look for his friend's dead body. He wants closure, hoping to ensure that he did, in fact, succeed in murdering Camille. But these visits are deeply disturbing to him, giving him "nightmares and fits of shuddering" that essentially incapacitate him and make it hard for him to breathe. Like the bitemark scar, the morgue brings with it a disturbing and grotesque feeling, one that seizes Laurent with "revulsion and horror." Although he and Thérèse have gotten away with murdering Camille in a legal sense, it becomes clear that Laurent will have a harder time moving on than he previously thought—after all, he seems to have developed a strange obsession with the morgue, which does little more than infuse his entire life with thoughts of death. In the aftermath of the murder, then, Laurent's existence is consumed by fear and repulsion, illustrating the negative effects that killing Camille has had on his ability to enjoy life.

Chapter 16 Quotes

> The two lovers no longer made any attempt to see each other on their own. They never sought a rendez-vous or exchanged a furtive kiss. For the moment, the murder had as it were smothered the sensual fire in their flesh; by killing Camille, they had managed to assuage those fierce and insatiable desires which had remained unsatisfied while they had lain locked in each other's arms. The crime had given them a feeling of acute pleasure which made their embraces seem insipid and loathsome in comparison.

Related Characters: Laurent, Thérèse Raquin, Camille

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

Even though Laurent and Thérèse kill Camille in order to finally be together, they don't actually spend much time with each other in the months following the murder. The reason for their sudden apathy toward each other has nothing to do with their fears of getting caught, since they could easily start planning ways to get married without attracting too much suspicion. Rather, they don't try to see each other because they no longer feel the burning passion that drove them to kill Camille. What's especially interesting is that the actual act of committing the murder seems to have satisfied their "insatiable desires." In fact, the novel even suggests that these desires had "remained unsatisfied while they had lain locked in each other's arms"—in other words, they never quite managed to fully satisfy their intense yearnings by having sex. The implication, then, is that they both got a sick thrill out of committing such a serious crime. And now that they've experienced such a thrill, nothing—not even their sexual relationship—can compare.

Whenever he reflected that he might have been found out and guillotined, all his caution and cowardice rushed back, making him shudder and bringing a cold sweat to his brow as he felt the icy kiss of the blade on the back of his neck. While he had been busily occupied he had gone straight ahead, with the blind tenacity of a dumb beast. Now, when he looked back at the chasm which he had just crossed, he was overcome by terror and faintness of heart.

'I must really have been drunk,' he thought; 'that woman must have intoxicated me with her caresses. Good God, what a crazy fool I've been! To risk the guillotine for something like that...It went off all right in the end, but if I had my time again I wouldn't even consider it.'

Related Characters: Laurent (speaker), Thérèse Raquin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87-8

Explanation and Analysis

As Laurent reflects on the nature of his relationship with Thérèse after killing Camille, he has a hard time piecing together what, exactly, drove him to commit such a risky crime. He realizes just how foolhardy it was to murder Camille, recognizing that he easily could have been "found out" and beheaded as a result. But none of these considerations occurred to him when he was in the throes of passion. Instead, he let himself strive forward without thinking, acting with the feverish and unyielding desire of a "dumb beast." Once again, the novel compares Laurent to an animal, suggesting that he's quick to prioritize his desires over all else, even when doing so isn't in his best interest.

And yet, while he now questions his choices, he doesn't actually show any remorse. He thinks about how he "wouldn't even consider" murdering Camille if he could go back in time, but that's only because he no longer thinks it was worth the risk. He has no moral qualms about what he's done—it's just that he doesn't feel as compelled by Thérèse anymore, so he can't justify such dangerous behavior. What's more, the fact that he blames Thérèse for "intoxicat[ing]" him with her "caresses" hints at his tendency to demonize her as a way of absolving himself, creating a dynamic that will lead to resentment later in their relationship.

Chapter 18 Quotes

If they were in a hurry to get marriage over with, it was because they could no longer stand being apart and on their own. Every night they were visited by the drowned man, and insomnia laid them on a bed of burning coals, turning them over with red-hot irons. The state of nervous irritation in which they were living still kindled new desires in them each evening, setting atrocious hallucinations before their eyes.

Related Characters: Laurent, Thérèse Raquin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 100

Explanation and Analysis

Fifteen months after murdering Camille, Thérèse and Laurent finally decide to start planning a way to get married without attracting suspicion. By making this decision, they manage to reignite their passion for one another. They're surprised, however, to find that the resurgence of their passion brings along horrific night terrors about Camille's drowned corpse. As they individually try to fall asleep each night, they are both "visited by the drowned man." What's more, they enter a vicious cycle in which their lack of sleep leads to "nervous irritation," which then puts them on edge and makes them desire each other, ultimately ushering in more "atrocious hallucinations" of Camille's dead body. It therefore becomes clear that their sexual cravings for one another have merged with their unsettling thoughts about Camille, making it quite unlikely that they'll be able to live in peace as a married couple. And yet, they delude themselves by thinking that sleeping together each night will protect them from their harrowing thoughts.

Chapter 21 Quotes

But in the dreadful silence that followed, the two murderers still went on conversing about their victim. [...] They could not have understood each other better if they had both screamed in heart-rending tones: 'We killed Camille, and his body is still here between us, turning our limbs to ice.' And the terrible confessions went on flowing between them, more visible and resounding than ever, in the calm, damp air of the room.

Related Characters: Camille, Laurent, Thérèse Raquin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 122

Explanation and Analysis

On Laurent and Thérèse's wedding night, they're unable to lie next to each other on the bed, let alone have sex. In fact, they find it difficult to even talk to each other, since they both feel like Camille's presence has filled the bedroom. To address the problem, they try not to talk at all. And yet, even in "the dreadful silence," they continue to communicate—their thoughts flow between each other as if they share a single mind. To put it a bit less dramatically, they both sense that the other one is thinking about Camille. It's so obvious, in fact, that it's as if they're screaming out a confession. Of course, their torment in this moment speaks to just how troubled they are by the fact that they murdered Camille, but the scene also emphasizes the idea that Laurent and Thérèse share an extremely close bond. They might not be capable of sleeping with each other, but they're so connected that they don't even need to speak aloud in order to communicate. In a way, murdering Camille has brought them even closer than they were before, though not in a positive way. To that end, they will continue to share this haunting bond throughout the rest of their relationship, even when it sours and becomes extraordinarily torturous.

❝ 'You know,' he said, 'I didn't get married for sleepless nights…We're behaving like children…It's your fault; when you put on your graveyard expression like that, it flusters me. Do try and be a bit more cheerful tonight and not scare me to death.'

Related Characters: Laurent (speaker), Thérèse Raquin, Camille

Related Themes:

Page Number: 128

Explanation and Analysis

The morning after their wedding day, Laurent and Thérèse feel foolish for staying up all night in terror. They're no longer quite as haunted by thoughts of Camille, so Laurent feels frustrated that they wasted the night sitting up and fretting about what they've done. In alignment with his tendency to blame Thérèse when things go wrong, he suggests that it's *her* fault that they couldn't sleep, accusing her of wearing a "graveyard expression" on her face that unnerved him and made it impossible to rest. Of course, he's just making excuses, since it's quite clear that Thérèse's face had nothing to do with his inability to sleep. There's also some subtle humor in this moment, since Laurent says that he "didn't get married for sleepless nights" when, in reality, that's *exactly* why he got married—after all, he murdered Camille so that he and Thérèse could be together and have sex whenever they wanted. In a sense, then, he really did want to marry her for "sleepless nights." But the difference, of course, is that he wanted to stay awake in the throes of sexual pleasure rather than in a pit of fear and despair!

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ His remorse was purely physical. Only his body, with its over-stretched nerves and trembling flesh, was afraid of the drowned man. His conscience had nothing to do with the terror he felt, and he did not in the least regret having killed Camille; in periods of calm when the ghost was not there, he would have committed the murder all over again if he had thought it was in his interests to do so. […] His body was suffering terribly but his soul remained absent; the wretched fellow did not feel in the least repentant. Thérèse's passion had infected him with a terrible sickness, and that was all.

Related Characters: Laurent, Camille, Thérèse Raquin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 130

Explanation and Analysis

The novel makes an important distinction between legitimate "remorse" and whatever it is, exactly, that Laurent experiences after killing Camille. In some ways, his reaction to murdering his friend looks a lot like guilt: he can't sleep, he thinks about Camille all the time, and he becomes unable to enjoy life. But all of these symptoms, the novel implies, are like a physical sickness and don't necessarily indicate that Laurent feels *guilty* or regrets his immoral behavior. Rather, he simply suffers from "over-stretched nerves." What's more, his main problem is that he's "afraid of the drowned man," suggesting that he's just thinking irrationally. To that end, the novel clearly states that Laurent's "conscience" has "nothing to do with the terror" he feels. In fact, he would even kill Camille again, as long as doing so would benefit him in some way. Consequently, Laurent emerges as a deeply unempathetic man whose self-interested nature triumphs over any kind of guilt or remorse that most people would feel if they murdered their friend and married his wife.

Chapter 24 Quotes

❝ Meanwhile, Thérèse and Laurent continued to lead their double lives. It was as if there were two quite distinct people in each of them: one, nervy and terrified, who started shaking as soon as darkness fell, the other sluggish and unconcerned, who breathed easily as soon as the sun was up. They were living two different existences, screaming in terror when they were left on their own, smiling serenely when there were other people there.

Related Characters: Laurent, Thérèse Raquin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 145

Explanation and Analysis

As Thérèse and Laurent's relationship becomes more and more emotionally torturous, nobody around them seems to recognize their unhappiness. To the contrary, everyone in their social group sees them as a model couple. The discrepancy between their public and private lives is largely due to the fact that the people who socialize at the Raquin household are quite oblivious and too self-important to see what's really going on. But it's also because Thérèse and Laurent have become accustomed to repressing their woes. What's more, they don't feel haunted by thoughts of Camille during the day, perhaps because there's enough going on to distract them and keep them from rehashing the murder. At night, though, they feel "nervy and terrified." And though they originally deluded themselves into thinking that keeping each other company at night would prevent them from having night terrors, they now know they were sorely mistaken, since spending time together only seems to make things worse.

Chapter 25 Quotes

❝ Thérèse remained tight-lipped, for she had no intention of letting Laurent fritter away the small fortune on which her freedom depended. When her husband pressed her with questions in an attempt to gain her assent, she replied drily, pointing out that, if he left his office, he would no longer be bringing in any money, so he would have to depend entirely on her. While she was speaking, Laurent looked at her sharply in a disconcerting way that made the rejection she was about to pronounce stick in her throat; she thought she could read in her accomplice's eyes the menacing threat: 'If you don't agree, I'll spill the beans.'

Related Characters: Laurent, Thérèse Raquin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

After suffering through months of unhappiness as Thérèse's husband, Laurent finally decides that he should make use of the family money. It's unsurprising that he makes this decision, since one of his main motivations for killing Camille—other than the fact that he wanted to marry Thérèse—was so that he could have access to Madame Raquin's savings and therefore lead the "idle" life he has always wanted. But Thérèse doesn't want to give him any money. Her reluctance reveals the resentment she clearly feels toward him, as she wants to withhold the Raquin family savings to keep him from squeezing enjoyment out of the cash. Of course, it's wise of her to keep him from accessing the money, since he's an indulgent person who would have no problem lavishly spending all of the savings. But she has trouble protecting the money because she suddenly fears that he will retaliate by turning them both in. A new, toxic dynamic thus develops in their relationship, as their suspicion of one another forces them to do things they don't want to do, all the while knowing that the other person holds a dangerous amount of power.

Chapter 27 Quotes

❝ 'It's perfectly clear, I can guess the whole sentence from the look in Madame's eye. I don't need things written out for me on a table, one glance from her is enough. What she meant to say is: "Thérèse and Laurent have taken good care of me."'

Grivet had reason to feel pleased with his powers of imagination, because this time the whole company agreed with him. The guests began to sing the couple's praises for having been so kind to the poor lady.

Related Characters: Grivet (speaker), Madame Raquin, Michaud, Olivier, Suzanne, Laurent, Thérèse Raquin

Related Themes:

Page Number: 167-8

Explanation and Analysis

After Madame Raquin suffers a medical "attack" and becomes paralyzed, Laurent and Thérèse accidentally acknowledge in front of her that they murdered Camille. Determined to bring them to justice, Madame Raquin manages to gain control of her hand at the next weekly

game of dominoes and uses it to spell out letters on the table. Everyone watches as she writes: "Thérèse and Laurent have…," but she's unable to finish because Grivet keeps interrupting her with guesses, enjoying the idea that he's gifted at intuiting what she's thinking. Of course, Grivet is wrong: he has no idea what she's thinking. His guesses are so disruptive that Madame Raquin's hand runs out of steam before she can finish the sentence, so Grivet claims to know exactly what she was trying to say: "Thérèse and Laurent have taken good care of me."

Given that Thérèse and Laurent were the ones to murder her son, it's obvious that Madame Raquin didn't want to praise them. But nobody at the dominoes game knows that. Instead, they're so ignorant that they celebrate the two murderers. This scene thus underscores just how easily Thérèse and Laurent have gotten away with murder, since the people closest to them—who would have the best chances of finding out the truth—are completely unaware of what really happened to Camille. And yet, Thérèse and Laurent are still miserable because they torment both themselves and each other. In a way, then, it would almost feel like a strange kind of mercy if they *did* get caught, since at least getting executed would put an end to their nightly terrors. Instead, though, they're forced to live with what they've done and listen to everyone talk about how kind they are.

Chapter 32 Quotes

❝ Suddenly, Thérèse and Laurent burst into tears. An overwhelming crisis broke them and flung them into each other's arms, as weak as children. They both felt something gentle and tender awakening in their bosom. They cried, unable to speak, thinking of the sordid life they had led and would go on leading, if they were cowardly enough to go on at all. Then, as they thought back over the past, they felt so weary and disgusted with themselves that they were filled with an immense need for rest, oblivion. They exchanged a final glance, a glance of gratitude, before the knife and the glass of poison. Then Thérèse took the glass, drank half of it, and handed it to Laurent, who swallowed the rest straight down.

Related Characters: Thérèse Raquin, Laurent

Related Themes:

Page Number: 204-5

Explanation and Analysis

In the novel's final scene, Thérèse and Laurent realize in the same moment that they're trying to kill each other. Perhaps because the intensity of their romantic relationship has always contained hints of violence and aggression, catching each other in the act of murder finally enables them to embrace one another in a tender, emotional way—a way they haven't been able to embrace each other since before they killed Camille. Although they both planned to murder the other out of self-interest (thinking that doing so would make it possible for them to live in peace), they seem to see murder as an act of kindness in this moment, as if they're both doing the good deed of putting the other person out of their misery. When they weep in each other's arms, readers are reminded of the strong connection that has remained between them throughout the entire novel. Even when their relationship was full of hatred and resentment, Laurent and Thérèse were bound to each other by their mutual suffering. In keeping with their unbreakable bond, then, it makes sense that they die together, ultimately suggesting that passion and intimacy aren't always fueled by love—rather, they're sometimes driven by something much darker, like hatred and misery.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

In a dark, grimy alley in Paris there is an old haberdashery. The light during the day is dim in the corridor, but passersby can just make out the solemn face of Thérèse Raquin as she sits inside the shop. An elderly woman sits next to her, asleep in the wan lamplight. In the evenings, Thérèse's husband passes the time with them in the shop, chatting or reading and always shaking with a slight fever. When they close the store at 10, they make their way to their living quarters above the shop, where the old woman goes to one bedroom and the married couple goes to the other. Before bed each night, Thérèse spends a moment gazing out the window, a look of contempt and dissatisfaction on her face.

The beginning of Thérèse Raquin *establishes the novel's somber tone. It also foregrounds Thérèse's discontent—she's clearly dissatisfied with her life in the dreary haberdashery, though the specific factors contributing to her unhappiness aren't yet all that apparent. Suffice it to say, though, it's obvious that her marriage doesn't bring her any kind of joy or relief from her otherwise depressing life.*

CHAPTER 2

Madame Raquin—the old woman who sits next to Thérèse each day in the shop—used to run a haberdashery just outside Paris for 25 years. After the death of her husband, she sold the business and used the money to create a pleasant life of relative solitude with her son, Camille, and her niece, Thérèse. They all lived together in a house situated on the banks of the Seine. Camille was already 20, but Madame Raquin still treated him like a child—he had been sick throughout his childhood, so she was used to constantly pampering him. He had turned into a weak young man, but his vulnerability just made his mother love him all the more.

There's a sense of dependency in the Raquin family, as Camille has—as a sickly child—been forced to rely on his mother to keep him from dying. What's more, Madame Raquin herself seems so attached to Camille that it's as if she *depends on* him *just as much as he depends on her—she needs him to be her vulnerable young boy so that she can play the role of the doting mother. As a result, she spoils him so much that it actually works against him, turning him into a helpless person and, in that way, suggesting that overreliance on other people can be rather harmful.*

When Camille turned 18, he felt bored and stifled by his mother's overbearing attention. Prone to a certain restlessness, he sought out a job, working for a local cloth merchant and earning a small monthly wage. Madame Raquin didn't like him leaving the house for work, but he enjoyed it: working gave him "infinite pleasure" and a certain "vacant feeling" that he cherished. Although he saw himself as a loving person who greatly appreciated other people, the truth was that he only cared about himself and was focused solely on doing whatever would bring him the most satisfaction in life.

By showering him in love and affection, Madame Raquin turns Camille into a pompous, self-obsessed young man. To that end, Camille doesn't want a job because he's ambitious or hard-working—rather, it's because he wants to get away from his mother. All in all, then, Madame Raquin's obsession with Camille has negative consequences, driving him away from her while also ensuring that he moves through the world in a purely self-interested way.

When Camille wasn't working, he would go down to the Seine with his cousin, Thérèse, who was the same age as him. Madame Raquin's brother had brought Thérèse to her when Thérèse was only two—he had just gotten back from Algeria, where he had impregnated a woman who later died, leaving him with Thérèse. Madame Raquin happily took her in, raising her alongside Camille. In fact, the two children shared the same bed, meaning that Thérèse spent the majority of her first 18 years lying next to a feverish, sickly boy and helping Madame Raquin care for him.

Thérèse grows up trapped in a stifling environment. She's forced to go along with Madame Raquin's overprotective behavior toward Camille. As a result, it seems unlikely that she's able to have a normal childhood in which it's possible for her to explore her own interests and gain a sense of independence—instead, she's stuck sharing a bed with her feverish cousin while her aunt obsesses over making his life as perfect as possible. In other words, she doesn't lead a particularly fulfilling life as a child, which is perhaps why she later seeks out joy and pleasure so ardently as an adult.

The lifestyle Thérèse was forced to lead alongside Camille caused her to adopt a withdrawn, reserved attitude. But whenever she made a quick movement, it was evident that she was full of energy and power. She was often told to be still and quiet, but there was a passion smoldering inside her. Still, she and Camille got along relatively well, and Madame Raquin took it for granted that they would one day get married. But there was nothing romantic between them. When they played together, Camille treated her like nothing more than a playmate. Once, when he caught her off guard by jokingly pushing her, she reared up like a "wild animal," jumping on him and battering him to the ground with a glint in her eyes—Camille was terrified.

The novel hints that there's a raw, animalistic intensity lurking deep inside Thérèse. The problem, though, is that this intensity has been repressed and bottled up by her boring upbringing in the Raquin household. And as if it's not bad enough that she has had to share a bed with Camille for her entire life, it now becomes clear that Madame Raquin expects them to get married, apparently not caring that they're cousins. They don't have a romantic connection, since they've grown up alongside each other as cousins, but this lack of passion just adds to the overall absence of pleasure and joy in the early stages of Thérèse's life.

When they're old enough, Madame Raquin arranges for Camille and Thérèse to get married. That night, instead of heading into her own bedroom, Thérèse goes into Camille's. The next morning, Camille seems exactly the same: he still looks sickly and unwell. And Thérèse, for her part, still seems apathetic and still has the same "frighteningly calm expression" she always wears.

It's not explicitly stated, but the implication here is that Camille and Thérèse may not have consummated their marriage. After all, nothing about them seems to change the next morning, perhaps subtly indicating that they didn't have sex on their wedding night. The fact that Thérèse's expression is described as "frighteningly calm" supports the idea that they didn't have sex, since she would most likely be somewhat disturbed by having done such a thing with Camille, whom she clearly does not find attractive. Furthermore, the term "frighteningly calm" hints that there's a certain sinister aspect to her tranquility, as if her composure is really just hiding deeper, more unnerving feelings.

CHAPTER 3

A week after the wedding, Camille decides that he and Thérèse must move to Paris. Madame Raquin is distraught. She already planned to grow old in their house on the Seine and hasn't accounted for the drastic change that will surely come about if Camille moves away. But Camille whines and threatens to make himself sick if she doesn't go along with the idea, so she relents. She decides to return to the haberdashery business, opening a small shop in Paris, where she and Thérèse can work while Camille does whatever he wants—walk around Paris, for instance, or maybe find a job.

Madame Raquin continues to spoil Camille. This time, though, she sacrifices her own vision for the rest of her life in order to please her son. She decides to go back into the haberdashery business at an old age—just so that her impulsive, selfish son can stroll around Paris. She is, it seems, unable to refuse her son. And though she could stay behind while Camille and Thérèse go to Paris, she's so attached to Camille that this thought doesn't even seem to enter her mind, thus illustrating the ways in which emotional dependency can interfere with a person's ability to make informed decisions.

Camille is intent on finding a job in Paris. He's obsessed with the idea of working for a large company, coveting the image of himself sitting at a desk with a fancy pen behind his ear. Madame Raquin goes along with his fantasy, and nobody asks Thérèse what she thinks—they're so accustomed to her docile obedience that it never occurs to them to ask for her opinion.

Camille's vision of himself sitting at work with a nice pen behind his ear reveals his superficiality—he's only interested in finding a job because he wants to seem important. Unsurprisingly, Madame Raquin completely indulges his vanity in this regard, indicating that she, too, has overinflated ideas about social status and the respectability that comes along with working in an office.

Madame Raquin goes to Paris and finds a shop in the dingy corridor known as Passage du Pont-Neuf. It's old and grimy, but she gets it for a good price—so good, in fact, that she knows that, between the profits of the haberdashery business and Camille's job, they'll be able to sustain themselves without dipping into her pension, thus leaving a healthy inheritance for future grandchildren. Excited by such an idea, she leaves Paris with a romanticized idea of the shop, returning to Camille and Thérèse with great things to say about the little store.

Madame Raquin idealizes the depressing little shop because it was cheap, thus allowing her to fantasize about saving money and, in that way, achieving a respectable level of financial security. Even though the store she buys is bleak and unimpressive, then, she allows an obsession with money to cloud her judgment, ultimately overlooking reality in favor of a fantasy about wealth.

When Thérèse, Camille, and Madame Raquin move into the shop, Thérèse is dismayed. It's nothing like Madame Raquin said. She especially hates the depressing apartment above the store, but Camille doesn't care. He says they'll hardly spend any time in the apartment anyway. During the days, he claims, he'll be off at work while Madame Raquin and Thérèse keep each other company in the shop. In truth, though, he never would accept such terrible accommodations if he weren't so set on working in a nice office somewhere in the city. Madame Raquin, for her part, is surprised by Thérèse's immediate resignation to their new reality. Whenever Madame Raquin suggests something that might improve the space, Thérèse shrugs it off, saying they don't need "luxuries."

The fact that Madame Raquin is surprised about how quickly Thérèse accepts her new life indicates that Madame Raquin herself is still quite aware that the store is depressing and unimpressive. Nonetheless, though, she doesn't say anything because she has already decided to prioritize Camille's desire to live in Paris over her own happiness in old age. Thérèse, for her part, doesn't object to their new circumstances because she has already learned how to be passive and acquiescent—she has, after all, practiced repressing her own desires for her entire life, always yielding to whatever Camille (and, thus, Madame Raquin) wants.

It takes Camille a month to find a job. He spends his days walking through Paris, actively avoiding the depressing haberdashery. Finally, he finds an office job at the Orleans Railway and is delighted to spend the vast majority of his time there. He even walks home leisurely, looking at the various landmarks in Paris. When he's not working, he spends his time reading thick history books, thinking he's vastly expanding his intelligence. He tries to get Thérèse to take an interest in these books, but she doesn't care about them—she'd rather sit completely still and let her mind drift, dedicating herself to the task of becoming a completely "passive instrument." Three years pass like this, with Thérèse feeling like her life will continue in this joyless way forever.

Camille thinks of himself as superior to Thérèse simply because he has an office job and reads large books. But these aren't very good measures of actual intelligence or personal worth. Rather, they simply indicate that Camille is obsessed with the idea of seeming *like a respectable, wealthy gentleman. Thérèse, on the other hand, has no delusions about what her life is really like: she knows she's unhappy, but she's accustomed to ignoring her own discontent and becoming a "passive instrument" in the lives of the people around her—something that will soon change when she suddenly feels the first stirrings of real passion.*

CHAPTER 4

The Raquins start hosting a social gathering every Thursday. It begins when Madame Raquin runs into an old friend, Michaud, who worked for the police outside of Paris and then moved to the city in retirement. Michaud starts coming once a week with his son, Olivier, who works at a police station in Paris and earns 300 francs per month—something that fills Camille, who makes just 100 francs per month, with jealousy and admiration. Olivier brings along his quiet, unintelligent wife, Suzanne, and Camille invites an older coworker at the Orleans Railway named Grivet. Camille knows that Grivet earns 2,100 francs per month, so he treats him with the utmost respect.

In keeping with his superficial obsession with social class and status, Camille is very conscious of how much money other people make. He himself has just started earning money, so he cozies up to people like Grivet because they earn what he thinks are respectable salaries. He seems to believe that anyone who earns a good salary is worthy of admiration, emphasizing just how much he invests himself in the importance of money and what it supposedly says about people.

Thérèse strongly dislikes all of Camille and Madame Raquin's friends, but she goes along with their weekly social engagement anyway. Sometimes, though, she pretends to feel sick so she can skip the socializing, which always involves sitting around the small table in the apartment above the shop and playing dominoes while Michaud, Grivet, and Olivier make inane jokes and idle conversation. She finds their company revolting, thinking they're all "sinister creatures" with whom she's been imprisoned each Thursday evening.

Thérèse's unhappiness is quite glaring, but nobody in her life seems to notice. She hates spending time with the people who Camille and Madame Raquin worship so dearly, suggesting that she—unlike her husband and aunt—is unimpressed by superficial things like money and social status. And yet, she doesn't seek out a more enjoyable, pleasing life, instead resigning herself to her current existence and, at the most, pretending to be sick so as to avoid the drudgery of the Thursday evening gatherings.

CHAPTER 5

Camille comes home from the office one Thursday with a new coworker. He introduces him to Madame Raquin, explaining with glee that the man is Laurent, a young boy he used to play with growing up. Both Madame Raquin and Camille are delighted by this coincidence, finding it astounding that it took so long for Camille and Laurent to recognize each other at work, which Camille interprets as an indication of just how impressively large and "important" the company is. Camille also marvels at the fact that Laurent already earns 1,500 francs per month.

The novel sets Laurent up to be yet another one of Camille's cronies—someone who earns a decent salary at Camille's company. What's humorous about Camille not recognizing Laurent for so long is that he sees it as an indication that he works for a big, "important" company, when—in reality—his failure to recognize Laurent says more about his own obliviousness than anything else. The novel thus subtly mocks Camille's self-importance and his tendency to focus on things like status to the exclusion of all else.

Singing Laurent's praises, Camille adds that his old friend went to law school and that he knows how to paint. As Laurent settles in after accepting an offer to stay for dinner, Thérèse studies him and is struck by his appearance. He is the first "real man" she has ever seen. He's large and strong, with a powerful air about him and enormous hands. As Thérèse looks at him, a tremble rolls through her entire body. When Camille asks if Laurent knows Thérèse, he looks directly at her and says that he recognized her immediately. They lock eyes with such intensity that Thérèse almost feels ill.

Finally, Thérèse really feels *something. In contrast to Camille, Laurent is powerful and seems to emanate a certain vitality that speaks to Thérèse, awakening a passion in her that has been lying dormant since childhood. What's more, he takes the time to really notice her. His remark that he recognized her immediately shows that he's very aware of her presence. Unlike Camille, who takes Thérèse for granted, Laurent sees her for the woman she is, and this excites her so much that she's jolted out of her normal passive state.*

Over dinner, Camille asks how Laurent's father—a farmer in their hometown—is doing. Laurent says he doesn't know: they had a falling out five years ago. Because Laurent's father is constantly getting into disputes with his neighbors, he sent Laurent to law school in the hopes that his son would be able to represent him in court free of charge. But Laurent hated law school. He pretended to attend class for the first two years, but only so that he could take the money his father sent him. Meanwhile, he lived in a studio with a painter and took up painting himself. He liked it, thinking it was easy and enjoyable. But what he *really* liked was lounging around all day and smoking. But then his father found out he wasn't attending school and cut him off.

Whereas Camille worships the idea of working in an important office, Laurent doesn't see the inherent value of work. Instead, he openly acknowledges his fondness of doing very little, ultimately indicating that he's someone who prioritizes pleasure. In other words, he has no problem with the idea of living a carefree, indulgent lifestyle—yet another thing that sets him apart from seemingly everyone else in Thérèse's life.

Laurent's father told him he could come home and work on the farm, but he refused. Instead, he tried to support himself by selling paintings, but he found it wasn't easy to make money this way. He therefore looked for a job, which is why he now works at the Orleans Railway, biding his time until his father dies and leaves him with an inheritance, at which point he'll quit his job so he can live "the idle life." Laurent is straightforward about what he wants, telling the Raquins his story without the slightest hint of emotion. He is, in short, "lazy" and is hungry for "long-lasting pleasures."

Even though Laurent doesn't idealize the idea of making a lot of money in the way that Camille does, there's no getting around the fact that everyone needs money in order to survive. More to the point, Laurent can't lead the "idle" lifestyle he yearns for without sufficient funds. Consequently, he has to work just like everyone else—the key difference between him and Camille, though, is that work is not something he cherishes. It's not something he thinks will bring him honor and respect, nor does he care about either of those things. Rather, work is just something that will sustain him until he inherits enough money to lead a life in which he can seek out the "long-lasting pleasures" that he seems to prioritize above all else.

The life Laurent led in school instilled in him an appetite for ease and enjoyment. He doesn't care about art, so it was easy to give it up—he isn't very good, anyway. What he really misses these days is the company of the women who used to model for him. They were always willing, for a small fee, to satisfy his sexual cravings. When Laurent talks about the women who used to model, Camille becomes boyish and immature, saying that Laurent must have been embarrassed when the models undressed. But Laurent disagrees, describing how fun it was to see them naked. He talks about one model's breasts in particular and then suddenly stops, looks up, and makes direct eye contact with Thérèse.

Laurent doesn't just enjoy leading a life full of pleasure and passion—he seems to need *these pleasures, since he has become accustomed to an existence in which it was easy for him to satisfy his every desire. Such ideas seem completely foreign to Camille, who doesn't yearn for anything other than a fancy job and a respectable salary. But they* do *resonate with Thérèse, and Laurent seems very aware of the interest she takes in his stories—so aware, in fact, that he makes a point of flirtatiously looking at her as he speaks about sexual matters that Camille would never discuss.*

Entertained by the difference between Thérèse's and Camille's reactions to his stories about naked women, Laurent says he'd like to paint Camille's portrait. Camille is overjoyed and accepts, and they make plans for Laurent to come by after work in the evenings. Then Grivet, Michaud, Olivier, and Suzanne arrive for the weekly game of dominoes, and though they're hesitant to embrace Laurent, he eventually charms them into liking him. That night, Thérèse doesn't make excuses to leave the table, instead basking in Laurent's magnetic presence.

Thérèse's interest in Laurent is obvious. She normally hates sitting through the Thursday night gatherings, but now she doesn't want to leave the table, clearly hoping to seize any opportunity to be near Laurent. After a lifetime of ignoring her own desires, then, she now seems to wake up to her burning passion—a passion Laurent has ignited.

CHAPTER 6

Laurent lives in a tiny apartment and doesn't have much money for food, so he starts coming to visit the Raquins quite frequently. He charms the family and gratefully accepts the tea and food Madame Raquin serves him. He also starts painting Camille's portrait. His brushstrokes are uneven and halting, making Camille look garish and strange, but Madame Raquin and Camille remain quite excited about the entire process. As he paints, Thérèse sits quietly behind him, not saying a word. All the same, he can sense her intense interest in him.

Although it's not hard to see that Laurent offers to paint Camille's portrait just so he can spend more time around Thérèse, both Camille and Madame Raquin are utterly oblivious of his true intentions. They're too wrapped up in the idea of Camille looking distinguished by having his portrait done to recognize that Laurent doesn't really care about the painting—in fact, they can't even see that Laurent is a bad painter, thus illustrating the extent to which they obsess over things like social status and respectability.

On his way home from painting Camille, Laurent contemplates starting a love affair with Thérèse. He can tell she desperately needs a lover because she's so bored. And since he knows Camille couldn't hurt him if he were to find out, he decides to act on his impulse to sleep with Thérèse. He certainly doesn't love her, but he wants to satisfy his physical cravings. What's more, if he started sleeping with Thérèse, then the entire Raquin family would bring him pleasure: Thérèse would fulfill his sexual desires, Madame Raquin would serve him food and drink, and Camille would offer some pleasant friendship in the evenings.

Laurent's tendency to prioritize pleasure in life becomes quite glaring as he weighs whether or not to start an affair with Thérèse. What's notable is that his decision-making process has nothing to do with morality—rather, he considers his options only insofar as they will benefit him. The only reason he would hold back, it seems, would be if he thought sleeping with Thérèse would somehow interfere with his ability to enjoy life. Because he doesn't think anything bad could come of the affair, though, he has no problem deciding to go through with it.

Laurent finishes the portrait. It's terrible and emphasizes Camille's sickly qualities. But Madame Raquin and Camille love it, believing it has an "air of distinction." Wanting to celebrate the completion of the painting, Camille goes to fetch some champagne. Meanwhile, Madame Raquin goes downstairs to the shop, leaving Laurent and Thérèse alone. They stare at each other for a moment of expectant hesitation, and then Laurent grabs Thérèse and kisses her. She instinctively tries to push him away, but then they lower themselves to the floor and passionately—but silently—embrace each other.

Again, Camille and Madame Raquin are too distracted by the idea of having a distinguished portrait of Camille to see that it's a terrible painting that emphasizes his worst qualities. Thérèse, on the other hand, doesn't seem to care about the painting at all: she only cares about what will happen between her and Laurent. Finally, they embrace each other. The fact that she instinctively resists him is interesting, since she otherwise seems to want to go through with the embrace. Her instinct to push him away suggests that there's something abrupt and vaguely sinister about his approach, perhaps hinting at how intense his animalistic passion feels.

CHAPTER 7

Laurent and Thérèse feel as if their secret relationship is "inevitable," like it's already been going on for a long time. But they still have to be careful about how they meet. Since Thérèse can't leave the shop during the day, Laurent makes up excuses to step away from work for a few hours each day. He then sneaks through an alleyway and up a small outdoor staircase that leads to the Raquins' backdoor, which opens into Thérèse's bedroom. Thérèse simply makes an excuse to go upstairs, leaving Madame Raquin in the shop while she goes to meet her lover. Whenever Laurent makes his way to the apartment, he's overcome with desire, and when he sees Thérèse, her beauty and passionate expression dazzle him.

Laurent and Thérèse's feeling that their affair was "inevitable" confirms that they've been eagerly awaiting the moment they finally get together. And though they're somewhat careful as they embark on their secret relationship, they're not that *careful—after all, they have sex with each other right above the shop, where Madame Raquin sits and waits for Thérèse to come back downstairs! In this way, their daring behavior underscores just how much they're willing to risk in order to satisfy their desires.*

Thérèse throws herself into her and Laurent's sexual relationship. She revels in his strong, powerful body, feeling as if she has been jolted alive by something primal and raw. She's so passionate when they embrace that Laurent starts to worry—he has never had such intense romantic embraces. When he leaves for the day, he stumbles into the street as if drunk. Sometimes, he tries to keep himself from going to visit her, but then he loses his willpower and rushes over. Although he had reservations about the relationship, he can't help but give himself over to it.

Laurent has led a life full of sexual pleasure, as made evident by the fact that he spent his time in law school indulging his desires. It's therefore remarkable that Thérèse is the most passionate person he has ever slept with, since he seems to have slept with many *women. To that end, she's so passionate that he can't resist her, no matter how hard he tries—an indication that intense sexual passion can lead to a certain loss of control.*

Thérèse tells Laurent at one point about her past, complaining about how miserable it was to grow up sleeping in the same bed as the sickly Camille. Sometimes she even had to take the same medicine as him, just to encourage him to swallow it. She admits that she doesn't wish ill on the Raquins, but she hated growing up with them and is now eager for a life of freedom and enjoyment. The pleasure she has with Laurent, she believes, is like taking revenge on the Raquins for forcing her to lead such a dull, dreary life. She resents them for making her into a "passive," hesitating person who has settled into a meaningless existence of comfort and tedium.

Until now, Thérèse has never done anything to actually express her discontent. Instead, she has always just repressed her emotions and deferred to the Raquins. However, she has now experienced what it's like to actually experience satisfaction and pleasure, so she's less willing to unquestioningly accept her boring, mundane life as Camille's wife. To put it another way, her relationship with Laurent energizes her and gives her a sense of passion that her life has been sorely lacking.

Thérèse says she loves Laurent, though she doesn't know how, exactly, that happened. When she first saw him, it was almost as if she *hated* him—his presence unnerved her and made her suffer. But her suffering was just a form of passion, and all she wanted was for him to embrace her. After she says this to Laurent, they fervently make love. Every time he comes over, in fact, they make love with alarming intensity, as if their caresses are "violent." He begins to worry that Thérèse will yell out too loudly in pleasure, but she isn't afraid, insisting that Madame Raquin is oblivious. Sure enough, when Madame Raquin comes upstairs one day, all Thérèse has to do is throw some clothes over Laurent and claim to be sick, and Madame Raquin politely goes away.

There's a subtle conflation in Thérèse and Laurent's relationship between passion and aggression. Because they desire each other so intensely, their passion can sometimes feel "violent," a word that hints at the sinister potential that lurks within their bond. For now, though, the lovers enjoy their intense connection—so much, in fact, that Thérèse can hardly be bothered to practice caution while having sex with Laurent, once again illustrating that passion can override a person's ability to think rationally.

One day, Laurent is unsettled by François, the Raquin family cat. François stares at him and Thérèse, but Thérèse makes a joke of it, imagining what it would be like if François could talk—he'd surely tell Camille everything that goes on in the bedroom, saying that Thérèse and Laurent do all sorts of "naughty things." She laughs, but Laurent is uncomfortable. Feeling afraid but not wanting to show it, he picks up the cat and puts it out of the room.

Even though the beginning phases of Laurent and Thérèse's relationship is mostly marked by excitement and burning desire, it becomes clear here that there's also an element of fear at play in the affair. Thérèse's comments about François are lighthearted and silly—he is, after all, just a cat! And yet, Laurent is legitimately unnerved by the idea that François is watching them. The mere fact that Laurent feels so suspicious (or perhaps superstitious*) suggests that—on some level—he has a guilty conscience, though the novel will go on to portray him as someone who never feels guilty, at least not in the ways that most people experience guilt.*

CHAPTER 8

Laurent doesn't mind visiting the Raquin household every evening, even though he's having an affair with Thérèse. To the contrary, he enjoys coming over. Madame Raquin spoils him with food and affection, and Camille entertains him to a certain degree. Thérèse, meanwhile, has no problem acting in the same cold and passive way that she always acts around Camille and his friends, since she's used to hiding her emotions. Whereas Laurent simply enjoys what the Raquins give him without thinking about right and wrong, Thérèse is acutely aware of what she's doing by deceiving Camille—but she doesn't care. In fact, she *likes* knowing that she's doing something dishonest.

Despite the fact that Laurent feels unnerved by François in a way that hints at a certain feeling of guilt, he otherwise doesn't seem to care whether or not what he and Thérèse are doing is right or wrong. He doesn't think in those terms. Instead, he thinks exclusively about his own pleasures, always calculating what will bring him the most satisfaction. Accordingly, he visits the Raquin household frequently, realizing that he can gain pleasure from the family in more ways than simply sleeping with Thérèse. As for Thérèse herself, she is *aware that what she and Laurent are doing is unfair to Camille, but she doesn't care—after all these years of submitting to the Raquins, she seems to take pleasure in finally prioritizing her own desires.*

Each night, Laurent comes over for dinner. When Camille and Madame Raquin aren't looking, he and Thérèse steal short, passionate kisses, though they're careful not to overdo it, since they don't want to get caught. Just to be sure nobody suspects him of anything, Laurent attends the Thursday night social gatherings, wanting to win over the Raquins' friends. He thus has to tolerate Michaud's repetitive stories about police work and Grivet's long, boring anecdotes about people at the Orleans Railway. As long as Laurent can keep seeing Thérèse, though, these things don't bother him—the only thing he dreads is the idea of their affair ever ending.

The mundanity of life in the Raquin household continues like normal, even as Thérèse and Laurent delight in their affair. Their bond therefore becomes a small oasis in an otherwise dreary life, which is why it feels important to them to make sure it continues—the idea of losing the pleasure that comes along with their affair is unthinkable. In a way, then, they come to depend on each other for contentment and satisfaction.

CHAPTER 9

Eight months later, Laurent's boss tells him that he'll be fired if he ever leaves work again—he has, his boss says, been taking too many liberties. He's depressed for the rest of the day and can sense later that night that Thérèse is angry at him over dinner. At the end of the evening, he finds a brief moment to tell her that they won't be able to see each other anymore because of what his boss said. That night, Thérèse is distraught and becomes determined to find a new way to continue their affair, but no ideas come to mind. For the next month, the only time they see each other is in the presence of others.

Having tasted joy and satisfaction, it's excruciatingly hard for Thérèse and Laurent to go back to their normal lives. What's more, it's not the first time that Laurent has had to forgo pleasure in order to make money—after all, he also had to give up his life as a carefree artist when it became clear that he couldn't support himself on his own without working. Once again, he's forced to prioritize money over his own contentment, despite his tendency to always indulge his desires.

The problem with the affair's abrupt end is that Laurent has come to rely on the satisfaction he derives from his relationship with Thérèse. He realizes that he's completely in love with her, though the idea of feeling so strongly for a woman would have been absurd to him just a year ago. Now, though, he can't even think straight. He feels so desirous of Thérèse that he even worries he'll do something brash, feeling as if he literally *needs* her in order to go on living.

Forced to suddenly stop sleeping with Thérèse, Laurent discovers that his feelings for her are a bit more intense than he thought. In fact, he realizes that he has developed a dependency on her, since it feels like he'll be unable to survive if he can't be with her. He takes this feeling to mean that he's in love with her, but it's not clear whether or not this is really the case. It's quite possible that he's just desperate for her touch. Because he can no longer revel in that touch, though, he convinces himself that he's in love with her, demonstrating (in a way) the idea that forbidden fruit is often he sweetest—or so it seems.

Thankfully for Laurent, he soon receives a letter from Thérèse, who tells him to stay at home that night. She makes up a story to Camille and Madame Raquin about needing to collect a customer's forgotten payment, and though they think this is unnecessary, they don't object. She thus has the opportunity to make her way to Laurent's apartment, where they make love for a long time. Suddenly, though, the clock strikes 10 and Thérèse realizes she has to go. Laurent wishes she could stay, but she says she can't—in fact, she won't ever be able to sneak out like this again.

After a long period of not being able to indulge their sexual cravings, Thérèse and Laurent are finally able to reunite. However, the pleasure is fleeting because they know they won't be able to meet like this in the future—it's untenable, since Thérèse can't lie her way out of the house every single evening. They're therefore in the same situation as before, though their yearnings are perhaps even more intense now that they've had the chance to stoke their passion for each other.

Both Laurent and Thérèse are so distraught about the idea of never having sex again that they start complaining about Camille—if it weren't for him, they would be able to do whatever they pleased. Laurent asks if there's some kind of trip Thérèse could send Camille on, just to get him out of the way for a while. Thérèse says this is impossible, since there aren't any trips that would be long enough to make a difference; there is, after all, only one kind of "journey" from which people never return. Both lovers then speak yearningly about how convenient it would be if Camille were to die. Before they know it, they're talking about how it's sometimes possible to murder someone in subtle ways—in ways that make the death look like an accident.

A gradual but very noticeable escalation takes place during this conversation, as Laurent and Thérèse go from talking about how much they want to be together to discussing the prospect of Camille dying. They don't come right out and say that they want to murder him, though. Instead, they flirt with the idea, speaking broadly about the fact that it is sometimes possible for people to kill others without getting caught. But the implications of this conversation are obvious: the lovers have become so desperate for each other that they're willing to consider murdering Camille.

Laurent brings the conversation to a close by assuring Thérèse that they will soon be happy together. He is going to figure everything out, but it might mean staying away from each other for a little while—all he wants, he says, is for her to know that he's working on a plan to make it possible for them to be together. She promises that she will be patient and that she "belong[s]" to him, and then she takes her leave.

In this moment, Laurent goes from speaking somewhat abstractly about murder to making a concrete decision: he is going to kill Camille. The way this conversation escalates is a perfect illustration of the fact that intense passion and an unquenchable yearning for pleasure can drive people to overlook their more rational sides.

That night, Laurent lies awake thinking passionately about Thérèse and realizing, without any apparent sense of shame, that desire and love have driven him to plan a murder. Except for the possibility of getting caught, the idea seems perfect: killing Camille would let him marry Thérèse and inherit Madame Raquin's money, making it possible for him to retire and live the "lazy life" he has always wanted.

Laurent doesn't consider the moral implications of murdering Camille. Instead, he focuses on the ways in which he stands to gain from committing such a heinous act. He'll not only have Thérèse all to himself but will also gain access to Madame Raquin's savings. In turn, he'll be able to live the life he has always wanted—one in which pleasure and satisfaction eclipse all other concerns, including any kind of moral considerations that would probably prevent most people from behaving with such cruelty.

CHAPTER 10

Three weeks pass. Laurent still hasn't come up with a safe way of murdering Camille. While playing dominoes on Thursday night, he and Thérèse listen to Michaud talk about how frequently murder cases go unsolved. Grivet is horrified to hear him say this, finding it terrifying to think that there are murderers walking the streets. But both Michaud and Olivier confirm that it's quite common for killers to go undetected. As they listen, Thérèse and Laurent don't even smile at the small jokes their friends make throughout the course of the conversation. For a brief, intense moment, their eyes meet.

The conversation at the domino table introduces the fact that murderers often go undetected. This idea validates Thérèse and Laurent's previous discussion about how it's possible to kill somebody without getting caught, thus encouraging them to go through with their plan—after all, they've now heard from two men trained in policework that there are often no consequences for committing murder. And though this might be true, what they fail to consider is that avoiding legal punishment doesn't necessarily mean there won't be any emotional *consequences for taking a human life.*

CHAPTER 11

Every once in a while, Camille takes Thérèse on an excursion to Saint-Ouen on the outskirts of Paris. Madame Raquin is always very nervous about them setting out for such journeys, but Camille disregards her. On one Sunday in autumn, he decides to go to Saint-Ouen with Thérèse and Laurent. They make the long trek and, having eaten lunch, find a nice clearing to have a short rest before going on a longer walk in the country before dinner. For a while, Camille blabbers on while Laurent secretly admires Thérèse, whom he thinks has fallen asleep. When Camille nods off, Laurent kisses Thérèse's ankle, which is lying right next to his head, and suddenly he feels filled with passion. He stands and sees that Thérèse isn't actually sleeping—she's staring straight up into the sky.

Even in mundane moments, Laurent and Thérèse's passion for each other is capable of filling them with intense longing. The fact that Laurent kisses Thérèse's ankle while they're right next to Camille is especially illustrative of just how irresistible he finds her—so irresistible, it seems, that he's willing to behave in reckless, ill-advised ways.

Overcome by his desire for Thérèse, Laurent goes over to Camille, who is sleeping with a silly look on his face. After a moment of consideration, Laurent raises his foot and lets it hover over Camille's head, ready to crush in his friend's skull. But Thérèse makes a muffled shriek and turns away as if to protect herself from the blood that would surely splatter if Laurent brought his foot down on Camille's face. Unnerved, Laurent takes his foot away—it would be unwise, anyway, to kill Camille like this, since he'd surely get caught.

Laurent's sudden rush of desire for Thérèse after he kisses her ankle ignites in him an urge to smash Camille's face in that very instant. It's obvious that killing Camille in this way would be extremely foolish, since it would leave blood all over his boot and also would be hard to frame as an accident. The fact that Laurent even considers *doing such a thing is a testament to how overcome he is with desire, which ultimately makes it hard for him to think clearly.*

Deep in thought, Laurent looks out over the Seine. Suddenly, he has an idea. When Camille wakes up, they go for a walk and make their way to a cheap restaurant that looks out over the river. It's crowded, so Laurent suggests that they rent a boat while the restaurant roasts them some chicken. Camille is unsure—he's afraid of water but doesn't want to admit it, so he gives the excuse that Thérèse is too hungry to wait. But after Laurent gives Thérèse a meaningful look, she says that she can wait to eat, so Laurent selects a particularly narrow rowboat. As they're all getting in, Laurent whispers to Thérèse that he's going to throw Camille overboard when the time is right.

It becomes clear that Camille's death is fast approaching, since Laurent has his mind set on killing him by throwing him into the Seine. Because he was able—at the last minute—to get ahold of himself before unwisely stomping Camille to death, Laurent has hatched a much better plan, as it will now be possible for him to frame Camille's death as an accidental drowning. No longer in the immediate throes of desire, then, Laurent is able to think a little more levelheadedly—though not levelheadedly enough to decide against murdering Camille altogether.

Thérèse hesitates to get in the boat after Laurent whispers his plan. When Camille laughs and mocks her for being afraid, though, she feels a surge of resentment and makes up her mind, getting in the boat once and for all. As they push out, the sun is already going down and the trees throw shadows over the water. When they reach the middle of the Seine, they come upon a small corridor where there's nobody in sight. Camille is lying down and dragging his hand in the water, and Laurent knows it's time to act. He can hear a rowing team making their way upstream, but they aren't visible yet, so he grabs Camille.

Although Thérèse eventually gets into the boat, her hesitation signals that she isn't quite as sure as Laurent is about the idea of killing Camille. The novel will go on to explore how murdering Camille impacts Thérèse and Laurent's relationship, so this hesitancy on her part is important—it suggests that she has more of a moral conscience when considering the plan. And yet, she ends up getting in the boat, essentially making an informed decision to kill Camille even after stopping to think about it—she is, then, nearly as culpable as Laurent in the plotting of Camille's murder.

At first, Camille thinks Laurent is joking around, so he laughs. But then he turns around and sees that Laurent's face is twisted into a gruesome expression, so he frantically tries to scramble to his knees, yelling all the while for Thérèse's help. Soon, though, he can't yell quite as loudly because Laurent clutches his neck and squeezes. Just as Camille is about to run out of breath, Thérèse collapses into a heap on the floor of the boat, unable to keep watching. Laurent lifts Camille and prepares to toss him, but right before he does, Camille bites him in the neck, tearing out a **chunk of flesh**. Camille then falls into the water, and though he struggles fiercely, he can't stay afloat.

At last, Laurent follows through with his plan to kill Camille. The struggle that takes place before he tosses Camille into the water is a striking scene, as Laurent's crazed expression sheds light on his darkest characteristics. Suddenly, he goes from acting like Camille's friend to acting like a senseless murderer. Until this point, the novel has almost invited readers to root for Laurent and Thérèse; after all, it's not as if Camille is the most likable person. But now readers are forced to recognize the raw intensity of Laurent's violent behavior, which emphases just how cruel and cold-hearted it is to murder another person— regardless of the circumstances.

Moments before the rowers coming upstream appear, Laurent capsizes the boat to make it look like they've had an accident. He times it perfectly, making it look like he saved Thérèse from drowning and was unable to do the same for Camille. This is the story he tells the rowers, who rush to their aid. He says Camille was joking around and dancing in the boat and ended up tipping it over, and though none of the rowers actually saw what happened, they all insist that they witnessed exactly what Laurent describes. When they reach land again, the rowers tell everyone that they saw Camille capsize the boat and Laurent bravely save Thérèse.

Laurent's plan to make Camille's death look like an accident succeeds because the rowers are so eager to be part of this scandal that they convince themselves that they saw what happened. In reality, though, Laurent has just manipulated their desire to be in on the local gossip. What's more, he's done so in a way that makes himself look like a hero instead of a murderer. So far, then, there are seemingly no consequences to his and Thérèse's decision to kill Camille, at least not in terms of punishment.

Back at the restaurant, Thérèse wakes up from having fainted. She's distraught and breaks into uncontrollable sobs, so the restaurant owners give her new clothes and a bed. Laurent, for his part, asks them to let her stay there while he returns to Paris to break the news to Madame Raquin. In reality, though, he wants to keep Thérèse away for a while because he's afraid her nerves will get the better of her and cause her to confess. As such, he thinks it's better if she has a little time to collect herself. As he makes his way back to Paris, the rowers sit down to eat the chicken that would have been Camille's dinner.

Whereas Laurent is cool, calm, and collected, Thérèse is a bundle of nerves, perhaps because she hadn't embraced the idea of killing Camille as much as Laurent had. And yet, she was equally excited by the idea when they first talked about killing Camille—it's just that following through with the idea feels different, suggesting that it's one thing to fantasize about committing a heinous and immoral act but another thing entirely to actually go through with it.

CHAPTER 12

Laurent is nervous but also satisfied about having achieved his goal of murdering Camille. Upon returning to Paris, he goes directly to Michaud's home. He has decided to break the news to Michaud because he thinks it would be good to win over the trust of the former policeman. Olivier and Suzanne happen to be there, too, which is good because he also wants to convince Olivier he's innocent. Another reason he doesn't go straight to Madame Raquin's is that he's afraid he won't be able to act convincingly sad—he knows she'll be beside herself with grief and worries that he'll be unable to cry enough to match her sorrow. Other than that, he doesn't care about Madame Raquin's reaction.

Laurent doesn't seem at all remorseful about killing Camille. His lack of guilt is consistent with his tendency to always prioritize the pursuit of pleasure. Because he thinks Camille's death will benefit him in the long run, he feels completely unbothered by what he has done. In fact, the only thing he's concerned about at this point is ensuring that nobody—and especially nobody on the police force—suspects him of foul play.

As Laurent tells his story, he worries that Olivier suspects him of lying, since he's staring at him with a blank expression. In reality, though, what Laurent thinks is suspicion is actually just "pity." Michaud, for his part, yells out in grief, making it quite clear that he buys Laurent's version of the story. At Michaud's suggestion, they all go to tell Madame Raquin, but Michaud instructs Laurent to stay outside because his ragged appearance will alarm the old woman. As he waits, then, Laurent goes to a *pâtisserie* and gorges himself with sweets.

Again, Laurent is completely free of any guilt. He cares about whether or not he'll get away with the murder, but beyond that, nothing about the entire event bothers him. The fact that he voraciously eats sweets at a nearby bakery while Michaud informs Madame Raquin that Camille is dead is a good illustration of how little Laurent cares about the ways in which his actions have affected others—all he cares about, in other words, is himself, so he has no problem eating pastries while everyone else falls into grief over what he has done.

Inside the haberdashery, Madame Raquin is absolutely beside herself with grief. She slumps to the floor and wails out, assaulted by images of her son drowning. She spent her entire life keeping him alive, and now he's gone. After breaking the news, Michaud and Olivier accompany Laurent back to Saint-Ouen, where Thérèse is still lying in bed and refusing to speak to anyone. She has decided to pretend to be ill so as not to face anyone, but all she can think about is the image of Camille and Laurent fighting in the boat—an image that makes her feel feverish.

There's a stark difference between Laurent and Thérèse's immediate reactions to Camille's death. The novel is mainly interested in presenting them as a united front that came together to kill Camille, but there's no denying the fact that Laurent played a more consequential role in the murder—after all, he was the one to actually go through with the act of strangling Camille and throwing him into the water. And yet, Thérèse appears to feel more remorse than Laurent, suggesting that she has more of a moral conscience than him (an idea that makes sense, considering that he's the one who prioritizes his own desires over all else).

Everyone believes Laurent's story, especially because the rowers are still talking about having seen it themselves. Satisfied that he has acted well, he goes up to see Thérèse, but she trembles at the very sound of his voice and doesn't say anything in return. On the way home, though, she lets him hold her hand, and their grasp is full of passion.

Even though Thérèse is distraught over what she and Laurent have done, she seems to allow herself to take comfort in the touch of her lover. Even now—after such an ugly incident—their passion for one another brings itself to bear, making it ever so slightly easier for Thérèse to cope with the otherwise impossible burden of what they've done.

CHAPTER 13

Laurent feels good the next morning. He slept well and is relieved to have finally committed the murder, which had been hanging over his head for a long time. As he gets dressed, though, his collar grazes the **bitemark** Camille left on his neck. The wound surges with pain, contorting Laurent's face into an ugly, grotesque expression. After washing the wound, though, he continues getting dressed and goes to work, where he tells everyone what happened. They all shower him with pity and treat him like a hero for saving Thérèse.

In some ways, it seems as if Laurent and Thérèse are going to get away with killing Camille without experiencing any downsides. From a legal perspective, this might be true, but it seems unlikely that the murderers will escape without experiencing some psychological *consequences—as made evident by the pain caused by Laurent's bitemark, which symbolizes that it's impossible to do something so horrible and then completely move on. The bitemark will seemingly always be with him, serving as a constant reminder of his extreme immorality.*

Laurent's only concern is that Camille's death has yet to be officially recorded, since the authorities still haven't found the body. Although he's sure Camille was dead, he's unsettled by the lack of closure, so he starts going to **the morgue** every day before work. It's a terrible routine, since he has to carefully study the faces of any corpse that died by drowning, staring into their bloated, disintegrating faces. He starts having nightmares and is relieved whenever there are no new drowned corpses. And yet, his time in the morgue is also somewhat interesting, since he can observe the many different kinds of people who visit the dead. What's more, he even becomes somewhat sexually aroused one day while looking at the nude corpse of a young woman.

Laurent's trips to the morgue have a certain symbolic significance because they suggest that his life has become grotesque and full of death after murdering Camille. He develops an obsession with death, finding himself compulsively drawn to the morgue on a daily basis. Indeed, he literally stares death in the face every morning, unable to let himself move on until he finds Camille's corpse. And yet, there's also a perverse eroticism at play in his trips to the morgue, suggesting that Laurent conflates violence and sexual passion—perhaps because he ended up resorting to violence as a way of continuing his romantic relationship with Thérèse.

Just when he can take the nightmares about **the morgue** no longer, Laurent tells himself he'll only go twice more—and then he finds Camille. His old friend's corpse is bloated, discolored, and disintegrating. As he studies Camille, he feels as if the body is "pathetic," thinking that anyone could tell by just a glance that Camille was nothing more than a low-paid employee. After leaving the morgue, Laurent feels as if the smell of rotting bodies is somehow following him. But because he now has closure that Camille is dead, he devotes himself to the gratifying attempt to forget about the entire matter.

Laurent gains the closure he's been looking for, but it's unlikely that closure will actually help him move on from murdering Camille. The fact that the smell of corpses seems to trail him as he walks through the streets is a testament to just how hard it will be to forget about what he's done. No matter what he tells himself, there's no changing the fact that he murdered Camille in cold blood. He will simply have to learn to live with this reality.

CHAPTER 14

Back at the haberdashery, Madame Raquin and Thérèse both stay in bed for three days. Thérèse doesn't want to confront Madame, who keeps crying inconsolably. Finally, though, Thérèse gets out of bed on the third day, feeling as if she has aged multiple years in the course of just a few days. She then goes to her aunt, who hugs her tight and weeps. That night, Thérèse encourages the old woman to get up for dinner, and then the two women open the store once again the following morning.

Thérèse deals with the aftermath of Camille's murder by staying in bed, but not necessarily because she feels guilty. Rather, she largely stays in bed because she's afraid of facing Madame Raquin. Her reaction to the entire incident is therefore not quite as dissimilar to Laurent's reaction as it first seemed. Although she seems a bit more remorseful, her main concern is whether or not she'll be able to act convincingly sad when she confronts Madame Raquin, suggesting that she's mainly thinking about herself and her own wellbeing rather than dwelling on the moral consequences of having murdered her husband.

CHAPTER 15

Laurent starts coming to the haberdashery every couple of days. He spends a somber half hour talking with Madame Raquin and avoids looking at Thérèse. Thankfully for him, Madame Raquin thinks he's a hero for saving Thérèse and trying to help Camille. While Laurent is there one Thursday evening, Michaud, Grivet, Olivier, and Suzanne all arrive for the weekly gathering. They feel awkward about it but not necessarily enough to stay away—they like playing dominoes above the haberdashery each week. Laurent, for one, is thrilled that they've come, knowing that he'll need to endear himself to Michaud, Grivet, and Olivier in order to marry Thérèse. For a brief moment, he and Thérèse make eye contact, and he's relieved to feel that she still "belong[s]" to him.

Thérèse Raquin *often presents its characters as if they're merely acting on animalistic impulses. Laurent, of course, is an obvious example, since he behaves viciously simply to get what he wants. But Michaud, Grivet, Olivier, and Suzanne also behave in a certain animalistic way by sticking so closely to their mindless routine of coming to the Raquin household every Thursday for a game of dominoes—even after a terrible tragedy has taken over the household. In the same way that Laurent thinks only of his own satisfaction, then, Madame Raquin's friends hold dearly to the fun they have playing dominoes each night, appearing to care more about that fun than about Camille's death.*

CHAPTER 16

Fifteen months pass, and life returns to its boring monotony. Laurent visits the haberdashery often, but he and Thérèse don't try to see each other in private. For now, at least, the intensity of the murder has snuffed out their passion—killing Camille strangely satisfied their powerful yearnings for each other. In fact, committing the crime was almost satisfying enough to render their sexual connection insignificant in comparison. They even go so far as to *avoid* spending time alone, and whenever they shake hands in public, the touch of each other's skin makes them feel a little sick.

Laurent and Thérèse murdered Camille so they could be together, but now they're not very interested in spending time with one another. The obvious reason for this change of heart is that they remind each other of their own gruesome behavior. What's more, the murder was so emotionally intense that it oddly seems to have satisfied them in ways that are similar to how sex satisfied them. Considering that Laurent conflates passion and aggression, it's not all that surprising that killing Camille gave him a certain rush that resembles the rush he used to experience while sleeping with Thérèse.

Despite their slight revulsion toward each other, Thérèse and Laurent convince themselves that they *wanted* their passion to fade in this way. They insist to themselves that they still love each other just as much as they did before killing Camille, making abstract plans to get married at some undetermined point in the future. During this period, Thérèse feels at ease and picks up reading, enjoying the feeling of immersing herself in a book. She even falls in love with a young student for a little while, though he eventually moves away. Every once in a while, she thinks about Laurent with a combination of yearning and fear.

The murder has driven Thérèse and Laurent apart. Although her attraction to Laurent originally fulfilled her longstanding desire for a more exciting life, Thérèse no longer sees him in this light—rather, she sees him as a reminder of her own immoral decision to kill Camille. It makes sense, then, that she seeks out some other escape from her life, ultimately finding that escape in reading. The sad thing, of course, is that she could have easily found joy and freedom in reading before embracing adultery and murder.

Reading novels shows Thérèse what it means to live a life of "kindness and gentleness." It also shows her that it's perfectly possible to find happiness "without killing one's husband." Meanwhile, Laurent feels mostly at peace, though sometimes he suddenly fears the prospect of someone finding out what he and Thérèse did. He didn't think much about the possible consequences when he was planning the murder—a detail that bothers him now, as he realizes just how much his passion for Thérèse kept him from thinking rationally. He blames Thérèse herself for his lack of control, chastising her in his head for making him "intoxicated" with lust.

Thérèse feels some slight regret about killing Camille, as she realizes that doing so was an extremely excessive way of dealing with a fairly common kind of unhappiness—she could have just found pleasure in reading instead of seeking it out in a murderous man who would help her hatch a plot to kill Camille! Funnily enough, even Laurent questions the original decision to kill Camille, realizing that his judgment was clouded by the intense passion he felt for Thérèse. Now that his passion has cooled, it's hard for him to wrap his head around why he would have been willing to commit such a serious crime.

Laurent continues to fret over the possibility of being arrested and executed for murdering Camille, but he also slips into a life of laziness and monotony. He thinks every once in a while about marrying Thérèse at some point, but he's in no rush. While visiting an old painter friend one day, he meets a beautiful young model. She comes back to his apartment and has sex with him, beginning an affair that pleases Laurent without making him feel guilty for betraying Thérèse—something he doesn't even really consider.

The spark in Laurent and Thérèse's relationship is all but nonexistent. In fact, they're so uninterested in each other that they both pursue other people: Thérèse falls in love with a young student, and Laurent takes a young model as his new lover. Considering that their original feelings for one another were so strong, the fact that they're now so indifferent about their relationship illustrates that even the most intense passion can fade.

While Laurent enjoys having a new lover, Thérèse stops wearing black mourning clothes. But Laurent feels uncomfortable around her. He's perfectly content right now, so why change anything? But then he remembers that it has been 15 months since they killed Camille. It would be pointless—and even "abhorrent"—to have murdered him for no reason. Plus, it might be unwise to offend Thérèse by choosing another lover over her, since she might retaliate by telling everyone what really happened. In any case, the matter soon becomes a moot point, since the model leaves Laurent.

There's a certain sense of obligation at play in Laurent and Thérèse's failing relationship, as Laurent feels like they have *to follow through with their original plan to get married. Even if he doesn't feel all that guilty about murdering Camille, he still thinks it would be a waste to have committed such a heinous act for no reason. Furthermore, his worry that Thérèse might confess if he doesn't marry her hints at a new tension in their relationship, as it becomes clear that they each have power over the other: they can, after all, come clean at any moment, a fact they could both use to manipulate each other if necessary.*

Laurent goes back to the haberdashery and asks Thérèse one night if he should sneak into her room. She gives him a terrified look and says they have to be careful, but he says he's waited long enough. After a moment, she says they should get married—then she will be his.

At last, Laurent and Thérèse agree to get married. But this is not a particularly romantic moment. The only reason Laurent wants to sleep with Thérèse, it seems, is because his other lover left him, so he has nobody to help him satisfy his sexual cravings. He also thinks he has a certain responsibility to follow through with the original plan by marrying Thérèse—an idea that isn't an especially romantic sentiment. Similarly, Thérèse seems completely unenthused by the idea of marrying Laurent. Even though she's the one to suggest that they get married, it seems as if she only does so as a way of putting off having to sleep with him.

CHAPTER 17

On his way home after agreeing with Thérèse to get married, Laurent's yearning for his lover feels reignited. But when he reaches his apartment, he feels inexplicably afraid. He doesn't want to open the door and walk upstairs, so he goes to a nearby bar and drinks until it closes. He then has no choice but to go home, where he spends a sleepless night having the same waking nightmare over and over. It always starts with him rushing to Thérèse's room to have sex, the thought of her burning him up with passion. But then, because the sheets grazed the **scar** from Camille's bite when he was first going to bed, he suddenly thinks of Camille's pale face. Each time he reaches Thérèse's door in his nightmare, Camille's corpse appears.

The resurgence of Laurent's desire for Thérèse comes along with some complicated feelings. Until now, it has been possible for Laurent to more or less live his life without having to think much about the murder. Now that his passion for Thérèse has been reawakened, though, it stirs up disturbing thoughts about murdering Camille, suggesting that, even if Laurent doesn't actively feel guilty for behaving so immorally, he's still haunted by what he's done.

Laurent doesn't sleep at all that night. He can't stop the cycle of desire and horror, his thoughts bouncing between Thérèse's alluring beauty and the grotesque image of Camille's corpse. He feels foolish in the morning, chastising himself for thinking such lurid thoughts and feeling comforted by the idea that sleeping next to Thérèse when they're married will soothe him. But when he sees the **bitemark** in the mirror while getting dressed, he is once again flooded with fear. He has a terrible, exhausted day at work, and when he goes to the haberdashery that evening, Madame Raquin tells him Thérèse didn't sleep well, either. Looking at each other, Laurent and Thérèse know they had the same troubles.

Camille's death has finally come back to haunt both Laurent and Thérèse. Laurent soothes himself by thinking about how marrying Thérèse will help him sleep at night, but it seems unlikely that this is actually the case—after all, his reawakened passion for Thérèse is what suddenly brought on horrifying thoughts about Camille's corpse, indicating that she vividly reminds him (and, in turn, that he reminds her*) of what happened that day on the Seine. And yet, he clings to the idea that she will make his life better, since he has nothing else to make him feel better.*

CHAPTER 18

Thérèse experiences the same kind of night terrors as Laurent, feeling a strange mixture of lust for Laurent and horror about Camille's murder. She and Laurent are now linked forever, as if they're one person who feels the same "pleasure and pain." They've spent more than a year ignoring the bond between them and leading casual, somewhat carefree lives. Now that they've committed themselves to each other once again, though, the intensity of their connection comes raining down on them.

Thérèse's feelings about Laurent clarify that their reignited bond has only dredged up terrible thoughts about Camille and what they did to him. Although they got away with the murder in a legal sense, then, it's clear that it won't be quite as easy to move on psychologically.

Thérèse and Laurent know they can't simply announce their marriage. Instead, they have to make the people in their lives—people like Madame Raquin and her weekly visitors—think the union is *their* idea, not the couple's. Unfortunately, this means showing some patience, which neither Thérèse nor Laurent are happy about, since they're both tortured each night by visions of Camille's corpse. Their fear is so overwhelming that they dread nightfall; Laurent even avoids going home one night, taking refuge under a bridge and freezing in the rain. Every time he falls asleep, he goes from imagining himself cradled in Thérèse's arms to feeling the cold, damp embrace of Camille's corpse.

The two murderers look forward to the day they can finally get married, but not because they love each other and can't wait to openly express their passion. Rather, they want to get married because they think doing so will help them be less afraid at night, when thoughts of Camille run wild in their heads. But it's naïve of them to think that being with each other will keep *them from thinking about Camille, since they clearly remind each other of what they did. All the same, they rely on the idea that they'll provide each other with comfort, which is the only thought that helps them withstand the terror they experience every night.*

The burning desire to be with each other returns for both Laurent and Thérèse, only now there's a new, strange element to their relationship. They each feel like they've peered into each other's true "natures," which terrify them and draw them closer all the while. For Thérèse, she wants to get married to banish her night terrors, and also because she desires Laurent's touch. Laurent wants to get married for those reasons, too, but also because of something more practical: he needs the money. He doesn't know when his father will die and leave him his inheritance, nor whether the old man will leave him money when he *does* die. And since one of the reasons Laurent killed Camille was to secure his friend's savings for himself, he's determined to do exactly that.

Laurent and Thérèse are both motivated to get married as a way of coping with their terrifying thoughts about Camille. For Laurent, though, there's an added incentive: the fact that marrying Thérèse will give him access to Madame Raquin's money, thus ensuring that he'll be able to live the "idle" life he has always wanted to live. Needless to say, none of these reasons are particularly good ones to get married, indicating that Laurent and Thérèse are in for a difficult, tumultuous marriage.

CHAPTER 19

Putting their plan to get married in motion, Thérèse starts acting glum and depressed around Madame Raquin. Her aunt is deeply concerned, so she asks Michaud what to do, and Michaud says the solution is obvious: Thérèse needs a new husband. At first, Madame Raquin is taken aback by such a suggestion, not yet ready to move on from her son's death. Slowly but surely, though, she comes around to the idea. The problem, however, is that she fears marrying Thérèse off to a stranger, not wanting that person to come into her own life and disrupt things—after all, she has 40,000 francs of savings, so she doesn't want someone untrustworthy to have access to that kind of money.

The ease with which Laurent and Thérèse manipulate Michaud into suggesting that Thérèse needs a new husband underscores just how ignorant and oblivious Madame Raquin and her friends really are. Even though Michaud dedicated his life to policework, he's not in the least suspicious of either Thérèse or Laurent. To the contrary, he's susceptible to their sinister control, implying that the people Camille respected so much are, in reality, rather unintelligent.

As Thérèse acts depressed, Laurent turns on the charm. He starts coming to the haberdashery all the time and showering Madame Raquin in affection. He also speaks frequently about Camille in admiring tones, and since everyone else avoids the subject, this endears him to the old woman. He has noticed that anytime Camille's name comes up, Madame Raquin becomes extremely emotional, so he uses her emotional vulnerability to his own benefit—she becomes especially "compliant" when she's weeping. One thing he doesn't like, though, is that Thérèse watches him in a strange way when he talks about Camille, causing him to wonder if she really believes the positive things he says about the dead man—a thought that makes him jealous.

A skilled manipulator, Laurent knows exactly how to make sure Madame Raquin sees him as a kind, caring person. The fact that he has no problem speaking about Camille in this context underscores his lack of guilt (or at least the kind of guilt most people would have in such a situation). As long as he stands to benefit from talking about the man he killed, Laurent doesn't mind going on at length about how great Camille was—yet another reminder that he's willing to do anything if he thinks it will make his own life better.

One Thursday, Laurent comes to the weekly social gathering at the haberdashery, makes his way to Thérèse, and—in front of everyone—kindly asks how she has been holding up. As he speaks in soothing tones, Michaud pulls Madame Raquin aside and says Laurent is the husband Thérèse needs—a solution Madame Raquin finds very agreeable, since she already trusts Laurent and almost sees him as a son. On the walk home that night, Michaud proposes the idea to Laurent, proud of himself for being such a savvy matchmaker. Meanwhile, Madame Raquin broaches the topic with Thérèse. In both cases, the lovers resist at first but eventually agree to marry.

Thérèse and Laurent's plan works: they subtly manipulate other people into thinking that it would be a splendid idea for them to get married. In doing so, they avoid any suspicion they might otherwise attract by announcing the idea themselves. Every time the murderers hatch a plan, it seems, they have no issues pulling it off. The only remaining question, then, is whether or not they'll really be able to move on from Camille's murder. Judging by the fact that their reignited connection brings on troubling thoughts about Camille's corpse, it's unlikely that getting married will do anything to help them. More likely, it'll work against them.

The next day, Laurent goes to the haberdashery and asks Thérèse in front of Madame Raquin and Michaud if she wants to make her "aunt's existence a happy and peaceful one." Thérèse says yes, adding that they have to "fulfil [their] duty." They clasp hands, and then Laurent turns to Madame Raquin and says that Camille said, as he was falling out of the boat, to save Thérèse—which, he says, is exactly what he's doing by marrying her now, effectively acting on Camille's "last wish." Madame Raquin is touched by the sentiment, but Thérèse is appalled. She drops Laurent's hand, stunned by his audacity.

In this moment, Thérèse catches a glimpse of Laurent's true nature. She realizes that he has no shame at all when it comes to getting what he wants. He will do anything to ensure his own happiness or wellbeing, and he has no qualms about exploiting Madame Raquin's grief. She, on the other hand, does *seem to feel some remorse about what they've done, so it's shocking to see just how callous and cold-hearted Laurent really is.*

Michaud urges the lovers to kiss, so they do. When their lips meet, they both feel uncomfortable and odd—Thérèse even backs away as if she has been burned. In the following days, Laurent writes for permission from his father, who responds by saying that he doesn't care *what* his son does. Madame Raquin feels so bad when Laurent shows her the letter that she signs over her 40,000 francs of savings to the newlyweds. It's agreed that Laurent won't have to bring in any money; he even makes it clear that he intends to retire.

Laurent is finally getting everything he originally wanted. He's about to marry Thérèse, and Madame Raquin has just given him access to her money, meaning that he can lead the "idle" life he has always wanted. But none of this changes the fact that he and Thérèse now have a completely different kind of relationship—a relationship in which even an innocent kiss is deeply unenjoyable, ultimately signaling that whatever passion they might still have for each other is unlikely to survive, since they both remind each other of the horrible thing they did to Camille.

CHAPTER 20

On the morning of their wedding day, both Laurent and Thérèse are overjoyed, thinking they'll finally be able to get some sleep. As he's getting dressed, though, Laurent notices his **bitemark** scar again—when he grazes it, he has the sensation that something is piercing his skin. The wedding itself is unremarkable. Sitting at the reception, Laurent and Thérèse are surprised to feel the same as they did before getting married; waiting for so long has squashed their passionate desire for each other. Worse, a shooting pain jumps through Laurent's scar every time he moves his head. By the time the day is over, they're both weary and dreading their first night together. Nonetheless, Laurent makes his way into Thérèse's bedroom, clinging to the door as if he's drunk.

There's nothing romantic about Thérèse and Laurent's wedding. To the contrary, they both carry around a sense of dread, since it's clear that their passion has fizzled out. And yet, they have no choice but to go through the motions, since everyone now expects them to be happy with one another. Plus, getting married was the whole point of murdering Camille in the first place—the only problem is that the murder now overshadows everything, making it impossible for them to actually enjoy themselves.

CHAPTER 21

The fireplace in Thérèse's room is roaring when Laurent enters. They watch it without touching each other, and then Laurent stoops to kiss Thérèse's shoulder, but she whips around and flinches. She looks at him with an expression of horror and disgust, so he just sits next to her. They haven't made love for almost two years. They thought killing Camille would make it possible for them to have sex whenever they wanted, and that has proved to be true—now, though, they don't *want* to have sex. Still, Laurent tries to talk about how they used to want so badly to be together, but he ends up saying Camille's name, which stops him in the middle of his sentence, and both of them feel as if Camille's ghost has suddenly entered the room.

From the very beginning of their marriage, it's overwhelmingly apparent that Thérèse and Laurent will be unable to recapture the intense passion they used to have for each other. Even touching each other proves too disturbing, as made abundantly clear by Thérèse's look of disgust when Laurent kisses her shoulder. Similarly, they can't even speak Camille's name without shuddering in pure horror—a good sign that they're psychologically haunted by the memory of killing him.

Without speaking, Thérèse and Laurent go through the story of having killed Camille. They don't need to talk—they each know exactly what the other is thinking. "We killed Camille," they seem to say in their minds, "and his body is still here between us, turning our limbs to ice." These horrifying thoughts continue throughout the night. At one point, Laurent asks for a kiss, hoping to distract himself and Thérèse from their terrifying thoughts, but Thérèse sees his **bitemark** scar and asks about it. When he tells her what it is, he suddenly burns for her to kiss it, forcing it down on her lips. But the kiss hurts him and makes him feel repulsed by his own aggression.

In a strange way, Laurent and Thérèse are still passionately linked with one another. Now, though, their connection isn't based on sexual desire—it's based on their shared sense of horror. Indeed, they're so connected by this horror that they don't even need to speak in order to communicate. Perhaps because he recognizes that they're connected in this way, Laurent suddenly wants Thérèse to kiss the bitemark, as if this will somehow purge him of his fears. Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth, since Thérèse's touch just heightens the agony he feels.

Later in the night, Laurent jumps in fright because he thinks he has just seen Camille's ghost. But it's only the portrait that he himself painted. Madame Raquin was supposed to move it but must have forgotten, so the newlyweds decide to turn it around. Except neither of them can summon the courage to get near it. Worse, they hear a scratching noise that makes them recoil in fear, but it's just François, the old cat. Laurent becomes convinced that Camille has inhabited the cat, so he quickly lets it out of the room. Despite all their fear, though, Laurent and Thérèse feel ridiculous the following morning. Laurent blames Thérèse for setting him off with her sullen looks, so he tells her to be "more cheerful" the following night.

The fact that Laurent and Thérèse are so afraid at night is an obvious indication that they haven't moved on from killing Camille. Rather, they're haunted by what they've done—of course, they're not haunted by an actual ghostly version of Camille (despite Laurent's fears about the cat), but by their own psychological misgivings. Laurent tries to blame his fear on Thérèse, hinting that he is beginning to resent her simply because he can't deal with his own emotional torture.

CHAPTER 22

The nights only get worse for Laurent and Thérèse. Their qualities don't mix well together, especially since Laurent feels as if he has taken on Thérèse's nervous, restless nature. He used to be calm and self-assured, but now everything in his life feels shrouded in fear. And yet, any "remorse" he feels for killing Camille only has to do with his physical constitution—his nerves are overworked, but his conscience has nothing to do with his misery. He doesn't regret murdering Camille and sometimes even thinks about how he would do it again if it seemed like it would benefit him.

The novel makes an interesting distinction between what Laurent experiences in the aftermath of killing Camille and what real *guilt looks like. The implication is that Laurent's reaction is merely physiological, suggesting that his body is the only thing that registers any kind of "remorse" for having done something so awful. Such an idea aligns with the fact that the novel's author, Émile Zola, was interested in examining his characters in a vaguely scientific way, as if observing an experiment. For Zola, Laurent is emotionally incapable of feeling true guilt because of his "temperament," or his natural disposition. However, Laurent still suffers as a result of his immoral deed, so it's tricky to claim that he doesn't feel any guilt at all.*

Thérèse is also in a bad way, feeling as if her predisposition toward anxiety has only been heightened. Unlike Laurent, though, she *does* have some regrets about killing Camille. In moments of terror, she even addresses Camille's ghost in her mind and begs for forgiveness. Laurent can sense when she does this and resents her all the more for it, which is why he takes his anger out on her by mistreating her in such moments.

Thérèse isn't quite as self-centered as Laurent, who doesn't fully regret killing Camille because he knows that he did so in order to benefit himself. Thérèse, on the other hand, is more capable of considering the immorality of the situation, which is why she has a harder time accepting what they've done—a dynamic that only leads to further resentment in her and Laurent's relationship.

The newlyweds avoid lying in bed for the first several nights of their marriage. Finally, because they're so tired, they manage to lie down, but they can't get close to each other because they feel as if Camille's corpse is lying between them. All the same, they sometimes try to become physically intimate, just as an experiment. But it never works—they always feel as if their lips are cold like death, which makes them feel disgusting and ill. Strangely enough, they never talk to each other about how they're feeling, never wanting to bring up the fear and torment they've experienced in the aftermath of Camille's murder.

Thérèse and Laurent don't turn to each other for comfort. Instead, they keep their emotions bottled up, unwilling to reach out to one another in an attempt to establish a dynamic of emotional support. They originally decided to get married precisely so they could soothe each other, but now they find it impossible to do so, since they just remind each other of what they've done, making it that much harder for them to move on from killing Camille.

CHAPTER 23

After suffering for three weeks, Laurent decides that he and Thérèse simply have to physically embrace each other, no matter how much it feels like Camille's corpse haunts their every touch. He pulls Thérèse close one night, and she returns his physical advance, since she, too, is ready to do anything in order to feel better. But their caresses feel terrible. Thinking that Laurent's **bitemark scar** is the "gaping wound in their relationship," Thérèse puts her mouth to it, hoping she'll be able to heal it. But the scar only burns both her and Laurent, who pushes her away. After a while, they give up trying to be intimate, as it only causes them great pain. Lying on opposite sides of the bed, they both weep.

Simply put, Laurent and Thérèse are utterly miserable. There's nothing they can do to forget about the fact that they ruthlessly murdered Camille. In fact, Laurent's neck bears a constant reminder of their immoral behavior in the form of the bitemark scar. On a certain level, it makes sense that Thérèse tries to kiss it, since they have—until now—been effectively avoiding any kind of acknowledgment of what they've done. Now, though, she tries to address the problem head-on by kissing the scar, thinking this might clear the air. But nothing, it seems, can clear the air when it comes to forgetting about such a heinous act. No matter what, they're forced to live out the bleak reality of what they've done.

CHAPTER 24

Each day, Laurent goes to work feeling exhausted. His only idea about how to improve his life is to quit his job and rent a studio, where he can paint and—more importantly—get away from Thérèse. Similarly, Thérèse only feels like life is bearable when Laurent isn't around. She starts distracting herself with everyday chores, constantly rushing off to cook or clean the apartment. When she's sitting in the haberdashery, she drifts in and out of sleep in a pleasant way. Upon waking up, she sometimes feels like she's in a communal grave—a feeling that she finds satisfying, since the idea of no longer feeling pain sounds quite nice to her.

Although they thought getting married would make them feel better, Laurent and Thérèse now feel the exact opposite: they want to get away from each other. After all, they torment each other simply by existing, since each of them reminds the other of the fact that they killed Camille.

Madame Raquin's presence becomes a great comfort in Thérèse and Laurent's life. They stay up late with her, putting off going to bed by listening to her ramble on. Even the Thursday night gatherings bring them some solace, despite the fact that they used to hate sitting around and listening to Grivet or Michaud go on and on about inane subjects. These days, the idle conversation helps distract them from their thoughts about Camille and delays the moment when they have to go to bed and face their nightly horrors.

Before murdering Camille, neither Thérèse nor Laurent took much interest in Madame Raquin and her boring friends. Now, though, the mundanity of life in the Raquin household feels comforting because it distracts them from their inner turmoil. What's interesting, though, is that Madame Raquin's presence doesn't unnerve them—she is, after all, the mother of the man they killed. And yet, they actively seek her out and see her as someone who can make them feel better about having killed Camille, suggesting that they really don't feel very guilty. Rather, they just want to take their minds off of their night terrors.

Because Madame Raquin provides them with such a good distraction from their woes, Thérèse and Laurent take extremely good care of her. They consult with doctors to make sure they do everything in their power to keep her in good health. Madame Raquin interprets their concern as a form of love and is deeply pleased—she never thought she'd have such good caretakers in the aftermath of Camille's death. Meanwhile, all of the family friends think Thérèse and Laurent are the perfect couple. Whenever they show up to the Thursday night gatherings with bags under their eyes from not sleeping, Grivet jokes about how hard they must be working to have a child.

One of the great ironies of Thérèse Raquin *is that the couple becomes so miserable even as everything around them goes extremely well. They were originally afraid of getting caught, but nobody suspects them of foul play. To the contrary, Madame Raquin is* grateful *to them for taking care of her, and people like Grivet see them as a model couple. But the fact that everything works out for them only highlights their internal agony, suggesting that, although it's possible to commit murder without getting caught, it's much harder to escape emotional torment in the aftermath of such immoral behavior.*

CHAPTER 25

Laurent would take Thérèse's money and leave, but he knows she would have to sign it over to him (a stipulation made when Madame Raquin bequeathed her 40,000 francs to her niece). Instead, he announces his intention to retire and rent a studio. Thérèse is against the idea, not wanting him to waste all of her money, but she stops in the middle of denying him the money because he gives her a piercing look—a look she interprets as a threat that he'll go to the authorities about what really happened to Camille. When she pauses, Madame Raquin jumps in and says that Laurent can certainly retire and rent a studio, effectively spoiling him just like she spoiled Camille.

Laurent and Thérèse are miserable together because they unintentionally remind each other that they killed Camille. To make matters worse, they're clearly suspicious of each other, as evidenced by the way Thérèse responds to Laurent's hateful look in this moment. They therefore have an unhealthy amount of power over each other. Instead of comforting one another like they thought they might, they are now beginning to use their power against each other, ultimately creating an even more distressing dynamic.

Laurent moves into his new studio but doesn't do any painting for a solid two weeks. Instead, he lounges around, naps, smokes, and generally enjoys some alone time. Eventually, though, he gets so bored that he *does* start painting. One day, he runs into an old painter friend on a walk. The friend hardly recognizes him, since he looks different—somehow more sophisticated and complex. Laurent invites the friend upstairs to see his paintings, and the friend agrees, though only because he's curious to hear more about Laurent's life; he knows the paintings will be bad, since Laurent was never any good as a painter. When he gets upstairs, though, he's astounded: the paintings are incredible. Laurent's agony has turned him into a true artist.

Before murdering Camille, Laurent was an untalented painter. Now, though, he seems to have become an admirable artist, suggesting that what he originally lacked was a certain amount of pathos. He was generally happy before murdering Camille, but now that he's miserable, he's able to create beautiful art, ultimately implying that meaningful art doesn't come from a place of pleasure or happiness, but from a darker, more troubled mindset.

Laurent's friend compliments his paintings. Before he leaves, though, he mentions one criticism: all of the paintings, each of which features a different person, seem to have the same face. He then takes his leave. Laurent is distressed. He, too, has suspected that the paintings all bear the same face. And the face, of course, is Camille's. Terrified, Laurent sits down to draw a face—any face, as long as it isn't Camille's. He fails. He tries again. He fails. No matter what he does, he can only draw Camille's face.

Everything Laurent does is entangled with the fact that he murdered Camille. He can't even pass his time pleasantly painting in his studio without subconsciously thinking about Camille, underscoring just how impossible it is for him to move on from such an atrocious act of cruelty and immorality.

CHAPTER 26

Madame Raquin has some sort of medical event—an "attack"—that paralyzes her. She can't even speak, let alone move. Thérèse and Laurent are beside themselves, worrying that now they have nobody to protect them from their own relationship. Still, though, they keep her in their presence at all times when they're at home, placing her in strategic locations so they feel like they aren't alone with each other. They even shine the lamplight directly in her face as she sits with them at night—an image that would disturb anyone but Thérèse and Laurent, who depend on Madame Raquin's presence to maintain their sanity.

The sight of Madame Raquin staring helplessly at Thérèse and Laurent with a light shining on her face is very garish and creepy. In fact, it's rather cruel of Thérèse and Laurent to place her in the bright light, but they don't actually care whether or not she's comfortable—all they care about is that her presence makes them feel less alone. Because they resent each other for existing as constant reminders of murdering Camille, then, they turn to Madame Raquin, selfishly depending on her to make them feel more at ease.

Despite her horrible circumstances, Madame Raquin is happy. She can't express it, but she's touched that she has devoted caretakers like Thérèse and Laurent, who go out of their way to spend time with her. She accepts the current arrangement and is, on the whole, grateful—until, that is, Thérèse and Laurent forget she's there one night and have an argument in which they speak openly about having murdered Camille. Madame Raquin's face twitches with the news, and though she's paralyzed, the murderers worry she's about to jump out of her chair. But she doesn't move. Instead, she's forced to suffer quietly, realizing right near the end of her life that she has been dreadfully betrayed.

Madame Raquin's circumstances are nothing short of torturous. She loved Camille more than anything in her life, and now she's forced to sit idly by as his murderers move around her house and take care of her. Indeed, she even has to depend on them to keep her alive. But Laurent and Thérèse don't seem to care about how she feels on an emotional level—the only thing they care about is whether or not she'll be able to regain control of her body, since this would mean she might be able to tell other people what she has learned. They are, in other words, only interested in themselves.

CHAPTER 27

Thérèse worries that Madame Raquin will find a way to reveal what she has learned to the people at the Thursday gathering, but Laurent mocks her. Madame Raquin, after all, is unable to speak or move. And yet, she manages to gain control of her hand during a game of dominoes one night. Everyone stares at her in utter astonishment as she traces letters on the table. But Grivet, who vainly thinks he's adept at discerning what she wants, keeps interrupting her, so she has to start over.

The implication in this scene is that Madame Raquin is so distraught that she's able to force herself out of a state of paralysis—a somewhat farfetched idea, though it illustrates just how motivated she is to take revenge on her son's killers. The fact that Grivet keeps interrupting her is in perfect alignment with his idiotic vanity, serving as a reminder that Camille admired truly imbecilic, oblivious people.

Madame Raquin eventually manages to spell out "Thérèse and Laurent have…" But because she has run out of energy, she can go no further. Vexed that he was unable to guess what she was going to say, Grivet tries again, claiming it's obvious that she meant to say: "Thérèse and Laurent have taken good care of me." Everyone agrees.

Once again, everyone sees Laurent and Thérèse as a perfect couple who have set aside their own interests in order to devote themselves to the task of caring for the elderly Madame Raquin. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth, but only Thérèse and Laurent know as much. In a way, it's arguable that the discrepancy between their utter misery and the way everyone celebrates them must be somewhat intolerable, since both Thérèse and Laurent surely know they don't deserve such praise.

CHAPTER 28

Thérèse and Laurent spend another two months in complete agony. They now deeply hate each other and start fighting every night. On some level, they understand that their bleak marriage is a form of "punishment" for having murdered Camille, but they're unwilling to admit as much. It now seems inevitable to them that something terrible will happen at some point. They argue and fight so much that it becomes an actual physical "need"—after going at each other so intensely, they're finally able to get a little sleep.

Whereas Thérèse and Laurent first shared a connection based on mutual desire and passion, they now share a connection based on mutual suffering. *Their passion, then, remains intact, except it has become something much more sinister. Along with their connection, they've developed a dependency on one another, relying on their tumultuous relationship to help them burn off their nervous energy, thus allowing them to sleep. Needless to say, they have a miserable arrangement, but they have seemingly no other choice but to stay together and fight—after all, they already know that being alone is emotionally torturous, too.*

As Thérèse and Laurent take out their anger on each other, Madame Raquin is forced to listen to them rehash her son's murder. They often try to push the blame on each other, especially when Thérèse tries to claim that she didn't want to go through with murdering Camille—a claim that torments Laurent, who hits Thérèse and tells her to own up to her "share of the blame." They also try to insist that Camille doesn't bother them at night, each one pretending like they're more emotionally stable than the other. And though listening to the couple talk about Camille's death is pure torture for Madame Raquin, her eyes shine in happiness whenever Laurent hits Thérèse.

Things begin to escalate in Thérèse and Laurent's relationship, as Laurent starts resorting to violence. Thérèse seems to intentionally provoke him by claiming that she had less to do with Camille's murder than he did, thus trying to make him feel alone with his guilt. While it's not necessarily fair of her to ignore her own culpability, it is *the case that she seemed more hesitant to kill Camille than Laurent did—she even hesitated to get in the rowboat after he told her what he planned to do to Camille. All the same, though, she knowingly went along with the plan, so even if she wasn't the one to throw Camille in the river, she certainly isn't as innocent as she'd like to seem when trying to unnerve Laurent.*

CHAPTER 29

Thérèse starts responding to her own misery in a different way. Instead of acting like Camille's memory doesn't haunt her, she tries to show remorse for what she's done. She acts as if she loved Camille, saying nice things about him and begging for forgiveness. She even cries to Madame Raquin, apologizing for killing Camille and asking the old woman to forgive her. After a while, she begins to believe what she's saying, which makes her feel a little better about herself. She therefore makes a habit of showing her atonement to Madame Raquin. All the while, her crying pains the old woman, who easily recognizes that Thérèse just wants to make herself feel better.

Thérèse's behavior toward Madame Raquin is yet another sign of just how selfish she is. It's obvious that Madame Raquin wouldn't want one of her son's killers coming to her for forgiveness. Because the old woman can't object, though, she has no choice but to endure Thérèse's crying fits, which are clearly just self-interested attempts to absolve herself of her terrible crime.

Thérèse manages to delude herself into thinking Madame Raquin has forgiven her. Meanwhile, Laurent chastises Thérèse for always crying to Madame Raquin, thinking that she's only doing it to bother him. He doesn't like seeing her express remorse, worrying that she might end up turning them in. But she doesn't listen to him when he tells her to stop—to the contrary, she adopts an air of superiority and encourages him to acknowledge his own wrongdoing. He needs, she says, to repent. He hates it when she says such things, but he secretly wishes he *could* feel remorseful, since it might help him. Because he can't figure out how to express regret, though, he instead beats Thérèse.

Laurent's guiltless attitude comes to the forefront of the novel when Thérèse tries to get him to repent. The fact that he's unable to feel remorse once again suggests that he's only interested in himself—in fact, he even sees remorse as a potential way of making himself feel better, further emphasizing his self-interested motivations. The idea that he doesn't feel guilty but is still quite miserable is interesting, underlining the novel's notion that it's possible to suffer as a result of a bad deed without actually regretting that deed from a moral standpoint.

CHAPTER 30

Madame Raquin decides to take her own life by refusing to eat. Distressed, Thérèse tries to force-feed her, but Laurent tells her to stop, saying that it doesn't matter—perhaps they'll even be better off when she's gone. Madame Raquin hears him say this and changes her mind, not wanting to die until she's completely sure they'll never be happy again. What's more, she can tell something drastic will surely happen soon—Thérèse and Laurent are constantly warring with each other. They've each thought about going their separate ways, but the idea of suffering on their own, without having each other to berate, is unthinkable.

Thérèse and Laurent are inextricably linked to each other. They depend on each other in a sick and twisted way, needing somebody to fight with in order to keep them from thinking too much about their own misery. They're therefore just as close as they were when they were enamored with each other—the difference, however, is that they're now bound by hatred and resentment, not desire and love.

Thérèse stops paying so much attention to her aunt. She also asks Suzanne if she wants to keep her company in the shop, which has lost most of its customers because Thérèse doesn't bother to treat anyone with the charm and kindness that Madame Raquin used to exhibit. With Suzanne sitting in the store, Thérèse starts leaving for hours at a time, but nobody knows where she goes. Around this time, she fears she has gotten pregnant. Afraid she'll give birth to a "drowned baby," she provokes Laurent and then, when he goes to kick her, positions herself so that his foot collides with her stomach. She has a miscarriage the following day.

Although they're tightly connected to each other, Thérèse can't imagine giving birth to Laurent's child. After all, she and Laurent hate each other and lead a miserable life, so she obviously wouldn't want to bring a baby into their home. Plus, she's (irrationally) afraid that the baby would come out looking like Camille's drowned corpse, indicating that she's completely unable to think about anything without fearing the ways in which the memory of Camille's death will hang over her.

Laurent is surprised to discover that he hates leading an "idle" life, since it only makes his agony about Camille feel even more pronounced. His only relief in life is coming home and beating Thérèse. But taking his anger out on her doesn't spare him from the most unbearable aspects of his existence—like, for instance, the daily reminder of Camille that he notices whenever he tries to shave, his razor hesitating over **the bitemark scar**. Another thing that bothers him is François, the cat whom he thinks knows all about what he and Thérèse have done. One night, the cat stares at Laurent so intensely that Laurent opens the window, grabs the cat, and hurls him at the wall across the alley. The animal breaks its back and spends the whole night screeching in pain outside.

From the very beginning of the novel, Laurent has dreamed of living a life in which he doesn't have to work and can pass the time however he wants. But killing Camille has made it impossible for him to enjoy such a lifestyle, since idleness gives him so much time to think about his friend's drowned corpse—a thought that constantly haunts him. Because he has nothing else to distract himself, he beats Thérèse, hoping to do anything to rid himself of the memory of murdering Camille. To that end, he throws François out the window because the cat is a living, breathing reminder that Camille used to live in the very apartment that Laurent now lives in. Simply put, Laurent is desperate to outrun his thoughts about Camille, but he's unable to do so because there are reminders of the incident everywhere he looks.

CHAPTER 31

No longer wasting her time apologizing to Madame Raquin, Thérèse starts going out multiple times a week. Laurent decides to follow her one day, terrified that she's going to the police station to confess. In the end, he's surprised to see her meet up with some bohemian people at a bar and then walk away with a younger man, going up to his apartment and embracing him. Laurent isn't mad that Thérèse is having an affair. In fact, he thinks it's a great idea and can't believe he didn't think to do the very same thing. He therefore decides to ask for money from his wife so he can entertain women and pay sex workers to sleep with him.

There's such a lack of romance in Thérèse and Laurent's relationship that Laurent doesn't even care when he discovers that she's having an affair. Rather, he's actually pleased to make this discovery, since it leads him to the realization that he could be doing the same thing. He thus decides to seek comfort in the one thing that never failed to bring him joy in the days before he killed Camille: sex.

When Laurent asks for money, he doesn't say what it's for. Thérèse refuses to give him anything, vowing to never let him have any of her savings. They then have such a heated argument that Laurent declares once and for all that he's going to the police station to turn them in. To his surprise, she agrees. They both march downstairs, intending to make their way to the station, but they stop at the front door. Thérèse admits that it's pointless to argue about money and agrees to give Laurent the cash he wants. Pleased, Laurent goes out as soon as he receives the money, but he doesn't find any relief in having sex—nothing brings him pleasure anymore.

Laurent thinks he can't successfully entertain a new lover without first securing some money. Yet again, he sees money as a means of attaining a happier lifestyle. Although he doesn't care about wealth in and of itself (like Camille did), he does imbue it with a certain power—that is, the power to bring him happiness and pleasure. He's so motivated to get money from Thérèse that he even threatens to turn them in when she refuses to give him what he wants, indicating once again that they both have an unhealthy amount of power over each other. Unsurprisingly, though, when Laurent finally does manage to convince Thérèse to pay him, he discovers that sex no longer brings him pleasure. Murdering Camille has therefore completely ruined his ability to enjoy life.

Like Laurent, Thérèse finds no pleasure in having sex, so she stops leaving the shop quite as much. They both stick to the apartment, feeling imprisoned and chained to one another. They continue their vicious fighting and soon come to fear each other, since they often threaten to confess their crime. It becomes quite common for them to say they're going to the police—they even go as far as the police station's front door multiple times, but they always back down.

Thérèse and Laurent can't help but exploit the power they each have over the other. It's obvious that neither of them will confess to the police, but the mere possibility that they might *keeps them both in a constant state of fear. Although their miserable relationship gives them something to distract themselves with, then, it also exacerbates their paranoia.*

After living in misery for so long, Thérèse and Laurent each hatch a plan to kill the other. They hope getting rid of their spouse will solve their problems. Laurent runs into an old friend who works in a laboratory, and this friend tells him about a fatal poison he has been working with. Laurent later pays the friend a visit and, when he's not looking, steals a bottle of the poison. Meanwhile, Thérèse sharpens a long knife and hides it in a convenient place in the kitchen.

Because they torment each other so much, Laurent and Thérèse seem to think that killing each other will help them move on from murdering Camille. The logic behind this thinking isn't very good, since it's unlikely that committing yet another *murder will help them forget about the first one. But they seem to think it's impossible to go on living with the knowledge that somebody else in the world is aware of what really happened to Camille, which is most likely why they don't just decide to leave each other—they would always fear that the other might turn them in. The novel thus shows how one heinous act can lead to another, as both Laurent and Thérèse justify committing another murder to cover up the first one.*

CHAPTER 32

That week, the Thursday evening guests stay especially long. They enjoy the weekly gatherings so much that they get lost in conversation, despite the fact that they always repeat the same stories. Tonight, though, both Laurent and Thérèse are particularly eager for them to leave, and Madame Raquin can sense that something is going to happen. When the guests finally depart, the former lovers sit down and wait to go to bed. Usually, Thérèse makes them sugared water before bed, but Laurent offers to do it this time. As he slips the poison into Thérèse's drink, she bends down to grab the knife—but then they look at each other and freeze, each one seeing what the other has in store.

As always, the Thursday evening guests are completely unaware of what's going on in the Raquin household, despite the fact that two of them are trained in policework. Once again, then, readers are reminded of just how oblivious and naïve Camille's friends really are—despite their supposedly respectable stations in life, they're utterly ignorant, indicating that things like social status are poor reflections of a person's true nature. The only person who can sense that something is amiss is Madame Raquin, who seems to know that Thérèse and Laurent's horrible crime is bound to take a staggering toll on their lives, apparently understanding that immoral behavior has grave consequences.

Madame Raquin watches Laurent and Thérèse as they look at each other with "pity and horror." And then the spouses both break into tears and embrace each other. They weep together, crying for the terrible existence they've led. Looking at each other one last time, they feel grateful to one another for finally bringing some kind of relief. Thérèse takes the glass of poison from Laurent, drinks half, and then hands it back to him. He drinks the other half. Having swallowed the poison, they collapse on each other, Thérèse's mouth coming to rest on Laurent's neck, right on top of Camille's **bitemark**. For the rest of the night, Madame Raquin stares at their corpses with smoldering but triumphant hatred.

In the last moment of their lives, Thérèse and Laurent share a certain tenderness that has been missing from their relationship ever since they murdered Camille. Although they resent each other, they also recognize in this final scene that they're inextricably bound to one another—and this, at least, is a small comfort. By dying together, they will finally succeed in putting Camille's death behind them, not having to worry anymore about how their actions will haunt them. In a way, then, they reignite their passion and love right at the end of their lives.

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