EPONINE. I heard you on the stairs. *(MARIUS turns. EPONINE is as miserably dressed as her sister. Underneath her dirt and look of weariness there's an undercurrent of genuine worth.)* I live next door with my family. I'm your neighbor.

MARIUS. Yes, I know.

EPONINE. We're a noisy family.

MARIUS. I won't argue. *(Washes his hands.)* The wall is thin and cracked.

EPONINE. My name is Eponine. The landlady told me your name. Marius. *(MARIUS dries his hands with the towel, a rag.)*

MARIUS. Is there something you want? *(EPONINE ignores the question. She likes being with MARIUS and wants to stay as long as possible. Sees books on the table.)*

EPONINE. Books! *(Checks the bindings.)* I can read. Write, too. A mirror. You have a mirror! *(She picks it up and studies her reflection.)* I can be pretty when I have something proper to wear and my face is scrubbed. *(Sees.)* Bread. *(Impusively, hungrily, she starts to twist away a piece. Quickly she stops, knowing MARIUS is watching her.)*

MARIUS. Go ahead. Have some. *(Delighted, EPONINE pulls away the end of the loaf, bites into it with obvious delight.)*

EPONINE. It's fresh! We only get stale and only that when times are good. I'd forgotten the taste. *(MARIUS is doing his best not to be rude, but he wishes she'd go. He sits at the writing table, unstrings the books.)* Last winter, before coming here, we lived beneath bridges. You had to huddle together not to freeze. Sometimes I wanted to drown myself, but then I thought, no, it's too cold. Sometimes I go out at night and stay out until it's dawn. Sometimes I think people are throwing stones at me. When you haven't had anything to eat for days the world seems a very strange place.

MARIUS. I am sorry, Eponine, but I must tend to my work.

EPONINE. We are being turned out. We're behind in our rent.

MARIUS *(resigned)*. How much does it come to?

EPONINE. Twenty francs.

MARIUS *(takes coins from his pocket; to himself)*. First Henri and now you. If this keeps up I'll be driven back to my aunt. *(To EPONINE.)* I have thirty francs. I'll give you twenty-five.

EPONINE. Twenty-five!

MARIUS. Twenty for the rent. Five for some food.

EPONINE. Five francs is enough to stuff us for two days.

MARIUS. I trust you won't make this a habit. My money goes out faster than it comes in. *(Still she doesn't leave.)* What are you waiting for?

EPONINE. I was just thinking, Monsieur, you're not only generous -- you're a good-looking young man. *(She exits. MARIUS thinks about her remark, smiles, gets busy with his work.)*