Frederic and Bernerette

Alfred de Musset

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Done into english by M. Raoul Pellissier

CHAPTER I

TOWARD the close of the Restoration, a young man from Besançon, Frederic Hombert by name, came to Paris to study law. His family was not rich and made him only a modest allowance. But as he was very careful, a little was sufficient. He roomed in the Latin quarter so as to be near his work. His tastes and inclinations were so sedentary that he hardly ever visited the promenades, the squares and the monuments, which, in Paris, are the chief objects of curiosity to the stranger. The society of some young men with whom he was thrown in contact at the Law School and a few houses whose doors had been opened to him by letters of introduction, were his only distractions. He kept up a regular correspondence with his parents and sent them word of his success in examinations as he passed them. After having worked assiduously for three years, at length, the time arrived for him to become an advocate. He had only to write his thesis, and had already fixed the time for his return to Besançon, when an unexpected event for a time disturbed his plans.

He lived in the Rue de la Harpe, on the third floor, and on his window sill were some flowers which he looked after carefully. While watering them one morning, at a window opposite him, he noticed a young girl who bagan to laugh. She watched him so gaily and openly that he could not help nodding his head. She graciously returned his salutation, and from this moment they became accustomed to wish each other "good morning" every day from one side of the street to the other. One day, when Frederic had risen earlier than usual, after having saluted his neighbor, he took a sheet of paper which he folded in the form of a letter and showed it to the girl, as if to ask if he could write to her. But she shook her head as a sign of refusal and disappeared as though offended.

The next day he chanced to meet her in the street. The young lady was returning home, accompanied by a young man whom Frederic did not know and whom he could not remember ever having seen among the students. From the appearance and dress of his neighbor, in spite of the fact that she had on a hat, he judged her to be what is known in Paris as a grisette. Her cavalier, of about his own age, was no doubt a brother or a lover, and in all probability the latter. Whichever it was, Frederic resolved to think no more of the matter. Winter having set in, he removed his flowers from the place they occupied in the window. But, in spite of himself, he could not help

looking out from time to time. He brought the desk, at which he worked, nearer to the window and arranged the curtains so that he could see without being himself perceived.

His neighbor no longer appeared in the morning. She was sometimes to be seen shutting the blinds at five o'clock in the evening after having lighted the lamp. Frederic made bold enough to send her a kiss one day. He was surprised to see her return it as gaily as she had before returned his first salute. He again took up the piece of paper which had remained folded on his table and, explaining by signs as well as he could, asked her to write to him or to receive a note from him. But the reply was not more favorable than the first time. The grisette again shook her head and the same thing happened for eight days. Kisses came readily enough, but as for letters, he had to give them up.

At the end of a week, Frederic, vexed at these repeated refusals, tore up the paper before his neighbor's eyes. At first she laughed, remained for some time undecided, and then drew from the pocket of her apron a letter which she showed to the student. You may well understand that he did not shake his head. Unable to speak, he wrote in big letters on a large sheet of drawing−paper these three words: "I adore you." Then he placed the sheet on a chair and arranged a lighted candle on each side. The lovely grisette, with the aid of a lorgnette, was thus enabled to read her lover's first declaration. She answered with a smile and motioned to Frederic to go down and get the note she had shown him.

It was dark and a heavy mist was rising. The young man hurriedly descended, crossed the street, and entered his neighbor's house. The door was open and the young lady was at the foot of the stairs. Frederic, throwing his arms round her, was quicker to kiss her than to speak. She ran away trembling.

"What have you written to me?" he asked. "When and how can I see you again?"

She stopped, retraced her steps, and slipping her note into Frederic's hand replied:

"Here, take it, and do not pass your nights away from home."

The fact is, the student, in spite of his wisdom, had for some time, been spending his nights away from his lodgings and the grisette had noticed this.

When two lovers agree, obstacles count for little. The note handed to Frederic enjoined the greatest precaution, spoke of hidden danger, and asked where they could meet each other. It could not be, she said, in the young man's room. So they must find a room somewhere in the neighborhood. The Latin quarter is full of them. The first meeting was arranged, when Frederic received the following letter:

> "You say you adore me, but you do not say if you think me pretty. You have scarcely seen me and, to be able to love me, you must see me better. I am going out with my servant. You go out too and meet me in the road. You will approach me, as an acquaintance, say a few words and, during this time, look at me well. If you do not think me pretty, tell me so, and I shall not be angry. It is quite simple, and, besides, I am not so bad.
>
> "A thousand kisses.
>
> "BERNERETTE."

Frederic obeyed the orders of his mistress, and I need only say the result was satisfactory. Yet Bernerette, by a refinement of coquetry, instead of loading herself with all her finery for this meeting, appeared in negligee, her hair done up under her hat. The student saluted her respectfully, told her that he thought her more beautiful than ever, and then went home delighted with his new conquest. But she appeared still more beautiful the following

day, when she came to the rendezvous, and here he saw that she could dispense with all finery and was equally as charming in the simplest costume.

CHAPTER II

FREDERIC and Bernerette had given way to their love almost before they had exchanged a single word and, from the very start, began to thee and thou each other. Wrapt in each other's arms they sat near the fireplace, where a small fire was burning. Here Bernerette, leaning on her lover's knees her checks aglow with pleasure, told him who she was. She had played in comedy in the provinces. Her real name was Louise Durand and Bernerette was but an assumed one. She had been living for two years with a young man whom she no longer loved. At all costs, she wished to get rid of him and change her mode of life, either by returning to the stage if she found some one to protect her, or by learning a trade. Apart from this, she said nothing about her family or the past. She simply announced her determination to break the bonds that held her and which were insupportable. Frederic did not wish to deceive her and told her exactly his position. Not being rich, and acquainted with few people, he could help her but little.

"As I can not support you," he added, "I did not wish, under any pretext, to cause a rupture. But, as I could not endure the thought of sharing you with another, I shall leave you, much to my regret, and cherish in my heart the memory of a happy day."

At this unexpected declaration, Bernerette burst into tears. "Why go?" said she. "If I break with my lover, it is not you who will have been the cause, since I have made up my mind for some time. If I go and serve my apprenticeship in a laundry, will you no longer love me? It is a pity you are not rich, but what of it? We will do the best we can."

Frederic was about to reply, but a kiss checked him.

"Let us think no more about it, nor mention it," said Bernerette. "When you want me, signal to me from your window and do not bother about the rest, which in any case does not concern you."

During about six weeks, Frederic hardly worked at all. His theme lay on his table, hardly commenced, and, he added a line, from time to time. He knew that if a desire for enjoyment came to him, he had but to open the window. Bernerette was always ready and when he asked her how she managed to have so much liberty, she always answered that it was no business of his. He had a few savings in his drawer which he rapidly spent. At the end of two weeks, he was obliged to have recourse to a friend to enable him to take his mistress out to supper.

When this friend, who was named Gerard, learned of Frederic's new mode of life he said to him: "Be careful, you are in love. Your grisette has nothing and you have not much more. In your position, I would be shy of an actress from the provinces. These passions lead to more than one would think."

Frederic laughingly replied that it was not a question of passion, but of a passing love. He told Gerard how he had come to know Bernerette, thanks to the window. "She is a girl who thinks of nothing but laughter," said he to his friend. "There is nothing less dangerous than she, and nothing less serious than our liaison."

Gerard yielded to this reasoning, but still urged Frederic to work. The latter assured him that his theme would soon be finished, and to prove it, in fact, he worked hard for a few hours; but, that very evening, Bernerette was awaiting him. They went together to *La Chaumière* and work was neglected.

La Chaumière is the Tivoli of the Latin quarter and the rendezvous of the students and grisettes. It follows, that it is a place for good company and a resort of pleasure. Drinking and dancing are indulged in: a frank gaiety,

somewhat noisy, animates the assembly. The *Elegantes* are there in their round bonnets and the *Fashionables* in velvet waistcoats. One smokes, touches glasses in sign of friendship and makes love openly. If the police should forbid the entrance to this garden of those on their rolls, it would perhaps be here only that the old life of the students of Paris might continue, that life so free and happy, the memories of which fade day by day.

Frederic, as a provincial, was not one to grumble at those he met there; and Bernerette, who only wished to enjoy herself, would not have noticed anything. One must have a certain knowledge of the world to be able to tell where to amuse one's self. Our happy couple did not reason over their pleasures. When they had danced all the evening, they went home tired and content. Frederic was such a novice that his first youthful follies appeared to him happiness itself. When Bernerette, leaning on his arm, walked with him down the Boulevard Neuf, he could imagine nothing sweeter than to live like this day by day. They wondered how it would all end, but neither could answer the question clearly. The rent of the furnished room near the Luxembourg was paid for two months: this was important. Sometimes, on arriving, Bernerette would have under her arm a cake wrapped up in paper and Frederic a bottle of good wine. They would then have a regular feast: the young girl at dessert would sing verses from the vaudevilles in which she had appeared. If she forgot the words, the student improvised verses in honor of his friend, and when he could not find the rhyme, a kiss sufficed. And in this way, they passed the night together, without a thought of time.

"You no longer do anything," Gerard would say, "and your passing fancy will last longer than a genuine passion. Take care: you are spending money and you neglect the means of making any more."

"Reassure yourself," answered Frederic, "my theme is progressing and Bernerette is about to apprentice herself to a laundry. Let me enjoy a moment of happiness in peace, and do not worry about the future."

But the time for printing the thesis was rapidly drawing near. It was finished in haste but was no worse on that account. Frederic was admitted to the bar and sent to Besançon several copies of his dissertation, together with his diploma. His father answered the happy news by sending him a sum of money much more than sufficient for his return home. Paternal joy, in this way and without knowing it, came to the assistance of love. Frederic was able to repay his friend the money he had borrowed and to convince him of the uselessness of his remonstrances. He wished to make Bernerette a present, but she refused.

"Take me out to supper," said she to him; "all I want from you is yourself."

With a character gay as that of this young girl, when she experienced the least trouble, it was easy to perceive. Frederic found her sad one day and asked her the reason. After some hesitation, she drew a letter from her pocket. "It is an anonymous letter," said she. "The young man who lives with me received it yesterday and gave it to me saying that he took no notice of accusations that were unsigned. Who has written this? I do not know. The spelling is as bad as the style, but it is no less dangerous for me. I am denounced as a lost woman and the very day and hour of our last meeting is mentioned. It must be some one in the house, a porter or a chambermaid. I do not know what to do nor how to escape the danger that threatens me."

"What danger?" demanded Frederic.

"I believe," said Bernerette, laughing, "that it is no less than a question of my life. I have to deal with a man of violent temper, and if he knew I deceived him, he would be quite capable of killing me."

In vain, Frederic read the letter a second time and examined it in a hundred different ways; he could not recognize the writing. He went home very much alarmed and resolved not to see Bernerette for a few days, but he soon received a note from her.

"He knows all," she wrote. "I do not know who has told him, but think it must be the porter. He is coming to see you and wants to fight with you. I am unable to say anything else I am more nearly dead than alive."

Frederic spent the entire day in his room. He awaited his rival's visit or at least some provocation. He was surprised to receive neither the one nor the other. The next day, and during the week, the same silence. At length, he learned that M. de N——, Bernerette's lover, had come to an understanding with her, after which, she had left the house and sought safety with her mother. Alone, and in despair over the loss of a mistress he had loved to distraction, the young man had gone out one morning and had not been heard from again. At the end of four days, not seeing him return, the door of his apartment had been forced. He had left a letter on the table announcing his fatal design. It was a week later that the remains of this unfortunate man were discovered in the forest of Meudon.

CHAPTER III

THE impression the news of this suicide made on Frederic was profound. Although he did not know this young man, and had never spoken to him, he knew his name, which was that of an illustrious family. He saw his parents arrive, his brothers in sorrow, and he knew the sad details of the search they had to make to find the body. The seals were affixed; soon after, the furniture was removed. The window, near which Bernerette had worked, remained open and now revealed only the walls of an empty room.

One does not feel remorse unless one is culpable, and Frederic had nothing serious with which to reproach himself, since he had deceived no one, and had never even clearly understood the state of affairs between the grisette and her lover. But he felt himself filled with horror at being the involuntary cause of such an unfortunate calamity. "Why did he not come and see me?" he said to himself. "Why did he not turn against me the weapon of which he made such terrible use? I do not know how I should have acted, nor what would have happened; but my heart tells me that such an occurrence would not have taken place. Why did I not know he loved her so much? Why was I not witness to his grief? Who knows? I should, perhaps, have gone away. I might have convinced him, cured him and brought him to reason by frank and friendly words. In any case, he would still be living, and I would rather he had broken my arm than to think that, while killing himself, he perhaps pronounced my name."

In the midst of these sad thoughts, he received a letter from Bernerette: she was ill and in bed. During his last interview with her, M. de N— had struck her and she had sustained a serious fall. Frederic went to see her, but lacked courage. To keep her as his mistress, seemed like committing a murder. He decided to leave. After having settled his affairs he sent the poor girl what he could spare, promised not to abandon her if she were in need, and returned to Besançon.

The day of his arrival, as you may imagine, was quite a holiday. He was congratulated on his new title and overwhelmed with questions about his stay in Paris. His father proudly introduced him to all the people of note in the town. He was soon informed of a plan conceived in his absence. They had thought of his marriage and proposed a young and pretty girl of honorable fortune. He neither refused nor accepted: in his heart was a sadness that nothing could remove. He allowed himself to be led where they pleased, answered, as well as he could, those who questioned him and even forced himself to make love to his intended. But it was without pleasure and almost in spite of himself that he performed these duties. Not that Bernerette was dear enough to him to make him refuse an advantageous marriage, but the last events had produced too strong an effect on him to be so soon forgotten. In a heart troubled by memories there is no place for hope. These two feelings, in their extreme keenness, exclude each other. It is only on losing their power that they become reconciled, and finish by intermingling.

The young lady in question was of a very melancholy disposition. She felt neither sympathy nor repugnance for Frederic. It was in her case, as in his, simply that she obeyed her parents' wishes. Thanks to the ease with which they could converse, they both learned the truth. They felt that love would not come to them, but friendship had come without any effort. One day, when the two united families had gone into the country, Frederic, on returning,

gave his arm to his intended. She asked him if he had not left some object of his affections in Paris and he gave her his history. She began by finding it amusing and treating it as a mere nothing. Frederic spoke of it all as but a folly of small importance, but the finish of the story appeared serious to Mademoiselle Darcy, the young lady's name. "Good God," said she, "but it is very cruel! I understand what you must have felt and I think all the more of you. But you are not to blame; let time do its work. Your parents are just as anxious as mine to bring about our marriage; but leave yourself in my hands. I will spare you as much as possible and, in any case, the pain of a refusal."

With these words, they parted. Frederic suspected that Mademoiselle Darcy, on her side, had a confession to make. He was not mistaken. She loved a young and penniless officer who had asked her hand and been rejected by the family. She, in her turn, was frank and Frederic swore that she should not regret it. They came to a tacit understanding to resist their parents, while appearing to submit to their wishes. They were incessantly seen together, dancing at the ball, chatting in the drawing−room, or walking alone. But, after having acted all day like two lovers, they shook hands in parting, and every night repeated that they would never marry.

Such situations are extremely dangerous. They possess a charm that leads one on and the heart yields with confidence. But love is a jealous god, who becomes irritated as soon as he is no longer feared, and one sometimes loves simply because one has promised not to love. After a time, Frederic recovered his spirits. He said to himself that, after all, it was not his fault that a slight intrigue had come to such a sinister ending, and that any other in his place would have acted as he did and, in fact, that one must forget what it is impossible to remedy. He began to find pleasure in seeing Mademoiselle Darcy every day: she appeared more beautiful than he had at first thought. He did not alter his conduct toward her, but, little by little, he put more warmth into his speech and protestations of love, a warmth which could not be mistaken. And the young lady was not deceived: her feminine instinct promptly warned her of what was happening in Frederic's heart. She was flattered and almost touched; but, either because she was more constant than he, or because she wished to keep her word, she determined to entirely break with him and to remove all hope. For this, it was necessary that he should explain himself more clearly, and the occasion soon presented itself.

One night, when Frederic had seemed more ardent than usual, Mademoiselle Darcy, during tea, went and sat in a small adjoining room. A certain romantic disposition, often natural to women, invested her glance and words with an indescribable charm. Unconscious of her feelings, she was sensible of the power to produce a strong impression and yielded to the temptation to use that power, even though she were to suffer herself. Frederic had seen her go into the next room. He followed and approached her and, after a few words, regarding the sadness he noticed in her, said:

"Well, mademoiselle! Do you not think the day is approaching when you must make up your mind? Have you found any means of eluding this necessity? I have come to consult you on the matter. My father questions me incessantly and I hardly know what to reply. What objection can I make to this union, and how can I say I do not want you? If I pretend not to think you beautiful enough, nor wise, nor gay, no one will believe me. I must, therefore, say I love another and the longer we wait the greater the falsehood in saying this. How could it be otherwise? Can I always see you with impunity? Can not the image of an absent one fade away when you are present? Tell me, then, what I must answer and what you think yourself. Have not your intentions changed? Will you allow your youth to consume itself in solitude? Will you remain faithful to a memory and will this memory suffice you? If I judge from my own experience, I must acknowledge that I do not believe it. For I feel that it is but deceiving oneself to resist the promptings of one's heart and a common destiny, which wishes us to forget and love. I will keep my word if you wish, but I can not help telling you that this obedience will be cruel. Know, then, that on you, alone, now depends our future: pronounce our fate."

"I am not surprised at what you tell me," answered Mademoiselle Darcy, "it is the language of all men. For them, the present is everything, and they would sacrifice their whole existence to the paying of a pretty compliment. Women also have similar temptations but the difference is that they resist them. I was wrong to leave myself in

your hands and it is but just that I should pay the penalty. But while my refusal may wound you and cause resentment toward me, you will learn from me something of which you will later admit the truth. It is that one loves but once in this life, that is, if one is capable of loving at all; those who are inconstant do not love: they play with the heart. I know that for a marriage, it is said that friendship suffices. In certain cases, this is possible, but how could it be possible for us, since you know I am in love with some one else? Supposing that today you abuse my confidence, in order to force me to marry you, what use will you make of this secret when I am your wife? Will it not be enough to make happiness impossible for both of us? I wish to believe that your Parisian love affair is only a youthful folly. Do you think that it has given me a good opinion of your heart, and that it is of no consequence to me, to know you to be of such a capricious character? Believe me, Frederic," she added, taking the young man by the hand, "believe me, you will one day fall in love, and on that day, if you think of me, you may perhaps hold in some esteem she who has dared to address you thus. You will then know what love really is."

With these words, Mademoiselle Darcy rose and left the room. She had noticed how troubled Frederic was and what an effect her words had produced: she left him very sad. The poor boy was too inexperienced to suppose that, in such a formal declaration, there might be a trace of coquetry. He was not aware of the strange motives which sometimes govern a woman's actions. He did not know that she who wishes to refuse, will say merely, "No," and that she who explains more fully, in truth, wishes to be convinced.

However it may be, this conversation had the worst possible influence over him. Instead of attempting to persuade Mademoiselle Darcy, during the following days, he avoided being alone with her. Too proud to yield, she allowed him to remain away in silence.

He went to his father and spoke of the necessity of completing his preparations for admission to the bar. As to the marriage, it was Mademoiselle Darcy who first broached the subject. She did not dare to refuse absolutely, for fear of offending her family, but she asked for time to reflect, and persuaded them to leave her alone for a year. So, Frederic prepared to return to Paris. His allowance was slightly increased and he left Besançon feeling even more sad than when he arrived. The memory of his last conversation with Mademoiselle Darcy pursued him like a bad omen and, while the stage was carrying him away from his father's house in the country, he kept repeating to himself, "You will then know what love really is."

CHAPTER IV

HE did not return to the Latin quarter. His profession led him to the Palais de Justice and he took a room near the Quai aux Fleurs. Hardly had he arrived, when he received a visit from his friend Gerard. During Frederic's absence, he had inherited considerable wealth. The death of an old uncle had made him rich. He had rooms in the Chaussée−d'Antin, a carriage and horses. He also kept a pretty mistress, received much company, and, in fact, lived a gay life at his house all day and often all night. He was seen at the balls, at all spectacles and on the promenades. In a word, from a modest student, had sprung a fashionable young man.

Without giving up his study, Frederic was drawn into the whirlpool that enveloped his friend. He soon learned to despise the pleasures of *La Chaumière:* this was no place for the gilded youth of Paris. They were often in worse company, but little matters; custom sanctions it and it was considered more noble to amuse oneself at *Musard's* with the bad company there than at the Boulevard Neuf with honest people. Gerard insisted on taking Frederic with him wherever he went. The latter resisted as much as he could, and finished by allowing himself to be led. He, thus, came to know a world of which he before was totally ignorant. He saw actresses and dancers and the society of these divinities has a great effect on a provincial. He mingled with gamblers and people who laughingly mentioned two hundred louis they had lost the night before. He passed the night with them and saw them at daybreak, after twelve hours of drinking and card−playing, asking themselves, while dressing, what were to be the pleasures of the day. He was invited to suppers where each one had, at his side, a woman of his own, to whom not

a word was said, and who was taken with one on leaving as one would take one's stick or hat. In short, he took part in all these fancies, in all the pleasures of this free and thoughtless life, under the shelter of sadness, which the elite, alone, possess and which appear to appertain to the rest of the world, only by means of pleasure.

At first, he enjoyed it all, from the fact that he lost all trace of sadness and all unwelcome memories were blotted out. And, in fact, in such a sphere it is impossible to be preoccupied: one must enjoy oneself or depart. But Frederic was doing himself an injury, as he was losing his practise of reflection and his orderly habits, those supreme safeguards. He had not sufficient means to play for long, but, nevertheless, he played. Unfortunately, he began by winning and had all the more to lose. His clothes were made by an old tailor at Besançon who had for a number of years worked for the family. He wrote that he no longer intended having his clothes made by him and patronized a fashionable Paris tailor. He soon found he had no time to go to the Palais de Justice; how could he, while in the company of young men who, in their busy idleness, could not even spare the time to read the newspapers? So, he prepared for his examination on the boulevards. He dined at the cafés, went to the Bois, had fine clothes and his pockets full of money. Nothing was lacking but a horse and a mistress to make him an accomplished dandy.

This is not saying little, it is true. In times gone by, a man was not a man and did not really know what it was to live, except when possessed of three things, a horse, a woman and a sword. Our prosaic and pusillanimous century, first of all, did away with the most noble, the surest and the most inseparable of these three friends to a man of heart. No longer do we have a sword at our side; and, alas! but few people possess a horse, while there are those who boast of living without a mistress.

One day, when Frederic had some pressing debts to pay, he found himself obliged to apply to his companions in pleasure, who were, however, unable to accommodate him. He finally obtained, from a banker who knew his father, three thousand francs on his note of hand. With this sum in his pocket and feeling happy and relieved from his embarrassment, he strolled down the boulevard before returning home. When passing the corner of the Rue de la Paix to return by the Tuileries, a woman, arm in arm with a young man, began to laugh: it was Bernerette. He stopped and followed her with his eyes. She turned round several times; he changed his route, hardly knowing why, and went to the Cafe de Paris.

He had been walking for an hour, and was about to go to dinner, when Bernerette passed once more. She was alone. He stopped her and asked her to dine with him. She accepted and took his arm, but begged him to take her to a place not so well known.

"Let us go to a cabaret," said she gaily. "I do not care to dine in the open air."

They drove away in a cab, and as before, kissed each other a thousand times before inquiring the news.

The tête−à−tête was happy and sad memories were banished. Nevertheless, Bernerette complained of Frederic's not having come to see her: he only replied that she should well know why. She read her lover's eyes and understood that the subject must be dropped. Seated near a roaring fire as on the first day, they dreamed only of enjoying the happy chance that had once more drawn them together. The champagne animated their gaiety and elicited from him those tender proposals, inspired by this wine of poetry, but disdained by the epicure. After dinner, they went to the theater. At eleven, Frederic asked Bernerette where he should take her: she was silent for a time, half ashamed and half alarmed. Then, throwing her arms round the young man's neck, she timidly whispered in his ear:

"With you."

He was somewhat surprised to find her free.

"And what if I am not: do you not think I love you? But I am," she immediately added, seeing Frederic hesitate. "The person who was with me just now has, perhaps, caused you to think. Did you look at him?"

"No, I saw only you."

"He is an excellent fellow, a dealer in novelties and rich. He wants to marry me."

"To marry you! Are you serious?"

"Very serious. I have not deceived him, he knows the whole story of my life, but is in love with me. He knows my mother, and proposed a month ago. My mother would not interfere with my affairs, although she was provoked when she learned that I had told him everything. He wishes me to look after his accounts. It would be a good position, for he makes fifteen thousand francs a year; unfortunately, it is impossible."

"Why? Is there some obstacle?"

"I will tell you all about it, but let us first go home."

"No. Speak frankly to me, first."

"Are you going to laugh at me? I esteem and like him; he is the best man in the world, but he is too fat."

"Too fat? What folly!"

"You have never seen him. He is both fat and short and you have such a fine figure!"

"And what of his face?"

"Not so bad. He has one merit and that is to appear good and to be so. I am more grateful to him than I can tell you, and if I had wished, even without marrying me, he would have assisted me. Nothing in the world would make me vex him, and, if I could render him a service, I would do it with all my heart."

"Then marry him, if that is how matters stand."

"He is too large: it is impossible. Let us go home and chat."

Frederic allowed himself to be led and, when he awoke on the following day, he had forgotten his late troubles and the beautiful eyes of Mademoiselle Darcy.

CHAPTER V

BERNERETTE, left after breakfast and would not allow him to escort her home. He put aside the money that had been loaned him, fully resolved to pay his debts, but he was in no hurry to do so. Some time after, he had supper with Gerard. They separated only at daybreak. As he was leaving, Gerard stopped him.

"What are you going to do?" said he. "It is too late to sleep, let us have breakfast in the country."

The party was arranged. Gerard sent to awaken his mistress and told her to get ready.

"It is a pity," said he to his friend, "that you have not any one to bring with you: we would be a party of four, in

that case, and could have more enjoyment."

"That is easy," answered Frederic, yielding to an impulse of amour propre. "I will write a note which your groom can take for me: although it is somewhat early, Bernerette will come, I am sure."

"Just the thing! Who is Bernerette? Is she not your grisette of former times?"

"Exactly; it was on her account you used to counsel me."

"Really?" said Gerard, laughing. "But perhaps I was right," he added, "for you are naturally constant and it is dangerous with these ladies."

As he spoke, his mistress entered. Bernerette did not keep them waiting and appeared at her best. They sent for a carriage, and, in spite of the cold weather, they started for Montmorency. The sky was clear, the sun shining and the young men talked while the two ladies sang to them. When they had gone a league they were friends.

After arriving at Montmorency, they went horseback riding. Galloping through the woods, Frederic felt his heart throb. He never felt so much at ease: Bernerette was near him and he noticed with pride the impression made on Gerard by the young girl's charming face aglow from the rapid ride. After a long detour in the forest, they stopped on a small eminence on which were a small house and a windmill. The miller gave them a bottle of white wine and they sat down on the heath.

"We should have brought some cake with us," said Gerard. "Riding gives one an appetite and I am ravenous; we could have had a little luncheon before returning to the inn."

Bernerette took from her pocket a cheese cake she had bought as she passed through Saint−Denis, and offered it so graciously to Gerard that he kissed her hand by way of expressing his thanks.

"Let us do better," said she. "Instead of returning to the village, why not dine here? This good woman surely has a leg of mutton in the cottage. Besides, here are chicken which they can roast for us. Ask if this can be done and, while dinner is being prepared, we will take a drive in the woods. What do you think? That will be far better than the old partridges of the *Cheval−Blanc."*

The proposition was accepted. The miller's wife wished to refuse, but, dazzled by a gold piece that Gerard presented to her, she set to work at once and sacrificed the poultry yard. Never was there a gayer dinner. It lasted longer than the revelers had anticipated. The sun soon disappeared behind the beautiful hills of Saint−Leu: heavy clouds descended on the valley and rain began to fall.

"What are we to do?" said Gerard. "It is nearly two leagues to Montmorency and this is no summer shower that one has only to allow time for it to pass. It is a real winter rain and will last all night."

"Why so?" asked Bernerette. "A winter rain will pass like any other. Let us play cards to amuse ourselves during the time. When the moon rises, it will be fine."

The miller, as may be supposed, possessed no cards, consequently there could be no card party. Cecile, the mistress of Gerard, began to regret not being at the inn, and was anxious about her new dress. The horses were placed in shelter in a shed. Two big men, not very prepossessing in appearance, entered the room. They were the miller's sons. They asked for their supper, little pleased at finding strangers present. Gerard was getting impatient and Frederic was out of temper. Nothing is more dismal for those, who have just been laughing, than to find their joy disturbed by some unforseen contretemps. Bernerette, alone, was happy and nothing seemed to trouble her.

"Since we have no cards," said she, "I will propose a game. Although it is November, let us first try to find a fly."

"A fly," said Gerard "What do you want to do with it?"

"Look for the fly and you will see."

After a diligent search, a fly was discovered. The poor thing had become torpid owing to the approach of winter. Bernerette picked it up carefully and placed it in the center of the table. She then made them all to sit down.

"Now," said she, "let every one take a piece of sugar and place it before the fly on the table. Let us each put some money on a plate and that shall be the stake. No one must speak or move. Let the fly awake: it is already flying and will settle on one of the pieces of sugar, then leave it and go to another and so on, according to its fancy. Every time a piece of sugar attracts it, he, to whom the sugar belongs, must draw from the stake till the plate is empty and we can then begin again."

Bernerette's happy thought brought back their spirits. Her instructions were followed and two or three more flies appeared. Each one, in the most religious silence, followed them with his eyes while they were fluttering in the air over the table. If one of them settled on the sugar, there was a general roar of laughter. An hour was spent in this manner and the rain had ceased.

"I can not endure an ill−tempered woman," said Gerard to his friend as they were returning. "One must acknowledge that cheerfulness is a great blessing, perhaps the best of all, since, if possessed of this, one can do without others. Your grisette found means of turning an hour of ennui into one of entertainment, and this alone causes me to have a better opinion of her than if she had written an epic poem. Will your love last long?"

"I can hardly tell," replied Frederic, affecting the same indifference as his companion. "If she suits you, you can try your luck."

"You are not frank, for you love her and she loves you."

"Yes, a mere caprice as before."

"Take care of these fancies."

"Now follow us, gentlemen," said Bernerette, who galloped in front with Cecile, after they had all taken to their saddles again. They drew rein on a plateau and halted. The moon was rising and gently emerged from the heavy masses of clouds, and, as she rose, the clouds seemed to flee before her. Below the plateau, the wind was silently waving a sea of somber verdure. It was so dark that nothing could be distinguished, and six leagues from Paris you might have imagined yourself before a ravine in the Black Forest. Suddenly, a star appeared on the horizon; a great gleam of light glided over the summit of the woods and filled space in an instant. The great full−grown trees, the clumps of chestnuts, the clearings, the paths, the hills were outlined in the distance as if by magic. The travelers looked at each other, astonished and pleased to be able to see each other. "Come, Bernerette," cried Frederic, "give us a song!"

"Sad or gay?" asked she.

"As you wish. A hunting song! Perchance the echoes will reply."

Bernerette threw back her veil and began the refrain of a bugle call, but suddenly stopped. The brilliant star Venus, which was scintillating above the mountain, had caught her eye, and as if under the charm of more tender thoughts, she sang to a German tune the following verses, which a passage in Ossian had inspired in Frederic:

Oh, brightest Marvel of the cloudless night,
A silver veil's the rising mist to you,
Since it must of your lofty flaming bright
Harvest a glory which e'er turns the dew
To sparkling gems. The winds have gone to sleep,
The bowing trees their whisp'ring vigils keep.
What a heavenly race the planets run,
Their silver tracks cross golden roads o'er the sun!
Venus, fair Wonder, why hasten you so,
Smiling to leave those who weep when you go?

Lamp to the shepherds, Pearl o' the night,
None knows the source of your wonderful light!
Why wander away through the heavens to roam?
These hills be your rest, our hearts your glad home.
But if you must go, pray, linger you long
And this be my tribute a lover's sad song!

As Bernerette sang, the rays of the moon, falling on her face, gave her a charming paleness. Cecile and Gerard complimented her on the freshness and accuracy of her voice and Frederic tenderly kissed her.

They returned to the inn and supped. At dessert, Gerard, heated by the Madeira wine of which he had partaken, became so ardent and so gallant that Cecile quarreled with him. They disputed angrily, and, Cecile having left the room, Gerard followed her, out of humor. Alone with Bernerette, Frederic asked her if she understood the cause of this quarrel.

"No," she answered. "It has nothing to do with the verses, however."

"Well! What do you think of it? This young man has taken a fancy to you. He is tired of his mistress and, one word from you would be sufficient to make him leave her."

"What does it matter to us? Are you jealous?"

"Quite the contrary: and you know very well I have no right to be. My dear child, I mean to say that neither my fortune nor my occupation permit me to be your lover. It is not only to−day that you know this and I have never deceived you on the matter. If I wished to play the *grand seigneur* with you, I should be ruined without having caused you any happiness. My allowance hardly suffices me; besides, I must soon return to Besançon. On this subject, as you perceive, I explain myself clearly, although it pains me. But there are certain things that I can not explain, so it is for you to reflect and think of the future."

"That is to say, you advise me to cultivate your friend."

"No. It is he who wishes to cultivate your acquaintance. Gerard is rich and I am not. He lives in Paris, in the midst of all pleasures, and my destiny is to be only a country lawyer. He is much pleased with you and it is, perhaps, a good thing for you."

In spite of his apparent calmness, Frederic was quite moved on speaking thus. Bernerette remained silent and went to lean on the window sill. She was crying and tried to hide her tears. Frederic noticed it and drew near.

"Leave me alone," said she. "You do not deign to be jealous, I perceive, and I suffer without complaint. But you speak too harshly, my friend. You treat me like a little girl and hurt me without cause."

They had decided to spend the night at the inn and return to Paris the next day. Bernerette removed the handkerchief from around her neck, and, while drying her tears, knotted it about her lover's head. Then, leaning on his shoulder, she gently drew him toward the alcove.

"Ah! Cruel one!" said she, kissing him, "is there no way to make you love me?"

Frederic caught her in his arms. He thought of what he exposed himself to in giving way to a moment of tenderness: the more he was tempted to yield to it, the more he distrusted himself. He was ready to tell her he loved her, but this dangerous word expired on his lips. But Bernerette felt it in her heart and they went to sleep, both contented, the one, in not having pronounced it, the other in having understood it.

CHAPTER VI

RETURNING to Paris, Frederic, this time, conducted Bernerette home. He found her in such poor surroundings that he easily understood her motive in not, at first, allowing him to escort her home. She lived in a furnished house, the entrance being through an obscure alley. She had but two small rooms, barely furnished. Frederic attempted to question her as to the unfortunate condition to which she appeared reduced, but she hardly replied at all.

A few days later, he was coming to see her and was entering the dark passage, when he heard strange sounds issuing from the landing above. Women were shrieking; they were calling for help, threatening and talking of sending for the police. In the midst of this uproar, the voice of a young man whom Frederic soon perceived was heard above the rest. He was pale, his clothes in rags, drunk with wine and angry.

"You shall pay for this, Louise!" he shouted, bringing his fist down on the baluster, "you shall pay for this! I will hunt you up and find means to make you obey me or drive you from here, What care I for your threats and the bawling of these women! You may reckon on seeing me shortly."

Still shouting, he descended and left the house in a fury. Frederic hesitated before going up, when he suddenly caught sight of Bernerette at the head of the stairs. She explained the cause of this scene, The man who had just gone was her brother.

"You have heard that sad name, Louise," said she weeping, "and you know that it is, unfortunately, mine. My brother went this evening to the cabaret and, when he left, this is how he has treated me, by reason of my refusal to give him money with which to continue his orgy."

In the midst of her disorder and tears, she told Frederic what she had always tried to hide from him. Her father was a carpenter and very poor and, after having horribly maltreated her during her childhood, they had sold her, at the age of sixteen, to a man no longer young. This man, wealthy and generous, had given her somewhat of an education. But he soon died and, being without means of sustaining herself, she had joined a troupe of comedians in the provinces. Her brother had followed from town to town, forcing her to give up to him whatever she made, and overwhelming her with blows and insults when she was unable to satisfy his demands. Having reached the age of eighteen, she had found means of freeing herself. But even the protection of the law could not prevent the visits of this odious brother, who terrified her with his acts of violence and dishonored her by his conduct. Such was the story that Bernerette, in her trouble, unfolded to him, a tale of which Frederic could not doubt the truth after the way in which she had revealed it.

Even if he had no love for the poor girl, he felt himself touched with pity. He learned her brother's address: a few gold pieces and firm language had the desired effect. The porter received orders to say that Bernerette had left, if the young man appeared again. But this was doing very little to assure quiet to a woman who lacked everything.

Instead of paying his own debts, Frederic paid those of Bernerette. In vain, she attempted to dissuade him: he would neither reflect on the imprudence that he was committing, nor on the results that might follow. He allowed himself to be guided by his heart and swore that, whatever happened, he would never be sorry for what he had done.

But he was soon forced to repent of it. For, to satisfy the obligations he had assumed, he was compelled to assume new ones, more difficult and more burdensome than the first. Nature had not gifted him with that careless character which, in similar cases, at least, removes the fear of any harm to come. On the contrary, of the qualities he had lost, the one remaining one was clear−sightedness. He would have become melancholy and taciturn, if that were possible at his age. His friends noticed this change in him, and he was unwilling to disclose the cause of it. In order to deceive others, he deceived himself, and through weakness or by necessity he allowed destiny to shape his course.

His language to Bernerette, however, remained unchanged. He always spoke of his approaching departure, but even while speaking thus, he did not go and saw her every day. When he had grown accustomed to the staircase, he no longer found the alley so dark. The two small rooms, which had, at first, appeared so gloomy to him, now looked cheerful. The sun's rays perpetrated in the morning, and their very smallness made them warmer: space was found for a hired piano. In the neighborhood was to be found a good restaurant, from which they had their dinner brought. Bernerette had a talent that few women possess: she was, at the same time, thoughtless and economical. But, she added to this, a still rarer virtue, being contented with everything and having no desire but the wish to please others.

I must also mention her faults. Without being idle, she lived in an inconceivable laziness. After having finished her housekeeping, light as this was, she spent the entire day on the sofa, her arms crossed. She spoke of sewing and embroidery just as Frederic spoke of his departure, that is to say, she never attempted it. Unhappily, many women are like this, especially among a certain class which has the more need of occupation than any other. There are, in Paris, certain girls, born penniless, who never held a needle and who allow themselves to die of hunger, while rubbing their hands with almond paste.

When the pleasures of the carnival began, Frederic, who attended all the balls, arrived at Bernerette's rooms at all hours, now at break of day, now in the middle of the night. Sometimes, on ringing the bell, he wondered whether he would find her alone. And if a rival had supplanted him, had he the right to complain? Without doubt, no, for of his own free will he refused to claim this right. Shall I say it? What he feared, he also almost wished for. He would then have had the courage to leave, and his mistress's infidelity would have forced him to separate from her. But Bernerette was always alone. Seated near the fire during the day, she would be combing the luxurious hair which fell over her shoulders. If it was in the night that Frederic arrived, she would run to meet him, half dressed, her eyes almost closed and a smile on her lips. She threw herself in his arms while almost asleep, stirred up the fire and laid the supper, always alert and engaging, never asking where her lover had been. Who would have been able to resist so sweet a life, and a love so rare and so gentle? Whatever the cares of the day, Frederic went to sleep happy. And was it possible for him to awake sad when his happy little friend was going and coming about the room, preparing the bath and the breakfast?

If it be true that rare meetings and constantly recurring obstacles render the passions more active and add to pleasure the zest of curiosity, one must also acknowledge that there is a strange charm, sweeter, more dangerous, perhaps, in the habit of living with one's beloved. This habit, it is said, leads to satiety. This may be possible: but it gives confidence, forgetfulness of self, and when love resists, it is the shelter from all fear. Lovers who see each other, only at long intervals, are never sure of their position. They prepare to be happy, wish to convince each other that they are, and look for what can not be found, that is, words in which to express their feelings. Those who live together, have no need to explain themselves. They are sympathetic, exchange glances and hold each other's hands. They alone enjoy a delicious freedom, the sweet languor of the morrow. They rest from transports of love in friendship. I have sometimes thought of these charming bonds on seeing two swans borne along by the

tide on some smooth waters.

If an impulse of generosity had at first led Frederic, it was the attraction this new life had for him that made him captive. Unhappily for the author of this story, there is but one pen, that of Bernardin de Saint−Pierre, that can give interest to the familiar details of a quiet love. And that skilful writer also possessed, to embellish his naive writings, the ardent nights of the *Ille de France* and the palm trees whose shade trembled over the bare arms of Virginia. It is in the presence of nature, at her richest, that he paints his characters. Shall I say that mine went every day to practise shooting at the Tivoli, from there to see their friend Gerard, and thence sometimes to dine at Very's, and afterward to the theater? Shall I say how, when tired, they played draughts near the fire? Who would care to read such vulgar details? And of what use, when a word is sufficient? They loved each other and lived together. This lasted for about three months.

At the end of this time, Frederic found himself in such an awkward position that he announced to his friend the necessity of parting with her. She had expected this for some time, and made no effort to keep him. She knew he had made every possible sacrifice for her, and could do nothing but resign herself to fate and hide from him her grief. They dined together for the last time. On leaving, Frederic slipped into Bernerette's hand a paper that held all the money that remained belonging to him. She accompanied him home and was silent all the way. When the cab stopped she kissed her lover's hand, letting fall a few tears, and they parted.

CHAPTER VII

HOWEVER, Frederic had neither the intention nor the means of leaving. For one reason, the debts he had contracted, another his law practise, which kept him in Paris. He worked hard to drive away the ennui that seized him. He no longer called on Gerard, shut himself in for a month, and only went out to go to the Palais de Justice. But the solitude in which he suddenly found himself, after such a round of dissipation, plunged him into the deepest melancholy. He passed entire days pacing up and down his room without opening a book and not knowing what to do. The carnival was at an end and the snow of February had given way to the glacial rains of March. Neither pleasure nor the companionship of his friends being any distraction to him, Frederic gave himself up bitterly to the depressing influence of this time of the year, fittingly called the dead season.

Gerard came to see him and asked the motive for such a useless seclusion. He made no mystery of it, but refused his friend's offers of help.

"It is time," said he, "to change the habits that can but lead to my ruin. It is better to endure some little ennui than to expose myself to real dangers."

He made no effort to hide the pain he felt at being separated from Bernerette and Gerard could only pity him and, at the same time, congratulate him on the determination to which he had come.

At Mid−Lent he attended the ball at the Opera. There were few people present. This last farewell to pleasure had not even the sweetness of a memory. The orchestra, more numerous than the public, played winter dances in the deserted place. A few masks wandered about the lobby. From their attire and their language one could perceive that society no longer graced these forgotten fetes. Frederic was about to retire, when a domino sat down near him. He recognized Bernerette and she told him she had come only in the hope of seeing him. He asked her what she had been doing since he last saw her. She answered that she had hopes of going back to the stage and was now learning her role, ready for her debut. Frederic was tempted to take her out to supper, but he thought of the ease with which he had allowed himself to be carried away on a similar occasion, on his return from Besançon. He shook hands with her and left the ballroom.

It is said that sorrow is better than ennui; it is sad, but unfortunately true. A well−bred person finds energy and

courage with which to combat sorrow, whatever it may be: a great misfortune is often a blessing in disguise. Ennui, on the contrary, wears away and destroys a man: the spirit becomes torpid, the body inert and one's thoughts wander hither and thither. To have no reason for living, is worse than death. When prudence, interest and wisdom are opposed to some passion, it is easy enough for the first−comer to justly blame him whom this passion is carrying away. Arguments on this subject can be found in abundance, and whether one will or not, one must yield to them. But when the sacrifice is made, when reason and prudence are satisfied, what philosopher or sophist is there who is not at the end of his arguments? And what answer can be given the man who says: "I have followed your advice, but have lost all; I have acted wisely, but I suffer"?

Such was Frederic's position. Bernerette wrote to him twice. In her first letter, she told him that life to her had become unbearable. She begged him to come and see her, from time to time, and not to entirely abandon her. He did not feel sure enough of himself to give way to this request. The second letter came some time later. "I have seen my parents again," wrote Bernerette, "and they are beginning to treat me more kindly: one of my uncles is dead, and has left us some money. I am having made, for my debut, costumes that will please you and which I should like to show you. Call for a minute or two, if you are passing this way." This time, Frederic allowed himself to be persuaded. He called on his friend, but nothing of what she had told him was true. She had only wished to see him again. He was touched by this perseverance, but only felt the more keenly the necessity for resistance. At the first words he uttered on this subject, Bernerette put her hand over his mouth.

"I know," said she. "Kiss me and go away."

Gerard was leaving for the country and took Frederic with him. The first fine days and rides on horseback made Frederic somewhat more cheerful. Gerard had done the same as he and had, so he said, dismissed his mistress. He wished to be free. The two young men rambled together through the woods and courted a pretty farmer's daughter in a neighboring hamlet. But invitations to Paris soon began to arrive. Walking was abandoned in favor of cards; the dinners became long and noisy. Frederic could not stand this life, which had formerly so dazzled him, and returned to his solitude.

He received a letter from Besançon. His father wrote to inform him that Mademoiselle Darcy was starting for Paris with her parents. And, in fact, she arrived in the course of the week. Frederic, much against his will, called upon her. He found her just as he had left her, true to her secret love, and ready to make use of this faithfulness as an excuse of coquetry. She confessed, however, that she was sorry for the somewhat unkind words which she had spoken during their last meeting at Besançon. She begged Frederic to forgive her, if she had appeared to doubt his discretion, and added that, having no wish to marry, she once more offered him her friendship, but, for the last time. When one feels neither gay nor happy, such offers are always welcome. The young man, therefore, thanked her, and found solace in occasionally passing an evening with her.

A certain need of emotion sometimes drives the blasé to seek the extraordinary. It may seem surprising that a woman, as young as Mademoiselle Darcy, was of this strange and dangerous character: but it is, nevertheless, true that such was the case. She found no difficulty in gaining Frederic's confidence and making him tell her all about his love affairs. She might, perhaps, have been able to console him. In showing herself only coquettish toward him, she would, at least, have distracted him: but it pleased her to do the opposite. Instead of blaming him for his follies, she told him that love pardons everything and that his madness did him honor. Instead of confirming him in his resolution, she informed him that she could not understand how he could do it. "If I were a man," she would say, "and if I had as much liberty as you, nothing in the world could tear me from the woman I loved. I would willingly expose myself to every danger, if necessary, rather than give up my mistress."

Such language was peculiar, coming as it did from the mouth of a young girl whose knowledge of this world did not extend beyond her own family. But for this very reason it was the more striking. Mademoiselle Darcy had two motives for playing this role, which, moreover, pleased her extremely. On one hand she wished to pass as large−hearted and appear romantic: on the other hand, she wished to demonstrate that, far from being displeased

that Frederic had forgotten her, she approved of his passion. The poor boy, for the second time, was deceived by this stratagem, and allowed himself to be duped by a girl of seventeen.

"You are right," he answered her. "After all, life is so short and happiness so rare here below, that one is very foolish to reflect and inflict on oneself voluntary sorrows, when there are so many that are unavoidable."

Mademoiselle Darcy now changed her tactics.

"Does your Bernerette love you?" she asked, indifferently. "Did you not tell me that she was a grisette? What faith can you put in such a woman? Is she worthy of a sacrifice, and will she feel the price paid?"

"I do not know," answered Frederic, "and I have no great love for her myself," he lightly added. "I never dreamed, when near her, except of amusing myself. I am weary now; that is the whole story."

"Fie!" cried Mademoiselle Darcy, "what is such a passion?" Started on this subject, the young woman became excited. She spoke as if they were discussing herself and her active imagination led her on. "Is it then love," said she, "simply to pass away the time? If you were not in love with this woman, why did you go to see her? If you love her, why do you abandon her? She suffers, perhaps is weeping for you. How can a miserable consideration for money find a place in any noble heart? Are you then so cold, as enslaved by your interests as my parents were by theirs, when they sacrificed my happiness? Is that the duty of a young man and should you not be ashamed of yourself? But no, you do not know yourself if you are suffering, nor whether you have any regrets. The first−comer might console you and your mind is only unemployed. Ah! It is not thus when one loves! I predicted, at Besançon, that you would one day know what love was. But if you have no greater courage, I tell you to−day that you will never know it."

Frederic returned home one night, after an interview of this kind. Caught in the rain, he entered a cafe and ordered a bowl of punch. When a long trouble has oppressed our hearts, little excitement is necessary to make it beat, and it then seems that we have in us a vase too full and overflowing. When Frederic left the cafe, he doubled his pace. Two months of solitude and privation were weighing on him. He felt an intolerable need of throwing off his burden and of being at his ease once more. Without thought, he went toward Bernerette's house. The rain had ceased. By the light of the moon he noticed his friend's windows, the floor and the road, which were all so familiar. He placed a trembling hand on the bell and, as before, he wondered if he would find the fire covered with ashes and the supper laid. At the moment of ringing he hesitated.

"But what harm can there be," he said to himself, "if I spend an hour here and ask Bernerette for a souvenir of our old love? What danger can I run? Since necessity separates us, why should I fear to see her once more for a moment?"

It was midnight. He gently rang and the door opened. As he was ascending the stairs, the porter called and told him no one was in. It was the first time he had found Bernerette away from home. He thought she must have gone to the theater and answered that he would wait for her; but the porter objected. After some hesitation, he finally confessed that Bernerette had gone out early and would only return the following day.

CHAPTER VIII

OF what use to pretend indifference when one is in love, unless to suffer cruelly when the truth is known? Frederic had sworn so many times that he would never be jealous of Bernerette and so often repeated it before his friends, that he had finally come to believe it himself. He walked home, whistling a waltz.

"She must have another lover," he said to himself. "So much the better for her; it is what I hoped for. From

henceforth I can be at rest."

But hardly had he returned, when he experienced a feeling of mortal weakness. He sat down and placed his head in his hands, as if to collect his thoughts. After a useless struggle, nature became the conqueror. He raised his tear−stained face and found some consolation in confessing all he felt.

An extreme languor succeeded this violent shock. Solitude became intolerable and for several days he passed the time in paying calls and in endless amusement. At one time he would attempt to reassume his affected indifference: at another he gave way to blind fury, to projects of revenge. He became disgusted with life. He remembered the sad circumstance that had attended his early love: this tragic example was always before him.

"I begin to understand it," he told Gerard. "I am no longer astonished that in such cases one longs for death. One does not kill oneself for a woman's sake, but because it is useless and impossible to live when one suffers to such a degree, whatever be the cause."

Gerard knew his friend too well to doubt his despair and loved him too well to abandon him to it. He was able, by means of powerful influence, of which he had never himself made use, to obtain for Frederic the post of attaché to an embassy. He arrived one morning with an order for departure from the Foreign Minister.

"Travel," said he, "is the best and only remedy for sorrow. To induce you to leave Paris, I have been hard at work and, thank God, have met with success. If you have any courage, you will leave at once for Berne, where the minister sends you."

Frederic did not hesitate. He thanked his friend and immediately set to work to put his affairs in order. He wrote to his father to tell him of his new project and asked his consent. The reply was favorable. At the end of two weeks his debts were paid: nothing now hindered Frederic's departure and he went to get his passport.

Mademoiselle Darcy questioned him at great length, but he did not care to answer. Not having clearly seen the condition of his own heart, he had feebly yielded to the curiosity of his young confidante. But his suffering was now too real for him to joke about it, and perceiving the danger of his passion, he had understood how frivolous was the interest taken in it by Mademoiselle Darcy. He therefore did what all men do in such cases. To help cure himself he pretended to be already cured, that a passing love affair had diverted him, but that he was now of an age to turn to more serious things. Mademoiselle Darcy, as may be believed, did not approve of such sentiments. She counted nothing serious in this world but love; all else to her seemed despicable. At least so her language led one to believe. Frederic let her talk and good−humoredly agreed with her that he would never know how to love. His heart told him the contrary, and in making himself out to be inconstant, he would have wished it true.

The more he felt his courage leaving him, the more he hastened his departure. He could not, however, relieve himself of a thought that oppressed him. Who was Bernerette's new lover? What was she doing? Should he try to see her once more? Gerard was not of this opinion: his motto was, "Do nothing by halves." From the moment Frederic had decided to leave, he counseled him to forget all. "What do you wish to know?" said he. "Either Bernerette will tell you nothing or she will hide the truth. Since it is proven that she has another lover, of what use to make her acknowledge it? A woman is never sincere with an old lover on this subject, even when all hopes of a reconciliation are gone. Besides, what do you hope for? She no longer loves you."

It was with a purpose, and to make his friend firm, that Gerard expressed himself so forcibly. I leave those who have loved to judge of the effect it produced. But many have loved and been unaware of it. The bonds of this world, even the strongest, become undone in time. A few only are broken. Those, whose love has been lessened by absence, ennui and satiety, can not imagine what they would feel should a sudden stroke fall. The coldest heart bleeds and is opened by such a blow; he who is insensible to it is not a man. Of all the wounds inflicted on us here below by death, before the final stroke of dissolution, it is the deepest. One must have looked through eyes

streaming with tears at the smile of a faithless mistress, before being able to understand these words: *"She no longer loves you."* One must have grieved long to remember it: it is a sad experience. If I were tempted to give to the ignorant an idea of what I mean, I should tell them that I do not know which is the most cruel, to suddenly lose the woman one loves by infidelity or by death.

Frederic found no answer to Gerard's strong language, but an instinct stronger than reason was warring within him against such advice. He took another course to reach his end. Without knowing what he wanted and with no care of what the results might be, he determined to find out what Bernerette was doing. He wore a rather fine ring, which she had often looked at with envy. In spite of all his love for her, he had never been able to make up his mind to present her with this jewel, given him by his father. He sent it to Gerard, saying that it belonged to Bernerette, and begged him to return it to her, as she had doubtless mislaid it. Gerard willingly undertook this commission, but was in no hurry to carry it out. Frederic insisted and he had to consent.

The two friends went out one morning together and while Gerard was calling on Bernerette, Frederic waited for him in the Tuileries; he joined the throng sadly. It was not without regret that he parted with a family heirloom that was dear to him. And what did he hope to gain by it? What would he find out to console him? Gerard was about to see Bernerette, and if a few words, a tear or two escaped her, would he not feel it necessary to take no notice? Frederic looked through the railing round the garden and expected at any moment to see his friend returning with an air of indifference. What did it matter? He would have seen Bernerette: it was impossible that he would have nothing to tell him. Who knows what chance may bring about? He might possibly learn many things from this visit. The longer Gerard was in making his appearance the greater Frederic's hopes.

The sky was cloudless and the trees were commencing to put forth verdure. There is a certain tree in the Tuileries that is named the "tree of the twentieth of March." It is a chestnut−tree, which, it is said, was in bloom the day the King of Rome was born and which blossoms every year at the same time. Frederic had sat down many times beneath this tree. Dreaming, habit led him once more to the same place. The chestnut−tree was faithful to its poetic renown: its blossoms gave out the first perfume of the year. Women, children and young people were coming and going. The gaiety of spring was mirrored on every face. Frederic thought of the future, of his journey and of the country he was about to see. An anxiety mingled with hope agitated him, in spite of himself. All his surroundings appeared to call him to a new life. He thought of his father, whose pride and support he was, and from whom he had always received only marks of tenderness. Little by little, sweeter ideas and more sensible ones took possession of him. The multitude swarming around him made him dream of the variety and inconsistency of things. And is there, in fact, a stranger spectacle than a crowd, when one reflects that each individual has his destiny? Is there anything that can give us a fairer idea of what we are worth, and of what we are in the eyes of Providence? One must live, thought Frederic, one must obey the supreme guide. We must move on even when suffering, for no one knows whither he is going. I am free and still quite young: I must take courage and resign myself.

As he was in the midst of these thoughts, Gerard appeared and ran toward him. He was pale and very much agitated.

"My friend," said he, "you must go there. Quick, let us lose no time."

"Where are you taking me?"

"To her. I counseled you to do what I thought was right. But there are occasions when our opinions are at fault, and prudence out of place."

"What then is happening?" cried Frederic.

"You will soon know. Come, let us run."

They went together to Bernerette's.

"Go up alone," said Gerard, "I will be back in a moment," and he was gone.

Frederic entered. The key was in the door, and the shutters closed. "Bernerette," said he, "where are you?"

There was no answer.

He advanced in the darkness, and by the light of a half−extinguished fire he perceived his friend seated on the ground near the chimney.

"What is the matter?" he demanded. "What has happened?"

Still no answer.

He approached her and took her by the hand.

"Get up," said he to her. "What are you doing there?"

But hardly had he pronounced these words, when he recoiled in horror. The hand he held was icy cold and an inanimate body rolled to his feet.

Frightened, he called for help. Gerard entered, followed by a doctor. The window was opened and Bernerette placed on her bed. The doctor examined her, shook his head and gave his orders. There was no doubt of the symptoms: the poor girl had taken poison. But what poison? The doctor could not tell and tried in vain to find out. He began by bleeding her. Frederic held her in his arms and she opened her eyes, recognized and kissed him, then fell back into unconsciousness. In the evening, they gave her a cup of tea. She came back to life as if awakened from sleep. They asked then what poison she had made use of. At first she refused to answer, but pressed by the doctor, she confessed. A copper candlestick on the mantelpiece bore the marks of several splashes of lime. She had resorted to this frightful method to increase the effect of a small dose of opium, the chemist from whom she had purchased it having refused to supply her with more.

CHAPTER IX

IT was two weeks before she was completely out of danger. She was able to sit up and take some nourishment, but her health was broken, and the doctor declared that she would suffer from it all her life.

Frederic had never left her. He was still in ignorance of the motive that had led her to attempt her own life and was surprised that absolutely no one cared about her. During the two weeks no one had called, neither a relative nor a stranger. Was it possible that her new lover had abandoned her in such a plight? Was this abandonment the cause of Bernerette's despair? These two suppositions appeared equally incredible to Frederic, and his friend had led him to believe that she would vouchsafe no explanation on the subject. So he remained in cruel doubt, troubled by a secret jealousy, held by love and pity.

In the midst of her pain, Bernerette gave evidence of the most passionate tenderness for him. Full of gratitude for the care he took of her, she was, when with him, gayer than ever, but of a gaiety that was melancholic, and so to speak, veiled by suffering. She made every effort to distract him and persuade him not to leave her alone. If he went out, she asked at what hour he would be back. She wished him to dine at her bedside, and to go to sleep holding his hand. To divert him, she told him endless stories of her past life. But as soon as it was a question of the present and her terrible act, she remained silent. No question and no prayer of Frederic's could obtain any

response. If he insisted, she became gloomy and sad.

One evening she was in bed and the doctor had just bled her. A few drops of blood were still trickling from the scarcely closed cut. She smilingly watched a purple tear stealing down her arm, white as marble.

"Do you still love me?" said she to Frederic. "Do not all these horrors make you disgusted with me?"

"I love you," he answered, "and nothing can now separate us."

"Is it true?" she asked, embracing him. "Do not deceive me, but tell me if I am dreaming."

"No, it is not a dream. No, my dear and beautiful mistress: let us be at rest and happy."

"Alas! It is impossible, it is impossible!" she cried in anguish. Then she added in a low voice "And if it is impossible, we must begin over again."

Although she had but murmured these last words, Frederic had heard them and shuddered. The following day he repeated them to Gerard.

"My decision is made," said he. "I do not know what my father will think of it, but I love her, and whatever happens I will not leave her to die."

In fact, he took a dangerous course, but the only one open to him. He wrote to his father and confided to him the story of his love. He forgot to mention Bernerette's infidelity and spoke but of her beauty, her constancy and the sweet obstinacy with which she had set to work to see him again, and finally of the horrible attempt she had made to take her life. Frederic's father, an old man of seventy, loved his only son more than his life. He hurried to Paris, accompanied by Mademoiselle Hombert, his sister, an aged and very devout lady. Unhappily, neither the good man nor the aunt possessed the virtue of discretion, so that no sooner had they arrived than all their acquaintances were aware of the fact that Frederic had fallen in e with a grisette who had taken poison on his account. It was soon added that he wished to marry her. The evil−disposed made a scandal of it, to the dishonor of the family. Under the pretense of defending the young man, Mademoiselle Darcy told all she knew, adding the most romantic details. In short, though trying to ward off a storm, Frederic found it descending on him from all sides.

He was, first of all, obliged to appear before his assembled relatives and friends and to submit to a sort of examination. Not that he was treated as having erred: on the contrary, they extended toward him the greatest indulgence. But he was forced to bare his heart and to listen to the discussion of his dearest secrets. It is useless to add that nothing was decided. M. Hombert wished to see Bernerette. He called on her, had a long conversation with her and asked her a thousand questions, to which she was able to reply with a grace and naiveté that charmed the old man. Like every one else, he had had his youthful loves. He came away from this interview much troubled and disquieted. He called for his son and told him that he had decided to make a small sacrifice in favor of Bernerette, if she promised, when well again, to learn some trade. Frederic carried this proposal to his friend.

"And you, what would you do?" said she to him. "Do you mean to remain or to go?"

He answered that he should stay, but against the wishes of his family. On this point, M. Hombert was intractable. He pointed out to his son the danger, the shame and the impossibility of such a union. He made him understand, in kind and measured words, that he would lose his reputation and ruin his future. After having forced him to reflect, he made use of an irresistible argument which from a father is all−powerful. He begged his son to do his duty and the latter promised what was asked of him. So many shocks, so many diverse interests had agitated him, that he no longer knew what to resolve upon, and seeing unhappiness on all sides, he did not dare to struggle or to choose. Gerard himself, ordinarily firm, sought in vain for some method of safety and found himself obliged to

say that it must be left to Destiny.

Two unexpected events suddenly altered the course of everything. Frederic was alone one night in his room, when Bernerette entered. She was pale and her hair in disorder. An ardent fever caused her eyes to shine with frightful brightness. Contrary to custom, she was brief and imperious. She came, she said, to demand an explanation.

"Do you wish to kill me?" she demanded. "Do you or do you not love me? Are you a child? Have you need of others to act for you? Are you mad to consult your father to know whether you must keep your mistress? What do they desire? To separate us? If you also wish it, you have only to follow their advice, and if you do not wish it, still less. Do you wish to go away? Take me with you. I can never learn a trade and can not go back to the stage. How could I, as I am? I suffer too much to wait; decide."

She spoke in this tone for nearly an hour, interrupting Frederic whenever he wished to reply. He tried in vain to calm her. Such a violent exaltation could give way to no argument. Finally, tired out, Bernerette burst into tears. The young man pressed her to his heart. He found it impossible to resist such love and carried his mistress to his bed.

"Remain there," he said to her, "and may God destroy me if I allow you to be taken away! I wish to hear and see nothing but you. You reproach me for my cowardice and you are right: but I will act now, you shall see. If my father disowns me, you must follow me: since God has willed it that I should be poor, we will live in poverty. I care nothing for my name, my family nor the future."

These words, pronounced with all the ardor of resolution, consoled Bernerette. She begged her friend to walk home with her. In spite of her fatigue, she wished to take the air. On the way they agreed on the plan they must follow. Frederic was to pretend to submit to his father's wish, but would represent to him that with small means it was impossible to risk a diplomatic career. He would ask to be allowed to continue with his law. M. Hombert would probably yield, on condition that his son forgot his foolish love affair. Bernerette, on her side, would change her quarters; they would think her gone. She would rent a small room in the Rue de la Harpe, or somewhere near. Here she would live with such economy that Frederic's allowance would be sufficient for them both. As soon as his father returned to Besançon, he would rejoin her and live with her. They would trust in Providence. Such was the project these two lovers determined upon, and the success of which they deemed certain, as is always the case under similar conditions.

Two days later, Frederic, after passing a sleepless night, went to call on his mistress at six in the morning. An interview he had with his father was worrying him; the family was insisting on his departure for Berne and he had come to kiss Bernerette and renew his drooping courage. The room was deserted, the bed empty. He questioned the porter and learned beyond all possibility of doubt that he had a rival and was being deceived.

On this occasion he felt more indignation than sorrow. Treason was too strong, for scorn not to take the place of love. Having returned, he wrote a long letter to Bernerette, overwhelming her with the most bitter reproaches. But he tore up this letter just as he was about to despatch it. Such a miserable being did not seem worthy even of his anger. He made up his mind to leave at the earliest possible moment. There was a vacant place in the next day's coach for Strasbourg. He reserved it and hastened to inform his father. The whole family congratulated him: no one certainly asked him by what chance he obeyed so soon. Gerard alone knew the truth. Mademoiselle Darcy declared that it was a pity and that men always were heartless. Mademoiselle Hombert added something from her savings to the small sum her nephew was taking with him. A farewell dinner reunited the family and Frederic left for Switzerland.

CHAPTER X

THE pleasures and fatigues of the journey, the attractions of a change and the occupation of his new career soon restored calm to his mind. He no longer thought but with horror of the fatal passion which had almost been his ruin. He was accorded a most gracious reception at the embassy, for he was well recommended. His appearance was in his favor, for a natural modesty enhanced the value of his talents without hiding them. He soon held an honorable position in the world, and the future appeared most promising.

Bernerette wrote several letters to him. She gaily asked him if he had left for good or did he think of returning soon. At first he abstained from replying; but, as the letters continued and became more and more pressing, he finally lost patience. He answered and unburdened his heart. He asked Bernerette, in the bitterest words, if she had forgotten her double treachery, and begged her to spare him in the future these false protestations of which he could no longer be the dupe. He added that he thanked God that he had been enlightened in time: that his resolution was irrevocable and that he would not again see France till after a long stay abroad. Having sent this letter, he felt more at ease and entirely finished with the past. Henceforth Bernerette ceased to write to him and he no longer heard any mention of her.

A well−to−do English family lived in a pretty house in the neighborhood of Berne. Frederic was introduced to them: three young girls, the eldest of whom was but twenty, did the honors of the house. She was remarkably beautiful and soon perceived the strong impression she produced on the young attaché, and did not show herself insensible to it. He was not, however, yet sufficiently cured to give way to a new love. But after so much agitation and so much sorrow, he found need of opening his heart to feelings calm and pure. The beautiful Fanny did not become his confidante, as had been Mademoiselle Darcy. But without his telling her all his troubles, she guessed that he had suffered and the glance of her blue eyes seemed to console Frederic; she often turned them in his direction.

Kindness leads to sympathy, and sympathy to love. At the end of three months, love had not come, but it was on the way. A man of a character as tender and expansive as Frederic could not be constant except on condition of being confiding. Gerard was right in telling him that he would love Bernerette longer than he expected. But for this it was necessary that Bernerette should love him too, or at least should appear to do so. In stirring up weak hearts, we place their very existence in danger. They must break or forget, for they have not the strength to be faithful to a memory from which they suffer. So Frederic accustomed himself, day by day, to live but for Fanny and the question of marriage soon came up. The young man was not wealthy, but his position was made and his friends powerful. Love, which removes all obstacles, pleaded for him. It was decided to ask a favor of the Court of France and that Frederic, now second secretary, should marry Fanny.

This happy day at length arrived. The couple had just been married and Frederic, in the intoxication of happiness, held his wife in his arms. He was seated near the mantel−piece. The crackling of the fire and the play of the flames caused him to tremble. By a strange freak of memory, he thought of the day on which for the first time he had sat thus with Bernerette, near the mantel−piece in a little bedroom. Those, whose imagination is pleased to admit that man hastens ever toward the accomplishment of his fate, may comment as they please on this strange fact. At this moment a letter with the Paris postmark was handed to Frederic, announcing the death of Bernerette. I need not paint his astonishment nor his grief. I must content myself with placing before the reader's eye the poor girl's farewell to her friend. Here in a few lines written in that style, half gay, half sad, which was peculiar to her, you will find the explanation of her conduct:

> "Alas! Frederic, you well knew it was but a dream. We could not live quietly and be happy. I wanted to leave here. I received a visit from a young man whom I had met in the country, in the time of my glory; he was madly in love with me at Bordeaux. I am unaware from whom he had obtained my address. He came and threw himself at my feet as if I were still the queen of the

stage. He offered me his fortune, which was not much, and his heart, which was nothing at all. It was the day after you left me, saying that you were going away. You will remember. I was none too happy, my dear, and I hardly knew where to dine. I allowed myself to be led, but unfortunately I could not adhere to it. I had sent my slippers to his rooms. I sent for them and decided to die.

"Yes, my dear, I wished to leave you there. I could not live as an apprentice. However, the second time I made up my mind. But your father called on me again: that is something you did not know. What could I say to him? I promised to forget you and returned to my admirer. Ah! How tired I was of it all! Is it my fault that all men appear ugly and foolish to me since I have loved you? But I can not live on memories. What do you think I could do?

"I do not kill myself; I do but finish a task already begun: it is not a great murder that I commit. My health is poor, forever gone. All this would be nothing if it were not for ennui. I am told you are about to marry; is she beautiful? Good−by, good−by. Remember, when it is fine, the day that you watered your flowers. Oh! how quickly I learned to love you! On seeing you I started and became pale. I have been very happy with you. Good−by.

"If your father had not wished it, we would never have parted. But you had no money, that is the misfortune. Neither had I. If I had gone to a laundry I could never have stayed there; so what were we to do? I have now tried twice to begin anew but I am successful in nothing.

"I assure you that it is not from madness that I take my life: I am in full possession of all my mental faculties. My parents (may God forgive them) have come back again. If you only knew what they want to do with me! It is too disgusting to be the plaything of misery and to be annoyed to such an extent. When we loved each other, if we had been more economical it would have been better. But you insisted on our going to the theater and amusing ourselves. We have spent many a happy evening at *La Chaumière.*

"Good−by, my dear, for the last time, good−by. If I had been in better health I would have gone back to the stage, but I can breathe and that is all. Never reproach yourself on account of my death. I feel that, had it been in your power to avert it, nothing would have happened. I felt it, but dared not say it. I saw whither events were drifting, but did not wish to worry you.

"It is a sad night on which I write to you and sadder, I assure you, than that on which you came and rang the bell and found me out. I had never thought you jealous. When I knew you were angry, I was both sorry and pleased. Why did you not wait for me? You would have seen the expression on my face when I returned from my adventure. But it is nothing, you loved me more than you admitted.

"I wish to finish, but can not. I cling to this paper as to the rest of my life; I crowd up my lines; I would collect all my remaining force and send it to you. No, you have not known my heart. You have loved me because you are good; it was out of pity that you came and also a little for pleasure. Had I been rich, you would not have left me: that is what I tell myself, and it is the only thing that gives me courage. Good−by.

"May your father have no reason to repent for the harm of which he has been the cause! Now, I feel it, what would I not give to know something, to have in my hands some means of making a living! It is too late. If, when a child, one could see one's life in a mirror, I would not end thus; you would still love me. But perhaps not, since you are about to marry.

"How could you write me such a cruel letter? Since your father insisted and you were going to leave, I saw no harm in trying to find another lover. I have never felt the same and never have I seen anything so droll as his face when I told him I was going home.

"Your letter has hurt me cruelly. I stayed by my fire for two days without being able to say a word or to move. I was born very unhappy, my friend. You can not imagine how the good God has treated me during the twenty years of my life: it is like a game of chance. As a child, I was beaten and when I cried I was put outside. 'Go and see if it is raining,' my father would say. When I was twelve years old I was made to polish the floor, and when I became a woman, was I not persecuted enough? My life has been spent in trying to live, and finally in seeing that I must die.

"May God bless you, you who have given me my only happy days; I then breathed the pure air; may God reward you. May you be happy and free, oh my friend! May you be loved as I love you, your poor dying Bernerette.

"Do not grieve; all will have an end. Do you remember a German tragedy that you were reading to me one night? The hero of the story demands: 'What shall we cry as we die?' *'Liberty!'* answers little George. You wept on reading that word. Weep then it is the last cry of your friend. The poor leave no will; but I send you a lock of my hair. One day when the hairdresser burned it with his iron, I remember that you wished to beat him. Since you did not wish them to burn my hair, you will not throw this lock of hair in the fire.

"Good−by, again good−by, forever.

"Your faithful friend,

"BERNERETTE."

I have been told that after reading this letter, Frederic made an attempt on his life. I will not speak of it here. The indifferent too often look upon such deeds as ridiculous, when one survives. The judgment of the world is sad on this matter. He who attempts to die is laughed at, and he who dies is forgotten.
