EDMÉE

A TALE OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

MRS. MOLESWORTH

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EDMÉE

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'I wonder when father and mother will tell us the story about her?'—Page 13.

Frontispiece.

EDMÉE

A TALE
OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

BY
Mary Louisa Stewart
MRS. MOLESWORTH

AUTHOR OF 'CARROTS,' 'CUCKOO CLOCK,' 'TELL ME A STORY'

ILLUSTRATED BY
GERTRUDE DEMAIN HAMMOND

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INTRODUCTION

NEARLY a hundred years ago this beautiful country of France, where I am now writing, was in a most sad and troubled state,—a state which we, whose lives have been passed in quiet and peaceful times, can scarcely picture to ourselves. For many, many years —hundreds of years—the causes which led to the terrible outbreak of the people against the ruling classes, known in history as "the great French Revolution," had been slowly but surely growing and gathering till at last the storm broke all bounds, and the unhappy country was given over to the rage and fury of the mob. Yet, cruel as were the leaders of this revolt, frightful as were the deeds they committed, it is impossible, and it would be altogether unjust, to blame them and their

followers alone. In national as in family quarrels, the adage of "faults on both sides" is almost always found to be true, and certainly the misdeeds which were at the bottom of this most terrible of quarrels were far more on the side of the upper classes than of the lower. For generations they had been growing more and more indifferent to the sufferings of those whom they should have protected and helped. They seemed to think that the poor and the humble only existed to be their slaves. They seemed to forget that those beneath them had hearts and feelings,—almost to forget that they were human beings. The beautiful teaching of Jesus Christ was trampled and cast under-foot, even by those who still called themselves His followers. The rich lived in the greatest luxury, squandering money which had been ground out of the sore toil and labour of the poor. And the poor hated and abhorred the rich, till at last all classes, alike but in one thing—that they listened only to their own evil passions, caring nothing for the

voice of God in their consciences, till that voice, so long disregarded, grew silent, and the good angels of the unhappy country seemed to fly away in mournful despair—were plunged into a sea of horror and bloodshed.

The king and queen were put to death, and so were hundreds, nay thousands, of the nobles and gentry of the country. For the leaders of the Revolution, seeing how badly things had gone under a *bad* government, foolishly thought, like children escaping from the rule of too harsh a schoolmaster, that the only way to be truly free and happy was to have no regular government at all, but for every one to do just what he pleased, with no regard for others, no respect for the eternal laws of right and wrong—a state of things which *could* not but become the worst of tyrannies, for it was the tyranny of the many instead of the few.

What was the end of this dreadful state of things—"the Reign of Terror," as it is often called—can be read in the many

histories that have been written of this time. It did not last long—it could not have done so, for "Order is Heaven's first law." Disorder and confusion soon wear themselves out. But the story of the great French Revolution will never be forgotten while history exists. It stands there as a terrible warning of the fate of a nation whose rulers neither themselves regard, nor teach to those below them, the Divine laws of justice and mercy and love to all mankind.

Good has come out of evil, as sooner or later it always must, in the history of France as in all other histories. But it would be a mistake to suppose that even during that dark time there was no brighter side to things. The very greatness of the evil brought out nobleness that in other times might have never been called forth. Among the many who suffered the horrors of the dungeon and the guillotine were numbers of pure and good and benevolent people, who, though belonging to the rich upper classes, had never treated their poorer

neighbours unjustly or unkindly, but had done their utmost to make them happier. These met death with calmness and courage beautiful to see, though their hearts were wrung with sorrow for the misery of their country. And among the people, there were many instances of faithful devotion at the greatest risk to themselves, of compassion even for some of those who had little deserved it at their hands. The simple story I am going to tell you will show you this, I hope—will show that even in the darkest pages of our poor old world's much-troubled history, bright lines stand out like rays of sunshine through a cloudy sky, telling of noble courage and self-sacrifice for others, of faithfulness till death—of trust in God through the most awful trials.

CHAPTER I

THERE was great rejoicing among the children in the farmhouse of Belle Prairie, one of the most flourishing farms in the beautiful part of Touraine where it was situated. To-morrow would be their mother's birthday, and for as long back as any of the small people could remember, "mother's birthday" had always been a holiday. For it fell in June, the loveliest month of the year, and the fun began the day before, when, as soon as they were released from school, they, and some chosen ones among their companions, came racing down the village street on their way to what was still called the "château" —although the house had long since disappeared,—there, in the grounds now left to run wild, to gather to their hearts' content

honeysuckle and roses, which had not always been "wild," bunches of forget-me-nots and trailing branches of ivy, with which to adorn the sitting-room at the farm which was considered peculiarly their mother's. It was what in an English farmhouse used to be called "the best parlour," and very proud of it were the boys and girls of Farmer Marcel, the owner of Belle Prairie. For it was not by any means every farmhouse that had a best parlour at all, and none possessed one as pretty as that of Madame Marcel, the farmer's wife.

The old gates of the château were still standing, as massive as ever, though only a few moss-covered stones marked the place where the mansion had once been. And the villagers were too used to the sight of them, and the still distinct traces of a carriage-drive leading to nowhere, to be struck with their strangeness and melancholy, as occasional visitors often were.

"It was burnt down in the great Revolution, like many another," they would reply

with a shrug of their shoulders. "But what of that? Those old times are past. We are happy and prosperous in our village of Valmont-les-Roses, and the lands of the de Valmonts have long been divided among those who make a better use of them than the old owners"—though, to be sure, some of the older among them would add, "they were not bad masters after all, those Counts of Valmont."

And so the village children played unchecked within the ancient gates, and gathered flowers as many as they wished, with none to say them nay.

Flushed and breathless, but eager and triumphant, the Marcel children hastened home with their spoils.

"Out of the way, little stupid!" cried Pierre, the eldest boy, nearly knocking over his tiny brother of three, in his hurry to get to his mother in the kitchen, where she was busied in some mysterious way which he pretended not to observe—Madame Marcel, on her side, handing him the key of the

best parlour in the most innocent manner possible.

"Come quickly, Edmée," he called out as he hurried back again, this time nearly tumbling over his sister as well, for she was employed in comforting little Roger, whose feelings had been much wounded.

"Pierre shan't call you 'little stupid,'" she said. "See, you have made him cry, poor dear; and he was so clever—he gathered such a lot of flowers all himself for the dear mother's birthday."

"Pierre was only in fun; Roger mustn't cry," said the big elder brother, good-naturedly picking up the tiny one. "Where are Marie and Joseph? Come quick, all of you, we shall only have time to put up the wreaths before father comes in to supper."

In another minute the five children were collected in the parlour, Pierre carefully locking the door inside when they had entered, to secure against surprises. It was always with a certain awe that the young Marcels crossed the threshold of this room.

They spoke in softer voices—they carefully wiped their thick shoes on the mat at the door—they would as soon have thought of romping or jumping in church as in here. And yet they themselves could hardly have explained why they felt so. The room, though pretty in a rather stiff way, was, after all, very simple. The wooden floor, to be sure, was polished like a mirror, and there were little lace curtains in the windows, which were never torn or soiled, for Madame Marcel took the greatest care of them, washing and getting them up twice a year with her own best caps, and never allowing Susette, the servant, to lay a finger on them. The brass handles of the old marble-topped chest of drawers were as bright as the copper pans in the kitchen, and so was the heavy old brass fender, behind which were the iron bars for the logs of wood, which, on very rare occasions, such as New Year's Day, or a marriage or christening feast, should it fall in winter, made a cheerful blaze up the old chimney. But

the stiff hard sofa backed up against the wall, and the stiff hard chairs and arm-chairs standing round in a row, were no longer white as in the days of their long past youth, and the old-fashioned tapestry with which their seats and backs were covered had little colour left, and here and there a careful darning was plainly to be seen.

The children stood still and looked round them, as they always somehow did on first entering the room, as if they expected to discover something they had never seen before. Then said Pierre :

"How shall we do it? The same as last year—a wreath on the chimney-piece, and two smaller ones round the mirror and the little old portrait? Yes, I think that is the best."

For there was a small queerly shaped mirror in a heavy, now dull, gilt frame on one side of the fireplace, and on the other, matching it, the object which the children regarded with more interest than anything in the room, "the little old portrait," they

called it among themselves, and "some day," their father had promised them, they should be told its history. But all they knew at present was that it had been many, many years—not far off a hundred—in the best room of the old farmhouse.

It was the portrait of a little girl—a very little girl. She did not seem more than four or five years old: one dimpled shoulder had escaped from the little white frock, the fair hair brushed back from the forehead was tied with a plain white ribbon—nothing could be simpler. But there was a great charm about it: the eyes were so bright and happy-looking, the rosy mouth seemed so ready to kiss you—it looked what it was, the picture of a creature who had never known sorrow or fear.

"How pretty she is!" said Edmée, as she twisted the ivy leaves round the frame, and a ray of sunshine fell on the little face. "I think she gets prettier and prettier—don't you, Marie? I wonder when father and mother will tell us the story about her?"

Pierre stopped short in his part of the business, which was that of arranging the garland over the mantelpiece, to listen to what his sisters were saying.

"Suppose we ask to hear it to-morrow," he said, "for a treat? Mother is always ready to give us a treat on her birthday."

"Not instead of the creams and the cake," put in Joseph, who was rather a greedy little boy. "I wouldn't like that. Stories aren't as nice as cake."

"Little glutton!" exclaimed Pierre; "you deserve to have none. All the same I know what I know. One has but to step inside the kitchen and to sniff a little, to see that mother forgets nothing."

"Indeed!" said Joseph, with satisfaction. "Yes, truly, I could almost fancy I smelt it even in here. That comes of having an oven of one's own. There is no other house at Valmont with an oven like ours. When I am a man, if I cannot afford an oven of my own in my kitchen, I shall——"

"What?" asked Marie.

"I shall be a baker," said Joseph solemnly. "I always stop before the door of Bernard, the baker, to smell the bread, especially on Saturdays, when he is baking the Sunday cakes and his Reverence's pie. Ah, how it smells!"

"A baker!" said Pierre with disdain. "Not for worlds! To see Bernard stewing away in his bakehouse till he can scarcely breathe is enough to make one hate the thought of cakes. A baker indeed! Ah, no—the open air and the fields for me! I shall be a farmer, like my father and my grandfathers and my great-grandfathers. We have always been plain, honest farmers, we Marcels—and my mother's people, the Laurents, too!"

"Some one told me once," said Edmée, who, her work finished, was standing thoughtfully contemplating the effect of the pretty wreath round the little face, "some one told me once, or I dreamt it, that the little old portrait was that of a great-grandmother of ours. I wonder if it is true? If all our

people have always been farmers I don't see how it can be, for that little girl doesn't look like a farmer's daughter—and besides, they wouldn't have made a grand picture of her in that case."

"Mother must know," said Marie.

"I asked her once if it was true," said Edmée, "but she said I was to wait till I was older, and she would tell us the story. I would *so* like to hear it. She is so sweet, that dear little girl. I wonder if she lived to grow old. How strange to think of *her*, that little baby, growing into an old woman, with grey hair."

"And little wrinkles all over her face, and her eyes screwed up, and red patches on her cheeks, like old Mother Mathurine, down in the village," said Joseph. "They do say, you know, that old Mathurine is nearly a thousand years old," and Joseph nodded his head sagaciously.

"Joseph!" exclaimed Marie, "how can you tell such stories? *Nobody's* a thousand!"

"Well, then, it is a hundred,—I meant

to say a hundred," said Joseph. "I always forget which is the most—a thousand or a hundred," for poor Joseph was only seven.

"What things she must remember!" said Edmée. "Fancy, Pierre, a hundred years ago! Perhaps she remembers the little girl. Oh, Pierre, do let us ask mother to tell us the story to-morrow!"

"Yes," Pierre agreed, "I should very much like to hear it. We'll ask her to-night, Edmée."

And just then the sound of their father's voice, as he crossed the farmyard on his way into the house, made them hasten to pick up the stray leaves and flowers which had fallen from the wreaths, and to put the chairs and all back in their places, so as to leave the room in perfect order for to-morrow.

That evening, when the little ones were in bed, Pierre, Edmée, and Marie lingered a moment when they were going to say good-night to their parents.

"What is it, my dears?" said their

mother, for she saw there was something they wanted to ask.

"Mother," said Pierre, "you know you are always very good to us on your birthday; we want to ask you a favour. Will you to-morrow tell us the story of the little picture in the parlour?"

"You said you would when we were older," said Edmée persuasively.

"What do you think?" said Madame Marcel, turning to her husband.

The farmer shrugged his shoulders good-naturedly.

"I have no objection," he said. "They are sensible children, and not likely to get foolish notions in their heads. On the contrary, they are old enough to learn good lessons from the story of these troubles of long ago. I am quite pleased that they should hear it, and I should like to hear it again myself, for I am not so good a scholar as you. I have sometimes looked into the papers, but I find the writing difficult."

"I think I almost know it by heart," said

his wife. "My mother liked me to read it to her. Well, then, my children, to-morrow evening, when the little ones are asleep, you shall hear the story of the little old portrait."

CHAPTER II

The Marcel children were up betimes the next morning—not that they were ever late, in summer especially, for, young as they were, there were plenty of ways in which they already helped their busy father and mother. And as everybody knows, there is no time so busy in a farm in summer as the early morning. In general they were all, except little Roger, due at school at eight o'clock, but to-day, as I have explained, was a holiday, and the mere feeling of not having to go to school seemed to make them wish to get up even earlier than usual.

Then there was the treat of coffee for breakfast, instead of the soup—a very homely kind of soup made with dripping, which English children would not, I fancy,

think very good—which was their usual fare, and not only coffee, but white bread and *butter*! Joseph smacked his lips at this, you may be sure. After breakfast they all went into the parlour for a few minutes, there to present to Madame Marcel the little gifts they had prepared for her, with which she was of course greatly pleased, as well as with the decorations of the room.

"Now go, my children," she said, "and amuse yourselves well till dinner-time. It is a most lovely day. If you can find a nice basketful of wood strawberries they will not come in badly for the dessert."

"No, indeed," said Joseph, "there is nothing better than strawberries with cream. You will give us a little of that beautiful thick cream you make the little cheeses for market with, won't you, mother? For a *very* great treat."

And Madame Marcel could not help laughing at the pathetic air with which he said it, even though she told him she feared he was growing too fond of nice things to eat.

The strawberry hunt was very successful, and the children came home in good spirits, and quite ready to do justice to the birthday dinner, to which had been invited the clergyman of the village, or "curé," as he was called, and Farmer Marcel's widowed sister, with her two children.

Later in the day the young people all played games in the orchard; then, too hot and tired to romp more, they sat on the grass playing with their pet kitten, till mother called them in. Their aunt and her little boys and the old curé soon after went away, and then, when Joseph and Roger were safely in bed, the three elder ones reminded their mother of her promise.

"I have not forgotten it," she said. "Your father is coming in a moment. I must let you sit up an hour later than usual this evening; but if there is not time to read all the story, we can finish it on Sunday evening, perhaps."

And then she led the way back to the parlour, which seemed the most suitable

place for reading the story in, besides being cooler than the kitchen, for the evening was very hot.

In a few minutes the farmer made his appearance. He seated himself in one of the two largest and most comfortable of the arm-chairs, while Madame Marcel took the other, drawing it near enough to the window to have a good light; for the sheaf of papers which she held in her hand was yellow with age, and the ink of the writing, from the same cause, had become pale and not very easy to read. And the children's eyes watched with eagerness, not unmixed with awe, the pages, which were tied together with a faded blue ribbon, as their mother smoothed them out and placed them ready.

"Before I begin," she said, "I must tell you, children, who wrote this little story, and why. It was written by my mother; you cannot remember your dear grandmother, children; she died when you, even, Pierre, were a very little boy, and Edmée still a

baby. It was a great sorrow to me. I had hoped she would have lived to help me to bring you up, and to educate you as she educated me, though I fear I have now forgotten much of what she taught me."

"There is no one in the village as clever as you, mother," said Pierre and Edmée. "Every one says so. Who can write so nicely as you, mother, or keep accounts so beautifully?"

"Yes, indeed," said the farmer. "Many a compliment I have had about my accounts, and very proud I am to say it is my good wife who makes them out."

"So you see, mother!" said the children.

"Well, well," said Madame Marcel. "But the little I can do is nothing to what my dear mother knew and could do. And she, again, used to say she felt ashamed of her ignorance in comparison with *her* mother's superiority. And this brings me to the story, or rather, in the first place, to the picture. That dear little girl up there, children, is my grandmother, your great-

grandmother, whose maiden name was Edmée de Valmont."

"Edmée de Valmont," repeated the children, as if they could scarcely believe it. "You don't mean—not de Valmont of Valmont-les-Roses, not one of *them*?" said Pierre eagerly.

"Yes, dear. My grandmother was the last of the old name. And how she came to be so, and how in the end she changed it for a much humbler one, and never repented having done so—that is the story here written out by her wish, and under her superintendence, by her daughter, my mother."

The children looked at their mother bewilderedly.

"I don't think I quite understand," said Edmée. "Whom did she marry? Was it our grandfather Marcel?"

"Oh dear no, my child," replied her mother, laughing; "that would have made very funny relationships," and Farmer Marcel smiled as he said:

"It is not to my side of the house, but

to little mother's, that you owe your noble descent."

And Madame Marcel went on to explain.

"My grandmother, Edmée de Valmont, married Pierre Germain. They had but one child, my mother, also Edmée, and she in turn married Joseph Laurent, my father. I, again, was an only child, so it has always been by Edmées that the de Valmonts have been remembered, till now, when my little Roger has revived the old Valmont name. There was always a Roger de Valmont in the old days."

"Ah, yes," exclaimed Pierre, "I know that by the old inscriptions in the church. Mother, why did you not call me, the eldest, Roger? I should have been proud of the name."

His mother looked at him with a rather anxious expression; he was a handsome boy, and before now some of the old people in the village had whispered to her that the Valmont blood was to be seen in the little farmer, though she had begged them

always to put no nonsense in her boy's head.

"My boy," she said seriously, almost solemnly, "when you have heard this little story you will, I think, agree with me that no one could be otherwise than proud to bear the name of my dear and honoured grandfather, Pierre Germain. I do not wish to speak with anything but respect of my grandmother's ancestors, especially as I am happy to think many of them deserved to be so thought of. They did their best, and strove to be just and benevolent at a time when there were few to show the example, and for that let us honour them. But the ancestors *I* am the most proud of, and I know your father agrees with me, are not the de Valmonts."

Pierre slipped his hand into his mother's.

"I should like to think the same as you and father," he said gently. And then Madame Marcel, having the papers smoothed out, and sitting in a good clear light, began to read as follows :—

"BELLE PRAIRIE FARM,
VALMONT-LES-ROSES,
TOURAINE,
1st June, in the year of our Lord 1822.

I, Edmée Germain, the only child of Pierre Germain and Edmée his wife (born Edmée de Valmont), by the wish of my mother, am going to endeavour to write the story of her life, that her descendants may know the true facts, and, above all, may learn to honour the memory of my dear father, Pierre Germain, who ended his good and faithful life on the 12th of last April. My dear mother and I have felt dreadfully sad since his death, and the idea of writing this simple narrative is the first thing which has at all consoled us. I fear I shall not do it very well, for though my mother has educated me carefully, I am not by nature as clever as she, and I feel that I have not well repaid the trouble she has taken with me. But it is her wish that I should write it rather than she herself; so I shall do my best, and if it should ever be read by children

or grandchildren of mine, I am sure they will judge it gently, and not be severe on my blunders. When it is completed, mother is going to ask our kind curé to read it through, and to put his name to it as a sign that all is truly stated, and without exaggeration. My mother and I wish that these papers should be always kept in the top drawer of the handsome chest of drawers in the best parlour at Belle Prairie Farm; so long, that is to say, as the farm continues in the hands of our descendants, which we hope will be for very very long. And as the children of the family grow old enough to feel an interest in its history, we wish that what I am about to write should be read aloud to them."

Madame Marcel stopped a moment. All eyes were fixed on her, all ears were eagerly listening. So she went on again. There was no other title or heading to the manuscript.

"It is nearly forty years ago that one day a little girl—a very little girl—was playing

with a boy a few years older than herself on the terrace in front of the château of Valmont-les-Roses. The château was very old; many generations of Valmonts had played on the same old terrace—had grown to be men and women, and found there were many things besides playing to be done in the world—had passed through the busy noontime of life, and gradually down the hill to old age and peaceful death. For they had been in general kindly and gentle, loving to live quietly on their lands, and make those about them happy, so that they were respected and trusted by their dependants; and even in troubled times of widely spread discontent and threatened revolt, the talk of these things passed quietly by our peaceful village, and no one paid much heed to it.

The little girl who was racing up and down the terrace, her companion pretending to try to catch her, and letting her slip past so that she might fancy she was quicker than he, was Edmée, only child of the Count de Valmont, and the boy was Pierre Germain,

her favourite playfellow, though only the son of her father's head forester.

Edmée had no brothers or sisters, and Pierre's mother had been for some time her nurse when she was a tiny baby. The kind woman had left her own little boy to come to the château to take care of the Countess's baby, who was so delicate that no one thought she would live, and by her devotion, Madame Germain had helped to make her the bright, healthy little girl that she now, at five years old, had become. So, as one always loves those to whom one has been of great service, Madame Germain loved little Edmée dearly, and Edmée loved her. There was nowhere in the village she so much liked to go as to the Germains' little cottage, and no child she cared to play with as much as Pierre, who was only four years older than she, but so gentle and careful with her that no one felt any anxiety when they knew that the little lady, 'Mademoiselle,' as she was called, was with Pierre Germain.

Tired with running and laughing, Edmée

called to Pierre to help her down the steep stone steps at one end of the terrace, and the two children settled themselves comfortably under the shade of a wide-spreading beech tree.

'Now, Pierrot, good pretty Pierrot,' said Edmée coaxingly, 'tell Edmée a story—a pretty story.'

'What about? My little lady has heard all the stories I know, so often,' said Pierre, gently stroking the pretty fair hair tumbling over his arm, as she leant her head against him.

'Never mind, I like them again—only *not* about Red Riding Hood,' said Edmée; 'that frightens me so, Pierre; I fancy I am little Red Riding Hood, only then I always think my Pierrot would come running, running *so* fast, so that the naughty wolf *shouldn't* eat me. Wouldn't my Pierrot do that? He *wouldn't* let the naughty wolf eat poor little Edmée?'

'No, indeed—*indeed*! I wouldn't,' said Pierre eagerly. 'I'd get the old sword—you know it, Edmée; father has it hanging up

over the door in our cottage ; it's rather rusty, but it would be good enough for a wolf—and I'd run at him with it before he could touch you. If he *had* to eat up somebody, I'd let him eat me first.'

'Oh, don't! don't, Pierrot,' said Edmée, trembling and clinging to him, 'don't say that; don't let us speak about things like that! There are no wolves here, are there? and don't you think, Pierrot dear, if people were very, very kind to all the wolves, and never hunted them, or anything like that — don't you think perhaps the wolves would get kind?'

Pierre smiled.

'I'm afraid not,' he said; 'but there are no wolves about here.'

'No, no,' repeated Edmée, 'no wolves and no naughty people at Valmont. Don't you wish there were no naughty people anywhere, Pierrot?'

'Indeed I do,' said the boy, and then he sat silent. 'What makes you talk about naughty people, Edmée?'

'I don't know,' said Edmée; 'sometimes I hear things, Pierrot, that frighten me. I hear the servants talking—they say that some lords like papa are so naughty and unkind. Is it true, Pierrot?'

'I'm afraid all rich men are not as kind as the Count,' said Pierre. 'But don't trouble yourself about it, dear; we won't let naughty, unkind people come here.'

Somehow Edmée had grown silent; she sat there quite still, leaning her little head on the boy's shoulder. And he did not talk either; Edmée's innocent words had reminded him of things he too had heard—of talk between his father and mother, of which, young as he was, he already understood a good deal. Even to quiet Valmont, growlings of the yet distant storm, which ere long was to overwhelm the country, had begun to penetrate. Now and then peasants from other villages would make their way to this peaceful corner, with tales of cruelties and indignities from which they were suffering, which could not but rouse the sympathy of

their more fortunate compatriots. And more than once Pierre had seen his quiet and serious father strangely excited.

'It cannot go on for ever,' he would say to his wife; 'we may not live to see, but our children will, some terrible retribution on this unhappy land. Ah, if all masters were like ours! But I fear there are but few, even in his own family, think of the difference.'

But when Pierre eagerly asked what he meant, he would say no more—he would say nothing to sow prejudice in the child's heart. But from others the boy learnt something of what his father was thinking of, and as he grew older and understood still more, his heart ached sometimes with vague fear and anxiety, though not for himself.

'It would be a bad day for us all—a bad day for our poor mistress and the dear little lady—if the good Count were taken from us,' he heard now and then, and the words always struck a cold chill to his heart; for the Count was by no means in good health—he had always been somewhat delicate,

unable to take part much in field sports and such amusement as absorbed the time of most of his country neighbours. He read much and thought much, and in many ways he was different from those among whom he lived. And though somewhat cold in manner, it was evident he was not so in heart, for all the little children in the village loved him as well as his beautiful and lovable young wife, and their dear little daughter, and beyond the limits even of his own domain he was spoken of as the 'good' Count of Valmont.

Suddenly, as the two children sat there in silence, a voice was heard calling:

'Mademoiselle! Mademoiselle! wherever can the child have hidden herself? Mademoiselle, you are wanted at once in the drawing-room.'

And as Edmée rose slowly, and perhaps rather unwillingly, to her feet, she saw coming along the terrace her mother's new maid Victorine, to whom, it must be confessed, she was not partial.

'I am not hidden, Victorine,' she said; 'it is easy to see if one looks.'

'If one looks in proper places,' said the maid pertly. '*I* never before saw a young lady always playing with a clodhopper!' and she came forward as if about to take Edmée by the hand and lead her away. But she reckoned without her host.

CHAPTER III

EDMÉE drew herself away.

'Naughty Victorine!' she said, 'you shall not call my Pierrot ugly names. Come away, Pierrot; we won't go with her.'

'But you *must* come, Mademoiselle Edmée; your lady mamma has sent for you,' said Victorine, by no means pleased, but a little afraid of getting into some trouble with this determined young lady.

'Mamma has sent for me? Oh, then I will come. Come, Pierrot, mamma wants us in the drawing-room. You need not wait, Victorine; Pierre will bring me.'

Victorine's face grew very red.

'Nobody wants *him*,' she said. 'However, do as you please. Thank goodness, I am not that child's nurse,' she muttered,

as she walked off with her head in the air. She was in hopes that Pierre, and perhaps Edmée too, would get a good scolding if the boy made his appearance with her in the drawing-room; but she was much mistaken. The children entered the house together, crossing the large cool hall paved with black and white marble, and then making their way down a side passage of red tiles. Here Pierre stopped: it was the way to the Countess's own rooms, which opened into the large drawing-room by a side door.

'I will wait here,' he said; 'if my lady wants me you will come and tell me, will you not, Mademoiselle?'

For it was not often that Pierre returned to the village without some message for his mother from the Countess, who considered her as one of her best and trustiest friends.

Edmée ran into her mother's room—there was no one there, but the doors, one at each side of a tiny ante-room, which led into the big drawing-room, were both

open, and voices, those of her father and mother and of another person, reached her ears. She ran gaily in.

'Here you are at last, my pet!' said her mother. 'How long you have been! This gentleman has been waiting to see you; he has come all the way from Tours on purpose to—can Edmée guess what he has come for?'

Edmée looked up in the stranger's face with a half-puzzled, half-roguish expression, very pretty to see.

'Ah!' exclaimed the young man hastily; 'excuse me, Madame—if the young lady could but be taken as she is now it would be admirable.'

'All in disorder!' exclaimed the Countess, laughing. 'Why, I was just going to send her to have her hair brushed, and to have a clean white frock put on; she is all tossed and tumbled.'

'All the better—nothing could be better,' said the artist, for such he was, and the Count agreed with him. But it was not

'Can Edmée guess what he has come for?'

so easily done as said. Edmée could not at all see why she was to sit still on a stiff-backed chair when she so much preferred running about, and though she had jerked one dimpled shoulder out of the strap of her frock, she had by no means intended to keep it there, as the stranger insisted. Furthermore, she objected to looking up at him as he desired, and was on the point of telling him that he was not pretty enough to look at so much, when happily another idea struck her.

'Let Pierrot come in,' she said; 'Pierrot can come and tell me a story, and then I'll sit still. Edmée always sits still when Pierrot tells her stories.'

But how are we to get hold of him?' said the Count, whose patience was rather tried by her fidgetiness. 'There is not time to send to the village, the light will be failing'—for it was already advanced in the afternoon—'and Mr. Denis is so anxious to make the first sketch to-day.'

'Pierrot is not in the village; he is here

at the door. Send for him and tell him to come in, and then Edmée will be so good—oh so good, and will sit so still!'

The Countess rang a little bell which stood on a side table; an old man-servant soon came to see what was wanted.

'Is Pierre Germain still here?' she said; 'if so, tell him to come in.'

In a moment Pierre made his appearance. His boots were thick and clumsy, and clattered on the shining polished floor; he held his cap in both hands, and stayed an instant at the door to make his bow and to wait the lady's pleasure. But, country boy though he was, he neither looked nor felt foolish or awkward, and the young artist, taking his eyes for a moment from his refractory little sitter, was struck by his bright face and fearless bearing.

'I would like to sketch him,' he said to himself. 'It is not often one sees peasants of his type nowadays among the half-starved, wolfish, and yet cowed-looking creatures they are becoming,' he added,

though not so as to be heard by any one else, turning to the Count, who stood beside him.

'No, indeed,' replied the gentleman, and a look of anxiety crossed his pale, serious face.

'Come forward, my boy,' said Edmée's mother. 'Why did you not come to see me before? You know you are always welcome.'

'I thought as Mademoiselle was sent for, perhaps there was company,' said Pierre smiling, while his sunburnt face grew ruddier.

'It was that naughty Victorine!' said Edmée, pouting; 'she called my Pierrot a clodhopper. I don't like Victorine!'

'A clodhopper?' said the Countess; 'no, indeed, she should not have said so; that comes of having a maid from Paris, I suppose. I think I shall keep to our own good Touraine girls for the future, even though they are not so clever. Now, Pierre, my boy, you are to help us to get Edmée to keep still; Mr. Denis is going to paint her, just as she is now.'

Pierre's quick wits soon understood what was wanted. He sat down on a stool by Edmée, and began telling her in a low voice one of her favourite stories, which soon drew all her attention. And it was thus that the portrait which is now hanging in the parlour at Belle Prairie Farm, and which will, I hope, always hang there, came to be taken. If one looks closely at one corner, one will see the date, 'July 15th, 1783,' and the painter's initials, 'R. D.'

This little scene which I have described is one of the first clearly impressed on my mother's memory. She has often told it to me. Perhaps the reason that she remembers it so well is that that summer was the last of the unbroken happiness of the Château de Valmont. The good Count, my grandfather, though always delicate, had hitherto been well enough to enjoy the quiet home life, which was what he preferred, and to attend himself to the care of his property and of his people. But the winter following this bright summer, which had seen my mother's fifth

birthday, was a severe one. My grandfather unfortunately caught cold one day from having been exposed to a snowstorm on his way home from a visit to his wife's brother, the Marquis de Sarinet, whose château was about two days' journey from Valmont-les-Roses. And this illness of my grandfather's was the beginning of troubles—not for himself and his family alone, but for scores of others whom he had always wished and endeavoured to protect and to make happy, so far as he could; though for him, and the few like him, it was more difficult than could nowadays be believed to behave with kindness, even with any approach to justice, to those in their power. For these few good and truly wise men stood alone against the blind obstinacy of the many, bent, though they knew it not, on their own destruction.

A glimpse of life in another and less favoured village than Valmont may perhaps give to those who in future days will, I hope, read this story, a better idea of the state of things than I could otherwise ensure them.

I have heard all about it so often from my mother, and even more from my father, who had seen more of the peasant life of the time than she, that it often seems to me as if I had myself been an eye-witness of the scenes I have heard described. And some knowledge of the things which were passing at but a short distance from my mother's peaceful home will enable her grandchildren and great-grandchildren better to understand the events I have to tell.

We need travel no farther than Sarinet, the place I have spoken of as the home of my grandmother's family—the wife of the good Count. She had married young, fortunately for her, for Sarinet would not have been a happy home for her. It was in the possession of her half-brother, the proud Marquis de Sarinet, who lived there a great part of the year with his wife and one child, Edmond, a boy about the age of Pierre Germain.

It is winter—that same cruelly severe winter which laid the seeds of the good

Count's fatal illness. Heavy snow is on the ground, and the air is bitter and cutting. The village of Sarinet seems asleep; there is hardly any one moving about. It is so cold—so cold that the poor inhabitants, such as are not obliged to be away at their daily work, are trying to keep some little warmth in them by staying indoors. And yet indoors it is scarcely warmer; in many of the cottages there is no fire to be seen, in some but a few wretched embers in the great open chimney, down which blows the wintry wind as if angry that any one should attempt to get warm. The well, or fountain, as they call it, whence they all draw water, has been frozen for some days; when the men come home at night they have to break the ice away with hatchets. There are few children to be seen—one is almost glad to think so—and yet the absence of the little creatures has brought sad sorrow to many hearts. For not many months ago the village and some others in the neighbourhood had been visited by a wasting fever, the result of bad food,

overwork, and general wretchedness, and scarcely a family but had lost some of its members—above all, among the children.

At the door of one of the miserable cottages stands a young girl of about fifteen, crying bitterly. Cold though it is, she scarcely seems to feel it. She looks up and down the road as if watching for some one, then she re-enters the cottage, which is bare and miserable beyond description, and tries to coax into flame a little heap of twigs and withered leaves which are all the fuel she possesses. Her clothing is desperately poor —one could scarcely see that it had ever had any colour or shape—and yet there is an attempt at neatness about her, and she is, or rather she would have been had she had a fair amount of food and decent clothing, a pretty, sweet-looking girl.

As she stands again in her restless misery at the door of the cottage, an old woman comes out from the next door.

'What is the matter, Marguerite?' she says; 'is your brother ill again?'

'Oh, Madelon,' she exclaims, 'I think it would be better if he were dead! My poor boy!' and she burst out sobbing again.

'What is it? Anything new? Come in here and tell me,' said the woman, and she drew Marguerite inside her own dwelling, which was, perhaps, a shade less wretched than its neighbour, though in one corner, on a pallet bed hardly worth calling such—it was in reality but a bag of coarse sacking filled with straw—a man, looking more like a corpse than a human being, was lying, apparently in a state of half-unconsciousness.

'He is getting better, they say,' observed the woman, nodding her head in his direction. 'The doctor looked in yesterday—he had been up at the Château to see the little lord. Yes, he says Jean is getting better, and with good food he might be fit for something again,' she added in a hard, indifferent tone, as if she did not much care.

'And will they not send some to *him*—they—up at the Château?' said Marguerite indignantly. 'They know how the accident

happened; it was in saving my lord's hay-stacks; but for him every one says they would all have been burnt.'

The woman gave a short, bitter laugh.

'On the other hand, as the bailiff says,' she replied, 'we should be overwhelmed with gratitude that Jean has not been accused of setting fire to them. You know what *that* would have meant,' and she passed her hand round her neck with an expressive gesture, for in those days a much smaller crime than that of incendiarism—or even, alas! in most cases, the *suspicion* of such a crime—was too surely punished by hanging, and hanging sometimes preceded by tortures too frightful to tell you of, and followed by hideous insult to the poor dead body, adding untold horror to the misery of the victim's friends, even after he could no longer suffer. 'There is one cause for thankfulness,' Jean's wife went on—I have called her an old woman, but she was, in reality, barely forty, though you would have taken her for fully twenty years more,—'and that is that he and I are now

alone to bear it. The fever has been our best friend after all.'

'Yes,' said Marguerite simply, 'your children with my mother and little Angèle — they are all at rest and happy in heaven.'

'But how can there be a heaven—how can there be a God, if He lets us suffer so horribly? Suffer till there is no *good*, no gentleness, no pity left in us, my girl. There are times when I feel as if the devil were in me, when I would enjoy the sight of *their* suffering, they who treat us worse than their dogs—dogs indeed! see my lady's little pampered poodles! if we were treated like their dogs we need not complain—when I would not have a drop of pity in my heart, however I saw them tortured,' and Madelon's face, in its thin misery, took an expression which made Marguerite shiver, so that the elder woman, thinking it was from cold, drew her nearer to the fire, which she stirred with her foot.

'I should not talk so to you, poor child.

Now tell me your troubles. Is it about Louis?'

'Partly, and about everything. Last night, Madelon, quite late, that horrible Martin, the bailiff's son, came down again, sent by his father about the rent. He said if we had not yet got it ready, Louis must either pay the fine or do extra work. You know we have not got it ready—how could we? And then—I think he had been drinking—he began teasing me. He said I was a pretty girl in spite of my rags;—they are poor enough, Madelon, but they are not rags; I do my best to mend them.'

'Ah, that you do,' replied the neighbour.

'And,' pursued Marguerite, 'he pulled me to him and tried to kiss me, and said if I would be amiable he would get me a new silk kerchief, and would persuade his father not to be harsh with us for the rent. But I tried to push him away—and Louis, he got so angry—my poor Louis!—he seized a stick and hit him.'

'Hit Martin, the bailiff's son!' exclaimed

Madelon, an expression of fear and anxiety replacing the sort of hard indifference on her face. 'My poor child—he must have been mad!'

'He did not hurt him much,' continued Marguerite, 'but Martin was furious. He went out vowing vengeance, and with an evil smile on his face. And not half-an-hour after he left, one of the bailiff's men came down, late as it was, to order Louis to be there at five this morning. Louis, so delicate as he is, and so cold and dark and miserable as it was! But that is not the worst: the man—it was André Michaud—was sorry for us, and warned us that Louis is to be terribly punished. The bailiff swore he would put him in harness—the roads are so bad for the horses in this weather; he laughed and said it would give one of them a rest. Oh, Madelon, you know how dreadful it is—and Louis so weak as he is still—it will kill him! I have been all the morning running to the door, thinking he would be coming back, or that perhaps they would be carrying him back, all torn and

bleeding, like Félix—you remember Félix, when they put him in the horse's place and he broke a blood-vessel?'

Madelon turned away—ah yes, she remembered but too well, but what could she say? It was true what Marguerite had described, and there was no use in complaining. The lords, such as were cruel enough to do so, were allowed by law to drive the peasants in their employ, in the place of horses or oxen, and even if lashed or goaded till they dropped, the wretched sufferers could claim no redress.

'Warm yourself, my child,' she said at last to the weeping girl. 'Keep up your heart for Louis' sake, as well as you can. Have you a bit of fire in there?'

Marguerite shook her head. Madelon went to a corner of the cottage, and came back with some twigs.

'I will try to make it up for you,' she said; 'come back with me. This wood is dry.'

'But, Madelon, you have so little for

yourself,' said Marguerite. 'I had meant to try to find some this morning, though there is scarcely any now, but my fears for Louis have stopped my doing anything.'

They had coaxed the miserable fire into a more promising condition when the sound of voices on the road made Marguerite start nervously, and rush to the door. At first she thought that her worst fears were fulfilled. Two men were carrying *something* on a plank, while beside walked a boy—a boy of about ten or eleven, whom she did not know by sight, who from time to time as they came along stooped over the plank and looked anxiously at the motionless figure extended on it. With a fearful scream Marguerite rushed out.

'My Louis! my Louis!' she cried. 'Is he dead?'

The two men tramped on into the cottage stolidly, and laid down the plank.

'Dead?—I know not,' said one, with a sort of indifference that was not heartlessness. 'Would you wish him alive, you foolish child?'

But the little boy touched her gently.

'He is not dead,' he said softly; 'he has only fainted,' and he drew a small bottle out of the inside of his jacket.

'I have a little wine here,' he said, 'mother gave it me before I left home. He is opening his eyes—give him a spoonful.'

The girl did as he said. Poor Louis swallowed with difficulty, and a very little colour came into his face. He tried to sit up, but sank back again, murmuring—

'My back—oh, my back!'

'He has strained it,' said the second man. 'No wonder. He must lie down; have you no mattress?'

Marguerite gazed round her stupidly. Madelon touched her.

'Rouse yourself, my girl,' she said; 'he looks nothing like as bad as Jean when they brought him home,' and Marguerite turned to drag out of its corner the heap of straw on which, covered with what had once been a woman's skirt, Louis spent the night. The little boy darted forward to help her.

'Who are you?' she said, looking at him with the quick suspicion with which these poor creatures looked at every new face. 'I don't know you—you don't belong here.'

'No,' said he; 'I come from Valmont. I came in the carriage that has been sent to fetch my lord, who has been staying here with my lady's brother. The coachman brought me to help him, as the groom who generally comes is ill.'

'And how did you—how came you to see Louis?'

'I was strolling about the woods when I met them *driving* him,' said the boy, in a low voice of distress and horror. 'I saw him fall—and I was so sorry for him,' he added simply, 'I thought I would come to see how he was. But I must not stay; the Count is returning home to-day—I must not stay. But see here,' and from his pocket he drew a little bag containing a few copper coins and one small silver piece.

'These are my own—my very own. It

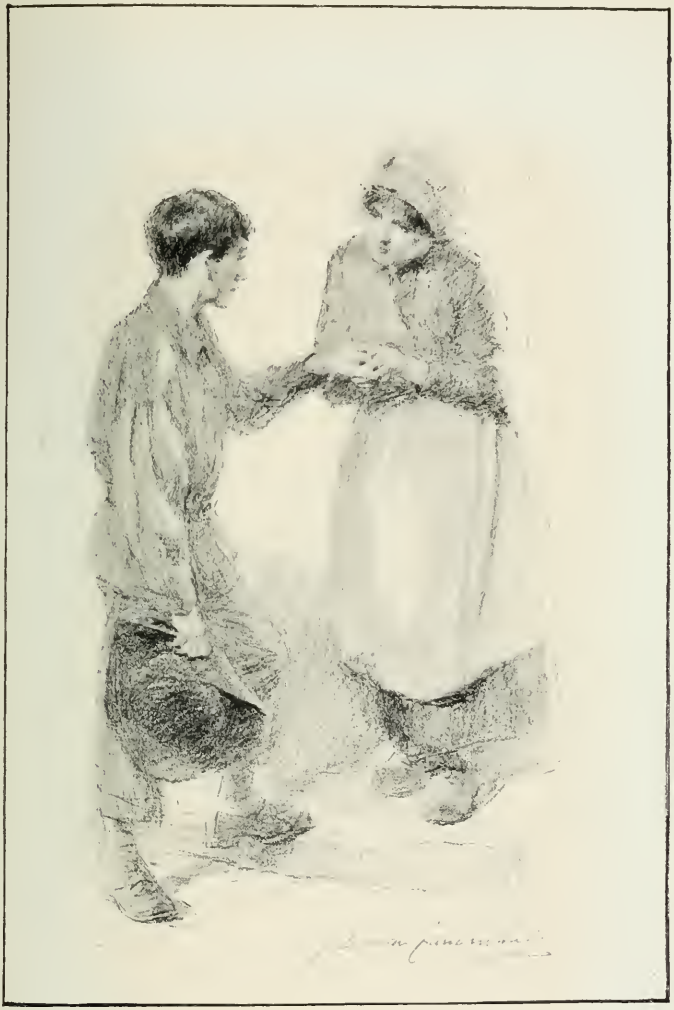
is all I have, but take it, to get some food for poor Louis.'

Marguerite seized his hand and kissed it.

'Tell me your name, that I may pray for you.'

'I am Pierre—Pierre Germain, the son of the forester at Valmont,' he said, as he ran off.

It was in very different circumstances that these two met again.



'Tell me your name, that I may pray for you.'

CHAPTER IV

That was a terrible journey back from Sarinet to Valmont-les-Roses. Little Pierre Germain never forgot it. The first day they got on well enough, and perched up on his seat beside the coachman, the boy enjoyed the driving along the wintry roads, where the snow had hardened sufficiently to enable them to make their way with no great difficulty. They stopped for the night at a village midway between the two châteaux, and despite some warnings, started again the next morning, for the Count was eager to get home, feeling sure that any delay would make the Countess very anxious. But long before they reached Valmont the snow came on again, more heavily than it had yet fallen that winter. For many hours

it was absolutely impossible to go on, and they were thankful even for the refuge of a miserable cabin, inhabited by an old road-mender and his wife, two poor creatures looking a hundred at least, whom they found cowering over a wretched fire, and who were at first too frightened at the sight of them to let them in. The name of the Count de Valmont reassured them, and they did their best to find shelter, both for the human beings and the horses, though their best was miserably insufficient. And the night in that poor hovel laid the seeds of the severe illness with which Edmée's father was prostrated but a few hours after reaching home.

For some weeks he was so ill that the doctors scarcely hoped he would live through the winter. The pretty young Countess grew thin and careworn with sorrow and anxiety and nursing, for she scarcely ever left his bedside, day or night. It was little Edmée's first meeting with trouble. The Marquis de Sarinet deferred going to Paris

till he saw how his brother-in-law's illness was to end, and he came two or three times to Valmont. For if he had a tender spot in his cold selfish heart it was love for the young sister who had when but a child been confided to his care, and though he scarcely understood it he pitied her distress. Madame, his wife, the Marquise, did *not* come, and I do not think her absence was regretted. She must, by all accounts, have been a most unlovable woman, as cold and proud to the full as her husband, and with no thought but her own amusement and adornment. As to their only child, Edmond, you will hear more as I proceed with my narrative of events.

To the delight, almost to the amazement, of all about him, the Count by degrees began to show signs of improvement. As at last the cold gave way to the milder days of spring, his strength slowly returned, and he would now and then allude to the possibility of recovering his health to a certain extent. It had been a most trying winter for many

besides the invalid. Exceedingly rigorous weather is always a terrible aggravation of the sufferings of the poor, and even at Valmont, in so many ways an unusually happy and prosperous village, many had suffered; and some perhaps more than was suspected, for now that the Count and Countess were unable to go amongst their people as usual, and to see for themselves where their help was called for, a natural feeling of pride prevented many from complaining until actually forced to do so, though the Countess did her best. She entrusted Pierre's mother with many a kindly mission, and whenever the weather was fit for so tender a creature to face it, little Edmée might have been seen trotting along by the kind woman, often herself carrying a basket with gifts for some little child or old person whom they had heard of as ill or suffering in some way.

'I don't like winter now,' she said one day, when, with Pierre on one side and his mother on the other, she was on her way to

a poor family a little out of the village. 'I used to think it was so pretty to see the snow and to slide on the ice. But I don't like it now. It made dear papa ill, and the poor people are so cold, and I think they're so much happier in summer.'

'Yes,' said Madame Germain. 'Hunger is bad to bear, but I fear cold is still worse. It has been a sad winter,' and the kind woman sighed.

'And if sad here in Valmont, what must it have been in other places?' said Pierre, his thoughts returning to what he had seen at Sarinet.

'At those places where the lords are not kind to the poor people, do you mean?' said Edmée eagerly. The subject always seemed to have a fascination for her, though her parents, and the Germains too, had taken care to tell her nothing to distress her sensitive feelings.

'Yes, of course that makes it worse,' said Madame Germain.

'Is my uncle Sarinet kind to his poor

people?' asked Edmée, in a low voice, though there was no one to overhear her.

'Why do you ask that, my child?' said Madame Germain. 'No one has ever spoken against the Marquis to you?'

'N-no,' said Edmée, 'but he has not a kind face, mamma Germain. He smiles at me, but still it is not a real smile. And before Victorine went away—oh, I am so glad she has gone to be my aunt's maid instead of little mamma's!—before she went away she said she was glad she was going where there would be no nonsense of spoiling the common people like here. At Sarinet they are well punished, she said, if they are naughty. How do they punish them, mamma Germain?'

'My little girl must not trouble herself about these things,' said Pierre's mother. 'It is sometimes right to punish those who are really naughty.'

'Yes,' said Edmée. 'But the poor people who are so often cold and hungry—ah, I could not make them more unhappy!'

'Bless her kind heart!' murmured Madame Germain, and many a dweller in Valmont-les-Roses echoed the words.

Some weeks passed—as if to make up for the severity of the winter, the spring came early that year, and with unusual softness and balminess. The Count was able to sit out on the terrace in the finest part of the day, enjoying the sweet air after his long confinement to the house, and though he knew in his heart that the improvement was but for a time, he had not the courage to say so to his poor wife. And so some amount of hopefulness seemed to have returned.

One day, when Edmée was coming back from a visit to the village, escorted by Pierre, she was met at the gates of the château by one of the servants, who told her that the Count and Countess wished her to go at once to the terrace.

'My lord the Marquis has arrived unexpectedly,' added the man.

Edmée shrank back.

'Pierrot,' she said, in the half-babyish

way she still sometimes spoke, 'Edmée doesn't want to see him.'

'But Edmée must,' said the boy, smiling.

'Pierrot must come too, then,' said the little girl coaxingly; and so, a good deal against his will, for he had an instinctive dislike to the lord of Sarinet, the boy was obliged to go with her. And, out of a sort of mischief, the child clung tightly to him, even when they came within sight of the group on the terrace, though when he saw that there were strangers there, Pierre would gladly have drawn back.

A tall distinguished-looking man, with clear-cut features and piercing dark eyes, was sitting beside the Countess. He rose as he heard her exclamation, 'At last comes Edmée!' and calling to him a boy about Pierre's age, but much smaller and thinner, came forward as if to meet her. But catching sight of her companion he hesitated; a frown crossed his face, and turning to his sister—for he was the Marquis de Sarinet—he said coldly:

'Whom have we here, Louise? It is time, it seems to me, that Edmée had some one to play with if you are so at a loss for comrades for her.'

The Countess's face flushed. But she knew her brother's character, and knew that there was no use in noticing such speeches. She held out her hand to Edmée, who ran forward to her, and then smiling kindly to Pierre, who stood, cap in hand, waiting respectfully—

'This is Pierre Germain,' she said, 'the son of our much-trusted forester. His mother, you may remember, saved our Edmée's life by her devotion to her when she was such a delicate baby. Pierre often accompanies Edmée in her walks. I am never the least uneasy when I know he is there—he is so careful of her.'

'Ah, indeed!' said the Marquis indifferently, as if the matter had already ceased to occupy his thoughts; he knew his sister too, and knew that, gentle as she was, she would not yield to any prejudices when she felt she

was in the right. 'Here, Edmond, you must make friends with your cousin, and be her little cavalier.'

Edmond did not stir; he stood beside his father with a vacant expression, as if he hardly heard his words. The Countess stooped and whispered something to Edmée; the little girl, though with much less than her usual bright readiness, came forward, and trying to get hold of the boy's hands, said gently:

'Good day, my cousin. Welcome to Valmont.'

Curiosity got the better of Edmond's surliness. He looked at Edmée with a mixture of expressions on his face—admiration, suspicion, and, as I said, a strong spice of curiosity.

'Good day, Mademoiselle,' he said.

'But you must not say "Mademoiselle" to your little cousin,' said the Countess, half laughing. She was sorry for the boy, and wished to be kind to him; but she had a strong feeling that Edmée would not approve

'Here, Edmond, you must make friends with your cousin, and be her little cavalier.'

of him as a playfellow. He was pale and thin, and looked extremely delicate, and his face, though the features were small and pretty if closely examined, was not attractive. Its expression was peevish and discontented, and there was a want of the bright, open frankness one loves to see in a child. 'Would you not like to go with Edmée to see some of her treasures?' she went on encouragingly. 'She has two pet rabbits and several birds to begin with.'

'Would you also like to see my picture?' said Edmée, for since the picture had been framed and hung up in her mother's room, she thought it the most wonderful thing in the house.

'I don't care for rabbits, and I don't care for birds,' replied Edmond. 'I don't mind looking at the picture. You may show it me if you choose.'

Edmée had kept hold of his hand and now drew him away.

'Come, then,' she said; 'we shall look first at the picture, and then we shall go out

in the garden, and Pierre will tell us stories, if you don't care to play with the rabbits. Pierre tells such pretty stories.'

She was, to tell the truth, so exceedingly anxious to get away from the Marquis that she was not easily discouraged by Edmond's ungraciousness. Besides, had not dear little mother whispered to her to be 'kind to the poor boy'?

Edmond, who was on the point of allowing her to lead him away, drew back again.

'Who is Pierre?' he said. 'Is it that boy? I don't want to play with *him*.'

Edmée's patience seemed about to give way. She looked at her mother appealingly. The Countess took Edmond's other hand.

'Come with me,' she said decidedly. 'It is right I should show you Edmée's picture, as it is in my room. And then we shall see what we can find for you to play at. Come, Pierre, my boy.'

Edmond could no longer resist; the Marquis, affecting to pay no attention to what was passing, had sat down by the

Count, and went on talking to him. Pierre followed the lady and the children into the house.

The first pleasant look that had been on Edmond's face came over it at the sight of the picture. He actually smiled.

'It is like her,' he said. 'I wish it was mine.'

'It was Pierrot made me sit still,' said Edmée; 'he told me stories all the time. He knows such pretty stories.'

Edmond glanced at Pierre with some approach to amiability for the first time. At that moment, through the open window, the Countess heard her husband's voice calling her. She turned quickly away.

'I must go,' she said. 'Edmée, take care of your cousin, and try to amuse him. Pierre will, I know, help you.'

The children made their way down into the garden. Then, after all, Edmond condescended to look at the rabbits, and to give his opinion of things in general. It was less pretty, he said, here at Valmont than at his

own home of Sarinet, where the flower garden was very magnificent, laid out and managed by foreign gardeners — 'not by these stupid louts of ours,' he added contemptuously.

Pierre's face flushed, but he said nothing. He felt on his honour bound to resent nothing the querulous little lord of Sarinet might say or do, for had not his dear lady trusted him—him, Pierre Germain—to help Edmée to amuse the guest. But Edmée was little accustomed to check or restrain her feelings, and she at once took her cousin to task.

'I don't know what "louts" means,' she said; 'we never hear those words here, but our people are not stupid, whatever yours are. And I don't care how grand your gardens at Sarinet are. I should never like it as well as Valmont. Here everybody is happy and contented. I know it is not so at Sarinet.'

Edmond laughed contemptuously.

'At Sarinet people are kept in their

proper places,' he said. 'We don't have low fellows like that'—and he flung a little cane he held in his hand at Pierre—'consorting with ladies and gentlemen.'

The cane struck Pierre on the cheek, and for an instant the pain was sharp, but it was not *that* that made him start forward with clenched hands and glowing eyes—he minded pain as little as any one—it was the insult. For he and his had not been used to such treatment; they had not been ground down by insolence and oppression, and the first contact with such things was bitter to him. But almost as quickly as he had started forward he drew back again, and passing his hand over his eyes, where the tears were springing, he turned away.

'I must not touch him,' he said; 'he is my lady's guest, and——'

Edmée was by his side in a moment.

'Pierrot—my Pierrot!' she said; 'that naughty, horrid boy!—I will run in and tell papa—I will! Why don't you beat him, Pierrot?'

Pierre could not help smiling at her vehemence.

'The Countess trusted me to take care of him,' he said, 'and then—why he is only half my size. One never fights with a boy like that.'

'I see,' said Edmée, quite convinced. 'But let me look at your face, Pierre. No, it is not very bad. Stoop down and let me tie my nice soft handkerchief round it. There now, that will do.

'But what are we to do?' said Pierre. 'We can't leave him alone. I do not want him to go in and complain, and perhaps add to your dear mamma's troubles.'

They turned and looked at Edmond. He was standing half sulky, half disconsolate —as if he too did not know what to do.

'After all,' said Pierre philosophically, 'we must remember he has never been taught better. I think the best way is to treat him as a naughty, spoilt child, and take no notice.'

He turned back.

'Master Edmond,' he said, 'if you would like to play a game of "graces" with Miss Edmée, I will go and get you the hoops and sticks.'

Edmond muttered something about not knowing how.

'Never mind,' said Pierre good-naturedly; 'I'll soon show you how,' and off he set.

Edmée stood still; she was less generous for Pierre than he was for himself; she would make no advances to Edmond. He, feeling, to tell the truth, rather ashamed of himself, threw on her from time to time furtive glances, which she took no notice of. At last, tired of her indifference, he spoke.

'Edmée,' he said.

'Well,' replied the little girl.

'It did not hurt him—that boy, I mean.'

'Did it not? How do you know?'

'It did not hurt him much,—I did not wish to hurt him,' continued Edmond.

'I am glad to hear it,' said Edmée. Her

tone was a very little softened. Edmond was encouraged by it to edge a little nearer.

'I would not wish to hurt any one you like, Edmée,' he said. 'But you made me angry by speaking against Sarinet.'

'You began by speaking against Valmont.'

'Well, I beg your pardon for that. I can see that that was ill-bred. I never wish to be ill-bred. My father would be shocked if he heard of that."

'Would he not be more shocked at your throwing your stick at Pierre?'

'Ah no,' said Edmond; 'in that there is nothing ill-bred. That is a different thing altogether from saying anything to annoy a lady.'

'But,' said Edmée, her eyes flashing again, 'I am much more angry with you for hitting Pierre than for speaking against Valmont.'

'Really? Well, I am sorry to have vexed you,' said Edmond. 'I like you very much, Edmée, and I want you to like me

and Sarinet, for when I am quite grown up I mean to marry you. I have often thought of it; for since I was quite little I have known we were to be married some day.'

'Who told you so?' said Edmée. 'I am not at all sure that I should like to marry *you*. You will have to do a great many things and change very much before I could even think of it.'

'How? What things do you mean?' said the boy eagerly.

'You must grow tall and strong—like Pierre.'

'*Pierre!*' repeated Edmond, contemptuously; 'I will not be compared with a——'

'Hush!' said Edmée, putting her little hand on his mouth before he could pronounce the word; 'don't say it, or you will make me *very* angry!'

'Well, do not speak of Pierre; say tall and strong like my father.'

Edmée gave a little shiver.

'No,' she said, 'I won't say that. Never mind about being tall and strong. You

must above all be very good and brave, and yet kind to everybody,—like a true knight in some of Pierre's stories. I think there are no true knights now.'

'Pierre again!' muttered the boy discontentedly. 'Tell me, Edmée, what do you mean by a true knight?'

'One who is always good and kind to everybody,' said Edmée. 'Not only to ladies and gentlemen, but to poor people, and weak and unhappy people, and who will not let any one be cruel. I can't tell you very well. But papa has books with stories about knights, which he lends to Pierre, and then Pierre tells them to me.'

'I never heard anybody talk like that before,' said Edmond. 'I don't know anything about poor people, and I'm sure I shouldn't like them. But I won't call that boy names if it vexes *you*, Edmée.'

Edmée had no time to say more, for just then Pierre returned with the sticks and hoops. And when the Countess, rather anxious in her mind in consequence of the

new addition to the childish party, came out an hour later to call Edmée and her cousin in, she found all of them playing merrily, and apparently on good terms with each other.

'Perhaps my nephew is a more amiable child than he appears at first sight,' she said to herself.

This afternoon—the first visit of Edmond de Sarinet to Valmont—is another of the scenes of her early childhood clearly impressed on my mother's mind.

CHAPTER V

My mother has been reading over what I have already written. She smiles at my description of her as a child, and maintains that my portrait of her, as well as that which hangs in the best parlour, is flattered. But I must, with all respect, disagree with her. She says I must now hurry on a little faster, otherwise I shall never arrive at the most interesting part of my story. Of the history of her early childhood there is not very much more to tell. It may really be said to have ended with the death of her dear father, the good Count, which took place early in the spring of the year after that of which I have been telling you. They had not expected him to linger so long, but the last winter of his life was an unusually mild

one, and he had regained some strength during the preceding summer, when he had lived almost entirely in the open air. The last days, and weeks even, of his life are not very distinct in my mother's remembrance. She thinks she was probably kept away from him a good deal on purpose, that she might not be saddened by the sight of his suffering and increased feebleness; and it seems to her, on looking back, that the greater part of that time was spent by her with Madame Germain and Pierre. But she distinctly remembers the day of the good Count's death, and those that followed it: her poor mother's terrible grief—how she clasped her to her arms, repeating that her Edmée was now all, *all* she had left; how bitterly she herself cried when she saw her dear father so cold and white and still, and through all, how kind and loving and unselfish were her dear 'mamma Germain' and Pierrot. Then came the funeral;—all the gentlemen of the neighbourhood assembled in the great salon, and first and foremost among them, and

in everything, her uncle the Marquis, tall and dark and proud as ever, with a smile for her whenever he caught sight of her, which she disliked almost as much as his frown. He brought a magnificent box of bonbons for her, and many pretty messages from her cousin 'and devoted cavalier' Edmond, none of which, she felt sure, child as she was, had really been sent by him. But she was a dignified little lady, and knew how to curtsey to the Marquis, and make her acknowledgments faultlessly, and to send messages in return to Edmond, saying that she would like to see him again, which seemed to please her uncle, and was really true.

For she and Pierre had often talked together about the poor boy, and agreed that there must be some good in him, and that the ill was not to be wondered at, considering how feeble and pampered and badly brought up he had been.

Many things were discussed at that time which Edmée knew nothing of till long afterwards.

The Marquis did his utmost to persuade his sister to leave her dear home and take up her quarters at Sarinet for part of the year, accompanying him and his wife to Paris every autumn; there to spend six months in their house in the Rue de Lille. But the Countess was firm in refusing. She knew in her heart, though she did not say so, that there never could be any real sympathy between herself and her sister-in-law, and she longed to keep Edmée in the country. But she thanked her brother for his kindness and affection for her, which, so far as they went, were real.

'When Edmée is older,' she said, 'and her education calls for it, I must make up my mind to spend part of the year in Paris.'

'Of course,' said the Marquis, '*that* is a matter there can be no doubt about. But I wish you could have made up your mind to get in the way of visiting Paris sooner. Not that Clémence — Clémence was the Marquise, his wife — would expect you to take part in any gay doings for some time

to come. But you are too young and too pretty, Louise, to get in the way of shutting yourself up. And for my little niece—for a girl with her prospects, sole heiress to all the de Valmont property—Paris is a necessity. I have a right to an opinion; Edmée, you remember, comes next to Edmond in *our* succession, and Edmond, poor fellow, is still a delicate lad.'

'Oh, brother, I trust not; I trust he may grow up strong and healthy!' exclaimed the Countess, shocked at the Marquis's cool way of talking of his son, and certainly with no desire to see her little Edmée in his place.

'I hope so, too. I hope to see the properties united in a different way, my fair sister,' he replied with a courtly bow. And the Countess pretended not to understand what he meant, for she was by no means sure that Edmond, brought up as he was, would ever be the husband she would choose for her precious child.

And then to her relief, and the relief of all the inhabitants of the château, the Marquis,

and his crowd of insolent attendants, took their leave. He drove away, satisfied that he had thoroughly fulfilled the duties of a brother and an uncle, and his servants gossiped and grumbled among themselves at the dull life they had led the last week at Valmont, and rejoiced to think that next month they would be back at Paris. And when one of the horses broke down on the road, from the furious driving the Marquis loved, the coachman was sworn at till he forced a trembling innkeeper to give them another, for which the chances were he would never be repaid save by the oaths the coachman threw at him in his turn. It was no matter of rejoicing in those days when a great lord came driving through the country, and this one was specially well known. No friendly voices bade him good speed on his way, as his wheels tossed the dust against the villagers of Valmont, as they had been wont to do to their own good lord, when he passed with a kindly greeting,—no homely faces lighted up with pleasure, or little children

shouted with glee as he re-entered his own domain; on the contrary, the men turned aside with a scowl, to avoid the servile obeisance expected of them, and more than one woman rushed into the road to see that no unfortunate child happened to be straying there. It was not to be supposed that the steeds of my lord the Marquis would be checked for an instant for the sake of any risk to a being so utterly beneath contempt as a peasant's brat!

And little Edmée and her mother for a time, a considerable time, were left in peace.

Those were quiet and uneventful years —at Valmont-les-Roses, that is to say. In the outside world the distant storm was coming nearer and ever nearer; the secret discontent was brewing and fermenting; the hard, cruel determination to listen to none of the people's complaints, the stupid blindness to what sooner or later *must* come unless timely measures were taken to avert it,—all these things were surely increasing. But at Valmont was heard but little, and that little affected but few. The Countess and her child

lived so thoroughly among their people, they took such part and sympathy in their joys and sorrows, they felt themselves so trusted and gave back such trust in return, that the notion of treachery and disloyalty, even if suggested, which it never was, would not for an instant have found place in their hearts. But Valmont, and some few other favoured spots like it, were, as I have said, happy exceptions to the rule. And even here, as will be seen later on, once the wild contagion was thoroughly aroused, there were some who yielded to it; for it is not difficult to dazzle and lead astray simple and uneducated people, who, left to themselves, would have remained faithful to their duties.

The Marquis came from time to time, and his visits were the darkest spots in Edmée's quiet life. He was more gentle to her and her mother than to any one else, but nevertheless the child shrank from him with indescribable dislike and fear. She could not bear the cold contempt underlying his courteous tones, and some remarks she once over-

heard as to his becoming her guardian, in case of her mother's death, made an impression on her that she never forgot, though, just because she thought of it with such terror perhaps, she could not bear to speak of it to the Countess.

All these years the mother devoted herself to Edmée's education, which she was well fitted to do. She was herself of great intelligence, and had learned much from her studious husband. Edmée never had at Valmont any teacher but her mother, or any attendant of more importance than the young girl who had been her maid ever since Madame Germain had left her. And in some things Madame Germain still had a charge of her former nursling. It was she who taught Edmée all sorts of fine and beautiful needlework. It was under her direction that the young lady of the château worked the set of chairs which, as I write, are still wonderfully fresh and beautiful in the best parlour here. It was she, too, who taught her how to nurse the sick, to dress wounds and burns, to distil scented waters, and make simple salves, and

brew *tisanes*, or warm drinks made from different kinds of herbs, which are very useful as household remedies. It was a quiet, simple life — compared with that of most ladies of their time. It appeared, I daresay, old-fashioned, and the Countess had taken an unusual course, and set at variance the opinions of her brother and other friends, in keeping Edmée at home instead of sending her to be educated at a convent.

Till the year Edmée was ten years old —that was the year 1787—she had never again seen her cousin Edmond. She and Pierre often talked of him, for in her secluded life his two days' visit had been an event she had never forgotten ; they wondered how he was growing up, if he were less petulant and self-willed, if he were strong and healthy now —for Pierre especially had always an idea that to be delicate and sickly was an excuse for almost anything; he, who had never known a day's illness, scarcely an hour's discomfort, could imagine nothing more unbearable. And when her uncle came to Valmont,

Edmée always inquired with pretty courtesy, and at the same time with real interest, for the poor boy, though the answers she received never gave her much satisfaction.

Edmond was quite well—would be much honoured by his cousin's remembrance of him, the Marquis would reply, with the half-mocking courtesy the little girl so disliked. But once she overheard some careless words of his to her mother which roused her old pity for the boy.

'He is a poor specimen; he will never be much of a credit to me,' and by the look on her mother's face she saw that she too pitied the evidently unloved boy.

This year, 1787, began the great changes in Edmée's life. They came in this way.

It was autumn. Several months had passed since the Marquis had been at Valmont, but now and then letters had come to the Countess which seemed to trouble and distress her. More than once Edmée had seen her mother with tears in her eyes, and at last one day, coming suddenly into her

room and finding her crying, the little girl could no longer keep silent.

'Little mamma,' she said, as she sat down on her favourite stool at her mother's feet, and stroked and kissed the hand she had taken possession of, 'I know it is not my place to ask you what you do not choose to tell me, but I am sure there is something the matter. I can see you have been crying.'

'But you have often seen me cry, my poor Edmée.'

'Yes, but not in that way. When you cry about dear papa it is sad, but not troubled in the same way.'

'That is true,' said her mother. 'I *have* a new trouble, my child. Many people, however, would think me very foolish for considering it a trouble. Besides, it is something I have always known would have to be sooner or later. I will promise to tell you all about it this evening, Edmée; I feel sure you will understand all I feel, though you are still only a little girl.'

'Not so very little, mamma. Ten past.'

The Countess smiled.

'Certainly, compared with the Edmée up there,' she replied, 'you are beginning to look a very big girl. But I am going to be busy now, dear. I have a long letter to write. This evening I will tell you all about it. You are going now to Madame Germain for your embroidery lesson, are you not?'

'Yes, mamma. Nanette is waiting to take me. Mamma,' she said, then stopped and hesitated.

'What is it, Edmée?'

'Does mamma Germain know about what is troubling you?'

'Yes, dear; she does.'

'Might I—would you mind her telling me?'

The Countess considered a moment.

'You may ask her to tell you. I know she will say nothing that is not wise and sensible.'

'Thank you, mamma,' said Edmée, well pleased. 'You see, dear mamma, if it is anything that troubles you, it will save you the pain of telling me,' she added, with the

little womanly protecting air she sometimes used to her mother; 'and then this evening we can talk it over, and I will do my best to console you. Good-bye; and good-bye, little Edmée,' she said, waving her hand to her own portrait, as she ran off; 'take care of little mother till I come back.'

Big Edmée, as she now considered herself, was very silent on her way to the village that afternoon. She went down the long red-paved passages and crossed the large tiled hall, so cool and pleasant in summer but so cold in winter, with the two great flights of stairs, one at each side, meeting up above on a marble landing, and again branching off till they ended in an immensely wide and long corridor, running the whole length of the house, with doors on each side leading into rooms which of late years had been but seldom used. Edmée stopped a moment when she had half crossed the hall and looked up—then out through the open doorway on to the terrace.

'How I love the château!' she said to

herself. 'I daresay it isn't so grand as Sarinet, but I don't care; I should never be so happy anywhere else. I do hope I shall never, *never* have to go away from Valmont,' and Nanette wondered what had come over her usually talkative little mistress, for all the way through the park and along the village street she hardly said a word.

The Germains' cottage was at the farther end. To reach it Edmée had to pass the old church, a large and imposing building for so small a village, and the neat little parsonage, or *presbytère*, as it is called, where lived the good old curé, who had baptized and married and seen die more than one generation since he had first come to Valmont. He was standing at his garden gate as the little girl passed, and, though he smiled and waved his hand to her, he did not speak or entice her to come in to see his flowers and bees as usual, which rather surprised her.

'I think Monsieur the Curé looks sad this morning,' thought Edmée; 'perhaps he too knows the news that is making little mother sad.'

And unconsciously her own face looked graver than usual as she nodded back in greeting to all her friends, who came to their cottage doors to see their little lady pass.

The Germains' cottage was a little better than most of the others in the village, yet it was extremely plain and simple. It was perhaps the neatness and cleanliness that made it seem so much more comfortable than its neighbours, though compared with such villages as Sarinet, every cottage in Valmont was a picture of prosperity. There were few but what possessed one or two good beds—sometimes, it is true, only recesses in the wall, but with good mattresses and blankets; and in several there were substantial four-posters, which had been handed down for generations. And, in almost all, the large family cupboards, which are to be seen, I believe, nearly all over France, and which those learned in such subjects can recognise by their carving as belonging to the various parts of the country.

The walls of Madame Germain's kitchen

were somewhat smoke-stained, for in cold or stormy weather it is, of course, impossible to keep the smoke of the great open chimneys altogether in its proper channel. But once a year it was whitewashed, and just at this season, the end of the summer, when the weather had been better for several months, it looked fresh and clean.

Madame Germain was sitting by a table near the window, arranging Edmée's tapestry frame, which the little girl had left behind her the last time, to have a mistake which she had made, put right. All remains of the dinner were already cleared away, though the big pot was simmering slowly by the fire, reminding one that supper and soup were to come.

'So there you are, my child,' said the good woman; 'I was just expecting you. See, here is where you made the wrong stitch—I have put it all right. You must get on with it, my child, if it is to be ready for my lady's birthday.'

'Yes, I know,' said Edmée, sitting down with a rather disconsolate air. 'Nanette,'

she added, rather less courteously than she usually spoke, 'you may go; I don't want you; Pierre will bring me home.'

'Very well, Mademoiselle,' said Nanette; 'of course I was only waiting for Mademoiselle's pleasure.'

Madame Germain looked rather anxiously at Edmée when the maid had left her.

'I don't mean to be cross,' said the little girl, 'but she troubles me, mother Germain. She would chatter all the way, and I didn't want to talk. Mamma Germain, there is something very much the matter; you must tell me what it is, for you know. I saw it in Monsieur the Curé's face, and even, it seemed to me, in the look of the villagers, as I passed. I am so unhappy; tell me what it is. Mamma said I might ask you,' and the child pushed aside her embroidery frame and knelt down beside her old friend, leaning her elbows on Madame Germain's knees.

CHAPTER VI

Mother Germain stroked back the fair hair from Edmée's forehead.

'My lady said I might tell you?' she said slowly. 'But, my dear, do not look so unhappy. It is no such very bad news. It is only what we have always known would have to be, sooner or later. You are growing a big girl, Edmée—indeed, I should no longer call you thus by your name.'

'Ah yes, yes, mamma Germain,' interrupted the child; 'to you I must always be Edmée.'

Madame Germain smiled.

'You will always be as dear to me as my own child, whatever name you are called by,' she said. 'But as I was saying, Edmée, you are growing a big girl; there are many things

young ladies of your station need to learn that cannot be taught in a village like Valmont. And your dear mother has never wished to be separated from you, so she would not send you away to a convent to be educated, as so many young girls are sent. That is why she now feels there is truth in what her brother, my lord the Marquis, is always saying—that she must go to live in Paris for awhile, taking you with her. There you can have lessons of every kind, in all the accomplishments right for you to know. And my lady too—she has lived here so many years, seldom seeing any friends of her own rank,—perhaps for her, too, it may be well—this change. It is only natural, sadly as we shall all miss her.'

Edmée's face had grown more and more melancholy as Madame Germain went on speaking, till at last she dropped it in her hands, and, leaning her head on her friend's knees, burst into a fit of sobbing. She did not cry loudly or wildly, but Madame Germain, laying her hand on her shoulders,

felt how the child shook all through, and was startled at the effect of her words.

'My child, my precious little lady,' she said, 'do not take it so to heart. Be brave, my Edmée. Think how it will trouble your dear mamma if she sees you so unhappy. For it is for your sake my lady is doing this —for your good—that you may grow up all that she and the good Count hoped you would.'

Edmée raised her tear-stained face.

'I don't mean to be naughty,' she said, 'but I don't want to go to Paris. I want to stay here, among my own people. In Paris no one will love us; it will all be full of strangers, who care for us no more than we care for them. Here in my own Valmont I know every face. I never walk down the village street without every one smiling at me. Oh! mamma Germain, I shall feel starved and cold among strangers, and I shall choke to be in a town among houses and walls—no longer my dear gardens and park, and trees and fields, and all the lovely country.'

'But that is selfish, Edmée, my child,' said her kind friend. 'If your dear mother can make up her mind to do it—for to her it is perhaps even more painful than to you—for your sake, you at least should be grateful to her, and do your best to show her you are so. In after years, if you never saw anything of the world but your little Valmont, you might regret your ignorance—might even reproach your friends for having shut you up in this corner. And you will come back again. It is not for *always* you are going away.'

'No, indeed, that is my only comfort,' said Edmée. 'I will try to learn all my lessons as fast and well as ever I can, so that little mother will soon see there is no need to stay longer in Paris, and we will come back, never again to leave our dear Valmont. Will not that be a good plan, mother Germain?'

'Excellent!' said the good woman, delighted to see that the child had taken up this idea; 'that will certainly be much better than crying.'

'Though,' continued Edmée, 'I shall not

like Paris—I have a sort of fear of it. I think there must be many cruel people there. That Victorine—do you remember her, mamma Germain?—she told me things I hardly understood, about the way people live there—how the rich despise the poor, and the poor hate the rich. And sometimes she would shake her head and say, "Ah, one would live to see many things changed—she herself might be a great lady yet; but if she were a great lady she could know how to enjoy herself—*she* would not choose for her friends common peasants." That she said to vex me, you know.'

'Ah yes, she was not a nice girl,' said Madame Germain.

'And she is still with my aunt, the Marquise,' went on Edmée. 'I do not want to see her again. I hope mamma will take Nanette. I should not like Victorine to have anything to do for me.' She remained silent for a moment, then looking up suddenly, 'Mother Germain,' she said, 'does Pierre, my poor Pierrot, does he know about our going away?'

Madame Germain nodded her head. For herself she could bear her share of the sorrow, but her heart failed her when she thought of how her boy would feel it, and for the first time the tears came into her eyes.

'Ah, he does,' said Edmée. 'He has not been to the Château for two days, and I wondered why.'

'He dared not go till we knew that you knew it,' said Pierre's mother. 'We felt sure your quick eyes would see there was something the matter.'

'I think I have known it was coming,' said the little girl with a sigh. 'I have felt sad sometimes of late without knowing why, and never has my uncle been here without my seeing that his words troubled my mother, even though she did not tell me why. Mother Germain, I cannot do any embroidery to-day; just let me sit still here beside you for awhile, and then I will go home. Pierre will be in soon, will he not?'

And, tired with the excitement and the crying, Edmée again laid her head on her

old friend's knee, and Madame Germain went on quietly knitting, and did not at first notice that the little girl had fallen asleep, till, hearing a step approaching, she looked up and saw Pierre entering the cottage. She was going to speak, but the boy held up his hand.

'She is asleep, mother,' he whispered as he came near, 'and she has been crying. Does she know? Has my lady told her?'

'I have told her, the poor lamb!' said Madame Germain. 'Her mother wished it so. Yes, she has been crying bitterly. She seems to think it will break her little heart to leave Valmont and go away to Paris.'

Pierre looked very sorrowfully at the innocent face, which seemed scarcely older than the fair baby face of the portrait at the château.

'Mother,' he said gently, 'I think I would give my life for our little lady.'

'I believe you would, my boy,' said his mother.

'I cannot bear their going away,' he

'Mother,' he said gently, 'I think I would give my life for our little lady.'

continued. 'It is not only that we shall miss them so sorely, but I have a sort of fear for them—our lady and this tender little creature; who would protect them and take care of them in any danger as we —their own people of Valmont—would?'

'But what danger could come to them?' said Madame Germain. 'You must not be fanciful, my boy. They will be in the Marquis's grand house in Paris, surrounded by his servants. And though I have no love for him, still I have no doubt he will take good care of his sister and her child. Indeed, the Countess has told me that that is one of the arguments he uses with her—he says it is not safe for two ladies alone as they are in the country in these unsettled times. For it appears there is a great deal of discontent and bad feeling about; that was a terrible business your father was telling me of the other day—a château burnt to the ground in the dead of night, and several of the inmates burnt to death, and no one can say who did it.'

'But then it is no mystery as to why it was done,' said Pierre. 'The lord of that country is noted for his cruelty. Father said he would not wish you ever to hear the horrors that he has committed among his people; what wonder that at last some one should try to avenge them? And, mother, the Marquis is both feared and hated. I hear strange things and see strange looks when he comes over here. I cannot think that *he* is a good protector for our ladies. They are far safer here at Valmont, where every one loves them.'

'It might be so were they going to Sarinet,' said Madame Germain, who was of a cheerful and hopeful disposition; 'but in Paris! In Paris, where are the king and queen, and all the great lords and ladies, and the king's regiments of guards!—ah no, it is not there that there could ever be any revolt.'

'But dark days have been known there before now, mother, and dreadful things have been done in Paris,' persisted Pierre,

who had read all the books of history he could get hold of, and had thought over what he had read. 'I could tell you——'

'Hush!' said Madame Germain, speaking still, as they had been doing all the time, in a whisper; 'the child is waking.'

And as she spoke Edmée opened her blue eyes and looked about her in surprise. As she saw where she was she gradually remembered all, and how it was that she had fallen asleep there, and a look of distress crept over her face as she held out her hands to her friend Pierre.

'I did not know I had fallen asleep,' she said. 'My eyes were sore with crying. Oh, Pierrot, are you not sorry for your poor little Edmée?'

Pierre did not speak, but his lip quivered, and he turned away his face. He was too big now to cry, he thought, but it was very difficult to keep back the tears.

'Come now, my children,' said Madame Germain, 'you must not look so sad, or my lady will think I have very badly fulfilled

her commission. You must cheer Edmée, Pierre; talk to her of the happy time when she will come home again to her own people —two, three years soon pass! Ah, when you are my age you will see how true that is, and not wish the time over.'

Edmée drew the kind face down to hers and kissed it.

'I will promise you to try to be cheerful with mamma,' she said. 'It is only here I will allow myself to cry. Now I must go home; Pierrot will come with me to the little gate.'

But all the way home to the château through the village the children scarcely spoke, though usually their tongues ran fast enough. Their hearts were too full; and when they got to the little gate through which a footpath led directly to the side door by which Edmée usually entered, she did not urge Pierre to come in to see her mother.

'Come to-morrow,' she said; 'by that time I shall be a little more accustomed to

it. To-night it will be all I can do not to cry when mamma speaks to me, and to see you looking so sorry makes me still more unhappy, my poor Pierrot!'

So they said good-night at the gate. I would not undertake to say that on his way home Pierre's resolution not to cry now that he was so big a boy held good. There was no one to see him except the little birds and a rabbit or two that scudded across the path through the park—and it was his first real trouble.

His tears would have been still more bitter, poor boy, had he known how few 'to-morrows' he and Edmée would have to spend together; for when the little girl entered the château she was met by unexpected news, and Nanette, who had been on the point of going to fetch her, told her to go at once to her mother's room, as the Countess wished to speak to her.

Feeling still bewildered by all she had heard, Edmée obeyed half-tremblingly. A glance at her mother told her there was

further trouble in store for her. The Countess was in tears, and her room, usually so neat and orderly, was all in confusion: cupboards and drawers open, and great travelling-cases, which Edmée did not remember ever to have seen before, standing about, and the Countess's maid, Françoise, an old woman who had been in the Valmont family since the time of the last Count's mother, was fussing about with trembling hands, her red eyes telling their own tale.

'Oh, Edmée, my darling, I am glad you have come back!' exclaimed her mother, but without giving her time to say more the little girl flew into her arms.

'She has told me, mamma—mother Germain has told me. But why are you crying? You were not so unhappy when I went out this morning—and poor Françoise too!'

'It is only, my darling,' said the Countess, taking her little daughter upon her knee, 'it is only that the summons has come rather sooner than I expected. A

courier has arrived from Sarinet with letters from your uncle, desiring us to arrange for going there almost at once. He requires me to be there a few days before going on with him and the Marquise to Paris, for there is much to arrange. So, Edmée, my sweet, we must say good-bye to our dear home.'

It was hard, very hard, for Edmée to keep her resolution of doing nothing to add to her mother's distress. But she bravely drove back her tears, and throwing her arms round the Countess's neck, kissed her tenderly.

'Don't cry, dear little mother,' she said; 'Madame Germain has been speaking to me, and I am going to be very good. I am going to learn my lessons in Paris so well, so very well, that you will be quite surprised how clever I shall become, and then we shall all the sooner be able to return to our dear Valmont. When are we to start, dear mamma? You see, I am going to be very good. You need not be afraid to tell me all,'

and she sat up, valiantly blinking away the tears that *would* keep coming.

The Countess was greatly relieved.

'My good Marie,' she said—'Marie' was Madame Germain's first name—'it is very kind of her to have spoken so wisely to my little girl, and it will make all easier for me. Yes, dear, it will be soon, very soon—the day after to-morrow we have to leave for Sarinet.'

'The day after to-morrow!' exclaimed Edmée. 'Ah, yes, that is *very* soon.'

But no other words of complaint or distress escaped her.

And two days later saw the Countess and her daughter in the great big travelling-carriage, which had made but few journeys since the good Count's death, on their way to the Château de Sarinet. They were accompanied by Nanette and her uncle Ludovic, who had long been a sort of steward in the house, and could not make up his mind to see his lady go to Paris without him. Poor old Françoise would gladly have

gone too, but at her age it was out of the question, so she remained, with many tears, at Valmont, where she kept all in the most perfect order, so that, as she used to say, 'if my lady comes back at any moment, there will be nothing to do but light the fire.' And on the box, between the rather fat coachman and Ludovic, Pierre Germain managed to squeeze himself in. He had begged hard to accompany them all the way to Sarinet, but the Countess had judged it better not. Her regard for the boy and his parents was very sincere, and it would have pained her for him to have been treated at her brother's house like a common servant-boy, as, indeed, no servant-boy was ever treated at Valmont. So Pierre bade his dear ladies farewell at Machard, a little village where they stopped for the first night, whence he returned by himself to his home, for twenty or thirty miles on foot was nothing to the sturdy boy.

It was a sad farewell — sadder, my mother has often told me, than the actual circumstances really warranted, and many

times, on looking back to it, she has thought that some foreboding of the terrible events to come must have been on their spirits.

'Good-bye, my faithful little friend,' were the Countess's last words to poor Pierre, as he reverently kissed her hand; 'you are the true son of your good father and mother—I can wish no better thing for you, my boy, than that you may grow up to resemble them.'

'My lady,' said Pierre, the tears coursing down his face, 'I can never, never thank you for all your goodness to me, but my life—everything I possess—is yours and my little lady's. I would give my life for you if it would do you good.'

And the future showed that his words said no more than the truth. As for Edmée, she was sobbing too much to say farewell to her childhood's friend at all. And the last view he had of her face it was drowned in tears—the dear little face that had so seldom been aught but radiant and sunny.

She brightened up a little when they

started again. It was the first time in her remembrance that she had been so far from home, and novelty has always great charm for a child. Travelling was not in those days as it is now, when the public conveyances go to Paris at least twice a week, and one does not require to be a great lord to be able to visit distant places. And Edmée felt as if she had got quite to the other side of the world when, on the evening of the second day, the heavy travelling-carriage turned in at the gates of Sarinet and drew up before the great door, where her uncle, the Marquise, a small delicate-looking lady with a peevish expression, and a boy, whom, though he had grown taller, she knew again in an instant to be her cousin Edmond, were all waiting to receive them with proper ceremony.

Edmée turned as quickly as she could, with politeness, from the smiles of her uncle, which she somehow always fancied to be half mocking, and the careless greeting of her aunt, to the boy cousin, of whom she

had often thought with pity. She wondered if he had become better-tempered and less selfish. But the first glance was not reassuring. Except that he had grown taller he was very much the same as the cross, haughty little boy of two or three years ago.

'What do you look at me so for, my cousin?' he said; 'I have grown tall, have I not? You are taller too, though of course much smaller than I. But you are very pretty. I find you even prettier than before, only your hair is arranged in a very old-fashioned way. However, I am delighted you have come to live with us. I shall now have some one to amuse me, and for you too —you will find Paris, and even Sarinet, much livelier than Valmont.'

Edmée had grown redder and redder during this speech, but Edmond did not seem to observe it.

'And how is that stable-boy you used to be so fond of?' continued Edmond. The children were a little apart from the elders of the group by this time, so, fortunately

perhaps for future harmony, no one overheard when the girl flashed round upon her cousin.

'Edmond de Sarinet,' she said with a dignity that was comical and yet touching, 'I warn you now, once for all, that I will only be your friend—I will only play with you and be kind to you—on condition of your never daring to say one word against my dear home or my dear friends. And this, sir, it is just as well you should understand from the beginning,' and then, overcome by all she had gone through in the last few days, she flew to her mother, and hiding her face in her arms burst into tears.

'What a little savage!' said the Marquise in a low voice to her husband. But the boy Edmond looked sorry.

CHAPTER VII

On a fine summer evening about two years after the sad day that had seen the departure of Edmée and her mother from their beloved home, Madame Germain, with her husband and son, was sitting on the bench in front of their cottage—the cottage which is at present, at the time I am writing, inhabited by Mathurine Le Blanc and her sons, standing, as I think I have already said, some short way out of the village—enjoying a little rest after the labour of the day. Not that they were altogether idle. The mother was of course knitting, the father smoking his pipe, if that can be considered an occupation, and the son was holding an open letter in his hand, from which he had just been reading aloud.

'Yes,' he said, 'in a few days from now we may certainly expect her. She was to leave the next week, my lady says, and that is a fortnight ago.'

'Old Ludovic was to bring her a part of the way, was he not?' said Germain, taking his pipe out of his mouth; 'I wish he had been coming all the way. I should have liked a talk about many things with the good old man.'

'Ah yes,' agreed his wife, 'and so should I. But think of the long journey, Germain, and he is getting very old.'

'Besides, he would never have agreed to leave my lady and her daughter for so long,' said Pierre. 'Think — now that Nanette has left them, old Ludovic is the only one of their own people about them! Oh, how I wish my lady would make up her mind to come home!'

'Perhaps she cannot—she hints as much,' said Madame Germain. 'You know the Marquis is the dear child's guardian by law, and he is an obstinate man once he takes a

thing in his head. But we shall hear more from Nanette — more, perhaps, than the Countess likes to write; letters are risky things, to my way of thinking.'

'And these are ticklish times,' said father Germain. He was a man of few words, and therefore what he did say carried the more weight.

'Yes, father, you are right,' said Pierre, and unconsciously he dropped his voice and spoke in a lower key. 'Our good curé was telling me some strange things to-day. The bad feeling is spreading fast. There was a château fired last week not very far from Sarinet. To be sure it was put out and no lives lost; but there was a good deal of destruction done, and it shows that it is coming nearer.'

'But here at Valmont,' said his mother, always slow to believe ill, 'I could *never* be afraid. Think how steady and industrious a set our people are—how loyal and faithful they have always shown themselves; and with good reason, for have they not ever been

treated most generously and kindly by our masters?'

'Ah yes,' said Germain, 'but it is not always the majority that carries the day. Here, as everywhere, there are *some* idle and discontented and turbulent spirits—enough to give trouble if they united with others. And I am assured that in no case is it the country people themselves that *start* the thing. Poor creatures! they are mostly too ground-down and wretched to start anything. But they are ready to follow, though not to lead, and the fire of revolt, once lighted by the secret emissaries sent for the purpose from Paris, soon spreads. Alas, I see not what is before us all—here even in our quiet, happy Valmont!'

Pierre, who had listened eagerly to his father's words, was on the point of replying when he suddenly started. They had been talking so earnestly that they had not heard footsteps coming up the few yards of lane which led from the village main street, till the newcomer was close to them, and Pierre,

recovering from his first surprise, touched his mother on the shoulder.

'Some one is here, mother,' he said, as Madame Germain looked up from her knitting. 'Can it be—yes, I think it must be—Nanette?'

'Yes, indeed,' said the young woman, holding out her hand with a smile. 'I am not surely so changed as you, Monsieur Pierre. Had I seen you anywhere else I would not have known you, so tall as you have grown. And you, Monsieur and Madame, of course you are not changed at all; you do not look a day older.'

'Life passes quietly here, my good Nanette,' said the forester. 'We do not wear ourselves out with wishing to be everything that we are not, as some do.'

'Ah no—you are wise,' said the girl. 'And I—I cannot tell you how happy I am to be at home again. Even,' she added with a slight blush, 'even if I were not going to be married'—for it was to fulfil an engagement made before she had gone to Paris that

Nanette had returned—'it is so good to feel safe in one's own country.'

'Safe,' repeated Madame Germain; 'but surely you were not *afraid* in Paris?'

'I don't know,' said Nanette evasively, and yet with a half glance round as if she feared her words might be overheard. 'I don't like Paris. It is not a place for good, simple people. All these new ideas!—ah, don't let us talk of all that. I have so much to tell you of our dear ladies; Paris or no Paris, it has been a terrible grief to me to leave them,' and her pretty bright eyes filled with tears.

'We were just talking of them when you came up,' said Madame Germain, 'and wondering when we should see you. Sit down, my child; in our surprise at seeing you we are forgetting politeness, and you must be tired with your long journey.'

'When did you arrive?'

'Only last night,' said Nanette. 'But I am not tired now. Yesterday was very pleasant; father drove the light cart over to Machard to meet me. The two days before

in the diligence—ah, that was tiring. My great-uncle Ludovic came the first day's journey with me, by my lady's wish ; you see what care she takes of me—of every one about her.'

'As ever—our dear lady!' said Madame Germain.

'Ah, if there were more like her!' said Nanette. 'Things and feelings would not be what they are coming to, if there had been more like her. The Marquise now—for all she looks so tiny and delicate—ah! she has a hard and cruel heart—or no heart at all. She is a fit wife for her husband. And how they are hated! Worse than ever, I believe.'

'By those about them in Paris, do you mean?' said the father Germain. 'At Sarinet he is now almost a stranger. All these years, I think, he has never been back again.'

'And do you not know why?' said Nanette. ''Tis said he dare not—and yet at worst he is a *brave* man. Perhaps after all he has some conscience left, and shrinks

from seeing the utter wretchedness he has caused. We passed through many villages on our way, but in none did I see more hideous misery than at Sarinet. My lord is always short of money now—he spends so much in every way—and they do say that he and the Marquise too, lose great sums at play. And when the money runs dry it is always the same thing. "Get it out of those lazy hounds of mine at Sarinet," writes my lord to his bailiff, and then the screw is put on again, ever tighter and tighter. Ah, it is horrible!' and Nanette shuddered.

Germain looked up at her in surprise. She had changed. It was not like the simple, light-hearted girl of three years ago to speak so forcibly, or to feel things so deeply.

'How have you heard so much, my girl?' he said.

'In Paris one learns much,' said Nanette. 'Much ill I might have learnt had my lady not taken care of me almost as if I had been her own sister. But the servants all talk,

and chatter, and complain, and threaten—and my lady, she too told me a great deal. She has almost no one to talk to there—no one who sees things as she does. And she told me to tell you—her good friends she always calls you—all I could. She wants you to understand how she is placed. There is nothing she longs for so much as to return to Valmont, and from month to month she is hoping to see her way to doing so. But the Marquis opposes it, and you know he is Mademoiselle's guardian by law, and my lady does not like to anger him ; his temper, too, grows worse and worse, though he is gentler to her than to any one else. But you can fancy it is not a home such as our dear ladies can be happy in. And at times I can see that the Countess is really afraid. There is talk of dark and wild things. There have been meetings of the people where dreadful threats have been uttered against the king and queen, the clergy and the nobles—against every one in high position, and sometimes the police and the soldiers

even, could scarce disperse them. Many think the people once roused will not be quieted again. And of all the great rich nobles who have oppressed the poor and made themselves hated, none, or few at least, are more hated than the Marquis.'

'And our dear Countess is his sister!' exclaimed Madame Germain, over whose cheerful face had crept a cloud of foreboding.

'I wonder you could bear to leave them,' said Pierre, almost indignantly; but Nanette did not resent his tone. She turned to him, her eyes full of tears.

'I did my utmost to stay,' she replied, 'but my lady would not hear of it. Albert had waited so long, she said; it was not right to put him off still, though for my part I could have found it in my heart to put him off altogether. I saw that the idea worried her. Then, too, I think she was glad for me to come home to talk to you—to explain things a little. She dare not write very much—letters are never very safe. And

she is so lonely—in the midst of all that racket—she and Mademoiselle Edmée.'

'Have they no friends they care for?' asked Pierre.

'Few—very few. And already of those some have left the country. Yes, indeed,' said Nanette, 'it is not yet much known, but several of the wiser and far-seeing among the nobility have gone to Switzerland—some to Holland, and to England, on pretence of travelling, but it is known they do not intend to return till they see how things turn out.'

'It seems almost cowardly,' said Pierre.

'Yes,' said Nanette, 'so my lady said. But I do not know that it is so. What can the few do in such a state of things? And they have their children to think of.'

'It is true. But *our* lady need not go so far. In no foreign country could she be so safe as here in her own Valmont.'

'It seems so at present,' said the girl with a sigh. 'But all the talk I have heard frightens and confuses me. Once the fire is

lighted, who can say? Still I wish with all my heart, and so does my old uncle Ludovic, that the ladies were here, and not in Paris. And you may be sure the Countess will seize the first chance of returning. I was to tell you this—and to say that she will count on you, father Germain, and on Pierre, to help them if occasion arises.'

'She will not be disappointed,' said Germain, and Pierre eagerly agreed with him.

'But all the same,' continued his father, 'I confess I do not see the great difficulty about their getting away; the Marquis would never *force* his sister to stay?'

'No,' said Nanette, 'but there *are* difficulties. I think my lord has power over Mademoiselle Edmée's money, and if the Countess broke off with him she might not know what he did with it. It is something like that, but my lady never fully explained to me. I only hope——' But then Nanette hesitated.

'What, my girl?' said Madame Germain.

'Perhaps it is wrong of me to think so,

but I have sometimes wondered if my dear little lady's money is safe. The Marquis is always short of money now, and for my part I think some of these fine gentlemen have strange notions of honesty.'

'Not among themselves,' said Germain. 'They may rob the poor, but they would think it dishonour to rob each other. However, I can understand how you mean, Nanette,' and he too gave a deep sigh. Ruin to their young mistress would not be prosperity for Valmont.

'And who is taking your place now, my good Nanette,' asked mother Germain. 'Is that girl whom Edmée disliked so—that Victorine—still with the Marquise?'

'Yes,' said Nanette. 'I cannot bear her. She is clever and cunning, and no one can please the Marquise as she does. She flatters her lady to her face, but behind her back she speaks worse than any of the servants. She is as false as she can be, and would be the first to turn on her masters—she wanted to attend to Mademoiselle when

she heard I was leaving, but our ladies do not like her. They live so simply—never going to parties or anything of that kind, for which, indeed, Mademoiselle is too young, and my lady too sad she says—that they need but little attendance. And there is a poor girl there—a Sarinet girl—whom my ladies have taken a fancy to. Marguerite Ribou is her name. She is a pretty, gentle girl, about my own age. I taught her what I could; perhaps with such kind mistresses she may get on,' said Nanette, with a slightly patronising tone.

'A Sarinet girl! I wonder to hear they have any one from Sarinet in the household,' said mother Germain.

'This girl is an orphan. Her only brother died some years ago. I think there was some ugly story about his death, though she never speaks of it,' said Nanette. 'I fancy he was cruelly treated, and that even the Marquis was somewhat ashamed, and the girl was offered a place at the château to save appearances.'

'I wonder she took it,' said mother Germain.

'She was starving probably,' said Nanette. 'Hunger is a hard master. But I doubt if her feelings to the family are much better than those of Victorine, only Marguerite says nothing.'

Suddenly Pierre broke in.

'Marguerite Ribou—I remember her!' he exclaimed. 'Mother, you have not forgotten my telling you of what I saw at Sarinet?—a young man all fainting and bleeding, and they were *driving* him—the brutes! And his sister was called Marguerite. Yes, indeed! how could she go to serve them?'

'It must have been as I say—she had no choice,' answered Nanette. 'And now I think she will stay out of affection for our ladies, who have been kind to her from the first. But for them, in that bad Paris, what would have become of her, heaven only knows. I must be going, my good friends. I promised mother not to be long—my first day at home! But I shall see you often, for

I shall not be more quickly tired of talking of our ladies than you will be of hearing. The Countess has such trust in you; she even told me to say to you——' But here again poor Nanette stopped, and the tears filled her eyes. 'There is no hurry,' she said; 'I will tell you another time.'

'Nay, my dear,' said mother Germain, 'I would like to hear it now, while her words are fresh in your mind.'

'It was the day I left. She was very sad; I think she was sorry for me to go, and perhaps there were other causes. "Tell my dear Germains," she said, "that if anything happens to me—one knows not what it might be in these times that are threatening us—there is no one—I have no friends I trust as I do them, no one to whom I could better confide my child. Even little Pierre"—my lady does not know how tall you are now, Monsieur Pierre,' said Nanette, with a smile —"Pierre, I believe, would give his life for Edmée," she said.'

'And she said true,' said Pierre, his

face glowing. 'Thank you, Mademoiselle Nanette, for telling me her very words.'

Then at last the girl left them, after reminding them all, Pierre included, that she counted upon them as guests at her wedding the following week.

'She is a good girl,' said Madame Germain, when Nanette had gone; 'but that she always was. She comes of a good stock. Old Ludovic is as faithful a servant as any one could possibly desire. Nanette has improved wonderfully. I used not to think her so intelligent and quick of perception.'

'It is the society of the Countess that has improved and educated her,' said father Germain, between the puffs of smoke from his pipe, which he was again enjoying—with, however, a grave, almost uneasy, expression on his face.

He said nothing, however, till that evening, when alone with his wife, for he was a man who well considered not only his words, but the best time at which to utter them.

'I like not the look of things—over

there,' he said, with a jerk of his thumb in the direction where Paris was supposed to lie. 'I think the girl Nanette is right in her fears. I wish my lady were back among us.'

'So indeed do I,' said Madame Germain.

'There is no use saying much about it before the boy,' resumed her husband. 'He thinks enough of it already. Much more and he would be setting off to Paris to rescue them before one clearly sees the danger.'

'But we would not stop him,' said his wife.

'Not if it were to render them real service. I would go myself. Thou knowest that, wife! But we must wait awhile till we see. No use getting ourselves into trouble without doing them any good.'

'True,' said Pierre's mother, for she had the greatest respect for her husband's opinion.

'At the same time do not mistake me,' he said. 'I am more than ready to do any service the Countess could desire. It may be that what she says is the fact—that she

has no friends she can so depend on as upon us. We are plain and simple folk, but we are faithful, and we are grateful, and the time may come for us to show it.'

'God grant we may see how to act wisely should it be so,' said his wife fervently. 'And God spare my lady and her child for a peaceful life in their own home.'

'Amen,' said the forester, no less devoutly than his good wife.

Nanette's wedding-day arrived, and the ceremony was celebrated with the usual gaieties. According to a special message from Edmée, Pierre, who was a better scribe than either his father or mother, wrote a full account of it to the Countess in Paris. He was very important over this letter, which took him quite a week to complete to his satisfaction, and then he took it to Nanette, now young Madame Delmar, for her approval, which was heartily bestowed.

'Ah, how pleased Mademoiselle will be to get it,' she said. 'I can fancy her reading it aloud to her dear mother, and possibly, if

he has been "very good," as Mademoiselle calls it, Monsieur Edmond will be allowed to hear it.'

Pierre's face darkened.

'That fellow!' he exclaimed, and he made a movement as if he would tear the paper. 'I won't have him mocking at my letter, Nanette.'

The young woman looked at him with surprise.

'No fear,' she said. 'You don't think our young lady would allow him or any one to mock at anything to do with her dear Valmont. Besides, poor Monsieur Edmond is not likely to do so. He is much the best of them, and he is so ill; they say he cannot live long. I think it is partly pity for him that keeps our ladies there. I was telling your good mother about him the other day, but you were not there, I remember.'

Pierre looked a little ashamed of his ebullition.

'I am sorry,' he said. 'I did not know.

I thought of him as when I saw him five years ago.'

'Ah yes,' said Nanette; 'but since then he is much changed. And he worships the very ground our young lady stands on. No wonder! what *would* he have been but for her and her mother? For neither his father nor mother can bear the sight of him.'

'Poor fellow!' said Pierre. 'Then *he* cannot be much of a protector to our ladies in case of need.'

'No indeed,' said Madame Delmar. And from that moment Pierre only thought of his childish enemy with profound pity.

CHAPTER VIII

As a rule, news, even of great importance, travelled very slowly in those days. But not long after the return of Nanette there came to Valmont, as to even far remoter corners of France, with a rush like that of a mighty wind, tidings of the first tremendous outburst of the great storm—the assault and taking of the prison of the Bastille by the infuriated mob. My mother well remembers that day in Paris. The terror which spread through all classes—the strange stories which were afloat about the wretched prisoners released from the dungeons, where some of them had been confined till they had forgotten not only the crime—imaginary in many cases—for which they had been punished, but even their own names and

histories! The destruction of the terrible Bastille can never be regretted, but it was accompanied by dreadful deeds. The murder of the governor and other officers who were but doing their duty; for the people, maddened by hunger as well as by their many wrongs, did not stop to consider which were the guilty and which the innocent. I have said to my mother that from this point I wish she would take this narrative into her own hands. It seems to me that as an eye-witness—for in this year, 1789, she was an intelligent girl of nearly thirteen—she could describe with much more force and vividness many of the scenes which followed. But she begs me to continue as I have begun. The story concerns my father quite as much as herself, she says, and she wishes it to be written as much from his recollections, which he has often related to me, as from her own. So I must do my best, sadly imperfect though I feel it to be.

The taking of the Bastille was the

signal for outrages through many parts of the country. Châteaux were burnt, convents sacked and destroyed, many even among the superior farmer class, who had had nothing to do with the government or the oppression of the poor, whose only crime was that through their industry and economy they had grown richer than their neighbours, suffered as well as their betters. In Paris itself many of the most conspicuous among the nobility were dragged by the mob from their houses and put to death in a horrible way, by being hanged on the street lamps. These I have always thought much more to be pitied than those later sufferers who perished by the famous guillotine; for this first manner of death united insult to barbarity.

How it came to pass that my great-uncle, the Marquis de Sarinet, was not among those on whom this first fury was wreaked, my mother has often felt at a loss to explain. It may have been that he had never mixed himself up much with affairs of state—for

he was selfish even in this, disliking everything which gave him trouble — and that thus his name was not one of the best known. But his punishment had already begun, for the following winter saw the complete destruction by fire, after it had been robbed of everything of value, of the beautiful old Château de Sarinet.

News of this was not long in reaching Valmont.

All through these months many a faithful heart there had ached with anxiety for their Countess and her child. But the disordered state of things was having everywhere a bad effect. Quiet and peaceable folk began to be frightened. Many dared not express any interest in or sympathy with those whose turn it was now to be unjustly and cruelly treated. And among the loose characters who now and then passed through or loitered about our quiet Valmont, there were not wanting some on the look-out for mischief-making.

'You speak of your lady as different

from others,' they would say. 'Let her show herself among you. If she cared for you she would be here, not amusing herself and wasting money on nonsense like all the fine ladies in Paris. It is that which has brought ruin on the country.'

And some listened to and believed these cunning words, so that already, had the Countess just then returned to Valmont, it is to be doubted if she would have been received with the old affection. There was some reason, too, for discontent. Collet, the Countess's bailiff, was the most discreet of men, devoted to the family's interest, but at the same time ready to carry out all his lady's endeavours to do good to her people. But it began to be noticed that he was more rigorous than formerly in exacting all the payments due, also that less money was forthcoming for charitable purposes, that the new year's gifts year by year were curtailed, and that Collet looked anxious and careworn.

'It is his bad conscience,' said some.

'He is going the way of all like him, enriching himself at our expense.'

'And the Countess is no doubt learning to throw about her money too. Trust fine ladies for that, however sweet-spoken they may be; and after all she is a Sarinet by birth,' said others.

But I need not say that in the Germains' cottage, and indeed in *most* of those in the village, nothing of this kind was believed, and once or twice, when words or hints to this effect were uttered before Pierre, his father had to check the hot indignation with which the lad would have met them, reminding him that by a dignified silence he was both showing more respect for their lady, and perhaps better serving her cause. He could speak with authority, for both he and the old curé were in poor Collet's confidence, and knew, what he thought it would be dishonourable to tell, that he strongly suspected that the Marquis, having exhausted his own resources, was now helping himself to the money of his sister and his

niece. And more than once both were of a mind to say out what they were almost sure of. 'If it goes much further we shall feel it our duty to do so,' said the curé to the bailiff. 'And even now I have almost made up my mind to write to the Countess, for I am certain she has no idea of what is being done, to some extent, in her name.'

But just as the good man was meditating a letter to Paris, one was received from there which altered the state of things, and for a long time brought some sunshine and hopefulness back to the hearts of the faithful friends of Edmée and her mother.

The Countess and her daughter were returning to Valmont.

'All then will be well,' said Madame Germain, wiping her eyes from which were running tears of joy. 'Things are evidently quieting down; otherwise our ladies would not think of undertaking the journey. Those poor, foolish people, no doubt, seeing how ready the king is to agree to everything

reasonable, will be satisfied at last, and all will be well.'

Nor was she the only one to hope, from time to time, during these early years of the Revolution, that the black cloud might after all disperse. For, thanks to the efforts of some unselfish and wise men, more than once a cordial understanding between the king, the government, and the people was almost arrived at, though always, alas! to be again broken through by treachery or mistakes or passionate outburst on one side or the other.

This was in the summer of 1790, about a year after the taking of the Bastille. All through the autumn days that followed, the Germain family and others waited eagerly for further news from Paris. At last came again a few hurried words to Madame Germain from the Countess, referring to other letters sent by the post which had never been received at Valmont. She had found it impossible, she said, to carry out her plan of returning home that last summer. The Marquis had

opposed it; he was so sure that things were calming down, and he objected to any member of his family leaving Paris. 'So again,' wrote the poor lady, 'Edmée and I must take patience. But surely *next* summer, the fourth since our absence, will see us in our own dear home.'

Next summer! Preceded by a severe winter, which saw sufferings such as Valmont had never known before—for the demands on Collet for money became more and more peremptory, and though the curé and Germain had written to the Countess a full account of the state of things, no notice had been taken of it, and they began to fear she had never received their letter—'next summer' brought no better state of things. The king and his family were now, to all intents and purposes, prisoners in the hands of their people; the few wiser and cooler-headed men in the government were overruled; great numbers of the better classes had left their unhappy country; of those whom obstinacy, in some cases poverty,

caused to remain, till too late to get away, the fate became daily more uncertain. And among these there was every reason to fear were Edmée de Valmont and her mother!

'If they had left the country, I feel sure they would have found some means of letting us know,' said Madame Germain, shaking her head, for the long anxiety and uncertainty had lessened her hopefulness. And just as her husband and son, after discussing for perhaps the hundredth time this sad state of things, had arrived at the conclusion that *something* must be done, *some* step they must and would take, there came again suddenly, and in an unexpected way, news of the two so dear to them.

It came in the shape of a very feeble and very old man, who, looking more dead than alive, dragged himself one evening, late in the month of September, in the year I have now reached in my narrative, that of 1792, to the door of the forester's cottage, and there, half-fainting on the threshold,

asked in a broken voice for Germain or his wife. They did not know him in the least—how could they, in this wretched, dust-and-mud-covered old beggar, whose white beard hung neglectedly, whose feet were almost shoeless, whose poor old hands trembled with nervous weakness, have recognised the carefully attired, respectable, nay stately Ludovic, who had driven away on the box of the travelling-chariot, so proud to follow his ladies to the end of the world had they bidden him? His devotion had cost him dear, poor old man, and as he feebly murmured, 'Don't you know me—your old friend Ludovic?' mother Germain burst into tears—tears of pity for him, of terror for those he had come from.

They at once did their best for him. It would have been cruel to question him till he had regained a little strength, and indeed useless. Now that he had reached the end of his journey, his forces seemed altogether to collapse, and for some hours they feared he would die without having told them

anything. But food and wine carefully administered, and a refreshing sleep into which he fell, did wonders for him, for notwithstanding his age, he had been till lately a vigorous and healthy man; and by the evening he woke up greatly revived, and eager to explain everything, and by degrees his kind hosts heard all, which perhaps it is well to give as far as possible in his own words—for the events he related have often been told me both by my mother who had seen them herself, and by my father who heard them at the moment from Ludovic's own lips.

'I never thought I should reach here alive,' began the old man. 'The last few days have been terribly hard. From some distance on the other side of Machard I have come on foot. But few conveyances are on the road—no longer a chance of meeting with those of some of the great lords whose attendants, had they known who I was, would have given me a lift—no, the days of such travelling are over indeed; and

in the few public coaches I met I could not have had a place, for I had not a sou! She gave me all she had—our dear lady—but it was very little, and there was no time to sell the jewels she had with her. Since four or five days I have scarcely tasted any food, though once or twice kind souls took pity on me. The first part of the journey was easy enough. I travelled in the public conveyances, to save time; but though easy, I soon saw it was a risk. While I was decently dressed they looked at me more than once with suspicion—above all that my clothes, though they were shabby enough compared with those you used to know me in, in happier days, had the look of my position, and noblemen's servants are now often objects of suspicion. So I decided to make the rest of the way as best I could, getting a lift in a cart as long as my money lasted, and when my clothes became so shabby I daresay it was a safeguard. At all events here I am! God be thanked, if I could but think my dear ladies were also in safety!'

'But where are they?—what of them?' burst out Pierre, who had listened with compassion indeed, but not without a certain impatience, to the poor old man's somewhat rambling account of his own adventures.

'Softly, my boy,' said his mother in a low voice. 'Do not hurry him, let him tell all in his own way, otherwise he may grow confused.'

But Pierre's words had done no harm.

'Of course,' said Ludovic, 'that is where I should have begun, instead of wasting time over my own affairs, stupid old man that I am. But you must forgive me, my good friends. Old age is garrulous, and finds it difficult to keep to the point. Where was I?' and he looked round feebly.

'You were saying,' said Pierre, trying to restrain his impatience, 'how thankful you would be, were you assured that the Countess and her daughter were in safety like yourself; and I interrupted you entreating you to tell us where you believe them to be.'

'Where?' said Ludovic; 'in Paris. At

least, I fear it is unlikely that they will again have attempted to leave.'

'Attempted to leave it! Did they do so? and did they not succeed?' exclaimed the Germains together.

'Alas, no!' replied Ludovic, shaking his white head. 'That is how I come to be here alone. I will tell you all. You have heard, no doubt, the principal events of this sad time. My lady has been longing to return to Valmont almost ever since she left it, but the Marquis has always opposed it. Two years ago she at last gained his consent, and was on the point of starting, when some one put it into his head that it was undignified, and would have a bad effect for any member of his family to leave his house, and as my lady could get no money except from him, and as she was also unwilling to anger him, she again gave in. He is the most obstinate man—even now he will not believe that there is any danger for him or his. And my lady at last came to see that if she is to get away, it must be without his assistance. All these

weary months she has been waiting for an opportunity. At last, about three weeks ago, all seemed favourable. The Marquis was away for a day or two, with some of his friends, who, like him, have refused to take warning, and all arrangements had been made for my ladies and myself to start quietly. We were to travel in a small plain carriage, not likely to attract attention, which a friend of the Marquis's, less obstinate than he, and really concerned for the Countess and her daughter, had hired, with a driver he could trust. This gentleman—how I do not know—had procured the necessary papers, which described the Countess as my daughter, returning to the country for her health. I was described as a shopkeeper of Tours. Well, we started—oh, the joy of Mademoiselle Edmée! The only drawback was the poor boy Edmond, whom my lady dared not bring away, in face of his father's commands that he was to stay—she had already fought hard to get leave for him to accompany them when they *should* leave—and who was heart-

broken. At the last moment my lady got out of the carriage again to clasp him in her arms, and whisper some words of comfort; it caused a little delay; sometimes I have thought those three minutes might have saved us. It was not to be. I can hardly bear to tell you of our terrible disappointment. We had scarcely got the length of the street when we met the Marquis returning, in a furious temper at having found it impossible to get as far as the country-house, a few miles out of Paris, where he was to meet his friends. He was furious, and, perhaps for the first time, alarmed; for, my friends, do you know what had happened the night before? — it was that of the 2nd of September!' and Ludovic looked up hesitatingly. Germain bowed his head.

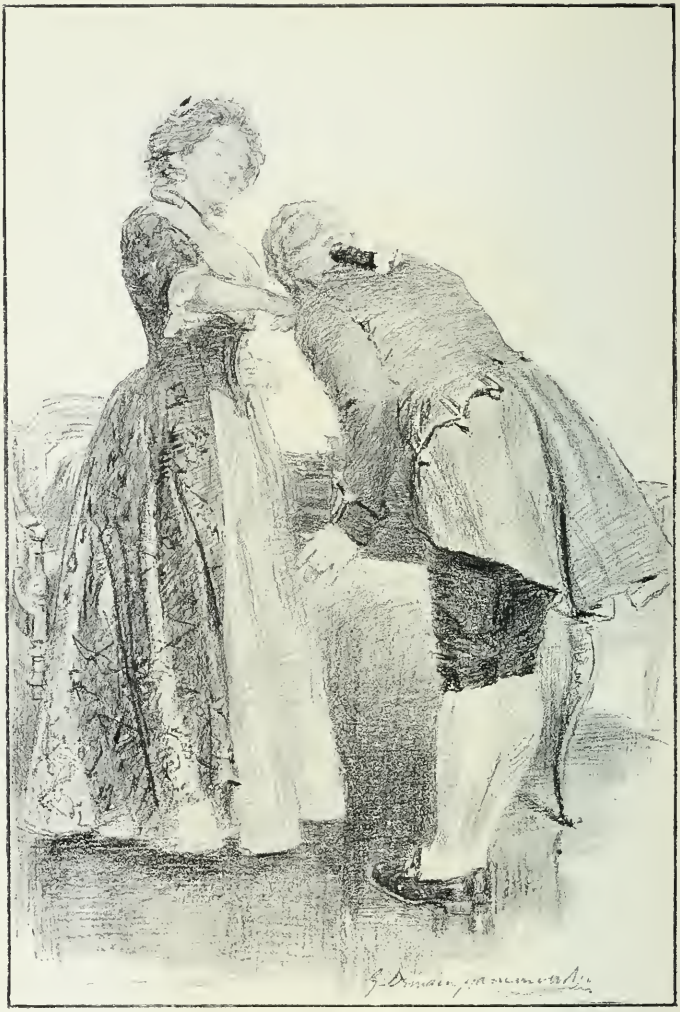
'I know,' he said, 'and so does Pierre. But we would not tell my poor wife. However, perhaps it is foolish,' and turning to Madame Germain, he rapidly related to her how on that dreadful night bands of wretches, armed with pikes and hatchets, had burst

open the doors of the prisons of Paris, and there slaughtered the unfortunate beings—all of the upper classes, and many innocent of any wrong—who had been seized and shut up as "suspected" of disloyalty to the new Government. For which bloody deed the wretches who had committed it were liberally rewarded by the authorities!'

'Yes,' continued Ludovic, 'for the first time the Marquis believed that the mob—the hounds and dogs he had despised — was a terrible enemy to have aroused, for the worst and lowest come to the front at such times. Perhaps he meant it for the best; but it was, I fear, an awful mistake. He turned the horses' heads, and insisted on his sister returning to his hotel. It was utterly impossible, he maintained, for her to attempt the journey thus alone and unprotected, save by an old fool, as he amiably called *me*. But what did I care? And there we were again —half an hour after our hopeful departure— powerless and heart-broken with disappointment. What the Countess heard of the

horrors I have told you I do not know—I dared not ask, for if she had *not* heard all, I would have been the last to tell her. But that evening, late, she sent for me privately, and gave me her instructions. She was as pale as death—she has changed terribly, and what wonder! Many a time I have thought our dear lady was not long for this world, and she thinks so, I believe, herself. "My good Ludovic," she said, "this has been a terrible disappointment. But for the moment I can attempt nothing else. It may be here, as my brother says, that in spite of all our precautions, in the present terribly excited state of the town, had we got as far as the barriers it would but have been to be stopped, and perhaps seized and imprisoned. He insists that it is better to wait a few days. But he has promised me at once to arrange for our all flying to Valmont—poor man, at Sarinet there is no longer a roof to shelter him and his!—and so, my good Ludovic, I must try to take courage and hope, though my mind misgives me sorely. For that my

poor brother has hitherto escaped seems to me scarcely short of a miracle, and I cannot feel confidence in his still doing so. Therefore, my faithful friend, I want *you* to set off at once for Valmont. It is for yourself less risk than staying here—not that you think of that, I know, and it is the best service you can at present render me and my child. Alone you will have, I am assured, little difficulty in making your way. Here is all the money I have been able to collect; to give you any of my jewels would but expose you to suspicion; take it and go. And, arrived at Valmont, seek at once my dear Germains. If by the end of this month they or you have no news of me—then I fear it will not mean good news—then I must trust to them to consider if in any way they can help me, or still more my child. Should my brother be taken, I have a plan in my head for concealing ourselves here in Paris till we can venture to try to escape. And Germain is a shrewd and clever man. I fancy there would be no risk for *him* in coming to Paris,



'And then she held out her hand; I kissed it, in weeping.'

and if he knows we are in danger, I believe nothing would keep him from attempting it. With his help and strong arm, we might manage a safe disguise. Should we succeed, as my brother hopes, in all leaving Paris together, I shall find means of letting you know at Valmont. Should we fail I shall still hope to conceal myself and Edmée, though at present I cannot make any detailed plan. One thing I may tell you"—and here my lady lowered her voice—"the *only* person I trust here is Marguerite Ribou. And now, my good Ludovic, the sooner you leave the better. The Marquis has no idea at present of my attempting anything. It will be time enough for me to tell him you are gone when you are beyond recall." And then,' continued Ludovic, 'she held out her hand; I kissed it, in weeping you may be sure, and I obeyed her. That night I spent in a little tavern near the barriers, and I got out the next morning without difficulty. And here—here at last, after all my troubles, I am! I have told you, I think, my lady's exact

words. It is now—is it not?—near the end of September?'

'The twentieth,' replied Pierre.

'And you have no news?'

'Not a word,' said Germain.

'Then,' said old Ludovic, 'it is for you to decide what can be done. A few days still—a few days perhaps we can wait. It will give me time to recover my old wits a little, if it brings no news from our poor ladies.'

CHAPTER IX

Long after poor old Ludovic was in bed and asleep that night, the Germains sat up talking over all he had told them.

'To-morrow will be the twenty-first of September,' said old Germain thoughtfully; 'that makes nine days more to wait——'

'But *should* we wait, father?' exclaimed Pierre. 'I feel so certain no news will come, and every day, every hour, it is so much time lost—can we not set off at once? Father, mother, let *me* go! I am so young and strong—fatigue is nothing to me, and father is not so strong as he was,' which was true, for rheumatism, that sad enemy of those whose duties force them to be out in all weather, had already more than once, for weeks at a time, crippled the forester's active limbs.

The father and mother looked at each other. True, they had said they would not grudge their boy in the service they had all their lives been devoted to, and the risk they did not think so great for him as it perhaps really was. But when it came to the point of his setting off on the long journey—so uncertain how to proceed, so young and inexperienced as he was?

'No, my son,' said Germain. 'It is right that I should go myself. I am an ignorant man—less taught than you—but I have the training of age, and have learnt to keep cool and quiet when your fiery young tongue would be getting you into trouble. No, stay you here and take care of your mother, and I will go where it is my duty to go. To-morrow we will talk over about when I should start. I should like to hear what Nanette Delmar thinks about it,' and with these words he rose from his chair, but stiffly and with difficulty; his wife and Pierre both noticed it more than heretofore. He was not the man he had been.

'Sitting so long cramps one—and the fire is out too,' he said.

But his wife looked concerned.

'These damp days in the woods are bringing the rheumatism out again, I fear,' she said sadly; 'but I must not murmur; I have had almost too happy a life, even compared with my dear lady. No, I would grudge nothing for *her*.'

Pierre kissed her—more affectionately even than usual, as he bade her good-night. Then he went up to his own little room, his mother thought, to go to bed and sleep as usual.

But early the next morning—very early, while the autumn haze was still over the woods and the hoar-frost on the fields, there came a soft tap to young Madame Delmar's door. Nanette was up already, for her husband was working just now at some distance, and she had to get his soup ready betimes, and so, as he had half hoped, Pierre Germain found her alone.

He quickly explained his errand. He

had come to charge her with the duty of telling his parents that he had gone.

'They must not think me disobedient,' he said. 'I feel that I am right, and they too will come to see it. My father is not what he was; if he set off on the journey alone he might fall ill on the way and we never know it; or if I went with him I might be obliged to nurse him in some strange place, feeling miserable at nothing being done. No, Nanette, father is best at home. I am young and strong, and I have so often thought over this, and all that I might have to do, that it seems to me as if I had got it by heart. But you, Nanette, who have seen them so much more lately than we, you who have been in Paris and know all about where they live and everything, I want you to talk to me, and tell me all you can, so that I shall feel less confused when I get there.'

'Willingly,' said Nanette. And then after putting the rest of the soup they had had, on to the fire again to heat for Pierre, and fetching some bread and a couple of

eggs to beat up into an omelette—he must have a good breakfast before starting, she said—she sat down and told him all she could think of. She described the house, the rooms occupied by Edmée and her mother, the one or two among the servants she thought better of than the others, though the only one she seemed to have any real confidence in was Marguerite Ribou.

'And even she,' said Pierre, 'she has more reason to wish for revenge than any of them—are you sure we can trust her?'

'She has no ill-will, nothing but good feelings to our ladies,' said Nanette thoughtfully. 'But beyond that—as to the Sarinet family, certainly I am sure she is bitter past words. And that Victorine may have influenced her! Of her I need not tell you to beware.'

'Then if all is still as usual with them when I get there,' said Pierre, 'how should I proceed? It would not be wise to say I came from Valmont to see the Countess.'

'No,' said Nanette, 'for if the Marquis

were still there he might hear of it, and he would suspect his sister was again making some plan without telling him, which he would only oppose—he is so obstinate. No, I think you had better ask for Marguerite, and judge for yourself. But, Pierre, I have faint hopes,' and Nanette's face grew very grave, 'very small hope that you will find things as they were in the Rue de Lille. Had they still been so, I feel sure the Countess would have written—and, indeed, I do not think she would have remained there all this time without making some other effort to get away.'

'She may have written,' said Pierre; 'letters miscarry so in these days.'

'If she dared write I am sure she will have done so,' said Nanette, 'unless——' and the young woman shuddered. 'No, do not let us think the worst; only it is sometimes impossible not to remember all I heard there. But again, if the Countess is in disguise somewhere, you see she would not dare to write for fear her letter

might be traced, and would betray who she was.'

'Should I know Mademoiselle Edmée again if I saw her, do you think?' asked Pierre.

'Oh yes, I think so; she has grown tall, of course, but still she has the same face. Indeed, she is still very like the dear little picture. My lady never has it out of her sight. It hangs in her room in Paris just as it did here.'

'Many a time my mother and I have wished they had left it at the château,' said Pierre with a smile; 'it would have been some consolation.'

'Ah, yes; that I understand,' said Nanette.

But then Pierre started up.

'I must be off,' he said. 'I mean to get over a good piece of ground before the day is old.'

'But you are not going on foot? You have some money with you surely?' said Madame Delmar anxiously.

'Oh yes,' said Pierre; 'I have enough to pay my journey. I mean to get on as fast as I can till I am near Paris. Then, perhaps, it will be as well to go on foot. No one will pay any attention to a young fellow like me, and I daresay it is as well for me not to have much money with me. It might be stolen. The Countess is sure to have money; there is no fear on *that* score!'

Nanette hesitated.

'I don't know,' she said; 'there is no telling to what straits even she may be brought. See here, Pierre,' she added, going to a cupboard from which she took out a locked box; 'in here are some of my savings. Take what you can; it is my own money, and even if it were not, Albert would be the last to grudge it in such a case,' and she forced into the boy's hands a little packet containing a few gold coins. 'See here, a moment; I will stitch it into the lining of your coat, where no one would suspect it.'

Pierre did not resist.

'It is for them,' he said simply, 'and for them I thank you. At worst, Nanette, my father and mother would repay you. Tell them you gave it to me; it will make them less anxious about me. Try to see them soon—before noon, will you not? And tell them you agree with me that if anything is to be done it is best at once, and that it was best for my father to stay at home.'

'Yes,' said Nanette, 'I will say all. I think you are right, Pierre. Farewell, and God bless you, my friend!'

She stood at the door, watching him along the road as far as she could see, and then with a sigh re-entered her cottage.

'I wish he were safe back again, and our dear ladies with him,' she said to herself. 'Though even their absence would seem nothing now, were one sure they were in safety. I wish they were safe in some other country, however far away, and even if we could not see them for years. It is

too dreadful to think of what may happen to them—of what may have already happened. My sweet lady and the dear tender little Edmée. Ah! I must not think of it, or I shall unfit myself for everything. Albert must not tell me any more of the dreadful things he hears. Not till *they* are safe at least.'

I cannot tell very much of Pierre Germain's journey to Paris. He himself used to say he did not, in after years, recall it very clearly; later events and anxieties made it grow vague and cloudy. But nothing of very great importance occurred. As he had himself said, he was not a figure in any way conspicuous, or likely to draw much attention. A fine sturdy young fellow of seventeen or eighteen, his little bundle slung over his shoulder, making his way along the country roads, whistling as he went, or now and then mounted on the top of the public coach ready for a little conversation, or to give a helping hand with the horses if he were wanted—he had not

the appearance of a dangerous person. Nor would any one have suspected the intense anxiety he learned so well to hide, the burning eagerness to get to the end of his journey which possessed him. All the information he could pick up, without seeming too much interested in doing so, he tried to acquire. And the nearer he approached the capital the greater seemed the half-suppressed excitement, the stranger became the looks and tones of many of the people he came across; while all through his journey he met the sight of burnt and ruined châteaux, of convents deserted by their inmates and pillaged by the neighbouring townspeople or villagers, of farms where no longer the cheerful sounds of labour were to be heard—and everywhere misery and reckless disorder.

He had no difficulty in entering the great city.

In those days it was much easier to get into Paris than, once there, to get out again. The bundle which he carried was carelessly

glanced at by the official at the barriers, who asked him mockingly if he had come to make his fortune in Paris, taking him for a country lad attracted, like hundreds of others, by the accounts of the lawlessness and licence of the 'rule of the mob,' and Pierre laughed back a mocking reply. He did not yet, not till he had made his way through what seemed to him innumerable streets, dare to ask for the Rue de Lille, so fearful was he of attracting attention by seeming to have any errand about which he might be questioned. But at last, feeling hungry and tired, he ventured into a milk-shop, where a meek, rather frightened-looking woman, with a little child in her arms, was standing behind the counter.

'Madame,' he was beginning, but the woman quickly interrupted him: 'citizeness, you mean, boy,' she said. 'Whence do you come to use a word we never hear now?' and on his hastily begging her pardon, 'it is not for me; it matters nothing to me. It is for yourself, citizen,' she added. 'You

must watch your words, and indeed by your looks it were better for you to go back whence you came.'

Pierre felt startled. 'By my looks, citizeness,' he said. 'I look what I am—a country lad come to see Paris for the first time.'

'Better never have seen it, then,' said the woman earnestly. 'Go back to your home, if you have one, my boy, for you look honest and innocent,' but she spoke in a low voice, and glanced round her as if afraid of being overheard.

There was something in her face, in her very timidity, which inspired Pierre with confidence.

'I cannot go back,' he said, speaking also in a low voice. 'I have come for a purpose, but I am a complete stranger. Perhaps you can help me. Will you tell me the way to the Rue de Lille?'

The woman looked at him with regret.

'It is not far from here,' she said; 'but it

is a long street. What house do you want there?'

'The house—the hotel of the Marquis de Sarinet,' he replied, but low as he spoke the woman held up her hand with a warning gesture.

'Hush, hush!' she said, 'we know no such names. The citizen Sarinet,' she continued reflectively; 'no, I do not remember ever to have heard of such an one. But there are few houses now inhabited by their former owners in the Rue de Lille. You must ask there, but take care *how* you ask.'

'Once there, I can find the house, I am sure,' said Pierre; 'it has been so well described to me. If you will direct me to the street, that is enough. But first, can you give me a cup of milk? I have had nothing to eat or drink to-day.'

'You shall have some coffee and some bread,' said the woman. 'I always have it ready early in the morning, as I used to in quieter times. But my customers are less regular than then. Those who spend their

nights drinking in the taverns are not ready betimes. Keep out of such places, my boy, and take my advice—get back to your mother in the country as soon as you can.'

'I wish nothing better,' said Pierre; 'but first I must do what I have come for.'

'And then the good woman gave him his breakfast, for which he paid her well. 'Poor thing, it was not easy for those who stayed quietly at home to get on nowadays,' she said. Her husband had done no work for long. Where he got what he brought home, though only to waste it, she did not like to ask.

'It is all the same cry now,' she said, waxing bolder in her confidences, and glad to have some one to talk to. 'They won't work. What is the great republic for if they are to go on working, they say? And so they drink and quarrel, and many are half the time starving. One day they feast like princes, and the next they have nothing. Everything is for all, and all are equal, they say; but for my part, I think it is rather take

who can, and those who can't go without—no, no, we are a long way off the fine things they promise us yet.'

And she was so taken up with her own troubles that Pierre could not get from her any information as to how things had been going of late; whether many aristocrats had been seized, or whether many had fled. He only stopped her long list of grievances by saying he must go, and begging her to direct him. She did so, and then reverting to his own risk, she again begged him to be careful.

'Return if you can, and tell me how you get on. But do not talk more than you can help; above all, do not be persuaded to enter the taverns and take wine.'

'I never take wine,' said Pierre.

'The more risk then if you did. It would go to your head, and you might tell what is better untold. Good-morning, little citizen,' she called out after him in a louder and rougher tone than was natural to her, but which Pierre understood to be for the benefit

of a group of dissipated-looking men in blouses, who came sauntering along, their hands in their pockets, just at the moment.

He had no difficulty in finding his way to the Rue de Lille, nor, once there, in picking out, thanks to the exact landmarks Nanette had given him, the great wooden doors, or gates rather, enclosing the courtyard of the Hôtel de Sarinet. But even outside, in the street where he stood, he seemed to distinguish a deserted air about the place. At that early hour in the morning it would only have been natural for the doors to have been open, to have seen some sweeping or cleaning going on inside, and have heard the cheerful sounds of grooms brushing down their horses and rolling out the heavy carriages to be aired. But, on the contrary, there was no sound; all was appallingly silent, and the street itself seemed like a place of the dead. There was no one of whom he could have made inquiry, had he wished. So after an instant's hesitation Pierre lifted the heavy knocker attached to the little door leading

into the porter's lodge, at the side of the great one, and let it fall with a loud rap. Then he waited, but there was no response, and again he knocked, again and yet again, waxing bolder with increasing anxiety, but always in vain. And after what seemed to him a great length of time—in reality a quarter of an hour or so—spent in that dreary waiting, he had at last to make up his mind to the fact, there was no one there—the house was entirely deserted! His first feeling was one of the bitterest disappointment; he could have sat down on the rough bit of pavement before the doors and burst into tears! He had felt so sure of finding them. His nature, hopeful like his mother's, did not prepare him for obstacles, and all through his journey he had been picturing to himself his arrival just in the nick of time to relieve the Countess's anxiety, and arrange for safely escorting her and her daughter through every danger to Valmont! But with a few minutes' reflection came other feelings besides disappointment. Where were they?

A shudder ran through Pierre as he thought where but too probably they were; probably enough in one or other of the prisons, crowded with many as gentle, as high-bred and delicate as they; possibly—for even children of Edmée's age had not been spared—possibly no longer alive; those innocent heads might already have fallen under the cruel guillotine! And the boy felt sick with fear and horror. But still it was also possible that they had escaped. The Countess had foreseen the danger, and spoken of plans for safety. She might, it was even very likely that it was so, have carried them out, and be at this moment in hiding and disguise somewhere, near perhaps, in this great city of Paris!

Pierre's hope revived, but he looked up and down the deserted street in bewilderment. What could he do? whom could he ask? whither could he go? Just then a door on the opposite side opened cautiously, and a very dirty old woman poked out her head, looked this way and that, and then emerged with a bucketful of rubbish—cabbage-stalks,

egg-shells, and the like — which she emptied at the side of the gutter. She had not seen Pierre, who was somewhat in shadow, but he saw her, and darted forward.

'Good-morning, Mad — Citizeness,' he said quickly. 'Can you by chance tell me whose house that is opposite,' and he pointed to the door where he had been knocking. 'I was sent there, but it was a fool's errand, I think. No one will open.'

'No wonder!' said the hag, glancing at him suspiciously, but taking him for some countrified lad new to Paris, as indeed he was. 'No wonder!—there's no one there. Ah no, indeed, my lord the Marquis will never come lashing his horses out of his courtyard again,' and she gave a shrill laugh, 'nor will my fine lady the sour-faced Marquise come driving by in her chariot. We've got it to ourselves now! The grand hôtels are to be had for low rents in this street,' and she turned to go in again. But Pierre, in his eagerness, caught her by the skirt, dirty as it was.

'But where are the others then?' he said. 'There were other ladies there—not proud, or sour-faced either. You must have seen them if you lived here.'

'They're all gone, I tell you! Seen them? Yes, I daresay I did when I came every day for the rubbish those wasteful servants threw about. But it's our turn now—my son's and mine; we've got a fine hôtel all to ourselves, you see! Yes, they're all gone—here and there too. Madame Guillotine will tell you; she's the only Madame now!'

'Are they all *dead*?' said Pierre, in a voice he would hardly have known for his own, and which struck even the half-crazed old hag with a sort of pity.

'How should I know?' she said. 'And what does it matter? You're no aristocrat—why should you care? Stay! I heard tell—what was it then? They let the little lady go—that was it, I think. A nice little lady too, if she hadn't been one of the cursed breed. Many's the silver piece she's given

me as she passed. What was she to you that you should look so, boy? Foster-sister, maybe?'

Pierre nodded. He could not speak.

'They let her go—or she wasn't to be found. That was it. You'll find *her* maybe. They said Marguerite had a hand in it—do you know Marguerite? She lives with the Citizeness ——. Nay, I forget her name, but you may hear of her at the wine-shop at the corner of the Rue de Poitiers. She can tell you more than I, if she will,' and with these words the old woman hurried off more quickly than one could have thought she could move, and closed the door sharply in Pierre's face.

He walked slowly down the street, stunned and dazed by what he had heard. He had known it might be so; he had heard plenty of the horrors taking place in this very Paris where he stood. But it had not come home to him till now, and he felt as if he could not believe it. Even to think of the Marquis and his wife coming to such an

end—people he had known, whose faces he could remember—made him shiver; but for his own ladies! No, he could not believe it. 'No one—not the hardest-hearted—could look in the Countess's face and not see how gentle and good she was! And Mademoiselle Edmée, if it were true that they had taken her mother, she would have died of grief. No—I shall hope still!' he said.

CHAPTER X

Pierre had wandered down the whole length of the Rue de Lille before he quite came to himself, and then he started to see how far he had come. He had crossed two or three side streets without noticing their names.

'I may have passed the Rue de Poitiers,' he said to himself, 'where she said the wine-shop was,' and he looked about him anxiously. A few steps farther brought him out of the quiet Rue de Lille into a wider thoroughfare, the noise of which had already begun to reach him. Here there was life and movement enough—of a kind. Groups stood about talking, noisily laughing; some few passers-by, looking more serious, as if on their way to or from their daily work, were stopped and jeered at, and in some cases seemed to have difficulty in getting away.

'Stay five minutes—they are coming this way—hark! you can hear them already,' Pierre heard said in a group of blouses to one of their fellows, who evidently wanted to get off.

'My wife's ill,' he said, 'and the noise frightens her when she hears them pass. Let me go, good friends; I would stay, and gladly, but for that.'

They let him go with a muttered oath. The man's face was pale, and belied his words. Indeed, on many faces Pierre learnt to recognise the traces of misery and deadly fear, though these very ones sometimes laughed and shouted the loudest. But his attention was now caught by a strange sound coming nearer and nearer—a distant roar it had seemed at first, but by degrees it grew into the shouting and yelling, hardly to be called singing—though there was some tune and measure in it, and the time was marked by the beating of small drums, the clashing and clanging of tambourines—of a multitude of human voices.

'What is it?' said Pierre, half timidly, to a boy a year or two younger than himself, who stood near. 'Is it a procession?'

The boy looked at him curiously. But his face was thin and pale; he did not look as if he had come in for many of the good things to be had for the asking.

'A procession!' he repeated, but in a low voice; 'mind what you say.' For the word is associated in France with religious observances. 'It is the Carmagnole—the dance of rejoicing. Stay, you will see for yourself; you must be a newcomer never to have seen it before.'

Many and many a time in his after-life, as he has often told me, did Pierre Germain wish he had never seen that horrid sight at all. It used to haunt him, strong and practical as he was, like a hideous nightmare. There they came—a band of men and women, or beings that had been such, though looking more like demons. Some were half-naked, with scarfs and ribbons, generally of flaming red, flying from them; some in the most

absurd and grotesque costumes that could be imagined: the women with long hair streaming, the men daubed crimson with paint or what looked like worse, some brandishing sticks and clubs, some waving scarlet flags —all leaping and dancing with a sort of monotonous rhythm, sometimes closing in together, sometimes stretching out with joined hands in enormous wheels, all yelling and shouting, with yet a tune or refrain that went in time to their steps, and somehow seemed to make the whole more horrible.

'Are they mad?' said Pierre, leaning back against the wall with unutterable loathing. The pale-faced boy was still beside him, for to proceed on one's way till the hideous crowd had passed was impossible.

'Hush! hush!' said the boy in a tone of real terror. 'Mad? Yes, indeed they are—mad with blood! Oh, I would not have risked coming out had I known I would meet them again,' and he reeled as if he were going to faint. Pierre caught him by the arm; something in the boy's air

and tone seemed at variance with his shabby clothes.

'Can I do nothing for you?' said Pierre. 'You seem so weak. Will you take my arm?'

But the boy seemed better again, and as the crowd began to disperse a little he was evidently in an agony to be gone.

'No, no,' he said, 'I have not far to go. Take care of yourself,' he added, and in an instant he had slipped away.

Pierre stood for a moment, feeling almost as sick and faint as the poor boy he had pitied. Then, afraid of attracting notice, he crossed the street and went down the first quiet one he came to. Here, after a while, he passed some children playing about, whom he asked to direct him to the Rue de Poitiers. It happened to be very near, and in another moment he found himself again at a corner of the Rue de Lille. Here stood a wine-shop, sure enough. It must be here that Marguerite Ribou was to be heard of.

But his courage, or presence of mind

rather, had begun to fail him a little. He had met with such disappointment, and was confused and shocked by what he had seen and heard, and by the constant warnings to 'beware' of he scarcely knew what. It was evident that his countrified air and anxious face made him remarked, and though he had no fear for himself, he felt more than ever that all chance of finding and rescuing Edmée or her mother hung on him alone. He was faint and hungry too—he had had nothing for many hours but his cup of coffee and bread—and he felt as if even the fumes of the wine, for he distinguished several blouses drinking inside, would mount to his head and make him feel still more confused, and he hung about irresolutely, even while conscious that his doing so might attract attention. Happily for him, before any one inside had noticed him, a servant-maid with a basket on her arm came out of the shop and passed down the street. Pierre followed her quickly.

'Pardon,' said he, lifting his cap—a

vague idea had struck him that this perhaps might be the Marguerite he was in search of, but one glance at the girl's round rosy face told him he was wrong,—'is there anywhere near here I can get anything to eat at?'

'Follow me,' said the girl, who seemed a matter-of-fact person, 'there is an eating-house round the corner.'

'Do you live there?' said Pierre, glancing back to the wine-shop.

'To be sure. I am the servant.'

'Do you know any one called Marguerite, who comes there sometimes?'

The girl shook her head.

'She comes no more,' she said. 'She and the mistress, the Citizeness Victorine, had words one day, and since then she comes no more.'

'Do you know where she is now?'

Again the stolid young person shook her head.

'It is somewhere over by the church of Notre Dame—a good way from here. But

I cannot tell you where,' said the girl. 'It is possible that the Citizeness Victorine may know, and would tell you if she were in a good temper.'

But Pierre, feeling sure that the Victorine she spoke of was none other than his old enemy of the same name, was unutterably thankful to have avoided coming across her, so in his turn he shook his head.

'It would not be worth while to derange the Citizeness—a mere inquiry,' he said vaguely, and then having arrived within sight of the modest restaurant, he thanked the girl, and entering, asked for the food he was much in need of.

His spirits rose a little when he was no longer faint and hungry. He determined to go in the direction the girl had mentioned, with a vague hope of somehow or other coming upon some trace, for in his inexperience he did not realise the difficulty and improbability of doing so. He spent the whole of the day in wandering about, seeing and hearing many strange and startling things,

doing his utmost to hide his impressions, for fear of attracting notice. But when night fell, and he could wander about no more he took refuge in a little room he had managed to find in the house of a poor washerwoman, who let it to him cheaply, on the condition of his paying a week in advance, and then poor Pierre, completely disheartened, beginning to doubt if after all he had done right in coming off as he had done, threw himself upon the little bed and burst into tears.

The history of that day was very much the history of many that followed. At the wine-shop of the Rue de Poitiers they would not or could not direct him to Marguerite Ribou, and Pierre wandered about, glancing in every face he passed in the hopes of seeing some one who might help him in his quest, though rarely, very rarely, venturing to make any inquiry. He forced himself to frequent places that were abhorrent to him; many an hour he hung about the streets through which would, as he came to know, pass the fearful 'tumbrils,' as they were

called—the heavy waggons crowded every day with the victims for the guillotine. Never in after-life did he forget the faces he saw—on this ghastly journey to death; some strong in despair, some fainting and unconscious as if already dead, a few, but very few, shrieking wildly for mercy to their brutal keepers—others, many even, with looks of sweet resignation and noble courage, to whom the guillotine was indeed but the gate of Heaven. But among them all, never did he perceive the pale, beautiful features of the Countess of Valmont, nor, though youthful boys and girls, little children even, were often among the condemned, did he ever catch sight of Edmée's fair head and blue eyes, which he felt sure he would have known among a thousand. Some few times he forced himself to make one of the crowd in the dreadful Place de la République, where the guillotine stood; but he grew too sick with horror to repeat often his search there, feeling, too, how awful would have been his success! He learnt to know

all the principal prisons, and the doors at which came out both the condemned and the appallingly small number of the released. But in vain—always, always in vain, till his hope began to die out, and his sad and wistful eyes told their own tale, had any one cared to read it. His money, too, was running low; he saw no possibility of gaining any; he felt that his days in Paris were numbered, and that he must return to Valmont having failed. But for his poor father and mother, he felt that he would rather die than do so.

At last came the first ray of hope. One evening, in a sort of old curiosity shop, not far from the neighbourhood where he had been told to look for Marguerite Ribou, he fancied he caught sight, as he passed, of a picture resembling the well-remembered portrait of the baby Edmée. It was some little way back in the shop, and the owner was just closing for the night, so he could see no more. But with the first of the morning he was back again, waiting till the window

was opened and the contents exposed to view. It was a quiet street, and there were few people about. What were his feelings when, able at last to press his face against the glass and peer into the shop, he saw that his glance the night before had not deceived him! It was indeed the well-known portrait of his little lady. This time Pierre threw caution to the winds: he entered the shop boldly, and walking up to the picture, asked the old man behind the counter, just preparing to enjoy his early breakfast of a bowl of soup, if he could tell him from whence it had come. The shopman's first glance of suspicion—everybody in Paris looked at everybody else with suspicion, it seemed to simple Pierre—fell before the boy's earnest and straightforward manner.

'Yes,' he said, 'if you have any particular reason for wanting to know.'

'I have the best of reasons,' said Pierre. 'It belongs—it belonged to the friends I owe most to in the world, and if they were not in great trouble it would not be here.'

'You are right,' said the old man. 'Many people to whom trouble is new are having a sharp taste of it now. I do not take any part in these things. I live as I have always done, and for my business it is a good time just now. You would wonder at the objects of value I have bought for almost nothing. It is not my fault. I cannot give more. And it will only be afterwards that I shall reap my benefit; when things recover themselves I daresay many will be glad to buy back at a profit the things I have. I should be glad to do the owners a good turn if I can, so I label the things carefully, and when I cannot get the real name I distinguish them somehow.'

'And thus,' said Pierre, beside himself with impatience, 'you can tell me where this came from?'

'Yes,' said the old man, 'for you seem honest and trustworthy. It came from some people living in the first street round the corner there,' and he pointed through the window, 'the first street to the right. I do not

know their name, but they have been there some time, and are, no doubt, as you say, in great trouble. I have several things of theirs —I mark them all with the name of the street and the number.'

'What is it?' asked Pierre breathlessly.

'Nine — number nine,' said the man; and scarcely waiting to thank him, young Germain, in a bewilderment of feeling such as he had never known, rushed out of the shop and in the direction pointed out.

It was a poor place, and it was not till he had knocked at several doors, and repeated several times the description of what he wanted—a lady—a citizeness, he was obliged to say—with her young daughter, a young girl with fair hair and blue eyes, that he was at last directed to the right rooms. Up at the very top of the house they were—rooms that would be dreary even to those who had never known any better: what must they have been to the Countess and her child? Pierre's tremulous knock was twice repeated before it was responded to. Then the door was opened,

hesitatingly and unwillingly, by a boy. At first Pierre's heart sank with new disappointment; then, looking again, fresh perplexity seized him—it was the boy, though still paler and thinner, the same boy he had met in the crowd that first day in Paris. And as he stared at him a new idea struck him like a revelation.

'I am not mistaken,' he said suddenly; 'they must be here. You are—are you not? —you are Edmond de Sarinet?' though, strangely enough, through all his search, the remembrance of his childish enemy, the thought of him as perhaps with his aunt and cousin, had never before occurred to him.

The boy drew himself up haughtily; thin and miserable as he looked, there would have been something ludicrous in his manner had it not been so piteous.

"'And what if I am?' he was beginning, when he was suddenly pushed aside. A girl, as tall as he nearly, and far stronger and healthier in appearance, though her face was pale, and her eyes swollen with much crying,

her flaxen hair tossed back over her shoulders, as if she had not had the time or the heart to arrange it, came flying forward, and in another instant her arms were round Pierre's neck, her fair face pressed against his sturdy shoulders as he bent to meet her.

'Oh, Pierrot! my own good Pierrot!' she cried, though her voice shook with sobs, 'you have come at last. I knew your voice at once. Oh, Pierrot, pity your poor Edmée!—mamma is dying! But come, come,' she went on, dragging him forward before he had time to utter a word of the sorrow and sympathy which were choking him; 'she will know you still—she will speak to you. It will make the leaving me less hard; she has prayed so, that God has answered at last. Come, Pierre, and comfort her.'

And before he could take in that he had really found them, feeling as if he were dreaming, Pierre Germain was standing in a small and poorly furnished room, where the evident efforts to make it as comfortable as

possible but made its bareness more touching —standing beside a bed, on which, whiter than the pillows that supported her, lay his dearly loved lady, the sweet and gentle Countess of Valmont!

'That I should have found you *thus*!' were the first words he uttered, while the tears ran down his sunburnt cheeks. 'After my long search—why has it come too late?'

But the Countess checked his words. With the beautiful calm of the dying for whom death has no terrors, she smiled up into his face.

'Not too late,' she whispered; 'in time —just in time, say rather, my boy. I think God has let me live for this. I think I should have died some days ago but for a strange hope that you would come. You will take her home to your mother, Pierre; she will love my Edmée as her own child. I cannot see into the future—I am too tired to think. But she will be safe with you, safer than anywhere else. O God, I thank Thee!'

Her words were scarcely audible—she had to stop between every two or three. She did not seem surprised to see Pierre, nor did she ask why he did not come before. Her spirit was already on the wing, only, as it were, recalled, or held back, by her great mother-love. And not for Edmée alone. After a pause, during which Pierre, kneeling beside her, murmured, amidst his sobs, his most solemn promises to devote his life, his strength, his everything to the girl so soon to be orphan and alone—promises which seemed to increase the soft peace on the dying face—she glanced round as if seeking some one.

'Edmond, my poor Edmond!' she whispered; 'him too—you will be kind to him too, Pierre?'

'God helping me, I will,' said Pierre.

'Where are you, Edmond? Give me your hand,' she said.

The poor boy came from behind the thin curtain of the bed, where he had hidden.

'Take me with you, auntie—little aunt, who have been my only true mother!' he said,

in an agony of tears. 'No one will care for me now. I am not strong enough to protect Edmée as I fain would, and she will not want me. Oh, cannot you ask God to take me too — weak and useless that I am?'

Even in the extremity of her own grief Edmée's generous heart was touched. She drew Edmond round to where she and Pierre were kneeling, and threw her arm round his thin shoulders.

'*I* love you, my poor Edmond. I will always love you, and we will all take care of you.'

He yielded to her, but he said nothing. But the Countess caught what Edmée said, and smiled again.

'Thank God!' she said. They were her last words, and what could have shown her more fit for Heaven? Thanking God through all—through the dark and bitter days that had befallen, through sunshine and through storm—thanking Him now with her latest breath for the ray of comfort that

had come at the last, though so long deferred that hope had well-nigh fled.

She died that afternoon. All through the long sad hours of that strange day the three young creatures watched beside her, not knowing, in their inexperience, the exact moment at which the gentle spirit fled—not till the Sister of Charity, who, in disguise, like many others all through those awful months, still went about ministering to the sick and dying—not till Sister Angélique tapped softly at the door, and entering, saw in a moment the sad truth, did they understand that the mother and friend was no longer there—only the garment she had worn.

'I would have come sooner, but I was even more wanted elsewhere; there was nothing to be done here. The doctor saw her yesterday,' she said to Pierre, when it was explained to her who he was.

'And the kind priest,' sobbed Edmée; 'he will come again, dear Sister, will he not? No one knows he is a priest,' she said to

Pierre. 'He has to dress like a workman.'

Angélique stayed a while and did what she could. There was a little, a very little money remaining, and Pierre drew out the remains of his. Edmée had been obliged to sell everything they had brought away in their flight from the Rue de Lille. 'My portrait was the last to go,' she said, 'but my darling did not know it. And as it brought us *you*, Pierre, we must not regret it. Some day we may buy it back again,' and by degrees she related to him all the details of the last few weeks. How the Marquis and Marquise had been taken very soon after Ludovic had left, how but for a warning from Marguerite Ribou she, her mother, and Edmond would infallibly have perished as *they* did.

'They were not long in prison,' she said. 'Marguerite told us the day they were guillotined. My uncle died like a gentleman, and at the last the Marquise seemed to find courage too. They must have repented of

much in those last days, I think. See! this is what my poor uncle sent us secretly,' and she held out a soiled scrap of paper, on which were written the two words 'Forgive me!' 'Ah,' continued Edmée, who—such is the education of sorrow—at fourteen spoke like a woman, 'I cannot murmur that *she* is gone when I think of her gentle death, and what it might have been. Marguerite had not wished to save Edmond,' she went on after a pause. 'She is very angry, even now, whenever she sees him. I think her brain is a little gone. But she has been most faithful to *us*. It was that dreadful Victorine that caused it. She kept persuading my aunt there was no danger, and thus delayed their escaping till she had completed her own plans. She must have robbed them fearfully.'

Pierre let Edmée talk. She was too excited to remain quiet. He listened without saying much, though his mind was terribly full. How were they to accomplish the journey to Valmont? Penniless to

begin with, and almost afraid to spend money if they had had it! How could Edmée ever make the journey on foot, and almost worse, Edmond, of whom Pierre had never thought? His presence, too, made the risk greater, for, as his father's son, there must be many to hate him, and notwithstanding his pity for the boy, Pierre foresaw trouble. Edmond had scarcely spoken to him, and even through his misery there flashed out sparks of his old ill-feeling.

There came again a knock at the door.

'It must be our kind priest,' said Edmée.

Pierre started up joyfully. 'Let me speak to him,' he said. And in his heart he added, 'Here will be some one to give me counsel.'

CHAPTER XI

PIERRE opened the door, but in an instant he saw it was not the priest. A woman in dark clothing, her face half concealed by a veil or handkerchief of some kind, which she had muffled round her head, stood before him. She was coming forward as if to enter without speaking, when, glancing upwards, she perceived that he was not, as she had imagined, Edmond. She fell back startled, but instantly recovered herself.

'Who may you be, citizen?' she said, in a hard, cold tone, which had little gentleness in it, and then she added in a lower voice, 'mind you, if you are another aristocrat in disguise, come to take refuge here, I will have nothing to do with you. I have enough on my hands, and so have

they,' nodding towards the door where the poor dead lady was lying, 'in there.'

Pierre looked at her quietly.

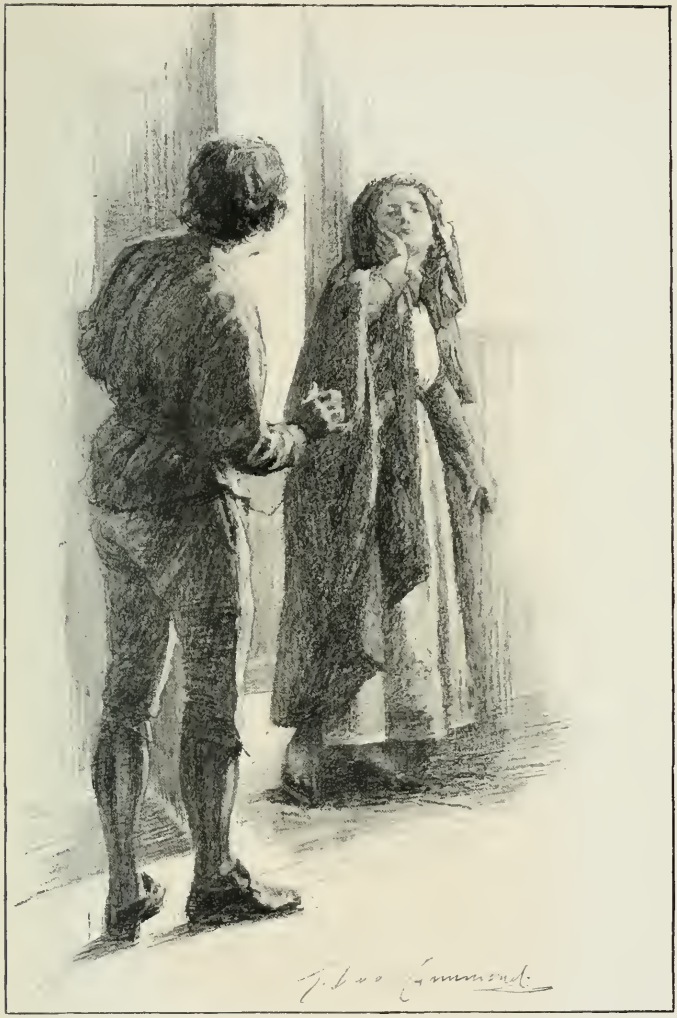
'I am Pierre Germain,' he said. 'I have seen you once before, Marguerite Ribou.'

The girl, or woman rather, for she had grown tall, and was finely proportioned, threw back her veil. Her beautiful dark face grew deathly pale, and she staggered back against the wall.

'Forgive me!' she said; 'I have never forgotten you, though there are times my poor brain aches with remembering,' and she passed her hand across her forehead with a gesture that reminded Pierre of what Edmée had said of her. 'All is wrong,' continued Marguerite; 'there is no right, no good anywhere! But I waste precious moments. It is well you have come, for it is only just in time—they must fly; well or ill, they must fly at once. Tell me, how is the Countess?'

'She is dead,' replied Pierre simply.

One or two large tears gathered in the



'I have seen you once before, Marguerite Ribou.'

girl's eyes and slowly rolled down her face. But all she said was, 'It is well.'

Then Pierre stepped back to let her pass in.

'You will see Mademoiselle?' he said.

Marguerite hesitated.

'It is as I said!' she exclaimed hurriedly. 'She must start at once—*at once*, I say—if she would not share the fate of her uncle and aunt!'

'How can we persuade her to leave *her* —the Countess!' said Pierre, in despair.

'Better leave her dead than dying,' said Marguerite; and though the words were almost coarse, the intense earnestness of the tone made them not seem so. Just then a step made both Pierre and the girl look round. It was Edmée. Pale almost as her dead mother, she came forward.

'I have heard,' she said. 'I opened the door to see who it was. Marguerite, I trust you—*she* did. Is it really as bad as you say? Is the danger so near?'

'Near!' repeated Marguerite; 'it is

here! I came to do what I could, though with but small hopes of seeing you. It is Victorine; she has not rested till she found where you were, and now it is only a question of a few hours.'

'I will be ready,' said Edmée, to the great surprise of both her hearers. 'When you tell me to go, Marguerite, I will go. I have no right to risk Pierre's life; he has risked it for me—that was his own doing. And I know he would not go without me. Besides, I promised—I promised my darling; she seemed to have known it would come so, and she made me promise to go, even if I could not stay to see her laid in the grave. Living, I could never have left her. Oh, Pierrot, it is hard!' she went on, turning to him, and clasping her hands, while the tears ran down her face again; 'must we already say we are glad she is dead?'

Pierre could not answer, but Marguerite did so for him.

'Yes, my poor child, it is so. You *must* say it and feel it.'

Her voice seemed to recall Edmée's thoughts.

'There is one thing,' she said, looking now at Marguerite. 'You understand — I will not go without Edmond.'

'Then,' said the girl, in a sudden burst of passion, 'you may stay, for all I will do to save you. Child, you are mad! But you, you, Pierre Germain, you should have influence with her. Tell her she is mad.'

'No, Marguerite,' said Pierre, 'we cannot desert him. If Edmée could be saved without my help, I would gladly stay with him and entreat her to go. But she cannot go alone. And I, too, promised to protect the poor boy.'

'Then you are both mad!' said Marguerite, and she burst away as she spoke. But Pierre was too quick for her. He caught her before she had reached the stair.

'Marguerite,' he said, 'you thanked me once for my pity, and the very little I was able to do for you in your sorrow. You said

you would never forget it. I too have never forgotten your wrongs and sorrows. I have no reason to risk danger for that boy's sake —I have no love for him. But I have promised—and besides, how cowardly would it be to desert a creature so weak and helpless! Marguerite, you will not fail us?—for your dead brother Louis's sake be generous, and return good for evil.'

A stifled groan from the girl when he named her brother was the only sound for a moment. Then she turned again.

'For *his* sake!—a strange revenge,' she muttered. Then she said aloud, though speaking softly—

'Be ready then—all three of you. In two hours I will be back. But you have made it much more difficult for me, and for yourselves,' and with these words she was gone.

Pierre hastened to tell Edmée that she had given in, and together they set to work to arrange the few, terribly few things belonging to the Countess and her daughter, so that they would be ready to carry away.

Edmond seemed dazed and stupid. His cousin had to pack for him too; he would scarcely speak, and seemed indifferent to everything. Pierre dared not leave Edmée alone, and yet he was anxious to go back to pay his poor landlady a little sum he owed her, and to collect his own little bundle. It was a dreadful afternoon. Every sound on the stairs made Edmée start and shiver with horror, and yet every time she glanced at the still, cold form on the bed, her heart seemed to burst with fresh agony at the thought of deserting all that was left her of her mother.

The thankfulness of both Pierre and the young girl was great when, an hour after Marguerite had left, Sister Angélique returned with the priest in disguise. They had already made arrangements for the burial of the Countess. It was to be in the night, so that in secret, with the help of one or two he could trust, the good priest would be able to read the service for the dead. He did not tell—and not till long afterwards did Edmée know—that for the necessary expense he had

parted with his watch, the last remains of his happier days! Pierre hurried to his lodgings, whence he returned only just in time, for Marguerite was already waiting. She had brought a gown of her own, which she had shortened for Edmée, and made Pierre dress Edmond in the suit he had in his bundle, replacing it by that which young de Sarinet had hitherto worn. He submitted, but in silence, and with no word of thanks. Pierre thought him merely dazed and stupid with sorrow, but Marguerite darted angry looks at him with her dark eyes.

'You will wish you had taken my advice about him before you get to the end of your journey,' she muttered to Pierre.

Then she gave them directions. They were to start at once, walking quietly through the town till they came to a little wine-shop in a street which she clearly described to them.

'There you must ask for the Citizeness Dupuis,' she said. 'She is a short, stout woman. She will say little to you, but you

may trust her. She will give you a good dinner in the room behind the shop, and there you must stay till I come. Pay no attention to anything you see or hear—be deaf and dumb. I will bring your things with me, and what you cannot carry away will be kept for you till I can send it to Valmont.'

In the same dry, hard manner she stood by while Edmée, in a passion of grief, threw herself on the bed where lay her mother, and kissed for the last time the soft white face already cold with the iciness of death. Sister Angélique had drawn Edmond aside, and was whispering good advice to him, which he seemed to receive more meekly than might have been expected; but even she, trained as she was to self-control through the most painful scenes, broke down when Edmée at last tore herself away from the Countess's room, and sobbed her farewell in the kind Sister's arms.

'Good-bye, my child. The good Father and I will do all we can—trust us. In more

peaceful days you may be able to visit her grave. God bless you, my sweet child, and take comfort in the thought that to-day's sorrow might have come in a more terrible form.'

'I know, I know,' said Edmée. 'I am ready now, Marguerite. Poor Marguerite!' she added, almost caressingly; 'how good you are! I want to be resigned, but you can understand how hard it is.'

But Pierre, who was standing close to her, heard the girl mutter under her breath, 'No, I understand nothing. I have no heart, no feelings any more, thank God.'

The boy shuddered, but intense pity softened his horror at her words. 'She knows not what she says,' he thought. 'Her actions show how good and generous a heart she had.'

Marguerite accompanied them only to the door, and then repeated her directions.

'Speak to each other in an ordinary way as you go along,' she said. 'You must hide your grief till there is no one to remark

you. Speak to her of Valmont, of country things, Pierre; it is best for you to speak with your country accent,' though, to tell the truth, he had but little, for in Touraine, as you know, the pronunciation, even of the peasants, is unusually good.

They reached the place indicated without difficulty, and on saying they were there to wait for the Citizeness Marguerite, the short, stout woman at once led them into a little back parlour, where she served them a good meal. Poor things! they were very hungry by this time, and it was a better dinner than any of the three had tasted for many days. (Often has my mother told me how strangely shocked she was at herself for being so hungry—in such circumstances.)

Edmond remained silent, and took no notice of Pierre's little overtures of friendliness, so young Germain ended by leaving him alone. It grew very dreary after their dinner—they had nothing to do, and for, no doubt, a good reason, the Citizeness Dupuis left them without a light. As it grew darker,

several men in blouses, and a few women, strolled into the shop, which at first had been empty, and Edmée began to understand Marguerite's warning. For such snatches of talk as came to them were far from reassuring, and as the evening went on and more wine was drunk, the loud laughing, the coarse jokes about 'Madame Guillotine,' and the good work she had done lately, the threats of what was yet to be done, grew so terrible, that more than once Edmée put her fingers in her ears. But she had to take them out again to soothe Edmond, who became wildly excited, at one moment declaring he would burst into the shop and tell the wretched hounds what he thought of them, and who *he* was, with a touch of his old braggadocio; and next, bursting into tears, and saying it was all a trick, Marguerite had decoyed them there to betray them, and as soon as she came would herself give them up to their enemies. Pierre *could* not think her capable of such hideous treachery, but still his mind misgave him somewhat, and

when at last Marguerite herself came in by another door than that by which they had entered, he had been on the point of suggesting to Edmée to take flight and trust to themselves.

'What is the matter?' said the girl, when she had lighted a small taper and saw the state that Edmond was in.

Edmée and Pierre explained to her.

'Well, did I not warn you?' she said. 'Though I own I did not think it would have been so noisy to-night, and I had hoped to be here sooner. It will do that fool no harm, all the same,' she added, and when Edmond, wild with fury, started up as if to strike her, she calmly seized his two arms and held them tightly behind his back, with a sort of contemptuous pity in her face, for she was very strong, twice as strong as poor thin Edmond.

'No, you shall not strike me, little Sarinet,' she said, and as if moved by a spirit of contradiction, 'I will save you in spite of yourself, you foolish boy.'

Then in a stern, grave whisper she told them to come with her, and without waiting to say good-bye to the Citizeness Dupuis, who I daresay was not sorry to find them gone, she led them out by the way she had entered.

In silence for some length of time the two boys followed their strange guide, who had made Edmée take her arm, she herself carrying the bag containing all of her small possessions that the last of the Valmonts had ventured to bring away. Marguerite chose the darkest and narrowest streets, but she seemed to know her way with wonderful cleverness, considering she was not a Parisian by birth or breeding. At last she stopped.

'I can go no farther,' she said. 'If I stay so late my friends will wonder what I am doing. In ten minutes, taking the first road to your left, you will arrive at the barriers. I know the sergeant who at this hour will probably be there. Show him these papers; you will have no trouble. Pierre must speak. Tell him you mean to

spend the night just outside the town, that you may be ready for a friend who is going your way in the morning, and ask him the nearest way to Choisy-le-roi. He will offer to send some one with you, as if out of good nature. Accept his offer. You may trust your guide, but you need not speak to him. He will take you to the cottage where you will spend the night. Start with the earliest dawn, and get as far as you can on your way before night. Do not hesitate to take any chance of getting on quicker, either in the public carriages if you meet them, or in any passing cart. The great thing is to get away far from Paris as fast as possible.'

'But,' said Pierre, 'we have no choice, my good Marguerite. We have no money.'

'I was coming to that,' she said. 'Here is more than enough for your journey in the only way in which you will dare to travel. I could give you more, but it would only expose you to danger.'

'But we cannot take *your* money,

Marguerite,' said Pierre. 'At least only as a loan.'

'And also——' began Edmée, and then she hesitated.

'I know,' said the girl; 'it is what the Countess said. She would rather have starved than take money from me, because she thought it ill come by. But this you can take without scruple.' She turned slightly aside, so that only Pierre and Edmée could hear her. 'The Hôtel de Sarinet was sacked last week; yesterday they threw me for my share some of *his* mother's jewels. I sold some; the rest I will pack among your things. *I* would not touch them. Now,' she went on, 'this is all I can do. You must now trust to your own sense and courage. It is only *he*,' and she nodded towards Edmond, standing apart, 'who may get you into trouble, as he nearly did to-night, mistrusting me for having brought you there—the safest place for you this evening, because the last they would have looked for you in! Now farewell.'

'Farewell, Marguerite, and God bless you!' said Pierre and Edmée together, and the latter added, 'If you would but have come with us, as my mother begged you.'

But Marguerite shook her head.

'There will always be a home for you at Valmont,' added Edmée, 'and we will always pray for you, dear Marguerite.'

'Ah,' said the poor girl, 'you may do that. Your prayers may be heard; *mine* have never been answered.'

And with these words she turned away, and was lost to sight.

At first all happened as their protectress had said. The sergeant at the gates let them pass with some rough good-natured words loudly spoken, as if he never supposed them to be other than their papers and Pierre's explanation represented them to be —two peasant lads and their sister making their way back to their friends in the country, as many of the better-class poor, getting shocked at the state of things in Paris, were glad to do at that time. And

after directing them to Choisy-le-roi, a second thought seemed to strike him. 'I can do more than that,' he said. 'Here, Jean, Choisy is your road. Show these little citizens the way,' and up started a man, young or old they could not tell, for they never saw his face, which seemed muffled up, nor did he speak all the way. And they never knew who he was, nor for what motive he had rendered them this service.

At Choisy-le-roi they spent the night with the old woman who seemed to be expecting them. Before daybreak they were some miles farther on their way to Bretigny, the first stage, one might say, on the road home, driven in a cart by a boy, the grandson of the old woman, and accustomed to take her eggs into Paris for the market. Some days of pretty steady travelling followed; the weather was fine, fortunately, for had it not been so, the poor children were but scantily protected; and Edmond kept up better than they could have hoped. Edmée

herself, during those first days, was scarcely conscious of fatigue, or even of anxiety. She felt as if in a dream, and constantly expected to wake and find herself again in the wretched lodgings, beside her mother. The thought of that mother, of the terrible parting from all that was left of her, possessed her to such an extent, that for herself she would have felt no fear, hardly emotion of any kind, had they been seized and carried back to Paris. Pierre was sometimes frightened by her very quietness; it was unlike her to be so dreamy and silent, even in sorrow, and more than once he endeavoured to rouse her by reminding her that she must not let herself fall ill. 'We are obeying the dear Countess,' he said. 'Her last thought was for you—the only comfort of those last moments was the belief that you would yet be safe at Valmont.'

'I know it was so,' said Edmée. 'Yes, Pierre, my kind Pierrot, you are right. I will try to wish what she did.'

But before they had reached the longed-for end of their journey, danger came so near them that all the girl's faculties were roused, and, terrible as it was, she has sometimes said to me that she thought this very experience saved her from falling into a sort of half-stupid, almost idiotic state, from which she might never have recovered. For till now, there had been nothing to make them realise along what a precipice-brink they were moving. Once out of Paris, both Edmée and her cousin had imagined themselves safe, and the girl had yielded to her overpowering sorrow, the boy to his grief, not less sincere, but less unselfish than hers. But for wide-awake, practical Pierre what would have become of them?

It happened thus: it was, as Marguerite had foreseen, the fault of Edmond.

One evening—they had been travelling, sometimes on foot and sometimes in a cart or in one of the public coaches, running short distances—they would not of course have ventured to take places right through

to Tours, the nearest point to Valmont for the regular diligences—one evening they reached a village not very far from Sarinet. Pierre had judged it wise to skirt Sarinet, both because Edmond might have been recognised, and also out of pity for the boy, to spare his feelings as much as possible, and as they were now in a part of the country he thoroughly knew, he found it easy to make their way round at what he thought a safe distance. But they had had a long day's walk before they arrived weary and foot-sore at a village where Pierre had decided to spend the night. There was a small inn in the village—a while ago Pierre would have been horrified at the idea of Edmée's entering such a place, but he had grown used to the necessity of such things, and the young girl never by word or glance murmured or seemed to notice the roughness and coarseness to which she was for the first time exposed. Pierre bespoke a bed for his 'sister,' and a corner of the barn for himself and Edmond, and

then they sat down in the rude kitchen to such a supper as could be provided for them. There were one or two peasants drinking in a corner, but quietly enough, when suddenly the door was pushed roughly open, and a couple of men in blouses came noisily in, shouting for something to drink. The innkeeper's wife, a timid, civil woman, hurried forward, but before she had time to serve the newcomers, one of them came up to the fireplace, near where the three young strangers were seated, and kicked the burning logs with his foot. Some embers flew out, and a spark or two lighted on Edmée's dress, though she at once extinguished them. But up started Edmond.

'Mind what you're about, fellow!' he cried, with the true Sarinet tone.

The offender turned round and eyed him curiously, but without speaking a word. Then he kicked the logs again till more sparks flew out in all directions. Edmond was springing to his feet, but Pierre held him forcibly back. 'Are you mad—quite mad?'

he whispered in a low, stern voice, while Edmée clasped his hand under the table with her trembling ones. The boy seemed startled into submission, and Pierre, rising from his seat, went forward to the fire.

'If you don't object, citizen,' he said good-humouredly, 'I think I can make it burn better without scorching your feet or my sister's dress,' and he skilfully turned and arranged the logs till a bright glow rewarded him.

The man eyed Pierre with curiosity.

'You are a handy fellow, and a civil one,' he said; 'how come you in company with such a young insolent as that one yonder?' and he jerked his thumb towards Edmond.

Pierre laughed, though his heart was beating so fast that he fancied it must be heard. But for knowing that Edmée was holding her cousin tight, he dared not have risked that laugh or his words.

'A spoilt child,' he said lightly. 'He was brought up in Paris; I and our sister in

the country. Now we are on our way to Tours, and my brother is tired. We have had a long tramp. You must excuse him, citizen.'

In his turn the man laughed, but the laugh had not a pleasant sound.

'He is not worth chastising; it is easy to see *he* is not country-bred,' he said. But Pierre, watching, saw him shoot an expressive glance over to his companion, who was sitting still and had taken no part in the discussion. And Pierre's heart stood still with horror, for to him the glance spoke terrible things.

'And but for Edmond,' he reflected, 'we might have passed unnoticed. Marguerite was right. Oh, my dear lady, I would have died for you and Edmée, but it will be too hard to have her sacrificed for him!'

CHAPTER XII

A FEW minutes later the two men went away. They paid for the wine they had drunk, but said nothing. Pierre breathed more freely when they were gone, and as both he and his two charges were very tired, they soon after went to bed: that is to say, Edmée went to the room prepared for her, and the boys made the best of their corner of the barn. It was a tumble-down old place, and there were several other out-buildings adjoining it; a disused stable was at one end, separated from it only by a wall which ran up as a partition, though leaving a space between its top and the roof. This Pierre happened to notice before he lay down. He was asleep in five minutes, but after some time, how long he knew not, he awoke with a start, something

had wakened him, though he could not remember what. He lay perfectly still, and in a moment a sound from the other side of the partition wall, of which I have spoken, caught his ears. It was that of men's voices, though speaking so softly that less sharp ears than those of the forester's boy, trained to distinguish each cry of the wood-creatures, each note of the birds, could have heard nothing.

'I tell you,' said one voice, 'I am as sure as I can be. I knew that insolent tone at once, and when I looked I was certain. The girl too — though who the third is I cannot make out. That baffled me.'

'Then if you were so sure, why give yourself and me all this bother?' grumbled the other. 'Why did you not at once seize them? It would be too bad to lose the reward after coming so far, and taking so much trouble.'

'I have told you why,' said the other, speaking more loudly as he got angry. 'They might have been too much for us; there is no telling whether they have not got

friends in the village. They are in their own country now, and that Valmont lot set up to be benevolent, and all that kind of thing. No, I would not risk any scene; let us wait here quietly and watch them off in the morning—we can see which way they go, and easily take them when they are alone. You have the order for the arrest all right?'

'Yes, but only for the two.'

'Of course; we don't want the country lad, though, perhaps——' But here the voice grew so low that Pierre, strain his ears as he would, could hear no more, till he caught a half-surly 'Good-night then' from the second speaker, and all was silent, save the beating of the poor boy's own heart, which sounded to him so unnaturally loud, that he felt as if it could not but be heard through the partition.

And all this time Edmond was sleeping soundly; it was too dark to see him, but by listening close, Pierre heard his soft and regular breathing. What could he do? what *dared* he do? or was it useless to attempt

anything? thought poor Pierre, till he began to fear the night would pass in this sort of paralysis of terror. At last his brain began to recover itself a little. He moved himself up into a sitting position, trembling at every rustle in the hay, and at last, getting on to his feet, having slipped off his shoes, he managed to creep out at the door, without its creaking. The fresh cold air did him good, and he rapidly regained his presence of mind. There would be no difficulty in rousing Edmée, he hoped, for he knew her to be the lightest of sleepers, and she was already uneasy from the events of the evening. The little room where she was, opened out of the kitchen where they had supped, and by good chance the house door was only latched. So far, all was easy, and in five minutes the poor child, who had only partly undressed, was standing shivering beside her young protector. She took it all in, in an instant.

'Pierrot,' she said, 'there is nothing to do; there is no chance of escape for us.

There is only one thing to do—save yourself. They may mean to take you too, or to kill you at once,' and Edmée shuddered, 'if you make any defence. Go, Pierre—go home to your father and mother, you have no right to throw your life away uselessly.'

But Pierre did not seem to hear her words.

'Edmée,' he replied, 'I can save *you*—we could start off at once, and hide in the woods till they have lost all trace of us—we should be hours in advance of them. But oh, Edmée, it is Edmond! And I promised—I promised the Countess not to desert him.'

'No,' said Edmée determinedly, 'we *cannot* desert him.'

They then consulted together—how to wake him without being heard by the two men was the terrible question. He was a heavy sleeper, especially when tired, and from his delicate health and nervousness he was always irritable if awakened before his sleep was completed.

'He is sure, *certain* to scream out crossly, and then all will be over,' said Edmée, her teeth chattering with cold and terror.

'Then there is only one thing to be done,' said Pierre. 'Have you your bag ready, Edmée?' The girl nodded as she held it up. 'You have nothing left in the house? That is right; my bundle and Edmond's are just as they were—only we must leave some money to pay for our supper and lodging. Here, I will slip in and place it on the table. Now we must both creep back into the barn—you to help me in case of need. I have here a large, strong handkerchief; I will gag Edmond before he has time to make a sound—he is so feeble it will be easily done; then if you can take the baggage I will carry him on my back till we are well out of hearing, and then explain all.'

'He will struggle fearfully,' said Edmée. 'Perhaps—perhaps, Pierre, if I whisper in his ear that it is we who are doing it to save him, he will be quiet.'

'*After* he is gagged, if you like,' said Pierre; 'but not before. We must run no risk; our lives hang on the thinnest of threads, Edmée. Come, try not to tremble so—oh, my poor little lady, if I could have spared you this!'

Edmée hesitated.

'Dear Pierrot,' she said, 'I think perhaps if I were to say a little prayer to the good God to help and save us, it would make me leave off trembling so.'

Pierre answered by uncovering his head, and then, at a sign from Edmée, he knelt down beside her on the grass, for they had crept back behind the house, and there the two young creatures prayed with earnest and simple words for the help they so sorely needed—'or,' whispered Edmée, 'if we do not escape, for courage to bear whatever is before us.'

Then she rose to her feet.

'I am not trembling now,' she said. 'Pierrot dear, kiss me once before we go; for we don't know, we may fail.'

Pierrot kissed her; he could not have spoken had he tried.

He led the way to the barn. Pierre crept in first to reconnoitre; all was quiet, and as he had left it, he reported, when he crept out again, bringing his own and Edmond's bundles, which, with her bag, he and Edmée carried a little way into the shelter of the wood hard by, so that the girl's hands might be free, if need were, to help him with the much more troublesome piece of baggage — Edmond. Then they both made their way in again, Edmée standing a little aside, while Pierre, by the very faint moonlight which came in through the open doorway, satisfied himself as to the exact position in which Edmond lay, before attempting to gag and seize him. How he succeeded he could never himself tell, but succeed he did. Before the sleeping boy had recovered his faculties sufficiently to attempt to scream or to make any resistance, he was safe and fast in Pierre's strong arms, his mouth so firmly gagged that, though he was

scarlet, nay purple, with rage and terror long before he found out the real state of the case, not the faintest sound was audible, as, followed by Edmée, young Germain, with his heavy burden, made his way from the barn by the path behind the house, which they had already discovered led into the woods. More than once Edmée tried to whisper into Edmond's ear, but blinded and confused as he was she could not catch his attention.

'Better wait awhile,' whispered Pierre, and it was not till after quite a quarter of an hour of this painful progress that he at last stopped, and, after listening in all directions, let Edmond slip to the ground, though still firmly holding him. The boy opened his eyes; he had half lost consciousness, and Pierre began to loosen the handkerchief.

'Edmond,' said Edmée, though still in a whisper, 'it is we—Pierre and I. Don't you know us?' But Edmond shivered convulsively, and it was some minutes—minutes of most precious time—before Edmée and Pierre together could get him to understand

all that had passed. Then he burst into tears, blaming himself as the cause of the terrible risk they had run, thanking them both for saving his life, and entreating their forgiveness. It was a great relief that his excitement had taken this form,—Edmée had been secretly terrified that he would perhaps have turned upon Pierre in a rage at him for having employed force, even to save his life, —for it was easy to make him do whatever they wished. He soon recovered himself enough to get on to his feet, and with Pierre on one side and Edmée on the other, to make his way deeper and deeper into the recesses of the forest. It was their best chance. Pierre's experience served as a guide, even though with these special woods he was unacquainted, and he was able to direct their steps ever towards Valmont, though plunging very much farther into the forest than he intended. And for some days they did not venture to leave its friendly shelter. What did they live upon? you will ask, as I have often asked my mother when she has been

relating to me the history of these strange days. Very little, it seems to me. Pierre managed, two or three times, to get a loaf from one of the wood-cutters' cottages they passed at long intervals, but which he never dared approach near, except by himself. He used to hide his companions and then, whistling lightly, as if on an ordinary journey of a few hours, would knock at the cottage door and ask for some bread, as he was hungry and had some distance to go; but not much of the bread fell to *his* share, you may be sure. Once or twice he got a few eggs, which he cooked on a fire of dry wood, and which Edmée thought delicious, for there is no sauce like hunger! The nights they spent, in part, in walking, when there was light enough to see their way, for it was cold work lying on the beds of dead leaves they collected, with the scanty spare clothing that was all their bundles contained; and had the weather not been exceptionally fine, and even mild for October, my mother has always maintained they would never have got to

Valmont alive. It was that thought—the thought that they were near their journey's end—that kept up their hearts through this, so much the most painful part of the journey. For even when so near home that a few hours in a passing diligence would have safely landed them within a league of Valmont, they dared not venture on the high road.

It was a forlorn little group which at last, late one evening,—they had purposely concealed themselves till late in the woods hard by, 'our own woods,' said Edmée and Pierre joyously, where to the boy every path, every tree almost, had been familiar from infancy,—approached the forester's cottage at the extreme end of the village. They had not ventured to pass along the main street, but made a round which brought them in by the other side; for since their terrible fright Pierre had grown doubly cautious.

'They may have come here and be waiting to take them,' he thought, though he did not say so to his two poor tired charges. And even when within a stone's throw of the

cottage he made Edmée and her cousin wait in a little copse while he went forward to reconnoitre. And these few minutes' waiting, my mother has often said, seemed to her the most trying part of the whole journey.

With what joy did she hear Pierre's footsteps in return, and his voice exclaiming eagerly, 'It is all right! come quickly. Ah, here is my mother behind me.'

And so it was. Poor Madame Germain had found it impossible to wait in the cottage —here she was, crying and sobbing, and yet smiling through her tears.

'My children! my children! whom I had given up hoping ever to see again!' she exclaimed, clasping Edmée to her arms, forgetful of everything except that she had again her precious nursling, her little lady, whose life she had so many years ago saved by her devotion!

But to poor Edmée the loving clasp of those motherly arms brought an agonising remembrance.

'Dear, dear mamma Germain,' she said.

'Do you know—has Pierrot told you all —about my sweet mother?'

'I know—he told me. Oh, my darling, how I grieve for you! But she is happy —and thank heaven her death was as it was. And now she will rejoice to see you safe —at last, my Edmée—after all your weary journeying. And Monsieur Edmond too,' she added, turning to the poor boy. 'Welcome, a thousand times welcome, to the best we can give you.'

And the last vestige of his foolish pride melted out of the poor boy's heart, as he impulsively threw himself into the kind motherly arms. 'Kiss me too,' he said, 'for Pierre's sake—Pierre, who has saved my life.'

You may be sure Madame Germain did not need twice asking to do so. 'Poor boy, poor boy, the most desolate of all,' she said to herself; 'for he has not even a happy past to look back to.'

How thankful they all were to sit down to a comfortable supper in the cottage—

and, even more, to rest their poor tired limbs in Madame Germain's nice clean beds, where the sheets, though not of the finest, were sweet with country bleaching, and scented with lavender! That night Germain said nothing to distress the poor children, but the next day direful news had to be told. Edmée was indeed homeless, for the Château of Valmont no longer existed, except in crumbling ruins. It had been burnt down during Pierre's absence. Poor old Ludovic, happily for himself perhaps, had not lived to see this. He had died a few days after Pierre's departure for Paris. No special ill-will to the family had been the reason of this destruction, but one of the wild mobs which in these dreadful times laid waste so much of the country had found their way to the peaceful village, and joined by some of the malcontents who would not believe that the recent exactions of money had not been the Countess's doing, had set fire to the home of the innocent lady and her child.

'After all she was a Sarinet,' was muttered as a sort of excuse for the shameful deed. But when the villagers recovered from the shock and horror, they had united to drive the doers of it from among them, and were now, father Germain had good reason to think, ready to defend the orphaned Edmée to the utmost.

So, after much consultation, the Germains determined to remain at Valmont, though they had at first hesitated whether it would be safe for their charges to do so. It would, however, as was soon seen, have been difficult, almost impossible, to move Edmond. His strength, once he felt himself in safety, rapidly failed; he took to his bed, where he lay in peaceful weakness for some months, suffering little, thankful and grateful, and clinging with touching affection to Pierre's kind mother, till at last, when the first spring blossoms began to peep out again, he gently died. And though the change in him had endeared him to them all, they felt it was better thus. Life would have been a hard

struggle to the poor boy, and he was devoid of the strength required to face his completely altered circumstances, for even had there been no Revolution the Sarinet family was ruined.

Before his death Edmée's kind protectors had begun to breathe rather more freely with regard to her safety. The state of things in Paris was growing worse and worse; the 'Reign of Terror,' so called, was beginning. But less attention was now given to the upper classes—if, indeed, any of them still remained in the country! The fury of the various Republican parties, every one fighting for the mastery, was now turning against each other—in the end to be the ruin of all; and the motives and causes of the first revolt were forgotten in the general chaos of selfishness and wild ambition.

So the months passed on, till they grew into years, and still Edmée was living like a simple country maiden with her kind friends. They did all in their power to prevent her

feeling the change in her position. The good curé gave her daily lessons, such as her mother would have wished her to have, and the Germains managed to turn an outhouse which had been used for storing apples and such things into a pretty little sitting-room for her, where they collected the very few pieces of furniture that had been saved from the château, several of which are now in the room where I am writing—the best room at Belle Prairie Farm. And Edmée gradually recovered some of her old brightness; she felt that she was where her mother would have wished her to be, and she was by nature of a wise and unworldly spirit. Even the destruction of her old home she learned to view in a way that was very different from the feelings of most of her class.

'We ourselves—we Valmonts—may not have sinned as others,' she said one day to the curé, when he had been explaining to her some of the causes of this dreadful Revolution which had so changed the face of the country, 'but our class was guilty. And we have

'Then I pray God to accept the sacrifice!'

suffered for their sins. Is it not so, dear Monsieur?'

And the old man's own eyes filled with tears, as he looked at her earnest ones upraised to his.

'It is even so, my child.'

'Then I pray God to accept the sacrifice!' said the child. 'But, Monsieur le Curé, I do not wish to be an aristocrat any more. I will belong to my own people.'

And to this, through all the years that followed, she remained firm. Even when distant relations, hearing of her escape, wrote from England, begging her to join them there, with good hope of before long returning to their own home in France, promising, poor as she now was, to adopt her as their own child, Edmée wrote decidedly, though gratefully, refusing. She had made her choice. Some years later, thanks to the efforts of all the most esteemed among the inhabitants of Valmont, a small portion of her forefathers' possessions, which had been

divided and sold, like scores of other properties, was restored to Edmée, and as the owner of the Belle Prairie Farm, she was able to do something in return for the kind friends who had sheltered her in her desolation. The whole family removed there, and you can fancy that it was a happy day for Edmée when she received her kind foster-parents under her own roof.

I have now come to a point at which I earnestly wish my mother would herself take up the pen. Not that there remain many facts or events to relate, but the crowning one—that of her marriage to my dear father—I could wish her to describe. At present—so shortly after his death—she says she could hardly bear to recall the details of those happy days, in which she gradually learnt to love her faithful Pierrot, with the trusting affection of a woman for the man she would choose for her husband. But in the future, I have good hopes she may be persuaded to do so, and also to relate how Pierre, frightened at first at his own audacity, could scarcely

believe it possible that his beautiful Edmée, his 'little lady,' could think herself honoured by his deep and fervent love. *I* cannot altogether sympathise in this great humility on the part of my dear father; but then I have known him, and the rare beauty of his character; then, too, I am quite as proud of my Germain ancestry as of the long lines of Valmont and Sarinet. And nothing gratifies my mother so much as when I say so.

In the meantime I may give a few particulars that may be of interest to those who will read these pages. Pierre and Edmée never saw poor Marguerite Ribou again; but years after they had news of her death—she died peacefully—from the kind priest in Paris, who had never lost sight of her, and who restored to Edmée the jewels and money the poor girl had so honestly kept for her. And thanks to him—for neither my father nor mother ever entered Paris again—the little portrait, which had been the means of Pierre's finding Edmée and her mother, was

recovered from the old dealer in antiquities, and placed, with the other relics of her child-life, in the best parlour at Belle Prairie Farm, where I trust it may be admired and loved by many generations of the descendants of Pierre and Edmée Germain. And now——"

Madame Marcel stopped suddenly, and looked up.

"What is it, mother dear? Go on, please —that is, if you are not tired," said several voices.

"No, dears, I am not tired. I have not read as much to-day as the two last times." (For though I have not interrupted the course of the story to say so, it will be readily understood that the reading of the old manuscript had occupied several holiday or Sunday evenings.) "But," she went on, "I have stopped simply because there is no more to read! Those two words, 'and now,' are the last of the manuscript."

"Oh dear!"—"What a pity!"—"Did our great-grandmother never write any more to

it, as our grandmother hoped she would?" exclaimed the children.

"No, my dears. She often intended to do so, but she did not live many years after her husband's death. She lived to see my mother happily married to my good father and then she died. I think the world seemed a strange place to her without her Pierre. She spoke of the manuscript not long before her death. 'After all,' she said, 'no words of mine could have done justice to his goodness. Teach your children to honour the memory of their grandfather, and to know that a long line of ancestry is not the only thing to be proud of.'"

"But, mother," said Pierre Marcel half-timidly, "if one's ancestors have been *good* people?"

"Ah yes, my boy. In such case be not so much proud of them as grateful to the good God for having come of such a stock, be they noblemen or farmers, high in the world's esteem, or working with their hands for their daily bread," said Farmer Marcel,

as he rose from the arm-chair where he had been sitting to listen to his wife's reading.

"And the Valmonts *were* good," whispered Pierre to his sister Edmée; "so we *may* be a little proud of them, you see, after all."

But when he went to say good-night to Madame Marcel, he added gently, "You are right, dear little mother. I *am* very glad that you called me Pierre, after my good great-grandfather, Pierre Germain."

My readers may be sure that from the time of the reading of the manuscript, the little old portrait was dusted with even greater care than before, and that on holidays and fête-days it was decorated with wreaths of the loveliest flowers to be found in all the country-side. And there, I hope, in the best room of the old farmhouse, it will smile down for many and many a day on the dwellers therein, reminding them that riches and greatness are not the best or most enduring possessions, that sorrows come alike to all, that trust in God and reverence for His laws

are the only sure pilots through this life—that faithful, unselfish love is the most beautiful thing on earth, and, may we not say, in Heaven also?

THE END

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