

CHAPTER XIII

As when a wave, that from a cloud impends,
And, swell'd with tempests, on the ship descends,
White are the decks with foam; the winds aloud,
Howl o'er the masts, and sing through ev'ry shroud:
Pale, trembling, tir'd, the sailors freeze with fears,
And instant death on ev'ry wave appears.

POPE'S HOMER

The Lady Blanche, meanwhile, who was left much alone, became impatient for the company of her new friend, whom she wished to observe sharing in the delight she received from the beautiful scenery around. She had now no person, to whom she could express her admiration and communicate her pleasures, no eye, that sparkled to her smile, or countenance, that reflected her happiness; and she became spiritless and pensive. The Count, observing her dissatisfaction, readily yielded to her entreaties, and reminded Emily of her promised visit; but the silence of Valancourt, which was now prolonged far beyond the period, when a letter might have arrived from Estuvière, oppressed Emily with severe anxiety, and, rendering her averse to society, she would willingly have deferred her acceptance of this invitation, till her spirits should be relieved. The Count and his family, however, pressed to see her; and, as the circumstances, that prompted her wish for solitude, could not be explained, there was an appearance of caprice in her refusal, which she could not persevere in, without offending the friends, whose esteem she valued. At length, therefore, she returned upon a second visit to Château-le-Blanc. Here the friendly manner of Count De Villefort encouraged Emily to mention to him her situation, respecting the estates of her late aunt, and to consult him on the means of recovering them. He had little doubt, that the law would decide in her favour, and, advising her to apply to it, offered first to write to an advocate at Avignon, on whose opinion he thought he could rely. His kindness was gratefully accepted by Emily, who, soothed by the courtesy she daily experienced, would have been once more happy, could she have been assured of Valancourt's welfare and unaltered affection. She had now been above a week at the château, without receiving intelligence of him, and, though she knew, that, if he was absent from his brother's residence, it was scarcely probable her letter had yet reached him, she could not forbear to admit doubts and fears, that destroyed her peace. Again she would consider of all, that might have happened in the long period, since her first seclusion at Udolpho, and her mind was sometimes so overwhelmed with an apprehension, that Valancourt was no more, or that he lived no longer for her, that the company even of Blanche became intolerably oppressive, and she would sit alone in her apartment for hours together, when the engagements of the family allowed her to do so, without incivility.

In one of these solitary hours, she unlocked a little box, which contained some letters of Valancourt, with some drawings she had sketched, during her stay in Tuscany, the latter of which were no longer interesting to her; but, in the letters,

she now, with melancholy indulgence, meant to retrace the tenderness, that had so often soothed her, and rendered her, for a moment, insensible of the distance, which separated her from the writer. But their effect was now changed; the affection they expressed appealed so forcibly to her heart, when she considered that it had, perhaps, yielded to the powers of time and absence, and even the view of the handwriting recalled so many painful recollections, that she found herself unable to go through the first she had opened, and sat musing, with her cheek resting on her arm, and tears stealing from her eyes, when old Dorothée entered the room to inform her, that dinner would be ready, an hour before the usual time. Emily started on perceiving her, and hastily put up the papers, but not before Dorothée had observed both her agitation and her tears.

“Ah, ma’amselle!” said she “You, who are so young — have you reason for sorrow?”

Emily tried to smile, but was unable to speak.

“Alas! Dear young lady, when you come to my age, you will not weep at trifles; and surely you have nothing serious, to grieve you.”

“No, Dorothée, nothing of any consequence” replied Emily. Dorothée, now stooping to pick up something, that had dropped from among the papers, suddenly exclaimed, “Holy Mary! what is it I see?” and then, trembling, sat down in a chair, that stood by the table.

“What is it you do see?” said Emily, alarmed by her manner, and looking round the room.

“It is herself” said Dorothée “her very self! just as she looked a little before she died!”

Emily, still more alarmed, began now to fear, that Dorothée was seized with sudden frenzy, but entreated her to explain herself.

“That picture!” said she “Where did you find it, lady? It is my blessed mistress herself!”

She laid on the table the miniature, which Emily had long ago found among the papers her father had enjoined her to destroy, and over which she had once seen him shed such tender and affecting tears; and, recollecting all the various circumstances of his conduct, that had long perplexed her, her emotions increased to an excess, which deprived her of all power to ask the questions she trembled to have answered, and she could only enquire, whether Dorothée was certain the picture resembled the late marchioness.

“O, ma’amselle!” said she “How came it to strike me so, the instant I saw it, if it was not my lady’s likeness? Ah!” added she, taking up the miniature, “these are her own blue eyes — looking so sweet and so mild; and there is her very look,

such as I have often seen it, when she had sat thinking for a long while, and then, the tears would often steal down her cheeks — but she never would complain! It was that look so meek, as it were, and resigned, that used to break my heart and make me love her so!”

“Dorothee!” said Emily solemnly “I am interested in the cause of that grief, more so, perhaps, than you may imagine; and I entreat, that you will no longer refuse to indulge my curiosity; — it is not a common one.”

As Emily said this, she remembered the papers, with which the picture had been found, and had scarcely a doubt, that they had concerned the Marchioness de Villeroi; but with this supposition came a scruple, whether she ought to enquire further on a subject, which might prove to be the same, that her father had so carefully endeavoured to conceal. Her curiosity, concerning the Marchioness, powerful as it was, it is probable she would now have resisted, as she had formerly done, on unwarily observing the few terrible words in the papers, which had never since been erased from her memory, had she been certain that the history of that lady was the subject of those papers, or, that such simple particulars only as it was probable Dorothee could relate were included in her father’s command. What was known to her could be no secret to many other persons; and, since it appeared very unlikely, that St. Aubert should attempt to conceal what Emily might learn by ordinary means, she at length concluded, that, if the papers had related to the story of the Marchioness, it was not those circumstances of it, which Dorothee could disclose, that he had thought sufficiently important to wish to have concealed. She, therefore, no longer hesitated to make the enquiries, that might lead to the gratification of her curiosity.

“Ah, ma’amselle!” said Dorothee “It is a sad story, and cannot be told now: but what am I saying? I never will tell it. Many years have passed, since it happened; and I never loved to talk of the Marchioness to anybody, but my husband. He lived in the family, at that time, as well as myself, and he knew many particulars from me, which nobody else did; for I was about the person of my lady in her last illness, and saw and heard as much, or more than my lord himself. Sweet saint! How patient she was! When she died, I thought I could have died with her!”

“Dorothee” said Emily, interrupting her “what you shall tell, you may depend upon it, shall never be disclosed by me. I have, I repeat it, particular reasons for wishing to be informed on this subject, and am willing to bind myself, in the most solemn manner, never to mention what you shall wish me to conceal.”

Dorothee seemed surprised at the earnestness of Emily’s manner, and, after regarding her for some moments, in silence, said, “Young lady! That look of yours pleads for you — it is so like my dear mistress’s, that I can almost fancy I see her before me; if you were her daughter, you could not remind me of her more. But dinner will be ready — had you not better go down?”

“You will first promise to grant my request,” said Emily.

“And ought not you first to tell me, ma’amselle, how this picture fell into your hands, and the reasons you say you have for curiosity about my lady?”

“Why, no, Dorothee” replied Emily, recollecting herself “I have also particular reasons for observing silence, on these subjects, at least, till I know further; and, remember, I do not promise ever to speak upon them; therefore, do not let me induce you to satisfy my curiosity, from an expectation, that I shall gratify yours. What I may judge proper to conceal, does not concern myself alone, or I should have less scruple in revealing it: let a confidence in my honour alone persuade you to disclose what I request.”

“Well, lady!” replied Dorothee, after a long pause, during which her eyes were fixed upon Emily, “You seem so much interested — and this picture and that face of yours make me think you have some reason to be so — that I will trust you — and tell some things, that I never told before to anybody, but my husband, though there are people, who have suspected as much. I will tell you the particulars of my lady’s death, too, and some of my own suspicions; but you must first promise me by all the saints —”

Emily, interrupting her, solemnly promised never to reveal what should be confided to her, without Dorothee’s consent.

“But there is the horn, ma’amselle, sounding for dinner” said Dorothee; “I must be gone.”

“When shall I see you again?” enquired Emily.

Dorothee mused, and then replied, “Why, madam, it may make people curious, if it is known I am so much in your apartment, and that I should be sorry for; so I will come when I am least likely to be observed. I have little leisure in the day, and I shall have a good deal to say; so, if you please, ma’am, I will come, when the family are all in bed.”

“That will suit me very well” replied Emily: “remember, then, tonight —”

“Aye, that is well remembered” said Dorothee “I fear I cannot come tonight, madam, for there will be the dance of the vintage, and it will be late, before the servants go to rest; for, when they once set in to dance, they will keep it up, in the cool of the air, till morning; at least, it used to be so in my time.”

“Ah! Is it the dance of the vintage?” said Emily, with a deep sigh, remembering, that it was on the evening of this festival, in the preceding year, that St. Aubert and herself had arrived in the neighbourhood of Château-le-Blanc. She paused a moment, overcome by the sudden recollection, and then, recovering herself, added — “But this dance is in the open woods; you, therefore, will not be wanted, and can easily come to me.”

Dorothee replied, that she had been accustomed to be present at the dance of the vintage, and she did not wish to be absent now; “but if I can get away, madam, I will” said she.

Emily then hastened to the dining-room, where the Count conducted himself with the courtesy, which is inseparable from true dignity, and of which the Countess frequently practised little, though her manner to Emily was an exception to her usual habit. But, if she retained few of the ornamental virtues, she cherished other qualities, which she seemed to consider invaluable. She had dismissed the grace of modesty, but then she knew perfectly well how to manage the stare of assurance; her manners had little of the tempered sweetness, which is necessary to render the female character interesting, but she could occasionally throw into them an affectation of spirits, which seemed to triumph over every person, who approached her. In the country, however, she generally affected an elegant languor, that persuaded her almost to faint, when her favourite read to her a story of fictitious sorrow; but her countenance suffered no change, when living objects of distress solicited her charity, and her heart beat with no transport to the thought of giving them instant relief; — she was a stranger to the highest luxury, of which, perhaps, the human mind can be sensible, for her benevolence had never yet called smiles upon the face of misery.

In the evening, the Count, with all his family, except the Countess and Mademoiselle Bearn, went to the woods to witness the festivity of the peasants. The scene was in a glade, where the trees, opening, formed a circle round the turf they highly overshadowed; between their branches, vines, loaded with ripe clusters, were hung in gay festoons; and, beneath, were tables, with fruit, wine, cheese and other rural fare — and seats for the Count and his family. At a little distance, were benches for the elder peasants, few of whom, however, could forbear to join the jocund dance, which began soon after sunset, when several of sixty tripped it with almost as much glee and airy lightness, as those of sixteen.

The musicians, who sat carelessly on the grass, at the foot of a tree, seemed inspired by the sound of their own instruments, which were chiefly flutes and a kind of long guitar. Behind, stood a boy, flourishing a tamborine, and dancing a solo, except that, as he sometimes gaily tossed the instrument, he tripped among the other dancers, when his antic gestures called forth a broader laugh, and heightened the rustic spirit of the scene.

The Count was highly delighted with the happiness he witnessed, to which his bounty had largely contributed, and the Lady Blanche joined the dance with a young gentleman of her father’s party. Du Pont requested Emily’s hand, but her spirits were too much depressed, to permit her to engage in the present festivity, which called to her remembrance that of the preceding year, when St. Aubert was living, and of the melancholy scenes, which had immediately followed it.

Overcome by these recollections, she, at length, left the spot, and walked slowly into the woods, where the softened music, floating at a distance, soothed her

melancholy mind. The moon threw a mellow light among the foliage; the air was balmy and cool, and Emily, lost in thought, strolled on, without observing whither, till she perceived the sounds sinking afar off, and an awful stillness round her, except that, sometimes, the nightingale beguiled the silence with

Liquid notes, that close the eye of day.

At length, she found herself near the avenue, which, on the night of her father's arrival, Michael had attempted to pass in search of a house, which was still nearly as wild and desolate as it had then appeared; for the Count had been so much engaged in directing other improvements, that he had neglected to give orders, concerning this extensive approach, and the road was yet broken, and the trees overloaded with their own luxuriance.

As she stood surveying it, and remembering the emotions, which she had formerly suffered there, she suddenly recollected the figure, that had been seen stealing among the trees, and which had returned no answer to Michael's repeated calls; and she experienced somewhat of the fear, that had then assailed her, for it did not appear improbable, that these deep woods were occasionally the haunt of banditti. She, therefore, turned back, and was hastily pursuing her way to the dancers, when she heard steps approaching from the avenue; and, being still beyond the call of the peasants on the green, for she could neither hear their voices, nor their music, she quickened her pace; but the persons following gained fast upon her, and, at length, distinguishing the voice of Henri, she walked leisurely, till he came up. He expressed some surprise at meeting her so far from the company; and, on her saying, that the pleasant moonlight had beguiled her to walk farther than she intended, an exclamation burst from the lips of his companion, and she thought she heard Valancourt speak! It was, indeed, he! and the meeting was such as may be imagined, between persons so affectionate, and so long separated as they had been.

In the joy of these moments, Emily forgot all her past sufferings, and Valancourt seemed to have forgotten, that any person but Emily existed; while Henri was a silent and astonished spectator of the scene.

Valancourt asked a thousand questions, concerning herself and Montoni, which there was now no time to answer; but she learned, that her letter had been forwarded to him, at Paris, which he had previously quitted, and was returning to Gascony, whither the letter also returned, which, at length, informed him of Emily's arrival, and on the receipt of which he had immediately set out for Languedoc. On reaching the monastery, whence she had dated her letter, he found, to his extreme disappointment, that the gates were already closed for the night; and believing, that he should not see Emily, till the morrow, he was returning to his little inn, with the intention of writing to her, when he was overtaken by Henri, with whom he had been intimate at Paris, and was led to her, whom he was secretly lamenting that he should not see, till the following day.

Emily, with Valancourt and Henri, now returned to the green, where the latter presented Valancourt to the Count, who, she fancied, received him with less than his usual benignity, though it appeared, that they were not strangers to each other. He was invited, however, to partake of the diversions of the evening; and, when he had paid his respects to the Count, and while the dancers continued their festivity, he seated himself by Emily, and conversed, without restraint. The lights, which were hung among the trees, under which they sat, allowed her a more perfect view of the countenance she had so frequently in absence endeavoured to recollect, and she perceived, with some regret, that it was not the same as when last she saw it. There was all its wonted intelligence and fire; but it had lost much of the simplicity, and somewhat of the open benevolence, that used to characterise it. Still, however, it was an interesting countenance; but Emily thought she perceived, at intervals, anxiety contract, and melancholy fix the features of Valancourt; sometimes, too, he fell into a momentary musing, and then appeared anxious to dissipate thought; while, at others, as he fixed his eyes on Emily, a kind of sudden distraction seemed to cross his mind. In her he perceived the same goodness and beautiful simplicity, that had charmed him, on their first acquaintance. The bloom of her countenance was somewhat faded, but all its sweetness remained, and it was rendered more interesting, than ever, by the faint expression of melancholy, that sometimes mingled with her smile.

At his request, she related the most important circumstances, that had occurred to her, since she left France, and emotions of pity and indignation alternately prevailed in his mind, when he heard how much she had suffered from the villany of Montoni. More than once, when she was speaking of his conduct, of which the guilt was rather softened, than exaggerated, by her representation, he started from his seat, and walked away, apparently overcome as much by self-accusation as by resentment. Her sufferings alone were mentioned in the few words, which he could address to her, and he listened not to the account, which she was careful to give as distinctly as possible, of the present loss of Madame Montoni's estates, and of the little reason there was to expect their restoration. At length, Valancourt remained lost in thought, and then some secret cause seemed to overcome him with anguish. Again he abruptly left her. When he returned, she perceived that he had been weeping, and tenderly begged, that he would compose himself. "My sufferings are all passed now" said she "for I have escaped from the tyranny of Montoni, and I see you well — let me also see you happy."

Valancourt was more agitated than before. "I am unworthy of you, Emily" said he "I am unworthy of you;" — words, by his manner of uttering which Emily was then more shocked than by their import. She fixed on him a mournful and enquiring eye. "Do not look thus on me" said he, turning away and pressing her hand; "I cannot bear those looks."

"I would ask" said Emily, in a gentle, but agitated voice "the meaning of your words; but I perceive, that the question would distress you now. Let us talk on other subjects. Tomorrow, perhaps, you may be more composed. Observe those moonlight woods, and the towers, which appear obscurely in the perspective.

You used to be a great admirer of landscape, and I have heard you say, that the faculty of deriving consolation, under misfortune, from the sublime prospects, which neither oppression, nor poverty withhold from us, was the peculiar blessing of the innocent." Valancourt was deeply affected.

"Yes" replied he "I had once a taste for innocent and elegant delights — I had once an uncorrupted heart." Then, checking himself, he added "Do you remember our journey together in the Pyrenees?"

"Can I forget it?" said Emily. —

"Would that I could!" he replied; — "That was the happiest period of my life. I then loved, with enthusiasm, whatever was truly great, or good."

It was some time before Emily could repress her tears, and try to command her emotions. "If you wish to forget that journey" said she "it must certainly be my wish to forget it also." She paused, and then added "You make me very uneasy; but this is not the time for further enquiry; — yet, how can I bear to believe, even for a moment, that you are less worthy of my esteem than formerly? I have still sufficient confidence in your candour, to believe, that, when I shall ask for an explanation, you will give it me." —

"Yes" said Valancourt "yes, Emily: I have not yet lost my candour: if I had, I could better have disguised my emotions, on learning what were your sufferings — your virtues, while I — I — but I will say no more. I did not mean to have said even so much — I have been surprised into the self-accusation. Tell me, Emily, that you will not forget that journey — will not wish to forget it, and I will be calm. I would not lose the remembrance of it for the whole earth."

"How contradictory is this!" said Emily; — "But we may be overheard. My recollection of it shall depend upon yours; I will endeavour to forget, or to recollect it, as you may do. Let us join the Count." —

"Tell me first" said Valancourt "that you forgive the uneasiness I have occasioned you, this evening, and that you will still love me." —

"I sincerely forgive you" replied Emily. "You best know whether I shall continue to love you, for you know whether you deserve my esteem. At present, I will believe that you do. It is unnecessary to say" added she, observing his dejection, "how much pain it would give me to believe otherwise. — The young lady, who approaches, is the Count's daughter."

Valancourt and Emily now joined the Lady Blanche; and the party, soon after, sat down with the Count, his son, and the Chevalier Du Pont, at a banquet, spread under a gay awning, beneath the trees. At the table also were seated several of the most venerable of the Count's tenants, and it was a festive repast to all but Valancourt and Emily. When the Count retired to the château, he did not invite Valancourt to accompany him, who, therefore, took leave of Emily, and retired to his solitary inn for the night: meanwhile, she soon withdrew to

her own apartment, where she mused, with deep anxiety and concern, on his behaviour, and on the Count's reception of him. Her attention was thus so wholly engaged, that she forgot Dorothee and her appointment, till morning was far advanced, when, knowing that the good old woman would not come, she retired, for a few hours, to repose.

On the following day, when the Count had accidentally joined Emily in one of the walks, they talked of the festival of the preceding evening, and this led him to a mention of Valancourt. "That is a young man of talents" said he; "you were formerly acquainted with him, I perceive." Emily said, that she was. "He was introduced to me, at Paris" said the Count, "and I was much pleased with him, on our first acquaintance." He paused, and Emily trembled, between the desire of hearing more and the fear of showing the Count, that she felt an interest on the subject. "May I ask" said he, at length "how long you have known Monsieur Valancourt?" —

"Will you allow me to ask your reason for the question, sir?" said she; "and I will answer it immediately." —

"Certainly" said the Count, "that is but just. I will tell you my reason. I cannot but perceive, that Monsieur Valancourt admires you; in that, however, there is nothing extraordinary; every person, who sees you, must do the same. I am above using commonplace compliments; I speak with sincerity. What I fear, is, that he is a favoured admirer." —

"Why do you fear it, sir?" said Emily, endeavouring to conceal her emotion. —

"Because" replied the Count "I think him not worthy of your favour." Emily, greatly agitated, entreated further explanation. "I will give it" said he "if you will believe, that nothing but a strong interest in your welfare could induce me to hazard that assertion." —

"I must believe so, sir" replied Emily.

"But let us rest under these trees" said the Count, observing the paleness of her countenance; "here is a seat — you are fatigued." They sat down, and the Count proceeded. "Many young ladies, circumstanced as you are, would think my conduct, on this occasion, and on so short an acquaintance, impertinent, instead of friendly; from what I have observed of your temper and understanding, I do not fear such a return from you. Our acquaintance has been short, but long enough to make me esteem you, and feel a lively interest in your happiness. You deserve to be very happy, and I trust that you will be so." Emily sighed softly, and bowed her thanks. The Count paused again. "I am unpleasantly circumstanced" said he; "but an opportunity of rendering you important service shall overcome inferior considerations. Will you inform me of the manner of your first acquaintance with the Chevalier Valancourt, if the subject is not too painful?"

Emily briefly related the accident of their meeting in the presence of her father, and then so earnestly entreated the Count not to hesitate in declaring what he knew, that he perceived the violent emotion, against which she was contending, and, regarding her with a look of tender compassion, considered how he might communicate his information with least pain to his anxious auditor.

“The Chevalier and my son” said he “were introduced to each other, at the table of a brother officer, at whose house I also met him, and invited him to my own, whenever he should be disengaged. I did not then know, that he had formed an acquaintance with a set of men, a disgrace to their species, who live by plunder and pass their lives in continual debauchery. I knew several of the Chevalier’s family, resident at Paris, and considered them as sufficient pledges for his introduction to my own. But you are ill; I will leave the subject.” —

“No, sir,” said Emily, “I beg you will proceed: I am only distressed.” —
“*Only!*” said the Count, with emphasis; “However, I will proceed. I soon learned, that these, his associates, had drawn him into a course of dissipation, from which he appeared to have neither the power, nor the inclination, to extricate himself. He lost large sums at the gaming table; he became infatuated with play; and was ruined. I spoke tenderly of this to his friends, who assured me, that they had remonstrated with him, till they were weary. I afterwards learned, that, in consideration of his talents for play, which were generally successful, when unopposed by the tricks of villany — that in consideration of these, the party had initiated him into the secrets of their trade, and allotted him a share of their profits.”

“Impossible!” said Emily suddenly; “But — pardon me, sir, I scarcely know what I say; allow for the distress of my mind. I must, indeed, I must believe, that you have not been truly informed. The Chevalier had, doubtless, enemies, who misrepresented him.” —

“I should be most happy to believe so,” replied the Count, “but I cannot. Nothing short of conviction, and a regard for your happiness, could have urged me to repeat these unpleasant reports.”

Emily was silent. She recollected Valancourt’s sayings, on the preceding evening, which discovered the pangs of self-reproach, and seemed to confirm all that the Count had related. Yet she had not fortitude enough to dare conviction. Her heart was overwhelmed with anguish at the mere suspicion of his guilt, and she could not endure a belief of it. After a silence, the Count said, “I perceive, and can allow for, your want of conviction. It is necessary I should give some proof of what I have asserted; but this I cannot do, without subjecting one, who is very dear to me, to danger.” —

“What is the danger you apprehend, sir?” said Emily; “If I can prevent it, you may safely confide in my honour.” —

“On your honour I am certain I can rely” said the Count; “but can I trust your fortitude? Do you think you can resist the solicitation of a favoured admirer,

when he pleads, in affliction, for the name of one, who has robbed him of a blessing?" —

"I shall not be exposed to such a temptation, sir" said Emily, with modest pride, "for I cannot favour one, whom I must no longer esteem. I, however, readily give my word." Tears, in the mean time, contradicted her first assertion; and she felt, that time and effort only could eradicate an affection, which had been formed on virtuous esteem, and cherished by habit and difficulty.

"I will trust you then" said the Count "for conviction is necessary to your peace, and cannot, I perceive, be obtained, without this confidence. My son has too often been an eye witness of the Chevalier's ill conduct; he was very near being drawn in by it; he was, indeed, drawn in to the commission of many follies, but I rescued him from guilt and destruction. Judge then, Mademoiselle St. Aubert, whether a father, who had nearly lost his only son by the example of the Chevalier, has not, from conviction, reason to warn those, whom he esteems, against trusting their happiness in such hands. I have myself seen the Chevalier engaged in deep play with men, whom I almost shuddered to look upon. If you still doubt, I will refer you to my son."

"I must not doubt what you have yourself witnessed" replied Emily, sinking with grief, "or what you assert. But the Chevalier has, perhaps, been drawn only into a transient folly, which he may never repeat. If you had known the justness of his former principles, you would allow for my present incredulity."

"Alas!" observed the Count "It is difficult to believe that, which will make us wretched. But I will not sooth you by flattering and false hopes. We all know how fascinating the vice of gaming is, and how difficult it is, also, to conquer habits; the Chevalier might, perhaps, reform for a while, but he would soon relapse into dissipation — for I fear, not only the bonds of habit would be powerful, but that his morals are corrupted. And — why should I conceal from you, that play is not his only vice? he appears to have a taste for every vicious pleasure."

The Count hesitated and paused; while Emily endeavoured to support herself, as, with increasing perturbation, she expected what he might further say. A long pause of silence ensued, during which he was visibly agitated; at length, he said "It would be a cruel delicacy, that could prevail with me to be silent — and I will inform you, that the Chevalier's extravagance has brought him twice into the prisons of Paris, from whence he was last extricated, as I was told upon authority, which I cannot doubt, by a well known Parisian Countess, with whom he continued to reside, when I left Paris."

He paused again; and, looking at Emily, perceived her countenance change, and that she was falling from the seat; he caught her, but she had fainted, and he called loudly for assistance. They were, however, beyond the hearing of his servants at the château, and he feared to leave her while he went thither for assistance, yet knew not how otherwise to obtain it; till a fountain at no great distance caught his eye, and he endeavoured to support Emily against the tree,

under which she had been sitting, while he went thither for water. But again he was perplexed, for he had nothing near him, in which water could be brought; but while, with increased anxiety, he watched her, he thought he perceived in her countenance symptoms of returning life.

It was long, however, before she revived, and then she found herself supported — not by the Count, but by Valancourt, who was observing her with looks of earnest apprehension, and who now spoke to her in a tone, tremulous with his anxiety. At the sound of his well known voice, she raised her eyes, but presently closed them, and a faintness again came over her.

The Count, with a look somewhat stern, waved him to withdraw; but he only sighed heavily, and called on the name of Emily, as he again held the water, that had been brought, to her lips. On the Count's repeating his action, and accompanying it with words, Valancourt answered him with a look of deep resentment, and refused to leave the place, till she should revive, or to resign her for a moment to the care of any person. In the next instant, his conscience seemed to inform him of what had been the subject of the Count's conversation with Emily, and indignation flashed in his eyes; but it was quickly repressed, and succeeded by an expression of serious anguish, that induced the Count to regard him with more pity than resentment, and the view of which so much affected Emily, when she again revived, that she yielded to the weakness of tears. But she soon restrained them, and, exerting her resolution to appear recovered, she rose, thanked the Count and Henri, with whom Valancourt had entered the garden, for their care, and moved towards the château, without noticing Valancourt, who, heartstruck by her manner, exclaimed in a low voice — "Good God! How have I deserved this? — What has been said, to occasion this change?"

Emily, without replying, but with increased emotion, quickened her steps. "What has thus disordered you, Emily?" said he, as he still walked by her side: "Give me a few moments' conversation, I entreat you; — I am very miserable!"

Though this was spoken in a low voice, it was overheard by the Count, who immediately replied, that Mademoiselle St. Aubert was then too much indisposed, to attend to any conversation, but that he would venture to promise she would see Monsieur Valancourt on the morrow, if she was better.

Valancourt's cheek was crimsoned: he looked haughtily at the Count, and then at Emily, with successive expressions of surprise, grief and supplication, which she could neither misunderstand, nor resist, and she said languidly — "I shall be better tomorrow, and if you wish to accept the Count's permission, I will see you then."

"See me!" exclaimed Valancourt, as he threw a glance of mingled pride and resentment upon the Count; and then, seeming to recollect himself, he added — "But I will come, madam; I will accept the Count's *permission*."

When they reached the door of the château, he lingered a moment, for his resentment was now fled; and then, with a look so expressive of tenderness and grief, that Emily's heart was not proof against it, he bade her good morning, and, bowing slightly to the Count, disappeared.

Emily withdrew to her own apartment, under such oppression of heart as she had seldom known, when she endeavoured to recollect all that the Count had told, to examine the probability of the circumstances he himself believed, and to consider of her future conduct towards Valancourt. But, when she attempted to think, her mind refused control, and she could only feel that she was miserable. One moment, she sunk under the conviction, that Valancourt was no longer the same, whom she had so tenderly loved, the idea of whom had hitherto supported her under affliction, and cheered her with the hope of happier days — but a fallen, a worthless character, whom she must teach herself to despise — if she could not forget. Then, unable to endure this terrible supposition, she rejected it, and disdained to believe him capable of conduct, such as the Count had described, to whom she believed he had been misrepresented by some artful enemy; and there were moments, when she even ventured to doubt the integrity of the Count himself, and to suspect, that he was influenced by some selfish motive, to break her connection with Valancourt. But this was the error of an instant, only; the Count's character, which she had heard spoken of by Du Pont and many other persons, and had herself observed, enabled her to judge, and forbade the supposition; had her confidence, indeed, been less, there appeared to be no temptation to betray him into conduct so treacherous, and so cruel. Nor did reflection suffer her to preserve the hope, that Valancourt had been misrepresented to the Count, who had said, that he spoke chiefly from his own observation, and from his son's experience. She must part from Valancourt, therefore, for ever — for what of either happiness or tranquillity could she expect with a man, whose tastes were degenerated into low inclinations, and to whom vice was become habitual? Whom she must no longer esteem, though the remembrance of what he once was, and the long habit of loving him, would render it very difficult for her to despise him. "O Valancourt!" she would exclaim "Having been separated so long — do we meet, only to be miserable — only to part for ever?"

Amidst all the tumult of her mind, she remembered pertinaciously the seeming candour and simplicity of his conduct, on the preceding night; and, had she dared to trust her own heart, it would have led her to hope much from this. Still she could not resolve to dismiss him for ever, without obtaining further proof of his ill conduct; yet she saw no probability of procuring it, if, indeed, proof more positive was possible. Something, however, it was necessary to decide upon, and she almost determined to be guided in her opinion solely by the manner, with which Valancourt should receive her hints concerning his late conduct.

Thus passed the hours till dinner time, when Emily, struggling against the pressure of her grief, dried her tears, and joined the family at table, where the Count preserved towards her the most delicate attention; but the Countess and Mademoiselle Bearn, having looked, for a moment, with surprise, on her

dejected countenance, began, as usual, to talk of trifles, while the eyes of Lady Blanche asked much of her friend, who could only reply by a mournful smile.

Emily withdrew as soon after dinner as possible, and was followed by the Lady Blanche, whose anxious enquiries, however, she found herself quite unequal to answer, and whom she entreated to spare her on the subject of her distress. To converse on any topic, was now, indeed, so extremely painful to her, that she soon gave up the attempt, and Blanche left her, with pity of the sorrow, which she perceived she had no power to assuage.

Emily secretly determined to go to her convent in a day or two; for company, especially that of the Countess and Mademoiselle Bearn, was intolerable to her, in the present state of her spirits; and, in the retirement of the convent, as well as the kindness of the abbess, she hoped to recover the command of her mind, and to teach it resignation to the event, which, she too plainly perceived, was approaching.

To have lost Valancourt by death, or to have seen him married to a rival, would, she thought, have given her less anguish, than a conviction of his unworthiness, which must terminate in misery to himself, and which robbed her even of the solitary image her heart so long had cherished. These painful reflections were interrupted, for a moment, by a note from Valancourt, written in evident distraction of mind, entreating, that she would permit him to see her on the approaching evening, instead of the following morning; a request, which occasioned her so much agitation, that she was unable to answer it. She wished to see him, and to terminate her present state of suspense, yet shrunk from the interview, and, incapable of deciding for herself, she, at length, sent to beg a few moments' conversation with the Count in his library, where she delivered to him the note, and requested his advice. After reading it, he said, that, if she believed herself well enough to support the interview, his opinion was, that, for the relief of both parties, it ought to take place, that evening.

“His affection for you is, undoubtedly, a very sincere one” added the Count; “and he appears so much distressed, and you, my amiable friend, are so ill at ease — that the sooner the affair is decided, the better.”

Emily replied, therefore, to Valancourt, that she would see him, and then exerted herself in endeavours to attain fortitude and composure, to bear her through the approaching scene — a scene so afflictingly the reverse of any, to which she had looked forward!

CHAPTER I

Is all the council that we two have shared,
the hours that we have spent,
When we have chid the hasty-footed time
For parting us—Oh! and is all forgot?

And will you rend our ancient love asunder?

MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

In the evening, when Emily was at length informed, that Count De Villefort requested to see her, she guessed that Valancourt was below, and, endeavouring to assume composure and to recollect all her spirits, she rose and left the apartment; but on reaching the door of the library, where she imagined him to be, her emotion returned with such energy, that, fearing to trust herself in the room, she returned into the hall, where she continued for a considerable time, unable to command her agitated spirits.

When she could recall them, she found in the library Valancourt, seated with the Count, who both rose on her entrance; but she did not dare to look at Valancourt, and the Count, having led her to a chair, immediately withdrew.

Emily remained with her eyes fixed on the floor, under such oppression of heart, that she could not speak, and with difficulty breathed; while Valancourt threw himself into a chair beside her, and, sighing heavily, continued silent, when, had she raised her eyes, she would have perceived the violent emotions, with which he was agitated.

At length, in a tremulous voice, he said “I have solicited to see you this evening, that I might, at least, be spared the further torture of suspense, which your altered manner had occasioned me, and which the hints I have just received from the Count have in part explained. I perceive I have enemies, Emily, who envied me my late happiness, and who have been busy in searching out the means to destroy it: I perceive, too, that time and absence have weakened the affection you once felt for me, and that you can now easily be taught to forget me.”

His last words faltered, and Emily, less able to speak than before, continued silent.

“O what a meeting is this!” exclaimed Valancourt, starting from his seat, and pacing the room with hurried steps “What a meeting is this, after our long — long separation!” Again he sat down, and, after the struggle of a moment, he

added in a firm, but despairing tone, "This is too much — I cannot bear it! Emily, will you not speak to me?"

He covered his face with his hand, as if to conceal his emotion, and took Emily's, which she did not withdraw. Her tears could no longer be restrained; and, when he raised his eyes and perceived that she was weeping, all his tenderness returned, and a gleam of hope appeared to cross his mind, for he exclaimed "O! you do pity me, then, you do love me! Yes, you are still my own Emily — let me believe those tears, that tell me so!"

Emily now made an effort to recover her firmness, and, hastily drying them, "Yes," said she, "I do pity you — I weep for you — but, ought I to think of you with affection? You may remember, that yester-evening I said, I had still sufficient confidence in your candour to believe, that, when I should request an explanation of your words, you would give it. This explanation is now unnecessary, I understand them too well; but prove, at least, that your candour is deserving of the confidence I give it, when I ask you, whether you are conscious of being the same estimable Valancourt — whom I once loved."

"Once loved!" cried he — "the same — the same!" He paused in extreme emotion, and then added, in a voice at once solemn, and dejected — "No — I am not the same! — I am lost — I am no longer worthy of you!"

He again concealed his face. Emily was too much affected by this honest confession to reply immediately, and, while she struggled to overcome the pleadings of her heart, and to act with the decisive firmness, which was necessary for her future peace, she perceived all the danger of trusting long to her resolution, in the presence of Valancourt, and was anxious to conclude an interview, that tortured them both; yet, when she considered, that this was probably their last meeting, her fortitude sunk at once, and she experienced only emotions of tenderness and of despondency.

Valancourt, meanwhile, lost in emotions of remorse and grief, which he had neither the power, nor the will to express, sat insensible almost of the presence of Emily, his features still concealed, and his breast agitated by convulsive sighs.

"Spare me the necessity" said Emily, recollecting her fortitude, "spare me the necessity of mentioning those circumstances of your conduct, which oblige me to break our connection for ever. — We must part, I now see you for the last time."

"Impossible!" cried Valancourt, roused from his deep silence, "You cannot mean what you say! — You cannot mean to throw me from you for ever!"

"We must part" repeated Emily, with emphasis — "and that for ever! Your own conduct has made this necessary."

“This is the Count’s determination” said he haughtily “not yours, and I shall enquire by what authority he interferes between us.” He now rose, and walked about the room in great emotion.

“Let me save you from this error” said Emily, not less agitated — “it is my determination, and, if you reflect a moment on your late conduct, you will perceive, that my future peace requires it.”

“Your future peace requires, that we should part — part for ever!” said Valancourt “How little did I ever expect to hear you say so!”

“And how little did I expect, that it would be necessary for me to say so!” rejoined Emily, while her voice softened into tenderness, and her tears flowed again. — “That you — you, Valancourt, would ever fall from my esteem!”

He was silent a moment, as if overwhelmed by the consciousness of no longer deserving this esteem, as well as the certainty of having lost it, and then, with impassioned grief, lamented the criminality of his late conduct and the misery to which it had reduced him, till, overcome by a recollection of the past and a conviction of the future, he burst into tears, and uttered only deep and broken sighs.

The remorse he had expressed, and the distress he suffered could not be witnessed by Emily with indifference, and, had she not called to her recollection all the circumstances, of which Count De Villefort had informed her, and all he had said of the danger of confiding in repentance, formed under the influence of passion, she might perhaps have trusted to the assurances of her heart, and have forgotten his misconduct in the tenderness, which that repentance excited.

Valancourt, returning to the chair beside her, at length, said, in a calm voice, “’Tis true, I am fallen — fallen from my own esteem! But could you, Emily, so soon, so suddenly resign, if you had not before ceased to love me, or, if your conduct was not governed by the designs, I will say, the selfish designs of another person! Would you not otherwise be willing to hope for my reformation — and could you bear, by estranging me from you, to abandon me to misery — to myself!” — Emily wept aloud. — “No, Emily — no — you would not do this, if you still loved me. You would find your own happiness in saving mine.”

“There are too many probabilities against that hope” said Emily “to justify me in trusting the comfort of my whole life to it. May I not also ask, whether you could wish me to do this, if you really loved me?”

“Really loved you!” exclaimed Valancourt — “is it possible you can doubt my love! Yet it is reasonable, that you should do so, since you see, that I am less ready to suffer the horror of parting with you, than that of involving you in my ruin. Yes, Emily — I am ruined — irreparably ruined — I am involved in debts, which I can never discharge!” Valancourt’s look, which was wild, as he spoke this, soon settled into an expression of gloomy despair; and Emily, while she

was compelled to admire his sincerity, saw, with unutterable anguish, new reasons for fear in the suddenness of his feelings and the extent of the misery, in which they might involve him. After some minutes, she seemed to contend against her grief and to struggle for fortitude to conclude the interview. "I will not prolong these moments" said she "by a conversation, which can answer no good purpose. Valancourt, farewell!"

"You are not going?" said he, wildly interrupting her — "You will not leave me thus — you will not abandon me even before my mind has suggested any possibility of compromise between the last indulgence of my despair and the endurance of my loss!"

Emily was terrified by the sternness of his look, and said, in a soothing voice, "You have yourself acknowledged, that it is necessary we should part; — if you wish, that I should believe you love me, you will repeat the acknowledgment."

— "Never — never" cried he — "I was distracted when I made it. O! Emily — this is too much; — though you are not deceived as to my faults, you must be deluded into this exasperation against them. The Count is the barrier between us; but he shall not long remain so."

"You are, indeed, distracted" said Emily, "the Count is not your enemy; on the contrary, he is my friend, and that might, in some degree, induce you to consider him as yours." —

"Your friend!" said Valancourt, hastily "How long has he been your friend, that he can so easily make you forget your lover? Was it he, who recommended to your favour the Monsieur Du Pont, who, you say, accompanied you from Italy, and who, I say, has stolen your affections? But I have no right to question you; — you are your own mistress. Du Pont, perhaps, may not long triumph over my fallen fortunes!"

Emily, more frightened than before by the frantic looks of Valancourt, said, in a tone scarcely audible "For heaven's sake be reasonable — be composed. Monsieur Du Pont is not your rival, nor is the Count his advocate. You have no rival; nor, except yourself, an enemy. My heart is wrung with anguish, which must increase while your frantic behaviour shows me, more than ever, that you are no longer the Valancourt I have been accustomed to love."

He made no reply, but sat with his arms rested on the table and his face concealed by his hands; while Emily stood, silent and trembling, wretched for herself and dreading to leave him in this state of mind.

"O excess of misery!" he suddenly exclaimed "That I can never lament my sufferings, without accusing myself, nor remember you, without recollecting the folly and the vice, by which I have lost you! Why was I forced to Paris, and why did I yield to allurements, which were to make me despicable for ever! O! Why cannot I look back, without interruption, to those days of innocence and peace, the days of our early love!" — The recollection seemed to melt his heart, and the

frenzy of despair yielded to tears. After a long pause, turning towards her and taking her hand, he said, in a softened voice, "Emily, can you bear that we should part — can you resolve to give up a heart, that loves you like mine — a heart, which, though it has erred — widely erred, is not irretrievable from error, as, you well know, it never can be retrievable from love?" Emily made no reply, but with her tears. "Can you" continued he "can you forget all our former days of happiness and confidence — when I had not a thought, that I might wish to conceal from you — when I had no taste — no pleasures, in which you did not participate?"

"O do not lead me to the remembrance of those days" said Emily "unless you can teach me to forget the present; I do not mean to reproach you; if I did, I should be spared these tears; but why will you render your present sufferings more conspicuous, by contrasting them with your former virtues?"

"Those virtues" said Valancourt "might, perhaps, again be mine, if your affection, which nurtured them, was unchanged; — but I fear, indeed, I see, that you can no longer love me; else the happy hours, which we have passed together, would plead for me, and you could not look back upon them unmoved. Yet, why should I torture myself with the remembrance — why do I linger here? Am I not ruined — would it not be madness to involve you in my misfortunes, even if your heart was still my own? I will not distress you further. Yet, before I go" added he, in a solemn voice, "let me repeat, that, whatever may be my destiny — whatever I may be doomed to suffer, I must always love you — most fondly love you! I am going, Emily, I am going to leave you — to leave you, for ever!" As he spoke the last words, his voice trembled, and he threw himself again into the chair, from which he had risen. Emily was utterly unable to leave the room, or to say farewell. All impression of his criminal conduct and almost of his follies was obliterated from her mind, and she was sensible only of pity and grief.

"My fortitude is gone" said Valancourt at length; "I can no longer even struggle to recall it. I cannot now leave you — I cannot bid you an eternal farewell; say, at least, that you will see me once again." Emily's heart was somewhat relieved by the request, and she endeavoured to believe, that she ought not to refuse it. Yet she was embarrassed by recollecting, that she was a visitor in the house of the Count, who could not be pleased by the return of Valancourt. Other considerations, however, soon overcame this, and she granted his request, on the condition, that he would neither think of the Count, as his enemy, nor Du Pont as his rival. He then left her, with a heart, so much lightened by this short respite, that he almost lost every former sense of misfortune.

Emily withdrew to her own room, that she might compose her spirits and remove the traces of her tears, which would encourage the censorious remarks of the Countess and her favourite, as well as excite the curiosity of the rest of the family. She found it, however, impossible to tranquillize her mind, from which she could not expel the remembrance of the late scene with Valancourt, or the consciousness, that she was to see him again, on the morrow. This

meeting now appeared more terrible to her than the last, for the ingenuous confession he had made of his ill conduct and his embarrassed circumstances, with the strength and tenderness of affection, which this confession discovered, had deeply impressed her, and, in spite of all she had heard and believed to his disadvantage, her esteem began to return. It frequently appeared to her impossible, that he could have been guilty of the depravities, reported of him, which, if not inconsistent with his warmth and impetuosity, were entirely so with his candour and sensibility. Whatever was the criminality, which had given rise to the reports, she could not now believe them to be wholly true, nor that his heart was finally closed against the charms of virtue. The deep consciousness, which he felt as well as expressed of his errors, seemed to justify the opinion; and, as she understood not the instability of youthful dispositions, when opposed by habit, and that professions frequently deceive those, who make, as well as those, who hear them, she might have yielded to the flattering persuasions of her own heart and the pleadings of Valancourt, had she not been guided by the superior prudence of the Count. He represented to her, in a clear light, the danger of her present situation, that of listening to promises of amendment, made under the influence of strong passion, and the slight hope, which could attach to a connection, whose chance of happiness rested upon the retrieval of ruined circumstances and the reform of corrupted habits. On these accounts, he lamented, that Emily had consented to a second interview, for he saw how much it would shake her resolution and increase the difficulty of her conquest.

Her mind was now so entirely occupied by nearer interests, that she forgot the old housekeeper and the promised history, which so lately had excited her curiosity, but which Dorothée was probably not very anxious to disclose, for night came; the hours passed; and she did not appear in Emily's chamber. With the latter it was a sleepless and dismal night; the more she suffered her memory to dwell on the late scenes with Valancourt, the more her resolution declined, and she was obliged to recollect all the arguments, which the Count had made use of to strengthen it, and all the precepts, which she had received from her deceased father, on the subject of self command, to enable her to act, with prudence and dignity, on this the most severe occasion of her life. There were moments, when all her fortitude forsook her, and when, remembering the confidence of former times, she thought it impossible, that she could renounce Valancourt. His reformation then appeared certain; the arguments of Count De Villefort were forgotten; she readily believed all she wished, and was willing to encounter any evil, rather than that of an immediate separation.

Thus passed the night in ineffectual struggles between affection and reason, and she rose, in the morning, with a mind, weakened and irresolute, and a frame, trembling with illness.