Chapter XXXVIII - Cloud

But it is not so for all. What then? His will be done, as done it surely will be, whether we humble ourselves to resignation or not. The impulse of creation forwards it; the strength of powers, seen and unseen, has its fulfilment in charge. Proof of a life to come must be given. In fire and in blood, if needful, must that proof be written. In fire and in blood do we trace the record throughout nature. In fire and in blood does it cross our own experience. Sufferer, faint not through terror of this burning evidence. Tired wayfarer, gird up thy loins; look upward, march onward. Pilgrims and brother mourners, join in friendly company. Dark through the wilderness of this world stretches the way for most of us: equal and steady be our tread; be our cross our banner. For staff we have His promise, whose 'word is tried, whose way perfect:' for present hope His providence, 'who gives the shield of salvation, whose gentleness makes great;' for final home His bosom, who 'dwells in the height of Heaven;' for crowning prize a glory, exceeding and eternal. Let us so run that we may obtain: let us endure hardness as good soldiers; let us finish our course, and keep the faith, reliant in the issue to come off more than conquerors: 'Art thou not from everlasting mine Holy One? WE SHALL NOT DIE!'

On a Thursday morning we were all assembled in classe, waiting for the lesson of literature. The hour was come; we expected the master.

The pupils of the first classe sat very still; the cleanly-written compositions prepared since the last lesson lay ready before them, neatly tied with ribbon, waiting to be gathered by the hand of the Professor as he made his rapid round of the desks. The month was July, the morning fine, the glass-door stood ajar, through it played a fresh breeze, and plants, growing at the lintel, waved, bent, looked in, seeming to whisper tidings.

M. Emanuel was not always quite punctual; we scarcely wondered at his being a little late, but we wondered when the door at last opened and, instead of him with his swiftness and his fire, there came quietly upon us the cautious Madame Beck.

She approached M. Paul's desk; she stood before it; she drew round her the light shawl covering her shoulders; beginning to speak in low, yet firm tones, and with a fixed gaze, she said, 'This morning there will be no lesson of literature.'

The second paragraph of her address followed, after about two minutes' pause.

'It is probable the lessons will be suspended for a week. I shall require at least that space of time to find an efficient substitute for M. Emanuel. Meanwhile, it shall be our study to fill the blanks usefully.

'Your Professor, ladies,' she went on, 'intends, if possible, duly to take leave of you. At the present moment he has not leisure for that ceremony. He is preparing for a long voyage. A very sudden and urgent summons of duty calls him to a great distance. He has decided to leave Europe for an indefinite time. Perhaps he may tell you more himself. Ladies, instead of the usual lesson with M. Emanuel, you will, this morning, read English with Mademoiselle Lucy.'

She bent her head courteously, drew closer the folds of her shawl, and passed from the classe.

A great silence fell: then a murmur went round the room: I believe some pupils wept.

Some time elapsed. The noise, the whispering, the occasional sobbing increased. I became conscious of a relaxation of discipline, a sort of growing disorder, as if my girls felt that vigilance was withdrawn, and that surveillance had virtually left the classe. Habit and the sense of duty enabled me to rally quickly, to rise in my usual way, to speak in my usual tone, to enjoin, and finally to establish quiet. I made the English reading long and close. I kept them at it the whole morning. I remember feeling a sentiment of impatience towards the pupils who sobbed. Indeed, their emotion was not of much value: it was only an hysteric agitation. I told them so unsparingly. I half ridiculed them. I was severe. The truth was, I could not do with their tears, or that gasping sound; I could not bear it. A rather weak- minded, low-spirited pupil kept it up when the others had done; relentless necessity obliged and assisted me so to accost her, that she dared not carry on the demonstration, that she was forced to conquer the convulsion.

That girl would have had a right to hate me, except that, when school was over and her companions departing, I ordered her to stay, and when they were gone, I did what I had never done to one among them before - pressed her to my heart and kissed her cheek. But, this impulse yielded to, I speedily put her out of the classe, for, upon that poignant strain, she wept more bitterly than ever.

I filled with occupation every minute of that day, and should have liked to sit up all night if I might have kept a candle burning; the night, however, proved a bad time, and left bad effects, preparing me ill for the next day's ordeal of insufferable gossip. Of course this news fell under general discussion. Some little reserve had accompanied the first surprise: that soon wore off; every mouth opened; every tongue

wagged; teachers, pupils, the very servants, mouthed the name of 'Emanuel.' He, whose connection with the school was contemporary with its commencement, thus suddenly to withdraw! All felt it strange.

They talked so much, so long, so often, that, out of the very multitude of their words and rumours, grew at last some intelligence. About the third day I heard it said that he was to sail in a week; then - that he was bound for the West Indies. I looked at Madame Beck's face, and into her eyes, for disproof or confirmation of this report; I perused her all over for information, but no part of her disclosed more than what was unperturbed and commonplace.

'This secession was an immense loss to her,' she alleged. 'She did not know how she should fill up the vacancy. She was so used to her kinsman, he had become her right hand; what should she do without him? She had opposed the step, but M. Paul had convinced her it was his duty.'

She said all this in public, in classe, at the dinner-table, speaking audibly to Zelie St. Pierre.

'Why was it his duty?' I could have asked her that. I had impulses to take hold of her suddenly, as she calmly passed me in classe, to stretch out my hand and grasp her fast, and say, 'Stop. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. *Why* is it his duty to go into banishment?' But Madame always addressed some other teacher, and never looked at me, never seemed conscious I could have a care in the question.

The week wore on. Nothing more was said about M. Emanuel coming to bid us good-by; and none seemed anxious for his coming; none questioned whether or not he would come; none betrayed torment lest he should depart silent and unseen; incessantly did they talk, and never, in all their talk, touched on this vital point. As to Madame, she of course could see him, and say to him as much as she pleased. What should *she* care whether or not he appeared in the schoolroom?

The week consumed. We were told that he was going on such a day, that his destination was 'Basseterre in Guadaloupe:' the business which called him abroad related to a friend's interests, not his own: I thought as much.

'Basseterre in Guadaloupe.' I had little sleep about this time, but whenever I *did* slumber, it followed infallibly that I was quickly roused with a start, while the words 'Basseterre,' 'Guadaloupe,' seemed pronounced over my pillow, or ran athwart the darkness round and before me, in zigzag characters of red or violet light.

For what I felt there was no help, and how could I help feeling? M. Emanuel had been very kind to me of late days; he had been growing hourly better and kinder. It was now a month since we had settled the theological difference, and in all that time there had been no quarrel. Nor had our peace been the cold daughter of divorce; we had not lived aloof; he had come oftener, he had talked with me more than before; he had spent hours with me, with temper soothed, with eye content, with manner home-like and mild. Kind subjects of conversation had grown between us; he had inquired into my plans of life, and I had communicated them; the school project pleased him; he made me repeat it more than once, though he called it an Alnaschar dream. The jar was over; the mutual understanding was settling and fixing; feelings of union and hope made themselves profoundly felt in the heart; affection and deep esteem and dawning trust had each fastened its bond.

What quiet lessons I had about this time! No more taunts on my 'intellect,' no more menaces of grating public shows! How sweetly, for the jealous gibe, and the more jealous, half-passionate eulogy, were substituted a mute, indulgent help, a fond guidance, and a tender forbearance which forgave but never praised. There were times when he would sit for many minutes and not speak at all; and when dusk or duty brought separation, he would leave with words like these, 'Il est doux, le repos! Il est precieux le calme bonheur!'

One evening, not ten short days since, he joined me whilst walking in my alley. He took my hand. I looked up in his face. I thought he meant to arrest my attention.

'Bonne petite amie!' said he, softly; 'douce consolatrice!' But through his touch, and with his words, a new feeling and a strange thought found a course. Could it be that he was becoming more than friend or brother? Did his look speak a kindness beyond fraternity or amity?

His eloquent look had more to say, his hand drew me forward, his interpreting lips stirred. No. Not now. Here into the twilight alley broke an interruption: it came dual and ominous: we faced two bodeful forms - a woman's and a priest's - Madame Beck and Pere Silas.

The aspect of the latter I shall never forget. On the first impulse it expressed a Jean-Jacques sensibility, stirred by the signs of affection just surprised; then, immediately, darkened over it the jaundice of ecclesiastical jealousy. He spoke to *me* with unction. He looked on his pupil with sternness. As to Madame Beck, she, of course, saw nothing - nothing; though her kinsman retained in her presence the hand of the heretic foreigner, not suffering withdrawal, but clasping it close and fast.

Following these incidents, that sudden announcement of departure had struck me at first as incredible. Indeed, it was only frequent repetition, and the credence of the hundred and fifty minds round me, which forced on me its full acceptance. As to that week of suspense, with its blank, yet burning days, which brought from him no word of explanation - I remember, but I cannot describe its passage.

The last day broke. Now would he visit us. Now he would come and speak his farewell, or he would vanish mute, and be seen by us nevermore.

This alternative seemed to be present in the mind of not a living creature in that school. All rose at the usual hour; all breakfasted as usual; all, without reference to, or apparent thought of their late Professor, betook themselves with wonted phlegm to their ordinary duties.

So oblivious was the house, so tame, so trained its proceedings, so inexpectant its aspect - I scarce knew how to breathe in an atmosphere thus stagnant, thus smothering. Would no one lend me a voice? Had no one a wish, no one a word, no one a prayer to which I could say - Amen?

I had seen them unanimous in demand for the merest trifle - a treat, a holiday, a lesson's remission; they could not, they *would* not now band to besiege Madame Beck, and insist on a last interview with a Master who had certainly been loved, at least by some - loved as *they* could love - but, oh! what *is* the love of the multitude?

I knew where he lived: I knew where he was to be heard of, or communicated with; the distance was scarce a stone's-throw: had it been in the next room - unsummoned, I could make no use of my knowledge. To follow, to seek out, to remind, to recall - for these things I had no faculty.

M. Emanuel might have passed within reach of my arm: had he passed silent and unnoticing, silent and stirless should I have suffered him to go by.

Morning wasted. Afternoon came, and I thought all was over. My heart trembled in its place. My blood was troubled in its current. I was quite sick, and hardly knew how to keep at my post - or do my work. Yet the little world round me plodded on indifferent; all seemed jocund, free of care, or fear, or thought: the very pupils who, seven days since, had wept hysterically at a startling piece of news, appeared quite to have forgotten the news, its import, and their emotion.

A little before five o'clock, the hour of dismissal, Madame Beck sent for me to her chamber, to read over and translate some English letter she had received, and to write for her the answer. Before settling to this work, I observed that she softly closed the two doors of her chamber; she even shut and fastened the casement, though it was a hot day, and free circulation of air was usually regarded by her as indispensable. Why this precaution? A keen suspicion, an almost fierce distrust, suggested such question. Did she want to exclude sound? what sound?

I listened as I had never listened before; I listened like the evening and winter-wolf, snuffing the snow, scenting prey, and hearing far off the traveller's tramp. Yet I could both listen and write. About the middle of the letter I heard - what checked my pen - a tread in the vestibule. No door-bell had rung; Rosine - acting doubtless by orders - had anticipated such reveillee. Madame saw me halt. She coughed, made a bustle, spoke louder. The tread had passed on to the classes.

'Proceed,' said Madame; but my hand was fettered, my ear enchained, my thoughts were carried off captive.

The classes formed another building; the hall parted them from the dwelling-house: despite distance and partition, I heard the sudden stir of numbers, a whole division rising at once.

'They are putting away work,' said Madame.

It was indeed the hour to put away work, but why that sudden hush - that instant quell of the tumult?

'Wait, Madame - I will see what it is.'

And I put down my pen and left her. Left her? No: she would not be left: powerless to detain me, she rose and followed, close as my shadow. I turned on the last step of the stair.

'Are you coming, too?' I asked.

'Yes,' said she; meeting my glance with a peculiar aspect - a look, clouded, yet resolute.

We proceeded then, not together, but she walked in my steps.

He was come. Entering the first classe, I saw him. There, once more appeared the form most familiar. I doubt not they had tried to keep him away, but he was come.

The girls stood in a semicircle; he was passing round, giving his farewells, pressing each hand, touching with his lips each cheek. This last ceremony, foreign custom permitted at such a parting - so solemn, to last so long.

I felt it hard that Madame Beck should dog me thus; following and watching me close; my neck and shoulder shrunk in fever under her breath; I became terribly goaded.

He was approaching; the semicircle was almost travelled round; he came to the last pupil; he turned. But Madame was before me; she had stepped out suddenly; she seemed to magnify her proportions and amplify her drapery; she eclipsed me; I was hid. She knew my weakness and deficiency; she could calculate the degree of moral paralysis - the total default of self-assertion - with which, in a crisis, I could be struck. She hastened to her kinsman, she broke upon him volubly, she mastered his attention, she hurried him to the door - the glass-door opening on the garden. I think he looked round; could I but have caught his eye, courage, I think, would have rushed in to aid feeling, and there would have been a charge, and, perhaps, a rescue; but already the room was all confusion, the semicircle broken into groups, my figure was lost among thirty more conspicuous. Madame had her will; yes, she got him away, and he had not seen me; he thought me absent. Five o'clock struck, the loud dismissal-bell rang, the school separated, the room emptied.

There seems, to my memory, an entire darkness and distraction in some certain minutes I then passed alone - a grief inexpressible over a loss unendurable. *What* should I do; oh! *what* should I do; when all my life's hope was thus torn by the roots out of my riven, outraged heart?

What I *should* have done, I know not, when a little child - the least child in the school - broke with its simplicity and its unconsciousness into the raging yet silent centre of that inward conflict.

'Mademoiselle,' lisped the treble voice, 'I am to give you that. M. Paul said I was to seek you all over the house, from the grenier to the cellar, and when I found you, to give you that.'

And the child delivered a note; the little dove dropped on my knee, its olive leaf plucked off. I found neither address nor name, only these words: -

'It was not my intention to take leave of you when I said good-by to the rest, but I hoped to see you in classe. I was disappointed. The interview is deferred. Be ready for me. Ere I sail, I must see you at leisure, and speak with you at length. Be ready; my moments are

numbered, and, just now, monopolized; besides, I have a private business on hand which I will not share with any, nor communicate - even to you. - PAUL.'

'Be ready?' Then it must be this evening: was he not to go on the morrow? Yes; of that point I was certain. I had seen the date of his vessel's departure advertised. Oh! *I* would be ready, but could that longed-for meeting really be achieved? the time was so short, the schemers seemed so watchful, so active, so hostile; the way of access appeared strait as a gully, deep as a chasm - Apollyon straddled across it, breathing flames. Could my Greatheart overcome? Could my guide reach me?

Who might tell? Yet I began to take some courage, some comfort; it seemed to me that I felt a pulse of his heart beating yet true to the whole throb of mine.

I waited my champion. Apollyon came trailing his Hell behind him. I think if Eternity held torment, its form would not be fiery rack, nor its nature despair. I think that on a certain day amongst those days which never dawned, and will not set, an angel entered Hades - stood, shone, smiled, delivered a prophecy of conditional pardon, kindled a doubtful hope of bliss to come, not now, but at a day and hour unlooked for, revealed in his own glory and grandeur the height and compass of his promise: spoke thus - then towering, became a star, and vanished into his own Heaven. His legacy was suspense - a worse boon than despair.

All that evening I waited, trusting in the dove-sent olive-leaf, yet in the midst of my trust, terribly fearing. My fear pressed heavy. Cold and peculiar, I knew it for the partner of a rarely-belied presentiment. The first hours seemed long and slow; in spirit I clung to the flying skirts of the last. They passed like drift cloud - like the wrack scudding before a storm.

They passed. All the long, hot summer day burned away like a Yule-log; the crimson of its close perished; I was left bent among the cool blue shades, over the pale and ashen gleams of its night.

Prayers were over; it was bed-time; my co-inmates were all retired. I still remained in the gloomy first classe, forgetting, or at least disregarding, rules I had never forgotten or disregarded before.

How long I paced that classe I cannot tell; I must have been afoot many hours; mechanically had I moved aside benches and desks, and had made for myself a path down its length. There I walked, and there, when certain that the whole household were abed, and quite out of hearing - there, I at last wept. Reliant on Night, confiding in

Solitude, I kept my tears sealed, my sobs chained, no longer; they heaved my heart; they tore their way. In this house, what grief could be sacred?

Soon after eleven o'clock - a very late hour in the Rue Fossette - the door unclosed, quietly but not stealthily; a lamp's flame invaded the moonlight; Madame Beck entered, with the same composed air, as if coming on an ordinary occasion, at an ordinary season. Instead of at once addressing me, she went to her desk, took her keys, and seemed to seek something: she loitered over this feigned search long, too long. She was calm, too calm; my mood scarce endured the pretence; driven beyond common range, two hours since I had left behind me wonted respects and fears. Led by a touch, and ruled by a word, under usual circumstances, no yoke could now be borne - no curb obeyed.

'It is more than time for retirement,' said Madame; 'the rule of the house has already been transgressed too long.'

Madame met no answer: I did not check my walk; when she came in my way, I put her out of it.

'Let me persuade you to calm, Meess; let me lead you to your chamber,' said she, trying to speak softly.

'No!' I said; 'neither you nor another shall persuade or lead me.'

'Your bed shall be warmed. Goton is sitting up still. She shall make you comfortable: she shall give you a sedative.'

'Madame,' I broke out, 'you are a sensualist. Under all your serenity, your peace, and your decorum, you are an undenied sensualist. Make your own bed warm and soft; take sedatives and meats, and drinks spiced and sweet, as much as you will. If you have any sorrow or disappointment - and, perhaps, you have - nay, I *know* you have - seek your own palliatives, in your own chosen resources. Leave me, however. *Leave me*, I say!'

'I must send another to watch you, Meess: I must send Goton.'

'I forbid it. Let me alone. Keep your hand off me, and my life, and my troubles. Oh, Madame! in *your* hand there is both chill and poison. You envenom and you paralyze.'

'What have I done, Meess? You must not marry Paul. He cannot marry.'

'Dog in the manger!' I said: for I knew she secretly wanted him, and had always wanted him. She called him 'insupportable:' she railed at

him for a 'devot:' she did not love, but she wanted to marry, that she might bind him to her interest. Deep into some of Madame's secrets I had entered - I know not how: by an intuition or an inspiration which came to me - I know not whence. In the course of living with her too, I had slowly learned, that, unless with an inferior, she must ever be a rival. She was *my* rival, heart and soul, though secretly, under the smoothest bearing, and utterly unknown to all save her and myself.

Two minutes I stood over Madame, feeling that the whole woman was in my power, because in some moods, such as the present - in some stimulated states of perception, like that of this instant - her habitual disguise, her mask and her domino, were to me a mere network reticulated with holes; and I saw underneath a being heartless, self-indulgent, and ignoble. She quietly retreated from me: meek and self-possessed, though very uneasy, she said, 'If I would not be persuaded to take rest, she must reluctantly leave me.' Which she did incontinent, perhaps even more glad to get away, than I was to see her vanish.

This was the sole flash-eliciting, truth-extorting, rencontre which ever occurred between me and Madame Beck: this short night-scene was never repeated. It did not one whit change her manner to me. I do not know that she revenged it. I do not know that she hated me the worse for my fell candour. I think she bucklered herself with the secret philosophy of her strong mind, and resolved to forget what it irked her to remember. I know that to the end of our mutual lives there occurred no repetition of, no allusion to, that fiery passage.

That night passed: all nights - even the starless night before dissolution - must wear away. About six o'clock, the hour which called up the household, I went out to the court, and washed my face in its cold, fresh well-water. Entering by the carre, a piece of mirror- glass, set in an oaken cabinet, repeated my image. It said I was changed: my cheeks and lips were sodden white, my eyes were glassy, and my eyelids swollen and purple.

On rejoining my companions, I knew they all looked at me - my heart seemed discovered to them: I believed myself self-betrayed. Hideously certain did it seem that the very youngest of the school must guess why and for whom I despaired.

'Isabelle,' the child whom I had once nursed in sickness, approached me. Would she, too, mock me!

'Que vous etes pale! Vous etes donc bien malade, Mademoiselle!' said she, putting her finger in her mouth, and staring with a wistful stupidity which at the moment seemed to me more beautiful than the keenest intelligence.

Isabelle did not long stand alone in the recommendation of ignorance: before the day was over, I gathered cause of gratitude towards the whole blind household. The multitude have something else to do than to read hearts and interpret dark sayings. Who wills, may keep his own counsel - be his own secret's sovereign. In the course of that day, proof met me on proof, not only that the cause of my present sorrow was unguessed, but that my whole inner life for the last six months, was still mine only. It was not known - it had not been noted - that I held in peculiar value one life among all lives. Gossip had passed me by; curiosity had looked me over; both subtle influences, hovering always round, had never become centred upon me. A given organization may live in a full fever-hospital, and escape typhus. M. Emanuel had come and gone: I had been taught and sought; in season and out of season he had called me, and I had obeyed him: 'M. Paul wants Miss Lucy' - 'Miss Lucy is with M. Paul' - such had been the perpetual bulletin; and nobody commented, far less condemned. Nobody hinted, nobody jested. Madame Beck read the riddle: none else resolved it. What I now suffered was called illness - a headache: I accepted the baptism.

But what bodily illness was ever like this pain? This certainty that he was gone without a farewell - this cruel conviction that fate and pursuing furies - a woman's envy and a priest's bigotry - would suffer me to see him no more? What wonder that the second evening found me like the first - untamed, tortured, again pacing a solitary room in an unalterable passion of silent desolation?

Madame Beck did not herself summon me to bed that night - she did not come near me: she sent Ginevra Fanshawe - a more efficient agent for the purpose she could not have employed. Ginevra's first words - 'Is your headache very bad to-night?' (for Ginevra, like the rest, thought I had a headache - an intolerable headache which made me frightfully white in the face, and insanely restless in the foot) - her first words, I say, inspired the impulse to flee anywhere, so that it were only out of reach. And soon, what followed - plaints about her own headaches - completed the business.

I went up-stairs. Presently I was in my bed - my miserable bed - haunted with quick scorpions. I had not been laid down five minutes, when another emissary arrived: Goton came, bringing me something to drink. I was consumed with thirst - I drank eagerly; the beverage was sweet, but I tasted a drug.

'Madame says it will make you sleep, chou-chou,' said Goton, as she received back the emptied cup.

Ah! the sedative had been administered. In fact, they had given me a strong opiate. I was to be held quiet for one night.

The household came to bed, the night-light was lit, the dormitory hushed. Sleep soon reigned: over those pillows, sleep won an easy supremacy: contented sovereign over heads and hearts which did not ache - he passed by the unquiet.

The drug wrought. I know not whether Madame had overcharged or under- charged the dose; its result was not that she intended. Instead of stupor, came excitement. I became alive to new thought - to reverie peculiar in colouring. A gathering call ran among the faculties, their bugles sang, their trumpets rang an untimely summons. Imagination was roused from her rest, and she came forth impetuous and venturous. With scorn she looked on Matter, her mate - 'Rise!' she said. 'Sluggard! this night I will have *my* will; nor shalt thou prevail.'

'Look forth and view the night!' was her cry; and when I lifted the heavy blind from the casement close at hand - with her own royal gesture, she showed me a moon supreme, in an element deep and splendid.

To my gasping senses she made the glimmering gloom, the narrow limits, the oppressive heat of the dormitory, intolerable. She lured me to leave this den and follow her forth into dew, coolness, and glory.

She brought upon me a strange vision of Villette at midnight. Especially she showed the park, the summer-park, with its long alleys all silent, lone and safe; among these lay a huge stone basin - that basin I knew, and beside which I had often stood - deep-set in the tree-shadows, brimming with cool water, clear, with a green, leafy, rushy bed. What of all this? The park-gates were shut up, locked, sentinelled: the place could not be entered.

Could it not? A point worth considering; and while revolving it, I mechanically dressed. Utterly incapable of sleeping or lying still - excited from head to foot - what could I do better than dress?

The gates were locked, soldiers set before them: was there, then, no admission to the park?

The other day, in walking past, I had seen, without then attending to the circumstance, a gap in the paling - one stake broken down: I now saw this gap again in recollection - saw it very plainly - the narrow, irregular aperture visible between the stems of the lindens, planted orderly as a colonnade. A man could not have made his way through that aperture, nor could a stout woman, perhaps not Madame Beck; but I thought I might: I fancied I should like to try, and once within, at this hour the whole park would be mine - the moonlight, midnight park!

How soundly the dormitory slept! What deep slumbers! What quiet breathing! How very still the whole large house! What was the time? I felt restless to know. There stood a clock in the classe below: what hindered me from venturing down to consult it? By such a moon, its large white face and jet black figures must be vividly distinct.

As for hindrance to this step, there offered not so much as a creaking hinge or a clicking latch. On these hot July nights, close air could not be tolerated, and the chamber-door stood wide open. Will the dormitory-planks sustain my tread untraitorous? Yes. I know wherever a board is loose, and will avoid it. The oak staircase creaks somewhat as I descend, but not much: - I am in the carre.

The great classe-doors are close shut: they are bolted. On the other hand, the entrance to the corridor stands open. The classes seem to my thought, great dreary jails, buried far back beyond thoroughfares, and for me, filled with spectral and intolerable Memories, laid miserable amongst their straw and their manacles. The corridor offers a cheerful vista, leading to the high vestibule which opens direct upon the street.

Hush! - the clock strikes. Ghostly deep as is the stillness of this convent, it is only eleven. While my ear follows to silence the hum of the last stroke, I catch faintly from the built-out capital, a sound like bells or like a band - a sound where sweetness, where victory, where mourning blend. Oh, to approach this music nearer, to listen to it alone by the rushy basin! Let me go - oh, let me go! What hinders, what does not aid freedom?

There, in the corridor, hangs my garden-costume, my large hat, my shawl. There is no lock on the huge, heavy, porte-cochere; there is no key to seek: it fastens with a sort of spring-bolt, not to be opened from the outside, but which, from within, may be noiselessly withdrawn. Can I manage it? It yields to my hand, yields with propitious facility. I wonder as that portal seems almost spontaneously to unclose - I wonder as I cross the threshold and step on the paved street, wonder at the strange ease with which this prison has been forced. It seems as if I had been pioneered invisibly, as if some dissolving force had gone before me: for myself, I have scarce made an effort.

Quiet Rue Fossette! I find on this pavement that wanderer-wooing summer night of which I mused; I see its moon over me; I feel its dew in the air. But here I cannot stay; I am still too near old haunts: so close under the dungeon, I can hear the prisoners moan. This solemn peace is not what I seek, it is not what I can bear: to me the face of that sky bears the aspect of a world's death. The park also will be calm - I know, a mortal serenity prevails everywhere - yet let me seek the park.

I took a route well known, and went up towards the palatial and royal Haute-Ville; thence the music I had heard certainly floated; it was hushed now, but it might re-waken. I went on: neither band nor bell music came to meet me; another sound replaced it, a sound like a strong tide, a great flow, deepening as I proceeded. Light broke, movement gathered, chimes pealed - to what was I coming? Entering on the level of a Grande Place, I found myself, with the suddenness of magic, plunged amidst a gay, living, joyous crowd.

Villette is one blaze, one broad illumination; the whole world seems abroad; moonlight and heaven are banished: the town, by her own flambeaux, beholds her own splendour - gay dresses, grand equipages, fine horses and gallant riders throng the bright streets. I see even scores of masks. It is a strange scene, stranger than dreams. But where is the park? - I ought to be near it. In the midst of this glare the park must be shadowy and calm - *there*, at least, are neither torches, lamps, nor crowd?

I was asking this question when an open carriage passed me filled with known faces. Through the deep throng it could pass but slowly; the spirited horses fretted in their curbed ardour. I saw the occupants of that carriage well: me they could not see, or, at least, not know, folded close in my large shawl, screened with my straw hat (in that motley crowd no dress was noticeably strange). I saw the Count de Bassompierre; I saw my godmother, handsomely apparelled, comely and cheerful; I saw, too, Paulina Mary, compassed with the triple halo of her beauty, her youth, and her happiness. In looking on her countenance of joy, and eyes of festal light, one scarce remembered to note the gala elegance of what she wore; I know only that the drapery floating about her was all white and light and bridal; seated opposite to her I saw Graham Bretton; it was in looking up at him her aspect had caught its lustre - the light repeated in *her* eyes beamed first out of his.

It gave me strange pleasure to follow these friends viewlessly, and I *did* follow them, as I thought, to the park. I watched them alight (carriages were inadmissible) amidst new and unanticipated splendours. Lo! the iron gateway, between the stone columns, was spanned by a flaming arch built of massed stars; and, following them cautiously beneath that arch, where were they, and where was I?

In a land of enchantment, a garden most gorgeous, a plain sprinkled with coloured meteors, a forest with sparks of purple and ruby and golden fire gemming the foliage; a region, not of trees and shadow, but of strangest architectural wealth - of altar and of temple, of pyramid, obelisk, and sphinx: incredible to say, the wonders and the symbols of Egypt teemed throughout the park of Villette.

No matter that in five minutes the secret was mine - the key of the mystery picked up, and its illusion unveiled - no matter that I quickly recognised the material of these solemn fragments - the timber, the paint, and the pasteboard - these inevitable discoveries failed to quite destroy the charm, or undermine the marvel of that night. No matter that I now seized the explanation of the whole great fete - a fete of which the conventual Rue Fossette had not tasted, though it had opened at dawn that morning, and was still in full vigour near midnight.

In past days there had been, said history, an awful crisis in the fate of Labassecour, involving I know not what peril to the rights and liberties of her gallant citizens. Rumours of wars there had been, if not wars themselves; a kind of struggling in the streets - a bustle - a running to and fro, some rearing of barricades, some burgher-rioting, some calling out of troops, much interchange of brickbats, and even a little of shot. Tradition held that patriots had fallen: in the old Basse-Ville was shown an enclosure, solemnly built in and set apart, holding, it was said, the sacred bones of martyrs. Be this as it may, a certain day in the year was still kept as a festival in honour of the said patriots and martyrs of somewhat apocryphal memory - the morning being given to a solemn Te Deum in St. Jean Baptiste, the evening devoted to spectacles, decorations, and illuminations, such as these I now saw.

While looking up at the image of a white ibis, fixed on a column - while fathoming the deep, torch-lit perspective of an avenue, at the close of which was couched a sphinx - I lost sight of the party which, from the middle of the great square, I had followed - or, rather, they vanished like a group of apparitions. On this whole scene was impressed a dream-like character: every shape was wavering, every movement floating, every voice echo-like - half-mocking, half-uncertain. Paulina and her friends being gone, I scarce could avouch that I had really seen them; nor did I miss them as guides through the chaos, far less regret them as protectors amidst the night.

That festal night would have been safe for a very child. Half the peasantry had come in from the outlying environs of Villette, and the decent burghers were all abroad and around, dressed in their best. My straw-hat passed amidst cap and jacket, short petticoat, and long calico mantle, without, perhaps, attracting a glance; I only took the precaution to bind down the broad leaf gipsy-wise, with a supplementary ribbon - and then I felt safe as if masked.

Safe I passed down the avenues - safe I mixed with the crowd where it was deepest. To be still was not in my power, nor quietly to observe. I took a revel of the scene; I drank the elastic night-air - the swell of sound, the dubious light, now flashing, now fading. As to Happiness

or Hope, they and I had shaken hands, but just now - I scorned Despair.

My vague aim, as I went, was to find the stone-basin, with its clear depth and green lining: of that coolness and verdure I thought, with the passionate thirst of unconscious fever. Amidst the glare, and hurry, and throng, and noise, I still secretly and chiefly longed to come on that circular mirror of crystal, and surprise the moon glassing therein her pearly front.

I knew my route, yet it seemed as if I was hindered from pursuing it direct: now a sight, and now a sound, called me aside, luring me down this alley and down that. Already I saw the thick-planted trees which framed this tremulous and rippled glass, when, choiring out of a glade to the right, broke such a sound as I thought might be heard if Heaven were to open - such a sound, perhaps, as *was* heard above the plain of Bethlehem, on the night of glad tidings.

The song, the sweet music, rose afar, but rushing swiftly on fast-strengthening pinions - there swept through these shades so full a storm of harmonies that, had no tree been near against which to lean, I think I must have dropped. Voices were there, it seemed to me, unnumbered; instruments varied and countless - bugle, horn, and trumpet I knew. The effect was as a sea breaking into song with all its waves.

The swaying tide swept this way, and then it fell back, and I followed its retreat. It led me towards a Byzantine building - a sort of kiosk near the park's centre. Round about stood crowded thousands, gathered to a grand concert in the open air. What I had heard was, I think, a wild Jaeger chorus; the night, the space, the scene, and my own mood, had but enhanced the sounds and their impression.

Here were assembled ladies, looking by this light most beautiful: some of their dresses were gauzy, and some had the sheen of satin, the flowers and the blond trembled, and the veils waved about their decorated bonnets, as that host-like chorus, with its greatly- gathering sound, sundered the air above them. Most of these ladies occupied the little light park-chairs, and behind and beside them stood guardian gentlemen. The outer ranks of the crowd were made up of citizens, plebeians and police.

In this outer rank I took my place. I rather liked to find myself the silent, unknown, consequently unaccosted neighbour of the short petticoat and the sabot; and only the distant gazer at the silk robe, the velvet mantle, and the plumed chapeau. Amidst so much life and joy, too, it suited me to be alone - quite alone. Having neither wish nor power to force my way through a mass so close-packed, my station

was on the farthest confines, where, indeed, I might hear, but could see little.

'Mademoiselle is not well placed,' said a voice at my elbow. Who dared accost *me*, a being in a mood so little social? I turned, rather to repel than to reply. I saw a man - a burgher - an entire stranger, as I deemed him for one moment, but the next, recognised in him a certain tradesman - a bookseller, whose shop furnished the Rue Fossette with its books and stationery; a man notorious in our pensionnat for the excessive brittleness of his temper, and frequent snappishness of his manner, even to us, his principal customers: but whom, for my solitary self, I had ever been disposed to like, and had always found civil, sometimes kind; once, in aiding me about some troublesome little exchange of foreign money, he had done me a service. He was an intelligent man; under his asperity, he was a good-hearted man; the thought had sometimes crossed me, that a part of his nature bore affinity to a part of M. Emanuel's (whom he knew well, and whom I had often seen sitting on Miret's counter, turning over the current month's publications); and it was in this affinity I read the explanation of that conciliatory feeling with which I instinctively regarded him.

Strange to say, this man knew me under my straw-hat and closely-folded shawl; and, though I deprecated the effort, he insisted on making a way for me through the crowd, and finding me a better situation. He carried his disinterested civility further; and, from some quarter, procured me a chair. Once and again, I have found that the most cross- grained are by no means the worst of mankind; nor the humblest in station, the least polished in feeling. This man, in his courtesy, seemed to find nothing strange in my being here alone; only a reason for extending to me, as far as he could, a retiring, yet efficient attention. Having secured me a place and a seat, he withdrew without asking a question, without obtruding a remark, without adding a superfluous word. No wonder that Professor Emanuel liked to take his cigar and his lounge, and to read his feuilleton in M. Miret's shop - the two must have suited.

I had not been seated five minutes, ere I became aware that chance and my worthy burgher friend had brought me once more within view of a familiar and domestic group. Right before me sat the Brettons and de Bassompierres. Within reach of my hand - had I chosen to extend it - sat a figure like a fairy-queen, whose array, lilies and their leaves seemed to have suggested; whatever was not spotless white, being forest-green. My godmother, too, sat so near, that, had I leaned forward, my breath might have stirred the ribbon of her bonnet. They were too near; having been just recognised by a comparative stranger, I felt uneasy at this close vicinage of intimate acquaintance.

It made me quite start when Mrs Bretton, turning to Mr Home, and speaking out of a kind impulse of memory, said, - 'I wonder what my steady little Lucy would say to all this if she were here? I wish we had brought her, she would have enjoyed it much.'

'So she would, so she would, in her grave sensible fashion; it is a pity but we had asked her,' rejoined the kind gentleman; and added, 'I like to see her so quietly pleased; so little moved, yet so content.'

Dear were they both to me, dear are they to this day in their remembered benevolence. Little knew they the rack of pain which had driven Lucy almost into fever, and brought her out, guideless and reckless, urged and drugged to the brink of frenzy. I had half a mind to bend over the elders' shoulders, and answer their goodness with the thanks of my eyes. M. de Bassompierre did not well know *me*, but I knew *him*, and honoured and admired his nature, with all its plain sincerity, its warm affection, and unconscious enthusiasm. Possibly I might have spoken, but just then Graham turned; he turned with one of his stately firm movements, so different from those, of a sharp-tempered under-sized man: there was behind him a throng, a hundred ranks deep; there were thousands to meet his eye and divide its scrutiny - why then did he concentrate all on me - oppressing me with the whole force of that full, blue, steadfast orb? Why, if he *would* look, did not one glance satisfy him? why did he turn on his chair, rest his elbow on its back, and study me leisurely? He could not see my face, I held it down; surely, he *could* not recognise me: I stooped, I turned, I *would* not be known. He rose, by some means he contrived to approach, in two minutes he would have had my secret: my identity would have been grasped between his, never tyrannous, but always powerful hands. There was but one way to evade or to check him. I implied, by a sort of supplicatory gesture, that it was my prayer to be let alone; after that, had he persisted, he would perhaps have seen the spectacle of Lucy incensed: not all that was grand, or good, or kind in him (and Lucy felt the full amount) should have kept her quite tame, or absolutely inoffensive and shadowlike. He looked, but he desisted. He shook his handsome head, but he was mute. He resumed his seat, nor did he again turn or disturb me by a glance, except indeed for one single instant, when a look, rather solicitous than curious, stole my way - speaking what somehow stilled my heart like 'the south-wind quieting the earth.' Graham's thoughts of me were not entirely those of a frozen indifference, after all. I believe in that goodly mansion, his heart, he kept one little place under the sky-lights where Lucy might have entertainment, if she chose to call. It was not so handsome as the chambers where he lodged his male friends; it was not like the hall where he accommodated his philanthropy, or the library where he treasured his science, still less did it resemble the pavilion where his marriage feast was splendidly spread; yet, gradually, by long and equal kindness, he proved to me that he kept one little closet, over the

door of which was written 'Lucy's Room.' I kept a place for him, too - a place of which I never took the measure, either by rule or compass: I think it was like the tent of Peri-Banou. All my life long I carried it folded in the hollow of my hand yet, released from that hold and constriction, I know not but its innate capacity for expanse might have magnified it into a tabernacle for a host.

Forbearing as he was to-night, I could not stay in this proximity; this dangerous place and seat must be given up: I watched my opportunity, rose, and stole away. He might think, he might even believe that Lucy was contained within that shawl, and sheltered under that hat; he never could be certain, for he did not see my face.

Surely the spirit of restlessness was by this time appeased? Had I not had enough of adventure? Did I not begin to flag, quail, and wish for safety under a roof? Not so. I still loathed my bed in the school dormitory more than words can express: I clung to whatever could distract thought. Somehow I felt, too, that the night's drama was but begun, that the prologue was scarce spoken: throughout this woody and turfy theatre reigned a shadow of mystery; actors and incidents unlooked-for, waited behind the scenes: I thought so foreboding told me as much.

Straying at random, obeying the push of every chance elbow, I was brought to a quarter where trees planted in clusters, or towering singly, broke up somewhat the dense packing of the crowd, and gave it a more scattered character. These confines were far from the music, and somewhat aloof even from the lamps, but there was sound enough to soothe, and with that full, high moon, lamps were scarce needed. Here had chiefly settled family-groups, burgher-parents; some of them, late as was the hour, actually surrounded by their children, with whom it had not been thought advisable to venture into the closer throng.

Three fine tall trees growing close, almost twined stem within stem, lifted a thick canopy of shade above a green knoll, crowned with a seat - a seat which might have held several, yet it seemed abandoned to one, the remaining members of the fortunate party in possession of this site standing dutifully round; yet, amongst this reverend circle was a lady, holding by the hand a little girl.

When I caught sight of this little girl, she was twisting herself round on her heel, swinging from her conductress's hand, flinging herself from side to side with wanton and fantastic gyrations. These perverse movements arrested my attention, they struck me as of a character fearfully familiar. On close inspection, no less so appeared the child's equipment; the lilac silk pelisse, the small swansdown boa, the white bonnet - the whole holiday toilette, in short, was the gala garb of a

cherub but too well known, of that tadpole, Desiree Beck - and Desiree Beck it was - she, or an imp in her likeness.

I might have taken this discovery as a thunder-clap, but such hyperbole would have been premature; discovery was destined to rise more than one degree, ere it reached its climax.

On whose hand could the amiable Desiree swing thus selfishly, whose glove could she tear thus recklessly, whose arm thus strain with impunity, or on the borders of whose dress thus turn and trample insolently, if not the hand, glove, arm, and robe of her lady-mother? And there, in an Indian shawl and a pale-green crape bonnet - there, fresh, portly, blithe, and pleasant - there stood Madame Beck.

Curious! I had certainly deemed Madame in her bed, and Desiree in her crib, at this blessed minute, sleeping, both of them, the sleep of the just, within the sacred walls, amidst the profound seclusion of the Rue Fossette. Most certainly also they did not picture 'Meess Lucie' otherwise engaged; and here we all three were taking our 'ebats' in the fete-blazing park at midnight!

The fact was, Madame was only acting according to her quite justifiable wont. I remembered now I had heard it said among the teachers - though without at the time particularly noticing the gossip - that often, when we thought Madame in her chamber, sleeping, she was gone, full-dressed, to take her pleasure at operas, or plays, or balls. Madame had no sort of taste for a monastic life, and took care - largely, though discreetly - to season her existence with a relish of the world.

Half a dozen gentlemen of her friends stood about her. Amongst these, I was not slow to recognise two or three. There was her brother, M. Victor Kint; there was another person, moustached and with long hair - a calm, taciturn man, but whose traits bore a stamp and a semblance I could not mark unmoved. Amidst reserve and phlegm, amidst contrasts of character and of countenance, something there still was which recalled a face - mobile, fervent, feeling - a face changeable, now clouded, and now alight - a face from my world taken away, for my eyes lost, but where my best spring-hours of life had alternated in shadow and in glow; that face, where I had often seen movements so near the signs of genius - that why there did not shine fully out the undoubted fire, the thing, the spirit, and the secret itself - I could never tell. Yes - this Josef Emanuel - this man of peace - reminded me of his ardent brother.

Besides Messieurs Victor and Josef, I knew another of this party. This third person stood behind and in the shade, his attitude too was stooping, yet his dress and bald white head made him the most

conspicuous figure of the group. He was an ecclesiastic: he was Pere Silas. Do not fancy, reader, that there was any inconsistency in the priest's presence at this fete. This was not considered a show of Vanity Fair, but a commemoration of patriotic sacrifice. The Church patronised it, even with ostentation. There were troops of priests in the park that night.

Pere Silas stooped over the seat with its single occupant, the rustic bench and that which sat upon it: a strange mass it was - bearing no shape, yet magnificent. You saw, indeed, the outline of a face, and features, but these were so cadaverous and so strangely placed, you could almost have fancied a head severed from its trunk, and flung at random on a pile of rich merchandise. The distant lamp-rays glanced on clear pendants, on broad rings; neither the chasteness of moonlight, nor the distance of the torches, could quite subdue the gorgeous dyes of the drapery. Hail, Madame Walravens! I think you looked more witch- like than ever. And presently the good lady proved that she was indeed no corpse or ghost, but a harsh and hardy old woman; for, upon some aggravation in the clamorous petition of Desiree Beck to her mother, to go to the kiosk and take sweetmeats, the hunchback suddenly fetched her a resounding rap with her gold-knobbed cane.

There, then, were Madame Walravens, Madame Beck, Pere Silas - the whole conjuration, the secret junta. The sight of them thus assembled did me good. I cannot say that I felt weak before them, or abashed, or dismayed. They outnumbered me, and I was worsted and under their feet; but, as yet, I was not dead.