BOOK FOURTEENTH.--THE GRANDEURS OF DESPAIR

CHAPTER I--THE FLAG: ACT FIRST

As yet, nothing had come. Ten o'clock had sounded from Saint-Merry. Enjolras and Combeferre had gone and seated themselves, carbines in hand, near the outlet of the grand barricade. They no longer addressed each other, they listened, seeking to catch even the faintest and most distant sound of marching.

Suddenly, in the midst of the dismal calm, a clear, gay, young voice, which seemed to come from the Rue Saint-Denis, rose and began to sing distinctly, to the old popular air of "By the Light of the Moon," this bit of poetry, terminated by a cry like the crow of a cock:--

Mon nez est en larmes,
Mon ami Bugeaud,
Prete moi tes gendarmes
Pour leur dire un mot.

En capote bleue,
La poule au shako,
Voici la banlieue!

Co-cocorico![54]

They pressed each other's hands.

"That is Gavroche," said Enjolras.

"He is warning us," said Combeferre.

A hasty rush troubled the deserted street; they beheld a being more agile than a clown climb over the omnibus, and Gavroche bounded into the barricade, all breathless, saying:--

"My gun! Here they are!"

An electric quiver shot through the whole barricade, and the sound of hands seeking their guns became audible.

"Would you like my carbine?" said Enjolras to the lad.

"I want a big gun," replied Gavroche.

And he seized Javert's gun.

Two sentinels had fallen back, and had come in almost at the same moment as Gavroche. They were the sentinels from the end of the street, and the

vidette of the Rue de la Petite-Truanderie. The vidette of the Lane des Precheurs had remained at his post, which indicated that nothing was approaching from the direction of the bridges and Halles.

The Rue de la Chanvrerie, of which a few paving-stones alone were dimly visible in the reflection of the light projected on the flag, offered to the insurgents the aspect of a vast black door vaguely opened into a smoke.

Each man had taken up his position for the conflict.

Forty-three insurgents, among whom were Enjolras, Combeferre, Courfeyrac, Bossuet, Joly, Bahorel, and Gavroche, were kneeling inside the large barricade, with their heads on a level with the crest of the barrier, the barrels of their guns and carbines aimed on the stones as though at loop-holes, attentive, mute, ready to fire. Six, commanded by Feuilly, had installed themselves, with their guns levelled at their shoulders, at the windows of the two stories of Corinthe.

Several minutes passed thus, then a sound of footsteps, measured, heavy, and numerous, became distinctly audible in the direction of Saint-Leu. This sound, faint at first, then precise, then heavy and sonorous, approached slowly, without halt, without intermission, with a tranquil and terrible continuity. Nothing was to be heard but this. It was that combined silence and sound, of the statue of the commander, but this stony step had something indescribably enormous and multiple about it

which awakened the idea of a throng, and, at the same time, the idea of a spectre. One thought one heard the terrible statue Legion marching onward. This tread drew near; it drew still nearer, and stopped. It seemed as though the breathing of many men could be heard at the end of the street. Nothing was to be seen, however, but at the bottom of that dense obscurity there could be distinguished a multitude of metallic threads, as fine as needles and almost imperceptible, which moved about like those indescribable phosphoric networks which one sees beneath one's closed eyelids, in the first mists of slumber at the moment when one is dropping off to sleep. These were bayonets and gun-barrels confusedly illuminated by the distant reflection of the torch.

A pause ensued, as though both sides were waiting. All at once, from the depths of this darkness, a voice, which was all the more sinister, since no one was visible, and which appeared to be the gloom itself speaking, shouted:--

"Who goes there?"

At the same time, the click of guns, as they were lowered into position, was heard.

Enjolras replied in a haughty and vibrating tone:--

"The French Revolution!"

"Fire!" shouted the voice.

A flash empurpled all the facades in the street as though the door of a furnace had been flung open, and hastily closed again.

A fearful detonation burst forth on the barricade. The red flag fell.
The discharge had been so violent and so dense that it had cut the staff, that is to say, the very tip of the omnibus pole.

Bullets which had rebounded from the cornices of the houses penetrated the barricade and wounded several men.

The impression produced by this first discharge was freezing. The attack had been rough, and of a nature to inspire reflection in the boldest.
It was evident that they had to deal with an entire regiment at the very least.

"Comrades!" shouted Courfeyrac, "let us not waste our powder. Let us wait until they are in the street before replying."

"And, above all," said Enjolras, "let us raise the flag again."

He picked up the flag, which had fallen precisely at his feet.

Outside, the clatter of the ramrods in the guns could be heard; the troops were re-loading their arms.

Enjolras went on:--

"Who is there here with a bold heart? Who will plant the flag on the barricade again?"

Not a man responded. To mount on the barricade at the very moment when, without any doubt, it was again the object of their aim, was simply death. The bravest hesitated to pronounce his own condemnation. Enjolras himself felt a thrill. He repeated:--

"Does no one volunteer?"

CHAPTER II--THE FLAG: ACT SECOND

Since they had arrived at Corinthe, and had begun the construction of the barricade, no attention had been paid to Father Mabeuf. M. Mabeuf had not quitted the mob, however; he had entered the ground-floor of the wine-shop and had seated himself behind the counter. There he had, so to speak, retreated into himself. He no longer seemed to look or to think. Courfeyrac and others had accosted him two or three times, warning him of his peril, beseeching him to withdraw, but he did not hear them. When they were not speaking to him, his mouth moved as though he were replying to some one, and as soon as he was addressed, his lips became motionless and his eyes no longer had the appearance of being alive.

Several hours before the barricade was attacked, he had assumed an attitude which he did not afterwards abandon, with both fists planted on his knees and his head thrust forward as though he were gazing over a precipice. Nothing had been able to move him from this attitude; it did not seem as though his mind were in the barricade. When each had gone to take up his position for the combat, there remained in the tap-room where Javert was bound to the post, only a single insurgent with a naked sword, watching over Javert, and himself, Mabeuf. At the moment of the attack, at the detonation, the physical shock had reached him and had, as it were, awakened him; he started up abruptly, crossed the room, and at the instant when Enjolras repeated his appeal: "Does no one volunteer?" the old man was seen to make his appearance on the threshold of the wine-shop. His presence produced a sort of commotion in the

different groups. A shout went up:--

"It is the voter! It is the member of the Convention! It is the representative of the people!"

It is probable that he did not hear them.

He strode straight up to Enjolras, the insurgents withdrawing before him with a religious fear; he tore the flag from Enjolras, who recoiled in amazement and then, since no one dared to stop or to assist him, this old man of eighty, with shaking head but firm foot, began slowly to ascend the staircase of paving-stones arranged in the barricade. This was so melancholy and so grand that all around him cried: "Off with your hats!" At every step that he mounted, it was a frightful spectacle; his white locks, his decrepit face, his lofty, bald, and wrinkled brow, his amazed and open mouth, his aged arm upholding the red banner, rose through the gloom and were enlarged in the bloody light of the torch, and the bystanders thought that they beheld the spectre of '93 emerging from the earth, with the flag of terror in his hand.

When he had reached the last step, when this trembling and terrible phantom, erect on that pile of rubbish in the presence of twelve hundred invisible guns, drew himself up in the face of death and as though he were more powerful than it, the whole barricade assumed amid the darkness, a supernatural and colossal form.

There ensued one of those silences which occur only in the presence of prodigies. In the midst of this silence, the old man waved the red flag and shouted:--

"Long live the Revolution! Long live the Republic! Fraternity! Equality! and Death!"

Those in the barricade heard a low and rapid whisper, like the murmur of a priest who is despatching a prayer in haste. It was probably the commissary of police who was making the legal summons at the other end of the street.

Then the same piercing voice which had shouted: "Who goes there?" shouted:--

"Retire!"

M. Mabeuf, pale, haggard, his eyes lighted up with the mournful flame of aberration, raised the flag above his head and repeated:--

"Long live the Republic!"

"Fire!" said the voice.

A second discharge, similar to the first, rained down upon the barricade.

The old man fell on his knees, then rose again, dropped the flag and fell backwards on the pavement, like a log, at full length, with outstretched arms.

Rivulets of blood flowed beneath him. His aged head, pale and sad, seemed to be gazing at the sky.

One of those emotions which are superior to man, which make him forget even to defend himself, seized upon the insurgents, and they approached the body with respectful awe.

"What men these regicides were!" said Enjolras.

Courfeyrac bent down to Enjolras' ear:--

"This is for yourself alone, I do not wish to dampen the enthusiasm. But this man was anything rather than a regicide. I knew him. His name was Father Mabeuf. I do not know what was the matter with him to-day. But he was a brave blockhead. Just look at his head."

"The head of a blockhead and the heart of a Brutus," replied Enjolras.

Then he raised his voice:--

"Citizens! This is the example which the old give to the young. We

hesitated, he came! We were drawing back, he advanced! This is what those who are trembling with age teach to those who tremble with fear! This aged man is august in the eyes of his country. He has had a long life and a magnificent death! Now, let us place the body under cover, that each one of us may defend this old man dead as he would his father living, and may his presence in our midst render the barricade impregnable!"

A murmur of gloomy and energetic assent followed these words.

Enjolras bent down, raised the old man's head, and fierce as he was, he kissed him on the brow, then, throwing wide his arms, and handling this dead man with tender precaution, as though he feared to hurt it, he removed his coat, showed the bloody holes in it to all, and said:--

"This is our flag now."

CHAPTER III--GAVROCHE WOULD HAVE DONE BETTER TO ACCEPT ENJOLRAS' CARBINE

They threw a long black shawl of Widow Hucheloup's over Father Mabeuf. Six men made a litter of their guns; on this they laid the body, and bore it, with bared heads, with solemn slowness, to the large table in the tap-room.

These men, wholly absorbed in the grave and sacred task in which they were engaged, thought no more of the perilous situation in which they stood.

When the corpse passed near Javert, who was still impassive, Enjolras said to the spy:--

"It will be your turn presently!"

During all this time, Little Gavroche, who alone had not quitted his post, but had remained on guard, thought he espied some men stealthily approaching the barricade. All at once he shouted:--

"Look out!"

Courfeyrac, Enjolras, Jean Prouvaire, Combeferre, Joly, Bahorel, Bossuet, and all the rest ran tumultuously from the wine-shop. It was almost too late. They saw a glistening density of bayonets undulating

above the barricade. Municipal guards of lofty stature were making their way in, some striding over the omnibus, others through the cut, thrusting before them the urchin, who retreated, but did not flee.

The moment was critical. It was that first, redoubtable moment of inundation, when the stream rises to the level of the levee and when the water begins to filter through the fissures of dike. A second more and the barricade would have been taken.

Bahorel dashed upon the first municipal guard who was entering, and killed him on the spot with a blow from his gun; the second killed Bahorel with a blow from his bayonet. Another had already overthrown Courfeyrac, who was shouting: "Follow me!" The largest of all, a sort of colossus, marched on Gavroche with his bayonet fixed. The urchin took in his arms Javert's immense gun, levelled it resolutely at the giant, and fired. No discharge followed. Javert's gun was not loaded. The municipal guard burst into a laugh and raised his bayonet at the child.

Before the bayonet had touched Gavroche, the gun slipped from the soldier's grasp, a bullet had struck the municipal guardsman in the centre of the forehead, and he fell over on his back. A second bullet struck the other guard, who had assaulted Courfeyrac in the breast, and laid him low on the pavement.

This was the work of Marius, who had just entered the barricade.

CHAPTER IV--THE BARREL OF POWDER

Marius, still concealed in the turn of the Rue Mondetour, had witnessed, shuddering and irresolute, the first phase of the combat. But he had not long been able to resist that mysterious and sovereign vertigo which may be designated as the call of the abyss. In the presence of the imminence of the peril, in the presence of the death of M. Mabeuf, that melancholy enigma, in the presence of Bahorel killed, and Courfeyrac shouting: "Follow me!" of that child threatened, of his friends to succor or to avenge, all hesitation had vanished, and he had flung himself into the conflict, his two pistols in hand. With his first shot he had saved Gavroche, and with the second delivered Courfeyrac.

Amid the sound of the shots, amid the cries of the assaulted guards, the assailants had climbed the entrenchment, on whose summit Municipal Guards, soldiers of the line and National Guards from the suburbs could now be seen, gun in hand, rearing themselves to more than half the height of their bodies.

They already covered more than two-thirds of the barrier, but they did not leap into the enclosure, as though wavering in the fear of some trap. They gazed into the dark barricade as one would gaze into a lion's den. The light of the torch illuminated only their bayonets, their bear-skin caps, and the upper part of their uneasy and angry faces.

Marius had no longer any weapons; he had flung away his discharged

pistols after firing them; but he had caught sight of the barrel of powder in the tap-room, near the door.

As he turned half round, gazing in that direction, a soldier took aim at him. At the moment when the soldier was sighting Marius, a hand was laid on the muzzle of the gun and obstructed it. This was done by some one who had darted forward,--the young workman in velvet trousers. The shot sped, traversed the hand and possibly, also, the workman, since he fell, but the ball did not strike Marius. All this, which was rather to be apprehended than seen through the smoke, Marius, who was entering the tap-room, hardly noticed. Still, he had, in a confused way, perceived that gun-barrel aimed at him, and the hand which had blocked it, and he had heard the discharge. But in moments like this, the things which one sees vacillate and are precipitated, and one pauses for nothing. One feels obscurely impelled towards more darkness still, and all is cloud.

The insurgents, surprised but not terrified, had rallied. Enjolras had shouted: "Wait! Don't fire at random!" In the first confusion, they might, in fact, wound each other. The majority of them had ascended to the window on the first story and to the attic windows, whence they commanded the assailants.

The most determined, with Enjolras, Courfeyrac, Jean Prouvaire, and Combeferre, had proudly placed themselves with their backs against the houses at the rear, unsheltered and facing the ranks of soldiers and guards who crowned the barricade.

All this was accomplished without haste, with that strange and threatening gravity which precedes engagements. They took aim, point blank, on both sides: they were so close that they could talk together without raising their voices.

When they had reached this point where the spark is on the brink of darting forth, an officer in a gorget extended his sword and said:--

"Lay down your arms!"

"Fire!" replied Enjolras.

The two discharges took place at the same moment, and all disappeared in smoke.

An acrid and stifling smoke in which dying and wounded lay with weak, dull groans. When the smoke cleared away, the combatants on both sides could be seen to be thinned out, but still in the same positions, reloading in silence. All at once, a thundering voice was heard, shouting:--

"Be off with you, or I'll blow up the barricade!"

All turned in the direction whence the voice proceeded.

Marius had entered the tap-room, and had seized the barrel of powder, then he had taken advantage of the smoke, and the sort of obscure mist which filled the entrenched enclosure, to glide along the barricade as far as that cage of paving-stones where the torch was fixed. To tear it from the torch, to replace it by the barrel of powder, to thrust the pile of stones under the barrel, which was instantly staved in, with a sort of horrible obedience,--all this had cost Marius but the time necessary to stoop and rise again; and now all, National Guards, Municipal Guards, officers, soldiers, huddled at the other extremity of the barricade, gazed stupidly at him, as he stood with his foot on the stones, his torch in his hand, his haughty face illuminated by a fatal resolution, drooping the flame of the torch towards that redoubtable pile where they could make out the broken barrel of powder, and giving vent to that startling cry:--

"Be off with you, or I'll blow up the barricade!"

Marius on that barricade after the octogenarian was the vision of the young revolution after the apparition of the old.

"Blow up the barricade!" said a sergeant, "and yourself with it!"

Marius retorted: "And myself also."

And he dropped the torch towards the barrel of powder.

But there was no longer any one on the barrier. The assailants, abandoning their dead and wounded, flowed back pell-mell and in disorder towards the extremity of the street, and there were again lost in the night. It was a headlong flight.

The barricade was free.

CHAPTER V--END OF THE VERSES OF JEAN PROUVAIRE

All flocked around Marius. Courfeyrac flung himself on his neck.

"Here you are!"

"What luck!" said Combeferre.

"You came in opportunely!" ejaculated Bossuet.

"If it had not been for you, I should have been dead!" began Courfeyrac again.

"If it had not been for you, I should have been gobbled up!" added Gavroche.

Marius asked:--

"Where is the chief?"

"You are he!" said Enjolras.

Marius had had a furnace in his brain all day long; now it was a whirlwind. This whirlwind which was within him, produced on him the effect of being outside of him and of bearing him away. It seemed to him that he was already at an immense distance from life. His two luminous

months of joy and love, ending abruptly at that frightful precipice, Cosette lost to him, that barricade, M. Mabeuf getting himself killed for the Republic, himself the leader of the insurgents,--all these things appeared to him like a tremendous nightmare. He was obliged to make a mental effort to recall the fact that all that surrounded him was real. Marius had already seen too much of life not to know that nothing is more imminent than the impossible, and that what it is always necessary to foresee is the unforeseen. He had looked on at his own drama as a piece which one does not understand.

In the mists which enveloped his thoughts, he did not recognize Javert, who, bound to his post, had not so much as moved his head during the whole of the attack on the barricade, and who had gazed on the revolt seething around him with the resignation of a martyr and the majesty of a judge. Marius had not even seen him.

In the meanwhile, the assailants did not stir, they could be heard marching and swarming through at the end of the street but they did not venture into it, either because they were awaiting orders or because they were awaiting reinforcements before hurling themselves afresh on this impregnable redoubt. The insurgents had posted sentinels, and some of them, who were medical students, set about caring for the wounded.

They had thrown the tables out of the wine-shop, with the exception of the two tables reserved for lint and cartridges, and of the one on which lay Father Mabeuf; they had added them to the barricade, and had

replaced them in the tap-room with mattresses from the bed of the widow Hucheloup and her servants. On these mattresses they had laid the wounded. As for the three poor creatures who inhabited Corinthe, no one knew what had become of them. They were finally found, however, hidden in the cellar.

A poignant emotion clouded the joy of the disencumbered barricade.

The roll was called. One of the insurgents was missing. And who was it? One of the dearest. One of the most valiant. Jean Prouvaire. He was sought among the wounded, he was not there. He was sought among the dead, he was not there. He was evidently a prisoner. Combeferre said to Enjolras:--

"They have our friend; we have their agent. Are you set on the death of that spy?"

"Yes," replied Enjolras; "but less so than on the life of Jean Prouvaire."

This took place in the tap-room near Javert's post.

"Well," resumed Combeferre, "I am going to fasten my handkerchief to my cane, and go as a flag of truce, to offer to exchange our man for theirs."

"Listen," said Enjolras, laying his hand on Combeferre's arm.

At the end of the street there was a significant clash of arms.

They heard a manly voice shout:--

"Vive la France! Long live France! Long live the future!"

They recognized the voice of Prouvaire.

A flash passed, a report rang out.

Silence fell again.

"They have killed him," exclaimed Combeferre.

Enjolras glanced at Javert, and said to him:--

"Your friends have just shot you."

CHAPTER VI--THE AGONY OF DEATH AFTER THE AGONY OF LIFE

A peculiarity of this species of war is, that the attack of the barricades is almost always made from the front, and that the assailants generally abstain from turning the position, either because they fear ambushes, or because they are afraid of getting entangled in the tortuous streets. The insurgents' whole attention had been directed, therefore, to the grand barricade, which was, evidently, the spot always menaced, and there the struggle would infallibly recommence. But Marius thought of the little barricade, and went thither. It was deserted and guarded only by the fire-pot which trembled between the paving-stones. Moreover, the Mondetour alley, and the branches of the Rue de la Petite Truanderie and the Rue du Cygne were profoundly calm.

As Marius was withdrawing, after concluding his inspection, he heard his name pronounced feebly in the darkness.

"Monsieur Marius!"

He started, for he recognized the voice which had called to him two hours before through the gate in the Rue Plumet.

Only, the voice now seemed to be nothing more than a breath.

He looked about him, but saw no one.

Marius thought he had been mistaken, that it was an illusion added by his mind to the extraordinary realities which were clashing around him. He advanced a step, in order to quit the distant recess where the barricade lay.

"Monsieur Marius!" repeated the voice.

This time he could not doubt that he had heard it distinctly; he looked and saw nothing.

"At your feet," said the voice.

He bent down, and saw in the darkness a form which was dragging itself towards him.

It was crawling along the pavement. It was this that had spoken to him.

The fire-pot allowed him to distinguish a blouse, torn trousers of coarse velvet, bare feet, and something which resembled a pool of blood. Marius indistinctly made out a pale head which was lifted towards him and which was saying to him:--

"You do not recognize me?"

"No."

"Eponine."

Marius bent hastily down. It was, in fact, that unhappy child. She was dressed in men's clothes.

"How come you here? What are you doing here?"

"I am dying," said she.

There are words and incidents which arouse dejected beings. Marius cried out with a start:--

"You are wounded! Wait, I will carry you into the room! They will attend to you there. Is it serious? How must I take hold of you in order not to hurt you? Where do you suffer? Help! My God! But why did you come hither?"

And he tried to pass his arm under her, in order to raise her.

She uttered a feeble cry.

"Have I hurt you?" asked Marius.

"A little."

"But I only touched your hand."

She raised her hand to Marius, and in the middle of that hand Marius saw a black hole.

"What is the matter with your hand?" said he.

"It is pierced."

"Pierced?"

"Yes."

"What with?"

"A bullet."

"How?"

"Did you see a gun aimed at you?"

"Yes, and a hand stopping it."

"It was mine."

Marius was seized with a shudder.

"What madness! Poor child! But so much the better, if that is all, it is nothing, let me carry you to a bed. They will dress your wound; one does not die of a pierced hand."

She murmured:--

"The bullet traversed my hand, but it came out through my back. It is useless to remove me from this spot. I will tell you how you can care for me better than any surgeon. Sit down near me on this stone."

He obeyed; she laid her head on Marius' knees, and, without looking at him, she said:--

"Oh! How good this is! How comfortable this is! There; I no longer suffer."

She remained silent for a moment, then she turned her face with an effort, and looked at Marius.

"Do you know what, Monsieur Marius? It puzzled me because you entered that garden; it was stupid, because it was I who showed you that house; and then, I ought to have said to myself that a young man like you--"

She paused, and overstepping the sombre transitions that undoubtedly existed in her mind, she resumed with a heartrending smile:--

"You thought me ugly, didn't you?"

She continued:--

"You see, you are lost! Now, no one can get out of the barricade. It was I who led you here, by the way! You are going to die, I count upon that. And yet, when I saw them taking aim at you, I put my hand on the muzzle of the gun. How queer it is! But it was because I wanted to die before you. When I received that bullet, I dragged myself here, no one saw me, no one picked me up, I was waiting for you, I said: 'So he is not coming!' Oh, if you only knew. I bit my blouse, I suffered so! Now I am well. Do you remember the day I entered your chamber and when I looked at myself in your mirror, and the day when I came to you on the boulevard near the washerwomen? How the birds sang! That was a long time ago. You gave me a hundred sous, and I said to you: 'I don't want your money.' I hope you picked up your coin? You are not rich. I did not think to tell you to pick it up. The sun was shining bright, and it was not cold. Do you remember, Monsieur Marius? Oh! How happy I am! Every one is going to die."

She had a mad, grave, and heart-breaking air. Her torn blouse disclosed her bare throat.

As she talked, she pressed her pierced hand to her breast, where there was another hole, and whence there spurted from moment to moment a stream of blood, like a jet of wine from an open bung-hole.

Marius gazed at this unfortunate creature with profound compassion.

"Oh!" she resumed, "it is coming again, I am stifling!"

She caught up her blouse and bit it, and her limbs stiffened on the pavement.

At that moment the young cock's crow executed by little Gavroche resounded through the barricade.

The child had mounted a table to load his gun, and was singing gayly the song then so popular:--

"En voyant Lafayette,
Le gendarme repete:--
Sauvons nous! sauvons nous!
sauvons nous!"

"On beholding Lafayette,
The gendarme repeats:--
Let us flee! let us flee!
let us flee!

Eponine raised herself and listened; then she murmured:--

"It is he."

And turning to Marius:--

"My brother is here. He must not see me. He would scold me."

"Your brother?" inquired Marius, who was meditating in the most bitter and sorrowful depths of his heart on the duties to the Thenardiers which his father had bequeathed to him; "who is your brother?"

"That little fellow."

"The one who is singing?"

"Yes."

Marius made a movement.

"Oh! don't go away," said she, "it will not be long now."

She was sitting almost upright, but her voice was very low and broken by hiccoughs.

At intervals, the death rattle interrupted her. She put her face as near that of Marius as possible. She added with a strange expression:--

"Listen, I do not wish to play you a trick. I have a letter in my pocket for you. I was told to put it in the post. I kept it. I did not want to have it reach you. But perhaps you will be angry with me for it when we

meet again presently? Take your letter."

She grasped Marius' hand convulsively with her pierced hand, but she no longer seemed to feel her sufferings. She put Marius' hand in the pocket of her blouse. There, in fact, Marius felt a paper.

"Take it," said she.

Marius took the letter.

She made a sign of satisfaction and contentment.

"Now, for my trouble, promise me--"

And she stopped.

"What?" asked Marius.

"Promise me!"

"I promise."

"Promise to give me a kiss on my brow when I am dead.--I shall feel it."

She dropped her head again on Marius' knees, and her eyelids closed. He thought the poor soul had departed. Eponine remained motionless. All

at once, at the very moment when Marius fancied her asleep forever, she slowly opened her eyes in which appeared the sombre profundity of death, and said to him in a tone whose sweetness seemed already to proceed from another world:--

"And by the way, Monsieur Marius, I believe that I was a little bit in love with you."

She tried to smile once more and expired.

CHAPTER VII--GAVROCHE AS A PROFOUND CALCULATOR OF DISTANCES

Marius kept his promise. He dropped a kiss on that livid brow, where the icy perspiration stood in beads.

This was no infidelity to Cosette; it was a gentle and pensive farewell to an unhappy soul.

It was not without a tremor that he had taken the letter which Eponine had given him. He had immediately felt that it was an event of weight. He was impatient to read it. The heart of man is so constituted that the unhappy child had hardly closed her eyes when Marius began to think of unfolding this paper.

He laid her gently on the ground, and went away. Something told him that he could not peruse that letter in the presence of that body.

He drew near to a candle in the tap-room. It was a small note, folded and sealed with a woman's elegant care. The address was in a woman's hand and ran:--

"To Monsieur, Monsieur Marius Pontmercy, at M. Courfeyrac's, Rue de la Verrerie, No. 16."

He broke the seal and read:--

"My dearest, alas! my father insists on our setting out immediately.
We shall be this evening in the Rue de l'Homme Arme, No. 7.
In a week we shall be in England. COSETTE. June 4th."

Such was the innocence of their love that Marius was not even acquainted with Cosette's handwriting.

What had taken place may be related in a few words. Eponine had been the cause of everything. After the evening of the 3d of June she had cherished a double idea, to defeat the projects of her father and the ruffians on the house of the Rue Plumet, and to separate Marius and Cosette. She had exchanged rags with the first young scamp she came across who had thought it amusing to dress like a woman, while Eponine disguised herself like a man. It was she who had conveyed to Jean Valjean in the Champ de Mars the expressive warning: "Leave your house." Jean Valjean had, in fact, returned home, and had said to Cosette: "We set out this evening and we go to the Rue de l'Homme Arme with Toussaint. Next week, we shall be in London." Cosette, utterly overwhelmed by this unexpected blow, had hastily penned a couple of lines to Marius. But how was she to get the letter to the post? She never went out alone, and Toussaint, surprised at such a commission, would certainly show the letter to M. Fauchelevent. In this dilemma, Cosette had caught sight through the fence of Eponine in man's clothes, who now prowled incessantly around the garden. Cosette had called to "this young workman" and had handed him five francs and the letter, saying: "Carry this letter immediately to its address." Eponine had put

the letter in her pocket. The next day, on the 5th of June, she went to Courfeyrac's quarters to inquire for Marius, not for the purpose of delivering the letter, but,--a thing which every jealous and loving soul will comprehend,--"to see." There she had waited for Marius, or at least for Courfeyrac, still for the purpose of seeing. When Courfeyrac had told her: "We are going to the barricades," an idea flashed through her mind, to fling herself into that death, as she would have done into any other, and to thrust Marius into it also. She had followed Courfeyrac, had made sure of the locality where the barricade was in process of construction; and, quite certain, since Marius had received no warning, and since she had intercepted the letter, that he would go at dusk to his trysting place for every evening, she had betaken herself to the Rue Plumet, had there awaited Marius, and had sent him, in the name of his friends, the appeal which would, she thought, lead him to the barricade. She reckoned on Marius' despair when he should fail to find Cosette; she was not mistaken. She had returned to the Rue de la Chanvrerie herself. What she did there the reader has just seen. She died with the tragic joy of jealous hearts who drag the beloved being into their own death, and who say: "No one shall have him!"

Marius covered Cosette's letter with kisses. So she loved him! For one moment the idea occurred to him that he ought not to die now. Then he said to himself: "She is going away. Her father is taking her to England, and my grandfather refuses his consent to the marriage. Nothing is changed in our fates." Dreamers like Marius are subject to supreme attacks of dejection, and desperate resolves are the result. The fatigue

of living is insupportable; death is sooner over with. Then he reflected that he had still two duties to fulfil: to inform Cosette of his death and send her a final farewell, and to save from the impending catastrophe which was in preparation, that poor child, Eponine's brother and Thenardier's son.

He had a pocket-book about him; the same one which had contained the note-book in which he had inscribed so many thoughts of love for Cosette. He tore out a leaf and wrote on it a few lines in pencil:--

"Our marriage was impossible. I asked my grandfather, he refused; I have no fortune, neither hast thou. I hastened to thee, thou wert no longer there. Thou knowest the promise that I gave thee, I shall keep it. I die. I love thee. When thou readest this, my soul will be near thee, and thou wilt smile."

Having nothing wherewith to seal this letter, he contented himself with folding the paper in four, and added the address:--

"To Mademoiselle Cosette Fauchelevent, at M. Fauchelevent's, Rue de l'Homme Arme, No. 7."

Having folded the letter, he stood in thought for a moment, drew out his pocket-book again, opened it, and wrote, with the same pencil, these four lines on the first page:--

"My name is Marius Pontmercy. Carry my body to my grandfather, M. Gillenormand, Rue des Filles-du-Calvaire, No. 6, in the Marais."

He put his pocketbook back in his pocket, then he called Gavroche.

The gamin, at the sound of Marius' voice, ran up to him with his merry and devoted air.

"Will you do something for me?"

"Anything," said Gavroche. "Good God! if it had not been for you, I should have been done for."

"Do you see this letter?"

"Yes."

"Take it. Leave the barricade instantly" (Gavroche began to scratch his ear uneasily) "and to-morrow morning, you will deliver it at its address to Mademoiselle Cosette, at M. Fauchelevent's, Rue de l'Homme Arme, No. 7."

The heroic child replied

"Well, but! in the meanwhile the barricade will be taken, and I shall not be there."

"The barricade will not be attacked until daybreak, according to all appearances, and will not be taken before to-morrow noon."

The fresh respite which the assailants were granting to the barricade had, in fact, been prolonged. It was one of those intermissions which frequently occur in nocturnal combats, which are always followed by an increase of rage.

"Well," said Gavroche, "what if I were to go and carry your letter to-morrow?"

"It will be too late. The barricade will probably be blockaded, all the streets will be guarded, and you will not be able to get out. Go at once."

Gavroche could think of no reply to this, and stood there in indecision, scratching his ear sadly.

All at once, he took the letter with one of those birdlike movements which were common with him.

"All right," said he.

And he started off at a run through Mondetour lane.

An idea had occurred to Gavroche which had brought him to a decision, but he had not mentioned it for fear that Marius might offer some objection to it.

This was the idea:--

"It is barely midnight, the Rue de l'Homme Arme is not far off; I will go and deliver the letter at once, and I shall get back in time."