

They pressed about him with love and respect, while Ursule hastened to unbuckle the straps of the sack that he carried upon his back. At the same instant, it was announced that dinner was ready. Followed by Sir Edward and the Marceaus, Madeleine took his arm, led him into the dining-hall, where nothing had been changed, and made him sit, in his artisan's dress, at the place which his father formerly occupied. Though the table was loaded with every hereditary luxury to which Maurice had been accustomed in youth, the repast was short and silent. Maurice retained to the end the attitude of a man who knowing not whether he is asleep or awake, fears lest by a too sudden gesture or imprudent word, he should cause the enchantment which he witnesses to vanish. At the end of a quarter of an hour, Madeleine rose, and, leaving the group of *convives*, directed her steps towards the park in company with her cousin, who allowed himself to be led like a child. Having arrived at a grassy eminence, the young girl seated herself first, and caused Maurice to sit beside her.

It was one of those beautiful evenings which seem to double the value of happiness. While one part of the sky was even yet purpled with sleeping fires, at the other limit of the horizon the moon was rising in a lake of azure, and mounting slowly over the tops of the trees, whose foliage glistened like silver in its pale rays. The nightingale sang deliciously amid the thick branches; in the depths of the woods was heard the distant sound of the cascade.

'Oh, *mon ami*,' said Madeleine at last, in a voice surpassing in melody the song of the nightingale and sweeter than the fresh night breeze, 'I have loved you from the day when I saw you here for the first time. You had need of regenerating yourself by passing through poverty, labour and abnegation. I understood it, and I wished to share the proofs that I imposed upon you. These proofs are ended, Maurice; will you forgive me?'

Maurice felt his very soul melt like a grain of incense, and exhale towards Madeleine in silent adoration. He knelt at the foot of the little eminence upon which his cousin was sitting. That pure being bent towards him her sweet face, and there, under the light of the silent stars, their lips met in a chaste kiss.

It is hardly necessary to state, now, that Madeleine's poverty was only a pious falsehood. She had not lost her lawsuit. She had deceived Maurice in order to save him. I do not wish to describe what passed in the heart of Madeleine while Maurice effected

his rehabilitation. Such a recital is best left to delicate souls; as to the others, they would not comprehend it. The young chevalier had just found his friends of Paris under the roof of his ancestors.

'They have been witnesses of your struggles and efforts; it is right,' said Madeleine, 'that they should be present at the moment when you receive the recompense that you have so well merited. What Sir Edward loved in me was our poverty; our happiness will console him.'

A month later Maurice and Madeleine were married without noise and ostentation at Neuville-les-Bois, in presence of their friends, peasants and domestics. Having enjoyed for several days the sight of their sweet pleasures, Pierre Marceau set out for Paris with his wife and children. In vain Madeleine essayed to retain them—in vain Maurice offered to keep them at the chateau, where they would easily find employment for their activity and their intelligence.

'You have found your true place,' Marceau wisely answered; 'permit me to keep mine. In spite of the friendship that unites us, I feel that I should disturb your happiness. I fear nothing from your pride; the work that we have shared together has established between us an equality that nothing would be able to change; but the society in the midst of which you are going to live would refuse to understand it, and its astonishment would be for me a silent reproach that I am anxious to spare both of us.'

The little family set out loaded with tokens of affection. At the end of a month Sir Edward departed on his tour. 'Carefully watch over your happiness,' said he to Maurice, at the moment of bidding him adieu; 'it is a delicate plant, that needs vigilant care. It has grown up under a balmy air; take care to protect it against the storms which might break it.' Then turning towards Madeleine, he wished to address a few words of adieu to her, but he was troubled, his eyes moistened, and the young wife felt a tear fall upon the hand that he pressed sorrowfully to his lips.

My task is ended. Happy existences are not related. Maurice was thenceforth out of danger, and no longer needed even fortitude. Though work was no longer a necessity, yet he was not idle; he busied himself in doing good, he disseminated his wealth around him. Madeleine was paid with usury for her devotion. No cloud appeared to disturb the serenity of their mutual tenderness. As to Ursule, whatever Madeleine might say, she persisted in believing that

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