

ble to all, she could only see in Gervais the man on whom she felt she could bestow her hand. But Gervais was too much absorbed in himself—too much occupied in coquetting with every grisette, to feel and appreciate the affection of the fond girl, and he only condescended to notice her at church or the village festival, to gratify his vanity, in showing his ascendancy over his companions in matters of the heart.

For some time affairs thus stood, when a circumstance occurred which entirely changed their aspect. The son of the *Seur* of the village having arrived at manhood, a grand *fete* was given on the occasion. The day was beautiful in the extreme, such days as are known only in the clime of sunny France, when the air is as balmy as the winds of Araby, and not a cloudlet is seen in the azure depths of the heavens. All ages were present—the old man with trembling steps and whitened tresses, the happy father and his youthful offspring, the blushing maiden and the manly youth, all swelled the *fete* to wish success to the future lord and master of the soil. The day sped on—the feast, the dance, the game and the frolic, lent to it wings of angel swiftness, and it was only when the shadows of twilight began to darken the landscape, that the happy throng were reminded to seek their respective homes.

It so happened that Rupert's path lay the same as that of Ninette's, and he respectfully offered her his protection, which was as respectfully accepted. As they proceeded on their way, a strange feeling took possession of his heart. He appeared to have inhaled a new existence; the voice of Ninette fell upon his ear singularly melodious; never, 'till that moment, had she occupied any place in his thoughts—but now she appeared to him a being of angelic beauty—his manly frame trembled if it came in contact with her's—he dared hardly gaze upon her—with difficulty could he reply to her remarks, and when at length they reached her dwelling, and she graciously bade him good night, he felt as if something of inestimable value—*something—he knew not what,* was lost to him for ever.

In the meantime, the young Gervais, with a party of boon companions, remained upon the scene of festivity 'till a late hour, when, in the midst of their merriment, they were suddenly surprised at a bright blaze arising from the village. It was apparent a fire had broken out, and each supposing it might be his own home, started for the scene of conflagration. When they reached the village, it was discovered to

be the dwelling of Monsieur Bonhomme, Ninette's father, and so rapid was the progress of the devouring element, that the inmates had been deprived of escape, and were threatened with inevitable destruction. A thousand devices were suggested and adopted, for their rescue, but all proved ineffectual. Fiercer and fiercer waxed the flames, while the shrieks of the inmates became more and more appalling. Poor Ninette stood at the window of her apartment, her hair dishevelled, and her arms stretched forth, imploring assistance. The floor already crackled beneath her feet, while the dense smoke curled around, depriving her of sight and feeling. Was there not one brave and bold enough to risk his life for a helpless woman? Where was Rupert? he that but a few hours before would have died to save her, why was he not among the assembled throng—had slumber so deeply bound him, that the shrieks of Ninette could not arouse him? Yet hold—who is that man, who dashing through the terrified spectators, plunges into the flames and rushes up the narrow staircase, amid burning rafts and falling timbers, to the room of Ninette? It is Rupert! He seizes her fainting form, casts over it a mantle, and through the jaws of the devouring element, retraces his steps, reaches the open air, and depositing his precious burden in the arms of her aged and weeping parent, falls senseless, maimed and blackened, on the ground.

As soon as Ninette was restored to sensibility, her first inquiry was for her preserver.—“It is Rupert!” exclaimed the crowd—“the brave—the generous Rupert.”

“And where is he?” asked Ninette—“lead me to him—let me thank my deliverer.”

To Rupert, who was now receiving the offices of kindness and attention, she was conveyed.

“Rupert, dear Rupert!” she exclaimed, throwing herself into his arms, “how can I ever repay you for this inestimable gift?” and she wept and sobbed upon his bosom.

It was the first time he had ever felt the fair soft arms of woman entwined around his neck; he felt her bosom, too, beat against his own, and his blood, which, 'till now, had been, as it were, congealed like a frozen current, at once dissolved, and coursed swiftly through his veins. He could not reply—he felt, too, her warm tears dropping on his neck, and her balmy breath cooling his scorched brow, and tears coming to his aid—the brave peasant wept like a very boy.

And where was Gervais all this time? Why