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THE SORROWS OF YOUNG WERTHER

Translated by Victor Lange

I have carefully gathered together, and present to you here, everything I could discover about poor Werther's story. You will thank me for doing so, I'm sure. His mind and character can't but win your admiration and love, his destiny your tears.

And you, good soul, who feels the same urge as he, take comfort from his sufferings and let this book be your friend if, due to fate or personal responsibility, you can find no closer one.

Book One

May 4, 1771

How glad I am to have got away! My dear friend, what a thing is the heart of man! To leave you, from whom I was inseparable, whom I love so much, and yet be happy! I know you will forgive me. Were not all my other attachments especially designed by fate to torment a heart like mine? Poor Leonore! And yet I was not to blame. Was it my fault, that, while the capricious charms of her sister afforded me agreeable entertainment, a passion for me developed in her poor heart? And yet—am I wholly blameless? Did I not encourage her emotions? Did I not find pleasure in those genuine expressions of Nature, which, though but little amusing in reality, so often made us laugh? Did I not—but oh! what is man, that he dares so to accuse himself? My dear friend, I promise you, I will change; I will no longer, as has always been my habit, continue to ruminate on every petty annoyance which fate may have in store for me; I will enjoy the present, and the past shall be for me the past. No doubt you are right, my best of friends, there would be far less suffering among mankind, if men—and God knows why they are so constituted—did not use their imaginations so assiduously in recalling the memory of past sorrow, instead of bearing an indifferent present.

Will you be so kind as to inform my mother that I shall look after her business to the best of my ability, and shall give her news about it soon. I have seen my aunt, and find that she is very far from being the disagreeable person our friends make her out to be. She is a lively, temperamental woman, with the best of hearts. I explained to her my mother's grievances with regard to that part of the legacy which has been withheld from her. She told me the reasons why she had done it, and the terms on which she would be willing to give up the whole, even to do more than we asked. In short, I don't wish to write further on this subject now; just tell my mother that all will be well. And in this trifling affair I have again found, my dear friend, that misunderstandings and neglect cause more mischief in the world than malice or wickedness. At any rate, the latter are much rarer.

For the rest, I am very well off here. Solitude in this terrestrial paradise is a wonderful balm to my emotions, and the early spring warms with all its fullness my often-shivering heart. Every tree, every bush is a bouquet of flowers; and one might wish himself transformed into a cockchafer, to float about in this ocean of fragrance, and find in it all the food one needs.

The town itself is disagreeable; but then, all around it, nature is inexpressibly beautiful. This induced the late Count M. to lay out a garden on one of the sloping hills which intersect here and form the most lovely valleys. The garden is simple and you feel upon entering that the plan was not designed by a scientific gardener, but by a man who wished to give himself up here to the enjoyment of his own sensitive heart. I have already shed many a tear to the memory of its departed master, in a summer house which is now reduced to ruins, but was his favorite retreat, and now is mine. I shall soon be master of the garden. The gardener has become attached to me within the few days I have spent here, and, I'm sure, it will not be to his disadvantage.

May 10

A wonderful serenity has taken possession of my entire soul, like these sweet spring mornings which I enjoy with all my heart. I am alone and feel the joy of life in this spot, which was created for souls like mine. I am so happy, my dear friend, so absorbed in the exquisite sense of tranquil existence, that I neglect my art. I could not draw at all now, not a single line, and yet I feel that I was never a greater painter than in such moments as these. When the lovely valley teems with mist around me, and the high sun strikes the impenetrable foliage of my trees, and but a few rays steal into the inner sanctuary, I lie in the tall grass by the trickling stream and notice a thousand familiar things; when I hear the humming of the little world among the stalks, and am near the countless indescribable forms of the worms and insects, then I feel the presence of the Almighty Who created us in His own image, and the breath of that universal love which sustains us, as we float in an eternity of bliss; and then, my friend, when the world grows dim before my eyes and earth and sky seem to dwell in my soul and absorb its power, like the form of a beloved—then I often think with longing, Oh, if only I could express it, could breathe onto paper all that lives so full and warm within me, that it might become the mirror of my soul, as my soul is the mirror of the infinite God! O my friend—but it will destroy me—I shall perish under the splendor of these visions!

May 12

I don't know whether some deceiving spirits haunt this spot, or whether it is the ardent, celestial fancy in my own heart which makes everything around me seem like paradise. In front of the house is a spring—a spring to which I am magically bound like Melusine and her sisters. Descending a gentle slope, you come to an arch, where, some twenty steps lower down, the clearest water springs forth from the marble rock. The little wall which encloses it above, the tall trees which surround the spot, and the coolness of the place itself—everything imparts a pleasant and yet chilling sensation. Not a day passes that I do not spend an hour there. The young girls come from the town to fetch water—the most innocent and necessary employment, but formerly the occupation of the daughters of kings. As I sit there, the old patriarchal idea comes to life again. I see them, our old ancestors, forming their friendships and doing their courting at the well; and I feel how fountains and streams were guarded by kindly spirits. Whoever cannot share in these feelings has never enjoyed a cool rest at the side of a spring after the hard walk of a summer's day.

May 13

You ask if you should send my books. My dear friend, for the love of God, keep them away from me! I no longer want to be guided, animated. My feelings are so stormy by themselves! I need a cradlesong to lull me and this I find abundantly in my Homer. How often must I still the burning fever of my blood, for you have never seen anything so unsteady, so restless, as my heart. But need I confess this to you, my dear friend, who have so often witnessed my sudden transitions from sorrow to joy, and from sweet melancholy to violent passion? I treat my heart like a sick child, and gratify its every fancy. Do not repeat this; there are people who would misunderstand it.

May 15

The poor people hereabouts know me already, and love me, particularly the children. When at first I associated with them, and asked them in a friendly way about this and that, some thought that I wanted to ridicule them and treated me quite rudely. I didn't mind this; I only felt keenly what I had often noticed before. People of rank keep themselves coldly aloof from the common people, as though they feared to lose something by the contact; while shallow minds and bad jokers pretend to descend to their level, only to make the poor people feel their impertinence all the more keenly.

I know very well that we are not all equal, nor can we be; but I am convinced that he who avoids the ordinary people in order to keep his respect, is as much to be condemned as a coward who hides from his enemy because he fears defeat.

The other day I went to the spring and found a young servant girl, who had set her pitcher on the lowest step, and looked round to see if one of her companions were near to place it on her head. I went down and looked at her. "Shall I help you?" I said. She blushed deeply. "Oh no, sir!" she exclaimed. "Come now! No ceremony!" I replied. She adjusted her headgear, and I helped her. She thanked me and walked up the steps.

May 17

I have made all sorts of acquaintances, but have as yet found no one I really like. I don't know what attraction I possess for people, so many of them like me, and attach themselves to me; and then I feel sorry when the road we go together takes us only a short distance. If you ask what the people here are like, I have to say: like everywhere else! The human race is a uniform lot. Most people work the greater part of their time just for a living; and the little freedom which remains to them frightens them so that they use every means of getting rid of it. Such is man's high calling!

But they are a good sort of people. If I occasionally forget myself, and take part in the innocent pleasures which are granted us humans and laugh and joke, for instance, round a well-set table with genuine freedom and sincerity, or arrange a walk or dance or suchlike, all this has a really good effect upon me; only I have to forget that there lie dormant within me so many other qualities which wither unused, and which I must carefully conceal. Ah! How this torments my heart!—And yet to be misunderstood is the fate of a man like me.

Oh, that the friend of my youth is gone! Oh, that I ever knew her! I might say to myself, "You're a fool to seek what is not to be found on this earth." But she was mine. I have felt that heart, that noble soul, in whose presence I seemed to be more than I really was, because I was all that I could be. God! Was there a single power in my soul that remained unused? And in her presence could I not develop fully that intense feeling with which my heart embraces Nature? Wasn't our life together a perpetual interplay of the subtlest emotions, of the keenest wit, whose many shades, however extravagant, bore the stamp of genius? Ah! the few years by which she was my senior brought her to the grave before me. I shall never forget her, never forget her steady mind or her heavenly patience.

A few days ago I met a young man named V., a frank, open fellow,

with most pleasing features. He has just left the university, does not think himself overwise, but still believes he knows more than other people. He has worked hard, as I can tell from many indications and, in short, is well informed. When he heard that I sketch a good deal, and that I know Greek (two unusual accomplishments for this part of the country), he came to see me and displayed his whole store of learning, from Batteux to Wood, from De Piles to Winckelmann: he assured me he had read all of the first part of Sulzer's "Theory" and possessed a manuscript of Heyne's on the study of antiquity. I let him talk.

I have also become acquainted with a very worthy fellow, the district judge, a straightforward and sincere man. I am told it is a delight to see him in the midst of his nine children. People especially talk about his oldest daughter. He has invited me to visit him, and I will do so soon. He lives at one of the prince's hunting lodges, an hour and a half walk from here, which he received permission to occupy after the death of his wife, since it was too painful for him to live in town at his official residence.

I have also come across a few curious eccentrics who are in every respect annoying and most intolerable in their demonstrations of friendship.

All the best! This letter will please you; it's quite factual.

May 22

That the life of man is but a dream has been sensed by many before; and I too am always haunted by this feeling. When I consider the narrow limits within which our active and our cognitive faculties are confined; when I see how all our energies are directed at little more than providing for mere necessities, which again have no further end than to prolong our wretched existence; and then realize that all our satisfaction concerning certain subjects of investigation amounts to nothing more than passive resignation, in which we paint our prison walls with bright figures and brilliant prospects; all this, Wilhelm, strikes me silent. I turn within myself and find there a world, but one of imagination and dim desires rather than of distinctness and living power. Everything swims before my senses, and I smile and dream my way through the world.

All learned teachers and tutors agree that children do not understand the cause of their desires; but no one likes to think that adults too wander about this earth like children, not knowing where they come from or where they are going, not acting in accord with genuine motives, but ruled like children by biscuits, sugarplums, and the rod—and yet it seems to me so obvious!

I know what you will say in reply, and I am ready to admit it, that those are happiest who, like children, live for the day, amuse themselves

with their dolls, dress and undress them, and eagerly watch the cupboard where Mother has locked up her sweets; and when at last they get what they want, eat it greedily and exclaim, "More!" These are certainly happy creatures; and so are those others who dignify their paltry employments, and sometimes even their passions, with high-sounding phrases, representing them to mankind as gigantic achievements performed for their welfare and glory. Happy the man who can be like this! But he who humbly realizes what all this means, who sees with what pleasure the cheerful citizen converts his little garden into a paradise, and how patiently even the unhappy people pursue their weary way beneath their burden, and how all alike wish to behold the light of the sun just a minute longer; yes, such a man is at peace, and creates his world out of his own soul—happy, because he is a human being. And then, however confined he may be, he still preserves in his heart the sweet feeling of liberty, and knows that he can quit this prison whenever he likes.

May 26

You know from long ago my way of settling down somewhere, of selecting a little place of my own in some pleasant spot, and of putting up in it. Here, too, I have discovered such a comfortable spot which delights me.

About an hour from the town is a place called Wahlheim.¹ It is interestingly situated on a hill; and by following one of the footpaths out of the village, you can have a view of the whole valley below you. A kindly woman keeps a small inn there, selling wine, beer, and coffee; and she is extremely cheerful and pleasant in spite of her age. The chief charm of this spot consists in two linden trees, spreading their enormous branches over the little green before the church, which is entirely surrounded by peasants' cottages, barns, and homesteads. Seldom have I seen a place so intimate and comfortable, and I often have my small table and chair brought out from the inn, and drink my coffee there, and read my Homer. Chance brought me to the spot one fine afternoon, and I found it perfectly deserted. Everybody was in the fields except a little boy about four years of age, who was sitting on the ground, and held between his feet a child about six months old; he pressed it to his breast with both arms, so that he formed a sort of armchair for him; and notwithstanding the liveliness which sparkled in his black eyes, he remained perfectly still. The sight charmed me. I sat down upon a plow opposite them, and sketched with great delight this little picture of brotherly tenderness. I

¹The reader need not take the trouble to look for the place thus designated. We have found it necessary to change the names given in the original letters.

added the neighboring hedge, the barn door, and some broken cart wheels, just as they happened to be there; and after an hour I found that I had made a well-formed and interesting drawing, without adding the slightest thing of my own. This confirmed me in my resolution of adhering in the future entirely to Nature. Nature alone is inexhaustible and can form the great artist. Much may be alleged in favor of rules; about as much as may be said in favor of middle-class society: an artist modeled after them will never produce anything absolutely bad or in poor taste, just as a man who observes the laws of society and obeys decorum can never be a wholly unwelcome neighbor or a real villain. Yet, say what you will of rules, they destroy the genuine feeling of Nature and its true expression. Do not tell me that I am “too severe, that rules only restrain and prune superfluous branches, etc.” My good friend, I shall give you an analogy. It is like love. A warmhearted youth becomes strongly attached to a girl: he spends every hour of the day in her company, lavishes all his energies and his fortune to prove that he is wholly devoted to her. Along comes some Philistine, a man of position and respectability, and says to him: “My good young friend, to love is human; but you must love within human bounds. Divide your time: devote a portion to business, and give the hours of recreation to your sweetheart. Calculate your assets; and from what is left after expenses you may buy her a present, only not too often—on her birthday, and such occasions, etc. etc.” If he were to follow this advice, he might become a useful member of society, and I should advise every prince to give him a post; but it is all over with his love, and, if he be an artist, with his art. O my friend! why is it that the torrent of genius so seldom bursts forth, so seldom rolls in full-flowing stream, overwhelming your astounded soul? Because, on either side of this stream sedate and respectable fellows have settled down; their arbors and tulip beds and cabbage fields would be destroyed; therefore in good time they have the sense to dig trenches and raise embankments in order to avert the impending danger.

May 27

I notice now that I fell into such raptures, declamations, and parables that I forgot to tell you what became of the meeting with the children. Absorbed in my artistic contemplations, which I described so inadequately in yesterday's letter, I had been sitting on the plow for two hours. Toward evening a young woman, with a basket on her arm, came towards the children, who had not moved all that time. She called out from a distance, “You are a very good boy, Philip!” She greeted me. I thanked her, rose, and went over to her, inquiring if she were the mother of those pretty children. “Yes,” she said. And, giving the elder

half a roll, she took the little one in her arms and kissed him with a mother's tenderness. "I left my baby in Philip's care," she said, "and went into the town with my eldest boy to buy some bread, some sugar, and an earthen dish for his cereal." I saw these various things in the basket, from which the cover had fallen. "I shall make some broth tonight for my little Hans (which was the name of the youngest): that wild fellow, the big one, broke my dish yesterday while he was scrambling with Philip for what was left of the food." I inquired about the eldest and she had scarcely told me that he was chasing a couple of geese in the field when he came running up and handed Philip a hazel switch. I talked a little longer with the woman and found that she was the daughter of the schoolmaster and that her husband was gone on a journey into Switzerland after some money that had been left to him by a relative. "They tried to cheat him," she said, "and would not answer his letters; so he has gone there himself. I only hope he hasn't had an accident; I haven't heard from him since he went." I left the woman with regret, giving each of the children a penny and one too for the youngest, to buy some wheaten bread for his broth when she went to town next; and so we parted.

I tell you, my dear friend, when my thoughts are all upset, the sight of such a creature as this quiets my disturbed mind. She moves in a tranquil happiness within the confined circle of her existence; she makes the best of it from one day to the next; and when she sees the leaves fall, she has no other thought than that winter is approaching.

Since that time I have often gone out there. The children have become quite used to me; and each gets his bit of sugar when I drink my coffee; and in the evening they share my sour milk and bread and butter. They always get their pennies on Sundays, and if I do not get there after evening service, my landlady has orders to give it to them.

They are quite at home with me, tell me everything; and I am particularly delighted when I can watch their passions and the simple outbursts of their desires when some of the other village children are with them.

It took a good deal of effort to allay the apprehensions of the mother, lest (as she says) "they should inconvenience the gentleman."

May 30

What I said the other day about painting is equally true of poetry. We must only know what is really excellent and dare express it; and that is saying a great deal in a few words. Today I watched a scene which, if I could only convey it, would make the most beautiful idyll in the world. But why talk of poetry and scenes and idylls? Can we never take pleasure in Nature without thinking of improving it?

If, after this introduction, you expect something grand or magnificent, you are sadly mistaken. It was only a peasant lad who aroused this in-

terest. As usual, I shall tell my story badly; and you, as usual, will think me extreme. It is again Wahlheim—always Wahlheim—that produces these unusual things.

There was a coffee party going on outside the house under the linden trees. The people did not exactly please me and, under one pretext or another, I lingered behind.

A peasant lad came from an adjoining house and busied himself with the same plow which I had sketched the other day. I liked his manner, spoke to him, and inquired about his circumstances. We became acquainted, and as is my way with people of that sort, I was soon on fairly familiar terms with him. He told me that he was in the service of a widow and did fairly well. He spoke so much of the woman, and praised her so, that I could soon see he was desperately in love with her. "She is no longer young," he said, "and was treated badly by her former husband; now she does not want to marry again." From his account it was so evident what beauty and charms she possessed for him, and how ardently he wished she would choose him to extinguish the memory of her first husband's faults, that I should have to repeat what he said word for word in order to relate the genuineness of the poor fellow's attachment, love, and devotion. It would require the gifts of a very great poet to convey the expression of his features, the harmony of his voice, and the fire of his eye. No, words cannot portray the tenderness of his every movement and his manner. Whatever I might say would only be clumsy. His fears that I might misunderstand his position with regard to the woman or question the propriety of her conduct especially touched me. How charming it was when he spoke of her figure, her body, which although without the graces of youth, had won and attached him to her! I can only recall it within my innermost soul. Never in my life have I seen or imagined in this purity such intense desire or such ardent affections. Do not scold me if I say that the mere recollection of this innocence and truth burns in my very soul; that this image of fidelity and tenderness haunts me everywhere; and that I consume myself in longing and desire, as though kindled by the flame.

I must try to see her as soon as I can; or perhaps it is better that I should see her through the eyes of her lover. When I actually see her, she might not appear as she now stands before me; and why should I spoil so sweet a picture?

June 16

Why haven't I written? You who pretend to know so much and yet you ask such a question! You should be able to guess that I am well—that is to say—in a word, I have made an acquaintance who has won my heart: I have—I don't know.

To tell you in orderly fashion how I met this most enchanting of

creatures will be a difficult task. I am happy, ecstatic, and therefore not a very reliable reporter.

An angel! Nonsense! Everybody says that of the girl he loves. And yet I find it impossible to tell you how perfect she is, or why she is so perfect: enough—she has completely captivated my soul.

So much simplicity with so much intelligence—so kind, and yet so resolute—a mind so calm, and a life so active.

But all this wretched stuff and pale abstraction tells you not a single concrete thing about her. Some other time—no, not some other time, now, this very instant, I will tell you all. Now or never. For just between us, since I began my letter, I have been three times on the point of putting down my pen, saddling my horse, and riding out there. I swore this morning that I wouldn't, and yet now I rush to the window every few minutes to see how high the sun is . . .

I couldn't help it—I had to go out to her. I've just come back, Wilhelm; I shall have my supper and write to you. What a delight it is for my soul to see her in the midst of those dear, happy children—her eight brothers and sisters!

But if I go on like this you will be no wiser at the end of my letter than you were at the beginning. Listen, then,—I'll force myself to go into detail.

I wrote to you the other day that I had become acquainted with the district judge, and that he had invited me to visit him soon at his hermitage, or rather in his little kingdom. But I neglected to do so, and perhaps might never have gone, if chance had not revealed to me the treasure concealed in that retired spot.

Some of our young people had arranged a ball in the countryside, which I agreed to attend. I invited for the evening a pretty and pleasant, but rather dull sort of girl from the neighborhood. It was agreed that I should hire a carriage and take my partner and her cousin. On the way we were to pick up Charlotte S. My companion told me, as we drove along through the park to the hunting lodge, that I should make the acquaintance of a very beautiful girl. "Take care," added the cousin, "that you don't fall in love." "What do you mean?" I said. "She is already engaged to a very worthy man," she replied, "who is gone to settle his affairs upon the death of his father and apply for a lucrative position." All this seemed of little interest to me.

When we arrived at the gate, the sun was about to set behind the hills. The air was sultry and the ladies expressed their fears of an approaching storm, as masses of greyish clouds were gathering on the horizon. I relieved their fears by pretending to be weather-wise, although I myself had a feeling that our party might be interrupted.

I had got out and a maid who came to the gate requested us to wait

a moment—Mademoiselle Lottchen would be with us presently. I walked across the yard to the house, and when I had gone up a flight of steps in front and had opened the door, I saw before me the most charming scene I have ever witnessed. Six children, from eleven to two years old, were running about the room, surrounding a lovely girl of medium height, dressed in a simple white frock with pink ribbons. She was holding a loaf of dark bread in her hand, and was cutting slices for the little ones all round, in proportion to their age and appetite. She performed her task with such affection and each child awaited his turn with outstretched hands and artlessly shouted his thanks. Some of them ran off at once to enjoy their supper, while others, of a gentler disposition, walked to the gate to see the strangers and to look at the carriage in which their Charlotte was to drive away. “Forgive me for causing you the trouble of coming for me and for keeping the ladies waiting, but dressing and making arrangements for the house while I’m out made me forget my children’s supper. They don’t like to take it from anyone but me.” I paid her some indifferent compliment, but my whole soul was absorbed by her air, her voice, her manner. I had scarcely recovered from my surprise when she ran into her room to fetch her gloves and fan. The young ones looked at me questioningly from a distance and I approached the youngest, a delicious little creature. He drew back and Charlotte, entering at that moment, said, “Louis, shake hands with your cousin.” The little fellow obeyed willingly and I could not resist giving him a hearty kiss, notwithstanding his dirty little face. “Cousin?” I said to Charlotte, as I offered her my hand, “do you think I deserve the happiness of being related to you?” She replied, with a quick smile, “Oh! I have such a number of cousins that I should be sorry if you were the most undeserving of them.” In taking leave, she impressed upon her next oldest sister, Sophie, a girl of about eleven, to take good care of the children, and to say hello to Papa for her when he came home from his ride. She enjoined the little ones to obey their sister Sophie as they would herself, and some did promise that they would. But a little fair-haired girl, about six years old, said, “Sophie isn’t you, Charlotte, and we like you best.” The two eldest boys had climbed up behind the carriage and, at my request, she permitted them to accompany us to the edge of the wood, if they promised to sit still and not to tease.

We were hardly seated, and the ladies had greeted one another, making the usual remarks upon each other’s dress, especially their bonnets, and upon the company they expected to meet, when Charlotte asked the coachman to stop and told her brothers to get down. They insisted upon kissing her hand once more, which the eldest did with all the delicacy of a youth of fifteen, but the other in a lighter and more impetuous manner. She asked them again to give her love to the children, and we drove off.

The cousin inquired whether Charlotte had finished the book she had

sent her the other day. “No,” said Charlotte; “I don’t like it; you can have it back. And the one before that wasn’t much better.” I was surprised, upon asking the title, at her reply.² I found so much character in everything she said, every word seemed to brighten her features with new charms, with new rays of intelligence, which appeared to increase gradually, as she felt that I understood her.

“When I was younger,” she said, “I loved nothing so much as novels. Nothing could equal my delight when, on Sundays, I could settle down quietly in a corner and enter with my whole heart and soul into the joys or sorrows of some Miss Jenny. I don’t deny that they still possess some charms for me. But I read so seldom that I prefer books that suit my taste. And I like those authors best who describe my own situation in life—and the friends who are about me—whose stories touch me with interest because they resemble my own domestic life, which is perhaps not absolutely paradise, but on the whole a source of indescribable happiness.”

I tried to conceal the emotion which these words aroused, but it was of slight avail; for when she incidentally expressed her opinion of “The Vicar of Wakefield,” and of other works,³ I could no longer contain myself but said what I thought of it; and it was not until Charlotte had addressed herself to the other two ladies that I remembered their presence, and observed them sitting silent and astonished. The cousin looked at me several times with a mocking air, to which, however, I paid no attention.

We talked of the pleasures of dancing. “If it is a fault to love it,” said Charlotte, “I confess that I prize it above all other amusements. Whenever anything worries me, I go to my old squeaky piano, drum out a quadrille, and then everything’s all right again.”

How I gazed into her rich dark eyes as she spoke; how my own eyes hung on her warm lips and fresh, glowing cheeks, how I became lost in the wonderful sense of what she said—so much so, that I often did not hear her actual words! In short, when we arrived at the dance, I alighted from the carriage as if in a dream and was so lost in the dim world around me that I scarcely heard the music which came from the brightly lit ballroom.

²We feel obliged to suppress this passage in the letter so as not to offend anyone; although no author need pay much attention to the opinion of one simple girl or that of an unbalanced young man.

³Though the names of some of our native authors are omitted, whoever shares Charlotte’s approbation will feel in his heart who they are, if he should read this passage. And no one else needs to know.

Two gentlemen, Mr. Audran and a certain N. N. (I can't be bothered with names), who were the cousin's and Charlotte's partners, received us at the carriage door and took charge of their ladies while I followed with mine.

We danced a minuet. I engaged one lady after another, and it seemed to me that precisely the most disagreeable could not bring themselves to change partners and end the figure. Charlotte and her partner began an English quadrille and you can imagine my delight when it was her turn to dance the figure with us. You should see Charlotte dance! She dances with her whole heart and soul: her body is all harmony, elegance, and grace, as if nothing else mattered, as if she had no other thought or feeling; and, doubtless, for the moment, everything else has ceased to exist for her.

She was engaged for the second quadrille, but promised me the third, and assured me, with the most disarming ingenuousness, that she was very fond of the German way of dancing. "It is the custom here," she said, "for the previous partners to dance the German dance together, but my partner is a bad waltzer, and will be grateful if I save him the trouble. Your partner can't waltz, and doesn't like it either. But I noticed during the quadrille that you waltz well, so, if you want to waltz with me, do propose it to my partner, and I will ask yours." We agreed, and it was arranged that while we danced our partners should entertain each other.

We began, and first delighted in joining arms according to the usual variety of patterns. With what charm, what ease she moved! When the waltz started, and the dancers whirled round each other like planets in the sky, there was some confusion, since some of the dancers were fairly clumsy. We kept back, allowing the others to wear themselves out, and when the most awkward dancers had left the floor, we joined in and kept it up with one other couple—Audran and his partner. Never had I danced more lightly. I felt myself more than human, holding this loveliest of creatures in my arms, flying with her like the wind, till I lost sight of everything else; and—Wilhelm, I vowed at that moment that a girl whom I loved, or for whom I felt the slightest attachment, should never waltz with another, even if it should be my end! You understand what I mean.

We took a few turns in the room to recover our breath. Then Charlotte sat down and we ate some oranges that I had secured—the only ones left; but at every slice which she politely offered to a greedy lady sitting next to her, I felt as though a dagger went through my heart.

We were the second couple in the third quadrille. As we were dancing along (and Heaven knows with what ecstasy I gazed at her eyes which shone with the sweetest feeling of enjoyment), we passed a lady whom I had noticed because of her charming expression, although she was no

longer young. She looks at Charlotte with a smile, shakes her finger at her, and twice repeats with great significance the name Albert.

"Who's Albert," I asked Charlotte, "if it's not too impertinent?" She was about to answer, when we had to separate, in order to execute the figure of eight, and as we crossed in front of each other, I felt that she looked somewhat pensive. "Why should I conceal it from you?" she said, as she gave me her hand for the promenade. "Albert is a worthy man, to whom I am as good as engaged." Now, there was nothing new to me in this (the girls had told me of it on the way), yet it struck me as new since I had not thought of it in connection with her whom in so short a time I had grown to like so much. At any rate, I became confused, got out of the figure, and caused a general confusion so that it took Charlotte's whole presence of mind to straighten me out by pulling and pushing me into my proper place.

The dance was not yet finished when the lightning which we had for some time seen on the horizon and which I had pretended was only summer lightning, grew more violent and thunder was heard above the music. The women ran in all directions, followed by their partners. The confusion spread and soon the music stopped. When any distress or terror interrupts our amusements, it naturally makes a deeper impression than at other times, partly because the contrast makes us more keenly susceptible, or perhaps because our senses are then more open to impressions, and the shock is consequently stronger. This probably accounts for the looks of fear I saw everywhere on the faces of the ladies. One wisely sat down in a corner with her back to the window, and held her hands over her ears; a second knelt down and hid her face in the other's lap; a third pushed herself between them, and embraced her sisters with a thousand tears. Some insisted on going home; others, unaware of what they were doing, lacked sufficient presence of mind to resist the impertinences of their partners, who had had something to drink and who sought to capture for themselves those sighs which the lips of our distressed beauties had intended for Heaven. Some of the gentlemen had gone downstairs to smoke a quiet pipe, and the rest of the company gladly accepted the wise suggestion of the hostess to retire into another room which had shutters and curtains. We had hardly got there when Charlotte arranged the chairs in a circle; and when the company had sat down at her request, she proposed a game.

I noticed some of the guests purse their lips and stretch themselves at the prospect of some agreeable forfeit. "Let's play at counting," said Charlotte. "Now, pay attention: I shall go round the circle from right to left and each one is to count, one after the other, the number that comes to him. But you must count fast; whoever hesitates or makes a mistake gets a box on the ear, and so on, till we have counted a thousand." It was delightful to see the fun. She went round the circle with upraised

arm. “One,” said the first; “two,” the second; “three,” the third; and so on, till Charlotte went faster and faster. One man made a mistake— instantly a box on the ear; and amid the laughter that ensued, another box; and so on, faster and faster. I myself came in for two cuffs, which to my inner delight seemed a little harder than the ones she gave the others. General laughter and commotion put an end to the game long before we had counted to a thousand. The party broke up into little separate groups, the storm was over, and I followed Charlotte into the ballroom. On the way she said, “The boxes on the ear made them forget their fears of the storm.” I could make no reply. She continued, “I was as frightened as any of them, but by pretending to be brave, to keep up the spirits of the others, I forgot my own fears.” We went to the window. It was still thundering in the distance; a soft rain was pouring down over the countryside and filled the air around us with delicious fragrance. Charlotte leaned on her elbows, her eyes wandered over the scene, she looked up to the sky, and then turned to me, her eyes filled with tears; she put her hand on mine and said, “Klopstock!” I remembered at once that magnificent ode of his which was in her thoughts, and felt overcome by the flood of emotion which the mention of his name called forth. It was more than I could bear. I bent over her hand, kissed it in a stream of ecstatic tears, and again looked into her eyes. Divine Klopstock! If only you could have seen your apotheosis in those eyes! And your name, so often profaned, may I never hear it uttered again!

June 19

I no longer remember where I stopped in my story. I only know that it was two in the morning when I went to bed; and if you had been with me and I might have talked instead of writing to you, I should probably have kept you up till daylight.

I think I have not yet told you what happened as we rode home from the ball, nor have I time to tell you now. It was a magnificent sunrise; the whole country was fresh, and the dew fell drop by drop from the trees. Our companions were dozing. Charlotte asked me if I didn’t want to join them, and urged me not to stand on ceremony. Looking at her, I answered, “As long as I see those eyes open, there is no danger of my falling asleep.” We both kept awake till we reached her gate. The maid opened it quietly and assured her, in answer to her inquiries, that her father and the children were well, and still sleeping. I left, asking her permission to see her that day. She consented, and I kept my promise. And since that time sun, moon, and stars may pursue their course: I know not whether it is day or night; the whole world about me has ceased to be.

June 21

My days are as happy at those God gives to his saints; and whatever be my fate hereafter, I can never say that I haven't tasted joy—the purest joys of life. You know my Wahlheim. I am now completely settled there. It is only half an hour from Charlotte: and there I feel my full self and taste all the happiness which can fall to the lot of man.

Little did I imagine, when I selected Wahlheim as the goal of my walks, that all Heaven lay so near it. How often in my wanderings had I seen, either from the hillside or from the meadows across the river, this hunting lodge, which now holds all the joys of my heart!

I have often reflected, dear Wilhelm, on the eagerness of men to wander about and make new discoveries, and on that secret urge which afterwards makes them return to their narrow circle, conform to the customary path, and pay no attention to the right or the left.

It is so strange how, when I came here first and looked out upon that lovely valley from the hills, I felt charmed with everything around me—the little wood opposite—how delightful to sit in its shade! How fine the view from that summit!—that delightful chain of hills, and the exquisite valleys at their feet!—could I but lose myself amongst them!—I ran off, and returned without finding what I sought. Distance, my friend, is like the future. A dim vastness is spread before our souls; our feelings are as obscure as our vision, and we desire to surrender our whole being, that it may be filled with the perfect bliss of one glorious emotion—but alas! when we rush towards our goal, when the distant *there* becomes the present *here*, all is the same; we are as poor and limited as ever, and our soul still languishes for unattainable happiness.

And so the restless traveler at last longs for his native soil, and finds in his own cottage, in the arms of his wife, in the affection of his children, and the labor necessary for their support, all that happiness which he sought in vain in the wide world.

When I go out to Wahlheim at sunrise, and with my own hands gather in the garden the sugar peas for my own dinner; and when I sit down to string them as I read my Homer, and then, selecting a saucepan from the little kitchen, fetch my own butter, put my peas on the fire, cover the pot, and sit down to stir it occasionally—I vividly recall the illustrious suitors of Penelope, killing, dressing, and roasting their own oxen and swine. Nothing fills me with a more pure and genuine happiness than those traits of patriarchal life which, thank Heaven! I can imitate without affectation.

I am glad that my heart can feel the same simple and innocent pleasure as the peasant whose table is covered with food of his own growing, and who not only enjoys his meal, but remembers with delight the happy days, and the sunny morning when he planted it, the mild evenings when he watered it, and the pleasure he experienced in watching its daily growth.

June 29

The day before yesterday the physician came from the town to pay a visit to the judge. He found me on the floor playing with Charlotte's brothers and sisters. Some of them were scrambling over me, others romped with me, and as I caught and tickled them, they made a great uproar. The doctor is the sort of person who adjusts his stuffy cuffs and continually settles his frill while he's talking; he thought my conduct beneath the dignity of a sensible man. I could see it in his face, but I did not let myself be disturbed and allowed him to continue his wise talk, while I rebuilt the children's card houses as fast as they threw them down. He went about the town afterwards, complaining that the judge's children were spoiled enough, but that now Werther was completely ruining them.

Yes, Wilhelm, nothing on this earth is closer to my heart than children. When I watch their doings; when I see in the little creatures the seeds of all those virtues and qualities, which they will one day find so indispensable; when I see in their obstinacy all the future firmness and constancy of a noble character, in their capriciousness that gaiety of temper which will carry them over the dangers and troubles of life—everything so simple and unspoiled—I always remember the golden words of the Great Teacher of mankind, "Unless ye become even as one of these." And yet, my friend, these children, who are our equals, whom we ought to consider models—we treat them as though they were our inferiors. They're not supposed to have a will of their own! Don't we have one? And why do we privilege ourselves? Because we're older and more experienced! Great God! from the height of Thy Heaven Thou beholdest only children, older and younger ones; and Thy Son has long since declared which of them afford Thee greater pleasure. But they will not believe in Him, and hear Him not—that, too, is an old story; and they train their children after their own image, and—

Adieu, Wilhelm, I must not continue this useless talk.

July 1

What Charlotte can be to an invalid I feel in my own heart, which suffers more than many a poor creature lingering on a bed of sickness. She will spend a few days in the town with a woman, whom the physicians have almost given up, and who wishes to have Charlotte near her in her last moments. I accompanied her last week on a visit to the vicar of St., a village in the mountains, about an hour away. We arrived about four o'clock. Charlotte had taken her little sister with her. When we entered the courtyard of the vicarage, we found the good old man sitting on a bench before the door, in the shade of two large walnut trees. At the sight of Charlotte, he seemed to gain fresh life, rose, forgot his knotty

stick, and ventured to walk towards her. She ran to him, and made him sit down; then, placing herself by his side, she gave him her father's greetings, and then caught up his youngest child—a dirty, ugly little thing, but the joy of his old age. I wish you could have seen her attention to this old man—how she raised her voice because of his deafness; how she told him of perfectly healthy young people who had died when it was least expected; praised the virtues of Karlsbad, and commended his decision to spend the next summer there; and assured him that he looked better and stronger than when she saw him last. In the meantime, I paid my respects to his good wife. The old man seemed in excellent spirits and, as I could not help admiring the beauty of the walnut trees which formed such an agreeable shade over us, he began, though with some little difficulty, to tell us their history. “The older,” he said, “we do not know who planted it—some say one vicar, and some say another; but the younger one, there behind us, is exactly the age of my wife—fifty years next October. Her father planted it the morning of the day she was born. My wife’s father was my predecessor here, and I cannot tell you how fond he was of that tree; and it is quite as dear to me. Under the shade of that very tree, on a log, my wife was seated, knitting, when I came into this courtyard for the first time as a poor student, just twenty-seven years ago.” Charlotte inquired after his daughter. He said she had gone with Mr. Schmidt to the workers in the field. The old man then resumed his story, and told us how his predecessor had taken a fancy to him, as had his daughter; and how he had become first his curate, and subsequently his successor. He had scarcely finished his story when his daughter returned through the garden, accompanied by Mr. Schmidt. She welcomed Charlotte affectionately, and I confess I was much taken with her appearance. She was a lively looking, good-humored brunette, good company for a short stay in the country. Her suitor (for such Mr. Schmidt appeared to be) was a polite but reserved person who would not join our conversation, in spite of Charlotte’s efforts to draw him out. I was much annoyed to see by his expression that his silence was not due to any dullness or stupidity, but to obstinacy and ill-humor. This became only too evident when we set out to take a walk, with Friederike accompanying Charlotte, and, on occasion, myself. The worthy gentleman’s face, which was by nature rather somber, became so dark and angry that Charlotte had to touch my arm and remind me that I was talking too much to Friederike. Nothing distresses me more than to see people torment each other, particularly when young people, in the very season of pleasure, waste their few short days of sunshine in quarrels and trifles, and only perceive their error when it is too late. This thought preoccupied me and in the evening, when we returned to the vicar’s and were sitting round the table with our bread and milk, the conversation turned on the joys and sorrows of the world, and I could not resist the tempta-

tion to attack bitterly ill-humor. "We are apt," I began, "to complain, but surely with very little reason, that our happy days are few, and our days of sorrow are many. If our hearts were always disposed to receive what God sends us every day, we should have strength enough to bear misery when it comes." "But," observed the vicar's wife, "we cannot always control our tempers, so much depends upon our nature; when the body suffers, the mind is ill at ease." "I admit that," I continued, "but let us regard it as a disease, and ask whether there is no remedy for it." "That sounds plausible," said Charlotte, "at least I think very much depends upon ourselves. I know it is so with me. When anything annoys and disturbs me, I run into the garden, hum a couple of dance tunes, and everything is all right again." "That's what I meant," I replied. "Ill-humor resembles laziness: it's natural to us, but if once we have courage to exert ourselves, our work runs fresh from our hands, and we find real enjoyment in activity." Friederike listened very attentively; the young man objected that we are not masters of ourselves, and still less so of our feelings. "We are talking about a disagreeable emotion," I added, "from which everyone would gladly escape, but none know their own powers without trial. Surely sick people are glad to consult doctors and submit to the most scrupulous regimen, the most nauseous medicines, in order to recover their health." I noticed that the good old man inclined his head, and strained to hear our discourse. I raised my voice and addressed myself directly to him. "They preach against a great many vices," I observed, "but I can't remember a sermon against ill-humor."⁴ "That should be done by your town clergymen," he replied; "country people are never ill-humored. Still, it might be useful occasionally—to our wives, for instance, and the judge." We all laughed, and he joined us so vigorously that he was seized by a fit of coughing, which interrupted our conversation for a time. Mr. Schmidt resumed the subject. "You call ill-humor a vice," he remarked, "but I think you exaggerate." "Not at all," I replied, "if a vice is simply that which is pernicious to ourselves and those around us. Isn't it enough that we lack the power to make one another happy, must we deprive each other of the pleasure which each of us can at times feel in his heart? Show me the man who has the courage to hide his ill-humor, who bears the whole burden himself without disturbing the happiness of his companions. No, ill-humor arises from a sense of our own inadequacy—from a discontent with ourselves and an hostility towards others incited by foolish vanity. We see people happy whom we have not made so, and cannot endure the sight." Charlotte looked at me with a smile as

⁴We have an excellent sermon on this subject by Lavater, among those on the Book of Jonas.

she observed the emotion with which I spoke; and a tear in Friederike's eye made me proceed. "Woe unto those," I said, "who use their power over another's heart to destroy the simple pleasures it would naturally enjoy! All the gifts, all the attentions in the world cannot compensate for the loss of that happiness which the cruel tyranny within us has destroyed."

My heart was full as I spoke. The memory of past events pressed upon my mind and filled my eyes with tears.

"We should daily repeat to ourselves," I exclaimed, "that we can do little for our friends except leave them their own joys and increase their happiness by sharing it with them! But when souls are tormented by a violent passion, or their hearts rent with grief, is it in your power to offer them the slightest comfort?"

"And when the last fatal illness seizes the being whose untimely grave you have prepared, when she lies languid and exhausted before you, her dim eyes raised to heaven, and the damp of death upon her pallid brow, then you stand at her bedside like a condemned criminal, with the bitter feeling that all your strength and will could not save her; and the agonizing thought haunts you that all your efforts cannot impart even a moment's strength to the departing soul, or quicken her with a moment of consolation."

As I spoke these words, the memory of a similar scene at which I had once been present fell with full force upon my heart. I put my handkerchief to my face and left the room; I was recalled to my senses only by Charlotte's voice, reminding me that it was time to go home. With what tenderness she scolded me on the way for the passionate interest I took in everything! It would destroy me, she said, and I ought to spare myself.—O, Angel! I will live for your sake.

July 6

She is still with her dying friend, and is always the same helpful and lovely creature whose presence softens pain, and brings happiness wherever she goes. She went out yesterday with little Marianne and Amalie: I knew of it, went to meet them, and we walked together. After about an hour and a half, we returned to the town. We stopped at the spring I am so fond of, and which is now a thousand times dearer to me than ever: Charlotte sat down by the low wall, and we gathered about her. I looked round, and recalled the time when my heart was all alone. "Beloved spring," I said, "since that time I have not come to enjoy cool repose by your fresh stream; I have passed you with scarcely a glance." I looked down, and observed Amalie coming up the steps with a glass of water. I turned towards Charlotte, and felt deeply how much she means to me. Amalie approached with the glass. Marianne wanted to take it

from her. "No!" cried the child with the sweetest expression, "Charlotte must drink first."

The goodness and simplicity with which this was uttered so charmed me that I sought to express my feelings by catching up the child and kissing her heartily. But she was frightened and began to cry. "You shouldn't do that," said Charlotte. I was perplexed. "Come, little one," she continued, taking her hand and leading her down the steps, "wash yourself quickly in the fresh water, and it won't hurt." I stood and watched the little dear rubbing her cheeks with her wet hands, in the fervent belief that all the impurities would be washed off by the miraculous water and that she would surely be spared the disgrace of an ugly beard. Even though Charlotte said it would do, she continued to wash with all her might, as if she thought too much were better than too little—I assure you, Wilhelm, I never attended a baptism with greater reverence; and when Charlotte came up, I could have fallen on my knees as before a prophet who has washed away the sins of his people.

In the evening I could not help telling the story to a man who, I thought, possessed some natural feeling because he was a man of understanding. But what a mistake I made! He maintained it was very wrong of Charlotte—that we should not deceive children, that such fanciful explanations occasion countless mistakes and superstitions from which we should protect the young. It occurred to me, then, that this very man had had his child baptized only a week before. I said nothing, but silently kept my belief that we should deal with children as God deals with us—we are happiest under the influence of innocent delusions.

July 8

What a child I am to be so covetous of a look! What a child I am! We had been to Wahlheim: the ladies took a carriage, but during our walks I thought I saw in Charlotte's black eyes—I am a fool—but forgive me! you should see them, those eyes. However, to be brief (for I can hardly keep my own eyes open), when the ladies stepped into their carriage again, young W., Seldstadt, Audran, and I were standing about the door. They were a merry lot of fellows, all laughing and joking together. I tried to catch Charlotte's eye. Her glance wandered from one to the other, but it didn't light on me—on me, who stood there motionless, on me who alone saw her. My heart bade her a thousand adieus, but she didn't notice me. The carriage drove off, and my eyes filled with tears. I looked after her: suddenly I saw Charlotte's bonnet leaning out of the window, as she turned to look back—was it at me? My dear friend, I don't know. And I am suspended in this uncertainty; but it is also my consolation: perhaps she did turn to look at me. Perhaps! Good night—what a child I am!

July 10

You should see how foolish I look in company when her name is mentioned, and particularly when I am asked how I like her. How I like her!—I detest the phrase. What sort of creature must he be who merely likes Charlotte, whose whole heart and senses are not entirely absorbed by her? Like her! Someone asked me the other day how I liked Ossian.

July 11

Mrs. M. is very ill. I pray for her because I share Charlotte's sufferings. I see Charlotte occasionally at a friend's house, and today she told me the strangest thing. Old Mr. M. is a greedy, miserly fellow who has long nagged his wife and kept her on an unreasonably strict allowance; but she has always been able to manage. A few days ago, when the doctor knew that there was little chance of her recovery, she sent for her husband—Charlotte was present—and said this to him: "I have something to confess which, after my death, may cause trouble and confusion. I have always managed your household as frugally and economically as possible, but you must forgive me for having deceived you for thirty years. At the beginning of our married life you allowed a small sum for the kitchen and other household expenses. When our establishment increased and our property grew larger, I could not persuade you to increase the weekly allowance in proportion. In short, you know that when our household cost most, you expected me to supply everything with seven florins a week. I took the money from you without saying anything, but made up the weekly deficiency from the receipts—as nobody would suspect your wife of robbing the till. I have wasted nothing, and should have been content to meet my eternal Judge without this confession, if I did not know that whoever looks after the house when I am gone will not be able to manage, and that you might insist that your allowance had been quite sufficient for your first wife."

I talked with Charlotte of the incredible blindness of mankind; how anyone could avoid suspecting some deception when seven florins were allowed to defray expenses twice as great. But I have myself known people who would have believed, without any visible astonishment, that their house possessed the prophet's never-failing cruse of oil.

July 13

No, I am not deceived. In her black eyes I read a genuine interest in me and in my life. Yes, I feel it; and I can believe my own heart which tells me—dare I say it?—dare I pronounce the divine words?—that she loves me!

That she loves me! How the idea exalts me in my own eyes! And—since you understand my feelings, I can say this to you—how I worship myself since she loves me!

Is this presumption, or is it an awareness of the truth? I do not know the man able to supplant me in Charlotte's heart; and yet when she speaks of her betrothed with so much warmth and affection, I feel like a soldier who has been stripped of his honors and titles, and deprived of his sword.

July 16

How my heart beats when by accident I touch her finger, or my feet meet hers under the table! I draw back as from a flame, but a secret force impels me forward again, and I begin to feel faint. Oh! Her innocent, pure heart never knows what agony these little familiarities inflict on me. Sometimes when we are talking she lays her hand on mine and in the eagerness of conversation comes closer to me, and her divine breath brushes my lips—I feel as if lightning had struck me, and I could sink into the earth. And yet, Wilhelm, with all this heavenly intimacy—if I should ever dare—you understand. No! my heart is not so depraved; it is weak, weak enough—but isn't that a kind of depravity?

She is sacred to me. All desire is silenced in her presence; I don't know what I feel when I'm near her. It is as if my soul beat in every nerve of my body. There is a melody which she plays on the piano with the touch of an angel—so simple is it, and yet so lofty! It's her favorite song, and when she strikes the first note all my worry and sorrow disappear in a moment.

I believe every word that is said of the ancient magic of music. How her simple song enchants me! And how she knows when to play it! Sometimes, when I feel like shooting a bullet into my head, she begins to sing. The gloom and madness are dispersed, and I breathe freely again.

July 18

Wilhelm, what is the world to our hearts without love? A magic lantern without light. You have but to set up the light within and the brightest pictures are thrown on the white screen. And if that is all there is, fleeting shadows, we are still happy, when, like children, we behold them and are transported with the wonderful sight. I haven't been able to see Charlotte today. I was prevented by company from which I could not disengage myself. What was I to do? I sent my servant to her house, that I might at least see somebody today who had been near her. Oh, the impatience with which I awaited his return, the joy

with which I welcomed him! I should have liked to hold him in my arms and kiss him, if I had not been embarrassed.

It is said that the Bologna stone, when it is placed in the sun, absorbs the rays and for a time appears luminous in the dark. So it was with me and this servant. The idea that her eyes had dwelt on his countenance, his cheek, his coat buttons, the collar of his surtout, made them all inestimably dear to me, so that at the moment I would not have parted with him for a thousand crowns. His presence made me so happy! For heaven's sake, Wilhelm, don't laugh at me! Can it be a delusion if it makes us so happy?

July 19

"I shall see her today!" I say to myself with delight when I rise in the morning and happily look out at the bright, beautiful sun. "I shall see her!" And then I have no further wish for the rest of the day; all, all is swallowed up by that one thought.

July 20

I cannot quite agree to your proposal that I should accompany the ambassador to * * *. I don't like subordination, and we all know that he's a disagreeable person. You say my mother wishes me to be employed. I could not help laughing at that. Am I not sufficiently employed? And in the end isn't it the same whether I count peas or lentils? The world runs on from one folly to another; and the man who, purely for the sake of others, and without any passion or inner compulsion of his own, toils after wealth or dignity, or any other phantom, is simply a fool.

July 24

You insist so on my not neglecting my drawing that it would be better for me to say nothing than to confess how little I have done lately.

I never felt happier, I never understood Nature better, even down to the stones or smallest blade of grass. And yet I am unable to express myself; the creative power of my imagination is so weak, everything seems to swim and float before me, so that I cannot make a clear, bold outline. But I imagine I should succeed better if I had clay or wax to model. I shall try, if this state of mind continues much longer, and will take to modeling, even if it's only cakes I make.

I have begun Charlotte's portrait three times, and have as often made a fool of myself. This is the more annoying, since I was formerly very

successful in catching likenesses. I have since traced her profile, and must content myself with that.

July 26

Yes, dear Charlotte! I will take care of everything as you wish. Do make me more requests, the more the better. I only ask one favor; use no more writing sand with the little notes you send me. Today I quickly raised your letter to my lips, and it set my teeth on edge.

July 26

I have often resolved not to see her so frequently. But who could keep such a resolution? Every day I succumb to temptation and promise faithfully that tomorrow I will really stay away. But when tomorrow comes, I find some irresistible reason for seeing her; and before I can account for it, I am with her again. Either she said on the previous evening, "Be sure to call tomorrow, won't you?"—and who could stay away?—or she gives me some errand, and I think it proper to take her the answer in person; or the day is lovely, and I walk to Wahlheim; and once I'm there, it's only half an hour to her. I am within the enchanted atmosphere, and suddenly find myself at her side. My grandmother used to tell us a story of a mountain of loadstone. Any ships that came near it were instantly deprived of their ironwork; the nails flew to the mountain and the unhappy crew perished amidst the debris of the planks.

July 30

Albert has arrived, and I must leave. Were he the best and noblest of men, and I in every respect his inferior, I could not endure to see him in possession of such perfection. Possession!—Enough, Wilhelm—her betrothed is here—a fine, worthy fellow, whom one cannot help liking. Fortunately I was not present at their reunion. It would have broken my heart! And he is so considerate, he has not given Charlotte one kiss in my presence. Heaven reward him for it! I must love him for the respect with which he treats her. He shows a regard for me, but I suspect I am more indebted for that to Charlotte than to his own feelings. Women have a delicate tact in such matters, and rightly so. They can't always succeed in keeping two rivals on good terms, but when they do, they are always the ones who benefit.

I cannot help respecting Albert. The calm of his temper contrasts strongly with the impetuosity of mine, which I cannot conceal. He has a

great deal of feeling, and knows what he possesses in Charlotte. He is free from ill-humor, which you know is the fault I detest most.

He regards me as a man of sense; and my attachment to Charlotte, and the interest I take in all that concerns her, only augment his triumph and his love. I won't inquire whether he doesn't at times bother her with petty jealousy; I know that in his place I should not be entirely free from such feelings.

But, be that as it may, my joy in being with Charlotte is over. Call it folly or infatuation, what does a name matter? The thing speaks for itself. Before Albert came, I knew all that I know now. I knew I could make no pretensions to her, nor did I make any—that is, as far as it was possible to be without desire in the presence of so much loveliness. And now look at me, the silly creature, staring at the other fellow coming along and taking the girl away.

I grit my teeth and feel infinite scorn for those who tell me to be resigned, because it all can't be helped. Let me get away from these stuffed creatures! I roam through the woods and when I return to Charlotte, and find Albert sitting by her side in the arbor in the garden, I can't bear it. I behave like a fool, and indulge in a thousand absurdities. "For Heaven's sake," Charlotte said today, "no more scenes like the one last night! You frighten me when you're so exuberant." Between us, I merely wait until he's busy elsewhere and then I'm out there in no time, delighted when I find her alone.

August 8

Believe me, Wilhelm, I didn't mean you when I spoke so severely of those who always advise resignation in the face of inevitable fate. I didn't think you would have any such ideas. Of course you're right. Only remember one thing: in this world it is seldom a question of "either ... or." There are as many shadings of conduct and opinion as there are turns of feature between an aquiline nose and a flat one.

Thus, you mustn't think ill of me if I concede your entire argument and still contrive to find a way somewhere between the "either . . . or."

I hear you say: "Either you have hopes of obtaining Charlotte, or you have none. Well, in the one case, pursue your course and press on to the fulfillment of your wishes. In the other, be a man and try to get rid of a miserable passion which will enervate and destroy you." My dear friend, this is well said—and easily said.

But would you ask a wretched being, whose life is slowly wasting under a lingering disease, to do away with himself by the stroke of a dagger? Does not the very disorder which consumes his strength deprive him of the courage to effect his own deliverance?

You may answer me, if you please, with a similar analogy: "Who

(continued...)