

VALMONT leaves the room; and a moment later, his voice is heard.

(*offstage*) Fetch Madame. Madame de Tourvel has been taken ill.

VALMONT hurries back into the room and over to the chaise-longue.

As he arrives there, MME DE TOURVEL reaches a hand up towards him. He takes it between both of his. He looks perplexed. He stands in silence, thoughtful, massaging her hand in his.

Presently, MME DE ROSEMONDE appears, shepherded by her maid. She clucks anxiously and hurries over towards the chaise-longue.

VALMONT releases MME DE TOURVEL's hand.

She seemed to be having difficulty breathing.

ROSEMONDE Oh, my dear, whatever is it?

MME DE TOURVEL stirs, managing a faint smile.

TOURVEL It's all right, I'm all right now.

VALMONT I shall leave her in your capable hands, Aunt. Send Adèle for me if I can be of any further assistance.

Still looking strangely abashed, VALMONT leaves the room.

ROSEMONDE We must send for a doctor, my dear.

MME DE TOURVEL is roused from her rapt contemplation of VALMONT's departure.

TOURVEL No, no, please, I don't need a doctor, I'm perfectly all right now.

ROSEMONDE We mustn't take any chances.

TOURVEL No, I just... I must talk to you for a moment.

MME DE ROSEMONDE frowns, but without surprise. She turns to gesture at the maid.

The maid curtsies and leaves.

MME DE TOURVEL motions MME DE ROSEMONDE to approach.

Come and sit by me. I can't speak very loud. What I have to say is too difficult.

MME DE ROSEMONDE perches on the edge of the chaise-longue looking down at her. MME DE TOURVEL takes her hands.

I have to leave this house first thing in the morning. I'm most desperately in love.

MME DE ROSEMONDE, still unsurprised, bows her head.

To leave here is the last thing in the world I want to do: but I'd rather die than have to live with the guilt. I don't mind if I die: to live without him is going to be no life at all. But that's what I have to do. Can you understand what I'm saying?

ROSEMONDE Of course. My dear girl. None of this is any surprise to me. The only thing which might surprise one is how little the world changes. Of course you must leave if you feel it's the right thing to do.

TOURVEL And what should I do then? What's your advice?

ROSEMONDE If I remember rightly, in such matters all advice is useless. You can't speak to the patient in the grip of a fever. We must talk again when you're closer to recovery.

TOURVEL I've never been so unhappy.

ROSEMONDE I'm sorry to say this: but those who are most worthy of love are never made happy by it. You're too young to have understood that.

TOURVEL But why, why should that be?

ROSEMONDE Do you still think men love the way we do? No. Men enjoy the happiness they feel; we can only enjoy the happiness we give. They're not capable of devoting themselves exclusively to one person. So to hope to be made happy by love is a certain cause of grief. I'm devoted to my nephew, but what is true of most men is doubly so of him.

TOURVEL And yet...he could have...just now. He took pity on me, I saw it happen, I saw his decision not to take advantage of me.

ROSEMONDE If he has released you, my dear child, it's because your example over these last few weeks has genuinely affected and improved him. If he's let you go, you must go.

TOURVEL I will. I will.

MME DE TOURVEL *starts crying again and twists round, letting her head drop into MME DE ROSEMONDE's lap. MME DE ROSEMONDE sits, looking down, stroking MME DE TOURVEL's hair.*

ROSEMONDE There. And even if you had given way, my dear girl, God knows how hard you've struggled against it. There now. (*She strokes MME DE TOURVEL's hair.*)

The lights fade to blackout.

Interval

VALMONT smiles and looks up as a footman shows MME DE MERTEUIL and DANCENY into the room.

VALMONT rises to greet them, dismissing AZOLAN as he does so, speaking out of the corner of his mouth.

VALMONT Off you go. Keep it up.

AZOLAN bows and leaves, together with the footman.

Madame. My dear boy.

DANCENY embraces VALMONT impulsively.

DANCENY Thank you, Monsieur, for everything.

VALMONT holds DANCENY for a moment, smiling wickedly at MERTEUIL over DANCENY's shoulder.

VALMONT I was afraid I'd been a sad disappointment to you.

DANCENY Of course I'm disappointed not to have seen Cécile for more than a month, but I believe I have you to thank for keeping our love alive.

VALMONT Oh, as to love, she thinks of little else.

DANCENY I had so hoped you'd be able to arrange a meeting between us in the country.

VALMONT Well, so had I, I made all the necessary arrangements, but she was adamant.

DANCENY I know, she said in her last letter you'd been trying hard to persuade her.

VALMONT I did what I could. In many respects I've found her very open to persuasion, but not, alas, on this issue.

DANCENY Yes, she said I couldn't do more myself than you've been doing on my behalf.

VALMONT She's a most generous girl.

MERTEUIL What else did she say?

DANCENY She said she'd seen signs of a change of heart in her mother. Perhaps in the end she'll come round to the idea of our marriage.

MERTEUIL That would be wonderful.

DANCENY Anyway, how is she, that's what I've really come round to ask you, Monsieur.

VALMONT Blooming. I really think the country air has done her good, I think she's even begun to fill out a little.

DANCENY Really?

VALMONT And of course she sends you all her love. She and her mother will be returning to Paris in about a fortnight, by which time the situation should be resolved one way or the other; and either way, she's longing to see you.

DANCENY I don't know how I can bear to go another two weeks without seeing her.

MERTEUIL We shall have to do our very best to provide some distraction for you.

DANCENY Without your friendship and encouragement, I can't think what would have become of me.

MERTEUIL My dear, if you'd be so kind as to wait in the carriage for a few minutes, there's a matter I must discuss with the Vicomte in private.

DANCENY Of course. *(He bows to VALMONT and pumps his hand heartily)* I don't know how I can ever repay you.

VALMONT Don't give it another thought, it's been delightful.

DANCENY *smiles charmingly at them both and leaves the room.*

As soon as he's gone, VALMONT and MERTEUIL burst out laughing and fall into each other's arms. They embrace for a moment and then pull apart, still smiling.

Poor boy. He's quite harmless.

Scene Four

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A fortnight later. Afternoon. The salon in VALMONT's house.

VALMONT *is pouring another glass of champagne for ÉMILIE, when his footman enters the room and murmurs something in his ear, which evidently gives him an unpleasant surprise. He controls himself quickly however, gives some instructions and, as the footman hurries out, turns to ÉMILIE.*

VALMONT Drink up.

ÉMILIE What is it?

VALMONT Someone who might well not appreciate your presence here.

ÉMILIE You mean a woman.

VALMONT A lady, we might even say.

ÉMILIE Oh, well, then. *(She tosses back her champagne and rises to her feet; then, a thought strikes her)* Not the one you wrote that letter to?

VALMONT The very one.

ÉMILIE I enjoyed that.

VALMONT And you proved a most talented desk.

ÉMILIE I'd love to see what she looks like.

VALMONT Well, you can't.

VALMONT *moves over to ÉMILIE as she makes a face of mock disappointment, ready to hustle her out of the room. As he reaches her, however, he seems to hesitate a moment, considering.*

On second thoughts, I don't see why you shouldn't.

ÉMILIE Oo.

VALMONT As long as there's no bad behaviour.

ÉMILIE Never unless required.

VALMONT *looks at ÉMILIE thoughtfully.*

VALMONT Where's your Dutchman?

ÉMILIE Safe in Holland, far as I know.

VALMONT And do you have an appointment for tonight?

ÉMILIE Few friends for dinner.

VALMONT And after dinner?

ÉMILIE Nothing firm.

VALMONT *crosses to his desk, opens a drawer and takes out, as before, a small bag of money.*

VALMONT Then perhaps I shall call round on you later. (He moves over to her and hands her the money)

The footman is showing in MME DE TOURVEL, who stops on the threshold, startled by what she sees.

ÉMILIE I'll be there.

ÉMILIE *leaves the room, staring with undisguised fascination at MME DE TOURVEL, who looks back at her, miserably confused.*

VALMONT *is hovering, torn between his desire to greet MME DE TOURVEL and his curiosity to see what will happen.*

It seems as if nothing will; but at the last minute, as she's passing MME DE TOURVEL, ÉMILIE is suddenly convulsed with mirth and leaves the room helplessly shaking with laughter.

MME DE TOURVEL *watches her, horrified; and VALMONT, concerned now, hurries over to her.*

VALMONT This is an unexpected pleasure.
TOURVEL Evidently.

VALMONT Take no notice of Émilie; she's notoriously eccentric.
TOURVEL I know that woman.

VALMONT Are you sure? I'd be surprised.

TOURVEL She's been pointed out to me at the Opéra.

VALMONT Ah, well, yes, she is striking.

TOURVEL She's a courtesan.

Silence.

Isn't she?

VALMONT I suppose in a manner of speaking...

But MME DE TOURVEL suddenly turns away, her eyes full of tears, and makes to hurry out of the room. VALMONT catches her arm.

TOURVEL Let me go.

VALMONT But what's got into you?

TOURVEL I'm sorry I've disturbed you.

VALMONT Of course you haven't disturbed me, I'm overjoyed to see you.

TOURVEL Please let me go now.

VALMONT No, no, I can't, this is absurd.

TOURVEL Let go!

MME DE TOURVEL wrenches free and VALMONT has to cut her off bodily as she makes a determined effort to leave. By now, she's sobbing blindly.

VALMONT No, wait, wait a minute, it never occurred to me you'd assume, you must let me explain...