

'I think Mlle. Zoe is right,' she said. 'If it is the Polytechnic, you could accompany her there every morning on your way to the office. If L'Ecole des Beaux Arts, I could run around there with her. It is not far. And always, wherever she should be, I could call for her in the afternoons.'

'Yes, that will be very good,' replied M. Bertrand. 'But, Zoe, I am loath to see you break up your pleasant studies with your friends.'

'That would have to be done some time, papa,' said the girl. 'They are not children and longer, either.'

'That is true,' answered her father, reaching for his pipe preparatory to going down stairs. 'It is a pity that young things should ever grow up.'

Mirza and Eveline accepted the situation with wonderful equanimity, considering how close had been their relations with Zoe in the past. For some time she had been a drag on their foolish and romantic conversations, in which they could now indulge to their hearts' content. Their intercourse with their former friend soon became limited to an occasional salute in passing through the courtyard, as Zoe had entered L'Ecole des Beaux Arts, where she made good progress. She had two American pupils with whom she held French conversations daily for an hour. She was busy and happy though her young heart felt an occasional pang at the thought of the frail tenure of a friendship which had once seemed eternal.

Strange to say, neither of the three fathers seemed to observe any change. But after a time M. Beauvallon began to notice that Zoe was never with the others. One day he said to Eveline:

'My dear, how is it that Zoe is no longer a sharer in your little pleasures and talks?'

'She is busy all day, papa,' replied Eveline.

'But on Sundays?'

'Oh, I don't know! On Sundays, as always, she likes to be with her father, I suppose.'

'But I never see her reading in the garden, as I used to.'

'That is not our fault, papa. She does not come, that is all.'

'You have had no quarrel, no misunderstanding?'

'Papa, we never had a quarrel in our lives.'

'Still, you do not seem to regret her absence.'

'I have Mirza, you know.'

'That is a very selfish remark, my child, particularly when one remembers the length and extent of your intimacy with Zoe.'

Eveline blushed, but said nothing. Her heart had often reproached her for her coldness toward the friend of her childhood, who was of much better fibre than Mirza. Still, she was at the age when cruelties are often perpetrated unthinkingly; and the delights which Mirza constantly portrayed to her were far more welcome than the quiet company of Zoe, whom she now found very uninteresting.

M. Beauvallon was a keen observer; he soon began to comprehend the situation, and resolved to let things take their course. He knew his daughter pretty well, and he also gauged the character of Mirza. He felt confident that in some way Eveline would be taught a lesson, and concluded to watch and be silent.

About three weeks after this, as Zoe was descending the stairs one morning, she met the doctor leaving the Beauvallons' apartment. When Madeleine came for her in the evening, she told her that Eveline had smallpox, and that all the tenants except themselves were leaving the hotel.

'How absurd!' exclaimed the gentle Zoe. 'And poor Eveline! What if she should be disfigured?'

'Or die,' said Madeleine. 'But, dear, it is not so absurd as you think, to go away from the house. The disease is very infectious. People do not want to run the risk of getting smallpox.'

'Papa will not move?' asked Zoe.

'I do not know. He is not yet aware of the circumstances, Mademoiselle.'

When M. Bertrand came home in the evening and learned the situation, he resolved to stay in the hotel. They were two storeys removed from the Beauvallons; he did not fear contagion. After the first day, they were the only residents of the house except the Beauvallons, now quarantined by sickness.

On the third day Zoe went into the garden for the first time in weeks. Seating herself on a bench, she looked up at the windows of M. Beauvallon's apartments. A white curtain hung loosely in front of Eveline's window. In a few moments a hand pushed it aside and a small basket descended by a rope to the ground. Quite unconscious that she was exposing herself to danger, Zoe went forward and picked it up. On a small piece of paper were the words: 'The nurse has gone. I am alone with my daughter. Get some one.'

Zoe ran quickly upstairs and told Madeleine. The old woman thought it best to wait for the doctor, who would probably soon be making his morning call. When he came, Zoe met him at the door, still holding the paper in her hand.

'Another gone!' said the doctor. 'I can get no one. The woman I sent yesterday had almost to be driven there. I don't know what to do. But who told you of it, my child?'

Zoe showed him the paper.

'Very imprudent of M. Beauvallon—very imprudent,' observed the doctor. 'Probably written in the sick-room. Do you know, Mademoiselle, that you run great danger now of taking the disease? You really ought to be quarantined.'

'I am not afraid,' replied Zoe. 'If it were not for my father, I should go myself and take care of her.'

'You are a brave girl,' said the doctor. 'Stay here till I return. However, you will—you should, I think—really be fumigated. My conscience will reproach me unless something is done.'

Zoe sat down on the stairs. In ten minutes the doctor returned.

'It is a terrible state of affairs,' he said. 'The child delirious, the father helpless—very inefficient. She will die unless I can get some one.'

'Where are the servants?'

'They have all fled.'

'All?'

'Every one. That man is alone there with his daughter.'

Zoe stood up. All memory of past coldness and indifference vanished from her mind; she saw only the kind faces of her former friends smiling in love upon her; she longed only to help them.

'You really think I am in danger?' she inquired.

'I know—it now,' replied the doctor. 'You have been doubly in danger. I have just come from the sick-room.'

'Shall I also have to be quarantined?'

'I fear so, if I am honest.'

'Very well, then, doctor. Please tell my father. God will take care of me. I cannot let my best friends suffer, perhaps die, for want of assistance at such a time as this.'

And before the doctor could realise what she was about to do, Zoe had lifted the portiere and passed into the infected apartment.

Six weeks later she emerged, her arm around Eveline's shoulder, leading her for the first time into the garden. Neither she nor M. Beauvallon had contracted the disease; but their labors had been heroic. Doctor Velot declared that if it had not been for the hourly application of lotions to Eveline's face, she would have been badly scarred; but, thanks to the ceaseless attention of her faithful friend, he assured them Eveline's skin would soon be as fresh and fair as before.

M. Beauvallon was already in the garden with cushions and wraps. Near him stood M. Bertrand and Madeleine, eagerly awaiting the arrival of the two girls. At a short distance M. de Bonneval was fitfully stroking the hat he held in his hand. He felt as nervous as he looked; for his daughter had declined accompanying him, saying that she would not risk taking smallpox for all the friends she ever had in the world.

After they had all greeted and congratulated Eveline, and Zoe had wept in her father's arms, and been kissed and hugged by Madeleine, and complimented by everybody on her heroic devotion to her friend, Eveline turned to M. de Bonneval.

'And how is Mirza?' she inquired.

'Very well,' he answered, in an embarrassed manner. 'And then, in the bungling way not unusual among men, he added: "She was a little timid about accompanying me to-day; but later she will come, I've no doubt."'

'And when do you return to your apartment?' asked M. Bertrand.

'I think we will remain where we are,' responded the poor man, still tactlessly. 'The rooms are pleasant, and Mirza very childlessly has a horror of possible infection.'

'That danger was over three weeks ago, Monsieur,' said Madeleine grimly.

M. de Bonneval wiped his heated brow with a large white handkerchief; M. Bertrand beamed adoringly on the two girls, sitting with their arms about each other; and M. Beauvallon, smiling at his daughter, knew that she had learned a lesson of a lifetime's value.

The true wisdom of nations is experience.—Napoleon I.

Most men have great pretensions and small projects.—Vauvenargues.

The foolish young man augments his acquaintance; the wise old one sifts his.—E. Thiaudiere.