Section Twelve

*She Learns the Truth about the Baron*

However, I am going too far ahead and have passed lightly over what interested me the most. By that I mean the Baron, whom I had left far behind.

As soon as I was married and settled in my husband’s residence I wanted the baron to know of my fate. Not wanting to write to him directly, I wrote to Madame de V- to give her a detailed account of my current state. I added compliments for her children, in which the Baron was included. I also said that I would be enchanted to learn that he was as happy in his position as a husband as I in my position of wife.

Ten days later I received an answer from Madame de V-, who was pleased with my contentment but reproached the hardness of heart I had shown the Baron. She said that I should not add to his misery, and that she had never thought me capable of this. It was insulting enough to have broken my engagement with him. He had been more scrupulous than I, shunning proposals even after my marriage. Through descriptions of my husband, the Baron knew my spouse to be his elder and he hoped that death would soon return to me my liberty. He believed that being more mature, I would then remember the promises I had made to him, assuming that suffering did not end his days. I confess that this letter iced the blood in my veins. I looked upon myself with contempt as I realized that I had been ungrateful and false to my vows, that I had been a murdereress and, in short, a monster in my own eyes.

I hid my grief as well as I could and I wrote to the Baron all that had happened; how I discovered his pretended marriage, the continuing silence in response to my letters. I ended by reaffirming my eternal attachment to him, which I should instead be giving to my husband. I begged him for advice and help in curbing the weakness in my heart for him. This plea was the greatest proof I could give him of my esteem. I urged him to find out what had happened to my letters, and to those he had seemingly written to me. I told him to contact the young music teacher, who was about to return to Paris.

The first letter that I received from him after mine was so tender, so full of sadness and admonishments to reconcile me to my fate, that I have always considered it a masterpiece. I cannot transcribe it, as I no longer have it. He informed me that he had written to me very often without response, and that finally he had learned of my marriage. His first reaction would have led him to most cruel extremes had he not received consolation from Madame de V- and Mademoiselle de Me-. Our parents had intended our misfortune, and he was awaiting impatiently the arrival of the musician, and would make him talk. A month later, the Baron wrote that he had seen the musician. At first he had approached him calmly, so as to lead him to disclose the truth. However, determined to maintain that he had faithfully delivered our letters, some to me, and others to the post, the Baron took a firmer tone to intimidate him, which worked. He then learned that my father, fearing that the musician would abet our correspondence, had bullied him to hand over our letters. He had, in fact, surrendered them, so that my father had them all, and it was with the consent of Monsieur de T that the letter which announced the marriage of the Baron was invented.

The musician did not stop there; he related to the Baron my troubles, the madness of Monsieur de T, the manner in which I had accepted the proposal of the Comte de L- without knowing him, and that I had wed him after knowing him but three days.
The Baron ended his letter saying: “It is a desperate step you have taken, my dear sister; God grant that I may be the only victim.”

We continued writing to each other. I communicated these letters to my husband, who was aware of our mutual inclination. He found the Baron’s style so respectable that he encouraged our writing, but this did not last. My relative soon blackened the innocence of our intentions so that my husband started quibbling about it. I will admit that I did not give in to his whims and we continued our correspondence, which was by no means offensive to my husband.

Several years passed. Few were peaceful, though I was devoted to my husband at first. I loved him tenderly until the arrival of the woman who turned my life into a tragedy. I had children, and it seemed impossible for me to hate the man who fathered them; yet if such people do exist, then I say they are monsters.

*The Runaway Wife*

Let us set aside the story of the Baron to return to my household troubles.

The anguish which I endured at home drove me into a stupor which harmed my senses. A hundred times I emerged from such a state to take some clothes and run off into the countryside.

One day among many, overwrought with the abuse to which I was subjected, I went out as usual and found myself near the parish church at dusk. It was the month of July and, not wanting to return to the chateau, I entered the church and went to the family pew. Shortly thereafter, I heard the sexton who was coming to toll the bells of the Angelus. I hid myself so that he wouldn’t see me. Indeed, he locked the doors, and I remained alone. I came to sit on the steps of the main altar. There was but one lamp, whose faint glimmer was more fit for the dead than the living. The church pew creaked from time to time, terrifying me beyond my control. Unable to master my fear, I could no longer think clearly. All this time I thought that I saw an old woman who had been buried there a few days earlier. I kept staring in the direction of her tomb. Reassuring myself through my trust in God, which was my only consolation in my unhappiness, throughout this short summer night, which seemed long to me, I did nothing but pray, cry, and tremble.

When I heard the sexton approach, I hid again in the sacristy. He did not see me, but nevertheless, having heard some noise, he fabricated some ghost story. As soon as he had left, the fear of being surprised by another visitor led me to the vicarage to see the parish priest. He was still asleep and was quite astonished to learn that I was there. I told him that I had come to attend mass and, fearing that he might soon begin, I had left very early. He did not wait long to say the mass although it was only four o’clock in the morning. I returned to his house. He was a good man; he knew of my situation and showed concern for me. I told him of the scene which had occurred the previous day. He wanted to accompany me to the chateau, where I did not want to return. I asked for his word of honor that he would tell no one of having seen me so early. We arrived at the chateau to find that my husband, who had been worried about me, had sent searches in all directions to find me. He asked me from whence I came, and where I had spent the night. To all of these I gave vague answers. My relative was whispering to him in her caustic manner. She was laughing at me, but I pretended not to notice.
More Lies and Abuse

The following day my husband came to my room to say that he had heard of my fine behavior. He claimed that I had had a romantic rendezvous the night before, and that trustworthy people had seen me in a wood (far from the church where I had been) with a man whom he named and of whom I would not have thought. He added that this man had been recognized despite his disguise and that our conversation, which was enlightening, had been overheard.

I only answered by asking him, “Who were his witnesses?” saying that he would do well to be suspicious of them. Later, as I went to the sitting room, my relative discussed again this incident and confirmed the story. I did not deem it proper to justify myself, and I let them say all that they wished. It was she who had imagined this story and recounted it to my husband, as though she had heard it elsewhere. It was the pattern that she gave to all the tales that she invented. The two of them repeated such stories to all who came by, and the servants did the same.

Madness, Depression, Weakness of her father

I had a married sister in Champagne who, concerned about my misfortune, urged me to spend some time at her house. My husband did not want me to go to visit her because of the close proximity to Paris, where he feared I would go. For more than a year I was unable to obtain his consent. In the end, I succeeded because I threatened to leave without his consent, as I could no longer endure the dreadful treatment to which I was subjected. My mind had been enfeebled to the point that many people noticed my absent-mindedness, which revealed the state of stupidity to which I had succumbed. I will mention only one incident as an example.

One afternoon, having suffered a thousand foolish insults, I went out and told my footman to fetch a spade and follow me. I led him to a meadow where I had him dig a grave. He did not know why, and demanded relentlessly without being satisfied with the response. His task completed, I laid down in the grave, and told him to cover me with soil. I wanted to remain there. This poor lad, who was much attached to me, began to cry. Falling to his knees, he begged me to come out, saying that he would not obey me. He reached to pull me out but I did not let him. He said that he would alert the Comte, and added that this would cause a scandal that my relative would distort in such a way that she would cause me to be locked away. “I would very much like to be,” I told him, “but under this earth.”

Giving into his plea, I finally emerged and forbade him to speak of it. He mentioned it only to my father, who happened to visit shortly thereafter. I was distraught, and I told my father of my ordeal. He had his own motives to deal tactfully with my husband. As a result, my father did not mention anything to him or to my relative, as he should have. Personal interest often betrays blood ties.