

AI-Generated Graded Readers

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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was translated from German into English and simplified using ChatGPT for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

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Antoine-François Prévost, *Manon Lescaut* (Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified from the French by ChatGPT)

Part 1

I must begin this story at the time when I first met the Chevalier des Grieux. At that time I was living a quiet life, far from the noise of the world. I rarely left my home, except when some small duty forced me to travel. One day, about six months before my departure for Spain, I was returning from the city of Rouen. My daughter had asked me to go there to speak with the judges about a matter concerning some land that she hoped to inherit from our family.

After leaving Rouen, I stopped for the night at Évreux. The next day, toward noon, I arrived at a small town called Pacy. As I entered the town, I immediately noticed that something unusual was happening. Many people were running in the same direction. They were leaving their houses and gathering in a crowd near a poor-looking inn. Their voices were loud and excited. Some people pushed one another to get closer to the door.

In front of the inn stood two covered wagons. The horses were still tied to them, and they looked tired and hot, as if they had just finished a long journey. The strange activity made me curious. I stopped my horse and asked several villagers what had happened, but no one paid much attention to me. Everyone seemed too eager to see what was inside the inn.

At that moment I saw a soldier standing at the door. He wore a belt across his chest and carried a gun on his shoulder. I signaled for him to come closer and politely asked him to explain the reason for the disturbance.

“It is nothing important, sir,” he answered. “We are escorting a group of women from Paris. There are about twelve of them. They are being taken to Le Havre, where they will be placed on a ship and sent to America.”

“To America?” I repeated.

“Yes, sir,” he said calmly. “They are women of bad reputation. The authorities have decided to send them away from France. Some of them are young and quite

pretty. That is why the villagers are so curious.”

After hearing this explanation, I was ready to continue my journey. But just as I prepared to ride away, an old woman came out of the inn. She raised her hands toward the sky and cried loudly.

“Ah! What a cruel sight! What a terrible thing!” she said. “It breaks the heart to see it!”

Her words increased my curiosity.

“What has happened?” I asked her.

“Come inside, sir,” she replied. “Come and see for yourself. Then you will understand why I cannot stop crying.”

I got down from my horse and gave the reins to my servant. Then I pushed my way through the crowd and entered the inn. Inside, the scene was indeed very sad.

In the middle of the room stood twelve young women. They were tied together with chains, six on each chain. Their hands were free, but the chains were fastened around their bodies so that they could not move far from one another. Several guards watched them carefully.

Among these unfortunate women there was one who immediately caught my attention. Her appearance was very different from that of the others. Even though her clothes were dirty and simple, her face was so beautiful and her expression so gentle that she seemed like a lady of high birth who had fallen into great misfortune.

She kept her head turned away from the crowd, trying to hide her face from the curious eyes around her. The movement was modest and natural. It seemed to come from a sense of shame rather than fear.

Her sadness touched me deeply. I felt both respect and pity for her.

The guards stood near the chained women. I approached the leader of the group and spoke to him quietly.

“Tell me,” I said, “what has this young woman done to deserve such a fate? She does not appear to belong among these others.”

The guard shook his head.

“I cannot tell you much, sir,” he replied. “We took her from the hospital in Paris

by order of the chief of police. That is all we know. It is unlikely that she was placed there for good behavior.”

He paused and looked at her again.

“I have questioned her several times during the journey,” he continued, “but she refuses to answer. Still, although I have no special orders concerning her, I treat her with a little more respect than the others. She seems better than the rest.”

Then he pointed to a corner of the room.

“If you want to know more about her story, you should speak to that young man over there,” he said. “He has followed us all the way from Paris. He has been crying almost the entire journey. He must be either her brother or her lover.”

I turned toward the corner he indicated.

There I saw a young man sitting alone on a bench. His head was lowered, and his eyes were fixed on the ground. His face showed the deepest sorrow I had ever seen.

His clothes were simple but neat. His manners, even in that miserable situation, revealed that he had received a good education and belonged to a respectable family.

I approached him slowly.

When he noticed me near him, he stood up at once. I saw in his eyes and in his movements such grace and dignity that I immediately felt sympathy for him.

“Please do not think that I wish to disturb you,” I said kindly, sitting down beside him. “But I cannot hide my curiosity. That young woman over there seems far too noble for the situation in which she now stands. Would you be willing to tell me who she is?”

He answered politely, though his voice trembled with emotion.

“I cannot reveal her identity without revealing my own,” he said. “And I have strong reasons for wishing to remain unknown.”

He sighed deeply before continuing.

“But I can tell you something that even these soldiers already know. I love her with such passion that it has made me the most unfortunate man in the world.”

He turned his eyes toward the young woman in chains.

“I tried everything in Paris to obtain her freedom,” he continued. “I begged, I pleaded, I even tried to use force. Nothing succeeded. In the end I decided to follow her wherever she might go—even to the end of the world. If she is sent to America, I will go there as well.”

His voice broke with sorrow.

“But these cruel men,” he added, pointing angrily at the guards, “will not even allow me to speak with her. At first I planned to attack them with the help of several friends. They promised to assist me if I paid them well. The traitors took my money and abandoned me.”

He wiped tears from his eyes.

“Now I have nothing left,” he said. “I offered these guards money to allow me to walk near her during the journey. At first they agreed. But my money soon disappeared, and now they push me away whenever I try to approach her.”

As he finished speaking, a few tears ran down his cheeks. The quiet dignity with which he told his story made his suffering even more touching.

I felt deeply moved by his misfortune. The strange adventure seemed both tragic and extraordinary.

“My young friend,” I said gently, “I will not force you to tell me more than you wish. But if there is any way in which I can help you, please allow me to do so.”

He shook his head sadly.

“Alas,” he replied, “I see no hope. My fate is fixed. I will follow her to America. At least there I will be free to live near the woman I love.”

He hesitated for a moment and then added quietly:

“My only difficulty now is to reach the port, and to make this poor creature’s journey a little easier.”

His words touched my heart.

“Then allow me to remove that difficulty,” I said. “Here is some money. Please accept it.”

I placed several gold coins in his hand, making sure that the guards did not see what I had done.

The gratitude in his eyes convinced me that I had helped a noble and

unfortunate soul.

Part 2

The young stranger seemed deeply moved by my offer. For a moment he was unable to speak. Then he pressed my hand with great emotion.

“Sir,” he said, “I do not know how I can thank you for such kindness. Your generosity will never be forgotten.”

His gratitude was so sincere that I felt even more convinced that he belonged to a respectable family and had been raised with good manners.

I reflected for a moment and then thought of another way to help him.

The guards were standing nearby, watching the prisoners and speaking among themselves. I called their leader to come closer.

“My friend,” I said quietly, “this young man wishes only to speak with the woman he loves. It is a cruel thing to prevent him from doing so. Would it not be possible to allow him to remain near her during the journey?”

The guard looked slightly embarrassed. Although he had already shown a certain hardness of character, he still seemed ashamed to appear too cruel in front of a stranger.

“It is not that we wish to refuse him entirely,” he replied. “But he wants to remain beside her all the time. That is inconvenient for us. If we allow it, he must pay for the trouble he causes.”

“Very well,” I said. “How much do you require?”

The guard hesitated for a moment, then answered boldly.

“Two louis.”

His demand was shameless, but I gave him the money at once. At the same time I spoke to him in a firm voice.

“Take care,” I said, “that you do not treat him badly after this. I will leave my address with him. If I hear that you have acted dishonestly, I assure you that you will regret it.”

The guard bowed slightly and promised to respect the agreement.

My charitable action cost me six louis in total, but I did not regret the expense. The joy and gratitude of the young man were worth far more than the money.

Before leaving the inn, I approached the young woman herself. She had remained silent during all this time, still trying to hide her face from the crowd.

When I spoke to her, she turned slightly toward me. Her eyes were filled with sadness, but her voice was gentle and calm.

“Sir,” she said softly, “I do not know what I have done to deserve such kindness from you. May Heaven reward you for your compassion.”

The sweetness of her manner and the modest grace with which she spoke made a strong impression on me. As I left the inn, I could not stop thinking about her. I reflected many times on the strange nature of women and on the mysteries of the human heart.

After returning to my quiet life, I heard nothing more about this adventure. Time passed, and the memory of the event gradually faded from my mind.

Nearly two years went by before chance allowed me to learn the full story.

At that time I was traveling from London to Calais with the young Marquis de..., who was under my care and education. We arrived at Calais in the afternoon and took rooms at an inn called the Golden Lion.

For certain reasons we were obliged to remain there until the following day. During the afternoon I decided to walk through the streets of the town.

As I was walking, I noticed a young man carrying a small travel bag under his arm. His clothes were poor and worn, and his face looked pale and tired.

Yet something about his appearance seemed familiar.

I looked at him more closely, and suddenly I recognized him. It was the same young man whom I had met two years earlier at the inn in Pacy.

I turned immediately to the Marquis.

“We must speak with that young man,” I said. “I believe I know him.”

We approached him without hesitation. The moment he saw me, his face changed completely. His tired expression disappeared, and his eyes filled with joy.

“Ah, sir!” he cried, taking my hand and kissing it with gratitude. “I have the happiness of seeing you again! How often I have wished to thank you properly

for your generosity.”

I asked him where he had come from.

“I have just arrived from Le Havre,” he replied. “I returned recently from America.”

His clothes and appearance showed clearly that he possessed very little money.

“You do not seem to be in a comfortable situation,” I said kindly. “Come with me to the Golden Lion. That is where I am staying. We will speak there more freely.”

He accepted my invitation with great eagerness.

We returned together to the inn. I ordered the servants to give him food and whatever else he needed. After he had rested for a short time, we sat together in a quiet room.

I was extremely curious to learn the details of his misfortunes and his journey to America.

However, he did not wait for me to question him.

“Sir,” he began, “you have treated me with such generosity that it would be shameful if I kept any secrets from you. I will tell you everything. I will tell you not only my misfortunes, but also my faults and weaknesses. I am certain that even when you condemn me, you will still feel pity for me.”

Before continuing his story, I must inform the reader that I wrote down his narrative almost immediately after hearing it. For that reason I can assure you that nothing is more exact or faithful than the account I am about to present.

I have preserved his reflections and his feelings exactly as he expressed them.

What follows, therefore, is his story. From this point forward, I will add nothing of my own until the end of the narrative.

The young man began his account in the following manner.

“I was seventeen years old,” he said, “and I had just finished my studies in philosophy at the city of Amiens. My parents belong to one of the most respected families in our province, and they had sent me there to complete my education.

“My life at that time was extremely orderly and calm. My teachers often pointed to me as an example for the other students. This was not because I made

extraordinary efforts to appear virtuous. I simply had a gentle and peaceful nature. I loved studying, and I felt a natural dislike for vice.

“Because of my birth, my success in my studies, and certain advantages in my appearance, I was well known and respected among the honorable people of the town.

“When I completed my final examinations, the Bishop himself attended the ceremony. He praised my work and suggested that I should enter the Church. According to him, I would achieve great success in that profession.

“However, my parents had already decided on another future for me. They wished me to join the Order of Malta. For that reason I had already begun to wear the cross and to use the title of Chevalier des Grioux.”

The young man paused for a moment before continuing.

“At the end of the school year I prepared to return home to my father. He had promised that he would soon send me to the Academy in Paris.

“My only regret in leaving Amiens was that I would be separated from my closest friend. His name was Tiberge.

“He was several years older than I was. We had grown up together and had always been very close. Unfortunately his family was not wealthy, so he had decided to enter the Church and remain in Amiens to continue his studies.

“He possessed many admirable qualities. In particular, he showed a generosity and loyalty in friendship that surpassed the examples of ancient history.

“If I had listened to his advice,” des Grioux continued sadly, “I would have remained wise and happy for the rest of my life.”

Part 3

“If I had at least followed his advice later,” des Grioux continued, “when my passions carried me toward ruin, I might still have saved part of my fortune and my reputation. But his efforts only brought him sorrow. Instead of thanking him for his care, I often received his advice with impatience and ingratitude.”

The young man sighed deeply as he remembered those days.

“The day of my departure from Amiens had already been decided,” he said. “Ah! If I had left only one day earlier, I would have returned to my father with all my innocence and peace of mind.

“On the very day before my departure, I went for a walk with Tiberge. As we were walking through the streets, we saw the carriage from Arras arrive in the town. Out of simple curiosity we followed it to the inn where travelers usually stopped.

“Several women got out of the carriage and immediately went inside the inn. But one young woman remained alone in the courtyard. She waited there while an older man, who seemed to be her guardian or servant, spoke with the driver and arranged their luggage.

“The moment I saw her, I felt something in my heart that I had never experienced before.

“She was extremely young and extraordinarily beautiful. Until that moment I had never paid attention to the difference between men and women. I had never looked carefully at any girl. Yet in that instant I felt my whole soul filled with emotion.

“The love that entered my heart was sudden and violent. I felt as if my life had changed forever.

“I was naturally shy and easily embarrassed. But strangely, at that moment my usual weakness disappeared. Instead of turning away, I walked directly toward her.

“Although she seemed even younger than I was, she received my greeting without any embarrassment.

“I asked her politely what had brought her to Amiens and whether she had relatives there.

“She answered with complete simplicity that her parents had sent her to the city to enter a convent.

“These words struck me like a terrible blow. My love had already opened my eyes. I immediately understood that if she entered a convent, I would lose her forever.

“The fear of this separation gave me courage. I spoke to her in a way that clearly revealed my feelings.

“She was much more experienced than I was, although she was so young. She quickly understood the meaning of my words.

“She told me that she had not chosen the convent willingly. Her parents had forced her to go there because they feared that her love of pleasure might lead her into trouble.

“Indeed,” des Grieux said sadly, “that same love of pleasure later became the cause of all her misfortunes and mine.”

He paused again before continuing his story.

“I tried with all my strength to oppose the cruel plan of her parents. My sudden love and my student’s eloquence gave me many arguments.

“But she did not respond with anger or pride. She listened quietly.

“After a short silence she said that she already expected to be unhappy in the convent. However, she believed that it must be the will of Heaven, since she saw no way to escape it.

“The sweetness of her voice, the sadness in her eyes, and the charm of her expression affected me so strongly that I could not hesitate for a single moment.

“I told her that if she trusted my honor and the sincere love she had inspired in me, I would devote my entire life to freeing her from the tyranny of her parents and making her happy.

“Even now,” des Grieux continued, “when I remember that moment, I am amazed at the courage and ease with which I spoke. Love truly performs miracles. It gives boldness even to the most timid hearts.”

He smiled faintly at the memory.

“I continued speaking to her with increasing passion. She seemed to believe me. At my age, she said, a young man is rarely capable of deceit.

“She confessed that if I could ever help her escape from the convent, she would feel that she owed me something more precious than life itself.

“I promised that I would do everything possible for her. But I had little experience, and I could not immediately imagine a practical plan. My promises

were sincere but vague.

“At that moment her old guardian returned. My hopes would have ended there if she had not shown remarkable intelligence.

“As soon as he approached us, she called me her cousin. Without the slightest hesitation she said that she was delighted to discover that I was in Amiens. Because of this fortunate meeting, she wished to delay her entrance into the convent until the next day so that she could enjoy the pleasure of dining with me that evening.

“I immediately understood her intention and played my role perfectly.

“I suggested that she should stay at an inn where the owner was completely devoted to me. He had once been my father’s coachman and had recently settled in Amiens.

“She agreed, and I personally escorted her there. The old guardian seemed somewhat suspicious and complained quietly, but he did not dare to oppose our plan openly.

“Meanwhile poor Tiberge followed us in silence. He understood nothing of what had happened. During my conversation with the young lady he had remained in the courtyard, walking slowly and waiting for me.

“I feared his wisdom and his good sense. For that reason I quickly found a small errand to send him away.

“Thanks to this excuse, I arrived at the inn alone with the woman who had already become the ruler of my heart.

“Once we were alone, I soon realized that I was less innocent than I had imagined. My heart filled with feelings of pleasure that I had never known before.

“A warm excitement seemed to flow through all my veins. I was almost unable to speak. My emotions were expressed only through my eyes.

“Mademoiselle Manon Lescaut—that was the name she told me—appeared very pleased by the effect of her charms.

“I even believed that she herself was not entirely unmoved.

“She confessed that she found me agreeable and that she would be delighted to owe her freedom to me.

“She asked who I was, and when she learned about my family and my position, her affection seemed to grow stronger. Because her own birth was modest, she felt flattered to have won the love of a young man like me.

“We spoke for a long time about the possibility of belonging to each other.

“After much discussion, we discovered only one possible solution.

“We must run away together.”

Part 4

“The plan of escape,” des Grieux continued, “appeared to us as the only way to preserve our happiness. We were both very young, and neither of us had much experience of the world. Yet the strength of our passion made us believe that no difficulty could stop us.

“There remained only one obstacle—the vigilance of the old man who accompanied Manon. Although he was only a servant, he seemed careful and suspicious, and we had to act with great prudence.

“After thinking about it for some time, we decided on the following plan. During the night I would prepare a post carriage. Early in the morning, before the old man awoke, I would return to the inn. We would leave quietly and travel directly to Paris. Once there, we intended to marry immediately.

“My resources were modest. I possessed about fifty écus, which I had saved little by little during my studies. Manon told me that she had nearly twice that amount.

“In our childish ignorance we imagined that this money would last forever. We never considered that it might soon disappear.

“That evening we supped together with more pleasure than I had ever experienced in my life. Everything seemed charming to me—our conversation, her smile, even the smallest movements of her hands and eyes.

“After supper I left her in order to prepare our escape.

“My preparations were easy, because I had already arranged my luggage for my journey home. I simply had my trunk placed secretly in the carriage and

ordered that a post chaise should be ready at five o'clock in the morning. At that hour the gates of the city would be opened.

“However, I soon encountered an obstacle that I had not expected.

“When I returned to my lodgings, I found Tiberge waiting for me. It was already ten o'clock at night.

“Tiberge was only three years older than I was, but his judgment was much more mature. He loved me with sincere affection, and he watched my conduct with great attention.

“The beauty of Manon, my eagerness to escort her, and the strange way in which I had sent him away had made him suspicious.

“He had not dared to return to the inn where I had left him, because he feared that his presence might offend me. Instead, he had come to my lodging and waited patiently for my return.

“When I entered the room and saw him there, I felt great discomfort. My surprise and confusion must have been obvious, because he immediately spoke to me.

“‘I am certain,’ he said calmly, ‘that you are planning something which you wish to hide from me. I can see it in your face.’

“I answered him somewhat sharply.

“‘I am not obliged to explain all my plans to you,’ I said.

“‘No,’ he replied, ‘but you have always treated me as a friend. Friendship requires a certain openness and confidence.’

“He insisted so strongly that I reveal my secret that I finally gave in. I had never kept anything from him before, and in the end I told him everything about my sudden passion for Manon.

“When he heard my story, his face changed. His expression showed serious displeasure, and I immediately regretted my lack of caution. I regretted even more that I had told him about our plan to escape.

“‘My dear friend,’ he said after listening to me carefully, ‘I am too sincerely attached to you to allow you to commit such a mistake. I must first show you the dangers of your plan. If you refuse to listen to reason, I will be obliged to inform

those who can prevent your escape.’

“He then spoke for more than fifteen minutes. His speech was serious and full of good sense. He warned me about the dangers of passion, the dishonor of such an action, and the sorrow that it would bring to my father.

“Finally he ended by threatening to reveal everything unless I promised to act more wisely.

“I was in despair at having trusted him so imprudently. Yet during the last few hours love had sharpened my intelligence in a remarkable way.

“I suddenly realized that I had not told him when our escape would take place. I decided to take advantage of this omission.

“‘Tiberge,’ I said, ‘I believed you to be my friend. That is why I made this confession. It is true that I love this young lady—I have not deceived you about that. But as for running away with her, that is not a decision to be made lightly.’

“He listened to me attentively.

“‘Come tomorrow morning at nine o’clock,’ I continued. ‘I will introduce you to my mistress. Then you can judge whether she is worthy of such devotion.’

“This statement contained an ambiguity which allowed me to deceive him.

“Satisfied with my promise, he finally left me after many expressions of friendship.

“I spent the rest of the night preparing everything for our escape. When dawn began to appear, I hurried to the inn where Manon was staying.

“I found her waiting for me.

“She stood at the window that looked out onto the street. The moment she saw me, she ran downstairs and opened the door herself.

“We left the inn quietly so as not to wake her guardian. She had no luggage except a small bundle of linen, which I carried for her.

“The carriage was ready. We entered quickly and ordered the driver to depart at once.

“Within a few minutes we were already leaving the city of Amiens behind us.

“Later I will explain how Tiberge reacted when he discovered that I had deceived him. His loyalty did not weaken, and you will see how far he was willing

to go for my sake—and how poorly I repaid his devotion.”

Des Grieux paused for a moment, as if ashamed of the memory.

Then he continued his story.

“We traveled rapidly and reached the town of Saint-Denis before nightfall. During most of the journey I rode beside the carriage on horseback. Because of this we could speak only when the horses were changed.

“But when we arrived so near to Paris, we finally felt safe. We stopped at an inn to rest and eat something, since we had eaten nothing since leaving Amiens.

“Although my love for Manon was already intense, she soon convinced me that her own affection for me was equally strong.

“Our happiness seemed complete.

“We were so little reserved in our tenderness that we could hardly wait to be alone. The servants at the inn looked at us with astonishment. They were surprised to see two young people of our age loving each other with such passion.

“Our original plan had been to marry as soon as we arrived in Paris.

“But at Saint-Denis we forgot that plan entirely.

“Without thinking about the laws of the Church, we behaved as if we were already husband and wife.

“It is certain,” des Grieux said softly, “that if Manon had remained faithful to me, I would have been happy for the rest of my life.”

Part 5

“If Manon had remained faithful,” des Grieux continued in a low voice, “my life would have been full of happiness. The more I came to know her, the more I discovered in her new charms. Her beauty, her sweetness, the grace of her conversation, and the tenderness of her heart formed a chain so strong and so delightful that I could never have wished to break it.

“What a terrible change was waiting for me! The very constancy of my love, which should have made my happiness, became the cause of my greatest misery.”

He paused for a moment before continuing.

“When we arrived in Paris, we rented a small furnished apartment. It was located in a quiet street, not far from the house of a wealthy man named Monsieur de B..., a famous tax collector.

“For the first three weeks we lived there in perfect happiness.

“My passion for Manon filled my entire heart. I rarely thought about my family or about the sorrow that my sudden disappearance must have caused my father.

“At the same time our life was not disorderly. I had no interest in gambling or other dangerous pleasures, and Manon behaved with great gentleness and modesty.

“The calm happiness in which we lived gradually allowed me to remember my duties toward my family. At last I formed a plan to reconcile myself with my father.

“I had no doubt that Manon would please him if he could see her beauty and kindness. I hoped that he might forgive our imprudent escape and eventually consent to our marriage.

“Another reason encouraged me to make peace with him. Our money was rapidly disappearing. I had begun to realize that the small fortune we possessed was far from endless.

“I spoke openly to Manon about my idea of writing to my father and asking for his forgiveness.

“She received this proposal coldly.

“However, the objections she made seemed to come only from her love for me. She feared that if my father learned our address, he might separate us forever.

“When I spoke about our lack of money, she smiled lightly.

“‘Do not worry,’ she said. ‘We still have enough for several weeks. After that I will write to some relatives in the provinces who are very fond of me. They will certainly send assistance.’

“She softened her refusal with such tender caresses that my suspicions disappeared immediately. I loved her with such simplicity that I could not imagine any deceit in her heart.

“I had given her complete control of our small fortune. She managed our household expenses and paid for everything we needed.

“Soon afterward I noticed that our table was better supplied than before. Manon

also began to buy some elegant clothes and ornaments.

“Since I knew that we had only twelve or fifteen pistoles remaining, I expressed my surprise at this apparent increase in our wealth.

“She laughed gently.

“‘Did I not promise you,’ she said, ‘that I would find new resources?’

“My love for her was so sincere that I felt no anxiety.

“One afternoon I went out for a walk and told Manon that I might remain away longer than usual. When I returned, I knocked at the door of our apartment.

“To my surprise no one opened immediately.

“After waiting two or three minutes, the door was finally opened by our young servant girl, who was about the same age as Manon.

“I asked her why she had taken so long to answer.

“‘I did not hear you knock, sir,’ she replied nervously.

“But I had knocked only once.

“‘If you did not hear me,’ I said, ‘why did you come to open the door?’

“My question confused her completely. She began to tremble and burst into tears.

“‘It is not my fault,’ she said. ‘Madame ordered me not to open the door until Monsieur de B... had left by the other staircase that leads from the cabinet.’

“These words struck me like a sudden blow.

“I felt such confusion that I could not even enter the apartment.

“Instead I pretended that I had forgotten an errand and went back down the stairs. Before leaving, however, I told the servant to inform Manon that I would return in a moment.

“But I also warned her not to tell Manon that she had spoken to me about Monsieur de B....

“When I reached the street, my distress was so great that tears began to fall from my eyes.

“I entered the first café that I saw and sat down at a table. Resting my head in my hands, I tried to understand the terrible suspicion that had suddenly entered my mind.

“I did not dare to repeat the servant’s words to myself.

“I wished to believe that they were an illusion.

“Several times I almost decided to return home immediately without mentioning anything to Manon.

“It seemed impossible to me that she could have betrayed me. I loved her too deeply to accuse her so easily.

“Had she not given me as many proofs of affection as I had given her? Why should I believe that she was less sincere than I was?

“What reason could she possibly have to deceive me?

“Only three hours earlier she had overwhelmed me with her most tender caresses. I knew my own heart well enough to be sure of its sincerity. Why should I doubt hers?

“‘No,’ I said to myself. ‘It is impossible. Manon cannot betray me. She knows that I live only for her. She knows how deeply I adore her.’

“Yet the secret visit of Monsieur de B... troubled me greatly.

“I remembered the expensive clothes she had recently purchased and the improvements in our household expenses. They seemed to suggest the generosity of another admirer.

“Her mysterious words about finding new resources also returned to my memory.

“All these signs were difficult to interpret in a favorable way.

“At the same time I knew that we had hardly been separated since arriving in Paris. We spent almost every moment together—walking, talking, or amusing ourselves.

“Even a short separation made us uneasy.

“We needed to hear constantly that we loved each other.

“How, then, could she have found time to think of another man?

“At last I convinced myself that I had discovered the explanation.

“‘Monsieur de B..., I told myself, is a man of influence with many connections. Perhaps the relatives of Manon have asked him to deliver some money to her.’

“This idea reassured me.

“‘She may already have received assistance from him,’ I continued thinking. ‘Perhaps he visited her today only to bring more money. She probably wished to surprise me pleasantly by keeping it secret.’

“The more I considered this explanation, the more reasonable it seemed.

“My sadness began to disappear.

“Without waiting any longer, I left the café and hurried back to our apartment.”

Part 6

“When I returned to our apartment,” des Grieux continued, “I embraced Manon with my usual tenderness. She received me kindly, just as she always did.

“At first I was tempted to reveal my suspicions and the explanation that I had invented to calm my fears. But I decided to remain silent. I hoped that she herself would soon speak and explain everything.

“Dinner was served.

“I tried to appear cheerful, but when the candle was placed between us on the table, its light allowed me to observe her face carefully. I thought I noticed a certain sadness in her expression and in her eyes.

“This discovery immediately disturbed me again.

“Her eyes were fixed on me in a way that seemed unusual. I could not determine whether her gaze expressed love or compassion. It seemed gentle, but also full of melancholy.

“I looked at her with the same attention. Perhaps she was also trying to read my thoughts.

“For several minutes we remained silent. Neither of us spoke or ate.

“At last I saw tears begin to fall from her beautiful eyes.

“‘Great Heaven!’ I cried. ‘You are weeping, my dear Manon! You are so unhappy that you are crying, and yet you tell me nothing about your sorrow!’

“She answered only with several deep sighs.

“My anxiety became unbearable.

“I rose from my chair and approached her. Trembling with emotion, I begged

her to reveal the cause of her tears. My voice was full of love and concern. As I wiped away her tears, my own began to flow.

“In that moment I felt more dead than alive.

“Even the most cruel man would have been moved by the sincerity of my suffering.

“While I was still speaking to her, I suddenly heard the sound of several people climbing the stairs outside our apartment. A gentle knock sounded at the door.

“Manon quickly gave me a kiss. Then she slipped out of my arms and ran into the small cabinet next to the room, closing the door behind her.

“I believed that she wished to hide herself for a moment because her appearance had become disordered during our emotional conversation.

“I went to open the door.

“But the moment I opened it, three men seized me.

“I recognized them immediately as servants from my father’s household.

“They did not treat me violently. Two of them simply held my arms while the third searched my pockets. The only weapon I possessed was a small knife, which he removed at once.

“‘Forgive us, sir,’ they said respectfully. ‘We are only obeying the orders of your father. Your elder brother is waiting below in a carriage.’

“I was so shocked and confused that I allowed them to lead me away without resistance.

“My brother was indeed waiting in the carriage.

“I was placed beside him, and the coachman immediately drove us away at great speed toward Saint-Denis.

“My brother embraced me affectionately, but he said nothing. His silence gave me plenty of time to reflect on my misfortune.

“At first my thoughts were completely confused. I knew that I had been betrayed, but I did not know by whom.

“My first suspicion fell upon poor Tiberge.

“‘Traitor!’ I said to myself. ‘If you are responsible for this, your life will pay for it.’

“But after a moment of reflection I realized that he did not know where I lived in Paris. It was impossible that he could have given my address to my family.

“I did not dare to accuse Manon.

“The sadness I had seen in her face, the tears she had shed, and the tender kiss she had given me before hiding herself—all these signs seemed mysterious. Yet my heart interpreted them as proof that she suffered as much as I did.

“Instead of suspecting her, I imagined that she was even more unfortunate than I was.

“Finally I persuaded myself that someone in Paris must have recognized me in the street and informed my father about my residence and my conduct.

“This explanation gave me some comfort.

“I believed that my father wished only to punish me for leaving home without permission. Perhaps he would scold me or even treat me harshly for a time.

“But I hoped that if I showed obedience and patience, he might soon forgive me. Then I could return secretly to Paris and restore happiness to my beloved Manon.

“We soon arrived at Saint-Denis.

“My brother, noticing my silence, thought that I was afraid. He attempted to reassure me.

“‘You have nothing to fear from our father,’ he said kindly, ‘provided that you are ready to obey him and return to your duty.’

“That night I was obliged to remain at an inn in Saint-Denis. My brother ordered the three servants to sleep in my room to prevent my escape.

“This precaution caused me great sorrow.

“We had stopped at the same inn where Manon and I had rested during our journey from Amiens to Paris.

“The innkeeper and his servants recognized me immediately. From their conversation I understood that they guessed the truth about my situation.

“‘Ah!’ I heard the innkeeper say, ‘this is the handsome young gentleman who passed here six weeks ago with that charming young lady he loved so much. What a beautiful girl she was! The poor children! They loved each other so tenderly. It

is a pity that they have been separated.’

“I pretended not to hear their words and avoided showing myself as much as possible.

“The next morning we left Saint-Denis in a smaller carriage belonging to my brother.

“We traveled quickly and arrived at our father’s house the following evening.

“My brother spoke to my father before allowing me to see him. He explained that I had behaved calmly during the journey and had not resisted my arrest.

“Because of this report, my father received me less harshly than I had expected.

“He limited himself to reproaching me gently for leaving home without permission. As for my mistress, he said that I deserved the consequences of trusting an unknown woman.

“‘I expected better judgment from you,’ he added. ‘But I hope that this small adventure will make you wiser.’

“I understood his words in the way that best suited my hopes.

“I thanked him sincerely for his kindness and promised to behave more wisely in the future.

“In truth I felt a secret joy.

“If matters continued in this way, I believed that I might easily escape from the house before the night was over and return to Paris to find Manon.”

Part 7

We sat down to supper that evening. My father appeared calm and almost cheerful, and the members of the household treated the situation as if it were a small adventure rather than a tragedy. They joked about my sudden escape from Amiens and about the charming young woman who had inspired such passion in me.

I accepted their laughter with apparent good humor. In truth, I was secretly pleased to hear Manon’s name spoken aloud, for my mind was constantly occupied with thoughts of her. Every word that mentioned her seemed to bring

her image back before my eyes.

However, during the conversation my father pronounced a name that immediately caught my attention.

He spoke of betrayal and of a certain service that had been rendered to him by a man called Monsieur de B....

The moment I heard this name, I felt a sudden chill run through my body.

I raised my head and asked him respectfully to explain himself.

My father turned to my brother.

“Did you not tell him the whole story during the journey?” he asked.

My brother replied that I had appeared so calm on the road that he had believed such an explanation unnecessary.

My father seemed to hesitate for a moment. I begged him so earnestly to satisfy my curiosity that he finally decided to speak.

His words struck my heart more cruelly than any physical blow.

“Tell me,” he began, “did you really believe that your mistress loved you sincerely?”

“Yes,” I replied firmly. “I have never doubted it for a single moment.”

My father burst into loud laughter.

“Excellent!” he cried. “You are a charming fool! I am delighted to see you so confident.”

He continued laughing.

“It is truly a pity,” he added mockingly, “that you were destined for the Order of Malta. With such dispositions you would make an excellent husband—patient, obedient, and very easy to deceive!”

He repeated several jokes of the same kind about my foolish trust.

I remained silent, although each word wounded me deeply.

At last he resumed his explanation.

“You must know,” he said, “that Monsieur de B... has completely won the heart of your princess. At least that is what he wishes me to believe. He claims that he acted only out of concern for my honor when he informed me about your situation. But I am not so naive as to believe that a man like him would act with such noble

motives.

“Your mistress revealed to him that you are my son. In order to free herself from your inconvenient presence, she helped him inform me about your residence and about the disorderly life you were leading in Paris.

“He even offered to assist in capturing you. Thanks to his information—and to the assistance of your own charming Manon—your brother found the perfect moment to seize you.

“So you may congratulate yourself,” my father concluded with another laugh. “Your victory lasted about twelve days.”

He paused to calculate with mock seriousness.

“You left Amiens on the twenty-eighth of last month. Today is the twenty-ninth of this month. Monsieur de B... wrote to me eleven days ago. I suppose that it took him eight days to win the complete affection of your mistress. If we subtract those days from the time since your departure, we see that your triumph lasted about twelve days—more or less.”

The laughter around the table began again.

I could endure no more.

Each word of this cruel explanation pierced my heart like a dagger.

I rose from the table without speaking. I had taken only a few steps toward the door when my strength failed me completely.

I fell to the floor without consciousness.

When I finally opened my eyes again, I felt tears streaming down my face. My heart was filled with such sorrow that I could hardly breathe.

My father, who loved me sincerely despite his harsh words, hurried to my side and tried to console me.

But I could barely hear what he said.

I threw myself at his feet and clasped my hands together in despair.

“Let me return to Paris!” I cried. “Allow me to go and kill that villain B...!”

My voice shook with anger and pain.

“No,” I continued wildly. “He cannot have won Manon’s heart! He must have forced her! He must have threatened her—perhaps with a dagger! Perhaps he has

used violence or deception to make her abandon me!”

My imagination was full of desperate excuses.

“Manon loves me!” I cried again. “I know it! She cannot betray me! That man has deceived us all!”

My father listened patiently, but when he saw that I insisted on returning to Paris, he understood that I might attempt to escape.

He therefore led me to an upper room and left two servants there to guard me constantly.

I was almost mad with grief.

I would have given a thousand lives for the chance to spend even a single hour in Paris.

Realizing that escape through the windows was impossible, I tried another method.

I spoke gently to the two servants who watched me.

I promised them great rewards if they would help me escape. I swore that one day I would make their fortune.

I begged them, I flattered them, and finally I threatened them.

But nothing could persuade them.

At last I lost all hope.

I threw myself onto the bed and decided that I would never leave it alive.

I spent the entire night and the following day in that state of despair.

When food was brought to me the next morning, I refused to eat.

My father came to see me that afternoon. His affection led him to use the gentlest arguments to calm my grief.

Finally he ordered me so firmly to take some food that I obeyed out of respect for him.

During the following days I ate only in his presence and only to satisfy his wishes.

He continued trying to convince me that Manon’s betrayal should teach me to despise her.

It is true that I could no longer respect her.

How could I respect the most faithless and deceitful of women?

Yet her image remained deeply fixed in my heart.

I felt it clearly.

“I may die,” I often said to myself. “Perhaps I should die after such shame and suffering. But I could suffer a thousand deaths and still be unable to forget the ungrateful Manon.”

Part 8

My father was astonished to see that my heart remained so deeply affected by this adventure. He knew that I had been raised with strong principles of honor. Because of this, he believed that once I had understood Manon’s betrayal, I would naturally despise her and forget her.

Since I continued to suffer so strongly, he began to imagine another explanation.

He thought that my sorrow did not come from love for Manon alone, but from a general weakness for women. His affection for me led him to adopt this idea completely.

One day he decided to speak openly with me about it.

“My dear Chevalier,” he said, “until now I intended that you should enter the Order of Malta. But I see clearly that your inclinations do not lead you in that direction. You love beautiful women too much. I think it would be wiser for me to find you a wife who would suit you.”

He looked at me carefully.

“Tell me honestly what you think about this.”

I replied bitterly that after what had happened I no longer made any distinction between women.

“I hate them all equally,” I said. “The misfortune I have suffered has taught me to distrust them forever.”

My father smiled slightly.

“Very well,” he said. “Then I will find you a woman who resembles Manon, but who will be more faithful.”

At these words my heart could no longer remain calm.

“If you truly wish to be kind to me,” I cried, “then give me back Manon! Be certain, my dear father, that she has not betrayed me. She is incapable of such cruelty. It is that villain B... who has deceived us all—you, her, and me.”

My voice trembled with emotion.

“If you knew how tender and sincere she is, you would love her yourself.”

My father shook his head.

“You are still a child,” he replied. “How can you blind yourself so completely after everything I have told you? It was she herself who helped deliver you into the hands of your brother. You should forget her name forever and take advantage of the indulgence I have shown you.”

I understood too clearly that his reasoning was correct. The defense I had made of Manon was only the involuntary movement of a heart that still loved her.

After a moment of silence I spoke again, but my voice was full of despair.

“Alas,” I said, “it is only too true that I have been the victim of the most shameful betrayal. Yes, I see now that I have been nothing but a foolish child. It was easy for them to deceive my trust.”

Tears of anger filled my eyes.

“But I know how to avenge myself,” I continued.

My father asked what I intended to do.

“I will go to Paris,” I said fiercely. “I will set fire to the house of B..., and I will burn him alive together with the faithless Manon!”

My violent words made my father laugh.

Instead of taking them seriously, he simply increased the precautions that prevented me from leaving my room.

In this way I remained imprisoned for six entire months.

During the first month my thoughts changed constantly. My feelings were a painful mixture of hatred and love, hope and despair.

Sometimes I remembered only the charm and beauty of Manon, and I longed desperately to see her again.

At other moments I saw her only as a treacherous and unfaithful woman, and I

swore that I would search for her only to punish her.

Books were eventually brought to me, and they gradually restored a certain calm to my mind.

I began reading again with great attention. I reviewed all the authors that I had studied earlier and even gained new knowledge.

Soon I felt a renewed passion for learning.

The strange thing was that love itself seemed to help my studies. Passages in Horace and Virgil that had once seemed obscure suddenly became clear to me.

I even began writing a commentary on the fourth book of the Aeneid, the story of Queen Dido and her tragic love.

“My commentary,” des Grieux said with a sad smile, “was inspired by my own heart. I believed that only a man who had suffered as I had could truly understand the faithful Dido.”

He sighed before continuing.

“One day my friend Tiberge came to visit me during my imprisonment.

“I was surprised by the warmth with which he embraced me.

“Until that moment I had always considered his friendship as one of those ordinary attachments that exist between young students of the same age.

“But now I found him greatly changed. In the five or six months since I had last seen him, he had become more mature. His face and his manner inspired respect.

“He spoke to me less like an old school friend and more like a wise adviser.

“He expressed sorrow for the error into which my passion had led me. At the same time he congratulated me, believing that my recovery had already begun.

“Finally he urged me to take advantage of this unfortunate experience to open my eyes to the vanity of worldly pleasures.

“I looked at him with astonishment.

“He quickly noticed my surprise.

“‘My dear Chevalier,’ he said gently, ‘I have told you nothing that is not perfectly true. I have carefully examined these questions with reason and reflection. Like you, I once felt a strong attraction toward pleasure. But Heaven

also gave me a love for virtue.’

“He spoke with great sincerity.

“‘I used my reason to compare the results of pleasure and the results of virtue,’ he continued. ‘I soon discovered how different they are. With the help of Heaven I have come to despise the world completely.’

“Then he added with emotion:

“‘Do you know what keeps me from leaving the world entirely and living in solitude? It is only my affection for you.’

“These words touched me deeply.”

Part 9

“The affection that Tiberge showed me,” des Grieux continued, “made a deep impression on my heart. I had always known that he was sincere, but until that moment I had not fully understood the strength of his friendship.

“He spoke to me with great seriousness.

“‘My dear friend,’ he said, ‘I know that your heart is naturally good. Your misfortune has come only from the weakness of youth and from the violence of your passions. You must not allow this single error to destroy your entire life.’

“I listened to him attentively.

“‘The world is full of dangers,’ he continued. ‘Pleasure attracts us strongly, but it leaves nothing except sorrow and regret. Virtue alone can give true peace.’

“He spoke for a long time in this way.

“His words were simple, but they were full of wisdom and sincerity. I could see that they came directly from his heart.

“Finally he suggested a plan that he believed would restore my happiness.

“‘You should enter the Church,’ he said. ‘Your talents and your education would allow you to succeed easily in that profession. You would gain honor, peace of mind, and the respect of everyone.’

“At first I hesitated.

“My heart still felt wounded by the memory of Manon. Yet the calm life that

Tiberge described seemed attractive after the violent passions I had experienced.

“My father also approved strongly of this idea.

“He had long wished that I would follow an honorable career, and the Church seemed the most suitable path for me.

“After several conversations with Tiberge, I finally allowed myself to be persuaded.

“I left my father’s house and went to Paris in order to study theology.

“My father gave me permission to live there with great freedom. He believed that the lessons of my past misfortune had completely cured me of my youthful passions.

“In truth my heart was still full of sadness.

“Yet I worked with great diligence.

“My natural intelligence and my previous education allowed me to make rapid progress in my studies. Soon I became known among the students for my seriousness and my ability.

“The professors praised my conduct and predicted that I would become a distinguished preacher.

“For nearly two years I lived in this way.

“During that time I rarely allowed myself to think about Manon.

“Whenever her image appeared in my memory, I forced myself to push it away.

“Gradually my heart became calmer.

“I even began to believe that I had completely conquered my passion.

“One evening, however, an unexpected event changed everything.

“I had spent the entire day studying at the seminary. In the evening I decided to take a short walk in the gardens that surrounded the building.

“The air was calm, and the quiet beauty of the evening invited peaceful reflection.

“As I walked slowly along one of the paths, I suddenly heard someone speak my name.

““Chevalier des Grieux!’ the voice called softly.

“I stopped at once.

“The voice was familiar.

“A moment later I saw a young woman approaching me.

“Even before I could see her clearly, my heart began to beat violently.

“It was Manon.

“Yes—Manon herself stood before me.

“Her beauty seemed even greater than before. She wore a simple but elegant dress, and her eyes shone with a tenderness that immediately disarmed my anger.

“For a moment I remained frozen with astonishment.

“My first impulse was to turn away from her.

“But she approached me quickly and seized my hands.

“‘My dear des Grieux!’ she cried. ‘You do not recognize me? Have you already forgotten the unhappy Manon?’

“Her voice trembled with emotion.

“I felt my strength disappearing.

“All the resolutions I had formed during the past two years vanished instantly.

“I tried to speak with firmness.

“‘What do you want from me?’ I asked.

“She looked at me with tears in her eyes.

“‘I want your forgiveness,’ she said.

“Her words struck my heart with irresistible force.

“‘Forgiveness!’ I repeated. ‘After the cruel betrayal that separated us?’

“She lowered her eyes.

“‘Yes,’ she said softly. ‘I confess that I have been guilty. I deserve your anger. But if you knew the terrible circumstances that forced me to act as I did, your heart would surely pity me.’

“Her voice was so gentle, and her beauty so touching, that I felt my anger melting away.

“Yet I tried to resist.

“‘Speak then,’ I said. ‘Explain your conduct, if you can.’

“She looked around anxiously.

“‘Not here,’ she said. ‘Too many people may pass through these gardens. Allow

me to tell you everything in a place where we can speak freely.’

“Despite all my efforts to remain firm, my heart had already surrendered.

“I followed her without another word.”

Part 10

“Manon led me out of the gardens,” des Grieux continued, “and we walked together through several quiet streets of Paris. I followed her almost without thinking. My heart was beating violently, and my mind was filled with confusion.

“At last we arrived at a small house where she said she was living.

“She opened the door and brought me into a modest room. A candle burned on the table, and the quiet atmosphere of the place seemed perfectly suited to the serious conversation that awaited us.

“When we were alone, Manon threw herself into a chair and began to weep.

“‘You see before you,’ she said, ‘the most unfortunate and the most guilty of women. I know that I deserve your hatred, yet I cannot bear the thought that you may despise me forever.’

“Her tears touched me deeply.

“Although I still wished to hear her explanation, I could not prevent myself from taking her hand and trying to calm her.

“‘Speak to me honestly,’ I said. ‘If you have truly been forced into your actions, I will listen with compassion.’

“She thanked me with a look full of tenderness.

“‘You remember,’ she began, ‘the evening when you left me alone in our apartment. I had been thinking about our situation during the entire day. Our money was nearly gone. I saw clearly that we could not continue living in Paris without resources.’

“She paused for a moment.

“‘It was then that I received a visit from Monsieur de B.... I had known him slightly before meeting you. He had always admired me, and he had often offered me his protection. When he learned that I was living with you, he came to

persuade me to abandon what he called a foolish adventure.’

“I listened in silence, although my heart was already trembling.

“‘At first I refused to listen to him,’ she continued. ‘I told him that I loved you and that I would rather suffer poverty with you than enjoy wealth without you.’

“She looked at me with emotion.

“‘But he spoke to me for a long time about the dangers that awaited us. He said that a young man like you would soon regret sacrificing your future for a woman like me. He told me that your family would never forgive you. Finally he convinced me that by separating myself from you for a short time, I might actually save your honor and your career.’

“I interrupted her.

“‘And you believed him?’ I asked bitterly.

“She lowered her eyes.

“‘I was weak,’ she replied. ‘Perhaps I also feared the poverty that awaited us. I will not hide my fault from you. I allowed myself to be persuaded.’

“Her tears flowed again.

“‘But I swear to you,’ she cried, ‘that the moment you were taken away I understood the horror of what I had done. I felt that I had betrayed the only man who truly loved me.’

“Her voice trembled with such sincerity that my anger began to disappear.

“‘Monsieur de B... soon discovered that my heart was not his,’ she continued. ‘Although he surrounded me with luxury, I could not hide my sadness. I spoke constantly about you. At last he became tired of my tears and reproaches.’

“She smiled sadly.

“‘He finally allowed me to leave him. Since then I have thought only of finding you and begging your forgiveness.’

“Her explanation was simple, yet the tone of her voice and the beauty of her expression gave it a powerful effect.

“My heart was already defeated.

“All the arguments of reason disappeared before the sight of her tears.

“I took her in my arms.

“‘Manon,’ I said, ‘I cannot resist you. Whether you are faithful or false, cruel or tender, I love you with all my soul.’

“She pressed me passionately to her heart.

“‘My dear des Grieux,’ she whispered, ‘you will never regret forgiving me.’

“In that moment all the calm that I had gained during two years of study disappeared completely.

“Love returned to my heart with greater force than ever.

“Manon soon revealed to me the new plan that she had prepared.

“‘We must live together again,’ she said. ‘But this time we must be more prudent. Love alone is not enough. We must also have money.’

“She spoke these words with complete seriousness.

“‘Monsieur de B... has provided me with some resources. If we manage them carefully, they will allow us to live comfortably for a long time.’

“I was troubled by this confession.

“‘You mean,’ I said slowly, ‘that we must live on the money that another man has given you?’

“She looked at me with surprise.

“‘Why not?’ she replied. ‘He offered it willingly. Besides, it will serve only to support our happiness.’

“Her reasoning disturbed me deeply.

“My sense of honor revolted against such an arrangement. Yet my love for her was stronger than my pride.

“After a long silence I finally said:

“‘Very well. Let us forget the past. I am ready to follow you wherever you wish.’

“Thus,” des Grieux concluded sadly, “I abandoned the peaceful life that might have saved me and returned willingly to the path of misfortune.”

Part 11

“After this reconciliation,” des Grieux continued, “Manon and I began once again to live together in Paris.

“At first our life seemed perfectly happy.

“Manon possessed a certain amount of money which Monsieur de B... had given her before allowing her to leave his house. Although my pride had been wounded by this fact, my love soon silenced those feelings.

“We rented a comfortable apartment in a quiet street. Manon furnished it with elegance and taste. She had a natural talent for arranging everything in a pleasing way.

“During the first weeks we lived peacefully and without fear.

“Manon treated me with the greatest tenderness. She seemed to devote herself entirely to my happiness.

“Yet her character contained a weakness that soon began to show itself again.

“She loved pleasure and luxury.

“Even when she sincerely loved me, she could not resist the attraction of fine clothes, beautiful jewels, and an elegant life.

“The money that we possessed began to disappear more rapidly than I had expected.

“One evening Manon spoke to me about this problem.

“‘My dear des Grieux,’ she said, ‘we must think seriously about our future. Our present resources will not last long.’

“Her tone was calm, but her eyes showed anxiety.

“‘What can we do?’ I asked.

“‘There are many possibilities,’ she replied. ‘But first we must find a way to obtain some money.’

“She hesitated before continuing.

“‘You know that I have some admirers in Paris. They admire my beauty and would gladly offer gifts if I allowed them to visit me.’

“I felt a painful movement in my heart.

“‘You cannot mean that seriously,’ I said.

“She smiled gently.

“‘Listen to me calmly,’ she replied. ‘I do not speak of abandoning you. I speak only of accepting certain advantages that others are ready to give.’

“I could not hide my distress.

“‘Manon,’ I said firmly, ‘I would rather die than share you with another man.’

“She embraced me tenderly.

“‘You misunderstand me,’ she said. ‘I will never belong to anyone except you. But if a foolish admirer wishes to offer me jewels or money, why should we refuse? It would be ridiculous to reject such opportunities when our happiness depends on them.’

“Her words revealed a way of thinking that was completely different from my own.

“My love for her made it difficult for me to oppose her arguments.

“After a long discussion we agreed on a compromise.

“Manon would receive certain visitors in my presence. Their admiration would provide us with small gifts or money, but she would never allow them any real intimacy.

“At first this arrangement seemed to work well.

“Several wealthy young men began to visit our apartment.

“They admired Manon’s beauty and her lively conversation. In order to please her they offered many presents—fine fabrics, jewelry, and sometimes money.

“Although my pride suffered each time I accepted such gifts, I convinced myself that these sacrifices were necessary for our happiness.

“For several months we lived in this way.

“Then an unexpected misfortune destroyed our peace once again.

“Among the visitors who admired Manon was a young man named Monsieur de G....

“He belonged to a wealthy family, and he possessed a large fortune.

“Unfortunately he also possessed a violent and jealous character.

“One evening he arrived at our apartment and found Manon alone.

“I had gone out for a short walk.

“During my absence he attempted to persuade her to abandon me and live with him.

“Manon refused his proposal.

“Her refusal wounded his pride deeply.

“When I returned home I found Manon pale and trembling.

“‘What has happened?’ I asked anxiously.

“She explained the conversation that had taken place.

“‘This man will never forgive us,’ she said. ‘He is capable of terrible revenge.’

“Her fear proved to be justified.

“Only a few days later several officers arrived suddenly at our apartment.

“They carried an official order for my arrest.

“Monsieur de G... had accused me of cheating him at cards and of stealing money from him.

“The accusation was completely false.

“Yet his influence was powerful enough to make the authorities act against me.

“Before I could defend myself, I was seized and taken away to prison.

“Manon tried desperately to follow me, but the officers forced her to remain behind.

“As I was led away, I heard her cry my name with heartbreaking despair.

“At that moment I believed that all hope had vanished from my life.”

Part 12

“I was taken to the prison of Saint-Lazare,” des Grieux continued. “It was a terrible place for a young man who had known only freedom and happiness.

“The gates closed behind me with a heavy sound that seemed to announce the end of my life.

“At first I was placed in a small room with bare walls and a single narrow bed. A guard locked the door and left me alone.

“I sat down and tried to understand what had happened.

“The accusation of Monsieur de G... was false, yet I knew that his wealth and influence could make the judges believe his story. In that moment I felt that my life had been ruined by the cruel jealousy of one man.

“But even in this terrible situation my thoughts were occupied less by myself

than by Manon.

“I imagined her wandering through the streets of Paris in despair, searching for some way to help me.

“Her tears and her cries echoed constantly in my memory.

“During the first days of my imprisonment I could not sleep or eat.

“I walked back and forth across the small room like a man who has lost his reason.

“At last a guard came to inform me that someone wished to speak with me.

“A moment later the door opened and my faithful friend Tiberge entered.

“The sight of him filled my heart with emotion.

“He embraced me warmly.

“‘My poor friend,’ he said, ‘I learned about your misfortune yesterday. I came as quickly as possible.’

“I could not speak for several seconds.

“Tiberge looked around the miserable room and sighed.

“‘You see,’ he continued gently, ‘where your passion for that woman has led you.’

“Although his words were severe, his voice expressed only compassion.

“I explained to him the injustice of the accusation made by Monsieur de G....

“Tiberge listened attentively.

“‘I believe you,’ he said. ‘Your character is not capable of such actions. But the world is cruel. A powerful enemy can easily destroy the reputation of a young man.’

“He thought for a moment.

“‘Do not despair,’ he added. ‘Perhaps I can help you.’

“I asked him anxiously what he intended to do.

“‘First,’ he said, ‘I will try to persuade your father to intervene. His influence may be strong enough to protect you.’

“I hesitated.

“The thought of confessing my new misfortune to my father filled me with shame.

“Yet I had no other hope.

“Tiberge promised to write to him immediately.

“Before leaving, he also offered me money so that I could live more comfortably in prison.

“I accepted it with gratitude.

“Thanks to his assistance I soon obtained permission to move to a larger room where the conditions were less severe.

“But my heart remained full of sorrow.

“Several days passed without news.

“At last the guard came again to announce another visitor.

“This time it was Manon.

“The moment she entered the room she ran toward me and threw herself into my arms.

“Her face was pale, and her eyes were red from crying.

“‘My dear des Grieux!’ she cried. ‘What terrible misfortune has fallen upon us!’

“Her grief seemed so sincere that I forgot all my own suffering.

“I tried to calm her.

“‘Do not lose courage,’ I said. ‘Perhaps my father will soon obtain my freedom.’

“She looked at me with sudden hope.

“‘If that is true,’ she said, ‘we must leave Paris immediately. That jealous monster G... will never stop persecuting us.’

“She spoke with great agitation.

“Then she lowered her voice.

“‘I have thought of a plan,’ she said.

“Her eyes shone with a mixture of fear and determination.

“‘One of the guards here admires me. He has already shown me great kindness. I believe that with a little persuasion he may agree to help us.’

“I understood her meaning.

“‘You mean that he might allow me to escape?’

“She nodded.

“‘Yes. But it will require money—and courage.’

“My heart began to beat quickly.

“Escape from prison seemed dangerous, but the thought of remaining there was unbearable.

“‘Tell me everything,’ I said.

“Manon explained that the guard had already hinted that such an escape might be possible.

“If we could obtain enough money to satisfy him, he would allow me to leave the prison secretly during the night.

“The plan was risky, but the hope of freedom filled my heart with excitement.

“‘Very well,’ I said at last. ‘Let us try.’

“Manon embraced me with joy.

“‘I knew that you would not refuse,’ she said.

“Thus we began preparing another desperate attempt to escape the misfortunes that seemed determined to pursue us.”

Part 13

“The plan for my escape,” des Grieux continued, “was prepared during several secret meetings between Manon and the guard who watched over my room.

“This man, whose name was Lescaut, had quickly become fascinated by Manon’s beauty. He admired her greatly and seemed ready to do almost anything to please her.

“At first I felt uneasy about trusting such a man. Yet our situation left us few choices.

“Manon assured me that he was reliable.

“‘He has already helped several prisoners escape,’ she said. ‘Of course he expects to be rewarded generously, but he will keep his promise.’

“We agreed to pay him a large sum of money.

“Manon succeeded in collecting the necessary amount from some friends who admired her. Although I felt ashamed to accept such assistance, my desire for freedom overcame my hesitation.

“The guard explained the details of the plan.

“‘Tomorrow night,’ he said, ‘the corridor will be quiet for several hours. I will bring you a pistol and open the door of your room. Once you are outside, we will pass through a small passage that leads to the outer courtyard.’

“He spoke calmly, as if such actions were part of his ordinary duties.

“‘From there,’ he continued, ‘you will find a carriage waiting. It will take you to a safe place where no one will search for you.’

“The simplicity of his explanation made the plan seem almost easy.

“Yet my heart was filled with anxiety.

“Manon noticed my hesitation.

“‘Do not be afraid,’ she said softly. ‘Everything will succeed. Once you are free, we will leave Paris and begin a new life together.’

“Her confidence encouraged me.

“The following day passed slowly.

“Every sound in the prison seemed louder than usual. Each moment of waiting felt like an hour.

“At last night arrived.

“Around midnight the guard came quietly to my door. He unlocked it and stepped inside.

“‘Everything is ready,’ he whispered.

“He handed me a pistol.

“‘Take this,’ he said. ‘You may not need it, but it is better to be prepared.’

“I took the weapon with trembling hands.

“Then we moved silently through the dark corridor.

“The prison was completely quiet. Only the distant sound of footsteps from another part of the building broke the silence.

“My heart beat violently as we reached the small passage that led toward the courtyard.

“The guard opened another door.

“At that moment, however, an unexpected danger appeared.

“Another officer suddenly turned the corner of the corridor and saw us.

“For a second we all remained frozen with surprise.
“The officer quickly realized what was happening.
“‘Stop!’ he shouted.
“If he had continued shouting, the entire prison would have been awakened.
“Without thinking I raised the pistol and pointed it at him.
“‘Silence!’ I cried. ‘Do not move, or I will shoot!’
“The officer hesitated.
“In that moment of hesitation the guard pushed me forward.
“‘Run!’ he whispered.
“I ran through the open door and into the courtyard.
“The night air struck my face like a sudden breath of freedom.
“A carriage was waiting near the gate exactly as the guard had promised.
“I entered quickly.
“The driver immediately urged the horses forward.
“Within a few seconds we had left the prison behind.
“I was free.
“But my escape had been more violent than we had planned.
“As we rode through the silent streets of Paris, a terrible thought entered my mind.
“In pointing the pistol at the officer I might have caused his death if the weapon had fired.
“The possibility that I had committed such a crime filled me with horror.
“Yet the driver did not allow me time to reflect.
“He continued driving rapidly until we reached the small house where Manon was waiting.
“When she saw me enter the room she ran toward me with a cry of joy.
“‘You are safe!’ she exclaimed.
“She embraced me passionately.
“For several minutes we spoke only of our happiness at being reunited.
“But soon another problem appeared.
“The violent nature of my escape meant that the authorities would search for

me immediately.

“Remaining in Paris was now impossible.

“We had to leave the city without delay.

“‘We will go to Chaillot,’ Manon said. ‘A friend of mine has a small house there. We can hide safely for a few days.’

“Her suggestion seemed reasonable.

“Within an hour we were once again traveling through the dark streets of Paris, fleeing from a new danger that threatened our fragile happiness.”

Part 14

“We reached Chaillot before dawn,” des Grieux continued. “The small house where Manon wished to hide was quiet and isolated. It stood at the edge of the village, surrounded by a garden and several tall trees.

“A servant who knew Manon opened the door and allowed us to enter without asking questions.

“For the first time since my escape I felt a moment of calm.

“Manon seemed delighted by the success of our plan. She spoke constantly about the happiness that awaited us once the danger had passed.

“‘We must remain here quietly for a few days,’ she said. ‘After that we will decide where to go.’

“Her cheerful voice gradually restored my courage.

“During the following days we lived in great secrecy.

“We rarely left the house, and when we walked in the garden we watched carefully to be sure that no strangers were observing us.

“At first our life there seemed peaceful.

“Manon treated me with great tenderness. She appeared to have forgotten completely the luxury and pleasures that she once loved so much.

“I began to believe that our misfortunes had finally taught her the value of a simple life.

“But this illusion did not last long.

“After about two weeks a new visitor appeared.

“One evening the servant announced that a gentleman wished to speak with Manon.

“The news surprised me greatly.

“Manon seemed slightly troubled.

“‘It is probably my brother,’ she said quickly. ‘He sometimes comes to see me.’

“Her explanation appeared reasonable, and I allowed the visitor to enter.

“The man who entered the room was indeed her brother, Monsieur Lescaut.

“He was a soldier with a lively and adventurous character. His manner was bold, and his eyes showed the restless energy of a man who loved gambling and excitement.

“At first he greeted me politely.

“‘My dear Chevalier,’ he said, ‘I have heard about your recent misfortune. It is a pleasure to see that you have escaped safely.’

“Yet I soon understood that his visit had another purpose.

“After a few moments of conversation he began speaking seriously to Manon.

“‘My sister,’ he said, ‘you cannot continue living here in this quiet place. Such a life does not suit you. You were made for pleasure and society.’

“Manon listened without answering.

“He continued with increasing enthusiasm.

“‘Paris is full of opportunities. There are men who would gladly offer their fortunes for the chance to admire your beauty. Why hide yourself here like a prisoner?’

“I felt my anger rising.

“‘Monsieur,’ I said firmly, ‘Manon is perfectly happy here with me.’

“He laughed.

“‘My dear Chevalier,’ he replied, ‘you are an excellent young man, but you do not understand the world. Happiness requires money. Without it love soon becomes misery.’

“His words disturbed me deeply.

“He turned again toward Manon.

“Think carefully,’ he said. ‘A wealthy admirer has already noticed you. He is ready to offer you a comfortable life. If you accept his protection, both of you could live without worry.’

“I rose from my chair with indignation.

“Such proposals are insulting,’ I said.

“Lescaut remained calm.

“You misunderstand me,’ he answered. ‘I speak only of practical arrangements. Many respectable women live very comfortably thanks to such friendships.’

“His reasoning revealed the dangerous influence he had over Manon.

“She did not openly support his plan, but I noticed that she listened with attention.

“After he left the house that evening, I spoke seriously to her.

“Manon,’ I said, ‘we must avoid the advice of your brother. His ideas will lead us only to misfortune.’

“She answered gently.

“Do not worry,’ she said. ‘I love you too much to abandon you.’

“Her words reassured me for the moment.

“But in the following days I noticed that she often appeared thoughtful and restless.

“The simple life that had seemed pleasant at first now appeared dull to her.

“She began speaking again about the pleasures of Paris—the theaters, the elegant houses, and the beautiful clothes that she once enjoyed.

“Each time she mentioned these things my heart became uneasy.

“I feared that the dangerous suggestions of her brother had awakened once again the love of luxury that had already caused us so much suffering.

“My fears proved to be correct.

“One morning Manon came to me with an expression of excitement in her eyes.

“My dear des Grieux,’ she said, ‘I have found a way to make us rich.’

“Her words filled me with dread.

“What do you mean?’ I asked slowly.

“She smiled with mysterious confidence.

“‘A very wealthy young man has fallen in love with me,’ she said. ‘His name is Monsieur de G... M... If we act cleverly, we can obtain a great fortune from him.’

“Her plan, as she soon explained it, would lead us toward another series of dangerous adventures.”

Part 15

“Manon explained her plan with great excitement,” des Grieux continued. “Her eyes shone with intelligence and confidence, as if she had already discovered the secret of our future happiness.

“‘This young man, Monsieur de G... M...,’ she said, ‘is the son of an extremely wealthy financier. He has more money than he knows how to spend, and he is foolish enough to believe every word that a beautiful woman tells him.’

“I listened with growing uneasiness.

“‘And what do you expect from him?’ I asked.

“She answered without hesitation.

“‘Everything,’ she said simply.

“Seeing my troubled expression, she took my hand and began explaining the details of her plan.

“‘Listen carefully,’ she continued. ‘He believes that I am alone in Paris and that I need a protector. I will allow him to think that he has won my affection. He will give me money, jewels, and perhaps even a house.’

“She spoke with a calm confidence that astonished me.

“‘And then?’ I asked.

“She smiled.

“‘Then we will take everything and disappear.’

“I remained silent for a moment.

“My heart felt divided between admiration for her cleverness and shame at the dishonorable nature of her proposal.

“‘Manon,’ I said slowly, ‘this plan is dangerous. If the young man discovers the

truth, he will try to ruin us.’

“She laughed lightly.

“‘You worry too much,’ she replied. ‘Men like him are easy to deceive. Besides, he will be too ashamed to admit that he has been fooled.’

“Although I continued to feel uneasy, my love for her once again overcame my doubts.

“In the end I agreed to follow her plan.

“Within a few days we returned secretly to Paris.

“Manon soon arranged a meeting with the young Monsieur de G... M....

“He was exactly the type of man she had described—young, wealthy, and completely inexperienced in matters of love.

“The moment he saw Manon, he became her devoted admirer.

“He visited her almost every day and showered her with gifts.

“He believed that she lived alone with a faithful servant.

“Meanwhile I remained hidden in a small room of the house.

“Our arrangement was carefully organized.

“When the young man arrived, I disappeared into the cabinet or left the house by a small staircase.

“When he departed, I returned to Manon and listened to her laughter as she described how easily he had been deceived.

“Soon he began giving her large sums of money.

“Thanks to these gifts we were able to live in great comfort.

“Manon purchased beautiful dresses, jewels, and elegant furniture.

“Our house became one of the most charming in the neighborhood.

“At first this life seemed almost too easy.

“Yet I could not completely silence the voice of conscience within my heart.

“Each time I saw the young man’s innocent enthusiasm, I felt a painful sense of guilt.

“He spoke of Manon with sincere admiration.

“‘She is the most charming woman in the world,’ he often said.

“His trust made our deception appear cruel.

“But Manon felt no such hesitation.

“She believed that the young man deserved to lose his money because of his foolish vanity.

“‘Men like him are dangerous for women,’ she explained. ‘If we do not take advantage of them, they will take advantage of us.’

“Her reasoning allowed her to enjoy the situation without remorse.

“For several months our plan succeeded perfectly.

“Then a small mistake destroyed everything.

“One evening Monsieur de G... M... arrived unexpectedly earlier than usual.

“At that moment I was still in the house.

“I had only a few seconds to hide myself in the cabinet.

“Unfortunately the young man had already noticed the sound of my footsteps.

“He looked at Manon with sudden suspicion.

“‘Who is in the house?’ he demanded.

“Manon tried to laugh and calm him.

“‘No one,’ she said lightly.

“But he was not convinced.

“He rushed toward the cabinet and opened the door.

“In that instant our deception was revealed.

“The young man stared at me with fury.

“‘So this is your faithful servant!’ he cried.

“His face was pale with anger.

“‘You have both deceived me!’ he shouted.

“Before we could speak, he ran out of the house and called loudly for help.

“Within minutes several officers appeared.

“This time both Manon and I were arrested together.

“Our second imprisonment was about to begin.”

Part 16

“When the officers entered the house,” des Grieux continued, “they treated us

with little respect. Monsieur de G... M... had already explained the situation with great anger. He accused us not only of deception but also of stealing the money he had given to Manon.

“Although the gifts had been offered freely, his wealth and influence made the officers treat his accusations as truth.

“Manon and I were taken away together.

“During the journey she remained calm, but I could see the fear in her eyes.

“‘Do not lose courage,’ she whispered to me quietly. ‘Perhaps we will still find a way to escape.’

“But the situation soon became more serious than we had imagined.

“I was taken once again to Saint-Lazare.

“Manon, however, was sent to another prison reserved for women whose conduct was considered immoral.

“The separation filled me with despair.

“My own imprisonment seemed unimportant compared to the thought of Manon suffering alone.

“Fortunately my faithful friend Tiberge soon learned about my new misfortune.

“He came to see me immediately.

“‘My poor des Grieux,’ he said sadly, ‘you see now the result of returning to the life you once promised to abandon.’

“His reproaches were gentle, but they were impossible to deny.

“I confessed everything to him—the plan that Manon had invented and my weakness in agreeing to it.

“Tiberge listened without anger.

“‘You have been foolish,’ he said at last, ‘but you are not wicked. Your greatest fault is that you love too strongly.’

“His kindness moved me deeply.

“‘Can you help Manon?’ I asked anxiously.

“He hesitated before answering.

“‘I will try,’ he said. ‘But I must speak honestly. That woman has brought you nothing but misfortune. If she disappears from your life, you may still recover

your honor.’

“I shook my head.

“‘I cannot abandon her,’ I replied. ‘Whatever her faults may be, she is the only woman I have ever loved.’

“Seeing that my feelings could not be changed, Tiberge agreed to help us.

“He spoke to several influential people in Paris and used all his efforts to obtain my freedom.

“After several days he returned with encouraging news.

“‘Your father has agreed to intervene again,’ he told me. ‘He is deeply disappointed by your conduct, but he cannot abandon his own son.’

“Thanks to my father’s influence, the accusations against me were soon reduced.

“I was released from prison.

“But the situation of Manon was far worse.

“Because of her reputation and her previous scandals, the authorities had decided to treat her more severely.

“She was included among a group of women who were to be transported to America.

“When I heard this terrible news, my heart almost stopped.

“‘America!’ I cried. ‘You mean that she will be sent away forever?’

“Tiberge nodded sadly.

“‘Yes. The decision has already been made. The ship will leave from Le Havre in a few days.’

“My despair became uncontrollable.

“‘Then I must follow her!’ I exclaimed.

“Tiberge tried to calm me.

“‘Think carefully,’ he said. ‘You are free now. You can still rebuild your life.’

“But I refused to listen.

“‘My life without Manon would be worse than death,’ I replied. ‘If she is sent to America, I will go with her—even if I must cross the ocean as a prisoner.’

“Seeing that my decision was unchangeable, Tiberge finally agreed to help me

again.

“He provided me with money for the journey and arranged everything necessary for my travel.

“Within two days I left Paris and hurried toward the port of Le Havre.

“My only hope was to reach the harbor before the ship carrying Manon departed.

“During the entire journey I felt only one emotion—a desperate determination to remain with her, whatever fate might await us.

“When I finally arrived at Le Havre, I discovered that the ship had not yet sailed.

“But the sight that awaited me there filled my heart with unbearable sorrow.”

Part 17

“When I arrived at the harbor of Le Havre,” des Grieux continued, “I immediately went to the place where the prisoners were being held before their departure.

“The scene that appeared before my eyes filled me with horror.

“Several miserable women were gathered in a courtyard surrounded by guards. They were dressed in poor clothes, and many of them wept or cried loudly. Some cursed their fate, while others sat silently on the ground in despair.

“Among these unfortunate women I soon recognized Manon.

“Her appearance broke my heart.

“Her beautiful hair, which she once arranged with such care, now hung loosely around her pale face. Her clothes were simple and worn, and the sadness in her eyes made her look older than her years.

“Yet even in that miserable condition her beauty remained extraordinary.

“The moment she saw me, she cried out with joy.

“‘Des Grieux!’ she exclaimed.

“She tried to run toward me, but the guards stopped her.

“I hurried forward and begged the officer in charge to allow me to speak with her.

“At first he refused.

“But when I offered him money and explained that I was her husband, he finally allowed us a short conversation.

“Manon threw herself into my arms and began to weep.

““Why have you come here?’ she cried. ‘You should have stayed far away from this misery!’

“Her concern for me touched me deeply.

““How could I abandon you?’ I replied. ‘Wherever you go, I will follow.’

“She looked at me with astonishment.

““Do you mean that you will cross the ocean with me?’

““Yes,’ I said firmly. ‘If they send you to America, I will go there as well.’

“At first she tried to persuade me to return to France.

““You must not destroy your future for my sake,’ she said. ‘Your family still loves you. You can recover your honor.’

“But I refused to listen.

““My honor and my future mean nothing without you,’ I answered.

“Seeing that my decision could not be changed, she finally accepted it.

“The officer allowed us to remain together for several minutes.

“During that time we spoke about our past misfortunes and our uncertain future.

“Manon blamed herself for everything.

““If I had been wiser,’ she said through her tears, ‘you would never have suffered so much because of me.’

“I tried to comfort her.

““Let us forget the past,’ I said. ‘Perhaps a new life awaits us in America.’

“Although I spoke with courage, I felt great anxiety about the unknown land that awaited us.

“At last the guards ordered us to separate.

“I spent the night in the town of Le Havre, waiting anxiously for the departure of the ship.

“The following morning the prisoners were brought to the harbor.

“A large crowd had gathered to watch them.

“Some people looked at the unfortunate women with pity, while others laughed

cruelly at their misfortune.

“Manon walked slowly among the prisoners.

“Her head was lowered, and she tried to avoid the curious eyes of the crowd.

“When she saw me waiting near the ship, her face brightened with gratitude.

“The officer in charge had agreed to allow me to travel on the same vessel.

“Although I was not a prisoner, I would share the long journey across the ocean with the group of condemned women.

“Soon the sailors ordered everyone to board the ship.

“Manon was placed among the prisoners below the deck.

“I was allowed to remain above, but I visited her whenever the guards permitted it.

“The ship finally left the harbor.

“As the coast of France slowly disappeared in the distance, I felt a strange mixture of sadness and hope.

“We were leaving behind the country where we had known so much happiness and so much suffering.

“Ahead of us lay an unknown world.

“Yet as long as Manon remained beside me, I believed that I could endure any fate.”

Part 18

“The voyage across the ocean lasted several weeks,” des Grieux continued. “At first the journey was difficult for everyone on board the ship.

“The sea was rough, and many of the passengers suffered from illness.

“The unfortunate women who had been condemned to exile were placed together in a narrow space below the deck. Their situation was miserable.

“The air there was heavy and unpleasant, and the guards treated them harshly.

“Whenever the officers allowed it, I went to see Manon.

“Although she tried to appear calm, I could see that the conditions of the voyage were very painful for her.

“‘Do not worry about me,’ she often said. ‘I am strong enough to endure this.’

“Her courage moved me deeply.

“During the long days at sea we spoke often about the future.

“We imagined a peaceful life in America, far away from the dangers and temptations of Paris.

“‘Perhaps our misfortunes were necessary,’ Manon said one evening. ‘They have taught us the value of a quiet life.’

“Her words filled me with hope.

“At last the ship arrived at the coast of Louisiana.

“The town where we landed was small and surrounded by wide forests and rivers.

“The governor of the colony received the prisoners and arranged their distribution among the settlers.

“Because of the affection I showed for Manon and the sincerity of our devotion to each other, the governor treated us kindly.

“He allowed us to live together as husband and wife.

“For the first time since our arrival in Paris, it seemed that fate had decided to favor us.

“We were given a small house on the edge of the settlement.

“The land around it was fertile, and the people of the colony lived simple and honest lives.

“Our neighbors welcomed us warmly.

“They were touched by the tenderness that united us.

“Soon our peaceful life began.

“I worked every day with the other settlers, helping to cultivate the land and build new houses.

“Manon managed our home with surprising care.

“Far from the luxury of Paris, she appeared content with the simple pleasures of our new life.

“In the quiet evenings we often walked together near the river.

“The sky of Louisiana was vast and beautiful, and the calm of the countryside

allowed us to forget the painful memories of the past.

“During these months my love for Manon grew even stronger.

“She seemed gentler and more sincere than ever before.

“Often she spoke with regret about the errors that had led us into so many misfortunes.

“‘If Heaven allows us to remain here in peace,’ she said one evening, ‘I will spend the rest of my life proving that I deserve your love.’

“Her words filled my heart with happiness.

“I believed that at last our trials had ended.

“But fate had prepared one final and cruel test.

“Among the inhabitants of the colony was the nephew of the governor, a young officer who soon noticed Manon’s beauty.

“He admired her passionately.

“At first he behaved politely and tried only to be friendly with us.

“But as time passed his admiration became more serious.

“One day he visited our house while I was away working in the fields.

“He spoke to Manon with increasing boldness.

“‘You are too beautiful to live in this poor settlement,’ he told her. ‘You deserve a life of luxury.’

“Manon rejected his compliments firmly.

“Yet the young officer did not abandon his pursuit.

“When I learned about his behavior, my heart filled with anger.

“I warned him to stay away from our home.

“Instead of obeying, he challenged me to a duel.

“Honor required that I accept.

“Thus the peaceful life that we had hoped to enjoy in Louisiana was suddenly threatened by a new danger.”

Part 19

“The challenge of the young officer placed me in a difficult position,” des

Grioux continued. "In the small colony where we lived, honor was considered extremely important. If I refused the duel, I would appear cowardly in the eyes of everyone.

"Yet I also knew that such a conflict might destroy the peaceful life that Manon and I had finally begun to enjoy.

"When I told her about the challenge, she became pale with fear.

"'You must not fight,' she cried. 'I cannot bear the thought of losing you.'

"Her anxiety moved me deeply.

"Do not worry,' I tried to reassure her. 'The matter will soon be resolved.'

"However, the situation soon became even more complicated.

"The governor himself heard about the quarrel between his nephew and me. Because he wished to prevent violence in the colony, he decided to intervene.

"He called both of us to his house and demanded an explanation.

"The young officer spoke first.

"'This man insults my honor,' he said angrily. 'I have the right to defend myself.'

"I remained calm and replied respectfully.

"'Sir,' I said to the governor, 'I have never wished to offend your nephew. But he has repeatedly disturbed the peace of my household.'

"The governor listened carefully.

"He was a wise and experienced man who preferred justice to family loyalty.

"After a moment of reflection he pronounced his decision.

"'There will be no duel,' he declared firmly. 'Such conflicts only bring trouble to our colony.'

"His authority ended the quarrel immediately.

"The young officer was forced to accept the decision, although his pride remained wounded.

"For several weeks after this incident he avoided us completely.

"Our peaceful life appeared to return.

"Yet fate had not finished testing us.

"Some time later the young officer came again to speak with the governor.

"During that conversation he revealed a secret that changed everything.

“He confessed that he wished to marry Manon.

“When the governor heard this proposal, he was astonished.

“‘Marry her?’ he asked. ‘But she already lives with the Chevalier des Grioux.’

“The young man answered with impatience.

“‘That man is nothing to her. She is only a transported woman. Her past makes her unworthy of him.’

“These cruel words wounded my honor deeply.

“The governor, however, understood the truth of our devotion to each other.

“He refused his nephew’s request immediately.

“‘Manon has chosen her companion,’ he said firmly. ‘Their affection is sincere. I will not destroy their happiness.’

“The young officer left the house in anger.

“From that moment we understood that our situation in the colony had become dangerous.

“The nephew of the governor was determined to obtain Manon at any cost.

“Soon afterwards he returned secretly to our house while I was absent.

“This time he brought a more terrible proposal.

“‘Your lover is poor,’ he told Manon. ‘His future in this colony is uncertain. But if you marry me, you will become the wife of an officer and enjoy wealth and respect.’

“Manon rejected him once again.

“But when I returned home and heard the entire story, I realized that our peace could not continue.

“The young officer’s pride had been wounded too deeply.

“Sooner or later he would seek revenge.

“After discussing the situation with Manon, we decided to leave the colony secretly and travel deeper into the wilderness.

“There, far from the settlements, we hoped to build a new life where no one could separate us.

“The decision was difficult.

“Yet our love gave us the courage to face the unknown dangers of the

wilderness together.”

Part 20

“We left the colony during the night,” des Grieux continued. “We took only a small amount of food and a few necessary objects. Everything else we abandoned behind us.

“The wilderness stretched endlessly before us.

“For several days we walked across empty land where no houses or villages could be seen. The sun was strong during the day, and the nights were cold and silent.

“At first Manon tried to remain cheerful.

“‘Do not be afraid,’ she said. ‘As long as we are together, we can endure anything.’

“Her courage strengthened my own.

“Yet the journey soon became more difficult than we had expected.

“The land was dry and rough. Sometimes we walked for hours without finding water. Our food also began to disappear quickly.

“Each day Manon became weaker.

“Her delicate body was not accustomed to such hardship.

“Several times she asked me to stop so that she could rest.

“I tried to encourage her with gentle words.

“‘Only a little farther,’ I told her. ‘Soon we will find a place where we can live peacefully.’

“But in truth I did not know where such a place could be found.

“On the third day our situation became desperate.

“The heat of the sun was intense, and we had almost no water left.

“Manon’s steps grew slower and slower.

“At last she stopped walking and looked at me with a faint smile.

“‘My dear des Grieux,’ she said softly, ‘I feel that my strength is leaving me.’

“Her voice trembled.

“I tried to support her, but she was too weak to continue.
“We sat down together on the dry ground.
“For a moment neither of us spoke.
“Then she took my hand.
“‘Do not blame yourself for what has happened,’ she said gently. ‘My misfortunes are the result of my own weakness.’
“Tears filled my eyes.
“‘Do not speak like that,’ I replied. ‘You will soon recover your strength.’
“But she shook her head slowly.
“‘No,’ she whispered. ‘I know that my life is ending.’
“Her words filled me with terror.
“I tried desperately to revive her, but her breathing was already becoming faint.
“With her last strength she looked at me with tenderness.
“‘Remember that I loved you,’ she said. ‘Even when I was weak and foolish, my heart always belonged to you.’
“A few moments later her head fell gently against my shoulder.
“Manon was dead.
“For a long time I remained beside her without moving.
“My sorrow was beyond all description.
“The vast silence of the wilderness surrounded me as I held the body of the woman I loved more than life itself.
“At last I found the strength to perform the last duty that love required of me.
“With my own hands I dug a grave in the dry earth.
“I placed Manon carefully inside it and covered her with soil.
“When the work was finished, I fell beside the grave in complete despair.
“I wished only to die there with her.
“But fate did not allow even that small consolation.
“Some travelers eventually discovered me lying unconscious near the grave.
“They carried me back to the nearest settlement, where I slowly recovered my strength.
“My faithful friend Tiberge later arrived from France after hearing about my

misfortunes.

“He brought me back to Europe.

“Since that time I have lived only with the memory of Manon.

“Her beauty, her weaknesses, and her love remain forever engraved in my heart.

“Thus ended the strange and tragic story of my life with Manon Lescaut.”