Die Leiden
des
jungen Werthers.

Erster Theil.

Leipzig,
in der Weygandschen Buchhandlung.
1774.

The Sorrows of Young Werther, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Contents

Book One

May 4th, 1771

I can't tell you how glad I am to have got away. Dear friend, how strange is the human heart! I love you, we were inseparable—yet I can leave you and be content. I know you will forgive me. Were not all my attachments designed by fate to intimidate a heart like mine? Poor Leonore! But I was not to blame. Was it my fault that, while her headstrong sister charmed and amused me, a passion for me developed in poor Leonore's heart? Yet I ask myself—am I entirely blameless? Did I perhaps encourage her? Didn't I quite frankly enjoy her completely sincere and natural outbursts, which often made the two of us laugh, although there was really nothing laughable about them? Didn't I…oh, what is man made of that he may reproach himself? I shall do better in the future, my dear friend, I promise you. I shall stop dwelling on the petty wrongs of providence, as has been my wont. I intend to enjoy the present and let the past take care of itself. Of course, best of friends, you are right—there would be less misery in this world if man were not so ever-ready to recall past evils rather than put up with the indifferent present. God knows why he is thus constituted!

Please tell my mother that I am doing my best to straighten out her affairs and will give her news of them as soon as I can. I have spoken to my aunt and must say that I didn't find her to be the dreadful vehement woman with the kindest of hearts. I explained my mother's complaint concerning her share of the inheritance, which has been withheld. She gave me the reasons for it and the conditions under

which she would be willing to hand over all of it, which is even more than we are asking. But I really don't feel like reporting about it now. Just tell her that everything will be all right. And in the course of this little transaction, my dear friend, I discovered again that misunderstandings and inertia cause perhaps more to go wrong in this world than slyness and evil intent. In any case, the latter are rarer.

And, by the way, I feel very well here. The solitude in these blissful surroundings is balm to my soul, and with its abundance, the youthful season of spring cheers my heart, which is still inclined to shudder. Every tree, every hedgerow is a bouquet. It makes me wish I were a ladybug and could fly in and out of the sea of wondrous scents and find all my nourishment there.

The town itself is not attractive, but I find ample compensation in the indescribable beauties of nature surrounding it. That was what induced the late Count von M. to set his garden on one of the numerous hillsides that intersect here, forming the loveliest valleys. The garden is not elaborate, and the moment you walk into it you feel that it was designed by a sensitive heart rather than a scientific gardener, a heart that sought to find its enjoyment there. I have shed a few tears myself for the departed gentleman, in the little, broken-down summerhouse that used to be his favorite haunt and now is mine. Soon I will be master of the garden. The gardener seems to think well of me, though I have been here only a few days, and I will see to it that he enjoys working for me.

May 10th

My whole being is filled with a marvelous gaiety, like the sweet spring mornings that I enjoy with all my heart. I am alone and glad to be alive in surroundings such as these, which were created for a soul like mine. I am so happy, best of friends, and so utterly absorbed by the sensations of a peaceful existence that my work suffers from it. I couldn't draw now, not a line, yet was never a better painter. When the mists in my beloved valley steam all around me; when the sun rests on the surface of the impenetrable depths of my forest at noon and only single rays

steal into the inner sanctum; when I lie in the tall grass beside a rushing brook and become aware of the remarkable diversity of a thousand little growing things on the ground, with all their peculiarities; when I can feel the teeming of a minute world amid the blades of grass and the innumerable, unfathomable shapes of worm and insect closer to my heart and can sense the presence of the Almighty, who in a state of continuous bliss bears and sustains us—then, my friend, when it grows light before my eyes and the world around me and the sky above come to rest wholly within my soul like a beloved, I am filled often with yearning and think, if only I could express it all on paper, everything that is housed so richly and warmly within me, so that it might be the mirror of my soul as my soul is the mirror of Infinite God…ah, my dear friend…but I am ruined by it. I succumb to its magnificence.

May 12th

I don't know whether deceptive spirits haunt these parts or whether it is the glowing fantasies of my heart that make everything around me seem so blissful. Just outside town there is a spring to which I feel mysteriously drawn, like Melusina and her sisters.1 You walk down a short slope and at the bottom find yourself facing an archway from which about twenty steps descend to a place where clearest water gushes out of marble rock. The low wall that hems this spot in at the top, the tall trees all around it that conceal the coolness within, all suggest something mysterious. Not a day passes without my spending an hour there. Young girls come from town to fetch water, a simple and very necessary business—in days of old even the daughters of kings used to do it—and as I sit there, a patriarchal atmosphere comes to life all around me. I can see our forefathers meeting and courting at wells like this, and how good spirits hovered over all such places. Whoever can't feel with me has never refreshed himself at a cool spring after a long excursion on a hot summer's day.

May 13th

You ask whether you should send me books. Dear friend, I beg of you—don't. I have no wish to be influenced, encouraged, or inspired any

more. My heart surges wildly enough without any outside influence. What I need is a lullaby, and I have found an abundance of them in my beloved Homer. How often I have to calm my rebellious blood! You have never known anything so wildly fluctuating as this heart of mine. But, dear friend, I don't have to tell you this—you, who have so often witnessed my transitions from grief to extravagant joy, from sweetest melancholy to pernicious passion. I coddle my heart like a sick child and give in to its every whim. But don't tell a soul. There are people who would condemn me for it.

May 15th

The simple folk here already know me and seem to be fond of me, especially the children. At first, when I made efforts to join them and ask questions about this and that, a few thought I was making fun of them and were quite rude. But I didn't let it bother me. I only felt keenly what I have noticed often—that persons of rank tend to keep their cold distance from the common man, as if they feared to lose something by such intimacy. And then, of course, there are those who shrink from all contact with simple people, and the tactless jokesters who talk down to them—they succeed only in making the poor souls more sharply aware than ever of their presumption. I know that we human beings were not created equal and cannot be, but I am of the opinion that he who keeps aloof from the so-called rabble in order to preserve the respect he feels is his due is just as reprehensible as the coward who hides from his enemies because he fears to be defeated by them.

Not long ago I came to the spring and found a young servant girl there. She had put her water jar on the lowest step and was looking around in the hope that a friend might come and help her place it on her head. I walked down the steps and faced her. "Would you like me to help you?" I asked. She blushed and replied, "Oh no, sir!" "Let's not stand on ceremony," I said. She adjusted the pad on her head, I helped her with her pitcher, she thanked me, and up she went!

May 17th

I have met all sorts of people, but I have yet to find the right companionship. I don't know what my attractions are, but many people seem to like me and attach themselves to me. Then it pains me when our paths coincide for only a short way. You ask what the people are like here. All I can say is, as they are everywhere else. There is something coldly uniform about the human race. Most of them have to work for the greater part of their lives in order to live and the little freedom they have left frightens them to such an extent that they will stop at nothing to rid themselves of it. Oh, human destiny!

But really, they are good people. Sometimes, when I forget myself and indulge in a few of the pleasures still left to mankind and sit down at a prettily set table to enjoy myself with them quite naturally and sincerely; or when I arrange a drive or a dance at the appropriate time…things like that…it does me good. The only thing I must not think of is that I am possessed of other potentialities as well, all of them going to waste, and that I have to keep them carefully concealed. And oh, how this constricts my heart! Yet to be misunderstood is the miserable destiny of people like myself.

How I regret that the sweetheart of my youth is no more; how I deplore the fact that I ever knew her! If I had not known her, I could say: "You are a fool. You are looking for something that does not exist." But she was mine. I experienced the warmth of a heart and the nobility of a soul in whose presence I seemed to be more than I was because I was everything I possibly could be. Dear God, was there a facet of my soul then that was not alive? With her I could fully develop that wonderful feeling with which my heart embraces nature. Our relationship was a constant interplay of the most subtle perception, the keenest wit. Even its nuances, right down to occasional outbursts of mischievousness on her part, showed every indication of genius. And now! Alas, the years she was my senior took her to her grave before me. But I will never forget her—not her resolute mind nor her divine tolerance.

A few days ago I met a young man called V., an ingenuous fellow with a very pleasant face. He has just left the university and doesn't consider

himself overly wise, yet thinks he knows more than most people. As far as I can make out, he seems to have been very diligent; in short, he is well informed. He had heard that I sketch a great deal and that I know Greek—staggering accomplishments in these parts—so he came to see me and unloaded his store of wisdom, everything from Batteux to Wood, and De Piles to Winckelmann; and assured me that he had read all of Sulzer's Theory (Part One) and owned a manuscript of Heyne's on "The Study of Antiquity." I let him talk.

I have also met another good fellow, the magistrate of this principality, a forthright, simple man. I have been told that it is perfectly delightful to see him with his children—he has nine! There is a lot of talk about his eldest daughter. He has asked me to visit them, and I shall do so as soon as I can. He resides in one of the Prince's hunting lodges, an hour and a half from here. He was given permission to move there after the death of his wife made it too painful for him to remain at his official residence in town.

Aside from these two, a few curious characters have crossed my path about whom everything is insufferable, especially their efforts to be friendly. Farewell! This letter should please you…it is strictly factual!

May 22nd

The illusion that life is but a dream has occurred to quite a few people, and I feel the same way about it. When I see the limitations imposed on man's powers of action and inquiry and observe how all his efficiency is aimed at nothing but the satisfaction of his needs, which in turn has but one purpose—to prolong his miserable existence—and when I see how all his reassurance on certain aspects of his inquiries is little more than a dreamy resignation, in that he chooses to bedaub the walls of his prison with motley figures and bright prospects—all this, William, makes me mute. I turn in upon myself and find a world there, again more in a spirit of presentiment and dour longing than dramatically or with vitality. Then everything grows hazy in my mind and I go on smiling dreamily at the world.

All learned schoolmasters and tutors are agreed that little children do not know what they want, but no one likes to admit that grown men stumble across this earth like children, not knowing whence they came nor whither they are going, and that a grown man can be just as poor at pursuing the higher aims of life and can be ruled, just like a child, by cookies, cake, and rod. To me all this is quite obvious.

I am perfectly willing to admit—because I know very well what your answer will be—that those people are happiest who live for the moment, like children dragging their dolls around with them, dressing and undressing them, eying the cupboard where Mama keeps the cookies with the greatest respect and, when at long last they get what they want, stuff their cheeks full, chew, swallow, and cry, “More!” Happy creatures! And they are lucky, also, who know how to give high-sounding names to their shabby professions, even to their passions, passing them off as great achievements that will benefit humanity. Any man is well off who can do that. But he who is humble knows very well where it all ends and can see how neatly every contented citizen prunes his little garden to suit his idea of Paradise, with what perseverance even the unhappy man bears his burden, and how all of them have but one thing on their minds—to see the sun shine for one short moment more. Believe me, such a man remains silent and learns how to create his own world by himself, and is happy—as they are—to be alive. And however confused he may be, he always carries in his heart a sweet feeling of freedom in the knowledge that he can leave his prison whenever he likes.

May 26th

You know my old habit of settling down in a place that suits me and of taking refuge there, however primitive it may be. Well, I have found such a spot here.
About an hour away there is a place called Wahlheim.* Its location on the top of a hill is quite unusual, and if you take the footpath that leads to the village, you suddenly find yourself overlooking the entire valley. At the inn a good woman, who is pleasant and lively in spite of her advanced years, serves wine, beer, and coffee; but the crowning glory

of the place are two linden trees that stretch their wide branches over the little green in front of the church, which is surrounded by cottages, barns and farmyards. I don't think I have ever before seen a place which was so secluded and in which I could feel so much at home. I have them bring a table and chair outside for me and there I sit, drinking coffee and reading Homer. When I came upon the place for the first time quite by chance on a beautiful afternoon, I found the spot deserted. Everyone was out in the fields.

Only a boy, about four years old, was sitting on the grass, holding an infant of about six months pressed with both arms tightly to his chest between his feet, thereby forming a sort of armchair for the child. In spite of the alert way he was looking about him out of his dark eyes, he sat perfectly still. The sight amused me. I sat down on a plow that was standing nearby and began, with great enthusiasm, to sketch this little picture of brotherly devotion. I put in the fence, a barn door, and a few dilapidated wagon wheels—everything, just as it was—and found, after an hour had passed, that I had produced a very well-arranged and interesting drawing without really having contributed anything to it. This strengthened my decision to stick to nature in the future, for only nature is infinitely rich and capable of developing a great artist.

There is much to be said for the advantage of rules and regulations, much the same things as can be said in praise of middle-class society—he who sticks to them will never produce anything that is bad or in poor taste, just as he who lets himself be molded by law, order, and prosperity will never become an intolerable neighbor or a striking scoundrel. On the other hand—and people can say what they like—rules and regulations ruin our true appreciation of nature and our powers to express it. Very well, say that I am being too harsh and that rules and regulations merely serve to curb us, cut down the rank vine, etc. Would you like me to give you an example? We can, for instance, apply what I have just said to love. A young man's heart belongs to a certain girl. He spends every hour of the day with her and expends all his strength and his entire fortune on assuring her at every moment that he is all hers. Along comes a Philistine, an official, let us say, and

says to him, “My dear young man, to love is human, but you must love properly.

Arrange your time more circumspectly into time for work, and spend only your hours of recreation with your sweetheart. Count your money and give her a present out of whatever remains after paying for the necessities of life…there is nothing to be said against that, only don’t do it too often…for her birthday, let us say, or her nameday,” etc. If the fellow obeys, you have a worthy young man and I would be willing to advise any Prince to let him head a committee. But as far as love is concerned, that’s finished. And if he is an artist, the same applies to his art. Oh my dear friend, would you like to know why genius so rarely breaks its bonds, why it so seldom bursts upon us like a raging torrent to shatter our astounded souls? My friend, it is because of the sober gentlemen who reside on either side of the river, whose precious little summerhouses, tulip beds, and vegetable gardens would be ruined by it, and who know so well how to build dams and divert all such threatening danger in good time.

May 27th

I see that I was carried away by ecstasy, parable, and oratory and quite forgot to tell you more about the children. I must have sat for at least two hours, lost in contemplation of my work—the sketch I did yesterday will give you a somewhat fragmentary impression of it—when, with the approach of evening, a young woman came toward the children, who still hadn’t moved. She was carrying a basket on her arm and called out to them from a distance, “My, what a good boy you are, Philip!” She nodded to me. I returned her greeting, rose, walked over to her, and asked if she was their mother. She said she was and, giving the older boy a bun, picked up the baby and kissed him in a very pretty display of motherly love. “I told Philip to hold the little one,” she explained, “while I went to town with my older boy to get some white bread and sugar, and a small earthenware dish for the baby’s porridge.” I could see all the things she mentioned in her basket because the lid was up.

“I want to make soup for my Hans this evening.” Hans was the name of the youngest child. “My oldest boy, the rascal, broke the dish yesterday while he was quarreling with Philip over what was left of the cereal.” I asked her where her oldest boy was, and she had just finished telling me that he was chasing a pair of geese in a nearby field, when he came running up to us with a hazel switch for his little brother. I went on chatting with the woman and learned that her husband had set out on a journey to Switzerland to claim an inheritance left him by a cousin. “They were going to cheat him of it,” she explained. “They didn’t reply to his letters so he had to go there himself. I hope nothing has happened to him. I have had no word from him since he left.” I found it difficult to part from the woman. I gave each of the children a penny and gave her one for the little boy, so she could treat him to some white bread with his soup when she went to town again. Then we parted.

Let me tell you something, my dear fellow—when I no longer know how to contain myself, the sight of someone like that, who is content within the narrow confines of her existence, who knows how to get by from day to day, who, when she sees the leaves fall, thinks of nothing but that winter is coming…it stills the tumult in my heart.
Since that day, I have visited Wahlheim often. The children have grown accustomed to me. I give them my sugar when I drink my coffee and share my bread and butter and sour milk with them in the evening. Every Sunday they get their penny, and if I don’t happen to be there after vespers, I leave word with the innkeeper to give it to them. They confide in me, all sorts of things, but what amuses me most is their wildness, and their simple outbursts of self-assertion when they are joined by other children from the village. It wasn’t easy to convince their mother that they were not annoying me in the least.

May 30th

What I said the other day about painting is true also of poetry. It is simply that one should recognize and try to express only what is excellent, and that is saying a great deal in a few words. Today I experienced something that, simply told, could be a beautiful idyll, but

what is poetry, episode, and idyll? Must it always be patchwork when we participate in a revelation of nature?

If you are expecting something very lofty and highly refined after this preamble, then you have been sadly misled again. Nothing more grandiose than a peasant lad produced this lively anticipation in me. I will tell the tale badly, as usual, and as usual you will say that I am exaggerating. It is Wahlheim again, always Wahlheim, where such unique things take place.
A group of people were taking coffee under the linden trees. They did not appeal to me, so I made up an excuse for not joining them. A peasant boy came out of one of the neighboring cottages and busied himself fixing the plow which I sketched a few days ago. I liked his appearance so I accosted him and asked him some questions about himself. We were soon on quite friendly terms, and, as is usual with this type of person, he began to confide in me. He told me that he was in the service of a widow and that he was being treated well there. He talked on and on about her, singing her praises, and it wasn't long before I realized that he was hopelessly in love with her. She was not young, he explained, and her first husband had treated her badly. She therefore did not want to marry again. From what he told it became quite clear how pretty and charming she was, and how much he wished that she would choose him to help her forget her first mistake.

I would have to repeat what he said word for word really to convey to you his attraction to the woman, his love and devotion. Indeed, I would have to be a great poet to reproduce what he said, his attitude, the harmoniousness of his voice, the latent fire in his eyes, as spiritedly as I experienced them. But there are no words for the tenderness expressed by the man as a whole. Anything I might say would be clumsy in comparison. I was especially touched by his fear that I might come to the wrong conclusions about the relationship and doubt her propriety. It was charming to hear him speak of her appearance and figure, to which he was so strongly attracted although she was no longer young. I can recapture it only in the depths of my soul. Never in my life have I witnessed the driving forces of desire and passion so purely expressed. I will even go so far as to say that I have never seen them envisioned

with so much chastity. Don't be vexed if I tell you that I catch fire myself when I recall his innocence and honesty. The thought of his loyalty and tenderness follows me everywhere, and I feel faint with desire myself, as if his passion had been contagious.

Of course I shall try to catch a glimpse of her as soon as possible, or rather, come to think of it, I don't think I shall. I'll do better to continue to visualize her through the eyes of her lover. Who knows…seen with my own, she might not look at all as I see her standing before me now, and why spoil the pretty picture?

June 16th

You want to know why I don't write? You ask me that, you who are supposed to be a learned man? You should know without a word from me that I am well and…oh, let's not beat about the bush. I have met someone who has touched my heart. I have…oh, I don't know what I have!
It is not going to be easy for me to tell you what happened chronologically—that I have met a most endearing creature. I am in high spirits and very happy, therefore no good at all for a factual accounting of affairs.

An angel? Rubbish! That is what every man calls his beloved, isn't it? Yet I am quite incapable of conveying to you how absolutely perfect she is and why she is so absolutely perfect. Let it suffice to say that she has captivated me.

She is naïve yet very sensible; she is kind yet firm, and tranquillity personified as she goes about her daily tasks.
And all I have just written is arrant nonsense and tiresome notions that really don't give you a single one of her traits. Some other time—no, not some other time but right now I am going to tell you about it. If I don't do it now, I never will. Because, to be quite frank, since I started writing to you I have put down my pen three times to see that my horse was saddled so that I could ride over to visit her. Although I swore to myself this morning that I would not go there today, I find myself

constantly wandering over to the window to note how high the sun still stands in the sky.

There. Nothing to be done about it. I simply had to go and see her, and here I am again, William. I shall have my supper now and write to you. What joy it is to see her surrounded by a swarm of charming, lively children, her eight brothers and sisters!

If I go on like this, you won't know much more when I am through than you did at the beginning. Very well, then, listen. I will do my best to give you the full details.
I wrote to you not long ago that I had made the acquaintance of Magistrate S. and how he asked me to visit him soon at his retreat, or rather, in his little private kingdom. I didn't do anything about it at the time and might never have gone if chance had not given me the opportunity to discover what a treasure lay hidden in that quiet spot.

Some of our young people had arranged a dance in the country, and I decided to go. I asked one of the young ladies here—a nice, good-looking but rather insignificant girl—to go with me, and it was agreed that I order a carriage for us and her cousin and that we pick up Charlotte S. on the way. "You are going to meet a very pretty girl," my partner told me, as we drove through a clearing to the lodge. "Watch out that you don't fall in love with her," her cousin said. "And why shouldn't I fall in love with her?" I wanted to know. "Because she is engaged," my partner explained, "to a very worthy man who is away just now on business. His father died and he has to attend to the settlement of a quite considerable estate." The information did not make much impression on me.

As we drove into the courtyard, the sun was low above the hills. It was oppressive, and the women were afraid that the leaden clouds gathering on the horizon presaged a thunderstorm. I pretended to know much more than I do about the weather and succeeded in reassuring the ladies, although I was beginning to wonder myself if our festivities were not going to be upset.

I had already alighted from the carriage when a servant girl, who had come to the gate, begged us to wait a moment. “Miss Lotte” would be out right away. I walked across the courtyard toward the attractive house, and when I had gone up the steps and through a doorway, I came upon the most charming sight imaginable. Six children, from about eleven to two, were swarming around a very pretty girl of medium height.

She had on a simple white dress with pale pink bows on the sleeves and at her breast, and she was holding a loaf of black bread and cutting a slice for every one of her little ones, according to their ages and appetites. She gave each his share with the most enchanting graciousness, and the children cried out their “thank you’s” to her absolutely at their ease, stretching out their little hands for their slice before she had even had a chance to cut it. Then they jumped off happily with their supper or, each according to his nature, walked away quietly in the direction of the courtyard to see the strange persons and the carriage in which their Lotte would soon drive away.
“I must apologize,” she said, “that you had to come in for me and that I am keeping the ladies waiting, but dressing, and all the little household duties that had to be attended to before leaving, made me forget to give my children their supper, and they don’t want anyone to give it to them but me.”

I said something, a casual compliment, but all the while my whole being was absorbed with the sight of her, the sound of her voice, her behavior. When she ran into her room to fetch her gloves and fan, I barely had time to recover my composure. The little ones eyed me suspiciously with sidelong glances, and kept their distance. I went up to the youngest, the fairest child you could imagine. He drew away from me, but just then Lotte came out of her room and said, “Shake hands with your cousin, Louis,” and the boy did, quite naturally, and I could not resist kissing him heartily in spite of his runny little nose. “Cousin?” I said, holding out my hand to take hers. “Do I merit being a relative?” “Oh,” she said, with a bright smile, “we have so many cousins. It would be sad if you were the worst among them.” As she was leaving, she told Sophie, the next oldest, a girl of about eleven, to take good care of the

children and best greetings to her father on his return from his ride. She asked the children to obey their sister, Sophie, just as they would obey her, and a few said they would, but one bright little blond girl of about six declared that it would not be like obeying her and “we should rather have you.” The two oldest boys had climbed up on the box, and when I interceded, were given permission to drive with us as far as the forest if they promised not to tease one another and held on tight.

We had just settled down, and the women had finished greeting each other and exchanging the correct remarks about the others’ clothes and hats and given the people they were going to meet a thorough going-over, when Lotte asked the coachman to stop and let the boys off. They insisted on kissing her hand again, the older boy with a tenderness that seems to come naturally to boys of fifteen; the younger was much more impetuous and carefree about it. She sent her love to the little ones again, and we drove on.

The cousin asked whether Lotte had read the book she had sent her recently. “No,” Lotte said, “I don’t like it. You may have it back. I didn’t like the one you sent me before that, either.” When I asked her what the books were, and she told me, I was astonished.* Altogether, I found that everything she said displayed a resolute character, and with every word she spoke I could see some new attraction in her and a fresh radiance in her face, which soon seemed free of all constraint, because she saw that I understood her.

“When I was younger,” she said, “all I liked to read was novels. I can’t tell you how happy it used to make me when I could curl up in a corner on a Sunday and participate heart and soul in the joys and sorrows of some Miss Jenny2 or other. I must say that I still like to read that sort of thing, but since I seldom have the opportunity to read, it must be something I can really enjoy. And I like those writers best who help me find my world again, where the sort of things happen that happen all around me, and the story is as interesting and sympathetic as my own life at home, which may not be paradise but is, on the whole, a source of quite inexplicable joy to me.”

I did my best to hide the emotions her words aroused in me. I didn't succeed very well because, when I heard her speak casually and very candidly about The Vicar of Wakefield and about——* I was quite beside myself and told her all I knew of them, and only after quite some time had passed, and Lotte turned suddenly to address the others, did I notice that they had been sitting there goggle-eyed, as if they weren't sitting there at all! The cousin looked down her nose at me several times, but I didn't care.

The conversation turned to the joy of dancing. "If a passion for dancing is sinful," Lotte said, "then I cheerfully admit to it. I don't know anything I would rather do than dance. When something is troubling me and I can sit down at my poor old piano—it needs tuning badly—and play a contredanse, everything is all right again."

I could not take my eyes off her dark eyes as she chattered; I could not look away from her animated mouth, her bonny cheeks; I was lost utterly in the infectious good spirits of everything she had to say, sometimes without even hearing the words with which she expressed it! That will give you some idea, since, after all, you know me well. In short, when we stopped in front of the pavilion I got out of the carriage like a dreamer, so lost in the twilit world around me that I scarcely noticed the music floating down to us from the illuminated ballroom.

The cousin and Lotte's partners, two gentlemen called Andran and N.N.—who can remember names?—met us at the entrance, appropriated their young ladies, and I led mine up the staircase.
One minuet followed another, and I asked one young lady after another to dance with me and it was always the most unattractive ones, of course, who would not end the figure. Lotte and her partner opened a quadrille, and you can imagine how delighted I was when the time came for them to start a figure with us. You should see her dance! She is so completely absorbed by motion, she dances with her whole heart, body, and soul. The result is harmony, so carefree and natural, as if there were nothing to life but dancing, as if she never gave anything else a thought—and I am sure that in such moments everything else is gone from her mind.

I asked her for the second contredanse. She replied that she could give me the third and with the most engaging frankness assured me that she liked to dance the allemande.3 “It is customary here,” she explained, “to dance the allemande with your escort. But my young man doesn’t waltz very well and won’t mind a bit if I relieve him of the obligation. Your partner can’t waltz either and doesn’t like to, so if you want to dance the allemande with me, why don’t you ask my partner for permission, and I will go and speak to your young lady about it?” This was agreed upon and our partners entertained each other while Lotte and I danced.

So that is how it all began. For a while we were simply delighted with the interlacing of our arms as we danced together. How charming and fleeting was her every move! And when it was time for the waltz and the couples began revolving around each other like spheres there was quite a bit of confusion; at any rate, there was at first, because so few knew how to waltz. We were clever—we left the floor to the others, and when the clumsiest ones had had enough, we joined in and with Andran and his partner were the last couples on the floor. I can’t recall ever having felt so light. I was transported! To hold the dearest creature in the world in my arms and fly through the room with her until everything around me was lost and…William, to be frank, I swore to myself then and there that the girl whom I loved and to whom I therefore had certain rights should never waltz with anyone but me, and if it should prove to be my downfall! Can you understand me?

We took a few turns around the ballroom to catch our breath; then she sat down. The oranges I had managed to procure for us—they were the last ones left—were most refreshing, except for the fact that I felt a stab in the region of my heart every time she graciously gave a piece to a greedy girl sitting next to her.
During the third quadrille, we were the second couple. As we danced down the row I was conscious of nothing but her arm in mine and the look on her face, which was so frankly suffused with the purest pleasure. We passed a woman who had attracted my attention before because of the kindly expression on a face no longer young. She looked

at Lotte, lifted a warning finger and, as we flew by, said the name "Albert" twice, with emphasis.

"Who is Albert?" I asked. "If I may be so bold as to inquire."
Lotte was about to reply, when we had to separate for the figure eight, and I thought I could detect a certain reflectiveness in her features when our paths crossed again. "Why shouldn't you know?" she said as she gave me her hand for the promenade. "Albert is a good man, and I suppose you might say I am engaged to him." This, of course, should not have come as a surprise to me; the ladies had mentioned it on the way over. Still it came as a complete surprise because I had somehow not connected it with her, who had now become so precious to me. At any rate, it served only to confuse me utterly. I became involved with the wrong couple, the result was chaos, and it took a great deal of Lotte's presence of mind and a lot of pulling and readjusting to get all of us in orderly motion again.

The lightning, which had been noticeable on the horizon for some time—I had tried to assure everyone that it was only heat lightning—became more and more violent, and the rumbling of thunder began to drown out the music long before the dance was over. Three of the ladies left the dance floor, their partners followed them, the restlessness became general, and the music stopped.

If an accident or some disaster surprises us when we are enjoying ourselves, it naturally makes a stronger impression on us than usual, partly because of the contrast, which makes itself keenly felt, but also—and all the more strongly—because our sensibilities are open wide to all feeling and we can therefore be impressed more acutely. At any rate, I attribute the weird expressions and behavior of many of the women to this. The cleverest one very wisely sat down in a corner with her back to the window and held her hands over her ears; another fell on her knees in front of her and buried her head in the other's lap; a third pushed her way unceremoniously between the two and threw her arms around her sister, the tears streaming from her eyes.

Many of the ladies begged to be taken home; others, who knew even less what they were doing, didn't have enough sense left to parry the impertinences of some of our young blades, who seemed anxious to intercept the prayers that rose to the lips of the frightened women and were actually meant for Heaven. A few of the gentlemen went downstairs to smoke their pipes in peace, and the rest were only too pleased to take advantage of the innkeeper's good suggestion to move into a room where the windows were shuttered and draped. All of us had scarcely assembled, when Lotte busied herself with making a circle of chairs, and as soon as everyone had sat down at her request, she suggested that we play a game.

I could see a few purse their lips and wriggle in happy anticipation of a smacking kiss as forfeit. "We are going to play numbers," she said. "Now listen carefully! I will go around the circle from right to left and you will count in the same direction. Each one must say the next number when it is his turn and you must count fast, fast as lightning. Whoever hesitates or says the wrong number gets a box on the ears. And we will count to a thousand."

What an amusing sight it was! She walked the circle with her arms outstretched. "One," said the first person she passed; the fellow next to him said, "Two"; the next girl, "Three"; and so on. Then she began to move faster, and someone missed…ptch!…a box on the ears. That made the fellow sitting next to him laugh…ptch!…he got one, too. And faster and faster. I was boxed on the ears twice, and with secret delight felt that she had boxed my ears harder than any of the others. General laughter and commotion broke up the game before she could count to a thousand.

The storm was over. Those who wished to be alone withdrew, and I followed Lotte into the dance hall. On the way she said, "The game made them forget all about the weather." I couldn't think of anything to say, and she went on, "I was terribly frightened but as I pretended to be brave to encourage the others, I suddenly felt courageous."

We walked over to the window. It was still thundering in the distance, the blessed rain was falling on the land, and a most refreshing scent rose up to us with a rush of warm air. She stood there, leaning on her elbows, her gaze penetrating the countryside; she looked up at the sky, at me, and I could see tears in her eyes. She laid her hand on mine and said, “Klopstock.” I knew at once of what she was thinking—his magnificent ode4—and was lost in the emotions that this one word aroused in me. I bent down and kissed her hand, and now there were tears in my eyes too as I looked into hers again. Oh, noble poet, if you could have seen the adoration in those eyes! I hope I need never have to hear your name, so oft profaned, spoken again by any other lips!

June 19th

I don’t know how far I got in my last letter; all I know is that it was two o’clock when I finally went to bed and if I could have talked to you instead of having to write, I would probably have kept you up until dawn.

I don’t think I have told you yet what happened on our way home from the dance and I don’t really feel like writing about it today, but I will. There was the most marvelous sunrise. The trees were wet, the fields refreshed, our chaperones nodding…. Lotte asked me if I didn’t want to close my eyes, too…. I should not stand on ceremony with her. “As long as I can look into your eyes,” I said, looking at her steadfastly, “there is no danger of my falling asleep.” And we stayed awake, both of us, until we arrived at her gate. The maid opened the door softly, and in reply to her query assured Lotte that her father and the children were well and still asleep. Then I left her, with the request that I might see her again that very day. She agreed, and I rode over to see her. Since then sun, moon, and stars can do what they will—I haven’t the faintest notion whether it is day or night. The world around me has vanished.

June 21st

I am experiencing the kind of happiness that God dispenses only to his saints. Whatever is yet to come, I shall never be able to say that I have

not felt the greatest, the purest joy life can hold. You know my beloved Wahlheim. I have moved there bag and baggage. From Wahlheim I can be with Lotte in half an hour; in Wahlheim I can be myself and experience every happiness known to man.

Who would have thought, when I chose Wahlheim as a goal for my walks, that it lay so close to heaven? How often I have seen on my wanderings, sometimes from a hillside, sometimes from the opposite side of the river, the hunting lodge that now houses all my desires.

Dear William, I have given a great deal of thought to man's desire for expansion and his urge to explore and roam the face of the earth, and then again, I think about his inner impetus to surrender willingly to the restrictions imposed by life and to travel in the rut of routine living, never giving a thought to what goes on to right or left.
It is truly marvelous—when I came here first and looked down into the valley from this hilltop—how the entire region attracted me. There…a little forest land…oh, to lose oneself in its shade…. There, a mountaintop…oh, to see the panorama from it! The rolling hills and enchanting valleys…I yearned to lose myself in them.

I would hurry down, but return home without having found what I had hoped to find. Distance is like the future. A vast twilit entity lies before us, our perception is lost in it and becomes as blurred as our eyesight, and we yearn, ah, we yearn to surrender all of our Self and let ourselves be filled to the brim with a single, tremendous, magnificent emotion, but alas…when we hurry to the spot, when There becomes Here, everything is as it was before and we are left standing in our poverty and constraint, our souls longing for the balm that has eluded us. Thus the most restless vagabond yearns in the end to return to his native land and find in his cottage, in the arms of his wife, with his children around him, and in the occupations that provide for them, the joys he sought vainly elsewhere.

When I ride out to Wahlheim in the morning with the rising sun and pick some sweet young peas in the garden behind the inn and string them and read a little Homer as I do so; when I then go into the small

kitchen and get a pan and melt some butter and put the pan on the fire to cook them and cover them and sit down beside them to toss them a little every now and then—I can feel so vividly how Penelope's high-spirited suitors slaughtered oxen and swine and carved them up and roasted them. Nothing can fill me with such true, serene emotion as any features of ancient, primitive life like this. Thank God I know how to fit them into my life without conceit. Oh, how thankful I am that my heart can feel the simple, harmless joys of the man who brings to the table a head of cabbage he has grown himself, and in a single moment enjoys, not only the vegetable, but all the fine days and fresh mornings since he planted it, the mild evenings when he watered it, and the pleasure he felt while watching it grow.

June 29th

The day before yesterday the doctor from our town came out to the lodge and found me on the floor with several of Lotte's children on top of me, the rest teasing me. He saw me tickling them and succeeding generally in creating an uproar. The doctor is a dogmatic puppet, constantly repleating his cuffs as he talks and pulling out a loose thread here and there. Of course, he found my behavior undignified for a man of my intellect. I could tell by the way he turned up his nose at the whole thing. I didn't let it bother me, but as he went about his more sensible business, I rebuilt the children's house of cards, which they had toppled; whereupon he went about town telling everyone that the magistrate's children had always been wild, but now Werther was ruining them completely.

Yes, dear William, nothing is dearer to me than children. As I watch them and see in everything they do the seed of all the virtue and strength they will one day need, when I recognize future steadfastness and firmness in their present obstinacy, good humor and the ability to pass lightly over the perils on this earth in their mischief, everything so unspoiled, everything still whole—then I want to repeat the Golden Rule of the teacher of mankind: "Unless ye become as one of these…" And then, my good friend, we treat the little creatures, who are our equals, and whom we should use as models, as our inferiors. They are

not supposed to have a will of their own. Why not? Don't we demand free will? What gives us the right to make such a decision? Because we are older and wiser? Dear God in Heaven, Thou dost look down upon old children and young children, and that's all there is to it! And Thy Divine Son told us long ago which of them pleaseth Thee more. But they believe in Him and don't hear Him; and that, too, is an old story. And they bring up their children to be like themselves and…farewell, William! I don't want to ramble on about it.

July 1st

My poor heart, which is worse off than many a heart wasting away on a sickbed, tells me what Lotte must mean to a sick person. She is going to spend a few days in town at the bedside of a worthy woman who, according to the doctor, is about to die. He wants Lotte at her side during the poor creature's final hours.

Last week I went with Lotte to visit the rector of St.——, a little town in the mountains about an hour away. We arrived there at four o'clock. Lotte took her two sisters with her. As we drove into the courtyard of the rectory, which lies in the shade of two tall walnut trees, the old man was sitting on a bench outside the door, and when he set eyes on Lotte he seemed to come to life. He forgot to use his knobby cane and rose to come forward to greet her without it.

She ran to him and saw to it that he sat down again by the simple expedient of sitting down beside him herself. She brought him greetings from her father and made a fuss of his horrid, dirty little youngest boy, the joy of his old age. You should have seen her, how she kept the old man amused, raising her voice so that his deaf ears might hear her; how she talked about robust young people who had died quite suddenly and praised Karlsbad to the skies and his decision to spend his summers there from now on. She elaborated on how much better she thought he looked and remarked that he seemed to have more strength than when she had seen him last. Meanwhile I paid my respects to the vicar's wife.

The old man became more and more lively. Of course I had to admire the magnificent nut trees that were offering us such delightful shade, so he began, a little clumsy, to tell us their story.

“We don’t know who planted the old one,” he began. “Some say it was this clergyman, others say it was another. But the younger tree over there is as old as my wife, fifty in October. Her father planted it in the morning of the day she was born…she was born toward evening. He was my predecessor here, and I can’t tell you how much the tree meant to him. Naturally, it means just as much to me. My wife was sitting on a bench underneath it, twenty-seven years ago, when I walked into this yard for the first time, just a poor student.”

Lotte asked after his daughter. She was told that the girl had gone out to the workers in the field with Herr Schmidt, and the old man went on with his story—how the vicar had become fond of him, then his daughter, too; how he had been curate first, then vicar. He was scarcely done when his young daughter came through the garden with the aforementioned Herr Schmidt. She greeted Lotte warmly, and, I must say, she was attractive—a lively brunette with an excellent figure who would have understood very well how to help anyone pass a short stay in the country. Her admirer—Herr Schmidt quite obviously was just that—turned out to be a sensitive and quiet young man who did not seem to want to join in our conversation, although Lotte did her best to include him.

What distressed me most about him was that I thought I could read in his expression that stubbornness and ill humor, rather than any limitations of the mind, prevented him from expressing himself. Unfortunately, this became very obvious later when we went for a walk, for whenever Friederike happened to walk with Lotte or me, the young man’s face—which was swarthy anyhow—darkened so visibly that Lotte plucked at my sleeve and gave me to understand I was paying too much attention to the girl. Now there is nothing that irritates me more than when people torment each other, especially when young people in the prime of their lives, who should be open to all joys, spoil the few good days they have with a dour mien and only

find out too late that they have wasted something irretrievable. The whole thing rankled within me, and when we returned to the rectory toward evening and were seated around a table drinking milk, and the conversation turned to the joys and sorrows of life, I simply had to take over the conversation and hold forth against the moodiness of man.

“People often complain,” I said, “that there are too few good days and too many bad ones, and as far as I can see, they do so unjustly. If we always kept our hearts wide open to receive the good things God has in store for us daily, we would soon have strength enough to bear the bad when they come.”

“But our spirit is not ours to shape,” the vicar’s wife objected. “Think how much depends on our bodies. If we don’t feel well everything seems out of joint.”
I agreed with her. “So let us look upon moodiness as a sickness,” I replied, “and ask ourselves if there be not a cure for it.”

“That’s a thought,” Lotte said. “I for one believe that a great deal depends on us. I know that it does from my own experience. If something is bothering or depressing me, I get up and hum a few dance tunes, up and down the garden, and right away it is gone.”

“That’s just what I was trying to express,” I said. “Ill humor is like indolence, because it is a form of indolence. Our natures tend toward it. But if we can muster the strength to pull ourselves together, work can be made easy and we can find true pleasure in activity.”

Friederike was listening attentively, and now her young man interrupted me, declaring that one was not always in control of oneself, least of all of one’s feelings.
“But what we are talking about,” I explained, “is a disagreeable feeling, and everyone should be thankful to be rid of it. And no one knows how strong he is until he has tried. After all, if a man is ill, he goes to one doctor after another and puts up with any restrictions and the bitterest medicine to preserve his good health.”

I noticed that the good old man was straining to hear what was being said so he could take part in the discussion. I therefore raised my voice and addressed him. “Our sermons speak out against so many vices,” I said, “but I have never heard a word spoken from the pulpit against ill humor.”*

“The preachers in the cities should see to that,” the old man replied. “Our peasants are good-humored by nature. Still, it wouldn’t do any harm from time to time, and it would certainly be a good lesson for my wife—and for the magistrate!”

Everyone laughed, and the old man joined in the laughter, until a fit of coughing put an end to the discussion for a while. The young man picked up the thread again. “You called ill humor a vice,” he said. “Wouldn’t you say that was exaggerating?”

“Not at all,” I replied. “Anything that does harm to oneself or one’s neighbor deserves to be called a vice. Isn’t it sad enough that we cannot make each other happy? Must we rob one another of the pleasure every heart can sometimes provide for itself? Show me the person who is ill-humored yet good enough to bear it alone, without destroying the happiness around him. Isn’t ill humor actually an inner annoyance with our own unworthiness, a dislike of ourselves, and isn’t it somehow always connected with the envy that is egged on by our own foolish vanity? We see happy people whom we are not making happy, and we cannot bear it.”

Lotte smiled at me because she could see how the topic touched me, and a tear in Friederike’s eye spurred me on. “What wretches they are, those who take advantage of the power they have over the heart of another,” I said, “and rob him of the simple joys within him! Not all the gifts in the world nor any favor can compensate for a moment of one’s personal pleasure that has been made bitter by the envious ill temper of this tyrant of ours!”

My heart was full. Memories of things past brought the tears to my eyes too. “If only man would tell himself daily: You owe your friends

nothing but to leave them their joys and increase their happiness by sharing it with them. Can you give them a little comfort when they are tormented by fear? And when the poor creature, whose soul you undermined in fairer days, is struggling with his last, fateful illness and lies there pitiful in his exhaustion, looking up at the sky, all feeling spent, the dew of death on his pale brow, and you stand by his deathbed like one damned, with the profound feeling that with everything in your power you can do nothing to help, and you are gripped by a dreadful fear and would give anything in the world if only you could imbue his perishing soul with one ounce of strength…"

As I spoke, the memory of such a scene overwhelmed me. I covered my face with my handkerchief and left the little group and was only able to control myself again when Lotte called out to me that we had to leave. On the way back, she scolded me for my too intense participation in all things going on around me and warned that it would lead to my ruination. I was, please, she begged, to think of myself. Angel! For you I have to live!

July 6th

She is with her dying friend constantly and is always the same: ever-present, ever lovely. Wherever her eyes fall, she eases pain and brings joy. Yesterday, she went for a walk with Marianne and little Amelia. I knew about it and met them, and all of us walked on together. About an hour and a half later we were approaching town again and we came to the spring that meant so much to me once and now means a thousand times more. Lotte sat down on the low stone wall; the rest of us stood around her. I looked about me, and the time that I was alone came to life again within me. "Beloved spring," I thought, "since then I have not rested in thy cool aura. Sometimes, when hurrying by, I have not even given thee a glance." I looked down and could see Amelia carefully carrying up a cup of water; I looked at Lotte and realized what she meant to me. Meanwhile, Amelia arrived with the cup and Marianne wanted to take it from her. "No," the child said, with the sweetest expression, "no…Lotte, you must drink first."

I was so entranced with the child's candor and goodness that I could express it in no other way than by picking her up and kissing her fervently, whereupon she immediately squealed and began to cry. "You shouldn't have done that," Lotte said.
I was abashed.

"Come, Melly," she said, taking the child by the hand and leading her down the steps. "Wash yourself in the fresh spring water quickly, and it won't matter at all." I stood there and watched the child rub her cheeks energetically with her little wet hands, so confident that the spring's miraculous powers would wash away all impurity, and she would not have to fear the shame of growing an ugly mustache. Lotte said that was enough; still the child went on scrubbing her cheeks as if more could only be better than little. William, I assure you that I never attended a baptism with more reverence, and when Lotte came up the steps again I longed to throw myself at her feet, as one throws oneself down before a prophet who has just washed his people clean of sin.

That evening my heart so overflowed with joy that I could not resist describing the event to a gentleman, a sensible fellow who, I was therefore sure, had a good understanding of human nature. But that was a mistake. He was of the opinion that Lotte was wrong—children should never be misled. Such nonsense could lead to innumerable errors and superstitions, and a child could not be protected from such things early enough in life. It occurred to me suddenly that only a week ago the man had had one of his children baptized, so I let it pass, but in my heart I remained true to my belief: We should treat children as God treats us when He lets us go our way in a transport of delightful illusions.

July 8th

William, we are children! Have you any idea how one can pine for a glance from one's beloved? We are children!
We visited Wahlheim—the ladies drove out—and on one of our walks I thought I could see in Lotte's eyes…I am a fool! Forgive me. But you should see those eyes.

I cannot write long. I am so sleepy my eyelids are drooping, but listen…the ladies were getting into the carriage. Young W., Selstadt, Andran, and I were standing beside it, chatting about nothing in particular. I tried to catch Lotte's eye. She was looking from one man to the other, but not at me, me, me, who alone stood there waiting for her glance. My heart was bidding her a thousand farewells, and she didn't even see me! The carriage passed us, and there were tears in my eyes. I looked after her and could see her bonnet as she leaned out and turned to look at—at whom? And that, in brief, describes my uncertainty, and my consolation. Perhaps she did look back at me. Perhaps. Good night. Oh William, what a child I am!

July 10th

You should see what an idiot I am when she is mentioned in public. And when someone asks how I like her! Like her? I can't abide the word. What kind of person could possibly "like" Lotte? What kind of person could possibly not be completely fulfilled by her? Like her! The other day someone asked me if I liked Ossian!5
Frau M. is very ill. I pray for her as I share Lotte's anxiety. I see her only rarely, at the house of a friend, and today she told me something very strange.

Old M., it seems, is a miserly, avaricious fellow who has tormented his wife throughout their life together and forced her to live exceedingly modestly, but the good woman always managed somehow. The other day, when the doctor had declared that her last hour had come, she sent for her husband—Lotte was in the room—and addressed him thus: "I have a confession to make that might prevent confusion and chagrin after my death. Until now I have kept house as frugally and properly as possible and I am sure you will forgive me for having deceived you these past thirty years. At the outset of our married life, you set aside a very modest sum for our household needs.

As our mode of living expanded and business prospered, you could not be persuaded to increase my weekly household allowance to match our

circumstances; in short—when we were most prosperous, you insisted that I manage on seven guilders a week. I accepted the seven guilders without demur and took the rest of what was needed out of our receipts, because I felt no one would ever suspect your wife of robbing the till. I never wasted any of it and would have gone to my rest happily now without mentioning it, were it not for the fact that whoever has to care for your household after me will not know how to manage, and you will insist, of course, that your wife always made do with the sum."

Lotte and I then spoke about the incredible fatuousness of a man who does not become suspicious when his wife manages on seven guilders a household that obviously betrays the fact that twice as much is being spent. But I have known people who accepted the widow's never-failing cruse of oil6 without surprise.

July 13th

No, I am not deceived—I can read true sympathy in her dark eyes. Yes, I feel…and here I know I can trust my heart…that she…dare I, can I express heaven in a few words? That she loves me.
Loves me. And how precious I have become to myself, how I—I can say this to you, who have understanding for such emotions—how I worship at my own altar since I know that she loves me!
Is this presumption or fact, I ask myself? I don't know the man who, I fear, has a place in Lotte's heart, yet when she speaks of her betrothed with so much warmth and love, then I am a man degraded, robbed of his honor, title, and sword.

July 16th

Oh, how wildly my blood courses through my veins when, by chance, my hand touches hers or our feet touch under the table! I start away as if from a fire, a mysterious power draws me back, and I become dizzy…and in her artlessness and innocence she has no idea how much such little intimacies torment me. When she puts her hand in mine in the course of a conversation and, absorbed by what we are talking about, draws closer to me, and the heavenly breath from her lips

touches mine…then I feel I must sink to the ground as if struck by lightning. William, if ever I should presume to take advantage of this heaven on earth, this trust in me…you know what I mean. But I am not depraved. Weak, yes, weak God knows I am…and can this not be called depraved?

She is sacred to me. All lust is stilled in her presence. I can't explain how I feel when I am with her. It is as if every nerve in my body were possessed by my soul. There is a certain melody…she plays it on the piano like an angel, so simply yet with so much spirit. It is her favorite song, and I am restored from all pain, confusion, and vagaries with the first note.
Nothing that has ever been said about the magic power of music seems improbable to me now. How that simple melody touches me! And how well she knows when she should play it, often at moments when I feel like blowing my brains out! Then all delusions and darkness within me are dispelled, and I breathe freely again.

July 18th

William, what is life worth without love? A magic lantern without light. All you have to do is put in the light, and it produces the loveliest colored pictures on a white wall. And if there is nothing more to it than these oh, so transient phantoms, always it denotes happiness when we stand in front of it like naïve boys and are enchanted by the magical visions. Today an unavoidable gathering prevented me from visiting Lotte. What could I do? I sent over my servant, if only to have someone about me who had been near her! The impatience with which I waited for him and the joy, when I saw him return, are indescribable! I would have liked to embrace and kiss him, but was, of course, too ashamed.

They say that when the stone of Bonona is exposed to the rays of the sun it attracts them and shines for a while into the night. That was how the boy affected me. The idea that she had looked at his face, at his cheeks, at the buttons on his waistcoat and the collar of his jacket, made every one of these things sacred and invaluable to me. At that point I wouldn't have let anyone have the boy for a thousand talers! I

felt simply wonderful in his presence! Dear God, William, don't laugh at me! Do you suppose it is illusory to be so happy?

July 19th

I shall see her today! When I awaken in the morning and look blithely into the sunlight, I cry out, "I shall see her today!" And I don't have another wish for the next twenty-four hours. Everything—everything, I tell you—is lost in this one anticipation!

July 20th

I can't agree with you that I should go to——with our ambassador. I don't like subordination, and we know only too well that the man is obnoxious. My mother, you say, would like to see me actively employed. I have to laugh. Am I not actively employed now, and does it make any difference, really, whether I am sorting peas or lentils? Everything on earth can be reduced to a triviality and the man who, to please another, wears himself out for money, honor, what you will, is a fool.

July 24th

I realize that it means a great deal to you that I do not neglect my sketching, so I would rather say nothing at all about it except confess that I have not done much work since I met Lotte.

I have never been happier. My appreciation of nature, down to the most insignificant stone or blade of grass, has never been more keen or profound, and yet…I don't know how to explain it to you. My powers of expression are weak and everything is so hazy in my mind that all contours seem to elude me. I tell myself that if I had clay or wax, I could shape them. And if this mood prevails, I shall certainly get hold of some clay and model it, even if all I turn out is a patty cake!

I have started three times to draw Lotte and three times made a complete mess of it. This irritates me, because only a short while ago I

was quite a good portraitist. So I did a silhouette of her, and that will have to suffice.

July 26th

Yes, dear Lotte, I shall attend to everything, only please give me more errands to do and give them to me more often. And one more request: no more sand, please, on the little notes you write to me. Today I pressed your letter to my lips and felt the grains on my teeth.

July 26th

Every now and then I make up my mind to see her less often—as if anyone could possibly adhere to such a rule! Every day I give in to temptation and swear that tomorrow I will stay away, but when tomorrow comes, I of course find an absolutely irresistible reason for going to see her, and before I know it—there I am! Perhaps it is because she said the evening before, "Will you be coming tomorrow?" So who could stay away? Or she asked me to attend to something, and I tell myself that the only proper thing to do is go personally to inform her that it has been done. Or the day is so beautiful that I go to Wahlheim and, once I am there…well, after all, she is only half an hour away. I am too close to her aura…whoosh! and I am there.
My grandmother used to tell a fairy tale about the Magnet Mountain: The ships that came too close to it were robbed suddenly of all their metal; even the nails flew to the mountain, and the miserable sailors foundered in a crash of falling timber.

Albert has come back, and I shall leave. He might be the best, the most noble man in the world, and I would be glad to subordinate myself to him in any capacity whatsoever, but I would find it insufferable to see him take possession of so much perfection. To take possession…let it suffice, William…her betrothed has returned—a worthy, kindly man whom one simply has to like. Fortunately, I was not present when he arrived; it would have torn my heart to shreds. And he is an honorable man. Not once has he kissed Lotte in my presence. May God reward him for it! And I have to love him for the way he respects the girl. He

seems to like me and I have the feeling that I have Lotte to thank for this rather than any impression of his own, because in things like that women have great intuition and they are right—it is always to their advantage to keep two admirers in harmony with each other, however rarely it may occur.

Meanwhile, I cannot help respecting Albert. His easygoing behavior contrasts strangely with my restlessness, which cannot be concealed. He is a man of strong feelings and knows what a treasure he has in Lotte. He seems to be a man of good spirits too, and you know that, as far as I am concerned, moroseness is a man's greatest vice. He apparently takes me for a sensible fellow, and my devotion to Lotte, my warm pleasure in everything in which she takes part, only increases his sense of triumph and makes him love her more!

I have no idea whether or not he sometimes plagues her with little outbursts of jealousy—we will have to leave that point undecided—but if I were in his shoes, I don't think I would be entirely free of this base emotion.

Be that as it may, the joyous days with Lotte are over. What shall I call it? Folly? Delusion? It does not need a name. The dilemma speaks for itself. I knew all I know now before he came; I knew that I had no claim to her and demanded none, or let us say, I did not desire her more than one simply has to desire anyone so altogether lovely. And now, idiot that I am, I stare wide-eyed with astonishment at my rival, who has come at last to take the girl away!

I grit my teeth and scoff at my misery and would scoff even more if anyone dared tell me to resign myself to the situation because there is nothing to be done about it. Just keep such straw men away from me! I tear through the woods and when I have gone as far as I can and find Lotte sitting beside Albert in the summerhouse in her little garden, I behave like an idiot and indulge in all sorts of absurdities. I don't even make sense! "For heaven's sake," she told me today, "please, I beg of you, no more scenes like the one in the garden last night. You are perfectly horrible when you are trying to be funny." Just between you

and me, I watch out for the times when he is busy and then…whoosh, there I am and when I find her alone I feel perfectly wonderful!

August 8th

I assure you, dear William, that I did not mean you when I took those men to task who demand from us resignation to an unavoidable fate. It never occurred to me that you might be of the same opinion. And actually you are right. But, my good friend, in this world things can be settled with an either-or attitude only very rarely. Feelings and behavior overshadow each other with an effect as varied as the difference between hawk- and pug-nose. So you won't be offended with me, I hope, if I concede your entire argument and try to squeeze through between the either and the or!

You say that I must "either" have hope of winning Lotte "or" I must have none. Very well. In the first case I am to try to grasp the fulfillment of my wish and make my hopes come true; in the second I am to pull myself together and try to rid myself of this miserable emotion that must in the end utterly debilitate me. Dear William, you put it so well, and it is easily advised. But can you demand of an unfortunate human who is dying by inches of an insidious disease that he should end his misery with one knife thrust? Wouldn't you rather say that his misfortune weakens him to such an extent that it must rob him also of the courage to rid himself of it?

Of course you might reply with an appropriate parable: who would not rather sacrifice his right arm than lose his life through hesitation and despair? I don't know. And don't let us settle it with parables. Enough! Yes, William, sometimes I do have moments of surging courage to shake it all off, and then…if only I knew whither…probably I would go.

Evening
Today I came across my diary. I haven't written in it for some time, and I was astonished to see how I got into all this, step by step, with my eyes wide open; how clearly I saw the whole thing and my condition,

yet dealt with it like a child. I see just as clearly today and note no sign of improvement.

August 10th

I could be leading the best of happiest lives if I were not such a fool. It would be hard to find more agreeable circumstances than those granted me now. But I am absolutely sure that our hearts alone can give us happiness. To be counted as a member of this charming family, to be loved like a son by her father and like a father by the children, and by Lotte! And then there is good, worthy Albert, who does nothing to disturb my joy with moody behavior and accepts me in a spirit of friendliness—even prefers me to anyone else, after Lotte! William, it is a pleasure to listen to us when we are out walking together and we talk about Lotte. I don't think you will find anything in the whole wide world more ridiculous than our relationship, and still my eyes fill with tears when I think of it.

He talks to me about her good mother—how, on her deathbed, she handed over house and children to Lotte, who since then has been quite changed; how, through having to care for a household and face the more serious aspects of life, she has become a real mother, and not a moment of her time passes without work or an act of love; how, in spite of all this, her blitheness and vitality have never forsaken her. I wander along at his side, pick flowers, arrange them carefully into a bouquet and…throw them into the stream rushing by and look after them as they are slowly sucked down. I don't know whether I wrote to you that Albert intends to remain here, and that the Prince will let him have a tidy little income because he is well liked at court. I have rarely seen his equal when it comes to orderliness and diligence in matters of business.

August 12th

Albert is the best man on earth…agreed! Yesterday I had a strange experience with him. I went to see him, to bid him farewell, for it had occurred to me that a ride up into the mountains (I am writing to you

from there now) was just what I wanted to do. As I was pacing up and down his room, I happened to see his pistols. “Lend me your pistols for the trip,” I said.
“By all means,” he replied, “if you want to take the trouble to load them. I only have them hanging around here pro forma.” As I took one down, he went on: “Since my sense of caution played me such a nasty trick, I don’t want to have anything more to do with them.”

I was anxious to hear the story. “I was in the country, staying with a friend for about three months,” he said. “I had a brace of pistols with me, unloaded, and slept peacefully. On a rainy afternoon I was sitting there with nothing much to do and, I don’t know why, but it occurred to me that we could be attacked; we might need the pistols and could—you know how it is. I gave them to a servant to clean and load. He fooled around with the girls, wanted to frighten them…. God knows how it happened, but the gun went off with the ramrod still in the barrel and shot the ramrod into the thumb of one of the girls, smashing it. And I had to listen to all the lamentations and pay the surgeon’s bill. Since then I leave the pistols unloaded. My dear fellow, what is precaution? We can never learn all there is to know about danger. To be sure…”

Now, you know that I love this man very much, except for his “to be sure,” for isn’t it obvious that every generalization admits of exceptions? But this fellow is full of such self-justification. When he thinks he has said something too hastily, or spoken a half-truth, or generalized too much, then you can’t stop him from attaching limitations to what he has said, from modifying it, adding to it and subtracting from it, until at last nothing is left of the original idea!

In the end, Albert became so involved in what he was saying that I stopped listening and was soon lost in my own thoughts. Suddenly, with a rough, abrupt gesture, I pressed the mouth of the pistol against my forehead, just above the right eye.
“Shame on you!” Albert said, as he forced my hand down. “What on earth is the meaning of this?”
“It isn’t loaded,” I said.

“Even so…what was going on in your mind?” He sounded impatient. “I simply cannot imagine how a man could be so foolish as to shoot himself. The very idea disgusts me.”
“Oh you people,” I cried, “who, when you talk about anything, must immediately declare: that is foolish, that is clever, that is good, that is bad! And what does it all amount to? Do you think you can uncover the vital circumstances of an action with your questions? Are you sure you know how to get at the heart of the matter: why did it happen? Why did it have to happen? If you were, you wouldn’t be so hasty with your decisions.”

“You will grant me, I am sure,” Albert said, “that certain actions are vicious whatever the reason may be.”
I shrugged and had to agree with him. “And yet, my dear fellow,” I went on, “here too you will find your exceptions. To steal is a sin, true, but the poor man who steals to save himself and his dear ones from starvation, what does he deserve? Pity or punishment? Who will cast the first stone against the married man who, in his first fury, murders his faithless wife and her vile seducer? And what about the young girl who in a blissful hour loses herself in the irresistible delights of love? Even our laws, cold-blooded and pedantic as they are, can be moved to withhold punishment.”

“That is something quite different,” said Albert. “A man who lets himself be overwhelmed by passion can be considered out of his mind, and is treated like a drunkard or a madman.”
“Oh you sensible people!” I cried, but I was smiling. “Passion. Inebriation. Madness. You respectable ones stand there so calmly, without any sense of participation. Upbraid the drunkard, abhor the madman, pass them by like the priest and thank God like the Pharisees that He did not make you as one of these! I have been drunk more than once, and my passion often borders on madness, and I regret neither. Because, in my own way, I have learned to understand that all exceptional people who created something great, something that seemed impossible, have to be decried as drunkards or madmen. And I find it intolerable, even in our daily life, to hear it said of almost

everyone who manages to do something that is free, noble and unexpected: He is a drunkard, he is a fool. They should be ashamed of themselves, all these sober people! And the wise ones!”

“Now you are being fanciful again,” Albert said. “You always exaggerate, and you are certainly wrong when you classify suicide—and suicide is what we are talking about—as any sort of great achievement, since it can be defined only as a sign of weakness. For it is certainly easier to die than to stand up to a life of torment.”

I was about to break off the conversation, for nothing can so completely disconcert me as when a man presents me, who am talking from the heart, with an insignificant platitude. But I controlled myself because I had heard the same thing so often and let it vex me. Instead I said, with quite some vehemence, “You call it weakness? I beg of you, don’t let yourself be misled by appearances. Would you call a nation groaning under the unbearable yoke of a tyrant weak if it revolts and breaks its chains? Or the man who, in his horror because his house is afire, musters sufficient strength to carry off burdens with ease which he could scarcely have budged when he was calm? Or the man who, enraged by insults, takes on six men and overpowers them? Would you call these men weak? And if exertion is strength, why should exaggeration be the opposite?”

Albert looked at me and said, “Don’t be offended, but the examples you give don’t seem to fit at all.”
“That may be,” I said. “I have often been told that my way of combining things borders on the absurd. Let us try and see if we can imagine in some other way how a person feels who shoots himself, thereby throwing off the burden of a life that is generally considered to be pleasant. Because we have the right to talk about a thing only when we can feel for it.

“Human nature,” I continued, “has its limitations. It can bear joy and suffering, and pain to a certain degree, but perishes when this point is passed. Here there can therefore be no question of whether a man is strong or weak, but of whether he can endure his suffering, be it moral

or physical. And I find it just as astonishing to say that a man who takes his own life is a coward, as it would be improper to call a man a coward who dies of a pernicious fever."
"Paradox! Paradox!" cried Albert.

"Not to the extent you would have it," I replied. "You must admit that we call it a fatal illness when Nature is attacked in a fashion that destroys a part of her powers and incapacitates the rest to such an extent that she cannot rise again and is incapable of restoring a normal flow of life. Well, my dear fellow, let us apply this precept to the spirit of man. Look at man, with all his limitations—how impressions affect him, how ideas take hold of him until finally a passion grows within him to such an extent that it robs him of his peace of mind and ruins him. The calm, sensible man overlooks the poor fellow's plight to no avail and encourages him with as little success, just as the healthy man, standing beside a sickbed, cannot imbue the invalid with any of his strength."

Albert found too much generalization in all this. I reminded him of a girl who had been found in the river, drowned, not long ago, and told him her story. She was a sweet young thing who had grown up in a world narrowed down by household duties and the regimentation of her daily chores. She knew no better pleasure nor could hope for anything more than a Sunday walk with girls like herself, in finery accumulated gradually, bit by bit. Perhaps she went dancing on our feast days or passed a few hours chatting with a neighbor, with all the liveliness of hearty participation in the cause of a quarrel or some other bit of gossip.

And then her passionate nature begins to feel more intimate needs and they are increased by the flattery of the men she meets. Slowly the little things that used to please her grow stale, until she at last meets a man to whom she is irresistibly attracted by a feeling hitherto unknown. Now she puts all her hopes in him, forgets the world around her, hears nothing, sees nothing, feels naught but him, longs only for him—he is her all. Unspoiled by the empty pleasures of fickle vanity, her desire has but one goal—to be his. In an eternal union with him she

hopes to find all the happiness she lacks and enjoy all the pleasures she longs for. Promises, repeated over and over again, seem to assure the fulfillment of her hopes; bold embraces increase her desire and make her soul captive.

With her consciousness dulled, she wavers in the anticipation of happiness and reaches the highest possible degree of tension. At last she stretches out her arms to grasp all she desires—and her lover leaves her. Petrified, out of her mind, she stands in front of an abyss. All is darkness around her; she has no comfort, nothing to hope for, because he, in whom she had her being, has left her. She doesn't see the wide world in front of her nor the many people who might make up for what she has lost. She feels alone, abandoned; and blindly, cornered by the horrible need in her heart, she jumps and drowns her torment in the embrace of death. And you see, Albert, that is the story of quite a few people, and tell me—would you not call it a sickness? Nature finds no way out of a labyrinth of confused and contradictory powers and has to die.

"What a wretch, the man who sees it happen and can say, 'Foolish girl! If only she had waited, if only she had let time take effect, her despair would have left her; another would have come forward to comfort her.' That is as if someone were to say, 'The fool! He died of a fever. Why didn't he wait until he regained his strength, until his physical condition improved and the tumult in his blood died down? Then everything would have turned out well and he would be alive today!'"

Albert, who still couldn't see the point, had a few things to say—among others, that I had spoken about a simple girl. But he could not understand how any sensible person, not so limited, with a broader outlook on life, could be excused for similar behavior.

"My friend!" I cried. "A man is a man, and the little bit of sense he may have plays little or no part at all when passion rages in him, and the limitations of humankind oppress him. And what is more—but no, we'll talk about it some other time," I concluded and reached for my hat. Oh, my heart was full, and we parted without having understood each

other. And that is how it is in the world. It is not easy for men to understand each other.

August 15th

One thing is certain—nothing justifies a man's existence like being loved. I feel that Lotte would not like to lose me, and it never occurs to the children that I might not turn up every day. Today I went over to tune Lotte's piano, but never got around to doing it, because the little ones would not leave me alone. They wanted a fairy tale, and in the end, even Lotte asked me to tell them one. I cut their supper bread for them—now they are almost as willing to receive it from me as from Lotte—and I told them their favorite tale about the princess who is waited on by invisible hands.

I learn a great deal when I do this sort of thing, I can assure you, and am astonished by what an impression it makes on them. Sometimes, when I have to invent an incident because I have forgotten how I told the story the first time, they tell me at once that last time it was different, so now I try to tell every tale in a sustained singsong tone. This has taught me that an author can harm his book if he publishes a second, changed version of his story, however improved it may be poetically. The first impression finds the reader willing, and a human being can be persuaded to believe in the most daring adventure, but it takes root immediately, and woe to him who tries to dig it up and eradicate it!

August 18th

Why does that which makes a man happy have to become the source of his misery?
My full, warm enjoyment of all living things that used to overwhelm me with so much delight and transform the world around me into a paradise has been turned into unbearable torment, a demon who pursues me wherever I go.

When I used to look at the far-off hills across the river from the crags that give me a full view of the fruitful valley below and saw all things

burgeoning around me: the mountains opposite, overgrown with thick, tall trees; the valleys winding in the shade of the loveliest forests; the river flowing gently between whispering reeds, mirroring the pretty clouds moving slowly across the horizon in the light evening breeze; when I heard the birds around me bringing the woods to life with their song and saw millions of little gnats swarming in the sun's red light; saw how its last tremulous rays brought the humming beetles up out of the grass; and all this whirring and buzzing around me made me more aware suddenly of the ground beneath my feet, of the moss wresting its nourishment out of the hard rock, of the brush flourishing on arid, sandy slopes, revealing the innermost, glowing, sacred life of nature itself—how warmly I used to be able to embrace all this and feel like a god in its abundance! How the magnificent creatures of this infinite world came to life in my soul!

I was surrounded by titanic mountains, abysses lay at my feet, waterfalls tumbled down steep slopes, rivers flowed beneath me, and forest and mountain resounded with it all. And I could see unfathomable powers working and creating in the bowels of the earth, generations of divers creatures milling around above the ground, beneath the sky—all of it taking a thousand different shapes—and the human beings seeking protection in their little houses, settling down together and, in their way, ruling over this wide world. He is a poor fool who has so little respect for all this because he is so small!

From the forbidding mountain range, across the barren plain untrodden by the foot of man, to the ends of the unknown seas, the spirit of the Eternal Creator can be felt rejoicing over every grain of dust that comprehends Him and lives! Oh, how often I used to yearn in those days to fly with the wings of the crane above me to the shores of the limitless seas and drink the surging joy of life from the foaming cup of eternity and feel, with the restricted powers of my breast, one single drop of the bliss of Him who created all this.

Dear brother, merely recalling hours such as these refreshes me; even the exertion of remembering those indescribable feelings, and the retelling of them, lifts me out of myself—but then I feel my dread

condition doubly hard. Something has been drawn away from my soul like a curtain and the panorama of eternal life has been transformed before my eyes into the abyss of an eternally open grave. Who can say, “That’s how it is!” when all things are transient and roll away with the passing storm, and one’s powers so rarely suffice for one’s span of life but are carried off in the torrent to sink and be dashed against the rocks? There is not a moment in which one is not a destroyer and has to be a destroyer. A harmless walk kills a thousand poor crawling things; one footstep smashes a laboriously built anthill and stamps a whole little world into an ignominious grave. The rare disasters of this world, the floods that wash away our villages, the earthquakes that swallow up our cities—they do not move me. My heart is undermined by the consuming power that lies hidden in the Allness of nature, which has created nothing, formed nothing, which has destroyed neither its neighbor nor itself. Surrounded by the heavens and the earth and the powerful web they weave between them, I reel with dread. I can see nothing but an eternally devouring, eternally regurgitating monster.

August 21st

I stretch out my arms for her in vain when, troubled by my dreams, I awaken in the morning; at night I vainly seek her in my bed when a happy, innocent dream has deceived me into imagining I am sitting beside her in a field and holding her hand and kissing her. Oh, when I feel for her, still half dazed with sleep, and wake myself with it—a flood of tears flows from my oppressed heart and I weep inconsolably into a dark, dreary future.

August 22nd

It is a tragedy, William. My creative powers have been reduced to a restless indolence. I cannot be idle, yet I cannot seem to do anything either. I have no imagination, no more feeling for nature, and reading has become repugnant to me. When we are robbed of ourselves, we are robbed of everything! I swear there are days when I wish I were a common laborer if only to have something to do that day, an impetus, some hope when I awaken in the morning. I often envy Albert when I

see him up to his ears in legal papers and tell myself that I would feel wonderful if I were in his place. How many times it has occurred to me to write and tell you that I was going to ask the minister for that post at the embassy, that you assured me would be granted me! I think it would be, too. The minister has shown a liking for me for some time now and has been urging me to seek some sort of occupation. For an hour or two I can work up a measure of enthusiasm for it, but then, when I think it over again, I am reminded of the fable about the horse that, impatient with its freedom, permitted itself to be saddled and ridden to death. I don't know what to do. And isn't it possible, my dear friend, that my longing for a change in my circumstances is an innate impatience that will pursue me wherever I go?

August 28th

It is true—if my illness were not incurable, these people could cure it. Today is my birthday, and early in the morning, I received a little package from Albert. When I opened it, I at once saw one of the pink bows Lotte was wearing when I saw her for the first time, which I have begged her so often to give me. The package consisted of two slim duodecimo volumes, the small Wetstein Homer, an edition I have often tried to find so that I would not have to drag my heavy Ernesti edition with me on my walks. So there you are—they try to fulfill my every wish; they think of any little friendly favors they can do me that are worth a thousand times more to me than those dazzling gifts that make us feel ashamed of the donor's vanity. I have kissed the little bow a thousand times, and with every breath I inhale the bliss with which those few, happy, irretrievable days filled me. William, that is how it is and I am not complaining. The flowers of life are illusion. How many blossom and leave no trace, how few bear fruit, and what a small amount of this fruit ripens! And still there are enough left, and still—oh, dearest friend—can we neglect the ripened fruit or despise it, or let it rot without ever having enjoyed it?

Farewell. It is a marvelous summer. I often sit in the fruit trees in Lotte's orchard and with long shears cut the pears from the top of the

tree. She stands below and takes them from me one by one as I hand them down to her.

August 30th

Miserable wretch! Aren't you a fool? Aren't you deceiving yourself? What is the meaning of this riotous, endless passion? There are no more prayers in me except prayers to her; my imagination can shape no other figure but hers; I see everything around me only in its relationship to her. And this results every now and then in a few happy hours, until I must tear myself away from her again. William, William, you have no idea what my heart often urges me to do! When I have sat beside her for two or three hours and have basked in the sight of her, in her behavior, in the heavenly expression she puts into everything she says—then slowly but surely all my sensibilities are stretched to the breaking point.

It grows dark before my eyes; I can scarcely hear; it has me by the throat like an assassin. My wildly beating heart tries to give breath to my afflicted senses and succeeds only in confusing them further…. William, then I don't know where I am! And when my melancholy gets the better of me and Lotte grants me the miserable consolation of giving way to my anguish in a flood of tears, as happens sometimes—then I have to get away, out, out…and I wander disconsolately in the fields. At moments such as these I like to climb a steep mountain or hack my way through uncleared forest, through hedges that hurt me, through brambles that scratch me! Then I feel a little better. A little better. And when I lie down to rest on the way, exhausted and thirsty, or when in the dark of night, with the full moon shining above me, I sit down on the branch of a deformed tree to rest my sore feet for a moment and sleep in an enervating stillness into the dawn—William, a solitary cell, a hair shirt, and a crown of thorns would be balm for which my soul is pining. Adieu! I can see no end to this misery but the grave!

September 3rd

I must leave here. Thank you, William, for encouraging me in my feeble decision. For the last two weeks I have been going around with the idea of leaving. I must get away. She is in town again, staying with a friend. And Albert…and—I must get away!

September 10th

What a dreadful night! William, now I know I can bear anything. I shall not see her again. Oh, why can't I fall on your neck and, in tears and rapture, confide to you, best of friends, the tumultuous passion that is breaking my heart! Here I sit, breathless, trying to calm down, waiting for the dawn when the horses will stand saddled outside. But she sleeps peacefully and has no idea that she will never see me again. I have succeeded in freeing myself, William, and found the strength, in the course of a conversation that lasted two hours, not to betray what was on my mind. And oh, dear God, what a conversation!

Albert had promised me that he and Lotte would come out into the garden after supper. I stood on the terrace under the tall chestnuts and saw the sun set for the last time across the delightful valley and the gentle stream. How often I have stood there with her and watched that magnificent sight—and now…I walked up and down the path that was so dear to me. A mysterious attraction often drew me there, even before I knew Lotte, and how delighted we were in those early days of our friendship when we discovered that both of us were drawn to this spot, which is really one of the most romantic ones any gardener could possibly produce.

First you have the wide view between the chestnuts. I seem to recall having written to you about it—how two lines of tall beeches finally wall it in, and the path is darkened by the adjoining shrubbery, until all ends in an enclosure that has a mysterious aura of loneliness. I can still feel the sense of seclusion I experienced when I entered it for the first time, one day at noon. Fleetingly I sensed then what a setting it would be one day for my bliss and pain.

I had languished for about half an hour in the bitter-sweet thought of reunion and separation when I heard the two of them coming up the terrace steps. I ran to meet them, and I shivered as I took her hand and kissed it. We reached the terrace just as the moon rose above the wooded hills. We talked about this and that and without noticing it, drew nearer to the gloomy enclosure. Lotte entered it and sat down; Albert sat on one side of her, I on the other.

But I could not remain seated; I was much too restless. So I rose and stood in front of them, walked up and down, sat down again. I was in a miserable state. Lotte drew our attention to the beautiful effect of the moonlight. Beyond the beeches, it was illuminating the entire terrace for us, a marvelous sight, made all the more striking by the fact that we were sitting in profound darkness. We were silent, and after a little while she said, “I never walk in the moonlight, never, without being reminded of my dead. In the moonlight I am always filled with a sense of death and of the hereafter. We live on”—and now she spoke with glorious feeling—“but, Werther, do we meet again? Shall we recognize each other? What do you feel? What do you believe?”

“Lotte,” I said, stretching out my hand to her, and my eyes were filled with tears, “we shall meet again. Here and there…we shall meet again.” I could say no more. William, did she have to ask me that just when my heart was full of this dreadful separation?

“And I often wonder,” she went on, “if our dear departed ones can see us. Do they know it, when all goes well with us, that we remember and love them? I can feel my mother with me always when I sit with her children…my children…in the quiet of evening, and they crowd around me as they used to crowd around her. Then, when I look up to heaven, my eyes filled with tears of longing, and wish that she could look down at us, if only for a moment, and see how I have kept the promise I made to her when she was dying…that I would be a mother to her children—oh, with what a wealth of feeling my heart cries out to her then, ‘Forgive me, beloved, if I cannot be to them what you were. I do my best…I dress them and feed them and…oh, what more can we do than cherish and love one another? If you could see the harmony between

us, oh my blessed mother, you would praise and thank the good Lord to whom you prayed for the well-being of your children with your last bitter tears.’”

That is what she said. But William, who can possibly repeat what she said? How can cold, dead letters express the heavenly revelation of her spirit? Albert interrupted her gently by saying, “Dear Lotte, you take these things too much to heart. I know that such ideas mean a great deal to you, but please…”

“Oh, Albert,” she said, “I know you haven’t forgotten the evenings when we sat at the little round table…. Papa was away and we had sent the little ones to bed. You often brought a good book with you, but seldom had the opportunity to read aloud from it because…oh, wasn’t it worth more than anything to listen to her? What a wonderful spirit she had, what a beautiful, gentle soul she was—and never, never idle. God knows the tears I have shed, kneeling at my bedside and praying to God that He might make me like her.”

“Lotte!” I cried, kneeling down beside her, and my tears fell on her hand as I took it in mine. “Lotte, the grace of God is upon you, and you are filled with the spirit of your mother.”
“If only you had known her,” she said, pressing my hand. “She deserved that you should have known her!”
It took my breath away. Never had anyone said anything so glorious to me.

“And she had to die in the prime of life,” Lotte continued, “when her youngest son was not yet six months old. She was not ill for long. She was so calm, so resigned. Only when she saw her children did she feel pain, especially the baby. When the end was near, she said to me, ‘Bring them up to me,’ and I did as she asked. The younger ones, they didn’t know…and the older ones, who didn’t comprehend…they stood around her bed. She lifted her hand and prayed for them and kissed them one by one and sent them away again. Then she said to me, ‘Be a mother to them.’

I promised her I would and gave her my hand on it. ‘You promise a great deal, my child,’ she said. ‘A mother’s heart…a mother’s eyes…your tears of gratitude have told me often that you know what they mean. Feel like that for your brothers and sisters, and for your father have the loyalty and obedience of a wife and you will be a comfort to him.’ She asked after him. He had gone out, torn by his anguish, to hide his unbearable grief.

“Albert, you were in the room. She could hear someone walking up and down and asked you to come to her bedside, and she looked at you and me with her tranquil eyes, assured that we were happy and that we would be happy together.”

Albert threw his arms around her neck and kissed her and cried, “We are! We are! And we shall be!” The quiet man had lost his composure and I—I didn’t know I was alive.
“And this good woman is supposed to be gone from us,” Lotte went on. “Dear God, Werther, when I think how one permits the dearest thing in life to be carried away, and no one feels it as keenly as the children. For a long, long time after it was all over they lamented—how the black men came and carried Mama away.”

She rose, and it brought me back to my senses. I was shattered and remained seated, still holding her hand. “Let us go,” she said. “It is late.” She wanted to withdraw her hand, but I clung to it. “We shall meet again!” I cried. “We shall find each other, whatever shape or form we may have. We shall recognize each other. I will go,” I added. “I will go willingly, but if I had to say good-bye forever, I could not bear it. Farewell, Lotte; farewell, Albert. We shall meet again.”

“Tomorrow, I imagine,” she said gaily. I could feel the word “tomorrow.” She didn’t know, as she drew her hand out of mine…. They walked down the path in the moonlight. I stood up and watched them go. Then I threw myself on the ground and wept until I could weep no more, after which I jumped to my feet and ran out onto the terrace. Below, in the shadows of the tall linden trees, I could see her

white dress shimmering as the two moved toward the gate. I stretched out my arms…and it vanished.

NOTE: Numbered notes are by the translator and are printed on pages 236–39. Goethe's notes, marked by asterisks, are set at the foot of the appropriate page.

* The reader need not take the trouble to look up the places that are mentioned here. It was considered necessary to change all real names that were found in the original manuscript.
* We have found it necessary to suppress this part of the letter in order to give no cause for complaint, although actually no author could care very much about the opinion of one girl and a young, unstable man.
* Here, too, the names of some authors have been omitted. Those of whom Lotte approved will surely know it in their hearts, if they have read this far, and the rest need not know anything about it.
* We now have an excellent sermon on this topic by Lavater, among those on the Book of Jonah.

Book Two

October 20th, 1771

We arrived here yesterday. The ambassador is indisposed and will not be going out for a few days. If only he were not so unpleasant, things would be a great deal easier. But fate has many trials in store for me—I know it, I know it. However, let us not lose courage, for a light heart can bear all things. A light heart? I have to laugh. How could I write such words? Ah yes, a little lighter blood could make me the happiest man on earth! Come, come, Werther! How can you doubt your strength, your gifts, when others complacently parade their puny strength and talents? Dear God, who hath bestowed all this upon me, why didst Thou not withhold a half of it and give me instead faith in myself and a modest capacity for contentment?
Patience! Patience! Things will improve.

Because I want to assure you, my dear friend, you are right. Since I spend my days among people again and observe what they do and how they live, I find it much easier to live with myself. Since we mortals happen to be so constituted that we compare everything with ourselves and ourselves with everything around us, our happiness and our misery have to lie in the things with which we compare ourselves. Nothing is therefore more dangerous than solitude. Our imagination, forced by its very nature to unfold, nourished by the fantastic visions of poetry, gives shape to a whole order of creatures of which we are the lowliest, and everything around us seems to be more glorious, everyone else more perfect.

And all this happens quite naturally. We feel so often that there is a great deal lacking in us and that our neighbor possesses just what we lack and, for good measure, we proceed to read into him our finer attributes, adding a bit of idealistic comfort to boot, and with that have rounded out a perfectly happy, fortunate man who is actually a figment of our imagination. If, on the other hand, we can make up our minds to go about our daily tasks, resigned to our failings and hardships, we often find that, in spite of our meanderings and procrastination, we have gone farther than quite a few others have gone with their sails unfurled and steering gear functioning. And, truly, it is a wonderful feeling when one manages somehow to keep up with one's fellow men, or better still, outpaces them.

November 26th

All things considered, I am beginning to find life quite tolerable here. The best part of it is that I am kept sufficiently busy, and the many different types and the fresh personalities create a colorful spectacle that distracts me. I have met Count C. and have to admire him more and more daily. He is a man of true intellect, never aloof just because he happens to be more discerning than most people. He radiates friendliness and affection. He took an interest in me when I had to transact some business with him and says that he noticed, with the first words we exchanged, that we understood each other and he could speak with me as he could not speak with anyone else. I can't praise his

candor sufficiently. There is no truer, no greater pleasure imaginable than to enjoy the confidence of a truly great mind.

December 24th

The ambassador is causing me a lot of trouble. I saw it coming. He is the most punctilious fool imaginable; everything has to be done step by step—and long-winded! A man who is never satisfied with himself and can therefore never be satisfied. I like to work fast and let it go at that, but he is just as likely to return a paper to me and say, “It isn’t bad but I would go over it again. One can always find a better word, a more precise specification….” Then I could tell him to go to the devil. No “ands” nor “buts,” no conjunctions may be missing, and he is dead set against any inversions that sometimes slip out before I have caught them. And if I don’t let one sentence follow the next in the same singsong rhythm, he can’t follow the meaning at all. Really, working for such a man is misery!

Count von C.’s friendship is the only compensation. The other day he told me quite frankly how dissatisfied he was with my ambassador’s procrastination and pedantry. People make things so difficult for themselves and for others; still, according to him, we have to resign ourselves to it, like a traveler who has to drive across a mountain. Of course the way would be easier and shorter if the mountain were not there, but the mountain is there and has to be crossed! I guess the old man notices too that the Count prefers my company, and that must annoy him; he never misses an opportunity to speak derogatively of the Count to me.

I, of course, don’t let it pass, which only serves to make matters worse. Yesterday he really made me lose my temper, because I knew he was also referring to me. When it was a question of business matters, he declared, the Count did well enough. Things came easily to him, and his style was good, but like all belletrists he lacked erudition! Then he gave me a look as much as to say, “Did that strike home?” But it didn’t. I despise any man who can think and behave like that. I stood up to him and fought back, quite vehemently too. I said that the Count was a man

who commanded respect, not only for his intellect but for his character as well. I had never known anyone, I said, who had succeeded so admirably in broadening his mind to include so many subjects and still be able to attend to the daily business of life. All of this was Greek to him, and I retired before I had to swallow any more of his déraisonnement.

And it is all your fault, all of you who talked me into this straitjacket and gave me such a song and dance about having something to do! If the man who plants his potatoes and drives his wagon to town to sell his grain isn't doing more than I am, I will gladly spend another ten years chained to the galleys as I am now!

And the glittering misery, the boredom of the perfectly horrible people I meet here! Their social aspirations! In their efforts to gain the slightest precedence they can't take their eyes off the next fellow. The most abject passions are displayed quite shamelessly. There is one woman, for instance, who can talk of nothing but her titles and her estates. One doesn't have to know her to realize that she is a complete fool who flatters herself with paltry titles and has an inflated provincial pride. But the worst part of it is, she is actually nothing more than the daughter of a local magistrate. I cannot understand how people can be so insensitive as to prostitute themselves in such a vulgar fashion.

Thus I notice daily, my dear friend, how foolish we are when we judge others by ourselves. And since I am so preoccupied with myself, and my heart is so tempestuous, I prefer to let others go their way—if only they would let me go mine!

What irritates me most are the deplorable social conditions. I know as well as anyone else how necessary it is that there be differences in rank, and how much this is to my advantage. All I ask is that it should not stand in my way when there is a small chance of my enjoying myself, or a glimmer of hope that I may still know happiness on this earth. A few days ago, while I was out walking, I made the acquaintance of a Fräulein von B., a charming creature who has somehow managed to remain natural in spite of the formalities of life here. We enjoyed our

conversation, and when we parted I asked for permission to call on her. She said that I might so unreservedly that I could scarcely wait for the proper time to elapse until I could visit her. She is not from these parts and lives with an aunt. I did not like the looks of the old lady.

I paid her a great deal of attention; almost everything I said was directed at her. But in little less than half an hour I realized what the young lady admitted later—that her dear aunt, with nothing but an inadequate fortune at her disposal and even less intellect, finds sustenance solely in her lineage and security only behind the ramparts of her rank, which is her castle, and takes pleasure in nothing but looking down her nose at the lower classes. In her youth she was beautiful and frittered her life away, at first by making many a young man miserable with her capriciousness; later, in her maturer years, she was completely under the thumb of an old army officer who, in return for having married her and a tolerable maintenance, was her companion in her bronze age, and died. Now, in her iron age, she finds herself alone and no one would pay her any heed if her niece were not so kind.

January 8th, 1772

How dreadful people are who have had nothing on their minds for years but formality, whose every effort and thought are bent toward moving one place higher up at table! And it is not because they have nothing better to do. Not at all! Important work piles up just because one is prevented from attending to it by a thousand vexations concerning rank and promotion. Last week there was a lot of such bickering on our sleigh ride and all the fun was spoiled.

If only the fools would realize that the seating doesn’t really matter, that he who sits at the head of the table rarely plays the leading role. Many a king is ruled by his prime minister and many a minister by his secretary, and then who is first? I would say he who can see through all the others and has the forcefulness or cunning to use their powers and passions to further his own ends.

January 20th

I must write to you, dear Lotte, here in a humble peasant inn where I have taken shelter from a severe storm. When I am in that miserable little town of D., among strangers, with people who are totally alien to my heart, there isn't a moment, not one, when my heart bids me write to you. But now, in this lowly house, in this solitude and confinement, with hail and snow pelting against the little window of my room, my first thoughts go out to you. When I entered I was overwhelmed by a vision of you, by my memories, oh Lotte—such sacred, such heartfelt memories! Dear God, this is my first moment of happiness since I left!

If you could only see me, dearest—in a whirl of distraction, but how arid is my spirit! Not a heartfelt moment, not a blissful hour—nothing…nothing. Sometimes I feel as if I were standing in front of a peep show. I can see tiny men and horses maneuvering in front of me, and I ask myself if it is not an optical illusion. I join in the games, or rather, I should say that I let myself be manipulated like a puppet, and sometimes I touch my neighbor's wooden hand and withdraw mine in horror. In the evening I decide to enjoy the sunrise, but in the morning I don't bother to get up. During the day I look forward to an enjoyment of the moonlight; then at night I stay in my room. I don't know why I get up or why I go to bed! The leaven that used to set my life in motion is lacking; the stimulus that kept me wide awake late into the night and woke me in the morning is gone.

I have found only one sympathetic female here, a Fräulein von B. She is very like you, dear Lotte, if there can be any comparison. Oh, I can hear you say, "He is in a mood for paying a pretty compliment," and you would not be entirely wrong. For some time now I have been behaving myself, because that seems to be the only thing to do. I have become quite a wit. The ladies say no one knows how to sing their praises like Werther (and to fabricate like him, they usually add, for there is no other way of doing it, you understand?). But I wanted to speak of Fräulein von B. She is a soulful creature who looks one straight in the eye. Hers are blue. Her rank is a burden to her that satisfies none of her aspirations. She longs to get away from all the hollow confusion around

her, and we dream-talk many an hour away in blissfully serene, pastoral surroundings. We talk about you. How often she has to worship at your altar—doesn't have to, does so willingly. She likes to hear me talk about you; she loves you.

Ah, if only I were sitting at your feet in our cozy little room, with our little darlings romping around us! If they were making too much noise I would gather them around me and tell them an eerie fairy story to calm them down.

The sun is setting magnificently behind a landscape glittering with snow. The storm has passed, and I—I have to lock myself in my cage again. Adieu. Is Albert with you? And how—oh, dear God, forgive me the question!

February 8th

For eight days now we have had the most terrible weather, and it does my heart good, because since I have been here we have not had a nice day that was not spoiled for me by someone. But if it rains and blusters, is chilly or thaws—ha! I tell myself that it can't get worse inside than out, or if you like, the other way round, and that suits me. But if I see the sun rise in the morning, promising a fine day, I say to myself, "There they have another treasure to do each other out of." There is nothing in this world, William, that they would not like to do each other out of—health, good repute, happiness, recreation—for the most part because they are foolish, narrow-minded, and dull-witted. You can listen to them with the best of open minds and come to no other conclusion. Sometimes I feel like falling on my knees and imploring them not to be so fanatically intent on cutting each other's throats.

February 17th

I am afraid my ambassador and I are not going to be able to put up with each other much longer. The man is impossible! His working habits and way of doing business are so ridiculous that I simply cannot control myself and have to contradict him; and often I do a thing the way I feel

it should be done, which of course never suits him. He complained about me at court the other day and the minister reprimanded me—gently enough, but all the same, it was a reprimand.

I was about to hand in my resignation when I received a personal letter from him that makes me want to kneel down and worship this infinitely noble and wise mind.* He rebukes me for being overly sensitive, yet respects my exaggerated ideas on effectiveness, influencing others, and succeeding in business, as examples of youthful high spirits and in no way tries to suppress them. All he wants to do is tone them down and guide them into the correct channels, where they may have the right effect. Now I have the strength to carry on for another week and have come to an understanding with myself. Peace of mind and the ability to take pleasure in oneself are glorious things. Dear friend, if only the treasure were not as fragile as it is precious and beautiful!

February 20th

God bless you, my dear ones, and give you all the good days He denies me!
I thank you, Albert, for having deceived me. I waited to be told the day of your wedding, and it was my intention, on that day, to go through the ceremony of taking the little silhouette I made of Lotte down from the wall and burying it with some other papers. Now you are united, and her picture is where it always has been. Very well, let it remain there. And why not? I know that I am with you too and have a place in Lotte's heart that does you no harm. I would go so far as to say second place and I want to hold onto it—must hold onto it! I think if she forgot me, I would go mad. Albert, all hell lies in the very thought! Farewell, Albert; farewell, dear angel from heaven. Lotte, farewell.

March 15th

I have just had a very distressing experience that will drive me away from here. I am still foaming at the mouth! The devil take it! I can't get over it, and it is your fault—you, who egged me on and drove me and tormented me to take a post that doesn't suit me at all! So now I'm

saddled with it and so are you! And don't tell me again that it is my exaggerated ideas that ruin everything! Here, my dear sir, is the whole unvarnished story, properly told, just as any historian would let you have it.

Count von C. is very fond of me. He singles me out—but you know all that. I have mentioned it a hundred times. I was invited to lunch there yesterday, and it happened to be the day on which the nobility from hereabout gathers at his house in the afternoon. I have never given them a thought, and it never occurred to me that we inferiors do not fit in. Very well. I lunched with the Count, and after lunch we walked up and down the great hall. I was conversing with him and Colonel B., who had joined us, when the time for the sociabilities drew near. Nothing was further from my mind.

The first to enter was the oh, so honorable Lady von S. with her spouse and the little goose of a daughter the two of them managed to hatch—with her flat little chest and dear little waist laced tight—their aristocratic eyebrows raised, their noses turned up. Since I wholeheartedly detest the entire breed, I was anxious to take my leave and was only waiting for the Count to free himself from their miserable prattle, when my Fräulein von B. came in. The sight of her always cheers my heart a little, so I decided to stay and took up my stand behind her chair. It took me a little while to realize that she was not conversing with me as freely as usual; in fact, she was behaving toward me with quite some constraint.

Then it was suddenly very noticeable. She couldn't be like all the rest of them, I thought, and was hurt and wanted to leave, but then I stayed on because I wanted so much to give her a chance to absolve herself. I couldn't believe her capable of such snobbery and still hoped to hear her speak a few pleasant words, and…oh, I don't know what! Meanwhile, the hall had become quite crowded. There was Baron F., decked out in the complete regalia of Franz I's coronation era; Privy Councilor R., here, in his official capacity, called Herr von R., with his deaf wife, etc. And let us not overlook S., shabbily dressed as usual.

He mends his antiquated wardrobe with patches of new material. After that they came pouring in; I conversed with a few of my friends and found all of them rather laconic; but I could think of nothing and pay attention to no one but my friend, B. I didn't notice the ladies at the other end of the room whispering to each other and how this spread to the men and how Frau von S. went over to the Count and spoke to him (I found out all this later from Fräulein B.) until finally the Count drew me over to one of the windows. "You know what charming conditions prevail here," he said. "I notice that my guests are displeased to find you present. The last thing in the world I want—"

"Your Excellency," I interrupted him, "a thousand apologies. I should have noticed it myself long before this, and I know you will forgive my inconsistency—I wanted to take my leave some time ago but," I added, smiling as I bowed, "a devilish impulse held me back." The Count shook my hand with a pressure that indicated just how he felt about it. I slipped away quietly, got into my cabriolet, and drove to M. to see the sun set from the hill there and read Homer's glorious verses about Ulysses and the hospitable swineherd. And all that was well and good. In the evening, I returned home for my supper.

There were only a few people in the taproom; they had turned back the tablecloth and were playing at dice. Suddenly honest old Adelin came in, put his hat down on the table, and said softly, "You're in trouble, I hear." "I?" said I. "The Count asked you to leave his party." "The devil take his party!" I said. "I was thankful to get out in the fresh air again." "I'm glad to see you're not taking it to heart," he said. "It only annoyed me because it's already all over town." And until then the whole thing hadn't bothered me a bit! But after that, of course, I felt that everyone who came in and looked at me was staring at me because of that. It was maddening!

And now, since everyone commiserates with me wherever I go and I am told that those who used to envy me are triumphing and saying, "There you can see how the presumptuous end, those who try to lift their insignificant heads too high and think they can go where they please and do as they like…." I could run a knife into my heart! Because people

can say what they like about being independent—show me the man who can stand being raked over the coals by scoundrels when they have the advantage over him. When their talk is idle nonsense, ah, then it can be easily ignored.

March 16th

Everything conspires against me. Today I met Fräulein von B. on the promenade. I simply had to go up to her, and as soon as we had withdrawn a little from the others, I let her know how I felt about her behavior the other day. “Oh, Werther,” she said fervently, “how could you interpret my behavior in such a fashion when you know what my feelings are? You have no idea how I suffered for you from the moment I entered the hall. I knew just what was going to happen. A hundred times it was on the tip of my tongue to tell you. I knew that the von S.’s, and T., and their husbands, would rather have left early than stay at a gathering that included you, and that the Count could not afford to offend them…and now, all this fuss!”

“What do you mean, Fräulein?” I said, trying to hide my dismay, because everything Adelin had said the day before ran suddenly like wildfire through my veins. “You cannot imagine how dearly I have had to pay for my behavior already,” the sweet creature replied, and there were tears in her eyes.
It was all I could do to control myself. I was on the point of throwing myself at her feet. “You must explain yourself!” I cried. “I insist!”

The tears were coursing down her cheeks. I was beside myself. She didn’t try to hide them from me as she dried her eyes. “You know my aunt,” she said. “She was there and, oh, the expression in her eyes as she watched the whole thing! Werther, last night and this morning I have had to endure a lecture about my friendship with you and hear you degraded and could only half defend you. I dared do no more.”

Every word she spoke was a stab in the heart. She didn’t seem to realize at all how merciful it would have been to spare me all this, but went on to say how people would continue to talk about it, and what

kind of people would gloat over it, and how it would amuse and delight them to see my arrogance and my poor opinion of others punished…. I have been reproached for them often enough. To hear her tell me all this, William, with so much compassion in her voice…I was shattered and am still furious with myself. I wish someone would dare reproach me about the whole thing so that I could run a dagger through his heart. If only I could see blood, I know I would feel better. Oh, I have picked up a knife a hundred times with the intention of plunging it into my own heart! I have heard tell of a noble breed of stallions who, when they are overheated and run wild, instinctively bite open one of their veins to relieve themselves. I feel like that often. I would like to open the vein that would give me eternal freedom.

March 24th

I have asked to be relieved of my post and hope my resignation will be accepted. You will forgive me, I am sure, for not having first asked your permission. I simply had to get away, and I know all the things you would have said to persuade me to remain. Inform my mother of the fact gently. I can't help myself, and she will just have to put up with my not being able to help her either. I realize that she will be hurt when she sees the fine career her son had just embarked on, which was supposed to lead to Privy Councilor and Ambassador, suddenly stop, and back with the creature in its stall! Break the news to her in any way you like and come to some sort of agreement on the conditions under which I could possibly have and certainly should have stayed…enough! I am leaving, and so you may know where I am going, Prince — is here and seems to find my company to his liking. He heard of my decision and has asked me to accompany him to his estate to spend the beautiful season of spring with him. He has promised that I will be entirely on my own, and since we understand each other up to a point, I intend to grasp the opportunity and accompany him.

April 19th

For your information:

Thank you for both letters. I did not reply because I left this letter unfinished until the time of my departure from court. I was afraid my mother might appeal to the minister and make it more difficult for me to go through with my plans. But now it is all over, and the time for my departure has come. I don't want to say how reluctant they were to let me go or what the minister wrote—you would only break out in renewed lamentations. The young duke gave me twenty-five ducats as a farewell gift, with a few words that moved me to tears, so my mother need not send me the money I asked for recently.

May 5th

Tomorrow I leave here, and since the place of my birth lies only six miles away, I want to visit it again and recall those happy, dreamlike days. I want to walk up to the gate through which my mother rode with me when she left that beloved, familiar place after my father's death to incarcerate herself in the unbearable town she lives in now. Adieu, William. I shall report on the trip.

May 9th

I undertook the journey to my former home with all the reverence of a pilgrim, and was gripped by a few quite unexpected emotions. I had the carriage stop beside the tall linden tree that stands about a quarter of an hour's drive from the city in the direction of S. I got out and told the postilion to drive on so that I might enjoy every memory on foot, vividly and renewed, according to the dictates of my heart. There I stood, under the tree that was once goal and limit of my walks as a boy, and how changed I was! In those days I longed with a happy ignorance to go out into the unknown world where I hoped to find so much nourishment for my heart, so much delight for my yearning soul.

And now I have returned from the wide, wide world, oh my friend, with so many shattered hopes and ruined plans. Stretched out before me I saw the mountains that had been the objective of my longing a thousand times. I used to be able to sit there by the hour and yearn for those mountains and lose my whole being in the woods and valleys that

presented themselves to me in such a pleasant twilit fashion. And then, when I had to return at a certain time, with what reluctance I used to leave the beloved spot!

I approached the town and greeted all the old familiar little houses, thought the new ones were repulsive, also all over innovations. I walked in at the gate and at once found myself again—all of me! Dear friend, I don't want to go into details. It was an enchanting experience, but would only fall flat in the telling.

I had decided to take lodgings on the market square next to our old house. On the way there, I noticed that our former schoolroom, where an honest old woman had crowded all our childhood together, had been turned into a general store. I recalled the restlessness, the tears, the dullness and fear that I had experienced in that little room. I could not take a step that was not worthy of note. A pilgrim in the Holy Land would not find so many places with sacred memories, nor could his soul possibly be filled with more reverent emotions. One more example will suffice: I walked downriver to a certain farm.

It used to be a favorite walk of mine and a place where we boys tried to see how many times we could make a flat stone ricochet on the water. I could remember vividly how I used to stand sometimes and watch the water, with what a marvelous feeling of reverie I would follow its course, and in a highly adventurous spirit, imagine the regions into which it flowed, until I soon found that my imagination had gone as far as it could—still it had to go on and on until I was lost utterly in invisible distances. Yes, my dear friend, that is how restrained yet happy our glorious ancestors were; their feelings and poetry were childlike. When Ulysses speaks of the boundless sea and the never-ending earth, it is so true, so human, so sincerely felt, so close and mysterious. Of what use is it to me that I can now recite with every schoolboy that the earth is round? A human being needs only a small plot of ground on which to be happy and even less to lie beneath.

So now here I am at the Prince's hunting lodge. Life with him is pleasant, and we get along well. He is honest and simple and

surrounded by very odd people whom I can't even begin to understand! They don't seem to be rogues, yet they don't impress me as being honest, either. Sometimes I feel they are sincere; still I can't trust them. Another thing I regret is that he speaks often of things he has only heard or read about, and then from the other person's point of view, and he seems to value my mind and my various talents more than this heart of mine, of which I am so proud, for it is the source of all things—all strength, all bliss, all misery. The things I know, every man can know, but, oh, my heart is mine alone!

May 25th

I have had something on my mind that I did not want to mention to you until I had gone through with it. Now that nothing has come of it, it is just as well. I wanted to enlist and get into the fighting. My heart has been full of the idea for some time. It is the main reason why I came here with the Prince. He is a general in the service of —. While out for a walk, I disclosed my intention. He advised me against it, and it must have been a caprice on my part rather than a sincere desire, for I heeded his argument.

June 11th

Say what you will—I cannot stay here any longer. What is there for me to do here? Time hangs heavy on my hands. The Prince sees to it that I am well cared for, as well as could possibly be; still I do not feel at home. He is a man of intellect, yet there is nothing extraordinary about his mind; being with him is no more entertaining than reading a good book. I shall stay another week; then I shall start wandering again. The best thing I have done here are a few sketches. The Prince has a certain amount of understanding for the arts and would be even better at it were he not fettered by distasteful scientific ideas and commonplace terminology. Sometimes it sets my teeth on edge when I point out nature and art to him with my heartfelt imagination, and he feels suddenly that he must do the correct thing and ruins everything with a platitude.

June 16th

Yes, I am a wanderer on this earth—a pilgrim. Are you anything more than that?

June 18th

You would like to know where I am heading? Let me inform you, confidentially…I have to stay here two weeks more; then, I tell myself, I want to visit the mines in —. Of course there's nothing to it, really, but that I want to be near Lotte. And I have to laugh at my heart as I do its bidding.

July 29th

No, all is well, all is well just as it is. I…her husband! O God, Who didst make me as I am, hadst Thou but granted me this bliss, my whole life would have been a paean of praise to Thee! But I shall not remonstrate, and I beg Thee to forgive my tears and my vain desires. Lotte…my wife! If only I could say that I had held the most beloved creature under the sun in my arms! It makes me shudder, William, to think of Albert putting his arms around her slender waist.

And—do I dare say it? Why not, William? She would have been happier with me. He is not the man to fulfill all her desires. A certain lack of sensitivity, a lack…oh, put it any way you like…his heart does not respond to certain passages in a book over which Lotte's and mine would meet, and on a hundred other occasions…when we are talking about someone else's behavior…oh, my dear William, of course he loves her with all his heart, and love such as that merits all things!

A perfectly unbearable person interrupted me at this point. I have dried my tears; I have been distracted; adieu, my friend!

August 4th

I am not the only one thus afflicted. All men suffer disappointments and are deceived in their expectations. I paid the good woman under the linden tree a visit. Her eldest boy ran to meet me. His cry of joy brought out his mother. She looked despondent. Her first words were, “Oh, my dear, good gentleman, my little Hans died.” He was her youngest boy. I was speechless. “And my husband has returned from Switzerland with empty hands,” she went on. “If it had not been for some kind people he would have had to beg his way home. On the way back he was stricken with a fever.” What could I say? I gave her boy something. She asked me to accept a few apples, which I did, and left the sorrowful scene.

August 21st

Like the turning of a hand…things change with me just as quickly. Sometimes a happier outlook on life tries to struggle to the surface—alas, only for a moment. When I am lost in my dreams I can’t help thinking—what if Albert were to die? You would…she would…and then I follow this phantasmagoria until it leads me to an abyss and I draw back trembling.
When I walk out of the gate, the way I drove when I went to fetch Lotte for the dance—how different things were then! All past, all over and done with! Not a trace left of that bygone world, not a heartbeat of my former emotions. I feel like a ghost who returns to the burnt-out, ruined castle he built when he was a virile prince, and furnished with all the treasure of a glorious life, and left hopefully to his beloved son.

September 3rd

Sometimes I simply cannot understand how she can love another, how she dare—since I love her alone, so deeply, so fully, and recognize nothing, know nothing, have nothing but her!

September 4th

Yes, I am right. That’s how it is. As all nature tends toward autumn, it becomes autumn within me and all around me. My leaves turn yellow,

as the leaves of the nearby trees fall to the ground. Didn't I write to you, shortly after I came here, about a peasant lad? I enquired about him in Wahlheim the other day and was told that he had been dismissed and nobody seemed to know anything about him. Yesterday I met him quite by chance on his way to another village. I accosted him, and he told me his story, which touched me deeply, as you will readily understand when I repeat it to you. But why do I bother? Why don't I keep what frightens and hurts me to myself? Why must I sadden you, too? Why do I constantly give you the opportunity to pity and scold me? Very well…that, too, may be a part of my destiny.

At first the poor fellow answered my questions with a quiet sadness in which I thought I could detect a certain shyness, but soon he spoke with less reserve, as if he had suddenly recognized me and himself. He was quite frank about the mistakes he had made and told me his whole sad story. I wish I could pass on every word of it to you, for you to pass judgment on it. He admitted, with something akin to the zest and happiness of remembrance itself, how his passion for his mistress had grown stronger daily, until in the end he hadn't known what he was doing or saying or where to lay his poor head.

He couldn't eat, drink, or sleep; he felt choked with emotion; he did things he wasn't supposed to do and what he was supposed to do he left undone. It was as if he were pursued by demons until, one day, when he knew that she was in one of the upstairs rooms, he went to her there—more than that, he was drawn to her. She wouldn't give in to him, so he tried to take her by force. He didn't know what came over him. As God was his witness, his intentions had always been honorable, and he had never longed for anything so much in his life as that she should marry him. After he had spoken on and on like this for a while, he became hesitant, like someone who has more on his mind but is afraid to speak out. At last he shyly confessed to the small intimacies she had allowed him and how close she had let him draw.

He broke off several times to protest over and over again that he was not telling me all this to damage her reputation in any way…that was how he put it. He loved and respected her as much as ever; he had

never talked about it before and was only telling me now to assure me that he was not a warped or unreasonable man. And here, good friend, I must repeat the old refrain I am constantly singing: if only I could put this man before you as I see him now! If only I could relate his story so you could feel how I share his fate—must share it! But enough—since you know me and my destiny only too well, you probably also know what attracts me to all unfortunate people, and to this man in particular.

On rereading this page, I see that I have forgotten to tell you the end of the story. It isn't difficult to guess. She rejected him. Her brother happened upon them. He had always hated the poor fellow and wished him out of the house because he feared his sister might marry again, and his children thereby lose the inheritance that he had high hopes would be theirs, because the woman is childless. The brother threw him out and noised the whole thing abroad to such an extent that she could not possibly have taken him back, even if she had wanted to. Then she took on another servant and it is rumored that she has had trouble with her brother about the new man too, but this time everyone feels sure she will marry him. My poor lad, however, is determined not to live to see it.

I have not exaggerated any of this or oversentimentalized it. I would go so far as to say that I have told it laconically—yes, laconically—and have tried to make it more commonplace by telling it in conventional terms.

Love, loyalty, and passion such as this are therefore no figments of my imagination. They live and can be found in all purity among a class of people we like to call uncultured and crude. We cultured ones—cultured until there is nothing left! Read my little tale with reverence, I beg of you! Today, as I write it down, all is quiet within me. You can see by my handwriting that I am not scribbling as I usually do. Read, my dear friend, and reflect that it is your friend's story too. Yes, it has happened to me, and the rest will happen to me too, and I am not nearly so well behaved or determined as that poor wretch, with whom I scarcely dare to compare myself.

September 5th

She wrote a little note to her husband, who is away on business. It started off with the words, “My best, my dearest one. Come home as soon as you can. I live in joyous anticipation of your return.” Just then a friend came in with the news that, owing to certain circumstances, Albert would not be able to return as soon as expected. The little note was forgotten, and in the course of the evening I came across it. I read it and smiled, and she asked me why I was smiling. “What a divine gift our imagination is!” I said. “For a moment I imagined that it was written to me.” She said nothing, but she seemed displeased by my behavior, and I was silenced.

September 6th

It was very difficult for me to decide to put aside the simple blue jacket in which I danced with Lotte for the first time, but it had become too threadbare. I have had one made exactly like it—collar and cuffs just alike, and the same yellow waistcoat and breeches. But it doesn’t have quite the desired effect. I don’t know…in time I suppose I shall grow fond of this suit, too.

September 12th

She was away for a few days. She left to fetch Albert. Today I walked into her room, she came to meet me, and I kissed her hand, my heart overflowing with joy. A canary flew from the mirror onto her shoulder. “My new friend,” she said and coaxed him onto her hand. “I brought him for the children. He is such a darling. Look, when I give him bread, he flutters and picks it up so neatly. And he kisses me. Look!”

She held the little creature to her mouth, and it touched her beloved lips so sweetly, as if it could feel the bliss it was being granted.
“Let him kiss you too,” she said, stretching out her hand to me, with the bird on it. His little beak found its way from her mouth to mine, and the little peck it gave me was like a breath, a premonition of the delights of love.

“I wouldn’t say that his kiss was entirely without desire,” I said. “He seeks food, and the kiss leaves him unsatisfied.”
“But he eats out of my mouth too,” she said, and let him take a few crumbs from her lips. She was smiling, radiant with the joy of an innocent love. I turned away. She should not have done it. She should not incite my imagination with such exhibitions of heavenly innocence and bliss; she should not rouse my heart, which the indifference of life sometimes rocks to sleep. And yet, why not? She trusts me. She knows how much I love her.

September 15th

It is enough to drive one mad, William! To think that there are people who have no feeling at all for the few things on this earth that are of real value! Do you remember the walnut trees under which I sat with Lotte when we visited the good vicar in St. —? Those magnificent trees that, God knows, always delighted me…how snug they made the rectory courtyard, how cool, and what marvelous branches they had! And the memories that went with them, back to the worthy vicar who had planted them so many years ago. The schoolmaster mentions his name often; he has it from his grandfather. What a good man he was, and his memory was sacred to me always under those trees. Let me tell you, there were tears in the schoolmaster’s eyes yesterday when we spoke about how they had been cut down. Yes, cut down!

The very idea drives me crazy! I could murder the dog who drove in the first ax. I, who would grieve if I had a pair of trees like that in my yard and had to see them die of old age…I have to see the thing happen! But, my dear friend, there is another side to it—human reaction. The whole village is grumbling about it, and I hope the vicar’s wife will be made to feel, by a lack of butter and eggs and the dearth of other little friendly gestures, how she has wounded the town. Because it was done on the orders of the new clergyman’s wife (our dear old man died), a gaunt, sickly woman who has every reason not to participate in the life going on around her because it wants no part of her. She is a crazy creature who pretends to be very learned, dabbles in new

interpretations of the Scriptures, shrugs off Lavater's ecstasies, and occupies herself with the moral-critical reformation of Christianity that is currently fashionable. She is thoroughly unhealthy and therefore knows naught of the joys on God's earth.

Only a person like that could have cut down my walnut trees! You can see—I can't get over it! Just imagine—the falling leaves, she says, messed up her yard and made it dank. The trees took away the light, and when the nuts were ripe, the boys threw stones at them, and that made her nervous! I suppose it disturbed her profound thoughts as she weighed the merits of Kennicott, Semler, and Michaelis. When I saw how upset the villagers were, especially the older ones, I asked, "Why did you let it happen?" "When the bailiff wants anything done," they said, "what can we do about it?" But I can report on one act of justice: the bailiff and the vicar—who wanted to see some gain from his wife's whim; they don't usually fill his larder—thought they would divide the profit of the trees between them. But the chamberlain got wind of it and said, "It goes into our coffers!" According to him, his office holds claim to that part of the parsonage on which the trees stood and will sell them to the highest bidder! There they lie. Oh, if I were prince, I would see to it that vicar's wife, bailiff, and chamberlain—prince? Ah me, if I were prince, of what concern would the trees on my land be to me?

October 10th

If only I can look into her dark eyes, then all is well with me again. And do you know what grieves me? I don't think Albert is as happy as he…hoped to be…as I thought I was when…
I don't like all these pauses, but can't seem to express myself in any other way at this point…and am expressing myself clearly enough, I think, anyway.

October 12th

Ossian has replaced Homer in my heart, and what a world it is into which this divine poet leads me! Oh, to wander across the heath in a

blustering windstorm, by the light of a waning moon, as it conjures up the ghosts of our ancestors in clouds of mist! Oh, to hear, above the rushing of a forest stream, the half-fading groans of specters issuing from caves in the hillside, and the keening maiden weeping herself into her grave beside the four moss-clad, grass-o'ergrown stones of her noble, fallen hero—her beloved.

When I see him—the roving, hoary bard—seeking the footsteps of his forefathers on the wide moor only to find their gravestones; and he looks up, lamenting, at the gentle star of eve about to sink into the rolling sea and times gone by revive in his heroic soul, times when a friendly light still guided the brave man in his peril, and the moon cast its serene light on his garlanded ship, sailing home victorious…when I can read the profound sorrow on his brow and see this last, forsaken, magnificent one reel exhausted to his grave, still finding a melancholy yet glowing joy in the powerless presence of the shades of his departed ones, and can hear him cry as he looks down upon the cold earth and tall waving grasses, "The wanderer will come, will come, who knew me in my glory and will ask, 'Where is the bard, oh, where is Fingal's7 admirable son?' His footsteps cross my grave and he asks in vain for me on earth!" Ah my friend, then, like a noble armiger, I would like to draw my sword and in a trice free my liege lord from the agonizing torment of a life that is a gradual death and send my own soul after the liberated demigod!

October 19th

Oh, this void, this dreadful void in my breast! Often I think—if just once I could press her to my heart, it would be filled!

October 26th

Yes, I am growing certain, dear friend, more and more certain, that the life of a human creature is a negligible factor, a very negligible factor. A friend came to see Lotte; I went into the next room to find a book—and couldn't read. Then I picked up a pen to write. I could hear them talking softly about unimportant things, new happenings in town, a wedding,

someone was ill, very ill…she has a hard dry cough and every bone in her face shows, she faints…“I wouldn’t give a penny for her life,” says Lotte’s friend. “I hear that N.N. is not well either,” says Lotte. “He’s so bloated,” says her friend.

And my lively imagination carries me off to the bedside of these poor people. I can see with what terrible resistance they turn their backs on life, while she—William, my girl speaks about it the way…the way one talks about such things…a stranger lies dying. And when I look around me and see this room—Lotte’s clothes, Albert’s papers, the pieces of furniture that have by now become my good friends, even this inkwell here—I think: see what you mean to this house. All in all, your friends respect you; you are a joy to them; your heart tells you that you could not do without them; and yet…if you were to go now, if you were to leave this aura…would they…and how long would it take them to fill the gap your loss would tear into their destiny? How long? Oh, man is so transient that he can be blotted out even where he feels quite sure of his existence, where he leaves the only true impression of his presence on earth—in the thoughts and souls of his loved ones. From them, too, he must vanish—and so soon!

October 27th

Often I would tear my breast and bash my brains in because we can mean so little to one another. Ah, the love, joy, warmth, and ecstasy that I cannot contribute and will therefore never receive from anyone else! With a heart full of joy I cannot make happy the man who stands before me, helpless and cold.

October 27th, Evening

I have so much, yet my feeling for her devours it all. I have so much, yet without her all of it is nothing.

October 30th

A hundred times, at least, I have been on the point of taking her in my arms. The good Lord knows what it means to see so much graciousness passing to and fro before one's eyes and not be allowed to grasp it, for grasping is the most natural urge of mankind. Don't children try to grasp anything they can think of? And I?

November 3rd

God knows, I go to bed often with the wish—yes, sometimes in the hope of not waking up again; then, in the morning, I open my eyes to the sun and am miserable. If only I could be moody and put the blame on the weather, or on some third person, or on a project that has failed, then the unbearable burden of my ill humor would be only half mine. But alas, I know only too well that it is all my fault, my fault. Suffice it to say that the source of all misery is within me just as I formerly bore within myself the source of all bliss. Am I not still the same man who used to bask in such an abundance of emotion, whose every step led to a paradise, who had a heart that could embrace the whole world lovingly?

But now this heart is dead; no ecstasy flows from it any more. My eyes are dry, and my mind, no longer laved by refreshing tears, describes fearful furrows on my brow. I suffer much, for I have lost what was my singular joy in life—the sacred, invigorating power with which I could create worlds around me.

It is gone. When I look out my window at the far distant hills and see the morning sun breaking through the mists that lie upon them and flooding the peaceful meadows with its light, the gentle river winding toward me between leafless willows—when all magnificent nature stands still before my eyes like a glossy picture, and all this glory is incapable of pumping one ounce of bliss from heart to brain—then the whole poor fellow that I am become stands before God like an exhausted fountainhead, a leaky pail run dry. Often I have thrown myself on the ground and begged God to give me tears, as a plowman begs for rain when the sky is leaden above him and his parched earth.

But oh, I can feel it. God gives no rain or sunshine in answer to our tempestuous pleas, and those bygone days, the memory of which torments me now, why were they so blissful if not because I waited then in patience for His grace and received the bliss He chose to bestow upon me with a whole and deeply grateful heart?

November 8th

She reproached me for my excessiveness—but so sweetly! My excessiveness—that I sometimes let a glass of wine lead me to drink a bottle! “Don’t do it,” she said. “Think of Lotte.” “Think!” I said. “Do you have to tell me that? I think—I don’t think—you are in my mind constantly. Today I sat down where you got out of the carriage the other day….” She spoke hastily of something else to stop me from pursuing the topic further. My dear friend, I am done for! She can do with me what she will.

November 15th

Thank you, William, for your sympathy and well-meant advice, and don’t worry, please. Let me suffer it through to the end. With all my weariness of spirit, I still have the strength left to persevere. I respect our religion; you know that. I feel that it is a staff for many a weary man and a comfort to him who is pining away. Only—can religion, must religion mean the same thing to every man? When you look at our vast world, you see thousands to whom it does not mean these things, thousands to whom it never will, whether it be preached to them or not. Must it therefore mean these things to me? Doesn’t the son of God Himself say that those will be with Him whom His Father gives unto Him?

But what if my Father wants to keep me for Himself, which is what my heart tells me? I beg of you, do not interpret this falsely; do not see ridicule in these innocent words. In them I lay my soul at your feet, or I would better have remained silent. I don’t like to speak about things of which everyone else knows just as little as I do. What else is it but the fate of man to suffer his destined measure and drink his full cup to the

end? And if the cup that the good Lord in heaven has put to his lips be too bitter, why should I put on airs and pretend that it is sweet?

And why should I not feel ashamed in those dread moments when I tremble between being and not-being, when the past shines like a flash of lightning above the dark abyss of the future and everything around me sinks down, and the world comes to an end? Is mine not the voice of a man cowering within himself, a man who has lost himself, hurtling inexorably downhill, who must cry out from the innermost depths of his vainly struggling forces, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” And why should I be ashamed to thus cry out—why should I dread this moment since it was not even spared Him who can roll back the heavens like a cloth?

November 21st

She doesn’t see, she doesn’t feel, that she is preparing a poison that will destroy her and me, and with voluptuous delight I drink the cup she hands me to the last dregs, and to my ruination. What is the meaning of that kindly look that she so often—often?…no, not often, but sometimes gives me, the graciousness with which she sometimes accepts a chance expression of my feelings for her, the compassion for what I am enduring, that is written on her brow?

Yesterday, as I was leaving, she gave me her hand and said, “Adieu, dear Werther.” Dear Werther! It was the first time she called me “dear” and I felt it to the core of me. I have repeated it to myself over and over again, and last night, when I was about to retire and was talking all sorts of things over in my mind, I suddenly said out loud, “Good night, dear Werther!” and had to laugh at myself.

November 22nd

I cannot pray “Let her remain mine,” yet often it seems to me that she is mine. I cannot pray “Give her to me,” for she belongs to another. Thus I mock my pain. Were I really to let myself go, a whole litany of antitheses would be the result.

November 24th

She knows how I suffer. Today her eyes looked deep into my heart. I found her alone. I said nothing, and she looked at me. And I no longer saw her loveliness nor the radiance of her wonderful spirit. All that had disappeared from before my eyes. Instead I had a far more glorious vision. I saw her face filled with an expression of the most intimate sympathy, the sweetest compassion.

Why couldn't I throw myself at her feet? Why couldn't I counter with an embrace and a thousand kisses? She escaped to the piano and sang to her own accompaniment in her sweet, low voice, and so melodiously. Never were her chaste lips more enchanting. It was as though they parted thirsty for the sweet tones that swelled forth from the instrument and only a furtive echo escaped them. Ah me, if only I could explain it to you! I offered no more resistance. I bowed my head and vowed that never would I presume to kiss those lips, o'er which celestial spirits hover…and yet…I want to kiss them. Ha! You see? That is what stands before my soul like a bulkhead—such bliss, and then…down, down, to atone for such a sin…. A sin?

November 26th

Sometimes I tell myself my fate is unique. Consider all other men fortunate, I tell myself; no one has ever suffered like you. Then I read a poet of ancient times, and it is as though I were looking deep into my own heart. I have to suffer much. Oh, has any human heart before me ever been so wretched?

November 30th

It seems that I am not going to be permitted to recover, no doubt about it. Wherever I go I encounter something that upsets me utterly. Today—oh, fate, oh, humankind!
At noon I was walking along the river. I didn't feel like eating. It was a dreary day. A raw wind was blowing down from the mountains and

gray rain clouds were rolling into the valley. Ahead of me, I could see a man in a shabby green coat, scrambling about among the rocks. I thought he was gathering herbs. As I drew nearer, and he, hearing me, turned around, I found myself looking into a most interesting face.

Its main expression was a quiet sadness; otherwise it betrayed nothing but candor and honesty. His black hair was pinned up in two rolls; the rest hung in one thick braid down his back. Since, judging by his dress, he seemed to be a man of humble origin, I decided that he would not take offense if I chose to comment on what he was doing, so I asked him what he was looking for. With a deep sigh, he replied, “I am looking for flowers, but can find none.”
“This is not the season for them,” I said, smiling.

“But there are so many flowers,” he replied, moving down to my level. “I have roses in my garden, and honeysuckle, two kinds. My father gave me one. They grow like weeds. I have been looking for them for two days and cannot find them. And outside there are always flowers, yellow ones, blue and red ones—and centaury has such a pretty blossom. I can’t find any of them.”
I could sense something mysterious, so I asked in a roundabout way, “And what does he want to do with the flowers?”
A bright, tremulous smile crossed his face. “If the gentleman won’t give me away,” he said, putting a finger to his lips, “I promised my sweetheart a bouquet.”
“Now there’s a good man!” I said.

“Oh, she has many other things,” he replied. “She is rich.”
“And yet she likes his nosegay,” I said.
“Oh,” he countered, “she has jewels and a crown.”
“What is her name?”

“If the Netherlands would only pay me,” he said, “it would make a changed man of me. Yes, yes, there was a time when I was very well off. Now that’s all over and done with. Now I am…” He turned his moist eyes skyward to express the rest.
“So he was once a happy man?” I asked.

“Ah, if only I could be like that again,” he replied. “How happy I used to feel in those days—so merry, like a fish in water.”
“Henry!” cried an old woman who now came up the path. “Henry, where are you? We’ve been looking for you everywhere. Come and eat.”
“Is that your son?” I asked, stepping forward.

“Indeed he is my poor son,” she said. “God has given me a heavy cross to bear.”
“How long has he been that way?” I asked.

“Quiet like that,” she said, “he has been only for the past six months. God be thanked that he is as he is now. The year before, he was a raving maniac and they had to keep him chained in the madhouse. Now he does no harm, but he is always troubled, his kings and emperors on his mind. He was such a good, quiet lad who helped toward my support and could write a pretty hand, but suddenly he became despondent and fell into a violent fever, and from that into raving madness, and now he is as you see him. If I were to tell you, sir—”

I interrupted her flood of words with the question, “What sort of time was it that he praises so highly, when he was so happy, so content?”
“The fool,” she cried, with a pitying smile. “He means the time he was deranged, the time he spent in the madhouse, when he didn’t know what was going on around him—that’s the time he is forever praising so highly.”
It struck me like a thunderbolt. I pressed a coin into her hand and hurried away.

“So that was when you were happy!” I cried aloud, as I hastened back to town. “When you felt like a fish in water!” Oh dear God in heaven, hast Thou made it man’s fate that he cannot be happy until he has found his reason and lost it again? Poor wretch! Yet how I envy him his dim mind, envy him pining away in his confusion. He goes out hopefully in the winter to pick flowers for his queen and grieves when he finds none and can’t grasp when he finds none…and I? I go out without hope

in my heart, with no purpose, and return home as I went. He can see the man he would be if only the Netherlands would pay him. Fortunate fellow! He can ascribe his lack of bliss to an earthly hindrance. He doesn't feel, he doesn't even know, that his misery lies in his destroyed heart, in his disordered mind—a fate from which all the kings on earth cannot save him!

The miserable wretch should perish who dares to mock a sick man journeying to a far-off healing spring that will only make his sickness worse and the rest of his days more painful; and so should he who looks down arrogantly on a man with a sorely afflicted heart who, to rid himself of his guilty conscience and cast off the sufferings of his soul, makes a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulcher. Every step he takes on an unbeaten track is balm to his fearful soul, and with every day of his journey endured, his heart rests lightened of many anxieties. And you dare to call it madness, you sophists on your downy cushions? Madness?

O God, Thou dost see my tears. Why didst Thou, Who made man poor, have to give him brothers who would rob him even of the little he has, of the little faith he has in Thee, Thou all-loving God? For what is faith in a healing root or in the tears of the grapevine but faith in Thee, in that Thou hast imbued all that surrounds us with the powers of salvation and the forces that ease pain, of which we stand in hourly need.

Father Whom I know not, Father Who once filled my whole soul but has turned His face from me now—call me unto Thee. Be silent no longer. Thy silence will not deter this thirsting soul. Could any man—could any father—be angry with a son who comes back unexpectedly and throws his arms around his neck, crying, "Here I am, returned to thee, my father. Be not angry that I interrupted my wanderings, which according to Thy will, I should have endured longer. The world is the same everywhere—in effort and work, in reward and joy—but what concern is it of mine? Only where Thou art can I be content. There I will suffer and rejoice." Wouldst Thou, dear heavenly Father, cast out such a man?

December 1st

William! The fellow I wrote to you about, that fortunate unfortunate man, was once secretary to Lotte's father, and his passionate love for her—which he nurtured, concealed, but finally disclosed, and because of which he was dismissed—drove him mad. Try to feel, as you read these dry words, with what derangement they filled me when Albert mentioned it to me just as casually as you read about it now.

December 4th

I beg of you…look…I am done for. I cannot endure it a moment longer. Today I was with her…she was sitting…she was playing the piano…different pieces, and with so much expression…with so much…with so much…What do you want me to do? Her little sister was sitting on my knee, dressing her doll. Tears rushed to my eyes. I leaned forward and suddenly could see nothing but Lotte's wedding ring, and my tears flowed. And all of a sudden, as if by chance, she began to play that old, heavenly sweet melody, and I was consoled. And my soul was filled with the recollection of things past, of other times when I had listened to the song, and the dark intervals, the grief, the hopes dashed, and then…I started to pace the room, up and down, my heart stifled with the pressure of these memories. "For God's sake," I said, turning on her with a vehemence I could not control, "for God's sake, stop!"

She did and stared at me wide-eyed. "Werther," she said, with a little smile that cut me to the quick, "Werther, you are ill. Your favorite things are repugnant to you. Go. I beg of you, go and try to calm down." I tore myself away and…dear God, Thou seest my misery. Put an end to it, I beseech Thee!

December 6th

How the sight of her haunts me! Awake and dreaming, she fills my whole being. Here, when I close my eyes, here, behind my forehead, where we assemble our insight, I see her dark eyes. Here! I cannot

express it adequately. I close my eyes and there they are…hers—like an abyss in front of me, inside me. They fill my whole mind.

What is man, this exalted demigod? Doesn't he lack power just when he needs it most? Whether he is uplifted by joy or engulfed by suffering, is he not stopped in both conditions and brought back to dull, cold consciousness just when he is ready to lose himself in the abundance of the infinite?

Editor To Reader

How I wish there was enough material left, covering our friend's last strange days, so that it would not be necessary to interrupt with narrative the flow of the letters he left behind.
I made a point of collecting precise reports from those who of necessity had a thorough knowledge of his story. It is simple, and except for a few details, all the accounts tally. Opinions differ only in accordance with the personalities and opinions of the characters involved.

There is nothing left to do but relate conscientiously what we were able to find out as a result of our meticulous efforts and include, in their proper place, letters that the departed left behind, not overlooking the smallest evidence we may have come across, since it is very difficult to uncover the true motive of even a single action when it takes place among people who are not cut of conventional cloth.

Ill humor and listlessness became more and more deeply rooted in Werther's soul until finally they took possession of his entire personality. The harmony of his spirit was utterly destroyed, and an inner passion and vehemence that confused all the forces of his nature resulted in the most objectionable effects, leaving him in the end with nothing but a feeling of exhaustion out of which he tried to rise with an even greater fear than he had felt when previously seeking to combat his misery.

His anxiety destroyed all the remaining forces of his intellect, his liveliness, his wit; he became sorry company, waxing ever more

unfortunate and unjust as he became increasingly unhappy. At any rate, that is what Albert's friends say. They declare that Werther could no longer evaluate that decent, quiet man who had at last taken possession of a happiness long desired with the attitude that had to accompany it—the wish to preserve this happiness in the future—not Werther, who expended his all daily only to suffer starvation at nightfall.

Albert, they say, underwent no such change. He was the same man Werther had known from the beginning and learned to appreciate and respect. He loved Lotte above all else; he was proud of her and liked to see everyone else recognize her as a paragon among women. Who can blame him if he did his best to avoid any traces of suspicion and had no desire to share his treasure with anyone, not even in the most innocent fashion? They admit that Albert often left his wife's room when Werther was there—not, however, in hatred or antipathy toward his friend but because he could sense that his presence oppressed Werther.
Lotte's father was suffering from a complaint that confined him to his room. He sent his carriage for her, and she drove out to see him. It was a beautiful winter day; the first heavy snow had fallen and covered the whole countryside.

Werther walked over on the following morning to accompany Lotte home in case Albert did not come for her. The clear weather had little effect on his dour mood. His heart was heavy, his unhappy view of things was deeply rooted in him, and his spirit could only pass from one painful thought to the next. Since he lived in a state of continual dissatisfaction with himself, the condition of others appeared to him as dubious and confused, too. He felt that he had disturbed the good relationship between Albert and Lotte and reproached himself on this score, and a secret resentment against Albert crept into his confusion.

On his way to fetch Lotte, his mind reverted to this subject. Yes, yes, he told himself, his jaw set hard…there you have it—the ultimate, friendly, tender relationship that participates in everything, a quiet, lasting faithfulness! Satiation—that's what it is! And indifference. Doesn't

every miserable bit of business he has to do attract him more than his precious wife? Does he appreciate his good fortune? Does he respect her as she deserves to be respected? He has her…all very well and good…he has her. I know he has her just as I know all sorts of things. I think I have become accustomed to the knowledge, but in the end, it will drive me mad and be the death of me. And has his friendship for me remained constant? Doesn't he see an interference in his rights in my devotion to Lotte, and a silent reproach in my attentions? I know it, I can feel it—he doesn't like to see me. He would like to see me go. My presence oppresses him.

Werther walked fast, stopped often, stood still and seemed to want to turn back, but then he persevered and went steadily forward and with thoughts such as these and mumbling to himself, finally reached the lodge almost against his will.

He walked up to the door, asked after the old man and Lotte, and found the house in quite a stir. The oldest boy told him that there had been a disaster in Wahlheim. A peasant had been murdered. The news had no particular effect on Werther. He went into the living room and found Lotte trying to talk her father out of going over to look into the matter in spite of his weak condition. The murderer was still unknown. The dead man had been found in front of his door early that morning. Suspicions centered on someone. The murdered man was the servant of a widow who had had another man in her service before him. This man had been dismissed under disagreeable circumstances.

When Werther heard this, he became very agitated. "It couldn't be!" he cried, and then, "I must go there at once!"
He rushed over to Wahlheim, every memory alive in him, and there was no doubt in his mind that the young man with whom he had spoken several times and whom he had come to like so much had committed the crime.

He had to pass under the linden trees to get to the inn where the body had been laid out and was horrified when he saw the beloved spot. Where the neighbor's children had played once it was befouled with

blood. Love and faithfulness—the most beautiful human emotions—had been transformed into violence and murder. The sturdy trees stood barren and thick with hoarfrost; the pretty hedges, arched over the low wall of the churchyard, were leafless; the snowcapped gravestones were visible through the gaps.

As Werther approached the inn in front of which the whole village had assembled there was a sudden hubbub of voices. A group of armed men was approaching from a distance, shouting that they had the murderer. Werther saw him and at once his doubts were dispelled. It was the boy who had loved the widow so much, whom Werther had met some time ago in his tacit fury and despair.

“What have you done, unhappy man?” Werther cried, walking up to the prisoner. The man looked at Werther quietly and was silent for a moment; then he said, “No one shall have her, and she shall have no one.” The men took the prisoner to the inn and Werther hurried away.

The impact of this horrifying experience created a state of chaos in his mind. For a moment he was torn out of his grief, his despondency and indifference to things, and sympathy for the young man overwhelmed him. He was seized by an indescribable urge to save him. He could feel the man’s misery, even as a criminal—he felt the man was innocent; and he could put himself so wholeheartedly into the poor wretch’s position that he was sure he could make others feel the same way. He wanted to speak for the man; the liveliest defense rushed to his lips. He tore over to the lodge, and all the way there could not keep from muttering to himself what he was going to say to the judge.

When he entered the room again, he found Albert present. For a moment this irritated him, but he soon regained control of himself and expounded to the judge how he felt about the crime. The old man shook his head several times, and although Werther set forth in the liveliest fashion and most passionately and truthfully anything and everything that one man could possibly say to excuse his neighbor, still, as is quite understandable, the judge remained unmoved. He didn’t even let Werther finish what he had to say, but disagreed heatedly and

reproved him for defending a murderer. He explained that all law would be voided and the security of the state destroyed if Werther's viewpoint were accepted, adding that he was in no position to do anything about it without taking grave responsibility upon himself. Everything would have to take its prescribed and orderly course.

But Werther did not give up so easily. He begged the judge at least to look the other way if anyone should help the man to escape! The judge, of course, rejected him on this count too. Albert, who at last joined in the conversation, sided with the judge. Werther was outnumbered, and in a state of abject misery took himself off, after the judge had told him several times, "The man is doomed."
How deeply these words impressed Werther can be seen from a note found among his papers, words that must certainly have been written on that day: "You are doomed, my unfortunate friend. I can see it quite clearly—we are doomed."

Werther especially resented Albert's final word in the matter, spoken in the presence of the judge, and thought he could detect resentment against himself in it, and even though, after giving the matter more thought, the fact could not have escaped him that both men were right, he still felt that he would be denying his innermost self if he admitted it.
A note referring to this, which perhaps expresses Werther's entire relationship to Albert, was found among his papers. "What good does it do me to tell myself again and again he is good, his behavior is impeccable…it tears me apart! I cannot be just!"

Since it was a mild evening and a thaw had set in, Lotte and Albert walked home. On the way, she looked about her every now and then as if she missed Werther's company. Albert began to talk about Werther reprovingly, accusing him of being unjust. He touched upon the young man's passionate nature and said he wished Werther would go away. "I wish it for our sakes as well," he said, "and I beg you, try to guide his attitude toward you into other channels. See to it that he visits us less often. People are beginning to notice, and I know that there has been talk about it."

Lotte was silent, and Albert seemed to feel her silence. At any rate, from then on, he never spoke of Werther in her presence, and if she mentioned him, he stopped talking or directed the conversation onto other topics.

Werther's vain effort to save the unfortunate man was the last flickering flame of a light that was dying. After it, he sank even deeper into pain and lassitude. He became especially overwrought when he heard that he might be asked to testify against the man, who now denied his guilt.

Everything disagreeable that had ever happened to him in his active life—his grievance against the embassy, every failure that had hurt him—now ran rampant through his tormented mind. He let it justify his idleness; he felt cut off from all hope of ever again being able to regain a firm grip on life. Thus he finally drew closer to his sad end, lost in a fantastic sensitivity and infinite passion, in the eternal monotony of a sad intercourse with the gracious and beloved creature whose inner repose he disturbed, stormy in the powers that were left him, working them off with no goal, no prospects.

A few letters he left behind bear witness to the confusion and tempestuousness of his restless activities and struggle, and of his weariness of life. We include them here.

December 12th

Dear William, I am in the condition in which those unfortunates who were believed to be possessed of evil spirits must have found themselves. Sometimes it takes hold of me—not fear, not desire, but an inner, unfathomable turmoil that threatens to burst the confines of my breast and choke me. Then I wander about in the dread nocturnal setting of this unfriendly season.
Last night I had to go out. We had a sudden thaw. I had heard that the river had overflowed its banks, all streams were swollen, and my beloved valley was inundated from Wahlheim down. It was after

eleven. I ran outside. What a terrible spectacle, to see the turbulent flood in the moonlight, pouring down from the rocks to cover field, meadow, and hedgerow! Whichever way you looked, the broad valley was one stormy sea in a howling gale. And when the moon came out again above a black cloud, and the flood rushed by me with a dull roar in its gloriously frightening reflection, I was overcome by a great trembling and, once more, a yearning.

With my arms open wide, I stood facing the abyss, breathing down, down, and was lost in the bliss of hurling my torment and suffering into it to be carried off foaming, like the waves…and couldn't lift my feet from the ground to put an end to my misery! My time is not yet run out. I feel it. William, I would have given my life to be able to tear the clouds apart with the gale that was howling, and to grasp the floodwater itself! Ha! And will not this prisoner perhaps be granted such bliss one day? As I looked down, in my melancholy, at a spot where I had rested once with Lotte under a willow tree during a hot walk, it too had been inundated. And I had scarcely recognized the willow, William, when I had to think, what about her meadows? Her neighborhood? The lodge? Has our summerhouse been destroyed by the torrent? And the sunshine of the past fell upon me as a dream of herds, meadows, and honors falls upon a prisoner. I stood still. I don't have to reproach myself, for I have the courage to die…I could have…and now I sit here like an old woman who gathers her firewood from broken-down hedges and begs her bread from door to door to prolong her fading, joyless existence one moment more….

December 14th

What would you call it, dearest friend…I am afraid of myself! Is not my love for her the most sacred, chaste, and brotherly love? Has my soul ever known a culpable desire? I have no wish to protest…and now, my dreams! Oh, how truly those men felt who ascribed our dreams to the contrary influences of strange powers! When I think of last night…I tremble to tell it…I held her in my arms, I pressed her to my heart, her adorable lips murmured love, and I covered them with endless kisses. My eyes were lost in the intoxication that lay in hers. Dear God, am I

culpable because I can still feel the bliss I experienced then and recall it with a full heart? Lotte! Lotte! It is all over with me. My mind is in a state of confusion. For days now I can't seem to come to my senses, and my eyes are constantly filled with tears. I am well nowhere and well everywhere. I wish for nothing, demand nothing. It would be best if I were to depart.

Under these conditions, the decision to leave this world took an even greater hold on Werther's soul. Since his return to Lotte, it had always been his last hope, yet he told himself that he dare not act hastily. He wanted to take the step with the quietest determination possible.

His doubts, his battle with himself, shine forth clearly in a note that is probably the beginning of a letter to William. It was found among his papers with no date.
"Her presence, her fate, her participation in my destiny force the last tears from my parched brain.

"Oh, to be able to lift the curtain and step behind it! That is all there is to it—so why do I hesitate? Because no one knows what it looks like back there? Because no one ever returns? And because it is characteristic of our spirit to anticipate confusion and darkness in what we do not know?"

In the end, he became more and more attuned to the melancholy idea; his decision became fixed and irrevocable. The following ambiguous letter, written to his friend, attests to this.

December 20th

I can thank your love for me, William, for the fact that you understand me as you did. You are right; it would be best for me to leave. Your suggestion that I return to you does not wholly suit me; at any rate, I would like to go out of my way a little, especially since we can count on a long period of frost and good roads. But it suits me very well that you want to come and fetch me; only please let a fortnight pass and wait for one more letter from me. Nothing should be plucked until it is ripe,

and a fortnight more or less can make quite a difference. Please ask my mother to pray for me and tell her that I beg her to forgive me for all the trouble I have caused her. It happened to be my fate to distress those to whom I should have brought joy. Farewell, best of friends! May all the blessings of heaven be yours! Farewell!

We scarcely dare to express in words what was going on in Lotte's soul during this time, and what her feelings were toward her husband and her unfortunate friend, although we can come to a tacit conclusion from our knowledge of her character, and any sensitive feminine soul will be able to think as she did and feel with her.

This much is certain: she was determined to do her best to keep Werther at a distance, and any hesitancy on her part must be attributed to a sincere desire to spare him, since she knew what it would mean to him to stay away and realized that it was as good as impossible for him to do so. Yet she was more inclined, during this time, to go through with her intention. Her husband meanwhile said nothing at all about it, nor did she, all of which made her more determined than ever to express her agreement with his viewpoint, at least in her behavior.
On the same day on which Werther wrote the letter, just inserted, to his friend—it was the Sunday before Christmas—he visited Lotte in the evening and found her alone.

She was busy arranging a few toys she had assembled for her brothers and sisters for Christmas. He spoke about the joy the children would experience and of the days when the unexpected opening of a door and the vision of a decorated Christmas tree with its wax candles, sugar candy, and apples could transport one into paradise. Lotte tried to hide her embarrassment behind a sweet smile. "There will be a present for you, too," she said, "if you promise to be good. A pretty candle and something else."

"And what do you call good?" he cried. "How can I be good, dearest Lotte?"

“Thursday evening,” she said, “is Christmas Eve. The children are coming, and my father, and all of them will receive their presents then. I want you to come, too, but not before.”
Werther was stunned.

“Please,” she went on, “that is how it is. I beg you, for the sake of my peace of mind, things can’t go on like this. They can’t.”
He turned away from her and began to pace up and down the room, muttering to himself under his breath, “Things can’t go on like this.” Lotte, who could feel the dread condition into which her words had thrown him, tried with questions about all sorts of things to distract him, but to no avail. “No, Lotte,” he said, “I shall not see you again.”

“But why?” she cried. “Werther…you may—you must come to see us again, only be more moderate. Oh, why did you have to be born with so much vehemence, with this fixed, uncontrollable passion for everything you touch? I implore you,” she went on, taking him by the hand, “practice moderation! Your mind—all your knowledge and talents…think of the happiness they can give you! Be more manly! Divert this tragic devotion from a human creature who can only pity you.”

His jaw set hard, he looked at her somberly. She held fast to his hand. “Think calmly, Werther,” she said, “for just one moment. Don’t you see that you are deceiving and ruining yourself on purpose? Why me, Werther? Why me of all people, who belongs to another? Why? I fear…I fear that it is just the impossibility of possessing me that makes your desire for me so fascinating.”

He drew his hand out of hers, and stared at her with a benumbed, resentful expression.
“Very clever!” he said. “Very clever. Are these perhaps Albert’s words? Very politic, very politic, indeed.”

“Anybody could say them,” she interrupted him. “Isn’t it possible that in this whole wide world there might be a girl who could fulfill the desires of your heart? Master yourself and seek her. I swear that you

will find her. Oh, I have been anxious for a long time now, for you and for us, because of the limitation you have imposed on yourself. Try to win control over yourself. A journey might distract you. Surely it would. Seek and find a worthy object of your affections and come back and let us enjoy the bliss of true friendship."

With a cold smile he replied, "That would look well in print and should be recommended to all tutors. Dear Lotte, give me a small respite, and all will be well."
"But just this one thing more, Werther—please do not come again before Christmas Eve."

He was about to reply when Albert entered the room. The men exchanged frosty greetings and walked up and down beside each other in some embarrassment. Werther started a desultory conversation that soon petered out; Albert did the same; then he asked his wife about a few things she was supposed to have attended to, and when he heard that they had not been done, he said something that, to Werther, sounded cold, even harsh. He wanted to leave, but couldn't seem to do so. He hesitated until eight o'clock, his discouragement and resentment increasing constantly. When he at last took up his hat and cane, the table was already set for supper. Albert asked him to stay, but Werther, who felt that the man's heart wasn't in the invitation, thanked him coldly and left.

He reached his house, took the candle from his servant, who wanted to light his way, and went to his room alone. There he wept, talked wildly to himself, paced savagely up and down, and at last threw himself fully dressed on his bed, where he was found at about eleven by his servant, who at last had dared to enter the room to ask his master whether he should not remove his boots. Werther let the man do it, then forbade the boy to enter his room the next morning until he was called.

Early on Monday morning, the twenty-first of December, Werther wrote the following letter to Lotte. It was found after his death, lying on his desk, sealed, and was brought to her. I have decided to insert it here, since it throws light on the conditions under which it was written.

Lotte, I have come to a decision. I want to die, and I am writing this without any romantic exaggeration on the morning of the day on which I shall see you for the last time. When you read these lines, my dearest one, the cool earth will already cover the rigid remains of your restless, unfortunate friend, who to his last hour knew no greater bliss than to converse with you. I have passed a terrible night, for it was the night that hardened my determination and settled it once and for all: I want to die. When I tore myself away from you yesterday, I was in a frightful state of rebellion against all that was oppressing me, and my hopeless, joyless existence beside you took me in its cold grip.

I could scarcely reach my room. I threw myself on my knees, beside myself, and Thou, dear God, didst finally grant me the refreshment of the most bitter tears. A thousand blows, a thousand perspectives stormed through my soul, and in the end, there it stood—firm, whole, the last and only thought: I want to die. I went to bed, and now, in the morning, in the quietude of awakening, it still stands firm and strong in my heart: I want to die. I have come to a conclusion not of despair but of certainty.

I sacrifice myself for you. Yes, Lotte, why should I remain silent? One of us three must go and I wish to be the one. Oh, my dearest one, the thought of murdering your husband…you…me, has often raged through my torn heart. So be it then. When you climb the hilltop on a beautiful summer's evening, think of me. Think of how often I used to come walking up the valley, then glance at the churchyard and look at my grave; see how the wind causes the tall grass to wave in the light of the setting sun. I was so calm when I began to write this, and now—now I am crying like a child because I can see it all so vividly.

At about ten, Werther called his servant and, as he dressed, told him that in a few days he intended to go on a journey. The man should therefore lay out his clothes and get ready to pack them. He also gave orders to collect all outstanding accounts, pick up several books he had loaned to various people, and pay two months in advance to a few poor souls to whom he customarily gave a little something every week.

He had his meal served in his room. After he had eaten, he rode to the magistrate's house, but found him not at home. Lost in thought, he walked up and down in the garden for a while, apparently wishing to burden himself with all the melancholy of remembrance.

The children didn't leave him in peace for long. They followed him, jumped around him, chattering about how, after tomorrow and one more tomorrow and one more day after that, it would be time for them to fetch their Christmas presents from Lotte. They talked about all the marvelous things that came to their childlike minds.

"Tomorrow!" he cried. "And another tomorrow, and one more day!" Then he kissed all of them tenderly and was about to leave when the littlest one had to whisper something in his ear. He betrayed the fact that his older brother had already written their New Year greetings, so big! One for Papa, one for Albert and Lotte, and one for Herr Werther. Early on New Year's Day they intended to distribute them. The news was too much for Werther. He gave each of the children something, mounted his horse, left greetings for the old gentleman, and rode off, his eyes blinded by tears.

He reached home again at about five and told the maid to stoke the fire and keep it going through the night. He ordered his servant to pack his books and linen in a trunk and fold his clothing. Then he must have written the following paragraph of his last letter to Lotte:
"You are not expecting me. You think I am going to obey and not come to see you until Christmas Eve. Ah Lotte, it has to be today or never! On Christmas Eve you will hold this note in your trembling hand and it will be bathed by your beloved tears. I shall do it. I have to do it. Oh, I feel so content in my determination."

Lotte, meanwhile, had fallen into a strange state of mind. After her last talk with Werther, she had begun to realize how hard it would be for her to part with him and how much he would suffer if forced to leave her. She had mentioned casually, in Albert's presence, that Werther was not going to put in an appearance again until Christmas Eve, and

Albert had ridden off to see a neighbor on a business trip that necessitated his staying away overnight.

Lotte was alone, and she was thinking quietly about their dilemma. She saw herself tied forever to a man with whose love and loyalty she was by now thoroughly familiar. She was devoted to him; his serenity and reliability—attributes on which any good woman could build her life's happiness—seemed heaven-sent. She realized only too well what part he would always play in her life, and that of her children. But Werther had come to mean a great deal to her. From the first moment of their acquaintance, the harmony of their spirits had been very evident, and her long association with him and several experiences they had shared had made indelible impressions on her heart.

She was accustomed to sharing everything that interested her with him, and his loss threatened to tear a gap into her life that she feared could never again be closed. If only she could have turned him into a brother at this point, how happy it would have made her! Or if she could have married him off to one of her friends…. If only she could have hoped that there might be a chance of his former good relationship with Albert being restored!
She thought of every one of her friends, one after the other, and found something wrong with all of them. She begrudged him to each in turn.

As a result of these reflections she began to realize, without admitting it to herself too clearly, that it was her secret but sincere desire to keep him for herself. At the same time she told herself, more in an aside, that she couldn't keep him; she had no right to. Her lovely spirit, usually so light and so easily able to help itself, suddenly felt the pressure of a melancholy to which all prospects of happiness were closed. She was depressed; a dark cloud obscured her vision.

It was half past six when she heard someone coming up the stairs and recognized Werther's step, and his voice asking for her. Her heart began to beat wildly, and I think we are safe in assuming that she received him in such condition for the first time. She would have liked to tell the maid to say she was not in, and as he came into the room,

she cried out, in something akin to passionate confusion, “You didn’t keep your promise!”

“I promised nothing,” was his reply.
“Well, then at least you should have granted my request,” she said. “It was made to serve the peace of mind of both of us.”
Without knowing what she was saying or doing, she proceeded to send messages to two of her friends to come at once—anything so as not to be alone with Werther. He put down several books he had brought with him and spoke about a few others, while she was wishing at one moment that her friends would come and in the next that they would stay away. The maid came back with word that both girls regretted they were unable to come.

Lotte would have liked the maid to sit in the next room with whatever she might have to do, then decided against it. Werther was pacing up and down. Lotte went over to the piano and began to play a minuet, but she could not play fluently. She pulled herself together and tried to be casual as she sat down beside Werther, who had taken his usual seat on the sofa.
“Haven’t you brought anything to read?” she asked. He had not. “In my drawer over there is your translation of Ossian’s songs. I haven’t read them yet. I was always hoping to hear them from you, but there never seemed to be any time…we couldn’t seem to…”

He smiled, got up and fetched the songs. As he took them in his hands, he shivered, and as he looked at them, his eyes filled with tears. He sat down and read:8
“O star of night descendant! How fair is thy light in the west; how radiantly thy head rises above thy cloud, moving toward thy hill regally! What dost thou seek on the heath? The storm winds have subsided; from far off comes the murmur of the tumbling brook; surf plays on distant rock, and hum of evening insects swarms across the lea. O beautiful light, what dost thou seek? But thou dost only smile and leave, gaily encircled by riplets that lave thy lovely hair. Farewell, calm beam of light! Arise, O magnificent effulgence of Ossian’s soul!

“And it arises in all its glory. I see my departed friends assembled in Lora as in days of yore—Fingal, a moist column of mist, his heroes around him—here, there…see the bards! Gray Ullin, stately Ryno, Alpin—beloved singer—and thou, gentle-voiced Minona. How changed you are, my friends, since the festive days of Selma when, like spring zephyrs, we contended for our singing laurels, striving in turn to bend the weak, whispering reed!

“Minona, in all her beauty, stepped forward, eyes downcast and filled with tears, hair flowing heavy in the inconstant wind blowing from the hill. She raised her beloved voice, and the souls of the heroes were bleak, for they had oft seen Salgar’s grave and the dark abode of white Colma—Colma, abandoned on the hill, Colma with her melodious voice. Salgar promised to come, but all around her night was falling. Hear Colma’s voice, as she sits on the hill alone!

“COLMA: ‘Night has fallen. I am alone and lost on the storm-swept hill. The wind howls down the canyon; no hut protects me from the rain. I have been abandoned on this stormy hill.
“‘Emerge, O moon, from thy cloud; stars of the night appear! Grant me a ray of light to guide me to the place where my beloved rests from the ardors of the hunt, his bow unstrung, his dogs snuffling around him. But I must needs sit here on the rocky banks of the stream, alone. Stream and storm roar, and I cannot hear the voice of my beloved.

“‘Why does he hesitate, Salgar, my beloved? Has he forgot his promise? There is the rock, and there is the tree, and here is the rushing stream. Oh, where has my Salgar lost his way?
“‘Thou didst promise to be here at nightfall. With thee I would flee, forsake father and brother—those two proud men! Our tribes have been enemies for so long, but thou and I, Salgar, we are not enemies.

“‘Be silent a while, O wind; be silent for one small while, O stream, so that my voice may resound in the valley and my wanderer hear me. Salgar, it is I calling. Here is the tree and the rock, and I am here, Salgar, my beloved. Why dost thou tarry?

“‘See…the moon appears, the river gleams in the valley, the rocks stand gray on the hillside—but I do not see him nor do his dogs herald his coming. Here must I sit alone.
“‘But who lies down there on the heath? My beloved? My brother? Speak to me, O my friends! They do not reply, and my soul is fearful. Ah me—they are slain; their swords are red with blood. O my brother, my brother, why hast thou slain my beloved? O Salgar, my beloved, why hast thou slain my brother? I loved you both. Among a thousand on the hill, you were beautiful, and in combat, you were terrible. Answer me! Hear me, my beloveds! Alas…they are mute, forever silenced, their breasts cold as the earth.

“‘Oh, speak, ye dead, from the rocks on the hill, from the top of the storm-swept mountain. Speak! I shall not shudder. Where did you go to your final rest? In which cave of the hill shall I find you? I hear no weak voice in the wind; no answer is wafted to me by the storm on the hill.

“‘I sit in my misery, bathed in my tears, and wait doggedly for the morn. Dig the grave of the dead, my friends, but do not cover it until I am come. Like a dream, my life leaves me—how can I remain behind? Here, beside the stream in the echoing rocks, I shall dwell with my friends. When night falls on the hill, and the wind sweeps o’er the heath, let my spirit stand in the wind and mourn the death of my friend. The hunter in his covert hears me, hears my voice and loves it, for the voice that mourns my friends shall be sweet. I loved them both.’
“That was thy song, O Minona, Torman’s gently blushing daughter. Our tears flowed for Colma, and our souls were darkened.

“Ullin stepped forward with his harp and gave us Alpin’s song. Alpin’s voice was friendly, and Ryno’s soul was a fiery fount; but they have both been laid to rest already in the narrow confines of their house, and their voices have echoed away in Selma. Once, before the heroes had fallen, Ullin came back from the hunt and could hear their contest on the hill. Their song was gentle but sad. They were mourning the downfall of Morar, the first of the heroes. His soul was like Fingal’s, his sword like the sword of Oscar. But he fell, and his father mourned his death, and the eyes of his sister Minona were filled with tears—

Minona, sister of Morar, the magnificent. She stepped back from Ullin's song like the moon in the west that foresees the rain and hides its lovely head in a cloud. With Ullin I accompanied Ryno's lament on my harp.

"RYNO: 'Wind and rain have passed, the hour of noon is clear, and the clouds are parting. An inconstant sun shines fleetingly on the hill, and the mountain stream flows red in the valley. Sweet is thy murmuring, O stream, yet the voice that I hear is sweeter—Alpin's voice, lamenting his dead. His head is bowed with age; red are his eyes from weeping. Alpin, glorious bard, where art thou, alone on the silenced hill? Why dost thou wail like the wind in the forest, like a wave on the far-off shores of the sea?'

"ALPIN: 'My tears, Ryno, are for the dead, and my voice is for the grave-dwellers. Thou art lithe on the mount, and among the sons of the heath, thou art beautiful. But thou wilt be slain like Morar, and the mourner shall sit on thy tomb. The hills will forget thee; thy bow will lie unstrung in the great hall.

"'Thou wert swift as the deer on the hill, Morar, and terrible as night fires in the sky. Thy anger was like a storm, like sheet lightning across the heath. Thy voice was a forest stream after rainfall, was thunder in far-off hills. Many fell beneath thy right arm, and the flame of thy fury consumed them, but when thou didst return from battle, how peaceful was thy brow! Thy countenance was like the moon on a silent night; thy breast was as calm as the waters of a lake after the blustering wind dies down.

"'Narrow are the confines of thy house now; dark is thy abode. Three paces carry me across thy grave, thou who wert once so great—thy sole memorial now…four mossy stone markers. A leafless tree, tall grass that rustles in the wind, point out the grave of mighty Morar, the hunter—but no mother to mourn thee, no maiden with tears of love. Dead is she who gave thee birth; slain is the daughter of Morglan.

“‘Who stands yonder, leaning on his staff? Who is he? His hair is hoary with age; his eyes are reddened from crying. It is thy father, Morar. Thou wert his only son. He knows all about thy fame in battle, about the enemy thou didst scatter; he has heard of Morar’s fame—alas, not of his wound! Weep, father of Morar, weep! But thy son cannot hear thee. The sleep of the dead is deep, and lowly is their pillow of dust. He pays no heed to thy voice; he will ne’er awaken to thy call. Oh, when will it be morning in his grave; when will it be time to bid the slumberer awaken?

“‘Farewell, noblest of men, conqueror on the field of battle. Never again shall the field of battle see thee, nor the gloomy forest be brightened by the gleam of thy sword. Thou hast left no progeny. But our song shall keep thy name alive, and future times shall hear of Morar who was slain in battle.’

“Loud was the grief of the heroes; loudest of all, though, was Armin’s heartbreaking sigh. For he was reminded of the death of his son who fell in the days of his youth. Carmor, chieftain of the echoing halls of Galmal, was sitting nearby. ‘Why does Armin’s sigh choke him?’ he asked. ‘What causes him so much grief? Song and voice should melt the heart and delight it. They are the gentle mist that rises from the lake and spreads into the valleys, and the blossoming trees are dampened by it. The sun, though, rises again in all its glory, and the mists are dispelled. Why art thou so wretched, Armin, chieftain of the sea-girt isle of Gorma?’

“‘Wretched? That I am. And the cause of my grief is not negligible. Carmor, thou hast not lost a son; thou hast not been deprived of a daughter. Colgar the brave lives, and Annira, fairest of maidens. The branches of thy house blossom, Carmor, but Armin is the last of his race. Dark is thy bier, O Daura, stifling thy sleep in the grave. When shalt thou awaken with thy songs, with thy melodious voice? Rise, winds of autumn; rise and storm across the bleak heath! Forest streams, roar! Wail, thou tempests in the crowns of the pines! Move through the broken clouds, O moon; show and hide thy pale face

alternately! Remind me of the dread night when my children perished, when mighty Arindal was slain, and beloved Daura died.

"'Daura, my daughter, thou wert fair as the moon on the hills of Fura; thou wert white as the driven snow and sweet as a zephyr. Arindal, thy bow was strong, and thy spear was fleet on the field. Thy gaze was as the fog on the waves; thy shield was a cloud of fire in the tempest.
"'Armar, famed warrior, came to woo Daura. She did not resist him long, and their friends wished them well.

"'Erath, son of Ogdal, was angry, for his brother lay slain by Armar. He came disguised as a mariner, his locks white with age, his stern features calm. His bark crossing the waters was a beautiful sight. "Loveliest of maidens," he cried, "fair daughter of Armin—on yonder rock in the sea, not far off, where thou canst see the red fruit sparkling on the tree, Armar is waiting for thee. I come to guide his beloved across the turgid sea."

"'Daura followed him and cried out to Armar. "Armar, my beloved, my beloved! Why dost thou frighten me? Hear me, O son of Armath! It is Daura crying out to thee!" Naught answered save the voice of the rocks.

"'Erath, the betrayer, fled laughing back to landward. Daura lifted her voice and cried out to father and brother, "Arindal! Armin! Is there no one to save Daura?"
"'Her voice came to them across the sea. Arindal, my son, descended the hillside, rough with the spoils of the hunt, his arrows rustling at his side. He carried his bow in his hand, and five gray-black dogs went with him. He saw bold Erath on the shore and took him and tied him to an oak, bound him firmly round his loins, and the captured man filled the air with his groaning.

"'Then Arindal walked into the waves with his boat to bring Daura back. Armar came and in his anger let fly his gray, feathered arrow. It hummed, but it sank into thy heart, Arindal, my son! Instead of Erath, the betrayer, thou didst fall. Arindal's boat reached the rock; he sank

down beside it and died. Her brother's blood ran out at Daura's feet. Oh, Daura, Daura, how terrible was thy grief!

"'The waves shattered the boat. Armar flung himself into the sea to save his Daura or die. A gust of wind from the hill struck hard at the waves and he sank, never to rise again.
"'Alone on the sea-washed rocks, I could hear the lament of my daughter. She cried loud and long, yet I could not save her. Throughout the night I stood on the shore. By the weak rays of the moon I could see her. Throughout the night I could hear her cry. Loud was the wind, and the rain hit sharply against the side of the mountain.

By dawn her voice was weak; soon it died away like the air of evening between grasses that grow on stone. Bowed low with grief, she died, leaving Armin alone. Gone is my strength in battle, gone my prowess among women.
"'When the mountain storms come, and the north wind rears up the wave, I sit on the echoing shore and gaze across the sea at the terrible rock. Oft, by the light of a waning moon, I see the ghosts of my children. Twilit they wander side by side in a sad unity.'"

A flood of tears streamed from Lotte's eyes, relieving her oppressed heart and preventing Werther from continuing. He threw the papers aside, took her hand, and wept bitterly. Lotte rested her head on her other hand and covered her eyes with her handkerchief. What both felt at that moment was agonizing. They experienced their own misery in the fate of these noble people, they felt it together, and their tears flowed as one.

Werther's lips and eyes burned on Lotte's arm. She was seized by a shivering. She wanted to leave the room, but pain and compassion left her numb. She breathed deeply in an effort to recover her composure and begged him, sobbing, to continue, implored him to do so with the whole force of heaven in her voice. Werther was trembling; he thought his heart would break. He took up the papers again and began to read in a broken voice, "Why dost thou awaken me, O zephyr of spring? Thou dost speak of love, saying, 'I spread the dew with drops from

heaven.’ But the time of my fading away is nigh; nigh is the storm that will defoliate me. And in the morn the wanderer will come; the wanderer will come who saw me in my glory. His eyes will seek me in the field but he will not find me….”

The full force of the words rained down upon the unfortunate man. In his despair he threw himself on his knees before Lotte, took her hand, pressed it to his eyes, his forehead, and a hint of the terrible thing he was planning seemed to brush Lotte’s soul. She became confused and pressed his hand tightly against her breast and, with a plaintive motion, moved closer to him. Their burning cheeks touched, and the world ended for them. Werther wound his arms around Lotte, pressed her to him, and covered her trembling, stammering lips with passionate kisses. “Werther!” she cried, in a voice that was choked, turning from him, “Werther!” and with her weak hand, she pushed him away. “Werther!” she said, in a voice controlled by the noblest sentiments.

He did nothing to resist her. He let her go and threw himself down insensibly at her feet. She managed to tear herself away and, in fearful confusion, trembling between love and anger, said, “This is the last time, Werther! You shall not see me again,” and with a look full of love at the miserable man, she rushed into the next room and locked the door. Werther stretched out his arms to her, but did not dare to stop her. He lay on the floor, his head resting against the side of the sofa, and remained like this for over half an hour, until a noise roused him. It was the maid, coming to set the table. He paced up and down the room and when he was alone again, walked over to the door of the room into which Lotte had fled and called softly, “Lotte…Lotte…only a word of farewell!” She was silent. He waited and begged and waited. Finally he tore himself away, crying, “Farewell, Lotte! Farewell forever!”

At the city gates, the watchmen, who were accustomed to the sight of him, let him out silently. It was drizzling, a mixture of rain and snow, and it was nearly eleven when he rapped on the gates again. His servant noted that his master came home without his hat. He didn’t dare to mention the fact but undressed him silently. All his clothes were wet. The hat was found later on a rock that overlooks the valley

from the precipitous side of a hill, and it is incredible that Werther could have climbed up it on a dark, wet night without falling out.

He went to bed and slept for a long time. Next morning, when his servant answered his call for coffee, he found his master writing. He was adding the following to his letter to Lotte:
“So, for the last time—yes, for the last time, I open these eyes. They shall not see the sun again. A dim, foggy day keeps them veiled. Very well then, mourn, O Nature—thy son, thy friend, thy beloved’s life is drawing to a close. Lotte, it is a feeling without parallel, yet to tell oneself, ‘This is the last morning,’ comes very close to one’s twilit dreams. The last.

Lotte, I have no understanding of the word ‘last.’ Am I not sitting here with my whole strength, and tomorrow I am to lie stretched out limp on the floor? To die. What does it mean? Look—when we talk about death we are dreaming. I have seen many a man die, but man is so limited that he has no understanding for the beginning and end of his existence. Mine—still mine as yet—and yours! Yours, O my beloved! Then, one moment more, and separated…divorced from one another, perhaps forever? No, Lotte, no. How could I possibly perish? How could you pass away? You and I…we are! Perish? What does it mean?

Again, nothing but a word. An empty sound with no feeling for my heart. Dead, Lotte—buried in the cold earth, so narrow, so dark. I had a sweetheart once who was my all in the days of my helpless youth. She died. I followed her bier and stood beside her grave as they let down the coffin—the ropes grating beneath it and snapping back up, the sound of the first spadeful of dirt tumbling down, and the dread casket giving off a dull tone, then a more muffled thud that became more and more muffled, until at last the coffin was covered. I sank down beside the grave, deeply moved, shattered, fearful, torn to the depths of my being, but I did not know what was the matter with me nor what was to befall me. Death. Grave. I have no understanding for the words.

“Oh, forgive me, forgive me…yesterday. It should have been the last moment of my life. Oh, you angel! For the first time—for the first time,

a feeling of bliss burned without any doubt in the depths of me. She loves me! She loves me! The sacred fire that streamed to me from you still burns on my lips. A new, warm rapture is in my heart. Forgive me, forgive me!
“Oh, I knew that you loved me, knew it when I met your first soulful glance, with the first pressure of your hand, and yet, when I was away from you, when I saw Albert at your side, I despaired again, in a fever of doubt.

“Do you recall the flowers that you sent me when, in his irritating company, you could not say a word nor give me your hand? I knelt half the night before them; they put a seal upon your love for me. But alas, such impressions pass, just as the feeling of God’s mercy—a feeling that is bestowed on a man of faith in all its divine abundance in holy, visible portent—can cede gradually from his soul.

“All such things are transient. But no eternity shall erase the glowing life that I experienced at your lips yesterday and that I feel within me now. She loves me. These arms have held her; these lips have trembled on hers; this mouth has stammered a few broken words against hers. She is mine. You are mine, Lotte, forever.

“And what difference does it make that Albert is your husband? Husband—that’s a word for this world, and for this world it’s a sin that I love you and would wrench you out of his arms into mine. A sin? Very well then, and I punish myself for it. I have tasted this sin in all its divine rapture; I have sucked its balm and strength into my heart. From now on you are mine—mine, Lotte! I go on ahead to my Father. To Him I will complain, and He will comfort me until you come, and I fly to meet you and enfold you and remain at your side in the sight of Infinite God in one eternal embrace.

“I do not dream; I do not think any more. Close to the grave, all grows lighter. We shall be. We shall see each other again. Your mother…I shall see her, find her, and oh, I shall unburden my whole heart to her. Your mother. Your image.”

At about eleven, Werther asked his servant if Albert had returned. The man said yes, he had seen him riding by on his horse. Werther then gave the man an open note containing the words, “Would you be so good as to lend me your pistols for a trip I am about to undertake? My very best regards.”

Lotte had slept little during the preceding night. What she had dreaded had been decided for her in a way she could neither have dreamed nor feared. Her blood, which usually coursed so chastely and steadily through her veins, was in a feverish turmoil. A thousand confused sensations disturbed her. Was it the passion of Werther’s embrace that she felt in her breast? Was it resentment of his boldness? Or was it the result of an unpleasant comparison of her present condition with former days of completely unabashed innocence and carefree confidence in herself? How was she to meet her husband?

There was nothing to hide, yet how was she to explain the scene to him? She didn’t dare to. They had been silent for such a long time on this subject—should she break the silence and make such an unexpected disclosure, perhaps at the wrong time? She feared that even the mention of Werther’s visit would make a disagreeable impression, and on top of that—this unexpected catastrophe! Could she hope that her husband would see things in their true light and accept what she had to say entirely without bias?

And did she want him to look into her soul and read what was there? But then again, could she dissemble before a man to whom she had always been frank and clear as crystal, from whom she had never been able to keep any of her feelings secret? All these things troubled and embarrassed her. Again and again her thoughts reverted to Werther, who was lost to her, whom she could not abandon, yet, alas, had to abandon, to whom—once he had lost her—nothing was left.

The estrangement which had closed in upon all three of them weighed heavily upon her now, but it was something she could not see clearly at the moment. Good, sensible people often withdraw from one another because of secret differences, each becoming absorbed by what he

feels is right, and by the error of the other. Conditions then grow more and more complicated and exasperating, until it becomes impossible to undo the knot at the crucial moment on which everything depends. If only a fortunate intimacy had brought them closer again before this, if only they could have felt love and consideration for one another mutually, and confided in one another, Werther might have been saved.

Another strange circumstance must be mentioned here. As we know from his letters, Werther had never made any secret of his longing to leave this world. Albert had argued the point with him often and had even discussed it with Lotte. Since such behavior was so distasteful to him, he had declared several times, with an irritability that was quite foreign to his character, that he doubted the seriousness of Werther's inclination. One day he had even gone so far as to joke about it and had mentioned his skepticism to Lotte. On the one hand, this helped to calm her whenever she dwelled on the unhappy prospect; on the other hand, she was reluctant for the same reason to share with her husband the anxieties that were tormenting her now.

Albert came home, and Lotte went to meet him in a state of self-conscious haste. He was not in good spirits. He had had to leave his business incompleted; the neighboring magistrate had turned out to be an inflexible, narrow-minded man. The bad roads had added to his irritation.

He asked if there was any news. She replied, a little too hastily, that Werther had been there the evening before. He asked if there was any mail and received the reply that some letters and packets had been placed in his room. He went there, and Lotte was left alone. The presence of the man she loved and respected had made a fresh impression on her heart. The thought of his generosity, his love and kindness, had calmed her. She felt the urge to follow him, took her work and went into his room, something she did quite often. She found him unwrapping the packets and reading the contents. Several seemed to contain unpleasant news. She asked a few questions; he replied curtly and sat down at his desk to write.

They were together like this for an hour, and Lotte's spirits sank increasingly lower. She realized how difficult it was going to be to disclose to her husband what was oppressing her, even if he were in the best of moods, and she lapsed into a melancholy that became more and more frightening as she tried to hide it and fight down her tears.

The appearance of Werther's groom put her in a very embarrassing position. He handed the note to Albert, who turned to his wife and said casually, "Give him the pistols." To the boy he said, "Tell your master that I wish him a pleasant journey."

The words fell like a thunderclap on Lotte's ears. She swayed as she rose to her feet; she didn't know what to do. Slowly she walked over to the wall and, with hands that trembled, took the pistols from the rack, dusted them, hesitated, and would have hesitated longer if Albert had not forced her with his questioning eyes to go on with what he had asked her to do.

Incapable of uttering a word, she gave the unfortunate weapons to the boy, and when he had left the house, she picked up her work and went to her room in a state of the most indescribable anxiety. Her heart foretold all terror. At one moment, she was on the point of throwing herself at her husband's feet and confessing everything—what had happened last night, her culpability, and her awful premonitions—then again she realized how futile that would be. The last thing she could hope for was that her husband would go over to see Werther.

The table was set. A good friend, who had only come to enquire about something, stayed and made the conversation at table at least tolerable. Lotte forced herself to some semblance of self-control, conversed, and forgot herself.

The servant brought Werther the weapons. He was delighted when he heard that Lotte had given them to the boy. He had bread and wine brought to him, told the boy to have his dinner, and sat down to write.

“They have passed through your hands. You brushed the dust from them. You touched them. I kiss them a thousand times. The spirit of heaven favors my decision, and you, Lotte, hand me the weapon—you, from whom I wished to receive death and now receive it. Oh, how I questioned my boy! You trembled, he said, as you handed them to him. You said no farewell. Alas—no farewell! Have you closed your heart to me, because of that moment that bound me to you forever? Lotte, not a thousand years can erase that impression. And—I feel it—you cannot hate him who glows with his whole heart for you.”

After dinner he ordered the boy to pack, tore up some papers, and went out and settled a few minor debts. He returned home; then, disregarding the rain, he went out again as far as the gate, from there into the Count’s garden, after which he wandered about the countryside. When night was falling he came home and wrote, “William, I have seen fields, wood, and sky for the last time. Farewell to you, too. Dear Mother, forgive me. Console her, William. God bless you both.

All my affairs are in order. Farewell. We shall meet again under happier circumstances.
“Albert, I have rewarded you poorly, but you will forgive me. I disturbed the peace of your household; I sowed distrust between you and Lotte. Farewell. It is my wish to terminate things. Ah, if only you could be made happy through my death! Albert, make my angel happy! And may God’s blessing be on you both.”

He spent the rest of the evening going through his papers again, tore up many and threw them into the stove, sealed several packets and addressed them to William. The latter contained a few short articles and random observations, several of which I have seen. After having had the stove stoked once more at ten o’ clock and ordering a bottle of wine for himself, he sent his servant to bed. The boy’s room, like the bedrooms of the other domestics, was far off in the back of the house. He lay down with his clothes on in order to be ready to leave early the next morning, for his master had told him that the post chaise would be at the house before six.

After eleven

Everything is so still around me and so calm within my soul. I thank you, God, who gave this last moment of mine such warmth, such strength.

I walk over to the window, my dearest one, and look out. Through the storm clouds flying by, I can still see a few stars in the eternal sky. No, you will not fall. The Eternal One carries you in his heart, as he carries me. I can see the handle of the Big Dipper, my favorite of all the constellations. When I left you that night, as I walked out the gate, it stood in the sky facing me. In what a state of intoxication I have been often when I looked at it. Then I would lift my hand and make a sign of it, a sacred marker for my present bliss. And I still do! Oh, Lotte, what does not remind me of you? Are you not all around me, and haven't I snatched all sorts of little things and held onto them like an insatiable child—things, my angel, that you touched?

Beloved silhouette. I leave it to you, Lotte, and beg you to respect it. I have pressed thousands of impassioned kisses on it and waved it a thousand greetings when I left the house or returned.

In another note I have asked your father to take care of my remains. There are two linden trees in the cemetery, back in a corner, near the field. That is where I wish to rest. He can—he will do it for his friend. Please ask him, too, to do so. It would be too much to expect a faithful Christian to lie beside a poor unfortunate like me. Oh, how I wish you could bury me by the wayside or in a lonely valley, so that priest and Levite might bless themselves as they pass the stone marker and the Samaritan could shed a tear there.

Here, Lotte…see, it does not make me shudder to grasp the cold and terrible cup from which I shall drink the transport of death. You hand it to me, and I do not hesitate. All! All of it! Thus all the wishes and hopes I had of life are fulfilled…to knock so coldly, so rigidly, on the brazen gates of death.

That I was granted the good fortune to die for you, Lotte, to sacrifice myself for you…I would die courageously, joyously, if only I could re-establish the repose and bliss of your existence. But oh, it has been granted to only a few noble men to shed their life's blood for those they love and, by their death, kindle a new life for their friends.

I want to be buried, Lotte, in the clothes I have on. You have touched them and made them sacred. I have asked your father, too, to do this for me. My soul floats over the coffin. Please let no one go through my pockets. The pale pink bow that you wore at your breast when I saw you for the first time with your children…kiss them a thousand times and tell them the fate of their unfortunate friend. The darlings…they are tumbling all around me.

Ah, how I attached myself to you from the first moment and could not let go. This bow is to be buried with me. You gave it to me on my birthday. Oh, how greedily I absorbed it all, never thinking that the way would lead here. Be calm, I beseech you, be calm.
It is loaded. The clock strikes midnight. So be it then, Lotte. Farewell. Farewell.

A neighbor saw the flash of gunpowder and heard the shot, but since all remained silent, he paid no further heed to the occurrence.
Next morning at six, the servant came into the room with a light. He found his master lying on the floor, the pistol, and the blood. He cried out, touched him—no response. Werther's last breath was rattling in his throat. The boy ran for the doctor and for Albert. Lotte heard the bell, and a shiver ran through every member of her body. She woke her husband. They got up. The servant, sobbing and stammering, delivered his message. Lotte sank fainting to the ground at Albert's feet.

When the doctor arrived, he found the unfortunate man on the floor. There was no hope of saving him. His pulse could still be felt but all his limbs were paralyzed. He had shot himself in the head above the right eye, driving his brains out. Quite superfluously, the doctor undertook a bloodletting of one vein. The blood ran out; Werther was still breathing.

The blood on the armchair was evidence of the fact that he had shot himself while sitting in front of his desk, then had slumped down and twisted himself convulsively out of the chair. He was lying on his back, against the window, fully clad in his blue coat and yellow vest, with his boots on.

The house, the neighborhood, the whole town were filled with commotion. Albert came in. They laid Werther on the bed and bandaged his forehead. His face was already like that of the dead; he did not move a muscle. His breathing was terrible—weak at one moment, then a little stronger. They were waiting for the end to come.

He had drunk only one glass of the wine. Emilia Galotti9 lay open on his lectern.
There are no words to express Albert's consternation or Lotte's misery.

The old judge came bursting in as soon as he heard the news. With the hot tears streaming down his cheeks, he kissed the dying man. His oldest sons soon followed him on foot. They fell on their knees beside the bed in attitudes of the wildest grief, kissing the dying man's hand, his mouth. The oldest one, whom Werther had always loved best, clung to his lips as he expired and had to be forcefully removed.

At twelve noon, Werther died. The presence of the judge and the arrangements he made silenced the crowd. That night, at about eleven, he had the body buried in the spot Werther had chosen. The old man and his sons walked behind the bier; Albert found himself incapable of doing so. They feared for Lotte's life. Workmen carried the body. There was no priest in attendance.

* Out of respect for this admirable man, this letter and one mentioned later are not included in this collection, in the belief that such indiscretions would be inexcusable, however grateful the reader might be.

Notes

l Melusina, a water sprite.

2 Miss Jenny, the heroine of a popular novel at the time.

3 Allemande, a precursor of the waltz.

4 Klopstock's ode, "Die Frühlingsfeier" ("The Rites of Spring").

5 Ossian, an Irish hero of the third century. Here the reference is to books of prose poems purported to be translations from the Gaelic (1762–1763) by James Macpherson and later exposed as fraudulent.

6 Cruse of oil, I Kings 17: 11–16.

7 Fingal, in the Ossianic legend, king of Morven and father of Ossian.

8 In various previous translations of Werther, the translator resorted to the original English text by James Macpherson, which is so weird and awkward it could never plausibly have moved Lotte and Werther to their tragic breakdown. Goethe's translation into German of the part called The Songs of Selma, here attributed to Werther, is such a vast improvement on the Macpherson version that I preferred to translate it—C.H.

9 Emilia Galotti, drama by Lessing.

The End