

*Mademoiselle Thérèse**
et l'Art de l'Amour'

1

Thank you for visiting me here in Ermenonville; I'm touched that you should wish to hear about my famous husband and me. I do hope your journey was not too tiring.

Did you see the gardens of the château as you approached our cottage in the grounds? The Marquis, René Louis de Girardin, very kindly offered us this sanctuary when my husband was alive. The Marquis has always been a great supporter of my husband and he was much influenced by his ideas. He decided to turn the marshes of his estate into English-styled gardens with more natural, picturesque landscaping than the severely classical, French lay-out of other châteaux.



My new husband, M. Jean-Henri Bally, who used to be the Marquis' *valet de chambre* is quite discreet; he's out checking on some things in the gardens so that we may be left alone to talk. He's not at all jealous of my past and is one of the kindest of men and very dear to me. In previous years, when my first husband was alive, we often received visits, of course, from all over Europe, though callers like yourself became less frequent as he grew older and more infirm.

I find that as one gets older, past experiences become... how shall I put it?... *clarified*, and I think I can better now distinguish what was most important

in my life with my previous husband, and also what was less so. I often catch myself these days addressing my five dear little babies, those children of ours whom I have always missed so terribly. The pain doesn't diminish with time; it simply deepens, like an open wound that has become infected. They may be dead for all I know, but the chances are that they are all alive somewhere, perhaps Paris where they were taken, totally ignorant forever of who their father was (and, of course, who their mother *is*).

So, when I tell you and others my stories, part of me imagines that *they*, my sweet, dispossessed children might somehow be listening as I talk - shocked maybe, *enlightened* just possibly, but always very close to my heart and yearned for by their still grieving mother, me, Marie-Thérèse.

He used to call me Thérèse, though my real name, as you surely know, was Marie-Thérèse Le Vasseur. I was '*Mademoiselle*' when others were present, and he was '*Monsieur*' when I addressed him, though in private I always called him by his first name. He liked me to be...*naturelle*.

It was in Paris that I met him, back in 1745 when I was working as a laundry woman. I was completely in awe of him for he seemed to belong to a totally superior class, even though his father was only a clockmaker and his mother the daughter of a clockmaker. He was ten years older than me - the friend and associate of aristocrats, having been 'befriended' as a youth by a baroness, Madame de Warens. These are, I realise, just details, which you probably know already, but they have their importance, I dare say. I am still nearly illiterate in spite of his best efforts. Unlike him I'm no writer, so you mustn't expect fine phrases from me.

Between 1746 and 1752, he and I had five children, one after another. As you may imagine, it was the hardest thing in the world for me to be compelled to part with each one, soon after their birth. How could such a man as he, you might ask me, a philosopher so concerned with the ill effects of society on

human morality, one who was later to write about the best ways of educating children, how *could* he have considered such a course for his own children?

You probably think the worse of me, but that's no more than I think of myself. How could *any* mother of feeling possibly give up her children like that? I cannot speak for him. For myself, I would only say that I was young and impressionable. I looked up to him in everything, and he was a man with particularly strong views.

He told me it was for the best, explaining that he couldn't afford to keep a family, which I supposed to be the case. I was also aware of his mistrust of my mother, who might have been willing and able to care for our babies; it's certainly true that hers was a forceful, controlling personality. In short, he persuaded me that our poor babies would fare better at the *Hospice des Enfants-Trouvés*, the Foundling Hospital in Paris. For all I knew at the time this might have been the case, though when the later births took place he was earning just a little more. I might have hoped for a change in his thinking, but my wishes were always in vain.

Ours was always a hand-to-mouth existence, I should say. Having abandoned his apprenticeship early on, he was trained for nothing, really. But, as you are no doubt aware, he *was* a true genius and he made a living of sorts, as a musicologist at first, copying scores and giving lessons - even inventing a new system of musical notation. He was also fascinated by and knowledgeable about botany; he became a bestselling philosopher, a renowned political scientist and an acclaimed novelist. Why, then, were we not richer in our later years? Well, he certainly was *not* a businessman.

I go over and over in my mind, I cannot help it, why my pretty darlings were abandoned by *me*, their mother? It happened because I loved and put my trust in this extraordinary man. I was a working class woman and was deeply grateful that he loved me back, *after his fashion*. It was to me he turned when he became tired of all the women he consorted with when he was younger:

Madame d'Epainay, Madame d'Houdetot, even his special '*Maman*', Madame de Warens. And he learned over the years to trust in my love for him, my devotion and my good sense. I had to nurse my sorrow in silence and bless my luck instead that he had chosen me to look after him.

After many ups and downs, and in spite of his having told me that we would never be wedded (what was the need? he said), he finally made an honest woman out of me at Bourgoin, where we happened to be living back in 1768, ten years before he died. We were married *officially*, though not ecclesiastically.

He playfully called me '*la Gouvernante*'. Was I really the boss? No, he was, always, but he came to need me, and I was faithful to him (in *my* way, as you will learn later) until the day he died. He said once that I was a chatterbox but that I was clever! You may imagine what pride I felt on receiving this praise from such an intelligent being as himself!

I looked after him, you see, when perhaps I should really have been looking after *them*. I'm truly sorry on their account, but I regret to tell you that if I had my life again I might well do the same as before. He had also managed to get my mother on his side, so that when I was confronted with the brutal reality of each child being wrenched away from me by the midwife, Mlle Gouin, I had nobody in the world who might have helped me to protest, or to oppose his wishes. I felt obliged to accept my fate, severe though that was.

There have been few men on earth like him, but I take pride in the fact that he wrote *all* of his great classic texts while we were together. Would it be too much to say that without me as his steady companion, all those extraordinary philosophical and literary masterpieces might never have seen the light of day? Who knows? I haven't read his books, I *cannot*, but he and I talked and talked. He said to me once that I was his sounding-board; I asked questions, I gave him my unlearned responses to the queries he put to me, we would discuss his sometimes strange ideas, we would laugh, puzzle and ponder together before he went away to his study to continue his work of wonders.

I don't wish to speak much about our life together. It is too private a matter; I was happy with Jean-Jacques, and I believe he was happy with me despite his periodic *aventures*, from which he always returned thoroughly penitent, his tail between his legs. It was not, I'm more than certain, physical attraction that drove him to seek other women, rather a desperate need for women who might mother him. In the end, he came to realise how much I was his bedrock, if I may put it that way.

To understand him properly, you should remember that his own mother died when he was only nine days old. His father was a kindly person, I believe, who brought him up as best he could, but throughout his life his son was searching always for the mother's love that he had lost so early. This was what he found in some measure with Mme de Warens, who first took him under her wing when he was in his teens, only to become almost immediately his lover. This complicated 'maternal' love was later what he found with me; he needed to be cherished and cared for. I didn't find him physically passionate, although he could be extremely intense in his emotions, as well as in his responses to nature and the world about him.

Increasingly he felt persecuted in his later years, and this was the most difficult period of his life because he was also ill. He had a bladder condition that caused him much pain and embarrassment in equal measure. For this reason, he tended to shun society. Many important people wanted to visit him and engage him in debate, for he was, after all, celebrated throughout Europe. He had been perfectly ready to welcome visitors when he could, but receiving people while he was suffering became increasingly an effort. A homemade catheter, his 'probe', which he used to help relieve himself, was of some help, but he felt his condition to be a degrading humiliation, and visitors were tolerated for only a short while at a time. He knew he could always depend on me, however, and we loved each other right up to his death a few years ago, here in Ermenonville.

Old age should be a period of gentle repose, with time at last for friends and family. Our later years, I'm afraid to say, were the complete opposite. I don't wish to complain because you must lie in the bed you have made, wouldn't you agree? I said earlier that Jean-Jacques felt increasingly persecuted as the years went by. We reached a point where we could no longer live where we wished - we were subjected to abuse, and several times we were forced to move and try to find a home somewhere else - anywhere; we just wanted to live quietly. Our life became harder and harder.

He had always (unintentionally, I think) antagonised authorities; his dominant idea, about man being naturally good and corrupted only by society, was furiously rejected by the Catholic Church, by the protestant Genevan Council and by the Parliament of Paris - which was strange because everyone else appeared to be very enthusiastic about his books; the whole world seemed to want to know *more* about his controversial ideas. His writings excited all sorts of intelligent readers in different countries; why then were the authorities nearby so set against him? You can guess, can you not? It was *revolutionary*, all of it!

It happened that he ended up antagonising the one person who you might have thought *would* agree with many of his ideas: Monsieur Voltaire, another intellectual heavyweight. At the start, indeed, Voltaire was keenly interested in his writings and collected his books. Their quarrel, however, really began when Voltaire attempted to have his cynical verse dramas produced in Geneva, which Jean-Jacques thought cheapened the moral tone of *his* city. I think he was also jealous of Voltaire's popularity. From there, the quarrel escalated dramatically until, at the end of December 1764, Monsieur Voltaire replied to one of his published letters, unfairly mentioning his abandonment of our children in very sarcastic terms. Up till then, it had been a secret known to only a few of our friends. But this very public taunting and humiliating was altogether too much

for him, and from then on he suffered dreadfully from what he saw as his persecution by the whole world. It drove him almost mad.

More and more, as I say, we found ourselves barred from places wherever we tried to settle down. These ordeals led him in 1766 to seek refuge in England, where Mr David Hume, an eminent philosopher, had generously invited him to stay. He wrote to me from Paris asking if I would join him in London, as he was travelling there in the company of Mr Hume, who was also secretary to the British Ambassador in France.

I could tell at once that he needed me and my support as never before. Of course, I obeyed immediately and took a carriage for Paris without hesitation. Once I reached Paris, I prepared to set off again to join my poor, dear soulmate (we were still not married then) in London. But I was quite worried about the journey before me, crossing the Channel and making my way in a country where I couldn't speak the language.

2

It's at this point in my story that I wish to take you back to that December of 1764, just before Monsieur Voltaire landed us with his bombshell.

We were living quietly and, for once in our lives, happily undisturbed at our home in the small village of Môtiers in Switzerland. We were quite close to Geneva, and therefore not far from Ferney (just over the French border), where Monsieur Voltaire was living like some disdainful, aristocratic *seigneur* in his château.

One day, we had an unexpected visitor - a young Scotsman of just twenty-four years of age, who had been travelling around the princely states of Germany in the company of someone we knew quite well, Lord Marischal. The young man was dressed rather grandly for the occasion in a green coat lined

with fox-fur (which also adorned the cuffs and collar), a scarlet waistcoat with gold lace, and a hat with gold trimming. He was clearly out to impress!

He had spent the previous year in Utrecht studying Dutch Law, which was quite similar, he told us, to Scottish Law. His father was an eminent Scottish judge, Lord Auchinleck, and these travels were a preparation for when he, James, in due course, became a barrister (though he wasn't, he told us, at all sure that he *wanted* to become a lawyer).

He had written to us before he arrived, saying he had with him a letter of introduction from Lord Marischal, but rather arrogantly, instead of handing over his letter, he had allowed a maid from his nearby inn to bring us his own, written introduction instead.

Jean-Jacques had read it out to me before, laughing as he did so. It began like this:

“Môtiers - Val de Travers, 3rd December 1764

Sir: — I am a Scots gentleman of ancient family. Now you know my rank. I am twenty-four years old. Now you know my age. Sixteen months ago, I left Great Britain a completely insular being, knowing hardly a word of French. I have been in Holland and in Germany, but not yet in France. You will therefore excuse my handling of the language. I am travelling with a genuine desire to improve myself. I have come here in the hope of seeing you.

I have heard, Sir, that you are very difficult, that you have refused the visits of several people of the first distinction. For that, Sir, I respect you the more. If you admitted all those who from vanity wished to be able to say, ‘I have seen him’, your house would no longer be the retreat of exquisite genius or elevated piety, and I should not be striving so eagerly to be received into it.

I present myself, Sir, as a man of singular merit, as a man with a feeling heart, a lively but melancholy spirit. Ah, if all that I have suffered does not give me singular merit in the eyes of Monsieur Rousseau, why was I made as I am? Why did he write as he has written?"

There was much more, in this same pompous vein, which had us both laughing. Jean-Jacques sent back his reply on a card after reading it out to me.

This was all he wrote:

"I am ill, in pain, really in no state to receive visits. Yet I cannot deprive myself of Mr. Boswell's, provided that out of consideration for the state of my health, he is willing to make it short."

Over the next few days, we had the (at first) dubious pleasure of his visits. His behaviour veered from obsequious flattery to vain self-congratulation whenever he was with Jean-Jacques. It turned out that he had actually *forgotten* his important letter of introduction from Lord Marischal, having left it by mistake at Neuchâtel. I had to laugh when I heard that, but Jean-Jacques told me he had assured the young man that he trusted him, and that Monsieur James was not to worry at all.

With Jean-Jacques, the young man was extremely keen to impress, but with me he was more at ease and treated me with proper courtesy and even some flirtation - I soon became aware that he was quite attracted to me, despite the difference in our ages. I left Jean-Jacques on his own with our caller until 5pm, when for his well-being, I entered and explained that the visit was at an end.

"Mademoiselle," our visitor complained teasingly as I was about to show him to the front door, "are you keeping him under *lock and key*?"

"Hardly that," I answered laughing. "He has another door in the room if he ever wants to leave."

“Ah, Mademoiselle,” said Jean-Jacques smiling, “you can keep nothing for yourself, I see.”

I always accompanied our guest to the door, rather than letting him be shown out by one of the servants. Monsieur James was good company and treated me always with respect, and he enjoyed gossip. I told him how I had been with Jean-Jacques for twenty-two years and how he had come to me and my mother for more ideas when he was writing his acclaimed novel, ‘*Julie ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*’. Monsieur James was fascinated and extremely impressed by that.

I told him that he could come either in the morning or else the afternoon, but not both. The following day, I think it was the 5th December and his third visit, he came in the afternoon and they talked about Catholicism for a while until, through the door, I heard Jean-Jacques groan slightly and say rather abruptly,

“You can go away now!”

That was my cue to enter and shepherd our visitor out.

I know they talked about Corsica, which interested Monsieur James greatly. Jean-Jacques had received an invitation to visit the island, with a view to helping General Paoli, who was trying to liberate the island from the French occupiers, who sided with the Genoese. Paoli wanted to establish a democratic republic with a new constitution, and his supporters had immediately thought of the author of ‘The Social Contract’ as the ideal person to help them. Monsieur James wondered whether *he* could visit Corsica, as Jean-Jacques’ ambassador, an amusing idea, I thought.

Something he had shown Jean-Jacques and wished to have returned was an extraordinary confession he had written about some girl he had had an affair with, and he was keen to know Jean-Jacques’ views on making love outside marriage. I don’t think he realised how prim my Jean-Jacques was! The answer

came that it was a bad idea for everyone concerned. I had a private smile as I heard this, given Jean-Jacques' past conduct.

After a while, I left the table making some excuse because Monsieur James was becoming more and more insistent on confessing his various amours - not really a subject I felt comfortable listening to. I found it amusing to think that this young Scotsman had come here hoping to gain access to Jean-Jacques' intimate secrets, but he ended up using his host as a sort of older *father confessor* for his own.

There was a gap of a few days before he came to visit us again on the 14th. I told him that Jean-Jacques was quite ill and in pain. He had with him his probe, which he was using to try to pass urine more easily. Monsieur James was not put off at all by this and tried to engage him as usual in conversation. He wanted to know what Jean-Jacques thought of him and the 'sketch' of his life.

"Come back this afternoon," muttered Jean-Jacques, "and I may tell you what I think, only please bring your watch." (Jean-Jacques, from his clock-making family, was always very aware of the time!)

"Why?"

"Because I will send you away after exactly fifteen minutes."

"Would it be possible to make it... twenty, sir?"

Jean-Jacques couldn't help laughing, in spite of his discomfort and clapped the young fellow on his shoulder.

"Hahaha! Be off with you!"

That afternoon our visitor returned, and Monsieur James again brought up the subject of women. Did Monsieur Rousseau think that his system of ideas could permit people like himself to enjoy lots of women, as was the natural custom in oriental countries? I was glad to hear Jean-Jacques say that this was *not* a sound plan at all, and that it would open him up to jealousies, lies, loose living, and in short was not worthy conduct for any man. It was at this point that

I thought it better to withdraw. This was once again hardly a conversation fit for a lady!

“See, monsieur, you are driving Mademoiselle from the room!” cried Jean-Jacques, smiling.

The young Scotsman invited himself boldly (he was quite bold) for lunch the following day at noon. I thought Jean-Jacques very forbearing, though I think he, like me, was tickled by this self-centred but likeable young man, who was clearly so thrilled to be talking to such a ‘great man’.

As he was leaving, I decided to take him to visit a poor family nearby, where the woman had had a great many children. Jean-Jacques and I helped them and gave them charity - I felt it would be *enlightening* for this young Scotsman, so preoccupied with himself, to see what happened when families were not taken care of properly, and to realise how important it was to care for others. I’m not sure that it made much of an impression on him, but at least he talked with the family and showed some interest in their plight.

I felt he was sailing rather close to the wind the following day when he criticised Jean-Jacques for not making clearer in his book, ‘*Emile ou L’Education*’, the duties of children to their parents and of parents to their children. I think Jean-Jacques was quite taken aback and he simply muttered that Emile in the story was just a fiction and he had no father - parents were *not* important there. But I certainly felt the force of Monsieur James’s remark.

Our guest was struck by Jean-Jacques’ modesty. The meal I had prepared of soup, a *bouilli* of beef and veal, cabbage, turnips and carrots, cold pork, pickled trout, with a dessert of chestnuts and pears, was plain but wholesome fare.

“You surprise me, sir, by living and speaking so simply,” he said. “I was expecting to find someone enthroned like a god, uttering things with ‘grave authority’.”

“Ha! Uttering *oracles*?”

“Precisely.”

“Will you visit Voltaire?”

“Yes, sir, I have a mind to, but I don’t think that he likes you.”

“No, he doesn’t. One never thinks well of those one *hurts*.”

At one point, James returned to the subject of visiting Corsica as Jean-Jacques’ representative.

“I’m afraid you would find me a bit of a despot, sir. With our tenants in Scotland, I’m very haughty and I expect old fashioned respect.”

“Do you like cats?” asked Jean-Jacques suddenly.

“No,” replied Monsieur James, surprised. “I can’t say that I’m fond of cats.”

“Ah, I was sure of it,” said Jean-Jacques smiling. “That shows the despotic instinct of men. Cats are naturally free, and they will never become slaves. They do not practise obedience!”

I told our visitor that his man was at the door, when his time was up, for he had managed to squeeze in some extra minutes. Jean-Jacques was clearly fond of his prattle, perhaps even seeing in him a sort of son. Certainly, Monsieur James looked up to him and was teasing him with a friendly warmth which I also found as comic and likeable as Jean-Jacques did. He held ‘Jamie’ in his arms and kissed him several times on both cheeks to the young man’s evident delight.

“Goodbye,” said Jean-Jacques tenderly. “You’re a fine fellow.”

“You, sir, have shown me great goodness,” replied Monsieur James, ‘but *I deserved it*.’”

“Yes, you’re a bit of a rogue, but it’s in fun and it’s a roguishness I don’t dislike.”

They agreed to write to each other, Monsieur James showing great enthusiasm to the very last.

“I, who often look on myself as a despicable being,” he declared, “as a good-for-nothing creature who ought really to make his exit from life, I shall be *upheld* for ever by the thought that I am bound to Monsieur Rousseau. Good-bye. Bravo! ‘I shall live to the end of my days.’”

“That is undoubtedly a thing one *must* do,” laughed Jean-Jacques. “Good-bye.”

Even I recognised Monsieur James’s allusion to a passage in ‘*Emile*’, which Jean-Jacques pretended not to notice. I accompanied our guest to the front door. Monsieur James there reminded me that before dinner I had said that Monsieur Rousseau had a high regard for him.

“*Oui, monsieur,*” I responded. “I told him, ‘That gentleman has an honest face. I am sure you will like him.’”

Monsieur James smiled and said, “Mademoiselle is a *good* judge.”

“Yes, indeed,” replied I, “I have seen strangers enough in the twenty-two years that I have been with Monsieur Rousseau, and I assure you that I have sent many of them packing because I didn’t fancy their way of talking.”

“You have promised to let me have news of you from time to time?”

“Yes, sir.”

“And tell me, Mademoiselle, what I can send you from Geneva. Make no ceremony.”

I considered, very touched that anyone should want to send me a present.

“Well, sir, if you will,” I said, “a garnet necklace would be my choice.”

As he passed by our house a short while after on horseback from his inn in the village, I waved to him and cried, “Bon voyage! Don’t forget to write to us!”

He waved back to me and was gone.

Of course, the last thing I expected from this amiable, earnest but rather unsteady young gentleman was a garnet necklace. I was more than surprised, a few days later when there was a knock on the door and a messenger announced

himself with a letter and a package, containing a beautiful necklace. It was adorned with garnet stones. He also sent me eight crowns, which was a lot of money for a tip. In a letter that had arrived a day or two earlier, he had asked Jean-Jacques' permission to write to me, promising him humorously that he had no intention of *stealing* me from him. I must say, I was very pleasantly surprised by such respect and generosity.

Here is what Monsieur James wrote to me:

"I take the liberty, my dear Mademoiselle, of sending you a garnet necklace, which you will have the goodness to keep as a slight remembrance of a worthy Scot whose face you found honest.

I shall never forget your worth. I shall never forget your feats of legerdemain. You weave lace. You do the cooking. You sit down at table. You make easy, cheerful conversation. Then you rise, the table is cleared, the dishes are washed, all is put in order, Mademoiselle Le Vasseur is with us again. Only a juggler could perform such feats.

Take good care of your charge, you who hold the Great Rousseau under lock and key. But do not be too haughty because of your station. Deign to write to me sometimes and to give me a particular account of what is happening to you. You have promised me that you will."

I was quite overcome!

But do you know what? I began to feel more than just a motherly warmth towards this young man; I was oddly drawn to him at the same time. I know that I was forty-three and he was twenty-four, but I felt his attraction for me in our exchanges together. He never once, however, over-stepped the mark, and he was (beneath his cheeky grin) always respectful towards us both.

He was, all in all, quick-witted as well as pompous - he was also absurd, warm, funny, thoughtful, enthusiastic, and, in spite of his sophistication, quite

an innocent. I found myself thinking that if one of our children had turned out like him, we should both have been more than proud. And I also thought that I should never, in all probability, see that strange Monsieur James Boswell ever again.

But Fate sometimes throws up the strangest of encounters.

3

As I told you before, at the end of January 1766, I was in Paris. I was accommodated at the Hotel de Luxembourg, where we quite often stayed. The owner, the Duc de Montmorency-Luxembourg, Charles II Frédéric, was a great supporter of Jean-Jacques, who had written, begging me to come to England as quickly as possible. He, too, had been lodging at the Hôtel de Luxembourg recently, when Mr David Hume, the fellow philosopher and secretary of the British Ambassador, as I think I told you, very kindly offered to let us live with him in London at his home.

I said to you that I had been quite nervous about travelling all that way to Paris and then to London across the Channel, and I was telling all of my worries to my friend Madame de la Roche, who was the lady-in-waiting for the duke's wife, Madame la Duchesse de Montmorency-Luxembourg, when to my amazement, who should be admitted to the room but Monsieur James Boswell.

When he heard the news that I had just arrived in Paris, he had hurried over to call on me.

“Madame, what a pleasant surprise to see you again!” he exclaimed, once he had paid us his courtesies and Madame de la Roche had retired to leave us alone together. “Why, you look *very* well - as youthful and fashionable as when I visited you and Monsieur Rousseau in Switzerland. What are you doing here on your own? Is he all right?”

I explained how I had been asked by him to travel to England - I was urgently needed there, whereupon Monsieur James told me that he had just heard that his mother had passed away and that he, too, had to travel to England before going on to Scotland to be with his father.

“Mon Dieu, Monsieur!” I couldn’t help exclaiming in my flustered anxiety. “Then we could travel together.”

“That would be splendid,” he said. “I should be most honoured to wait upon you.”

I suddenly thought how selfish I was, thinking of myself rather than of the poor man’s loss of his mother.

“I’m most sorry to hear of your loss, Monsieur James, please accept my heartfelt condolences. Were you very close to your mother?”

I remembered him telling us that he found it hard to relate to his father.

“She was a little distant with me, I suppose, but she had a very kind heart and was extremely pious. My father thought most highly of her, and I think he will find her loss particularly hard to bear. I hope I will be able to comfort him in his grief.”

“Please accept my thanks also for your generosity,” I said. “I treasure my garnet necklace and will certainly wear it in England.”

He seemed genuinely pleased, and embarrassed at my gratitude. We parted, both of us cheered to think that we would have each other to make the journey pass more pleasantly. Monsieur James said he would come to fetch me for the post carriage in two days’ time as he still had a few matters to order and acquaintances to see. He returned once more before we left, but he was less patient on that occasion and seemed distracted, perhaps by grief for his mother. He seemed also a little less interested in Jean-Jacques, but perhaps I was wrong to think that.

Friday arrived and I was up early, ready and packed. Monsieur James arrived three hours late having been up all night writing, so he said. He looked

dreadful - tired and hastily dressed, but he seemed excited to be off at last. Perhaps he was dreading the meeting with his father, who could say?

We set off towards Amiens and the first day passed uneventfully, though James seemed irritated when I was tipping the servants and wasn't able to find the right change. I couldn't afford to tip as well as he, for I was restricted to the allowance that Jean-Jacques had handed to me before he left. Monsieur James might have had a rich enough father, but Jean-Jacques and I had a very restricted income and we depended on the generosity of his wealthy friends.

On the second day, we arrived at a hotel which was short of bedrooms.

"Will you and Madame be happy to share a bedroom?" asked the innkeeper, seeing that we were travelling as a couple and assuming I was Monsieur Boswell's wife. I'm glad the man never asked if I was his *mother*, but then I prided myself that I was quite *petite* and well turned out. I think I looked younger than my forty-five years.

"Er, yes, I'm sure that we will manage, *n'est-ce pas, madame?*" said my companion turning to me.

"*Mais certainement, mon chéri,*" I said to ease his embarrassment.

The room had only one quite large bed, which was, however, cleanly made and inviting enough. We both undressed somewhat self-consciously, but it had been a tiring day and we climbed into bed as quickly as possible after we had made our *toilettes*.

It seemed quite natural to me that we might become lovers. What was the harm? We knew and liked each other - and we had been chatting away all day, after all. He was young and quite personable, eager to impress and quite a good listener. I was flattered, I have to admit it, that he should be attracted to me, for I was almost old enough to be his mother. He had given me little glances and smiles that made me think he was quite keen on becoming more intimate. But once in bed, as he moved to snuggle up close to me, he seemed to lose all his desire and become more like a frightened child.

“Is there something the matter, Jamie?” I asked, wondering if I had offended him in some way.

He suddenly gave a loud sob and covered his face with his hands.

“My mother...” he said brokenly. “I’ve lost all my urge to make love, as I think of her and of where she is now. I cannot believe that she is dead.” He began weeping like a little boy.

I did what came most naturally to me. I put my arm round him and placed his hand on my shoulder. He seemed to respond to that and was soon regaining his impetus.

But what I found strange (perhaps I shouldn’t be telling you this, but it’s all in the past now - Jean-Jacques is dead, I don’t care anymore, and you have been a sympathetic listener - you deserve to know the truth, and this is *all* true), the poor, young fellow had *no idea* how to make love to a woman. He pumped away on top of me for a few minutes in silence, gasped and then rolled off me, as if I was no longer needed. It was as though all he could think about was getting his own satisfaction as quickly as possible. He panted once or twice and then fell fast asleep.

I was so surprised I couldn’t speak. Was this the effect his mother’s death had on him, or was he, and perhaps *all* Scotsmen, completely ignorant of what women desire in men? My only comparison was my dear Jean-Jacques, who was perfectly acquiescent and seemed to desire only to please me in any way I wished. His motivation was always to seek the most naturally *instinctive* way of going about things, and I was so uncultivated that I could only depend on my own, untrained instincts. Having pondered the oddity of human beings, or rather, *men*, for a few minutes, I, too, fell soundly asleep.

Monsieur James, as I referred to him once again at the breakfast table the following morning, while the horses were being harnessed in the yard outside, appeared unaware that anything out of the ordinary had happened. He seemed, on the contrary, extremely proud of himself, and he was full of jokes and teases.

Once in the coach, he even had the nerve to say to me,

“Mademoiselle, or may I call you Thérèse now? Please allow me to congratulate you for having at last experienced the ardours of a Scottish lover!”

This, I must say, took my breath away. How pompous could a young man like him *be*?

“I allow,” I retorted, “that you are a hardy and vigorous lover, Jamie, but you have no *art*.”

That deflated him. His smile disappeared and he looked totally subdued, so I tried to mend matters a little.

“I don’t mean to hurt you, James. You are young, you can learn. Tonight, I, myself, will give you your first lesson in the art of love!”

For once, he didn’t speak. A look of terror crossed his face and I realised that probably none of his many ‘amours’, though they may have been more ‘professional’ partners than genuine lovers, had ever spoken to him like this. Normally, I could tell, *he* had to be in the driving seat, while *they* played along pretending that he was a divinely superior being. For the rest of the day, he looked rather forlorn and not a little distracted.

That evening, we were given a curious bedroom that was in the shape of an ‘L’. Our bed was around the corner of the longish dining parlour, tucked into an alcove at the end of the ‘L’. I could tell that he was becoming more frightened by the minute, but there was no getting out of the encounter now. I was beginning to quite enjoy myself.

I told him that I was going to bed after I had made my *toilette*, and then I went and undressed before slipping into bed, between the sheets and covers. I left him seated at the dining table, where a servant had fetched him a bottle. He pretended to be reading a book while he poured himself a glass of wine.

“Are you ready for your lesson, Jamie?” I called, after a few minutes, but there was no reply.

“I’m waiting for you, *mon cher*!”

Suddenly, he appeared, clutching his wine bottle and sipping from his glass.

“Have you heard from Monsieur Rousseau recently, Mademoiselle?” he asked, trying to look nonchalant. I said that I had not.

“I should be interested, you see, to find out more about his ideas of love. Of course, like everyone else, it seems, I’ve read ‘*Julie, ou La Nouvelle Héloïse*’, but love there is described in more... spiritual terms. I am also very keen to question him on his ideas of fatherhood and the duties of a parent. I.. I have a particular interest as far as being a good son or... a good father is concerned.”

“I’m sure you can talk to Jean-Jacques when we meet him,” I said reassuringly. “Now, don’t you wish to join me in bed?”

“You know, Thérèse, in Môtiers I started to look up to him as a sort of father figure. His books are so clever and full of ideas that have such depth. I have only just now begun to realise how far-reaching his political ideas are.”

“I’m sure you’re right, James, but it’s time to turn to the more pressing matters of lovemaking, right here and now. Please take off your clothes and lie down here beside me.”

The poor man was still looking apprehensive, but the wine seemed to be fortifying him somewhat. He raised the bottle to his lips and drained what was left before shedding his clothes, which he carefully folded and placed on a chair nearby. He held up a night gown questioningly, but I shook my head and blew out the candle.

“Listen carefully,” I told him quietly, after he had settled himself beside me. “You are allowed to be ardent, but you *must* be gentle. Above all, take your time; there’s no hurry and you must attend to *my* wishes and desires just as much as to your own. Is that clear?”

“Perfectly, madame.”

“As a man who has travelled quite a lot recently,” I continued, “have you not noticed how much can be achieved by a man’s hands?”

“I beg your pardon, Thérèse, what exactly do you...?”

“Your *hands*, Monsieur James, I want you to use your hands for a long time - on me - before you even think of using anything else. Is that clearly understood?”

“Er, yes, Thérèse.”

“Well, get to work, then.”

After a while, I felt my pupil was beginning to improve, but I also thought there was still some resistance to my demands and wishes.

“What gives you the *right*, madame,” he asked in an interlude, “to set yourself up as a teacher, if I may ask?”.

“Because I’m a woman and I know these things. You are not a woman, and you clearly don’t know very much. That’s what gives me the right to tell you these things.”

Many things that we did that night (and the following nights until we reached Calais) came as quite a shock to him.

“You *rode* me, Mademoiselle,” he complained afterwards, wryly laughing but also quite disturbed because I had reversed our rôles. “You were... agitated, like a bad rider galloping downhill!”

I burst out laughing and threw a pillow over his face.

Yes, my friend, Monsieur James did improve, markedly, during our journey together, but he *would* keep on talking about Jean-Jacques, still hoping, a little like you, perhaps, to find out more about the man, while he was with me. In the end this bored me considerably. How could I talk to him about political philosophy? It was quite enough just getting him to do what I wished in bed.

He may have resisted my instruction to some extent, but he was very pleased to have made love to me *twelve* times (I hadn’t kept count, but he

obviously found this a cause of some pride, and a proof of that ‘ardour’ of his that he so esteemed) before we left Calais.

The last time we made love together, in a very friendly fashion, despite it being the *thirteenth* time according to him, was when we reached Dover and we didn’t get to bed in our hotel until early in the morning. We slept afterwards until 2pm the following day, when we caught the fly to London and had a very late ‘breakfast’ in Rochester. We finally arrived in London that evening, where he dropped me off at Mr Hume’s place.

The last time I saw my travelling companion was when he picked me up from Mr David Hume’s home and drove me out to Chiswick to join my dear Jean-Jacques, who was staying there. In the carriage, I managed to extort a solemn promise from him, that while I or Monsieur Rousseau were still alive on this planet, he was not to breathe a *word* of our adventure together, not to *anybody*, not even his dearest friends.

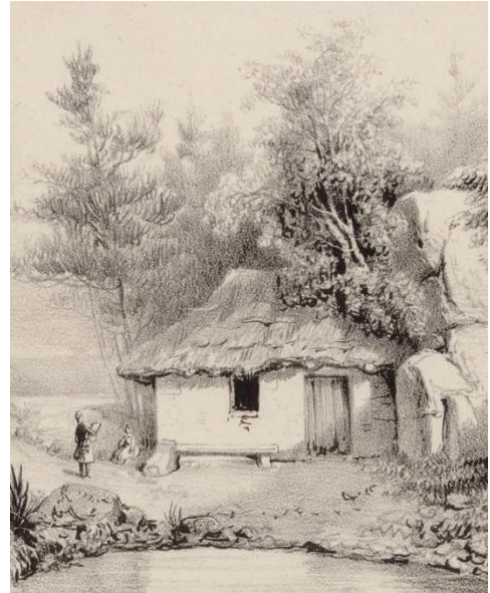
This he promised to do, though I forgot to warn him not to *write* about it either, in his private journal. I had noticed that Monsieur James Boswell was perpetually writing, either letters, or memos, or daily entries in a very private journal.

He told me that one day the world would take note of his writings and that he was fixed on a project to write a book all about Corsica and his meetings with General Paoli. Jean-Jacques was most interested in what he had to say on that subject when we arrived, but I noticed in Chiswick, during the brief time we were all three together, that Monsieur Boswell was beginning to distance himself from his former mentor. He was no longer quite so keen to impress, nor was he quite so interested in discussing subjects like...love!

That, I'm afraid to tell you, is the way of the world. Love exists in many forms, but usually it's men who have the stories to tell. I'm telling you *my* story of love - it may seem unconventional to you, but this is how it was lived, and by a *real* person, me!

When you wander through the gardens as you leave, don't forget to visit the old cabin we all called the '*Ermitage*'. Jean-Jacques was a great walker and he loved to wander around on foot, noting all the flowers and plants. He would often spend time there, meditating in his private cabin. If you see Jean-Henri, you could tell him that we are finished here.

Thank you again for your visit - not being able to put pen to paper, I'm more than pleased to be able to share my past with you like this.



*The 'Ermitage' at Ermenonville
where Rousseau used to meditate*

*

James Boswell's diaries were edited by Frederick A. Pottle in the early 1950s and you can find them on the internet. Between 1764, when Boswell visited both Rousseau and Voltaire, and 1766, when he returned to England, he was touring Italy and Corsica, later writing a best-selling account of its history and, more compellingly, of his meetings with General Paoli (who was the charismatic 'Che Guevara' sort of revolutionary liberator of his day). I have fictionalised Marie-Thérèse Le Vasseur's recounting of her particular story, but the events and conversations are largely true and based mainly on Boswell's own

accounts, which are very detailed and often reported verbatim, making them immensely readable.



The details of Marie-Thérèse's journey to London with James Boswell, which were written up on 12 pages by Boswell in his private notebook, were unfortunately lost (censored by one of his literary executors). Luckily, however, a certain Colonel Isham, to whom the papers were delivered, had read and was able to recollect in some detail the content of those intriguing 'missing pages'.

Here is James Boswell in 1766, painted by George Willison. These are the exact clothes in which he went to visit Jean-Jacques Rousseau. He had had the wonderful (but totally unrealisable) brainwave of interviewing Rousseau and Voltaire and trying to get them to be friends. What a coup that might have been!



Marie-Thérèse Le Vasseur

*Jean-Jacques Rousseau
painted in 1766*

