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Excerpt

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## BOOK VII

### CHAPTER I

THE spring had commenced in all its brilliancy; a storm, that had been lowering all day, went fiercely down upon the hills; the rain drew back into the country; the sun came forth in all its splendour, and upon the dark vapour rose the lordly rainbow. Wilhelm was riding towards it: the sight made him sad. "Ah!" said he within himself, "do the fairest hues of life appear, then, only on a ground of black? And must drops fall, if we are to be charmed? A bright day is like a dim one, if we look at it unmoved: and what can move us but some silent hope that the inborn inclination of our soul shall not always be without an object? The recital of a noble action moves us; the sight of everything harmonious moves us: we feel then as if we were not altogether in a foreign land; we fancy we are nearer the home, towards which our best and inmost wishes impatiently strive."

Meanwhile a pedestrian overtook him, and walking with a stout step by the side of the horse, began to keep him company. After a few common words, he looked at the rider and said: "If I am not mistaken, I must have already seen you somewhere."

"I too remember you," said Wilhelm: "had we not some time ago a pleasant sail together?" "Right!" replied the other.

Wilhelm looked at him more narrowly; then, after a pause, observed: "I do not know what alteration has occurred in you; last time we met, I took you for a Lutheran clergyman, you now seem rather like a Catholic one."

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"Today at least you are not wrong," replied the other, taking off his hat and showing him the tonsure. "Where is your company gone? Did you stay long with them?"

"Longer than was good: on looking back upon the period which I passed in their society, it seems as if I looked into an endless void; nothing of it has remained with me."

"Here you are mistaken," said the stranger; "everything that happens to us leaves some trace behind it, everything contributes imperceptibly to form us. Yet often it is dangerous to take a strict account of that. For either we grow proud and negligent, or downcast and dispirited; and both are equally injurious in their consequences. The safe plan is, always simply to do the task that lies nearest us; and this in the present case," added he with a smile, "is to hasten to our quarters."

Wilhelm asked how far Lothario's house was distant; the stranger answered that it lay behind the hill. "Perhaps I shall meet you there," continued he; "I have merely a small affair to manage in the neighbourhood. Farewell till then!" And with this, he struck into a steep path, that seemed to lead more speedily across the hill.

"Yes, the man is right!" said Wilhelm to himself as he proceeded; "we should think of what is nearest: and for me at present there is nothing nearer than the mournful errand I have come to do. Let me see whether I can still repeat the speech, which is to put that cruel man to shame."

He then began reciting to himself this piece of oratory: not a syllable was wanting; and the more his recollection served him, the higher grew his passion and his courage. Aurelia's sorrows and her death were vividly present to his soul.

"Spirit of my friend!" exclaimed he, "hover round me; and if thou canst, give some sign to me that thou art softened, art appeased!"

Amid such words and meditations, he had reached the summit of the hill; and near the foot of its declivity, he now

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## CHAP. I.] MEISTER'S APPRENTICESHIP 3

beheld a curious building, which he at once took to be Lothario's dwelling. An old irregular castle, with several turrets and peaked roofs, appeared to have been the primitive erection; but the new additions to it, placed near the main structure, looked still more irregular. A part of them stood close upon the main edifice; others, at some distance, were combined with it by galleries and covered passages. All external symmetry, every shade of architectural beauty, appeared to have been sacrificed to the convenience of the interior. No trace of wall or trench was to be seen; none of avenues or artificial gardens. A fruit and potherb garden reached to the very buildings; and little patches of a like sort showed themselves even in the intermediate spaces. A cheerful village lay at no great distance: the fields and gardens everywhere appeared in the highest state of cultivation.

Sunk in his own impassioned feelings, Wilhelm rode along, not thinking much of what he saw: he put up his horse at an inn; and, not without emotion, hastened to the Castle.

An old serving-man received him at the door; and signified, with much good-nature, that today it would be difficult to get admission to his Lordship; who was occupied in writing letters, and had already refused some people that had business with him. Our friend became more importunate; the old man was at last obliged to yield, and announce him. He returned, and conducted Wilhelm to a spacious ancient hall; desiring him to be so good as wait, since perhaps it might be some time before his Lordship could appear. Our friend walked up and down unrestfully; casting now and then a look at the knights and dames, whose ancient figures hung round him on the walls. He repeated the beginning of his speech: it seemed, in presence of these ruffs and coats of mail, to answer even better. Every time there rose any stir, he put himself in posture to receive his man with dignity; meaning first to hand him the letter, then assail him with the weapons of reproach.

More than once mistaken, he was now beginning to be really

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vexed and out of tune, when at last a handsome man, in boots and light surtout, stepped in from a side-door. "What good news have you for me?" said he to Wilhelm, with a friendly voice; "pardon me, that I have made you wait."

So speaking, he kept folding a letter, which he held in his hand. Wilhelm, not without embarrassment, delivered him Aurelia's paper, and replied: "I bring you the last words of a friend, which you will not read without emotion."

Lothario took it, and returned to his chamber with it; where, as Wilhelm through the open door could very easily observe, he addressed and sealed some letters, before opening Aurelia's. He appeared to have perused it once or twice; and Wilhelm, though his feelings signified that the pathetic speech would sort but ill with such a cool reception, girded up his mind, went forward to the threshold, and was just about beginning his address, when a tapestry door of the cabinet opened, and the clergyman came in.

"I have got the strangest message you can think of," cried Lothario to him. "Pardon me," continued he, addressing Wilhelm, "if I am not in a mood for speaking farther with you at this moment. You remain with us tonight: you, Abbé, see the stranger properly attended to."

With these words, he made his guest a bow: the clergyman took Wilhelm by the hand, who followed, not without reluctance.

They walked along some curious passages, in silence, and at last reached a very pretty chamber. The Abbé led him in; then left him, making no excuses. Ere long, an active boy appeared; he introduced himself as Wilhelm's valet; and brought up his supper. In waiting, he had much to say about the order of the house, about their breakfasting and dining, labours and amusements; interspersing many things in commendation of Lothario.

Pleasant as the boy was, Wilhelm endeavoured to get rid of him as soon as possible. He wished to be alone; for he felt exceedingly oppressed and straitened, in his new position.

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## CHAP. I.] MEISTER'S APPRENTICESHIP 5

He reproached himself with having executed his intentions so ill, with having done his errand only half. One moment, he proposed to overtake next morning what he had neglected tonight; the next, he saw that by Lothario's presence he would be attuned to quite a different set of feelings. The house, too, where he was, seemed very strange to him: he could not be at home in his position. Intending to undress, he opened his travelling-bag: with his night-clothes, he took out the Spirit's veil, which Mignon had packed in along with them. The sight of it increased the sadness of his humour. "Fly! youth, fly!" cried he: "What means this mystic word? What am I to fly, or whither? It were better had the Spirit called to me: Return to thyself!" He cast his eyes on some English copperplates, hung round the room in frames; most of them he looked at with indifference: at last he met with one, in which a ship was represented sinking in a tempest; a father with his lovely daughters was awaiting death from the intrusive billows. One of the maidens had a kind of likeness to the Amazon: an indescribable compassion seized our friend; he felt an irresistible necessity to vent his feelings; tears filled his eyes, he wept, and did not recover his composure, till slumber overpowered him.

Strange dreams arose upon him towards morning. He was in a garden, which in boyhood he had often visited; he looked with pleasure at the well-known alleys, hedges, flower-beds: Mariana met him, he spoke to her with love and tenderness, recollecting nothing of any bygone grievance. Ere long his father joined them, in his week-day dress; with a look of frankness that was rare in him, he bade his son fetch two seats from the garden-house; then took Mariana by the hand, and led her into a grove.

Wilhelm hastened to the garden-house, but found it altogether empty; only at a window in the farther side he saw Aurelia standing. He went forward and addressed her, but she turned not round; and though he placed himself beside her, he could never see her face. He looked out from the

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window; in an unknown garden, there were several people, some of whom he recognised. Frau Melina, seated under a tree, was playing with a rose which she had in her hand; Laertes stood beside her, counting money from the one hand to the other. Mignon and Felix were lying on the grass; the former on her back, the latter on his face. Philina came and clapped her hands above the children; Mignon lay unmoved; Felix started up and fled. At first he laughed while running, as Philina followed: but he screamed in terror, when he saw the Harper coming after him with large, slow steps. Felix ran directly to a pond; Wilhelm hastened after him: too late; the child was lying in the water! Wilhelm stood as if rooted to the spot. The fair Amazon appeared on the other side of the pond; she stretched her right hand towards the child, and walked along the shore. The child came through the water, by the course her finger pointed to; he followed her as she went round; at last she reached her hand to him, and pulled him out. Wilhelm had come nearer: the child was all in flames; fiery drops were falling from his body. Wilhelm's agony was greater than ever; but instantly the Amazon took a white veil from her head, and covered up the child with it. The fire was at once quenched. But when she lifted up the veil, two boys sprang out from under it, and frolicsomenly sported to and fro; while Wilhelm and the Amazon proceeded hand in hand across the garden; and noticed in the distance Mariana and his father walking in an alley, which was formed of lofty trees, and seemed to go quite round the garden. He turned his steps to them, and with his beautiful attendant was moving through the garden, when suddenly the fair-haired Friedrich came across their path, and kept them back with loud laughter and a thousand tricks. Still, however, they insisted on proceeding; and Friedrich hastened off, running towards Mariana and the father. These seemed to fly before him; he pursued the faster; till Wilhelm saw them hovering down the alley almost as on wings. Nature and inclination called on him to go, and help them; but the hand of the

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## CHAP. II.] MEISTER'S APPRENTICESHIP 7

Amazon detained him. How gladly did he let himself be held! With this mingled feeling he awoke; and found his chamber shining with the morning beams.

## CHAPTER II

OUR friend was called to breakfast by the boy: he found the Abbé waiting in the hall; Lothario, it appeared, had ridden out. The Abbé was not very talkative, but rather wore a thoughtful look; he inquired about Aurelia's death, and listened to our friend's recital of it, with apparent sympathy. "Ah!" cried he, "the man that discerns, with lively clearness, what infinite operations art and nature must have joined in, before a cultivated human being can be formed; the man that himself as much as possible takes interest in the culture of his fellowmen, is ready to despair when he sees how lightly mortals will destroy themselves, will blamelessly or blameably expose themselves to be destroyed. When I think of these things, life itself appears to me so uncertain a gift, that I could praise the man who does not value it beyond its worth."

Scarcely had he spoken, when the door flew violently up; a young lady came rushing in; she pushed away the old servant who attempted to restrain her. She made right to the Abbé, and seized him by the arm; her tears and sobs would hardly let her speak these words: "Where is he? Where have you put him? 'Tis a frightful treachery! Confess it now! I know what you are doing: I will after him; will know where you have sent him!"

"Be calm, my child," replied the Abbé, with assumed composure; "come with me to your room; you shall know it all; only you must have the strength to listen, if you ask me to relate." He offered her his hand, as if he meant to lead her out. "I will not return to my room," cried she: "I hate the walls where you have kept me prisoner so long. I know it all

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already: the Colonel has challenged him; he is gone to meet his enemy; perhaps this very moment he—Once or twice I thought I heard the sound of shots! I tell you, order out a coach, and come along with me, or I will fill the house and all the village with my screaming.”

Weeping bitterly, she hastened to the window; the Abbé held her back, and sought in vain to soothe her.

They heard a sound of wheels: she threw up the window, exclaiming: “He is dead! They are bringing home his body.” “He is coming out,” replied the Abbé; “you perceive he lives.” “He is wounded,” said she wildly, “else he would have come on horseback. They are holding him! The wound is dangerous!” She ran to the door, and down the stairs: the Abbé hastened after her; and Wilhelm following, observed the fair one meet her lover, who had now dismounted.

Lothario leaned on his attendant, whom Wilhelm at once knew as his ancient patron Jarno. The wounded man spoke very tenderly and kindly to the tearful damsel; he rested on her shoulder, and came slowly up the steps; saluted Wilhelm as he passed, and was conducted to his cabinet.

Jarno soon returned, and going up to Wilhelm, “It appears,” said he, “you are predestined everywhere to find a theatre and actors. We have here commenced a play which is not altogether pleasant.”

“I rejoice to find you,” answered Wilhelm, “in so strange an hour: I am astonished, frightened; and your presence already quiets my mind. Tell me, is there danger? Is the Baron badly wounded?” “I imagine not,” said Jarno.

It was not long till the young surgeon entered from the cabinet. “Now what say you?” cried Jarno to him. “That it is a dangerous piece of work,” replied the other, putting several instruments into his leathern pouch. Wilhelm looked at the band, which was hanging from the pouch; he fancied he knew it. Bright contrary colours, a curious pattern, gold and silver wrought in singular figures, marked this band from all the bands in the world. Wilhelm was convinced he beheld



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the very pouch of the ancient surgeon, who had dressed his wounds in the green of the forest; and the hope, so long deferred, of again finding traces of the lovely Amazon, struck like a flame through all his soul.

"Where did you get that pouch?" cried he. "To whom did it belong before you? I beg of you, tell me." "I bought it at an auction," said the other: "what is it to me, whom it belonged to?" So speaking, he went out; and Jarno said: "If there would come but one word of truth from our young Doctor's mouth!" "Then he did not buy the pouch?" said Wilhelm. "Just as little as Lothario is in danger," said the other.

Wilhelm stood immersed in many reflections; Jarno asked how he had fared of late. Wilhelm sketched an outline of his history; and when he at last came to speak of Aurelia's death, and his message to the place, his auditor exclaimed: "Well! it is strange, most strange!"

The Abbé entered from Lothario's chamber; beckoned Jarno to go in instead of him; and said to Wilhelm: "The Baron bids me ask you to remain with us a day or two, to share his hospitality, and, in the present circumstances, contribute to his solacement. If you need to give any notice to your people, your letter shall be instantly despatched. Meanwhile, to make you understand this curious incident, of which you have been witness, I must tell you something, which indeed is no secret. The Baron had a small adventure with a lady, which excited more than usual attention; the lady having taken him from a rival, and wishing to enjoy her victory too ostentatiously. After a time, he no longer found the same delight in her society; which he of course forsook: but being of a violent temper, she could not bear her fate with patience. Meeting at a ball, they had an open quarrel: she thought herself irreparably injured; and would be revenged. No knight stepped forth to do battle for her; till her husband, whom for years she had not lived with, heard of the affair and took it up. He challenged the Baron, and today he has

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wounded him ; yet, as I hear, the gallant Colonel has himself come still worse off."

From this hour, our friend was treated in the house as if he had belonged to it.

### CHAPTER III

At times they had read a little to the patient ; Wilhelm joyfully performed this service. Lydia stirred not from Lothario's bed ; her care for him absorbed her whole attention. But today the patient himself seemed occupied with thought : he bade them lay aside their book. "Today," said he, "I feel through my whole heart how foolishly we let our time pass on. How many things have I proposed to do, how many have I planned ; yet how we loiter in our noblest purposes ! I have just read over the scheme of the changes which I mean to make in my estates : and it is chiefly, I may say, on their account that I rejoice at the bullet's not having gone a deadlier road."

Lydia looked at him with tenderness, with tears in her eyes, as if to ask if *she*, if his friends could not pretend to any interest in his wish to live. Jarno answered : "Changes, such as you project, require to be considered well on every side, before they are resolved on."

"Long considerations," said Lothario, "are commonly a proof that we have not the point to be determined clearly in our eye ; precipitate proceedings, that we do not know it. I see distinctly that in managing my property, there are several particulars, in which the services of my dependants cannot be remitted ; certain rights which I must rigidly insist on : but I also see that there are other articles, advantageous to me, but by no means indispensable, which might admit of relaxation. Do I not profit by my lands far better than my father did ? Is not my income still increasing ? And shall I alone enjoy this growing benefit ? Shall not those who labour with and