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Opening extract from

A Little in Love

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Published by

Chicken House Ltd

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Rue de la Chanvrerie, 5 June 1832

I'm dying. There's no use hoping I'll live or telling myself, *Keep going, it's only a small wound.* There's too much blood on the ground.

I'm going to die in this street.

I can hardly breathe. My hand, my arm and my body are so full of pain. I'm whimpering, trembling. And I'm cold too – lying on my back with the cobblestones pressing into me. In the distance are horses' hooves, and someone is shouting, 'Is anyone alive out there?' I want to call, *'Yes, over here!'* But I can't. It hurts too much to speak or move.

I can smell gunpowder. And burning wood. The barricade's still alight, filling the air with thick, black smoke. It protected us for a while, this wall, but not now. The soldiers broke through it, set it on fire with their musket shots. It's crackling near me, turning to ash, and like all the people who are dying on this street it will be cold by morning.

I will be cold by morning.

I blink. I can see stars through the smoke – too many to ever count, millions and millions. What are they thinking as they look down? Perhaps they're sad because Paris is burning. Because so many good people are dead.

The stars . . . They've always felt like my friends. They're like tiny, shining faces I've known all my life. When I've been scared or can't sleep, they've been there to keep me company. I've done so many bad things in my life but the stars always forgave me.

I whisper to them now: 'Can you hear me? I'm so scared. Please don't let it hurt so much . . .' But how can they stop me bleeding? No one can.

Please . . . My eyes fill with tears.

What will stop the pain? And how can I stop being afraid? I don't want to die. Not tonight, and not like this.

Maybe it'll help to think of happy times and the beautiful things in my life? I close my eyes very tightly. Yes, that's better . . . I can see a bird singing. A peach tree. A full moon over the rooftops of Paris. A rainbow. My brother's freckled face. Flowers in hedgerows that made the lane smell lovely.

And him.

I open my eyes.

Him. Marius. Yes, I'll think of Marius because he makes me happy. He always has, from the first time I saw him in the Gorbeau tenement. He's kind and shy, and he hums without knowing it and once he held my hand on a sunlit street . . .

Is he near me? Is that him, shouting, 'Is anyone alive?' I try to sit up, to call out, but I can't for the pain is like a fire, shooting through me.

Instead I whisper, 'Stars? Bring him to me?' He'd make

this hurt less, I know. He'd smile very gently. He'd crouch down and say, 'Ssh, Eponine . . . I'm here, see?' I don't think I'd be frightened of dying if he was by my side.

The nearby church clock is chiming – eleven times. My teeth are chattering. I'm so tired, so cold.

I close my eyes again. For a moment I see Cosette.

Then I see rain. It's rain through a window. There are ditches full of water. I can see a horse too and she's so wet she's turned from grey to black.

Where's my mother? Downstairs . . .

My body lies in a Paris street, surrounded by corpses and my own blood and a burning barricade, but my head and its thoughts are in Montfermeil. How old am I, in Montfermeil? I'm three. And I'm in a blue pinafore, watching the rain.

What did I know back then? Some things. But I didn't know, couldn't even imagine, the life that lay ahead for me or that I'd ever fall in love. Or that I'd put my hand in front of a soldier's gun to save that boy's life, and bleed to death for him.