



Jane Austen's
Mansfield Park
Abridged

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Mansfield Park

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Preface

This edition of *Mansfield Park* has been shortened to about two-thirds of its original length, the aim being to preserve the character of the book as far as possible whilst making it more easily approachable. It is designed for those who wish to read Jane Austen but are daunted by the length and density of the full text.

Although there is little in Jane Austen's writing that is superfluous, this version aims to aid the reader's understanding while causing minimal damage to the sense and feeling of the book. No scenes have been removed: however, many sentences have been simplified, and some obscure or ambiguous words have been changed to make the meaning clearer. A very few spellings have been modernised (notably "choose" for "chuse" and "show" for "shew"); and some new paragraph breaks have been introduced.

If you are studying *Mansfield Park* as a set text and thinking of using this book as an easier option than the original, please think again. You will miss many of Jane Austen's subtleties, and be at high risk of misquotation. The unabridged book may be downloaded free from Project Gutenberg.

Emma Laybourn

CONTENTS

[CHAPTER 1](#)
[CHAPTER 2](#)
[CHAPTER 3](#)
[CHAPTER 4](#)
[CHAPTER 5](#)
[CHAPTER 6](#)
[CHAPTER 7](#)
[CHAPTER 8](#)
[CHAPTER 9](#)
[CHAPTER 10](#)
[CHAPTER 11](#)
[CHAPTER 12](#)
[CHAPTER 13](#)
[CHAPTER 14](#)
[CHAPTER 15](#)
[CHAPTER 16](#)
[CHAPTER 17](#)
[CHAPTER 18](#)
[CHAPTER 19](#)
[CHAPTER 20](#)
[CHAPTER 21](#)
[CHAPTER 22](#)
[CHAPTER 23](#)
[CHAPTER 24](#)
[CHAPTER 25](#)
[CHAPTER 26](#)
[CHAPTER 27](#)
[CHAPTER 28](#)
[CHAPTER 29](#)
[CHAPTER 30](#)
[CHAPTER 31](#)
[CHAPTER 32](#)
[CHAPTER 33](#)
[CHAPTER 34](#)
[CHAPTER 35](#)
[CHAPTER 36](#)
[CHAPTER 37](#)
[CHAPTER 38](#)
[CHAPTER 39](#)
[CHAPTER 40](#)
[CHAPTER 41](#)
[CHAPTER 42](#)
[CHAPTER 43](#)
[CHAPTER 44](#)
[CHAPTER 45](#)
[CHAPTER 46](#)
[CHAPTER 47](#)
[CHAPTER 48](#)

CHAPTER 1

About thirty years ago Miss Maria Ward, of Huntingdon, with only seven thousand pounds, had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram, of Mansfield Park in the county of Northampton, and to be thereby raised to the rank of a baronet's lady, with a handsome house and large income. She had two sisters to benefit from her elevation; but while Miss Ward and Miss Frances were thought to be quite as handsome as Miss Maria, there are not so many rich men in the world as there are pretty women to deserve them. Miss Ward, after half a dozen years, found herself obliged to be married to the Rev. Mr. Norris, a friend of her brother-in-law, with scarcely any private fortune, and Miss Frances fared yet worse.

Miss Ward's match was not contemptible: Sir Thomas was happily able to give his friend an income in the living of Mansfield. But Miss Frances married, as they say, to disoblige her family, and by fixing on a lieutenant of marines, without education, fortune, or connexions, did it very thoroughly.

Sir Thomas Bertram, having a general wish of doing right, and a desire of seeing those connected with him respectably situated, would have gladly used his influence for Lady Bertram's sister; but her husband's profession was such as no influence could reach. Before he could devise any method of assisting them, an absolute breach between the sisters had taken place.

It was such as a very imprudent marriage almost always produces. To save herself from remonstrance, Mrs. Price never wrote to her family about her marriage till actually married. Lady Bertram, a woman of tranquil feelings and an easy temper, would have contented herself with merely giving up her sister, and thinking no more of it; but Mrs. Norris could not be satisfied till she had written a long and angry letter to Fanny, to point out the folly of her conduct.

Mrs. Price, in her turn, was injured and angry; and her bitter, disrespectful answer, which Mrs. Norris could not possibly keep to herself, put an end to all intercourse between them for a long period. They hardly heard of each other during the next eleven years; and Sir Thomas was surprised that Mrs. Norris should ever have it in her power to tell them, as she now and then did, in an angry voice, that Fanny had got another child.

By the end of eleven years, however, Mrs. Price could no longer afford to cherish resentment, or to lose a connexion that might assist her. A large family, a husband disabled for active service but still equal to good liquor, and a very small income, made her eager to regain her friends; and she sent Lady Bertram a letter which spoke of so much contrition, such a superfluity of children, and such a want of almost everything else, as could only lead to a reconciliation. She was preparing for the arrival of her ninth child; and could not conceal how important she felt her relatives might be to the maintenance of the other eight. Her eldest was a boy of ten years, a fine spirited fellow, who longed to be out in the world. Was there any chance of his being useful to Sir Thomas in the concerns of his West Indian property? or elsewhere?

The letter re-established peace and kindness. Sir Thomas sent friendly advice, Lady Bertram dispatched money and baby-linen, and Mrs. Norris wrote the letters.

Within a year a more important advantage to Mrs. Price resulted from it. Mrs. Norris was often observing to the others that she could not get her poor sister out of her head; and at length she owned it to be her wish that poor Mrs. Price should be relieved from the expense of one child entirely. "What if they were to undertake the

care of her eldest daughter, a girl now nine years old? The trouble would be nothing, compared with the benevolence of the action." Lady Bertram agreed with her instantly. "I think we cannot do better," said she; "let us send for the child."

Sir Thomas could not consent so swiftly. He hesitated;—it was a serious charge;—the girl must be adequately provided for, or it would be cruel to take her from her family. He thought of his own four children, of his two sons, of cousins in love, etc.;—but no sooner had he begun to state his objections, than Mrs. Norris interrupted him.

"My dear Sir Thomas, I perfectly comprehend you, and I entirely agree with you in the main. Do not let us be frightened from a good deed by a trifle. Give a girl an education, and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one she has the means of settling well, without farther expense to anybody. A niece of yours, Sir Thomas, would grow up here with many advantages. I dare say she would not be so handsome as her cousins; but she would probably make a creditable marriage. You are thinking of your sons—but that is unlikely to happen, brought up as they would be like brothers and sisters. It is, in fact, a sure way of providing against the connexion. Suppose her a pretty girl, and seen by Tom or Edmund for the first time seven years hence, and I dare say there would be mischief. But bring her up with them now, and she will never be more to either than a sister."

"There is much truth in what you say," replied Sir Thomas. "I only meant to observe that we must provide for the child as a gentlewoman, if no such marriage should occur."

"I thoroughly understand you," cried Mrs. Norris, "you are everything that is generous and considerate. I am always ready to do whatever I can for those I love; and, though I could never feel for this little girl the hundredth part of the regard I bear your own dear children, I should hate myself if I neglected her. I have a warm heart; and, poor as I am, would rather deny myself the necessaries of life than be ungenerous. So, if you are not against it, I will write to my poor sister tomorrow, and make the proposal; and I will engage to get the child to Mansfield; you shall have no trouble. My own trouble, you know, I never regard. I will send Nanny to London, and she may have a bed at her cousin the saddler's, and the child may meet her there. They may easily get the child from Portsmouth to London by the coach, under the care of any creditable person that may chance to be going. I dare say there is always some tradesman's wife or other going up."

A more respectable, though less economical rendezvous being substituted, everything was settled. Sir Thomas was resolved to be the real patron of the child, and Mrs. Norris had not the least intention of being at any expense whatever in her maintenance. Nobody knew better how to dictate liberality to others; but she knew quite as well how to save her own money as to spend that of her friends. Having married on a narrow income, she had, from the first, fancied very strict economy necessary; and what began as prudence, soon grew into a matter of choice. With no family to provide for, there was nothing to impede her frugality; yet she walked home to the Parsonage, after this conversation, in the happy belief of being the most generous sister and aunt in the world.

When the subject was raised again, her views were more fully explained. In reply to Lady Bertram's calm inquiry of "Where shall the child come to first, sister, to you or to us?" Sir Thomas heard with some surprise that it would be totally out of Mrs. Norris's power to take any share in the personal charge of her. He had been considering her as a welcome companion to Mrs. Norris at the Parsonage; but he found himself mistaken. Mrs. Norris was sorry to say that the little girl's staying with them

was quite out of the question. Poor Mr. Norris's indifferent state of health made it an impossibility. Poor Mr. Norris took up every moment of her time.

"Then she had better come to us," said Lady Bertram, with composure. Sir Thomas added, "Yes, let her home be in this house. She will, at least, have companions of her own age, and a regular instructress."

"Very true," cried Mrs. Norris. "I only wish I could be more useful; but you see I do all in my power. Nanny shall fetch her, however it may inconvenience me to have my chief counsellor away for three days. I suppose, sister, you will put the child in the little white attic. It will be the best place for her, close by the housemaids, who could help to dress her, you know, and take care of her clothes."

Lady Bertram made no opposition.

"I hope she will prove a well-disposed girl," continued Mrs. Norris.

"Should her disposition be really bad," said Sir Thomas, "we must not, for our own children's sake, continue her in the family; but there is no reason to expect so great an evil. We must prepare ourselves for gross ignorance, some meanness of opinions, and distressing vulgarity of manner; but these are not incurable faults; nor can they be dangerous for her associates. Had my daughters been younger, I should have considered the introduction of such a companion as a very serious matter; but, as it is, there can be nothing to fear for them, and everything to hope for her, from the association."

"That is exactly what I think," cried Mrs. Norris, "It will be an education for the child, only being with her cousins; if Miss Lee taught her nothing, she would learn to be good and clever from them."

"I hope she will not tease my poor pug," said Lady Bertram; "I have only just got Julia to leave it alone."

"There will be some difficulty, Mrs. Norris," observed Sir Thomas, "as to the distinction to be made between the girls as they grow up: how to preserve in the minds of my daughters the consciousness of what they are, without making them think too lowly of their cousin; and how, without depressing her spirits too far, to make her remember that she is not a Miss Bertram. I should wish to see them very good friends, and would not authorise in my girls any arrogance towards their relation; but they cannot be equals. It is a point of great delicacy, and you must assist us in our endeavours to choose exactly the right line of conduct."

Mrs. Norris was quite at his service, and encouraged him to hope that between them it would be easily managed.

Mrs. Norris did not write to her sister in vain. Mrs. Price seemed surprised that a girl should be fixed on, when she had so many fine boys, but accepted the offer thankfully, assuring them of her daughter's being a very well-disposed, good-humoured girl. She spoke of her as somewhat delicate, but hoped of her being better for change of air. Poor woman! she probably thought change of air might agree with many of her children.

CHAPTER 2

The little girl made her long journey in safety; and at Northampton was met by Mrs. Norris.

Fanny Price was just ten years old, and though there might not be much in her appearance to captivate, there was, at least, nothing to disgust her relations. She was small for her age, with no glow of complexion, nor any other striking beauty; exceedingly timid and shy, and shrinking from notice; but her air, though awkward, was not vulgar, her voice was sweet, and when she spoke her countenance was pretty.

Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram received her very kindly; and Sir Thomas tried to be conciliating: but he had to work against his gravity of deportment; and Lady Bertram, without taking half so much trouble, by the mere aid of a good-humoured smile, became immediately the less awful character of the two.

The young people were all at home, and received Fanny with much good humour, at least on the part of the sons, who, at seventeen and sixteen, had all the grandeur of men in the eyes of their little cousin. The two girls were more at a loss from being younger and in greater awe of their father. But, their confidence increasing from their cousin's want of it, they were soon able to take a survey of her face and her frock in easy indifference.

They were a remarkably fine family, the sons well-looking, the daughters handsome, and all of them well-grown for their age, which produced a striking difference between the cousins; no one would have supposed the girls so close in age as they really were. There were in fact but two years between the youngest and Fanny. Julia Bertram was twelve, and Maria a year older.

The little visitor meanwhile was as unhappy as possible. Afraid of everybody, ashamed of herself, and longing for the home she had left, she knew not how to look up, and could scarcely speak to be heard, or without crying. Mrs. Norris had been talking to her the whole way from Northampton of her wonderful good fortune, and the extraordinary degree of gratitude which it ought to produce, and her misery was therefore increased by the idea of its being a wicked thing for her not to be happy. The fatigue, too, of so long a journey, was not trifling. She could scarcely swallow two mouthfuls of gooseberry tart before tears interrupted her, and she was taken to finish her sorrows in bed.

"This is not a very promising beginning," said Mrs. Norris, when Fanny had left the room. "After all that I said to her as we came along, I thought she would have behaved better. I hope there may not be a little sulkiness of temper—her poor mother had a good deal; but we must make allowances for such a child—and I do not know that her being sorry to leave her home is really against her, for, with all its faults, it *was* her home."

It required a long time, however, to reconcile Fanny to the novelty of Mansfield Park. Her feelings were very acute, and not properly attended to. Nobody meant to be unkind, but nobody put themselves out of their way to secure her comfort.

The Miss Bertrams were allowed a holiday the next day, to give them leisure for getting acquainted with their young cousin. However, having found that she had but two sashes, and had never learned French, they made her a generous present of some of their least valued toys, and left her to herself.

Fanny, whether in the schoolroom, the drawing-room, or the shrubbery, was equally forlorn, finding something to fear in every person and place. She was

disheartened by Lady Bertram's silence, awed by Sir Thomas's grave looks, and quite overcome by Mrs. Norris's scoldings. Her elder cousins abashed her by noticing her shyness: Miss Lee wondered at her ignorance, and the maid-servants sneered at her clothes. When to these sorrows was added the memory of the brothers and sisters among whom she had been important as playfellow, instructress, and nurse, the despondence that sunk her little heart was severe.

The grandeur of the house astonished, but could not console her. The rooms were too large: whatever she touched she expected to injure, and she crept about in constant terror, often retreating to her own chamber to cry; and ended every day's sorrows by sobbing herself to sleep.

A week had passed in this way, with no suspicion of it conveyed by her quiet passive manner, when she was found one morning by her cousin Edmund, the youngest of the sons, sitting crying on the attic stairs.

"My dear little cousin," said he, with all the gentleness of an excellent nature, "what can be the matter?" And sitting down by her, he was at great pains to persuade her to speak openly. Was she ill? or was anybody angry with her? or had she quarrelled with Maria and Julia? or was she puzzled about anything in her lesson that he could explain?

For a long while no answer could be obtained beyond a "no, no—not at all"; but he persevered; and no sooner had he mentioned her own home, than her sobs explained where the grievance lay. He tried to console her.

"You are sorry to leave Mama, my dear little Fanny," said he, "which shows you to be a very good girl; but you must remember that you are with relations and friends, who all love you, and wish to make you happy. Let us walk out in the park, and you shall tell me about your brothers and sisters."

On doing this, he found that there was one among them who ran more in her thoughts than the rest. It was William whom she talked of most, and wanted most to see. William, the eldest, a year older than herself, her constant friend. "William did not like she should come away; he had told her he should miss her very much." "But William will write to you, I dare say." "Yes, but he had told her to write first." "And when shall you do it?" She hung her head and answered hesitatingly, "she had not any paper."

"If that be all your difficulty, I will furnish you with paper, and you may write your letter whenever you choose. Would it make you happy to write to William?"

"Yes, very."

"Then let it be done now. Come with me into the breakfast-room, we shall find everything there."

"But, cousin, will it go to the post?"

"Yes, it shall go with the other letters; and, as your uncle will frank it, it will cost William nothing."

"My uncle!" repeated Fanny, with a frightened look.

"Yes, I will take it to my father to frank."

Fanny offered no further resistance; and they went together into the breakfast-room, where Edmund prepared her paper, and ruled her lines with all the goodwill that her brother could have felt, and probably with more exactness. He stayed to assist her; and showed a kindness to her brother which delighted her. He wrote with his own hand his love to cousin William, and sent him half a guinea under the seal. Fanny's countenance and artless words fully conveyed all her gratitude, and her cousin began to find her an interesting object. He talked to her more, and was convinced of her having an affectionate heart, and a desire of doing right; and perceiving her great

timidity, he gave her much good advice as to playing with Maria and Julia, and being as merry as possible.

From this day Fanny grew more comfortable. She felt that she had a friend, and the kindness of her cousin Edmund gave her better spirits with everybody else. The place became less strange, and the people less formidable. She was no longer afraid to appear before her uncle, nor did her aunt Norris's voice startle her so much. To her cousins she became occasionally an acceptable companion. Their pleasures were sometimes of a nature to make a third very useful, especially when that third was of an obliging temper; and they owned that "Fanny was good-natured enough."

Edmund was uniformly kind; and she had nothing worse to endure on the part of Tom than that sort of merriment which a young man of seventeen will always think fair with a child of ten. He was just entering into life, full of spirits, and with all the liberality of an eldest son, who feels born only for expense and enjoyment. His kindness to his little cousin was consistent with his situation: he made her some very pretty presents, and laughed at her.

As her appearance and spirits improved, Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris thought with greater satisfaction of their benevolent plan; and it was soon decided that, though far from clever, she was tractable, and seemed likely to give them little trouble. A poor opinion of Fanny's abilities was not confined to them. As her cousins found her ignorant of many things with which they had been long familiar, they thought her prodigiously stupid, and for the first two or three weeks were continually bringing some fresh report of it.

"Dear mama, only think, my cousin cannot put the map of Europe together—or tell the principal rivers in Russia—she does not know the difference between water-colours and crayons!—Did you ever hear anything so stupid?"

"My dear," their considerate aunt Norris would reply, "it is very bad, but you must not expect everybody to be as quick at learning as yourself."

"But, aunt, she is really so very ignorant!—Do you know, we asked her last night which way she would go to get to Ireland; and she said, she should cross to the Isle of Wight. She calls it the Island, as if there were no other island in the world. I cannot remember the time when I did not know much more than her. How long ago it is, aunt, since we used to repeat the order of the kings of England, with their dates!"

"Yes," added the other; "and the Roman emperors, and all the metals, semi-metals, planets, and distinguished philosophers."

"Very true indeed, my dears, but you are blessed with wonderful memories, and your poor cousin has probably none at all. You must pity her deficiency. And remember that you should always be modest; for there is a great deal more for you to learn."

"Yes, I know there is, till I am seventeen. But I must tell you another thing of Fanny, so stupid. Do you know, she does not want to learn either music or drawing."

"To be sure, my dear, that is very stupid indeed. But, all things considered, it is well that it should be so, for it is not necessary that she should be as accomplished as you are; it is much more desirable that there should be a difference."

Such were the counsels by which Mrs. Norris formed her nieces' minds; and it is no wonder that, with all their promising talents, they should be entirely deficient in self-knowledge, generosity and humility. In everything but disposition they were admirably taught. Sir Thomas did not know what was wanting because, though a truly anxious father, the reserve of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him.

To the education of her daughters Lady Bertram paid not the smallest attention. She had not time for such cares. She was a woman who spent her days in sitting, nicely dressed, on a sofa, doing some long piece of needlework, of little use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug dog than her children, but indulgent to them when it did not cause her inconvenience, guided in everything important by Sir Thomas, and in smaller concerns by her sister. Her girls were under the care of a governess, and could need nothing more. As for Fanny's being stupid at learning, "it was very unlucky, but some people were stupid, and she saw no harm in the poor little thing, and found her very handy in carrying messages, and fetching things."

Fanny, with all her faults of ignorance and timidity, was fixed at Mansfield Park, and grew up there not unhappily among her cousins. There was no positive ill-nature in Maria or Julia; and though Fanny was often mortified by their treatment of her, she thought too lowly of her own claims to feel injured by it.

From about the time of her entering the family, Lady Bertram gave up the house in London, and remained wholly in the country, leaving Sir Thomas to attend his duty in Parliament without her. In the country, therefore, the Miss Bertrams continued to grow tall and womanly; and their father saw them becoming in person, manner, and accomplishments, everything that he could wish. His eldest son was careless and extravagant, and had already given him much uneasiness; but his other children promised nothing but good. His daughters, he trusted, would make respectable alliances; and the character of Edmund, his strong good sense and uprightness of mind, bid most fairly for utility, honour, and happiness. He was to be a clergyman.

Sir Thomas did what he could for the children of Mrs. Price. He assisted her liberally in the education and careers of her sons; and Fanny had true satisfaction in hearing of any kindness towards them. Only once, in those years, had she the happiness of being with William. Of the rest she saw nothing: nobody seemed to think of her visiting them; but William, determining to be a sailor, was invited to spend a week with his sister before he went to sea.

Their eager affection in meeting, their delight in being together, their hours of mirth, and moments of serious conference, may be imagined; as well as her misery when he left her. Luckily the visit happened in the Christmas holidays, when she could look for comfort to her cousin Edmund. Edmund's friendship never failed her: his leaving Eton for Oxford made no change in his kindness. He was always considerate of her feelings, trying to make her good qualities understood, and giving her advice, consolation, and encouragement.

Kept back as she was by everybody else, his support alone could not bring her forward; but his attentions were otherwise of the highest importance in improving her mind. He knew her to be clever, and to have a fondness for reading. Miss Lee taught her French, and heard her read the daily portion of history; but he recommended the books which charmed her leisure hours, he encouraged her taste, and corrected her judgment. In return for such services she loved him better than anybody in the world except William: her heart was divided between the two.

CHAPTER 3

The death of Mr. Norris, when Fanny was about fifteen, brought changes. Mrs. Norris removed to a small house in the village, and consoled herself for the loss of her husband by considering that she could do very well without him; and for her reduction of income by the necessity of stricter economy.

The parson's living was for Edmund; and would have been given to some friend to hold till he were old enough for orders. But Tom's extravagance had been so great as to make a different disposal necessary; the younger brother must help to pay for the pleasures of the elder. There was another family living actually held for Edmund; but even so, Sir Thomas could not but feel it to be an injustice, and he earnestly tried to impress his eldest son with the same conviction.

"I blush for you, Tom," said he, in his most dignified manner; "You have robbed Edmund for twenty, thirty years, perhaps for life, of more than half the income which ought to be his. It may hereafter be in my power, or in yours, to find him a better position; but nothing can equal the advantage which he must now forego through the urgency of your debts."

Tom listened with some shame and sorrow; but escaping as quickly as possible, could soon with cheerful selfishness reflect, firstly, that he had not been half so much in debt as some of his friends; secondly, that his father had made a tiresome piece of work of it; and, thirdly, that the future incumbent, whoever he might be, would probably die very soon.

On Mr. Norris's death the living went to a Dr. Grant, who came to reside at Mansfield; and proving to be a hearty man of forty-five, seemed likely to disappoint Mr. Bertram's calculations. But "no, he was a short-necked, apoplectic sort of fellow, and would soon pop off."

He had a wife about fifteen years his junior, but no children; and they entered the neighbourhood with the usual fair report of being very respectable, agreeable people.

The time was now come when Sir Thomas expected his sister-in-law to claim her share in their niece. Now that Mrs. Norris was a widow, to have Fanny living with her would be very suitable; and as he had borne some losses on his West India estate, in addition to his eldest son's extravagance, he wished to be relieved from the expense of her support. He mentioned this probability to his wife; and she later calmly observed to Fanny, "So, Fanny, you are going to leave us, and live with my sister. How shall you like it?"

"Going to leave you?"

"Yes, my dear; why should you be astonished? You have been five years with us, and my sister always meant to take you when Mr. Norris died."

The news was as disagreeable to Fanny as it was unexpected. She had never received kindness from her aunt Norris, and could not love her.

"I shall be very sorry to go away," said she, with a faltering voice.

"Yes, I dare say you will. You have had as little to vex you in this house as any creature in the world."

"I hope I am not ungrateful, aunt," said Fanny.

"No, my dear; I have always found you a very good girl."

"Am I never to live here again?"

"Never, my dear; but you are sure of a comfortable home."

Fanny left the room with a very sorrowful heart; she could not think of living with her aunt with satisfaction. As soon as she met with Edmund she told him her distress.

"Cousin," said she, "something is going to happen which I do not like at all. I am going to live entirely with my aunt Norris."

"Indeed!"

"Yes; my aunt Bertram has just told me so. I am to leave Mansfield Park, and go to the White House."

"Well, Fanny, if the plan were not unpleasant to you, I should call it an excellent one."

"Oh, cousin!"

"My aunt is acting like a sensible woman in wishing for you. She is choosing a companion exactly where she ought, and I am glad her love of money does not interfere. I hope it does not distress you very much, Fanny?"

"Indeed it does. I love this house and everything in it. You know how uncomfortable I feel with her."

"It was the same with us all when we were younger. She never knew how to be pleasant to children. But you are now of an age to be treated better; and when you are her only companion, you must be important to her."

"I can never be important to any one."

"What is to prevent you?"

"Everything. My situation, my foolishness and awkwardness."

"As to your foolishness and awkwardness, my dear Fanny, believe me, you never have a shadow of either, but in using the words so improperly. There is no reason in the world why you should not be important where you are known. You have good sense, and a sweet temper, and I am sure you have a grateful heart. I do not know any better qualifications for a friend and companion."

"You are too kind," said Fanny, colouring at such praise; "how shall I ever thank you as I ought, for thinking so well of me. Oh! cousin, if I am to go away, I shall remember your goodness to the last moment of my life."

"Why, Fanny, I should hope to be remembered at such a distance as the White House. You speak as if you were going two hundred miles off; but you will belong to us as much as ever. The two families will be meeting every day. The only difference will be that, living with your aunt, you will be brought forward. Here there are too many whom you can hide behind; but with her you will be forced to speak for yourself."

"Oh! do not say so."

"I must say it, and with pleasure. Mrs. Norris will do a great deal for anybody she interests herself about."

Fanny sighed. "I cannot see things as you do; but I ought to believe you to be right, and I am obliged to you for trying to reconcile me to it. If I could suppose my aunt really to care for me, it would be delightful to feel myself of consequence to anybody. Here, I know, I am of none, and yet I love the place so well."

"The place, Fanny, is what you will not quit, though you quit the house. You will have as free a command of the park and gardens as ever. You will have the same walks to frequent, the same library to choose from, the same horse to ride."

"Yes, dear old grey pony! Ah! cousin, I remember how much I used to dread riding, what terrors it gave me; and how kindly you persuaded me out of my fears, and convinced me that I should like it after a little while. When I feel how right you were, I hope you may always prophesy so well."

"And I am quite convinced that your being with Mrs. Norris will be as good for your mind as riding has been for your health, and for your happiness too."

So ended their discourse, which might as well have been spared, for Mrs. Norris had not the smallest intention of taking Fanny. It was a thing to be avoided. To prevent its being expected, she had fixed on the smallest habitation which could rank as genteel, the White House being only just large enough to receive herself and her servants, and allow a spare room for a friend, of which she made a very particular point. The spare rooms at the Parsonage had never been wanted, but the absolute necessity of a spare room for a friend was now never forgotten. Perhaps her very display of the importance of a spare room might have misled Sir Thomas to suppose it really intended for Fanny. Lady Bertram soon brought the matter to a head by carelessly observing to Mrs. Norris—

"I think, sister, we need not keep Miss Lee, when Fanny goes to live with you."

"Live with me! what do you mean?"

"Is she not to live with you? I thought you had settled it with Sir Thomas."

"Me! never. I never spoke a syllable about it to Sir Thomas, nor he to me. Fanny live with me! Good heaven! what could I do with Fanny? Me! a poor, helpless, forlorn widow, my spirits quite broke down; what could I do with a girl of fifteen? the very age of all others to put the cheerfulest spirits to the test! Sir Thomas could not seriously expect such a thing! How came he to speak to you about it?"

"I do not know. I suppose he thought it best."

"But he could not say he wished me to take Fanny."

"No; he only said he thought it very likely. We both thought it would be a comfort to you. But if you do not like it, she is no encumbrance here."

"Dear sister, how can she be any comfort to me? Here am I, a poor desolate widow, my health and spirits gone, my peace destroyed, with hardly enough to support me—what possible comfort could I have in taking such a charge upon me as Fanny? I would not be so unjust to the poor girl. She is in good hands. I must struggle through my sorrows as I can."

"Then you will not mind living quite alone?"

"Lady Bertram, I do not complain. I cannot live as I have done. I have been a liberal housekeeper enough, but I shall practise economy now. At the White House, I must live within my income; and I own it would give me great satisfaction to lay by a little at the end of the year."

"I dare say you will. You always do, don't you?"

"My object, Lady Bertram, is to be of use to those that come after me. It is for your children's good that I wish to be richer. I should be glad to think I could leave them a little trifle."

"You are very good, but they are sure of being well provided for. Sir Thomas will take care of that."

"Why, you know, Sir Thomas's means will be straitened if the Antigua estate makes such poor returns."

"Oh! that will soon be settled."

"Well, Lady Bertram," said Mrs. Norris, "My sole desire is to be of use to your family: and so, if Sir Thomas should speak again about my taking Fanny, you will be able to say that my health and spirits put it quite out of the question; besides, I really have no bed to give her, for I must keep a spare room for a friend."

Lady Bertram repeated enough of this conversation to her husband to convince him that he had mistaken his sister-in-law's views; and she was from that moment safe

from expectation. He wondered at her refusing to do anything for a niece whom she had been so anxious to adopt; but soon accepted it.

Fanny learnt how unnecessary had been her fears. Mrs. Norris moved to the White House, the Grants arrived at the Parsonage, and everything at Mansfield went on for some time as usual.

The Grants, being friendly and sociable, gave great satisfaction among their new acquaintance. They had their faults, and Mrs. Norris soon found them out. The Doctor was very fond of eating, and would have a good dinner every day; and Mrs. Grant gave her cook as high wages as they did at Mansfield Park. Mrs. Norris could not speak with any temper of such grievances, nor of the quantity of butter and eggs that were consumed in the house. "Nobody loved plenty and hospitality more than herself; but this was a way of going on that she could not understand. A fine lady in a country parsonage was quite out of place. Inquire where she would, she could not find out that Mrs. Grant had ever had more than five thousand pounds."

Lady Bertram listened without much interest. She could not enter into the wrongs of an economist, but she felt astonishment in Mrs. Grant's being so well settled in life without being handsome.

Hardly a year on, another event arose of importance in the family. Sir Thomas needed to go to Antigua to sort out his affairs, and he took his eldest son, in the hope of detaching him from some bad connexions at home. They left England expecting to be a twelvemonth absent.

The necessity of the journey reconciled Sir Thomas to quitting the rest of his family, and leaving his daughters in the care of others. He could not think Lady Bertram quite equal to supply his place with them; but, in Mrs. Norris's watchful attention, and in Edmund's judgment, he had confidence.

Lady Bertram did not like to have her husband leave her; but she was not disturbed by any alarm for his safety, being one of those persons who think nothing can be dangerous or difficult to anybody but themselves.

The Miss Bertrams were much to be pitied on the occasion: not for their sorrow, but for their lack of it. Their father was no object of love to them; his absence was unhappily most welcome. They were relieved by it from all restraint; they felt themselves at their own disposal, and to have every indulgence within their reach.

Fanny's relief was quite equal to her cousins'; but she really grieved because she could not grieve. "Sir Thomas, who had done so much for her, gone perhaps never to return! that she should see him go without a tear! it was a shameful insensibility." He had said to her, on the last morning, that he hoped she might see William again, and had told her to invite him to Mansfield when his squadron was in England. "This was so thoughtful and kind!" and if he had only smiled, and called her "my dear Fanny", every former cold address might have been forgotten. But he had ended his speech by adding, "If William does come to Mansfield, I hope you may convince him that your years here have not been spent entirely without improvement; though, I fear, he must find his sister at sixteen too much like his sister at ten." She cried bitterly over this reflection when her uncle was gone; and her cousins, seeing her with red eyes, set her down as a hypocrite.

CHAPTER 4

Lady Bertram was soon astonished to find how well they did without Sir Thomas, how well Edmund could supply his place in carving, settling with the servants, and saving her from all possible exertion.

News of the travellers' safe arrival at Antigua was received; though not before Mrs. Norris had been indulging in very dreadful fears; and as she depended on being the first person to learn of any catastrophe, she had already arranged the manner of breaking it to all the others, when Sir Thomas's assurances of their being alive and well made it necessary to lay by preparatory speeches for a while.

The winter passed without their being called for; the accounts continued perfectly good; and Mrs. Norris, in promoting gaieties for her nieces, displaying their accomplishments, and looking about for their future husbands, had very little time to fear for the absent.

The Miss Bertrams were now fully established among the neighbourhood's belles; and as they joined to beauty and brilliant acquirements a manner naturally easy and civil, they gained favour as well as admiration. Their vanity was in such good order that they seemed to be quite free from it, and gave themselves no airs; while the praises secured and brought round by their aunt strengthened them in believing they had no faults.

Lady Bertram was too indolent to go into public with her daughters. The charge was made over to her sister, who thoroughly relished the means it afforded her of mixing in society without having horses to hire.

Fanny had no share in the season's festivities; but she enjoyed being useful as her aunt's companion; and, as Miss Lee had left Mansfield, she naturally became everything to Lady Bertram during the night of a party. She talked to her, listened to her, read to her; and the tranquillity of such evenings was unspeakably welcome to her mind. As to her cousins' gaieties, she loved to hear an account of them, especially of the balls, and whom Edmund had danced with; but never imagined she should ever be admitted to the same. It was a comfortable winter to her; for though it brought no William to England, the never-failing hope of his arrival was worth much.

The spring deprived her of her friend, the old grey pony; and she was in danger of feeling the loss in her health as well as in her affections; for despite the acknowledged importance of her riding, no measures were taken for mounting her again, "because," as her aunts observed, "she might ride her cousins' horses at any time when they did not want them." As the Miss Bertrams wanted their horses every fine day, and had no idea of sacrificing any real pleasure, that time never came. They took their cheerful rides in the fine mornings of April and May; and Fanny either sat at home all day with one aunt, or walked beyond her strength at the instigation of the other: Lady Bertram holding exercise to be unnecessary; and Mrs. Norris thinking everybody ought to walk all day, as she did.

Edmund was absent; but when he returned and saw how Fanny was affected, "Fanny must have a horse" was his resolute declaration. Mrs. Norris thought some steady old thing might be found at the Park that would do. She considered it as unnecessary, and even improper, that Fanny should have a lady's horse of her own, in the style of her cousins. She was sure Sir Thomas had never intended it: and to be adding to the great expenses of his stable, at a time when his income was unsettled, seemed to her unjustifiable.

"Fanny must have a horse," was Edmund's only reply. Mrs. Norris could not see it in the same light. Lady Bertram agreed with her son; she only wanted him to wait till Sir Thomas's return, and then Sir Thomas might settle it himself. He would be at home in September, and where would be the harm of waiting till then?

Edmund determined on a method of proceeding which would not cost too much. He had three horses of his own, but not one that would carry a woman. Two of them were hunters; the third, a useful road-horse: this third he exchanged for one that his cousin might ride. The whole business was soon completed. The new mare proved a treasure; and Fanny was put in possession of her. She had not supposed that anything could suit her like the old grey pony; but her delight in Edmund's mare was far beyond her former pleasure; and her appreciation of his kindness was beyond words. She regarded her cousin as an example of everything good and great, entitled to more gratitude than she could ever pay him. Her feelings towards him were all that was respectful, grateful, confiding, and tender.

As the horse continued to be Edmund's property, Mrs. Norris could tolerate its being for Fanny's use; and had Lady Bertram ever thought about the matter, she might have excused Edmund for not waiting till Sir Thomas's return, for when September came Sir Thomas was still abroad.

Unfavourable circumstances had suddenly arisen; and the great uncertainty of his affairs determined him on sending home his son, and staying on by himself. Tom arrived safely, bringing an excellent account of his father's health; but Mrs. Norris could not help feeling dreadful presentiments; and as the long autumn evenings came on, was so terribly haunted by these ideas, in the sad solitariness of her cottage, as to be obliged to take daily refuge in the dining-room of the Park.

The return of winter engagements, however, was not without effect; her mind became pleasantly occupied in superintending the fortunes of her eldest niece. "If poor Sir Thomas were never to return, it would be consoling to see dear Maria well married," she often thought; always when they were in the company of men of fortune, particularly one young man who had recently succeeded to one of the largest estates in the country.

Mr. Rushworth was struck with the beauty of Miss Bertram, and, being inclined to marry, soon fancied himself in love. He was a heavy young man, with not more than common sense; but as there was nothing disagreeable in his address, the young lady was well pleased with her conquest. Being now in her twenty-first year, Maria Bertram was beginning to think that she ought to marry; and as marriage with Mr. Rushworth would give her the enjoyment of a larger income than her father's, as well as a house in town, it became her evident duty to marry Mr. Rushworth if she could.

Mrs. Norris was zealous in promoting the match by every contrivance, and by seeking an intimacy with the gentleman's mother. It was not long before a good understanding took place between this lady and herself. Mrs. Rushworth desired that her son should marry, and declared that of all the young ladies she had seen, Miss Bertram seemed the best adapted to make him happy. Mrs. Norris accepted the compliment. Maria was indeed the pride and delight of them all—perfectly faultless—an angel; and, of course, surrounded by admirers: yet Mr. Rushworth appeared precisely the young man to attach her.

After dancing with each other at a proper number of balls, the young people entered into an engagement, much to the satisfaction of their families, and of the general lookers-on of the neighbourhood.

It was some months before Sir Thomas's consent could be received; but as no one doubted his pleasure, the two families met without restraint, and with no other attempt

made at secrecy than Mrs. Norris's talking of it everywhere as a matter not to be talked of at present.

Edmund was the only one who could see a fault in the business; he could not find Mr. Rushworth a desirable companion. He allowed his sister to be the best judge of her own happiness, but he was not pleased that her happiness should centre in a large income; nor could he refrain from often saying to himself, when he was in Mr. Rushworth's company—"If this man had not twelve thousand a year, he would be a very stupid fellow."

Sir Thomas, however, was truly happy in the prospect of an alliance so advantageous. His hearty concurrence was conveyed as soon as possible. He only asked that the marriage should not take place before his return. He wrote in April, and had strong hopes of settling everything to his satisfaction, and leaving Antigua before the end of the summer.

Such was the state of affairs in July; and Fanny had just reached her eighteenth year, when the village received an addition in the brother and sister of Mrs. Grant, a Mr. and Miss Crawford, the children of her mother by a second marriage.

They were young people of fortune. The son had a good estate in Norfolk, the daughter twenty thousand pounds. As Mrs. Grant's own marriage had been soon followed by the death of their common parent, she had scarcely seen them since. In their uncle's house they had found a kind home. Admiral and Mrs. Crawford, though agreeing in nothing else, were united in affection for these children. The Admiral delighted in the boy, Mrs. Crawford doted on the girl; and it was the lady's death which now obliged her protégée to find another home. Admiral Crawford was a man of vicious conduct, who chose to bring his mistress under his own roof; and Mrs. Grant's sister proposed to come to her, a measure welcome on both sides; for Mrs. Grant was in want of some variety at home. The arrival, therefore, of a beloved sister was highly agreeable; and her chief anxiety was lest Mansfield should not satisfy a young woman who was used to London.

Miss Crawford was not entirely free from similar apprehensions; and it was not till after she had tried in vain to persuade her brother to settle with her at his own country house, that she resolved to try her other relations. Henry Crawford had a great dislike of settling in one place; but he kindly escorted his sister into Northamptonshire, and as readily engaged to fetch her away again, at half an hour's notice, whenever she might be weary of it.

The meeting was very satisfactory. Miss Crawford found a sister with refinement, a sister's husband who looked the gentleman, and a house commodious and well fitted up; and Mrs. Grant received a young man and woman of very prepossessing appearance. Mary Crawford was remarkably pretty; Henry, though not handsome, had air and countenance; the manners of both were lively and pleasant, and Mrs. Grant immediately gave them credit for everything else. She was delighted with each, but Mary was her dearest object; and having never been able to glory in beauty of her own, she thoroughly enjoyed being proud of her sister's. She had already looked out for a suitable match for her: she had fixed on Tom Bertram; the eldest son of a baronet was not too good for a girl of twenty thousand pounds with elegance and accomplishments; and since she was a warm-hearted, unreserved woman, Mary had not been three hours in the house before she told her what she had planned.

Miss Crawford was glad to find a family of consequence so near them, and not at all displeased at her sister's choice. Matrimony was her object, provided she could marry well: and having seen Mr. Bertram in town, she knew that no objection could

be made to his person. While she treated it as a joke, she did not forget to think of it seriously. The scheme was repeated to Henry.

"And now," added Mrs. Grant, "I have thought of something to make it complete. I should dearly love to settle you both here; and therefore, Henry, you shall marry the youngest Miss Bertram, a nice, handsome, good-humoured girl, who will make you very happy."

Henry bowed and thanked her.

"My dear sister," said Mary, "if you can persuade him into anything of the sort, I shall be delighted. I have three friends who have been all dying for him in their turn; and the pains which they, their mothers, my dear aunt and myself, have taken to reason, coax, or trick him into marrying, is inconceivable! He is the most horrible flirt that can be imagined. If your Miss Bertrams do not like to have their hearts broke, let them avoid Henry."

"My dear brother, I will not believe this."

"No, I am sure you will be kinder than Mary. You will allow for the doubts of youth. I am cautious, and unwilling to risk my happiness in a hurry. Nobody can think more highly of matrimony than myself. I consider the blessing of a wife as most justly described by the poet—'Heaven's last best gift.'"

"There, Mrs. Grant, you see how he dwells on one word, and only look at his smile. I assure you he is detestable; the Admiral's lessons have quite spoiled him."

"I pay very little regard," said Mrs. Grant, "to what any young person says about marriage. If they profess a disinclination for it, I know that they have not yet seen the right person."

Dr. Grant laughingly congratulated Miss Crawford on feeling no disinclination to the state herself.

"Oh yes! I am not ashamed of it. I would have everybody marry if they can do it to advantage."

CHAPTER 5

The young people were pleased with each other from the first. The Miss Bertrams were too handsome themselves to dislike any woman for being so too, and were as much charmed as their brothers with Miss Crawford's lively dark eye, clear brown complexion, and general prettiness. Had she been tall, full formed, and fair, it might have been more of a trial: but as it was, there could be no comparison; and she was allowably a sweet, pretty girl, while they were the finest young women in the country.

Her brother was not handsome: no, he was absolutely plain; but still a gentleman, with a pleasing address. The second meeting proved him not so very plain: he was so expressive, and so well made, that one soon forgot he was plain; and after a third interview, he was no longer allowed to be called so by anybody. He was, in fact, the most agreeable young man the sisters had ever known. Miss Bertram's engagement made him the property of Julia, of which Julia was fully aware; and before he had been at Mansfield a week, she was quite ready to be fallen in love with.

Maria's notions on the subject were more confused. She did not want to see or understand. "There could be no harm in her liking an agreeable man—everybody knew her situation—Mr. Crawford must take care of himself." Mr. Crawford did not mean to be in any danger! the Miss Bertrams were worth pleasing, and he began with no object but of making them like him. He did not want them to die of love; but he allowed himself great latitude on such points.

"I like your Miss Bertrams exceedingly, sister," said he, as they returned from a dinner visit; "very elegant, agreeable girls."

"I am delighted to hear you say it. But you like Julia best."

"Oh yes! I like Julia best."

"But do you really? for Miss Bertram is in general thought the handsomest."

"Miss Bertram is certainly the handsomest, and I have found her the most agreeable, but I shall always like Julia best, because you order me."

"I shall not talk to you, Henry, but I know you will like her best at last."

"Do not I tell you that I like her best at first?"

"And besides, Miss Bertram is engaged. Remember that, my dear brother."

"Yes, and I like her the better for it. An engaged woman is always more agreeable. She feels that she may exert her powers of pleasing without suspicion. All is safe with her: no harm can be done."

"Mr. Rushworth is a very good sort of man, and it is a great match."

"But Miss Bertram does not care three straws for him; that is your opinion. I do not subscribe to it. I am sure Miss Bertram is very much attached to Mr. Rushworth. I could see it in her eyes, when he was mentioned. I think too well of Miss Bertram to suppose she would ever give her hand without her heart."

"Mary, how shall we manage him?"

"Talking does no good. He will be taken in at last."

"But I would not have him taken in; I would not have him duped."

"Oh dear! let him stand his chance and be taken in. Everybody is taken in at some time or other."

"Not always in marriage, dear Mary."

"In marriage especially. With all due respect, my dear Mrs. Grant, there is not one in a hundred who is not taken in when they marry. It is, of all transactions, the one in which people expect most from others, and are least honest themselves."

"Ah! You have been in a bad school for matrimony, in Hill Street."

"My poor aunt had certainly little cause to love the state; but I know many who have married in the expectation of some good quality in the person, who have found themselves entirely deceived, and been obliged to put up with exactly the reverse. What is this but a take in?"

"My dear child, I cannot quite believe you. You see but half. You see the evil, but you do not see the consolation. There will be little disappointments everywhere, and we are all apt to expect too much; but those evil-minded observers, dearest Mary, who make much of a little, are more deceived than the parties themselves."

"Well done, sister! When I am a wife, I mean to be just as staunch myself."

"You are as bad as your brother, Mary; but stay with us, and Mansfield shall cure you both, without any taking in."

The Crawfords were very willing to stay. Mary was satisfied with the Parsonage as a home, and Henry equally ready to lengthen his visit. He had come, intending to spend only a few days; but Mansfield promised well. It delighted Mrs. Grant to keep them both, and Dr. Grant was well contented to have the society of a pretty young woman like Miss Crawford; while Mr. Crawford's being his guest was an excuse for drinking claret every day.

Miss Crawford acknowledged that the Mr. Bertrams were very fine young men, and their manners, particularly those of the eldest, were very good. He had been much in London, and had more liveliness and gallantry than Edmund, and must, therefore, be preferred; and, indeed, his being the eldest was another strong claim. She had felt a presentiment that she should like the eldest best. She knew it was her way.

Tom Bertram was the sort of young man to be generally liked, for he had easy manners, excellent spirits, a large acquaintance, and a great deal to say; and the reversion of Mansfield Park, and a baronetcy, did no harm to all this. Miss Crawford soon felt that he and his situation might do. She looked about her, and found almost everything in his favour: a real park, five miles round, a spacious modern-built house, well placed and well-screened, and wanting only to be completely new furnished—pleasant sisters, a quiet mother, and an agreeable man himself—with the advantages of being prevented from gambling by a promise to his father, and of being Sir Thomas hereafter. It might do very well; she believed she should accept him; and she began accordingly to interest herself about the horse which he was going to run at the races.

These races were to call him away soon; and as the family did not expect him back for many weeks, it would bring his passion to an early proof. Much was said on his side to induce her to attend the races, and eager schemes were made for a large party, but it was no more than talk.

And Fanny, what was she doing all this while? and what was her opinion of the newcomers? Few young ladies of eighteen could be less called on to speak their opinion than Fanny. In a quiet way, she paid her tribute to Miss Crawford's beauty; but she continued to think Mr. Crawford very plain, in spite of her two cousins having proved the contrary.

"Pray, is Miss Price out, or not?" said Miss Crawford, as she was walking with the Mr. Bertrams. "I am puzzled. She dined at the Parsonage, with the rest of you, which seemed like being out; and yet she says so little, that I can hardly suppose she is."

Edmund replied, "I will not undertake to answer. My cousin has the age and sense of a woman, but the outs and not outs are beyond me."

"And yet, in general, nothing can be more easily ascertained. Till now, I could not have supposed it possible to be mistaken as to a girl's being out or not. A girl not out has always the same sort of dress: looks very demure, and never says a word. You may smile, but it is so, I assure you; and it is very proper. Girls should be quiet and

modest. But the alteration of manners on being introduced into company is frequently too sudden. They sometimes pass in such very little time from reserve to confidence! One does not like to see a girl of eighteen so immediately up to everything when she was hardly able to speak the year before. Mr. Bertram, I dare say you have met with such changes."

"I have, but this is hardly fair. You are quizzing me and Miss Anderson."

"No, indeed. I do not know who you mean. But I will quiz you gladly, if you will tell me what about."

"Ah! You must have had Miss Anderson in your eye, in describing an altered young lady. You paint too accurately for mistake. Edmund, you have heard me mention Charles Anderson. When he first introduced me to his family, his sister was not out, and I could not get her to speak to me. I sat an hour one morning waiting for Anderson, with the mother in and out every moment, and I could hardly get a word from the young lady—she screwed up her mouth, and turned from me with such an air! I did not see her again for a twelvemonth. She was then out. She came up to me, claimed me as an acquaintance, and talked and laughed till I did not know which way to look. I felt that I must be the jest of the room, and Miss Crawford, it is plain, has heard the story."

"A very pretty story. It is too common a fault. Mothers certainly have not got quite the right way of managing their daughters. I do not know where the error lies. I do not pretend to set people right, but I do see that they are often wrong."

"Those who show the world what female manners should be," said Mr. Bertram gallantly, "are doing much to set them right."

"The error is plain enough," said the less courteous Edmund; "such girls are ill brought up. They are given wrong notions from the beginning. There is no more real modesty in their behaviour before they appear in public than afterwards."

"I do not know," replied Miss Crawford hesitatingly. "I cannot agree. It is much worse to have girls not out give themselves the same airs as if they were. That is quite disgusting!"

"Yes, very inconvenient indeed," said Mr. Bertram. "It leads one astray. The demure air tells one what is expected; but I got into a dreadful scrape last year. I went down to Ramsgate with a friend last September. My friend Sneyd—you have heard me speak of Sneyd, Edmund—his father, mother, and sisters were there, all new to me. We went to meet them, and found them on the pier: I made my bow, and attached myself to one of Mrs Sneyd's daughters, walked by her side, and made myself agreeable; the young lady perfectly easy in her manners, and as ready to talk as to listen. I had not a suspicion that I was doing anything wrong. They looked just the same: but I afterwards found that I had been giving all my attention to the youngest, who was not out, and had excessively offended the eldest. Miss Sneyd has never forgiven me."

"Poor Miss Sneyd. I feel for her; but it was the mother's fault. But now I must be satisfied about Miss Price. Does she go to balls? Does she dine out everywhere?"

"No," replied Edmund; "I do not think Fanny has ever been to a ball. She stays at home with my mother."

"Oh! then the point is clear. Miss Price is not out."

CHAPTER 6

Mr. Bertram set off, and Miss Crawford was prepared to miss him decidedly in the meetings between the families; and on their dining together at the Park soon after his going, she fully expected to feel a melancholy difference. It would be a flat business, she was sure. Edmund would have nothing to say. The soup would be sent round in a spiritless manner, wine drank without any agreeable trifling, and the venison cut up without one pleasant anecdote about "my friend such a one."

She must try to find amusement in observing Mr. Rushworth, who was now at Mansfield. He had been visiting a friend in the neighbouring county, and that friend having recently had his grounds laid out, Mr. Rushworth returned with his head full of the subject. Eager to improve his own place in the same way, he could talk of nothing else. The subject had been already handled in the drawing-room; it was revived in the dining-parlour. Miss Bertram's attention was his chief aim; and though she showed more superiority than solicitude, the mention of Sotherton Court gave her a feeling of complacency, which made her gracious.

"I wish you could see Compton," said he; "I never saw a place so altered in my life. The approach now, is one of the finest in the country: you see the house in the most surprising manner. I declare, when I got back to Sotherton yesterday, it looked like a dismal old prison."

"Oh, for shame!" cried Mrs. Norris. "Sotherton Court is the noblest old place in the world."

"It wants improvement, ma'am. It is so forlorn that I do not know what can be done with it. I need some good friend to help me."

"Your best friend upon such an occasion," said Miss Bertram calmly, "would be Mr. Repton."

"That is what I was thinking. As he has done so well by Smith, I think I had better have him. His terms are five guineas a day."

"Well, and if they were ten," cried Mrs. Norris, "I am sure you need not regard it. Sotherton Court deserves everything that taste and money can do. If I had anything the fiftieth part of the size of Sotherton, I should be always improving. It would be ridiculous for me to attempt anything where I am now, with my little half acre. But if I had more, I should take a prodigious delight in improving and planting. We did a vast deal in that way at the Parsonage: and would have done more, but for poor Mr. Norris's sad state of health. We put in the apricot against the stable wall, which is now such a noble tree, sir," addressing herself to Dr. Grant.

"The tree thrives well, madam," replied Dr. Grant. "The soil is good; and I never pass it without regretting that the fruit should be so little worth the trouble of gathering."

"Sir, it is a Moor Park, and it cost us—that is, it was a present from Sir Thomas, but I saw the bill—and I know it cost seven shillings."

"You were imposed on, ma'am," replied Dr. Grant: "The fruit from that tree is insipid."

"The truth is, ma'am," said Mrs. Grant, pretending to whisper across the table, "that Dr. Grant hardly knows what the natural taste of our apricot is: he is scarcely ever indulged with one, for it is so valuable a fruit, that what with tarts and preserves, my cook contrives to get them all."

Mrs. Norris, who had begun to redden, was appeased. Mr. Rushworth began again. "Smith's place is the admiration of all the country; and it was nothing before Repton took it in hand. I think I shall have Repton."

"Mr. Rushworth," said Lady Bertram, "if I were you, I would have a pretty shrubbery."

Mr. Rushworth was eager to assure her ladyship of this, and tried to say something complimentary; but, between admiring her good taste, and his having always intended the same, and professing his attention to the ladies' comfort, but meaning one lady especially, he grew puzzled; and Edmund was glad to put an end to his speech by a proposal of wine. Mr. Rushworth, however, had still more to say on the subject next his heart. "Smith has not much above a hundred acres. Now, at Sotherton we have seven hundred; so that I think we need not despair. There have been two or three fine old trees cut down, and it opens the prospect amazingly, which makes me think that Repton would certainly have the avenue at Sotherton down: the avenue from the west front to the hill, you know," turning to Miss Bertram.

"Oh! I do not recollect it. I really know very little of Sotherton."

Fanny, sitting beside Edmund, said to him in a low voice—

"Cut down an avenue! What a pity! Does it not make you think of Cowper? 'Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited.'"

He smiled. "I am afraid the avenue stands a bad chance, Fanny."

"I should like to see Sotherton before it is cut down; but I do not suppose I shall."

"Have you never been there? Unluckily, it is too far for a ride. I wish we could contrive it."

"Oh! it does not signify."

"I collect," said Miss Crawford, "that Sotherton is an old place of some grandeur. In any particular style of building?"

"The house was built in Elizabeth's time," said Edmund, "and is a large brick building; heavy, but respectable, with many good rooms. It is ill placed, in one of the lowest spots of the park. But the woods are fine, and there is a stream, which might be made a good deal of. Mr. Rushworth is quite right, I think, in meaning to give it a modern dress, and I have no doubt that it will be done extremely well."

Miss Crawford listened, and said to herself, "He is a well-bred man; he makes the best of it."

"I do not wish to influence Mr. Rushworth," he continued; "but, had I a place to fashion, I should not put myself into the hands of an improver. I would rather have an inferior degree of beauty, of my own choice."

"That would not suit me. I have no eye for such matters; and had I a place of my own, I should be most thankful to any Mr. Repton who would undertake it; and I should never look at it till it was complete."

"It would be delightful to me to see its progress," said Fanny.

"I consider improvements as the greatest of nuisances. Three years ago the Admiral, my honoured uncle, bought a cottage at Twickenham for us to spend our summers in; and my aunt and I went down to it quite in raptures; but being excessively pretty, it had to be improved, and for three months we were all dirt and confusion. I would have everything complete, shrubberies and flower-gardens, and rustic seats: but it must be done without my care. Henry is different; he loves to be doing."

Edmund was sorry to hear Miss Crawford, whom he was disposed to admire, speak so freely of her uncle. It did not suit his sense of propriety, and he was silenced, till induced by further smiles to put the matter by.

"Mr. Bertram," said she, "I have tidings of my harp at last. I am assured that it is safe at Northampton; and has probably been there these ten days, in spite of the solemn assurances we received to the contrary." Edmund expressed his pleasure and surprise. "The truth is, that our inquiries were too direct; but this morning we heard of it in the right way. It was seen by some farmer, and he told the miller, and the miller told the butcher, and the butcher's son-in-law left word at the shop."

"I am very glad that you have heard of it, by whatever means."

"I am to have it to-morrow; but I could hire no wagon in the village to convey it."

"You found it difficult, in the middle of hay harvest, to hire a horse and cart?"

"I was astonished to find what a piece of work was made of it! I thought it would be only ask and have. Guess my surprise, when I found that I had been asking the most unreasonable thing in the world; had offended all the farmers in the parish!"

"You could not be expected to have thought of it; but you must see the importance of getting in the grass. In harvest, it must be quite out of our farmers' power to spare a horse."

"I shall understand all your ways in time; but, coming down with the London maxim, that everything is to be got with money, I was a little embarrassed by the sturdy independence of your country customs. However, I am to have my harp to-morrow. Henry, who is good-nature itself, has offered to fetch it in his barouche."

Edmund spoke of the harp as his favourite instrument, and hoped to be allowed to hear her. Fanny had never heard the harp at all, and wished for it very much.

"I shall be most happy to play to you both," said Miss Crawford; "for as long as you like to listen: probably longer. Mr. Bertram, if you write to your brother, tell him that my harp is come: and that I shall prepare my most plaintive airs for his return, as I know his horse will lose."

"If I write, I will say whatever you wish; but I do not foresee any need to write."

"What strange creatures brothers are! You would not write to each other but upon the most urgent necessity, and in the fewest possible words. You have but one style among you. I know it perfectly. Henry, who is in every other respect exactly what a brother should be, who confides in me, and will talk to me by the hour together, has never yet used a second page in a letter; and often it is nothing more than—'Dear Mary, I am just arrived. Bath seems full, and everything as usual. Yours sincerely.' That is a complete brother's letter."

"When they are far from their family," said Fanny, colouring, "they can write long letters."

"Miss Price has a brother at sea," said Edmund, "whose excellence as a correspondent makes her think you too severe."

"At sea? In the king's service?"

Fanny would rather have had Edmund tell the story, but his determined silence obliged her to relate her brother's situation: her voice was animated, but she could not mention the number of years that he had been absent without tears in her eyes. Miss Crawford civilly wished him an early promotion.

"Do you know anything of my cousin's captain?" said Edmund; "Captain Marshall? You have a large acquaintance in the navy, I conclude?"

"Among admirals, large enough; but," with an air of grandeur, "we know very little of the inferior ranks. Post-captains may be very good sort of men, but they do not belong to us. Of various admirals I could tell you a great deal: of their flags, and their pay, and their bickerings and jealousies. Certainly, my home at my uncle's brought me acquainted with a circle of admirals. Of Rears and Vices I saw enough. Now do not be suspecting me of a pun, I entreat."

Edmund again felt grave, and only replied, "It is a noble profession."

"Yes, it is well enough; but it is not a favourite profession of mine."

Edmund reverted to the harp, and was again very happy in the prospect of hearing her play.

The subject of improving grounds, meanwhile, was still under consideration among the others; and Mrs. Grant addressed her brother.

"My dear Henry, have you nothing to say? You have been an improver yourself, and Everingham's natural beauties are great. Such a happy fall of ground, and such timber! What would I not give to see it again?"

"I fear you would be disappointed;" was his answer; "you would be surprised at its insignificance; and, as for improvement, there was too little for me to do: I should like to have been busy much longer."

"You are fond of that sort of thing?" said Julia.

"Excessively; but I had not been of age three months before Everingham was completed. My plan was laid at Westminster, a little altered at Cambridge, and at one-and-twenty executed. I envy Mr. Rushworth for having so much happiness yet before him. I have been a devourer of my own."

"Those who see quickly, will resolve quickly, and act quickly," said Julia. "You should assist Mr Rushworth with your opinion."

Mrs. Grant agreed warmly; and as Miss Bertram gave the idea her full support, Mr. Rushworth requested the favour of Mr. Crawford's assistance; and Mr. Crawford was quite at his service. Mr. Rushworth then began to propose Mr. Crawford's coming over to Sotherton, when Mrs. Norris interposed.

"Why should not more of us go? Why should not we make a little party? Here are many that would be interested in your improvements, my dear Mr. Rushworth; and, for my own part, I have long wished to wait upon your good mother again; I could sit with Mrs. Rushworth, while the rest of you walked about and settled things, and then we could dine at Sotherton, and have a pleasant drive home by moonlight. I dare say Mr. Crawford would take my two nieces and me in his barouche, and Edmund can go on horseback, you know, sister, and Fanny will stay at home with you."

Lady Bertram made no objection; and every one gave their concurrence, excepting Edmund, who said nothing.

CHAPTER 7

"Well, Fanny, how do you like Miss Crawford?" said Edmund the next day.

"Very well. I like to hear her talk; and she is so extremely pretty, that I have great pleasure in looking at her."

"She has a wonderful play of feature! But was there nothing in her conversation that struck you, Fanny, as not quite right?"

"Oh yes! she ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did. An uncle with whom she has been living so many years, and who, whatever his faults, is so fond of her brother. I could not have believed it!"

"I thought you would be struck. It was very wrong."

"And ungrateful, I think."

"Ungrateful is a strong word. I do not know that her uncle has any claim to her gratitude; it is respect for her aunt's memory which misleads her. It must be difficult to do justice to her affection for Mrs. Crawford, without accusing the Admiral. I do not pretend to know which was most to blame in their disagreements, though the Admiral's present conduct might incline one to the side of his wife; but it is natural that Miss Crawford should acquit her aunt. However, there is certainly impropriety in making her opinions public. It makes one aware of the disadvantages she has been under. But I think her present home must do her good. She speaks of her brother with very pleasing affection."

"Yes, except as to his writing such short letters. She made me almost laugh; but what right had she to suppose that *you* would not write long letters?"

"The right of a lively mind, Fanny, seizing whatever may amuse it; perfectly allowable, when untinged by ill-humour or roughness; and there is not a shadow of either in Miss Crawford's manner. She is perfectly feminine, except in the instances we have been speaking of. There she cannot be justified. I am glad you saw it all as I did."

Having formed her mind, he had a good chance of her thinking like him; though on this subject, there began now to be some danger of dissimilarity, for he was in a line of admiration of Miss Crawford, where Fanny could not follow.

Miss Crawford's attractions did not lessen. The harp arrived, and added to her beauty, wit, and good-humour; for she played with expression and taste, and there was something clever to be said at the close of every air. Edmund was daily at the Parsonage, to be indulged with his favourite instrument: each morning secured an invitation for the next.

A young woman, pretty, lively, with a harp as elegant as herself, placed near a window that opened on a little lawn, surrounded by the rich foliage of summer, was enough to catch any man's heart. Edmund was beginning to be a good deal in love; and to the lady's credit it may be added that, without his being an elder brother, and without any of the arts of flattery, he began to be agreeable to her. She had not foreseen this, and could hardly understand it; for he was not pleasant by any common rule: he talked no nonsense; he paid no compliments; his opinions were unbending, his attentions tranquil. There was a charm, perhaps, in his sincerity, his steadiness, his integrity. She did not think very much about it, however: he pleased her for the present; it was enough.

Fanny could not wonder that Edmund was at the Parsonage every morning; she too would gladly have gone to hear the harp; neither could she wonder that after their evening stroll he should think it right to attend Mrs. Grant and her sister to their home,

while Mr. Crawford was devoted to the ladies of the Park; but she thought it a very bad exchange. She was surprised that he could spend so many hours with Miss Crawford, and not see more of the sort of fault which he had already observed; but so it was.

The first actual pain which Miss Crawford caused her was the consequence of a wish to learn to ride. Edward encouraged it, and offered his own quiet mare for her first attempts, as the best fitted for a beginner. He meant no injury to Fanny in this offer: she was not to lose a day's exercise. The mare was only to be taken down to the Parsonage half an hour before her ride were to begin; and Fanny, so far from feeling slighted, was almost over-powered with gratitude that he should be asking her leave.

Miss Crawford made her first attempt with great credit to herself, and no inconvenience to Fanny. Edmund returned with the mare in excellent time, before either Fanny or the steady old coachman who attended her were ready to set forward.

The second day's trial was not so guiltless. Miss Crawford's enjoyment was such that she did not know how to leave off. Active and fearless, and though small, strongly made, she seemed formed for a horsewoman; and to the pleasure of the exercise, something was probably added in Edmund's attendance, and the conviction of surpassing her sex by her early progress, to make her unwilling to dismount. Fanny was waiting, and Mrs. Norris was beginning to scold her for not being gone, and still no horse was announced. To avoid her aunt, and look for Edward, she went out.

The houses, though scarcely half a mile apart, were not within sight of each other; but, by walking fifty yards from the hall door, she could command a view of the Parsonage and its surroundings; and she immediately saw the group—Edmund and Miss Crawford both on horse-back, riding side by side, Dr. and Mrs. Grant, and Mr. Crawford, with the grooms, looking on. A happy party it appeared: for the sound of merriment ascended to her. She wondered that Edmund should forget her, and felt a pang. Miss Crawford and her companion made the circuit of the field; then, at her apparent suggestion, they rose into a canter; and to Fanny's timid nature it was astonishing to see how well she sat.

After a few minutes they stopped. Edmund was close to her; he was speaking to her, evidently directing her management of the bridle; he had hold of her hand; she saw it, or the imagination supplied what the eye could not reach. She must not wonder at all this; what could be more natural than that Edmund should make himself useful? It would have been becoming in Miss Crawford's brother to assist her; but Mr. Crawford was not as kind as Edmund.

Her feelings were eased by seeing the party in the meadow disperse. Miss Crawford, still on horseback, with Edmund on foot, passed into the park, and came towards the spot where she stood. Fanny began then to be afraid of appearing rude and impatient; and walked to meet them.

"My dear Miss Price," said Miss Crawford, "I apologise for keeping you waiting—I knew it was late, and that I was behaving extremely ill; if you please, you must forgive me."

Fanny's answer was extremely civil, and Edmund added his conviction that she could be in no hurry. "For there is time enough for my cousin to ride twice as far as she ever goes," said he, "and you have prevented her from setting off when it was too hot for comfort: clouds are now coming up, and she will not suffer from the heat. I wish you may not be fatigued by so much exercise."

"Nothing ever fatigues me but doing what I do not like," said she, as she sprang down with his help; "Miss Price, I give way to you with a bad grace; but I hope you will have a pleasant ride on this beautiful animal."

The old coachman now joining them, Fanny was lifted on her horse, and they set off; her discomfort not lightened by seeing that the others were walking together to the village; nor did her attendant do her much good by his comments on Miss Crawford's great cleverness as a horse-woman.

"It is a pleasure to see a lady with such a good heart for riding!" said he. "She did not have a thought of fear. Very different from you, miss, when you first began. Lord bless you! how you did tremble!"

In the drawing-room Miss Crawford was also praised by the Miss Bertrams; her delight in riding, and her early excellence, were like their own.

"I was sure she would ride well," said Julia. "Her figure is as neat as her brother's."

"Yes," added Maria, "and her spirits are as good. I think that good horsemanship has a great deal to do with the mind."

When they parted at night Edmund asked Fanny whether she meant to ride the next day.

"No, I do not know—not if you want the mare."

"I do not want her for myself," said he; "but whenever you are next inclined to stay at home, I think Miss Crawford would be glad to have her for a morning. She has a desire to get as far as Mansfield Common, and I have no doubt of her being equal to it. But any morning will do. She would be extremely sorry to interfere with you. It would be very wrong if she did. She rides only for pleasure; you for health."

"I shall not ride to-morrow, certainly," said Fanny; "I have been out often lately, and would rather stay at home. I am strong enough now to walk very well."

Edmund looked pleased, which must be Fanny's comfort, and the ride to Mansfield Common took place the next morning: the party included all the young people but herself, and was much enjoyed. A successful scheme of this sort generally brings on another; and they all wished to go somewhere else the day after. Four fine mornings successively were spent in this manner, in showing the Crawfords the country's finest spots. It was all gaiety and good-humour—till the fourth day, when the happiness of one of the party was exceedingly clouded.

Miss Bertram was the one. Edmund and Julia were invited to dine at the Parsonage, and she was excluded. It was done by Mrs. Grant, with perfect good-humour, on account of Mr. Rushworth, who was expected at the Park that day; but it was felt as a grievous injury, and Maria could barely conceal her anger till she reached home. As Mr. Rushworth did not come, the injury was increased; she could only be sullen, and throw as great a gloom as possible over dinner.

Between ten and eleven Edmund and Julia walked into the drawing-room, fresh with the evening air, glowing and cheerful, the very reverse of what they found in the three ladies sitting there, for Maria would scarcely raise her eyes from her book, and Lady Bertram was half-asleep; and even Mrs. Norris said little. Edmund, looking around, said, "Where is Fanny? Is she gone to bed?"

"Not that I know of," replied Mrs. Norris; "she was here a moment ago."

Her own gentle voice speaking from the other end of the room told them that she was on the sofa. Mrs. Norris began scolding.

"That is a very foolish trick, Fanny, to be idling upon a sofa. Why cannot you come and sit here, and employ yourself? If you have no work, I can supply you from the poor basket. There is the new calico, that was bought last week, not touched yet. I am sure I almost broke my back cutting it out. You should learn to think of other people. It is a shocking trick for a young person to be always lolling upon a sofa."

Before half of this was said, Fanny had returned to the table and taken up her work; and Julia, who was in high good-humour, did her the justice of exclaiming, "I must say, ma'am, that Fanny is as little upon the sofa as anybody in the house."

"Fanny," said Edmund, looking at her attentively, "I am sure you have the headache."

She could not deny it, but said it was not very bad.

"I can hardly believe you," he replied; "I know your looks too well. How long have you had it?"

"Since a little before dinner. It is nothing but the heat."

"Did you get out in the heat?"

"To be sure she did," said Mrs. Norris: "would you have her stay within on such a fine day? Even your mother was out to-day."

"Yes, indeed, Edmund," added her ladyship. "I sat in the flower-garden, while Fanny cut the roses; and very pleasant it was, but very hot."

"Fanny has been cutting roses, has she?"

"Yes, and I am afraid they will be the last this year. Poor thing! She found it hot enough; but they were so full-blown that one could not wait."

"There was no help for it," rejoined Mrs. Norris, in a rather softened voice; "There is nothing so likely to give one a headache as standing in a hot sun; but I dare say it will be well to-morrow. Suppose you let her have your aromatic vinegar."

"She has had it since she came back from your house the second time," said Lady Bertram.

"What!" cried Edmund; "has she been walking twice across the hot park, ma'am? No wonder her head aches."

"I was afraid it would be too much for her," said Lady Bertram; "but your aunt wished to have the roses."

"Were there roses enough to oblige her to go twice?"

"No; but they were to be put into the spare room to dry; and, unluckily, Fanny forgot to lock the room and bring away the key, so she was obliged to go again."

Edmund got up and walked about, saying, "And could nobody be employed on such an errand but Fanny? Upon my word, ma'am, it has been very ill-managed."

"I do not know how it was to have been done better," cried Mrs. Norris, "unless I had gone myself; but I cannot be in two places at once; and I was talking to Mr. Green at that very time about your mother's dairymaid. Really I cannot do everything at once. And as for Fanny's just stepping down to my house—it is not much above a quarter of a mile. How often do I pace it three times a day, and in all weathers too?"

"I wish Fanny had half your strength, ma'am."

"If Fanny would be more regular in her exercise, she would not be knocked up so soon. She has not been out on horseback this long while, and I am persuaded that, when she does not ride, she ought to walk. But I thought it would do her good after stooping among the roses; between ourselves, Edmund, it was cutting the roses that did the mischief."

"I am afraid it was, indeed," said the candid Lady Bertram; "The heat was enough to kill anybody. Sitting and calling to Pug was almost too much for me."

Edmund said no more; but going quietly to the supper-tray, brought a glass of Madeira to Fanny, and obliged her to drink. She wished to decline it; but her tears made it easier to swallow than to speak.

Vexed as Edmund was with his mother and aunt, he was still more angry with himself. Fanny had been left without any exercise, and without any excuse for avoiding whatever her unreasonable aunts might require. He was ashamed to think

that for four days she had not been able to ride, and resolved that it should never happen again.

Fanny went to bed with her heart full. She had been struggling against discontent and envy for some days. As she leant on the sofa, the pain of her mind had been much beyond that in her head; and the sudden change which Edmund's kindness had then occasioned, made her hardly know how to support herself.

CHAPTER 8

Fanny's rides recommenced the very next day; and as it was cooler, Edmund trusted that her loss of health would be soon made good. While she was gone Mr. Rushworth arrived, escorting his mother, who came to urge them to visit Sotherton, as planned. Mrs. Norris and her nieces were well pleased, and an early day was agreed, provided Mr. Crawford should be free: and on a hint from Miss Bertram, Mr. Rushworth decided to walk down to the Parsonage directly, and call on Mr. Crawford, and inquire whether Wednesday would suit him.

Before his return Mrs. Grant and Miss Crawford came in. Having taken a different route to the house, they had not met him; but they hoped that he would find Mr. Crawford at home. The Sotherton scheme was mentioned of course. Mrs. Norris was in high spirits about it; and Mrs. Rushworth, a well-meaning, civil, prosing, pompous woman, was still pressing Lady Bertram to join the group. Lady Bertram constantly declined; but her placid manner of refusal made Mrs. Rushworth still think she wished to come, till Mrs. Norris convinced her of the truth.

"The fatigue would be too much for my sister, my dear Mrs. Rushworth. Ten miles there, and ten back, you know. You must accept our two dear girls and myself without her. She will have a companion in Fanny Price; and as for Edmund, I will answer for his being most happy to join the party. He can go on horseback, you know."

Mrs. Rushworth was sorry. "She should have been extremely happy to have seen her Ladyship, and Miss Price, who had never been at Sotherton yet."

"You are all kindness, my dear madam," cried Mrs. Norris; "but Fanny will have opportunities in plenty of seeing Sotherton. Her going now is out of the question. Lady Bertram could not possibly spare her."

"Oh no! I cannot do without Fanny."

Mrs. Rushworth proceeded next to invite Miss Crawford; and Mary was swift to accept. Mr. Rushworth came back from the Parsonage successful; and Edmund made his appearance just in time to learn what had been settled for Wednesday, to attend Mrs. Rushworth to her carriage, and walk half-way down the park with the two other ladies.

On his return to the breakfast-room, he found Mrs. Norris trying to decide whether Miss Crawford's being of the party were desirable, or whether her brother's barouche would not be full without her. The Miss Bertrams laughed, assuring her that the barouche would hold four perfectly well, independent of the box, on which one might go with him.

"But why should only Crawford's carriage be employed?" said Edmund. "Why is no use to be made of my mother's chaise?"

"What!" cried Julia: "go boxed up in a postchaise in this weather, when we may have seats in a barouche!"

"Besides," said Maria, "I know that Mr. Crawford depends upon taking us."

"And, my dear Edmund," added Mrs. Norris, "to take two carriages when one will do, would be trouble for nothing; and coachman always complains of the narrow lanes to Sotherton scratching his carriage, and one should not like to have dear Sir Thomas, when he comes home, find all the varnish scratched off."

"That would not be a very handsome reason for using Mr. Crawford's," said Maria; "but the truth is, that Wilcox is a stupid old fellow, and does not know how to

drive. I will answer for it that we shall find no inconvenience from narrow roads on Wednesday."

"There will be nothing unpleasant, I suppose," said Edmund, "in going on the barouche box."

"Unpleasant!" cried Maria: "It would be generally thought the favourite seat, for one's view of the country. Probably Miss Crawford will choose the barouche-box herself."

"There can be no objection, then, to Fanny's going with you; there can be no doubt of your having room."

"Fanny!" repeated Mrs. Norris; "my dear Edmund, there is no idea of her going with us. She stays with her aunt. I told Mrs. Rushworth so. She is not expected."

"If you could do without her, madam," said he, addressing his mother, "you would not wish to keep her at home?"

"To be sure not, but I cannot do without her."

"You can, if I stay at home with you."

There was a general cry out at this. "Yes," he continued, "there is no necessity for my going. Fanny has a great desire to see Sotherton. She has not often a gratification of the kind, and I am sure, ma'am, you would be glad to give her the pleasure now?"

"Oh yes! very glad, if your aunt sees no objection."

Mrs. Norris was very ready with her objection—their having positively assured Mrs. Rushworth that Fanny could not go, and the very strange appearance there would be in taking her, which seemed to her a difficulty quite impossible to be got over. It would show such disrespect for Mrs. Rushworth, that she really did not feel equal to it. Her opposition to Edmund arose more from partiality for her own scheme, because it was her own, than from anything else. When Edmund, therefore, told her that he had mentioned Miss Price to Mrs. Rushworth, and had received an invitation for her, Mrs. Norris was too much vexed to submit with grace, and would only say, "Very well, settle it your own way."

"It seems very odd," said Maria, "that you should be staying at home instead of Fanny."

"I am sure she ought to be very much obliged to you," added Julia, conscious that she ought to offer to stay at home herself.

"Fanny will feel quite as grateful as the occasion requires," was Edmund's only reply.

Fanny's gratitude, when she heard the plan, was, in fact, much greater than her pleasure. She felt Edmund's kindness more than he, unsuspecting of her fond attachment, could be aware of; but that he should forego any enjoyment gave her pain, and her own satisfaction in seeing Sotherton would be nothing without him.

The next meeting of the Mansfield families produced another alteration in the plan. Mrs. Grant offered herself as companion for the day to Lady Bertram. Lady Bertram was very well pleased, and even Edmund was thankful for an arrangement which restored him to the party; while Mrs. Norris thought it an excellent plan, and had been on the point of proposing it herself.

Wednesday was fine, and soon after breakfast the barouche arrived, Mr. Crawford driving his sisters. When Mrs. Grant alighted, everybody was ready to take their places. The place of all places, the envied seat, was vacant. To whose happy lot was it to fall? While each of the Miss Bertrams were meditating how to secure it, the matter was settled by Mrs. Grant's saying, "One of you should sit with Henry; and as you were saying lately that you wished you could drive, Julia, this will be a good opportunity for you to take a lesson."

Happy Julia! Unhappy Maria! The former was on the barouche-box in a moment, the latter took her seat within, in gloom and mortification; and the carriage drove off.

Their road was through a pleasant country; and Fanny, whose rides had never been extensive, was very happy in observing all that was new and pretty. She was not often invited to join in the conversation, nor did she desire it. Her own thoughts were habitually her best companions; and, in observing the appearance of the country, the state of the harvest, the cottages, the cattle and the children, she found entertainment that could only have been heightened by having Edmund to discuss it with.

That was the only point of resemblance between her and the lady who sat by her: in everything but a value for Edmund, Miss Crawford was very unlike her. She had none of Fanny's delicacy of feeling; she saw Nature with little observation; her attention was all for men and women, her talents for the light and lively. In looking back after Edmund, however, when there was any stretch of road behind them, they were united, and a "there he is" broke at the same moment from them both.

For the first seven miles Miss Bertram had very little comfort: her prospect always ended in Mr. Crawford and her sister sitting side by side, full of conversation and merriment; a perpetual source of irritation, which her sense of propriety could only just smooth over. Julia looked back, smiling, and spoke in the highest spirits: "her view of the country was charming, she wished they could all see it," etc.; but her only offer of exchange was addressed to Miss Crawford: "I wish you had my seat, but I dare say you will not take it, let me press you ever so much." Miss Crawford could hardly answer before they were moving again.

When they came nearer to Sotherton, it was better for Miss Bertram, who might be said to have two strings to her bow. She had Rushworth feelings, and Crawford feelings, and in the vicinity of Sotherton the former had considerable effect. She could not tell Miss Crawford that "those woods belonged to Sotherton," she could not carelessly observe that "she believed that it was now all Mr. Rushworth's property on each side of the road," without elation of heart; and it was a pleasure to increase with their approach to the mansion.

"Now we shall have no more rough road, Miss Crawford; the rest of the way is as it ought to be. Mr. Rushworth has improved it since he succeeded to the estate. Here begins the village. Those cottages are really a disgrace. The church spire is reckoned remarkably handsome. There is the parsonage: a tidy-looking house, and I understand the clergyman and his wife are very decent people. To the right is the steward's house; he is a very respectable man. Now we are coming to the lodge-gates; but we have nearly a mile through the park still. There is some fine timber, but the situation of the house is dreadful. We go down hill to it for half a mile; it would not be an ill-looking place if it had a better approach."

Miss Crawford was not slow to admire; she guessed Miss Bertram's feelings, and made it a point of honour to promote her enjoyment to the utmost. Mrs. Norris was all delight; and even Fanny had something to say in admiration. Her eye was eagerly taking in everything; and she asked, "Where is the avenue? It must be at the back of the house."

"Yes, it is behind the house, and ascends for half a mile. It is oak entirely."

Miss Bertram could now speak with decided information of what she had known nothing about when Mr. Rushworth had asked her opinion; and her spirits were in as happy a flutter as pride could furnish, when they drove up to the spacious stone steps before the principal entrance.

CHAPTER 9

Mr. Rushworth was at the door to welcome the party with due attention. In the drawing-room they were met with equal cordiality by the mother, and Miss Bertram had all the distinction that she could wish. The doors were thrown open to admit them into the dining-parlour, where a luncheon was prepared with abundance and elegance. Much was said, and ate, and all went well.

Mrs Rushworth then proposed showing the party round the house. They rose accordingly, and under Mrs. Rushworth's guidance were shown through a number of rooms, all lofty, large, and amply furnished in the taste of fifty years back, with shining floors, solid mahogany, rich damask, marble, gilding, and carving, each handsome in its way. There were many pictures, some good, but most were family portraits, no longer anything to anybody but Mrs. Rushworth.

She addressed herself chiefly to Miss Crawford and Fanny. Miss Crawford, who had seen scores of great houses, and cared for none of them, had only the appearance of civilly listening, while Fanny, to whom everything was new, attended earnestly to all that Mrs. Rushworth could relate of the family in former times, delighted to connect anything with the history that she knew, or to warm her imagination with scenes of the past.

There was not much prospect from any of the rooms; and Henry Crawford looked grave, shaking his head at the windows. Every room on the west front looked across a lawn to the beginning of the avenue beyond tall iron palisades.

"Now," said Mrs. Rushworth, "we are coming to the chapel."

They entered. Fanny expected something grander than a spacious, oblong room, fitted up for the purpose of devotion: with nothing more striking or solemn than the profusion of mahogany, and crimson velvet cushions.

"I am disappointed," said she quietly to Edmund. "This is not my idea of a chapel. There is nothing melancholy, nothing grand. Here are no aisles, no arches, no inscriptions. No banners to be 'blown by the night wind of heaven.'"

"You forget, Fanny, how lately all this has been built, and only for the private use of the family. You must look in the parish church for the banners."

Mrs. Rushworth began, "This chapel was fitted up as you see it, in James the Second's time. Before then, the pews were only wainscot; and the cushions only purple cloth. It is a handsome chapel, and was formerly in constant use. Prayers were read in it by the domestic chaplain, within the memory of many; but the late Mr. Rushworth left it off."

"Every generation has its improvements," said Miss Crawford, with a smile, to Edmund.

"It is a pity," cried Fanny, "that the custom should have been discontinued. It is so much in character with a great house! A whole family assembling regularly for the purpose of prayer is fine!"

"Very fine indeed," said Miss Crawford, laughing. "It must do the heads of the family good to force all the poor housemaids to say their prayers here twice a day, while they are inventing excuses themselves for staying away."

"That is hardly Fanny's idea of a family assembling," said Edmund.

"It is safer to leave people to their own devices on such subjects. Everybody likes to choose their own time and manner of devotion. The obligation of attendance is a formidable thing. Cannot you imagine with what unwilling feelings the former belles

of the house came to this chapel? Starched up into seeming piety, but with heads full of something very different—especially if the poor chaplain were not worth looking at—and, in those days, I fancy parsons were inferior even to what they are now."

For a few moments she was unanswered. Fanny coloured and looked at Edmund, but felt too angry for speech; and he needed a little recollection before he could say, "Your lively mind can hardly be serious even on serious subjects. You have given us an amusing sketch, and human nature cannot say it was not so. We must all feel at times the difficulty of fixing our thoughts as we could wish; but do you think the minds which are indulged in wanderings in a chapel, would be more collected in a closet?"

"Yes, for two reasons. There would be less to distract the attention, and it would not be taxed so long."

"The mind would always find objects to distract it; and the influence of the place may often rouse better feelings than are begun with. The length of the service I admit to be sometimes too hard upon the mind. I have not yet left Oxford long enough to forget what chapel prayers are."

Meanwhile, Julia called Mr. Crawford's attention to her sister, saying, "Do look at Mr. Rushworth and Maria, standing side by side, exactly as if the wedding ceremony were going to be performed."

Mr. Crawford smiled, and stepping forward to Maria, said, in a voice which she only could hear, "I do not like to see Miss Bertram so near the altar."

Starting, the lady instinctively moved a step or two, but recovering, affected to laugh, and asked him, in a tone not much louder, "If he would give her away?"

"I am afraid I should do it very awkwardly," was his reply, with a look of meaning.

Julia, joining them, carried on the joke.

"It is really a pity that it should not take place directly, if we had a licence, for nothing in the world could be more pleasant." And she talked about it with so little caution as to catch the comprehension of Mr. Rushworth, who whispered gallantries to Maria.

"If Edmund were but in orders!" cried Julia: "My dear Edmund, if you were in orders now, you might perform the ceremony directly. How unlucky that you are not ordained."

Miss Crawford looked almost aghast under this new idea. Fanny pitied her. "How distressed she will be at what she said just now," passed across her mind.

"Ordained!" said Miss Crawford; "are you to be a clergyman?"

"Yes; I shall take orders after my father's return—probably at Christmas."

Miss Crawford, rallying her spirits, replied only, "If I had known this before, I would have spoken of the cloth with more respect," and turned the subject.

The chapel was soon afterwards left to the silence which reigned in it throughout the year. All seemed to feel that they had been there long enough.

The lower part of the house had now been shown, and Mrs. Rushworth would have proceeded towards the staircase if her son had not interposed. "We shall not have time to survey the grounds," said he. "It is past two, and we are to dine at five."

Mrs. Rushworth submitted; and Mrs. Norris was beginning to arrange by what combination of carriages and horses most could be done, when the young people, meeting with an outward door that opened temptingly on a flight of steps, as by one impulse, all walked out.

"Suppose we turn down here for the present," said Mrs. Rushworth, civilly taking the hint and following them. "Here are the greatest number of our plants, and our pheasants."

"I see walls of great promise," said Mr Crawford, looking round. He moved forward to examine the end of the house. The lawn, bounded by a high wall, contained a bowling-green, and beyond the bowling-green a long terrace walk, backed by iron palisades, with a view over them into the tree-tops of a wilderness. It was a good spot for fault-finding. Mr. Crawford was followed by Miss Bertram and Mr. Rushworth; and these three were found in busy consultation on the terrace by Edmund, Miss Crawford, and Fanny, who seemed as naturally to unite, and who, after a few words, left them and walked on.

The remaining three, Mrs. Rushworth, Mrs. Norris, and Julia, were still far behind; for Julia, whose happy star no longer prevailed, was obliged to stay with Mrs. Rushworth, and restrain her impatient feet to that lady's slow pace, while her aunt was lingering behind in gossip with the housekeeper. Poor Julia was now as different from the Julia of the barouche-box as could be imagined. Politeness made it impossible for her to escape; while the want of that self-command, that consideration of others, that principle of right, which had not formed any essential part of her education, made her miserable.

"This is insufferably hot," said Miss Crawford, when her group of three had taken a turn on the terrace, and were near the door to the wilderness. "Shall any of us object to being comfortable? Here is a nice little wood, if one can but get into it. What happiness if the door should not be locked! in these great places the gardeners are the only people who can go where they like."

The door, however, proved not to be locked, and they turned joyfully through it, leaving the glare of day behind. A flight of steps landed them in the wilderness, which was a planted wood of about two acres. Though it was chiefly of larch and laurel, laid out with too much regularity, it was shade and natural beauty compared with the terrace. They all felt refreshed as they walked. At length, Miss Crawford began, "So you are to be a clergyman, Mr. Bertram. This is a surprise to me."

"Why? You must suppose me designed for some profession."

"There is generally an uncle or a grandfather to leave a fortune to the second son."

"A very praiseworthy practice," said Edmund, "but not quite universal. Being one of the exceptions, I must do something for myself."

"But why be a clergyman? I thought that was always the lot of the youngest, where many chose before him."

"Do you think the church itself never chosen, then?"

"*Never* is a black word. But yes, in the *never* of conversation, which means not very often, I do think it. For what is to be done in the church? Men love to distinguish themselves, and in other lines distinction may be gained, but not in the church. A clergyman is nothing."

"The *nothing* of conversation has its gradations too, I hope. A clergyman cannot be high in state or fashion. But I cannot call it nothing to have the charge of all that is of the first importance to mankind, the guardianship of religion and of morals. No one can call the office nothing."

"You give greater consequence to the clergyman than I can comprehend. One does not see much of this importance in society. How can two sermons a week, even supposing them worth hearing, govern the conduct of a large congregation for the rest of the week? One scarcely sees a clergyman out of his pulpit."

"You are speaking of London, I am speaking of the nation at large."

"The metropolis, I imagine, is a pretty fair sample of the rest."

"We do not look in great cities for our best morality. It is not there that the influence of the clergy can be most felt. A fine preacher is admired; but it is not in fine preaching only that a good clergyman will be useful, where the parish and neighbourhood know his character, and can observe his conduct, which in London can rarely be the case. The clergy are lost there in the crowds of their parishioners. They are known only as preachers. It will, I believe, be everywhere found, that as the clergy are, or are not what they ought to be, so are the rest of the nation."

"Certainly," said Fanny, with gentle earnestness.

"There," cried Miss Crawford, "you have convinced Miss Price already."

"I wish I could convince Miss Crawford too."

"I do not think you ever will," said she, with an arch smile; "I am still surprised now that you should intend to take orders. You really are fit for something better. Come, change your mind. It is not too late. Go into the law."

"Go into the law! With as much ease as I was told to go into this wilderness."

"Now you are going to say something about law being the worse wilderness of the two, but I forestall you."

"You need not, for there is not the least wit in my nature. I am a very matter-of-fact, plain-spoken being, and may blunder on the borders of a repartee for half an hour together without getting it out."

A silence followed. Each was thoughtful. Fanny made the first interruption by saying, "I wonder that I should be tired with only walking in this sweet wood; but the next time we come to a seat, I should be glad to sit down for a little while."

"My dear Fanny," cried Edmund, immediately drawing her arm within his, "how thoughtless I have been! I hope you are not very tired. Perhaps," turning to Miss Crawford, "my other companion may do me the honour of taking an arm."

"Thank you, but I am not at all tired." She took it, however, and the gratification of feeling such a connexion for the first time made him a little forgetful of Fanny. "You scarcely touch me," said he. "What a difference in the weight of a woman's arm from that of a man! At Oxford I have been used to have a man lean on me for the length of a street, and you are only a fly in comparison."

"I am really not tired, which I almost wonder at; for we must have walked at least a mile in this wood. Do not you think we have?"

"Not half a mile."

"Oh! consider how much we have wound about. And we have not seen the end of the wood since we left the first path."

"But if you remember, before we left that first path, we saw directly to the end of it. We looked down the whole vista, and saw it closed by iron gates, and it could not have been more than a furlong in length."

"Oh! I know nothing of your furlongs, but I am sure it is a very long wood, and that we have been winding in and out ever since we came into it; and therefore I say that we have walked a mile."

"We have been exactly a quarter of an hour here," said Edmund, taking out his watch. "Do you think we are walking four miles an hour?"

"Oh! do not attack me with your watch. A watch is always too fast or too slow."

A few steps brought them out at the bottom of the very walk they had been talking of; and well shaded and looking over a deep ditch, a ha-ha, into the park, was a bench, on which they all sat down.

"I am afraid you are very tired, Fanny," said Edmund; "why would not you speak sooner? Every sort of exercise fatigues her so soon, Miss Crawford, except riding."

"How abominable in you, then, to let me engross her horse as I did all last week! I am ashamed of you and of myself, but it shall never happen again."

"Your consideration makes me more aware of my own neglect. Fanny's well-being seems in safer hands with you than with me."

"I am not surprised that she is tired now; for there is nothing so fatiguing as seeing a great house, dawdling from one room to another, straining one's eyes and one's attention, hearing what one does not understand, admiring what one does not care for. It is the greatest bore in the world, and Miss Price has found it so, though she did not know it."

"I shall soon be rested," said Fanny; "to sit in the shade, and look upon verdure, is the most perfect refreshment."

After sitting a little while Miss Crawford was up again. "I must move," said she; "resting fatigues me. I have looked across the ha-ha till I am weary. I must go and look through that iron gate at the same view, without being able to see it so well."

Edmund left the seat likewise. "Now, Miss Crawford, if you look up the walk, you will see that it cannot be half a mile long."

"It is an immense distance; I see that with a glance."

He reasoned with her in vain. She would not calculate; she would only smile and assert in a way that was most engaging. At last they agreed to determine the dimensions of the wood by walking a little more about it. They would go to one end of it, and turn a little way in some other direction, and be back in a few minutes.

Fanny said she was rested, and would have moved too, but this was not allowed. Edmund urged her to remain where she was. She was left on the bench to think with pleasure of her cousin's care, but with regret that she was not stronger. She watched them till they had turned the corner, and listened till all sound of them had ceased.

CHAPTER 10

Twenty minutes passed, and Fanny began to be surprised at being left so long, and to listen anxiously for their steps and voices. At length she heard voices approaching; but it was not those she wanted. Miss Bertram, Mr. Rushworth, and Mr. Crawford were before her.

"My dear Fanny, how comes this?"

She told her story. "Poor dear Fanny," cried Maria, "how ill you have been used! You had better have stayed with us."

Seating herself with a gentleman on each side, Maria resumed their conversation, discussing the possible improvements with much animation. Nothing was fixed on; but Henry Crawford was full of ideas, and whatever he proposed was immediately approved, first by her, and then by Mr. Rushworth, who scarcely risked an original thought of his own.

After some minutes, Miss Bertram, observing the iron gate, expressed a wish of passing through it into the park, that their views and plans might be more comprehensive. It was the best way of proceeding, in Henry Crawford's opinion; and he saw a knoll not half a mile off, which would give them a view of the house. Go therefore they must to that knoll; but the gate was locked.

Mr. Rushworth wished he had brought the key; he had been very near to bringing the key; he was determined he would never come without the key again; but this did not remove the present evil. They could not get through; and it ended in Mr. Rushworth's declaring that he would go and fetch the key. He set off accordingly.

When he was gone, Maria addressed Mr Crawford. "Sincerely, do not you find the place worse than you expected?"

"No, indeed. I find it grander, more complete in its style, though that style may not be the best. And to tell you the truth," speaking rather lower, "I do not think that I shall ever see Sotherton again with so much pleasure as I do now. Another summer will hardly improve it to me."

After a moment's embarrassment the lady replied, "You are too much a man of the world not to see with the eyes of the world. If other people think Sotherton improved, I have no doubt that you will."

"I am afraid I am not so much the man of the world as might be good for me. My feelings are not quite so light as is the case with men of the world."

There was a short silence. Miss Bertram began again. "You seemed to enjoy your drive here very much this morning. I was glad to see you so well entertained. You and Julia were laughing the whole way."

"Were we? Yes, I believe we were; but I have not the least recollection at what. Oh! I believe I was relating to her some ridiculous stories of an old Irish groom of my uncle's. Your sister loves to laugh."

"You think her more light-hearted than I am?"

"More easily amused," he replied, smiling. "I could not have hoped to entertain you with Irish anecdotes during a ten miles' drive."

"Naturally, I believe, I am as lively as Julia, but I have more to think of now."

"You have, undoubtedly. Your prospects, however, are fair. You have a very smiling scene before you."

"Do you mean literally or figuratively? Literally, I conclude. Yes, certainly, the sun shines, and the park looks very cheerful. But unluckily that iron gate, that ha-ha,

give me a feeling of restraint and hardship. 'I cannot get out,' as the starling said." As she spoke, and it was with expression, she walked to the gate: he followed her. "Mr. Rushworth is so long fetching this key!"

"And for the world you would not get out without the key and without Mr. Rushworth's authority, or I think you might easily pass round the edge of the gate, here, with my assistance; I think it might be done, if you really wished to be more at large, and did not think it prohibited."

"Prohibited! nonsense! I certainly can get out that way, and I will. Mr. Rushworth will be here in a moment; we shall not be out of sight."

"Or if we are, Miss Price will tell him that he will find us on that knoll."

Fanny, feeling all this to be wrong, could not help making an effort to prevent it. "You will hurt yourself, Miss Bertram," she cried; "you will tear your gown; you will be in danger of slipping into the ha-ha. You had better not go."

Her cousin was safe on the other side while these words were spoken, and, smiling with the good-humour of success, she said, "Thank you, dear Fanny, but I and my gown are alive and well, and so good-bye."

Fanny was again left alone, and with no pleasant feelings, for she was astonished at Miss Bertram, and angry with Mr. Crawford. By taking a circuitous and very unreasonable direction to the knoll, they were soon beyond her eye; and for some minutes she had the little wood all to herself.

She was again roused by sudden footsteps: somebody was coming at a quick pace down the walk. She expected Mr. Rushworth, but it was Julia, who, hot and out of breath, and with a look of disappointment, cried out, "Heyday! Where are the others? I thought Maria and Mr. Crawford were with you."

Fanny explained.

"A pretty trick, upon my word! I cannot see them. But they cannot be far off, and I think I am equal to as much as Maria, even without help."

"But, Julia, Mr. Rushworth will be here in a moment with the key. Do wait for Mr. Rushworth."

"Not I, indeed. I have had enough of the family for one morning. Why, I have but this moment escaped from his horrible mother. Such a penance as I have endured, while you were sitting here composed and happy! You always contrive to keep out of these scrapes."

This was a most unjust reflection, but Fanny could allow for it, for Julia was vexed. She therefore only asked her if she had seen Mr. Rushworth.

"Yes, he was hurrying away as if upon life and death, and could just spare time to tell us his errand."

"It is a pity he should have so much trouble for nothing."

"That is Miss Maria's concern. I am not obliged to punish myself for her sins. The mother I could not avoid, but the son I can get away from."

And she immediately scrambled across the fence, and walked away. Fanny now sat in dread of seeing Mr. Rushworth; she felt that he had been very ill-used.

He joined her five minutes after Julia's exit; and though she made the best of the story, he was evidently greatly mortified. His looks expressed his extreme surprise and vexation, and he walked to the gate and stood there, without seeming to know what to do.

"My cousin Maria charged me to say that you would find them at that knoll."

"I shall not go," said he sullenly; "I see nothing of them. By the time I get to the knoll they may be somewhere else. I have had walking enough."

And he sat down gloomily by Fanny.

"I am very sorry," said she.

"I think they might have stayed for me," said he.

"Miss Bertram thought you would follow her."

"I should not have had to follow her if she had stayed."

Fanny was silenced. After a pause, he went on—"Pray, Miss Price, are you such a great admirer of this Mr. Crawford as some people are? For my part, I can see nothing in him."

"I do not think him at all handsome."

"Handsome! Nobody can call such an undersized man handsome. He is not more than five foot eight. In my opinion, these Crawfords are no addition at all. We did very well without them."

A small sigh escaped Fanny here.

"If I had made any difficulty about fetching the key, there might have been some excuse, but I went the very moment she said she wanted it."

"Nothing could be more obliging, I am sure, and I dare say you walked as fast as you could; but still it is some distance, you know; and when people are waiting, every half minute seems like five."

He got up and walked to the gate again. Fanny thought he was inclined to relent, and she said, therefore, "It is a pity you should not join them. They expected to have a better view of the house from there, and will be thinking how it may be improved; and nothing can be settled without you."

"Well," said he, "if you really think I had better go: it would be foolish to bring the key for nothing." And letting himself out, he walked off.

Fanny's thoughts were now engrossed by the two who had left her so long ago, and getting quite impatient, she resolved to go in search of them. She followed their steps along the bottom walk, and had just turned up into another, when the laugh of Miss Crawford caught her ear; a few more windings brought them before her. They were just returned from the park, and they had been into the very avenue which Fanny had been hoping the whole morning to reach, and had been sitting down under one of the trees. This was their history. It was evident that they had been spending their time pleasantly, and were not aware of the length of their absence.

Fanny was assured that Edmund had wished for her very much, and that he should certainly have come back for her, had she not been tired; but this was not sufficient to ease the pain of having been left a whole hour, when he had talked of only a few minutes, nor to banish the curiosity she felt to know what they had been talking about all that time; and she felt depressed as they returned to the house.

As they reached the bottom of the terrace, Mrs. Rushworth and Mrs. Norris appeared at the top, just ready for the wilderness. Mrs. Norris had been too well employed to move faster; for the housekeeper had taken her to the dairy, told her all about their cows, and given her the recipe for a famous cream cheese; and they had met the gardener, with whom she had made a most satisfactory acquaintance, for she had set him right as to his grandson's illness, and he had shown her his choicest plants, and presented her with a specimen of heath.

They all returned to the house together, to lounge away the time till the return of the others, and the arrival of dinner. It was late before the Miss Bertrams and the two gentlemen came in, and their ramble did not appear to have been productive of anything useful. By their own accounts they had been all walking after each other, and the meeting which had taken place at last seemed to have been too late to re-establish harmony. There was gloom on the faces of Julia and Mr Rushworth. Mr. Crawford and Miss Bertram were much more gay, and Fanny thought that he was taking

particular pains to do away any resentment of the other two, and restore good-humour.

They sat down to table, and then it was a quick succession of busy nothings till the carriage came to the door. Mrs. Norris, having obtained a few pheasants' eggs and a cream cheese from the housekeeper, was ready to lead the way.

Mr. Crawford, approaching Julia, said, "I hope I am not to lose my companion, unless she is afraid of the evening air in so exposed a seat." The request had not been foreseen, but was very graciously received, and Julia's day was likely to end almost as well as it began. Miss Bertram was a little disappointed; but her conviction of being really the one preferred comforted her, and she received Mr. Rushworth's parting attentions as she ought. He was certainly better pleased to hand her into the barouche than to assist her in ascending the box.

"Well, Fanny, this has been a fine day for you," said Mrs. Norris, as they drove through the park. "Nothing but pleasure from beginning to end! You ought to be very much obliged to your aunt Bertram and me for contriving to let you go. A pretty good day's amusement you have had!"

Maria was just discontented enough to say, "I think you have done pretty well yourself, ma'am. Your lap seems full of good things, and here is a basket of something knocking my elbow unmercifully."

"My dear, it is only a beautiful little heath, which that nice old gardener would have me take. Fanny, you carry that parcel for me; take great care of it: it is a cream cheese. Nothing would satisfy that good old Mrs. Whitaker, but my taking one of the cheeses. I stood out as long as I could, till the tears almost came into her eyes. That Mrs. Whitaker is a treasure! I can manage the basket very well."

"What else have you been sponging?" said Maria.

"Sponging, my dear! It is nothing but four of those beautiful pheasants' eggs, which Mrs. Whitaker would quite force upon me. She said it must be such an amusement to me, as I lived quite alone, to have a few living creatures. It will be a great delight in my lonely hours to attend to them."

It was a beautiful evening, and the drive was pleasant; but when Mrs. Norris ceased speaking, those within were altogether silent. Their spirits were exhausted; and to determine whether the day had afforded most pleasure or pain, might occupy the thoughts of almost all.

CHAPTER 11

The day at Sotherton, with all its imperfections, gave the Miss Bertrams much more agreeable feelings than the letters from Antigua, which soon afterwards reached Mansfield. It was much pleasanter to think of Henry Crawford than of their father.

November was the black month fixed for his return. Sir Thomas's business being nearly concluded, he proposed to sail in the September packet, and looked forward to being with his beloved family again early in November.

Maria was more to be pitied than Julia; for to her the father brought a husband, and the return of the friend most anxious for her happiness would unite her to the lover, on whom she had chosen that happiness should depend. It was a gloomy prospect, and all she could do was to throw a mist over it, and hope that when the mist cleared away she should see something else. It would hardly be early in November, there were generally delays; it would probably be the middle of November at least; the middle of November was thirteen weeks off. Much might happen in thirteen weeks.

Sir Thomas would have been deeply mortified by his daughters' feelings, and would hardly have found consolation in another young lady's interest. Miss Crawford heard the good news with attention. After tea, as she was standing at a window with Edmund and Fanny looking out on a twilight scene, while the Miss Bertrams, Mr. Rushworth, and Henry Crawford were all busy at the pianoforte, she suddenly turned round towards the group, saying, "How happy Mr. Rushworth looks! He is thinking of November."

Edmund looked round at Mr. Rushworth too, but had nothing to say.

"Your father's return will be a very interesting event."

"It will, indeed."

"It will be the forerunner of other interesting events: your sister's marriage, and your taking orders."

"Yes."

"Don't be affronted," said she, laughing, "but it does put me in mind of some old heathen heroes, who, after great exploits in a foreign land, offered sacrifices to the gods on their safe return."

"There is no sacrifice in the case," replied Edmund, with a serious smile, and glancing at the pianoforte again; "it is entirely her own doing."

"Oh yes. I was joking. She has done no more than what every young woman would do; and I have no doubt of her being extremely happy. The other sacrifice, of course, you do not understand."

"My taking orders, I assure you, is quite as voluntary as Maria's marrying."

"It is fortunate that your wish and your father's convenience should accord so well. There is a very good living kept for you, I understand."

"Which you suppose has biased me?"

"I am sure it has not," cried Fanny.

"Thank you, Fanny, but it is more than I would affirm myself. On the contrary, knowing that there was such a provision probably did bias me. Nor can I think it wrong that it should. I see no reason why a man should make a worse clergyman for knowing that he will have a competence early in life. I have no doubt that I was biased, but I think it was blamelessly."

"It is the same sort of thing," said Fanny, "as for the son of an admiral to go into the navy, or the son of a general to be in the army, and nobody sees anything wrong in that. Nobody wonders that they should prefer the line where their friends can serve them best."

"No, my dear Miss Price, and for reasons good. The profession, either navy or army, is its own justification. It has everything in its favour: heroism, danger, bustle, fashion. Soldiers and sailors are always acceptable in society. Nobody can wonder that men are soldiers and sailors."

"But the motives of a man who takes orders with the certainty of preferment may be suspected, you think?" said Edmund. "To be justified in your eyes, he must do it in complete uncertainty of any provision."

"What! take orders without a living! No; that is madness indeed."

"Shall I ask you how the church is to be filled, if a man is neither to take orders with a living nor without? No; for you certainly would not know what to say. But I must beg some advantage to the clergyman from your own argument. As heroism, and noise, and fashion, cannot tempt him, he ought not to be suspected of lacking sincerity in his choice."

"Oh! no doubt he is very sincere in preferring an income ready made, to the trouble of working for one; and has the best intentions of doing nothing all his days but eat, drink, and grow fat. It is indolence, Mr. Bertram; a want of ambition, of taste for good company, or of inclination to be agreeable, which make men clergymen. A clergyman has nothing to do but be slovenly and selfish. His curate does all the work, and the business of his own life is to dine."

"There are such clergymen, no doubt, but they are not so common as you suppose. I suspect that in this comprehensive censure, you are judging from prejudiced persons, whose opinions you have been in the habit of hearing. It is impossible that you can have much knowledge of the clergy. You are speaking what you have been told at your uncle's table."

"I speak what is the general opinion; and where an opinion is general, it is usually correct. The lives of clergymen are seen by too many to leave any deficiency of information."

"Where any body of educated men are condemned indiscriminately, there must be a deficiency of information, or (smiling) of something else. Your uncle, and his brother admirals, perhaps knew little of clergymen beyond the chaplains whom they were always wishing away."

"Poor William! He has met with great kindness from the chaplain of the Antwerp," was a tender remark of Fanny's, very much to the purpose of her own feelings if not of the conversation.

"I do not take my opinions from my uncle," said Miss Crawford, "and I can see what clergymen are, being the guest of Dr. Grant. And though Dr. Grant is most kind and obliging to me, and though he is clever, and often preaches good sermons, I see him to be an indolent, selfish bon vivant, who must have his palate consulted in everything; who will not stir a finger for the convenience of any one; and who, moreover, if the cook makes a blunder, is out of humour with his excellent wife. Henry and I were driven out this very evening by a disappointment about a green goose, which he could not get the better of. My poor sister was forced to stay and bear it."

"I do not wonder at your disapprobation. It is a great defect of temper, and to see your sister suffering from it must be exceedingly painful. Fanny, it goes against us. We cannot attempt to defend Dr. Grant."

"No," replied Fanny, "but whatever profession Dr. Grant had chosen, he would have taken a—not a good temper into it; and in the navy or army, I think more would have been made unhappy by him than as a clergyman. Besides, in a more worldly profession, he might have escaped that knowledge of himself, which it is impossible he should escape now. A man cannot teach others their duty every week and preach such very good sermons as he does, without being the better for it himself. It must make him think."

"We cannot prove to the contrary, to be sure; but I wish you a better fate, Miss Price, than to be the wife of a man whose amiableness depends upon his own sermons; for though he may preach himself into a good-humour every Sunday, it is still bad enough to have him quarrelling about green geese from Monday till Saturday night."

"I think the man who could quarrel with Fanny," said Edmund affectionately, "must be beyond the reach of any sermons."

Fanny turned away; and Miss Crawford had only time to say pleasantly, "I fancy Miss Price has been more used to deserve praise than to hear it"; when, being invited by the Miss Bertrams to join in a glee, she tripped off to the instrument, leaving Edmund looking after her in an ecstasy of admiration of her many virtues, from her obliging manners to her graceful tread.

"There goes good-humour, I am sure," said he. "There goes a temper which would never give pain! How well she walks! and how readily she pleases others! What a pity that she should have been in such hands!"

Fanny agreed, and had the pleasure of seeing him continue at the window with her, in spite of the expected glee; and of having his eyes turned, like hers, outside, where a solemn, soothing, and lovely scene appeared in the brilliancy of an unclouded night. Fanny spoke her feelings.

"Here's harmony!" said she; "here's repose! Here's what may leave all painting and all music behind, and what poetry only can attempt to describe! Here's what may tranquillise every care, and lift the heart to rapture! When I look out on such a night as this, I feel as if there could be neither wickedness nor sorrow in the world; and there certainly would be less of both if the sublimity of Nature were more attended to, and people were carried more out of themselves by contemplating such a scene."

"I like to hear your enthusiasm, Fanny. They are much to be pitied who have not been taught to feel as you do."

"You taught me to think and feel on the subject, cousin."

"I had a very apt scholar. There's Arcturus looking very bright."

"Yes, and the Bear. I wish I could see Cassiopeia."

"We must go out on the lawn for that. Should you be afraid?"

"Not in the least. It is a great while since we have had any star-gazing."

"Yes; I do not know how it has happened." The glee began. "We will stay till this is finished, Fanny," said he, turning his back on the window; and as it advanced, she had the mortification of seeing him advance too, moving forward by gentle degrees towards the instrument. When it ceased, he was close by the singers, among the most urgent in requesting to hear the glee again.

Fanny sighed alone at the window, till scolded away by Mrs. Norris's threats of catching cold.

CHAPTER 12

At the end of August Mr Tom Bertram arrived, to be gay, agreeable, and gallant as Miss Crawford demanded; to tell of races and parties and friends, to which she might have listened six weeks before with some interest, and altogether to convince her that she preferred his younger brother.

It was very vexatious, and she was heartily sorry for it; but so it was; and far from now meaning to marry the elder, she did not even want to attract him beyond what the simplest claims of conscious beauty required. His long absence from Mansfield made it clear that he did not care about her; and were he now the owner of Mansfield Park, she did not believe she could accept him.

The season which brought Mr. Bertram back to Mansfield took Mr. Crawford into Norfolk. He went for a fortnight—a fortnight of such dullness to the Miss Bertrams as ought to have put them on their guard, and made even Julia see the need to distrust his attentions; and a fortnight of sufficient leisure, between shooting and sleeping, to have convinced the gentleman that he ought to keep longer away; but, thoughtless and selfish from prosperity and bad example, he would not look beyond the present. The sisters, handsome, clever, and encouraging, were an amusement to his sated mind; and he gladly returned to Mansfield, to be welcomed quite as gladly by those whom he came to trifle with.

Maria, with only Mr. Rushworth to attend to her, and doomed to hear repeated details of his day's sport, his dogs, his neighbours' jealousy, and his zeal after poachers, had missed Mr. Crawford grievously; and Julia felt all the right of missing him much more. Each sister believed herself the favourite. Julia might be justified in so doing by the hints of Mrs. Grant, and Maria by the hints of Mr. Crawford himself. Everything returned into the same channel as before his absence. His manners to each were so agreeable as to lose no ground with either, and just stopped short of the warmth which might excite general notice.

Only Fanny found anything to dislike; but since the day at Sotherton, she could never see Mr. Crawford with either sister without wonder or censure. Had her confidence in her own judgment been greater, she would probably have spoken of it to Edmund. As it was, she only hazarded a hint, and the hint was lost. "I am surprised," said she, "that Mr. Crawford should come back again so soon; for I had understood he was so very fond of change that he would go elsewhere. He is used to much gayer places than Mansfield."

"It is to his credit," was Edmund's answer; "His sister does not like his unsettled habits."

"What a favourite he is with my cousins!"

"Yes, his manners to women are such as must please. Mrs. Grant, I believe, suspects him of a preference for Julia; I wish it may be so."

"If Miss Bertram were not engaged," said Fanny cautiously, "I could sometimes almost think that he admired her more than Julia."

"Which is, perhaps, in favour of his liking Julia best; for I believe it often happens that a man, before he has quite made up his own mind, will distinguish the sister or friend of the woman he is thinking of more than the woman herself. Crawford has too much sense to stay here if he found himself in any danger from Maria; and she has given proof by her engagement that her feelings are not strong."

Fanny supposed she must have been mistaken; but she knew not always what to think. Hearing the hopes of her aunt Norris on the subject, she could not help wondering. It was while all the other young people were dancing, and she was sitting unwillingly among the chaperons, longing for the re-entrance of her elder cousin, on whom all her own hopes of a partner depended.

It was Fanny's first ball, though without the preparation or splendour of many a young lady's first ball. It had been thought of only that afternoon, on the strength of a violin player in the servants' hall; and five couples were found with the help of a new intimate friend of Mr. Bertram's just arrived on a visit. Fanny, however, had been very happy through four dances, and was grieved to be losing even a quarter of an hour. While waiting and wishing, she heard this dialogue between Mrs Norris and Mrs Rushworth—

"I think, ma'am," said Mrs. Norris, watching Mr. Rushworth and Maria, "we shall see some happy faces again now."

"Yes, indeed," replied the other, with a stately simper, "I think it was a pity they should have had to part. Young folks in their situation should be excused complying with custom."

"Dear Maria has such a strict sense of propriety, so much of that true delicacy which one seldom meets with nowadays, Mrs. Rushworth. Only look at her face; how different from what it was the two last dances!"

Miss Bertram did indeed look happy; her eyes were sparkling with pleasure, for Julia and her partner, Mr. Crawford, were close to her. How she had looked before, Fanny could not recollect, for she had been dancing with Edmund.

Mrs. Norris continued, "It is quite delightful, ma'am, to see young people so well suited! And what do you say, ma'am, to the chance of another match? Such things are very catching."

Mrs. Rushworth, who saw nothing but her son, was at a loss.

"The couple above, ma'am."

"Oh! Miss Julia and Mr. Crawford. Yes, a very pretty match. What is his property?"

"Four thousand a year."

"Very well. He seems a genteel, steady young man, so I hope Miss Julia will be very happy."

"It is not a settled thing, ma'am, yet. But I have very little doubt it will be. He is growing extremely particular in his attentions."

Fanny could listen no farther. Mr. Bertram was in the room; and though feeling it would be a great honour to be asked to dance by him, she thought it must happen. He came towards their little circle; but instead of asking her to dance, drew up a chair, and gave her an account of the present state of a sick horse. Fanny found that it was not to be, and immediately felt that she had been unreasonable in expecting it. Next, he took a newspaper from the table, and said in a languid way, "If you want to dance, Fanny, I will stand up with you." With equal civility the offer was declined; she did not wish to dance.

"I am glad," said he, more briskly, "for I am tired to death. I only wonder how people can keep it up so long. They must be all in love, to find any amusement in such folly."

"My dear Tom," cried his aunt, "as you are not dancing, you will have no objection to join us at cards; shall you?" She added in a whisper, "We want to make a table for Mrs. Rushworth, you know. You and I and Dr. Grant; and you know, you may bet half-guineas with him."

"I should be most happy," replied he, jumping up with alacrity, "but I am this moment going to dance. Come, Fanny," taking her hand, "do not be dawdling any longer, or the dance will be over."

Fanny was led off very willingly, though it was impossible for her to feel much gratitude towards her cousin.

"Upon my word," he exclaimed as they walked away. "To want to nail me to a card-table for the next two hours with that poking old woman. And to ask me in such a way too! so as to leave me no possibility of refusing! I hate the pretence of being given a choice, and at the same time obliged to do the very thing! If I had not luckily thought of standing up with you I could not have got out of it. But when my aunt has got a fancy in her head, nothing can stop her."

CHAPTER 13

The Honourable John Yates, this new friend of Tom's, had not much to recommend him beyond being the younger son of a lord; and Sir Thomas would probably have thought his introduction at Mansfield undesirable. Mr. Bertram's acquaintance with him had begun at Weymouth, where they had spent ten days in the same society. Mr. Yates was invited to visit Mansfield, and came rather earlier than expected, in consequence of the sudden breaking-up of a large party at the house of another friend.

He came on the wings of disappointment, and with his head full of acting, for it had been a theatrical party; the sudden death of a connexion of the family had dispersed the performers two days before the performance. To be so near happiness, so near fame, so near the long paragraph in praise of the private theatricals at Ecclesford, the seat of Lord Ravenshaw, which would have immortalised the whole party for a twelvemonth! to lose it all, was an injury keenly felt, and Mr. Yates could talk of nothing else. Ecclesford and its theatre, its dresses, rehearsals and jokes, was his never-failing subject.

Happily for him, a love of the theatre is so general, an itch for acting so strong among young people, that he could hardly out-talk the interest of his hearers. It was all bewitching. The play had been *Lovers' Vows*, and Mr. Yates was to have been Count Cassel.

"A trifling part," said he, "and not to my taste; but I was determined to make no difficulties. Lord Ravenshaw and the duke had taken the only two characters worth playing. I was sorry that Lord Ravenshaw should have so mistaken his powers, for he was not equal to the Baron—a little man with a weak voice, always hoarse after ten minutes. Sir Henry thought the duke not equal to Frederick, but that was because Sir Henry wanted the part himself. Our Agatha was inimitable, and the duke was thought very great by many. It would certainly have gone off wonderfully."

"I do think you were very much to be pitied," was the kind response.

"To be sure, the poor old dowager could not have died at a worse time; and I wish the news could have been suppressed for just three days. I think there would have been no great harm, and it was suggested, I know; but Lord Ravenshaw would not hear of it."

"To make you amends, Yates," said Mr Bertram, "I think we must raise a little theatre at Mansfield, and ask you to be our manager."

The desire to act was awakened in Tom, who was now master of the house; and who had such lively talents and comic taste as were exactly adapted to the novelty of acting. Each sister echoed the wish; and Henry Crawford, to whom, in all the riot of his gratifications it was an untasted pleasure, was quite alive at the idea.

"I really believe," said he, "I could at this moment undertake any character that ever was written. I feel as if I could rant and storm, or sigh or cut capers, in any play in the English language. Let us be doing something. As for a theatre, any room in this house might suffice."

"We must have a curtain," said Tom Bertram; "a few yards of green baize for a curtain may be enough."

"Oh, quite enough," cried Mr. Yates, "with only just a side wing or two run up, doors in flat, and three or four scenes to be let down. We should want nothing more."

"I believe we must be satisfied with less," said Maria. "We must make the performance, not the theatre, our object."

"Nay," said Edmund, listening with alarm. "Let us do nothing by halves. If we are to act, let it be in a theatre completely fitted up with pit, boxes, and gallery, and let us have a play entire, with a good tricking, and a figure-dance, and a hornpipe, and a song between the acts. If we do not outdo Ecclesford, we do nothing."

"Now, Edmund, do not be disagreeable," said Julia. "Nobody loves a play better than you do, or can have gone farther to see one."

"True, to see real acting; but I would hardly walk from this room to the next to look at the raw efforts of those who have not been bred to the trade."

However, the subject continued to be discussed with eagerness; and though nothing was settled but that Tom Bertram would prefer a comedy, and his sisters and Henry Crawford a tragedy, and that nothing could be easier than to find a piece which would please them all, their resolution to act seemed so decided as to make Edmund quite uncomfortable. He was determined to prevent it, if possible, though his mother did not show the least disapprobation.

The same evening gave him an opportunity of trying his strength. Maria, Julia, Henry Crawford, and Mr. Yates were in the billiard-room. Tom, returning from them into the drawing-room, found Edmund standing thoughtfully by the fire, while Lady Bertram and Fanny were on the sofa. Tom began as he entered—"Such a horribly vile billiard-table as ours is not to be met with. I can stand it no longer, but I have just ascertained one good thing: the room is precisely the shape for a theatre; and with the doors at the end communicating with each other, as they may be made to do by merely moving the bookcase in my father's room, is the very thing we could have desired."

"You are not serious, Tom, in meaning to act?" said Edmund.

"Never more so, I assure you."

"I think it would be very wrong. It would be highly injudicious. It would show great lack of feeling on my father's account, absent as he is, and in constant danger; and it would be imprudent with regard to Maria, whose situation is a very delicate one."

"You take it so seriously! as if we were going to act three times a week, and invite all the country. But we mean nothing but a little amusement among ourselves. We want no audience, no publicity. As to my father's absence, I consider it a motive; for this must be a very anxious period to my mother; and if we can keep up her spirits for the next few weeks, I shall think our time well spent."

Each looked towards their mother. Lady Bertram, sunk in one corner of the sofa, the picture of ease and tranquillity, was just falling into a gentle doze.

Edmund smiled and shook his head.

"By Jove! this won't do," cried Tom, with a laugh. "To be sure, my dear mother—I was unlucky there."

"What is the matter?" asked her ladyship, half-roused; "I was not asleep."

"No, ma'am, nobody suspected you! Well, Edmund," he continued, as Lady Bertram began to nod again, "I maintain that we shall be doing no harm."

"I cannot agree; I am convinced that my father would totally disapprove it."

"And I am convinced to the contrary. Nobody is fonder of the exercise of talent in young people than my father, and I think he has a decided taste for acting. He encouraged it in us as boys. How many a time have we mourned over the dead body of Caesar, and to be'd and not to be'd, for his amusement?"

"It was a very different thing. My father wished us, as schoolboys, to speak well, but he would never wish his grown-up daughters to be acting plays. His sense of decorum is strict."

"I know that," said Tom, displeased. "I know my father as well as you do; and I'll take care that his daughters do nothing to distress him. Manage your own concerns, Edmund, and I'll take care of the rest of the family."

"If you are resolved on acting," replied the persevering Edmund, "I hope it will be in a very quiet way; and I think a theatre ought not to be attempted. It would be taking liberties with my father's house."

"I will be answerable," said Tom. "His house shall not be hurt. I have quite as great an interest in his house as you; and as to such alterations as moving a bookcase, or unlocking a door, or using the billiard-room for the space of a week, you might as well suppose he would object to my sister's pianoforte being moved from one side of the room to the other. Absolute nonsense!"

"The innovation will be wrong as an expense."

"Yes, the expense would be prodigious! Perhaps it might cost a whole twenty pounds. It will be a green curtain and a little carpenter's work, that's all; and as the carpenter's work may be done by Christopher Jackson, it will be absurd to talk of expense. As long as Jackson is employed, everything will be right with Sir Thomas. Don't imagine that nobody in this house can see or judge but yourself. Don't act yourself, if you do not like it, but don't expect to govern everybody else."

"No, as to acting myself," said Edmund, "that I absolutely protest against."

Tom walked out of the room, and Edmund was left to stir the fire in thoughtful vexation.

Fanny said, anxious to suggest some comfort, "Perhaps they may not find any play to suit them. Your brother's taste and your sisters' seem very different."

"I have no hope there, Fanny. They will find something. I shall try to dissuade my sisters, and that is all I can do."

"I should think my aunt Norris would be on your side."

"I dare say she would, but she has no influence with either Tom or my sisters; and if I cannot convince them myself, I shall let things take their course. Family squabbling is the greatest evil of all."

His sisters, to whom he spoke the next morning, were quite as impatient of his advice as Tom. Their mother had no objection to the plan, and they were not afraid of their father's disapprobation. There could be no harm in what had been done in so many respectable families. Julia did admit that Maria's situation might require particular caution—but that could not extend to *her*—she was at liberty; and Maria evidently considered her engagement as only raising her so much more above restraint.

Edmund was still urging them when Henry Crawford entered the room, calling out, "No lack of hands in our theatre, Miss Bertram. My sister hopes to be admitted into the company, and will be happy to take the part of any old duenna that you may not like yourselves."

Maria gave Edmund a glance, which meant, "What say you now? Can we be wrong if Mary Crawford feels the same?" And Edmund, silenced, acknowledged that the charm of acting might well carry fascination to the mind of genius.

As to Mrs. Norris, he was mistaken in supposing she would wish to oppose the scheme. She was talked down in five minutes by her eldest nephew and niece, who were all-powerful with her. The arrangement was to bring very little expense to anybody, and none at all to herself. She foresaw in it all the comforts of bustle and importance, and fancied herself obliged to leave her own house, where she had been living at her own cost, and stay in theirs, so that every hour might be spent in their service. She was, in fact, delighted with the project.

CHAPTER 14

Fanny seemed nearer being right than Edmund had supposed. Finding a play that would suit everybody proved to be no trifle; and the carpenter had taken his measurements, and, with an enlargement of plan, was already at work, while a play was still to seek.

Other preparations were in hand. An enormous roll of green baize had arrived from Northampton, and had been cut out by Mrs. Norris (with a saving by her good management of full three-quarters of a yard), and was being made into a curtain, and still the play was wanting. Edmund began almost to hope that none might ever be found.

There were, in fact, so many people to be pleased, so many best characters required, and, above all, such a need that the play should be at once both tragedy and comedy, that there did seem little chance of a decision.

On the tragic side were the Miss Bertrams, Henry Crawford, and Mr. Yates; on the comic, Tom Bertram, not quite alone, because Mary Crawford's wishes, though politely kept back, inclined the same way. They wanted a piece containing very few characters, but every character first-rate, and three principal women.

All the best plays were run over in vain. Neither Hamlet, nor Macbeth, nor Othello presented anything that could satisfy even the tragedians; and *The Rivals*, *The School for Scandal*, and a long et cetera, were dismissed. No piece could be proposed that did not supply a difficulty. "Oh no, that will never do! Let us have no ranting tragedies. Too many characters. Not a tolerable woman's part in the play. Anything but that, my dear Tom."

Fanny looked on, amused, and wondering how it would end. She could have wished that something might be acted, for she had never seen a play, but everything of higher consequence was against it.

"This will never do," said Tom Bertram at last. "We are wasting time abominably. Something must be fixed on. No matter what, so that something is chosen. A few characters too many must not frighten us. We must double them. From this moment I make no difficulties. I take any part you choose to give me, so as it be comic. I condition for nothing more."

For about the fifth time he then proposed the *Heir at Law*, trying unsuccessfully to persuade the others that there were some fine tragic parts in it.

The pause which followed this fruitless effort was ended when Tom, taking up a volume from the table, suddenly exclaimed—"Lovers' Vows! Why should not Lovers' Vows do for us as well as for the Ravenshaws? What say you? Here are two capital tragic parts for Yates and Crawford, and here is the rhyming Butler for me, if nobody else wants it. And as for the rest, they may be filled up by anybody. It is only Count Cassel and Anhalt."

The suggestion was welcome. Everybody was growing weary of indecision. Mr. Yates was particularly pleased: he had been longing to do the Baron at Ecclesford, had grudged every rant of Lord Ravenshaw's, and been forced to re-rant it all in his own room. With the advantage of knowing half the scenes by heart already, he now offered his services for the part. Then, remembering that there was some very good ranting-ground in Frederick, he professed an equal willingness for that.

Henry Crawford was ready to take either. Miss Bertram, feeling the interest of an Agatha in the question, decided it by observing to Mr. Yates that his height seemed to

fit him peculiarly for the Baron. She was acknowledged to be quite right, and was certain of the proper Frederick. Three of the characters were now cast, besides Mr. Rushworth, who was answered for by Maria as willing to do anything; when Julia, meaning, like her sister, to be Agatha, began to be scrupulous on Miss Crawford's account.

"Here are not women enough," said she. "Amelia and Agatha may do for Maria and me, but here is nothing for your sister, Mr. Crawford."

Mr. Crawford desired that might not be thought of: his sister wished only to be useful. But Tom Bertram asserted the part of Amelia to be the property of Miss Crawford. "It falls as naturally to her," said he, "as Agatha does to one or other of my sisters. It can be no sacrifice on their side, for it is highly comic."

A short silence followed. Each sister looked anxious; for each felt the best claim to Agatha, and was hoping to have it pressed on her by the rest. Henry Crawford, who meanwhile had taken up the play, and with seeming carelessness was turning over the first act, settled the business.

"I must entreat Miss Julia Bertram," said he, "not to engage in the part of Agatha, or it will be the ruin of all my solemnity. Indeed you must not" (turning to her). "I could not stand your countenance dressed up in woe. The many laughs we have had together would infallibly come across me, and Frederick would be obliged to run away."

Pleasantly, courteously, it was spoken; but the manner was lost to Julia's feelings. She saw a glance at Maria which confirmed the injury to herself: it was a trick; she was slighted, Maria was preferred; the smile of triumph which Maria was trying to suppress showed how well it was understood; and before Julia could command herself enough to speak, her brother said, "Oh yes! Maria must be Agatha. Though Julia fancies she prefers tragedy, I would not trust her in it. There is nothing of tragedy about her. She had better do the old countrywoman: the Cottager's wife; you had, indeed, Julia."

"Cottager's wife!" cried Mr. Yates. "What are you talking of? The most trivial, paltry part. Your sister do that! It is an insult to propose it. At Ecclesford the governess was to have done it. A little more justice, Mr. Manager, if you please."

"Why, I mean no disparagement to Julia. We cannot have two Agathas, and we must have one Cottager's wife. If the part is trifling she will have credit in making something of it."

"We must not let her good-nature be imposed on," said Henry Crawford. "We must not allow her to accept the part. Her talents will be wanted in Amelia. Amelia is a character more difficult to act well than even Agatha. I consider Amelia is the most difficult character in the whole piece. It requires great powers to give her playfulness and simplicity without extravagance. I have seen good actresses fail in the part. It requires a gentlewoman—a Julia Bertram. You will undertake it, I hope?" turning to her with a look of anxious entreaty, which softened her a little; but while she hesitated, her brother again interposed.

"No, no, Julia must not be Amelia. She is too tall and robust. Amelia should be a small, light, girlish, skipping figure. It is fit for Miss Crawford, and Miss Crawford only."

Without attending to this, Henry Crawford continued his supplication. "You must oblige us," said he. "When you have studied the character, I am sure you will feel it will suit you. Tragedy may be your choice, but it will certainly appear that comedy chooses you. You will be to visit me in prison with a basket of provisions; you will not refuse to visit me in prison? I think I see you coming in with your basket."

Julia wavered; but was he only trying to pacify her, and make her overlook the previous affront? She distrusted him. He was, perhaps, at treacherous play with her. She looked suspiciously at her sister; Maria's face was to decide it: if she were vexed and alarmed—but Maria looked all serenity and satisfaction. With hasty indignation, therefore, she said to him, "You do not seem afraid of not keeping your countenance when I come in with a basket of provisions—though one might have supposed—but it is only as Agatha that I was to be so overpowering!" She stopped—Henry Crawford looked rather foolish. Tom Bertram began again—

"Miss Crawford must be Amelia. She will be an excellent Amelia."

"Do not be afraid of my wanting the character," cried Julia, with angry quickness: "I am not to be Agatha, and I will do nothing else; and as to Amelia, I quite detest her. An odious, little, pert, unnatural girl. I have always protested against comedy, and this is comedy in its worst form." So saying, she walked hastily out of the room, exciting small compassion in any except Fanny, who pitied her jealousy.

A short silence followed; but her brother soon returned to business, and was eagerly looking over the play to ascertain what scenery would be necessary—while Maria and Henry Crawford conversed together in an under-voice. "I would give up the part to Julia most willingly," said Maria, "but though I shall probably do it very ill, I feel persuaded she would do it worse."

Tom Bertram and Mr. Yates walked off to consult in the room now beginning to be called the Theatre; Miss Bertram resolved to go down to the Parsonage with the offer of Amelia to Miss Crawford; and Fanny remained alone.

She took up the volume which had been left on the table, and began to read the play. Her curiosity was awake, and she ran through it with an eagerness which was suspended only by astonishment that it could be proposed and accepted in a private theatre! Agatha and Amelia appeared to be so totally improper—the situation of one, and the language of the other, so unfit for any modest woman, that she could hardly suppose her cousins could be aware of what they were engaging in. She longed to have them roused as soon as possible by the remonstrance which Edmund would certainly make.

CHAPTER 15

Miss Crawford accepted the part readily; and when Mr. Rushworth arrived, another character was cast. He had the offer of Count Cassel and Anhalt, and at first did not know which to choose, but recollecting that he had once seen the play, and had thought Anhalt a very stupid fellow, he decided on the Count.

Miss Bertram approved, for the less he had to learn the better. Though she could not sympathise in his wish that the Count and Agatha act together, nor wait very patiently while he was slowly turning over the leaves with the hope of discovering such a scene, she very kindly took his part in hand, and curtailed every speech that admitted being shortened; besides pointing out the necessity of his being finely dressed. Mr. Rushworth liked the idea of his finery very well, though pretending to despise it; and was too engaged with his own appearance to feel any of the displeasure which Maria had been prepared for.

Thus much was settled before Edmund, who was out all morning, knew anything of it; but when he entered the drawing-room, the buzz of discussion was high, and Mr. Rushworth stepped forward with alacrity to tell him the agreeable news.

"We have got a play," said he. "It is to be Lovers' Vows; and I am to be Count Cassel, and am to come in first with a pink satin cloak, and afterwards am to have another fancy suit, by way of a shooting-dress. I do not know how I shall like it."

Fanny's eyes followed Edmund, and her heart beat for him as she felt what his sensations must be.

"Lovers' Vows!" in a tone of the greatest amazement, was his reply, and he turned towards his brother and sisters.

"Yes," cried Mr. Yates. "We find there is nothing that will suit us so well. We have cast almost every part."

"But what do you do for women?" said Edmund gravely, looking at Maria.

Maria blushed in spite of herself as she answered, "I take the part which Lady Ravenshaw was to have done, and" (with a bolder eye) "Miss Crawford is to be Amelia."

"I should not have thought it the sort of play to be so easily filled up, with us," replied Edmund, turning away with a look of great vexation.

Mr. Rushworth followed him. "I come in three times, and have two-and-forty speeches. That's something, is not it? But I do not like the idea of being so fine. I shall hardly know myself in a pink satin cloak."

Edmund could not answer. Mr. Bertram was called out of the room by the carpenter, and was accompanied by Mr. Yates and Mr. Rushworth. Edmund then said, "My dear Maria, I must tell you that I think this play exceedingly unfit for private performance. I hope you will give it up. Read the first act aloud to your mother, and see how you can approve it."

"I am perfectly acquainted with the play;" cried Maria, "and with a very few omissions, I see nothing objectionable in it; and I am not the only young woman who thinks it fit for private performance."

"I am sorry for it," was his answer; "but in this matter you must set the example. If others have blundered, it is your place to put them right, and show them what true delicacy is."

This picture of her consequence had some effect; and with far more good-humour she answered, "I am obliged to you, Edmund; you mean well, I am sure: but I still

think you see things too strongly; and I cannot undertake to harangue all the rest upon the subject."

"Do you imagine that I meant that? No; let your conduct be the only harangue. Say that, on examining the part, you feel yourself unequal to it. All will understand your motive. The play will be given up, and your delicacy honoured as it ought."

"Do not act anything improper, my dear," said Lady Bertram. "Sir Thomas would not like it.—Fanny, ring the bell; I must have my dinner."

"I am convinced, madam," said Edmund, preventing Fanny, "that Sir Thomas would not like it."

"There, my dear, do you hear what Edmund says?"

"If I were to decline the part," said Maria, with renewed zeal, "Julia would certainly take it. She might think that she need not be so scrupulous as me. I cannot retract my consent; it is too settled, everybody would be so disappointed; and if we are so fastidious, we shall never act anything."

"I was just going to say the same thing," said Mrs. Norris. "The preparations will be so much money thrown away. I do not know the play; but if there is anything a little too warm it can be easily left out. As Mr. Rushworth is to act too, there can be no harm. I only wish Tom had known his own mind when the carpenters began, for there was the loss of half a day's work about those side-doors. The curtain will be a good job, however. I think we shall be able to send back some dozens of the rings. I am of some use, I hope, in preventing waste. There should always be one steady head to superintend so many young ones. I forgot to tell Tom of something that happened to me today. Who should I see but Dick Jackson making off with two bits of deal board in his hand, pilfered you may be sure; I hate such encroaching people as the Jacksons, who get all they can. I said to the boy directly, 'I'll take the boards, Dick, so get you home again.' The boy looked very silly, and turned away without a word; and I dare say it will cure him of marauding about the house for a while. I hate such greediness!"

Nobody troubled to answer.

Dinner passed heavily. Mrs. Norris related again her triumph over Dick Jackson, but neither play nor preparation were much talked of, for Edmund's disapprobation was felt even by his brother. Maria thought the subject better avoided. Mr. Yates, who was trying to make himself agreeable to Julia, found her gloom was less on other topics; and Mr. Rushworth, having only his own part and his own dress in his head, had soon talked away all that could be said of either.

But after an hour or two, the spirits of the evening gave fresh courage. Tom, Maria, and Mr. Yates were seated at the table with the play open before them, when Mr. and Miss Crawford entered and were received with grateful joy.

Henry Crawford was soon seated with the other three at the table, while his sister made her way to Lady Bertram, by the fire.

"I congratulate your ladyship," said she, "on the play being chosen; for I am sure you must be sick of all our difficulties. The bystanders must be infinitely thankful for a decision; and I give you joy, madam, as well as everybody else who is in the same predicament," glancing at Edmund.

Edmund said nothing. After chatting a few minutes, Miss Crawford returned to the party round the table; and seemed to interest herself in their arrangements till, as if struck by a sudden recollection, she exclaimed, "My good friends, pray let me know my fate. Who is to be Anhalt? What gentleman among you am I to have the pleasure of making love to?"

For a moment no one spoke; and then many spoke together to tell the melancholy truth, that they had not yet got any Anhalt.

"I thought I should like the Count best," said Mr Rushworth, "though I do not much relish the finery I am to have."

"You chose wisely, I am sure," replied Miss Crawford, with a brightened look; "Anhalt is a heavy part."

"The Count has two-and-forty speeches," returned Mr. Rushworth, "which is no trifle."

"I am not surprised," said Miss Crawford, "at this want of an Anhalt. Amelia deserves no better. Such a forward young lady may well frighten the men."

"I should take the part, if it were possible," cried Tom; "but, unluckily, the Butler and Anhalt are in together. However; I will try what can be done."

"Your brother should take the part," said Mr. Yates.

"I shall not ask him," replied Tom coldly.

Miss Crawford talked of something else, and soon afterwards rejoined the party at the fire.

"They do not want me," said she. "Mr. Edmund Bertram, as you do not act yourself, you will be a disinterested adviser; and, therefore, I apply to you. What shall we do for an Anhalt? What is your advice?"

"My advice," said he calmly, "is that you change the play."

"I should have no objection," she replied; "though I should not particularly dislike the part of Amelia; but as they do not choose to hear your advice, it certainly will not be taken."

Edmund said no more.

"If any part could tempt you to act, I suppose it would be Anhalt," observed the lady archly, after a short pause; "for he is a clergyman, you know."

"That would not tempt me," he replied, "for I should be sorry to make the character ridiculous by bad acting."

Miss Crawford was silenced. Moving her chair nearer the tea-table, she gave her attention to Mrs. Norris.

"Fanny," cried Tom Bertram, "we want your services."

Fanny was up in a moment, expecting some errand.

"Oh! we do not want to disturb you from your seat. We only want you in our play. You must be Cottager's wife."

"Me!" cried Fanny, sitting down again with a frightened look. "Indeed you must excuse me. I cannot act."

"But you must. It need not frighten you: it is a nothing of a part, not half a dozen speeches, and it will not signify if nobody hears a word you say; so you may be as creep-mouse as you like."

"Why, I have forty-two speeches," cried Mr. Rushworth.

"It is not that I am afraid of learning by heart," said Fanny, shocked to find that every eye was upon her; "but I really cannot act."

"You can act well enough for us. You have only two scenes."

"No, indeed, Mr. Bertram, you must excuse me. It would be absolutely impossible for me. I should only disappoint you."

"Phoo! We do not expect perfection. You must get a brown gown, and a white apron, and a mob cap, and we must make you a few wrinkles, and you will be a very proper little old woman."

"Indeed you must excuse me," cried Fanny, in agitation, and looking distressfully at Edmund, who was kindly observing her; but unwilling to exasperate his brother,

gave her only an encouraging smile. Her entreaty had no effect on Tom: and it was not merely Tom. His request was now backed by Maria, and Mr. Crawford, and Mr. Yates, and Mrs. Norris addressed her in an angry whisper—"What a piece of work about nothing: I am quite ashamed of you, Fanny, to make such a difficulty of obliging your cousins in such a trifle—so kind as they are to you!"

"Do not urge her, madam," said Edmund. "You see she does not like to act."

"I am not going to urge her," replied Mrs. Norris sharply; "but I shall think her a very obstinate, ungrateful girl, if she does not do what her aunt and cousins wish—very ungrateful, indeed, considering who and what she is."

Edmund was too angry to speak; but Miss Crawford, looking with astonished eyes at Mrs. Norris, and then at Fanny, whose tears were beginning to show, immediately said, "I do not like my situation: this place is too hot for me." She moved her chair close to Fanny, saying to her, in a kind, low whisper, "Never mind, my dear Miss Price, this is a cross evening: everybody is cross and teasing, but do not let us mind them"; and continued to talk to her and endeavour to raise her spirits, in spite of being out of spirits herself. The really good feelings by which she was almost purely governed were rapidly restoring her in Edmund's favour.

Fanny did not love Miss Crawford; but she felt very grateful for her kindness; and when, after talking about her needlework, Miss Crawford proceeded to inquire if she had heard lately from her brother at sea, and said that she was curious to see him, and imagined him a very fine young man—she could not help admitting it to be very agreeable flattery, and answering with more animation than she had intended.

Miss Crawford's attention was called from Fanny by Tom Bertram's telling her, with regret, that he found it impossible to take the part of Anhalt in addition to the Butler. "But there will no difficulty in filling it," he added. "We may pick and choose. I could name six young men who are wild to be admitted into our company, and there are one or two that would not disgrace us: Tom Oliver is a clever fellow, and Charles Maddox is a gentlemanlike man, so I will ride over tomorrow, and settle with one of them."

Maria looked apprehensively at Edmund, expecting that he must oppose this enlargement of the plan: but Edmund said nothing. After a moment's thought, Miss Crawford calmly replied, "I can have no objection to anything that you all think eligible. Have I ever seen either of the gentlemen? Yes, Mr. Charles Maddox dined at my sister's, did not he, Henry? A quiet-looking young man. Let him be applied to, if you please, for it will be less unpleasant to me than a perfect stranger."

Tom repeated his resolution of going to Charles Maddox on the morrow; and though Julia observed sarcastically that "the Mansfield theatricals would enliven the whole neighbourhood exceedingly," Edmund still held his peace, and showed his feelings only by a determined gravity.

Miss Crawford said quietly to Fanny, "I can tell Mr. Maddox that I shall shorten some of his speeches, and a great many of my own, before we rehearse together. It will be very disagreeable, and by no means what I expected."

CHAPTER 16

Miss Crawford could not make Fanny forget what had passed. She went to bed full of it, her nerves still agitated and her spirits sinking under her aunt's unkind reproach. To be told that she must do what was so impossible as to act; and then to have the charge of obstinacy and ingratitude follow, had been distressing, especially with the added dread of what the morrow might produce. Miss Crawford had protected her only for the time; and if she were applied to again, what should she do?

She fell asleep before she could answer the question, and found it quite as puzzling when she awoke the next morning. The little white attic, where she had always slept, suggesting no reply, she went as soon as she was dressed to the old school-room. When Miss Lee had quitted them, the room had become quite deserted, except by Fanny, who still kept her books there: gradually, she had added to her possessions, and spent more of her time there, and the East room was now considered hers. The Miss Bertrams, with every superiority in their own apartments, were entirely approving it; and Mrs. Norris, having stipulated that there should never be a fire in it on Fanny's account, was resigned to her having what nobody else wanted, though she sometimes spoke as if it was the best room in the house.

Even without a fire, Fanny found great comfort there in her hours of leisure. After anything unpleasant below, she could find immediate consolation in her plants, her books, her writing-desk, and her works of charity, all within her reach; or if nothing but musing would do, she could scarcely see an object in that room which had not an interesting remembrance connected with it. Everything was a friend; and held a memory of how her aunt Bertram had spoken for her, or Miss Lee had been encouraging, or how Edmund had been her champion; he had supported her cause, he had told her not to cry, or had given her some proof of affection which made her tears delightful.

The room was most dear to her, and she would not have changed its furniture for the handsomest in the house, though its greatest elegancies were a faded footstool of Julia's work, too ill done for the drawing-room, a collection of family profiles, thought unworthy of being anywhere else, and a small sketch of a ship sent four years ago from the Mediterranean by William, with H.M.S. Antwerp at the bottom, in letters as tall as the mainmast.

But as Fanny walked round the room on this morning, her doubts were increasing. Was she right in refusing what was so strongly wished for? Was it not selfishness, and a fear of exposing herself? It would be so horrible to her to act that she was inclined to suspect the purity of her own scruples; and as she looked around, the claims of her cousins were strengthened by the sight of present upon present that she had received from them. The table was covered with work-boxes which had been given her at different times, principally by Tom; and she grew bewildered. A tap at the door roused her, and her gentle "Come in" was answered by the appearance of one, before whom all her doubts were wont to be laid. Her eyes brightened at the sight of Edmund.

"Can I speak with you, Fanny?" said he.

"Yes, certainly."

"I want your opinion."

"My opinion!" she cried, shrinking from such a compliment, highly as it gratified her.

"Yes. I do not know what to do. This acting scheme gets worse and worse, you see. They have chosen almost as bad a play as they could, and now are going to ask the help of a young man very slightly known to us. This is the end of privacy and propriety. I know no harm of Charles Maddox; but the excessive intimacy which must spring from his joining us is highly objectionable. It appears to me an evil that must, if possible, be prevented."

"Yes; but what can be done? Your brother is so determined."

"I must take Anhalt myself, Fanny. Nothing else will quiet Tom."

Fanny could not answer him.

"It is not what I like," he continued, "but I can think of no other alternative. Can you, Fanny?"

"No," said Fanny slowly, "not immediately, but—"

"I see your judgment is not with me. Think it over. Perhaps you are not aware of the unpleasantness that must arise from a young man's being received in this manner. Think of the licence which every rehearsal must create. It is very bad! Put yourself in Miss Crawford's place, Fanny. I heard enough of what she said to you last night to understand her unwillingness to act with a stranger; and as she probably took the part with different expectations—it would be really wrong to expose her to it. Does it not strike you so, Fanny? You hesitate."

"I am sorry for Miss Crawford; but I am more sorry to see you drawn in to do what you had resolved against, and what you think will be disagreeable to my uncle. It will be such a triumph to the others!"

"They will not have much cause of triumph when they see how infamously I act. But if I can restrain the publicity of the business, and limit the exhibition, I shall be repaid. As I am now, I have no influence: but when I have put them in good-humour by this concession, I hope to persuade them to confine the play within a much smaller circle, to Mrs. Rushworth and the Grants. Will not this be worth gaining?"

"Yes, it will be a great point."

"But still it has not your approval. Give me your approbation, Fanny. I am not comfortable without it."

"Oh, cousin!"

"If you are against me, I ought to distrust myself, and yet I cannot let Tom go riding about the country in quest of anybody who can be persuaded to act. I thought you would have entered more into Miss Crawford's feelings."

"It must be a great relief to her," said Fanny, trying for greater warmth of manner.

"She never appeared more amiable than in her behaviour to you last night."

"She was very kind, indeed, and I am glad to have her spared..."

She could not finish, but Edmund was satisfied.

"Now, dear Fanny, I will not interrupt you any longer," said he. "But I could not be easy till I had spoken to you. My head has been full of this matter all night. I shall go to Tom directly and get it over, and when we meet at breakfast we shall be all in high good-humour at the prospect of acting the fool together. You, in the meanwhile, will be taking a trip into China, I suppose."—opening a volume on the table. "And here are Crabbe's Tales, and the Idler, to relieve you, if you tire of your great book. I admire your little establishment exceedingly; and as soon as I am gone, you will empty your head of all this nonsense, and sit comfortably down to your table."

He went; but there was no reading, no China, no composure for Fanny. He had told her the most extraordinary, the most unwelcome news; and she could think of nothing else. To be acting! After all his objections! Could it be possible? Edmund so inconsistent! Was he not deceiving himself? Was he not wrong?

Alas! it was all Miss Crawford's doing. She had seen her influence in every speech, and was miserable. The doubts as to her own conduct, which had previously distressed her, were become of little consequence now. This deeper anxiety swallowed them up. She cared not how it ended. Her cousins might attack, but she was beyond their reach; and if at last obliged to yield—no matter—it was all misery now.

CHAPTER 17

It was, indeed, a triumphant day to Mr. Bertram and Maria. Such a victory over Edmund had been beyond their hopes, and was most delightful. Edmund might still look grave, and say he did not like the scheme; but their point was gained: he was to act, and he was driven to it by selfish inclinations only. Edmund had descended from his moral elevation, and they were both the happier for the descent.

They behaved very well to him, however, betraying no exultation beyond the lines about the corners of the mouth. When Edmund gave a hint of his hope that the audience would be limited, they were ready to promise anything. It was all good-humour and encouragement. Mrs. Norris offered to contrive his dress, and Mr. Rushworth undertook to count his speeches.

"Perhaps," said Tom, "Fanny may be more disposed to oblige us now. Perhaps you may persuade her."

"No, she is quite determined. She will not act."

"Oh! very well." Not another word was said; but Fanny felt herself again in danger, and her indifference to the danger was beginning to fail her already.

Miss Crawford entered into the affair with such renewed cheerfulness as could have but one effect on Edmund. "He was certainly right in respecting her feelings; he was glad he had determined on it." And the morning wore away in satisfactions very sweet, if not very sound.

One advantage resulted to Fanny: at Miss Crawford's request, Mrs. Grant agreed to take the part for which Fanny had been wanted. Even this brought a pang, for it was Miss Crawford to whom she was obliged. She was safe; but peace and safety were unconnected here. Her mind had been never farther from peace. She could not feel that she had done wrong, but she was disquieted in every other way. Her heart and her judgment were equally against Edmund's decision: she could not acquit his unsteadiness, and his happiness made her wretched. She was full of jealousy and agitation. Miss Crawford's looks of gaiety seemed an insult, and she could hardly answer her friendly expressions calmly.

Everybody around her was busy and important; each had their part, their dress, their favourite scene, their friends: all were finding employment. She alone was sad and insignificant: she had no share in anything; she might go or stay without being seen or missed. She could almost think anything would have been preferable to this. Mrs. Grant was of consequence: she was sought for, and attended, and praised; and Fanny was in some danger of envying her the character she had accepted. But reflection brought better feelings, and showed her that Mrs. Grant was entitled to respect which could never have belonged to *her*; and that she could never have supported a scheme which, considering her uncle, she must condemn.

Fanny's heart was not the only saddened one. Julia was a sufferer too, though not quite so blamelessly.

Henry Crawford had trifled with her feelings; but she had allowed his attentions, and now that his preference for Maria had been forced on her, she submitted to it without any alarm for Maria's situation, or any endeavour at tranquillity for herself. She either sat in gloomy silence; or, allowing the attentions of Mr. Yates, was talking with forced gaiety to him alone, and ridiculing the acting of the others.

For a day or two, Henry Crawford had endeavoured to do away the affront by the usual attack of gallantry and compliment, but he had not cared enough to persevere;

and becoming too busy to have time for more than one flirtation, he grew indifferent to the quarrel, or rather thought it lucky in quietly putting an end to her expectations. He assured Mrs Grant, with a smile, that neither he nor Julia had ever had a serious thought of each other. She cautioned him as to the elder sister, entreating him not to risk too much admiration there.

"I rather wonder Julia is not in love with Henry," was her observation to Mary.

"I dare say she is," replied Mary coldly. "I imagine both sisters are."

"Both! no, that must not be. Think of Mr. Rushworth!"

"You had better tell Miss Bertram to think of Mr. Rushworth. It may do her some good."

"I dare say he will be in parliament soon, when Sir Thomas comes."

"Sir Thomas is to achieve many mighty things when he comes home," said Mary. "Everything seems to depend upon Sir Thomas's return."

"You will find his consequence very reasonable when you see him, I assure you. He has a fine dignified manner, which suits the head of such a house. Lady Bertram seems more of a cipher now than when he is at home; and nobody else can keep Mrs. Norris in order. But, Mary, do not fancy that Maria Bertram cares for Henry. I am sure Julia does not, or she would not have flirted as she did last night with Mr. Yates; and though he and Maria are very good friends, I think she likes Sotherton too well to be inconstant."

"I would not give much for Mr. Rushworth's chance if Henry stepped in."

"If you have such a suspicion, something must be done; and as soon as the play is all over, we will talk to him seriously; and if he means nothing, we will send him off, though he is Henry, for a time."

Julia did suffer, however. She had loved, she did love still; and she was suffering under the disappointment of a dear, though irrational hope, and a strong sense of ill-usage. Her heart was sore and angry, and she was capable only of angry consolations. Her sister was now become her greatest enemy: and Julia was not above hoping for some distressing end to the attentions which were still carrying on. The sisters had not affection or principle enough to give them honour or compassion. Maria felt her triumph, and pursued her purpose, careless of Julia; and Julia trusted that there would be punishment for Maria at last.

Fanny saw and pitied much of this in Julia; but they did not speak of it to each other. They were two solitary sufferers.

The blindness of the two brothers and their aunt to this must be imputed to the fullness of their own minds. Tom was engrossed by the concerns of his theatre. Edmund, with Miss Crawford's claims, was equally unobservant; and Mrs. Norris was too busy in directing little matters, and saving half a crown here and there for the absent Sir Thomas, to have leisure for watching the behaviour, or guarding the happiness of his daughters.

CHAPTER 18

Everything was now in train: theatre, actors, actresses, and dresses, were all getting forward; but Fanny found that it was not all uninterrupted enjoyment to the party. Everybody began to have their vexation. Edmund had many. Against his judgment, a scene-painter arrived from town, and was at work, increasing the expenses; and his brother was giving an invitation to every family who came in his way. Tom himself began to fret, and to feel the miseries of waiting. He had learned his part—all his parts, for he took every trifling one that could be united with the Butler, and was impatient to be acting.

Fanny, being a very courteous listener, came in for the complaints of most of them. She knew that Mr. Yates was in general thought to rant dreadfully; that Mr. Yates was disappointed in Henry Crawford; that Tom Bertram spoke too quick; that Mrs. Grant spoiled everything by laughing; that Edmund was behindhand with his part, and that it was misery to have anything to do with Mr. Rushworth, who needed a prompter through every speech. She knew, also, that poor Mr. Rushworth could seldom get anybody to rehearse with him: and so decidedly did her cousin Maria avoid him, and so needlessly often did she rehearse the first scene with Mr. Crawford, that Fanny was soon terrified of other complaints from him.

So far from being all satisfied, everybody required something they had not. Everybody had a part either too long or too short; nobody would attend as they ought; nobody would remember on which side they were to come in; nobody but the complainer would observe any directions.

Fanny derived much innocent enjoyment from the play. Henry Crawford acted well, and it was a pleasure to her to creep into the theatre, and attend the rehearsal of the first act, in spite of the feelings it excited in some speeches for Maria. Maria also acted well, too well. Fanny began to be their only audience, sometimes as prompter, sometimes as spectator.

As far as she could judge, Mr. Crawford was the best actor of all: he had more confidence than Edmund, more judgment than Tom, more talent and taste than Mr. Yates. She did not like him, but she must admit him to be the best actor. The day came at last, when Mr. Rushworth turned to her with a black look, and said, "Do you think there is anything so very fine in all this? For the life and soul of me, I cannot admire him. To see such an undersized man set up for a fine actor, is ridiculous in my opinion."

From this moment there was a return of his jealousy, which Maria, from increasing hopes of Crawford, was at little pains to remove; and the chances of Mr. Rushworth's ever learning his two-and-forty speeches became much less. As to his ever making anything tolerable of them, nobody had the smallest idea of that; they aspired at nothing beyond his remembering the first line of his speech, and being able to follow the prompter through the rest. Fanny, in her pity and kindheartedness, was at great pains to teach him how to learn, trying to make an artificial memory for him, and learning every word of his part herself, but without his being much the forwarder.

Many apprehensive feelings she certainly had; but with these claims on her attention, she was far from finding herself without employment. She was occasionally useful to all; she was perhaps as much at peace as any.

There was a great deal of needlework to be done, moreover, in which her help was wanted; and Mrs. Norris thought her quite as well off as the rest—"Come, Fanny,"

she cried, "these are fine times for you, but you must not be always looking on at your ease; I want you here. I have been slaving till I can hardly stand, to contrive Mr. Rushworth's cloak without sending for more satin; now you may help me in putting it together. There are but three seams; you may do them in a trice. If nobody did more than you, we should not get on very fast."

Fanny took the work very quietly, but her kinder aunt Bertram observed—

"One cannot wonder, sister, that Fanny should be delighted: it is all new to her, you know; I used to be very fond of a play, and when I am a little more at leisure, I mean to look in at their rehearsals. What is the play about, Fanny? you have never told me."

"Oh! sister, pray do not ask her now; for Fanny cannot talk and work at the same time. It is about Lovers' Vows."

"I believe," said Fanny to her aunt Bertram, "there will be three acts rehearsed to-morrow evening, when you may see all the actors."

"You had better stay till the curtain is hung," interposed Mrs. Norris; "the curtain will be hung in a day or two, and you will find it draws up into very handsome festoons."

Lady Bertram seemed quite resigned to waiting. Fanny did not share her aunt's composure: she thought of the morrow a great deal, for if the three acts were rehearsed, Edmund and Miss Crawford would then be acting together for the first time. The third act would bring a scene between them which interested her particularly, and which she was longing and dreading to see how they would perform. The whole subject of it was love—a marriage of love was to be described by the gentleman, and little short of a declaration of love made by the lady.

She had read and read the scene again with many painful, wondering emotions. She did not believe they had yet rehearsed it, even in private.

The morrow came, and Fanny worked diligently under her aunt's directions, but her diligence concealed a very absent, anxious mind. About noon she made her escape with her work to the East room, to avoid another unnecessary rehearsal of the first act, which Henry Crawford was proposing. She worked and meditated in the East room, undisturbed, for a quarter of an hour, when a gentle tap at the door was followed by the entrance of Miss Crawford.

"Am I right? Yes; this is the East room. My dear Miss Price, I beg your pardon, but I have come to entreat your help."

Fanny, surprised, answered civilly, and looked at the bars of her empty grate with concern.

"Thank you; I am quite warm. Allow me to stay a little while, and have the goodness to hear me my third act. I have brought my book, and if you would but rehearse it with me, I should be so obliged! I came to-day intending to rehearse it with Edmund, but he is not here; and if he were, I do not think I could go through it with him, till I have hardened myself a little; for really there is a speech or two. You will be so good, won't you?"

Fanny was most civil in her assurances, though she could not give them in a very steady voice.

"Have you ever happened to look at the part I mean?" continued Miss Crawford, opening her book. "I did not think much of it at first—but, upon my word. There, look at that speech, and that. How am I to look him in the face and say such things? Could you do it? But he is your cousin, which makes all the difference. You must rehearse it with me, that I may fancy you him, and get on by degrees. You have a look of his sometimes."

"Have I? I will do my best; but I must read the part, for I can say very little of it."

"None of it, I suppose. We must have two chairs for the front of the stage. There—very good school-room chairs, fitted for little girls to sit and kick their feet against. What would your governess and your uncle say to see them used for such a purpose? If Sir Thomas could see us now, he would bless himself, for we are rehearsing all over the house. Yates is storming away in the dining-room, and the theatre is engaged of course by Agatha and Frederick. By the bye, I looked in upon them five minutes ago, at exactly one of the times when they were trying not to embrace, and Mr. Rushworth was with me. I thought he began to look a little queer, so I whispered to him, 'We shall have an excellent Agatha; there is something so completely *maternal* in her manner.' Was not that well done of me? He brightened up directly. Now for my soliloquy."

She began, and Fanny joined in, but with looks and voice so feminine as to be no very good picture of a man. With such an Anhalt, however, Miss Crawford had courage enough; and they had got through half the scene, when a tap at the door, and the entrance of Edmund, suspended it.

Surprise, consciousness, and pleasure appeared in each on this unexpected meeting. Edmund was come on the very same business that had brought Miss Crawford. He too had his book, and was seeking Fanny to ask her to rehearse with him, without knowing Miss Crawford was in the house. Great was the joy of being thus thrown together, and sympathising in praise of Fanny's kind offices.

She could not equal them in their warmth. Her spirits sank under the glow of theirs, and she felt herself becoming too nearly nothing to both to have any comfort in having been sought by either.

They must now rehearse together. Edmund entreated it, till the lady, not very unwilling, could refuse no longer, and Fanny was wanted only to prompt and observe them. She was earnestly desired to tell them all their faults; but shrank from the task. To prompt them must be enough; and it was sometimes more than enough; for in watching them she forgot herself; and, agitated by the increasing spirit of Edmund's manner, closed the page and turned away exactly as he wanted help. It was imputed to very reasonable weariness, and she was thanked and pitied; but she deserved their pity more than she hoped they would ever guess.

At last the scene was over, and Fanny forced herself to add her praise to the compliments each was giving the other. When again alone, she was inclined to believe their performance would, indeed, have such feeling in it as must ensure their credit, and make it very painful to herself. However, she must bear the brunt of it again that very day.

The rehearsal of the three first acts was to take place in the evening; and everyone concerned was looking forward with eagerness. With the exception of Lady Bertram, Mrs. Norris, and Julia, everybody was in the theatre early, waiting only the arrival of Mrs. Grant and the Crawfords to begin.

They did not wait long for the Crawfords, but there was no Mrs. Grant. She could not come. Dr. Grant, who was ill, could not spare his wife.

Here was disappointment! They could not rehearse without her. What was to be done? After a pause, some eyes were turned towards Fanny, and a voice said, "If Miss Price would be so good as to read the part." She was immediately surrounded by supplications; even Edmund said, "Do, Fanny, if it is not very disagreeable to you."

Fanny could not endure the idea of it. Why had not she gone safely to her room, instead of attending the rehearsal? She had known it her duty to keep away. She was properly punished.

"You have only to read the part," said Henry Crawford.

"I do believe she can say every word of it," added Maria. "Fanny, I am sure you know the part."

As they all persevered, as Edmund repeated his wish, she must yield. She would do her best. Everybody was satisfied; and she was left to the tremors of a palpitating heart, while the others prepared to begin.

They did begin; and being too much engaged in their own noise to notice an unusual noise in the other part of the house, had proceeded some way when the door of the room was thrown open. Julia, appearing at it, her face aghast, exclaimed, "My father is come! He is in the hall at this moment."

CHAPTER 19

How is the consternation of the party to be described? To most it was a moment of absolute horror. Sir Thomas in the house! After the first exclamations, not a word was spoken for half a minute: each with an altered countenance was looking at some other, and feeling it a stroke the most unwelcome, most ill-timed! Mr. Yates might consider it only as an interruption, and Mr. Rushworth might imagine it a blessing; but every other heart was sinking under self-condemnation or undefined alarm. It was a terrible pause; and terrible to every ear were the sounds of opening doors and footsteps.

Julia was the first to move and speak again. At the moment of her appearance, Frederick was listening with devoted looks to Agatha, and pressing her hand to his heart; and as soon as Julia noticed this, and saw that he still retained her sister's hand, her wounded heart swelled again with injury. She left the room, saying, "*I need not be afraid of appearing before him.*"

Her going roused the rest. The two brothers stepped forward, and agreed they must go to the drawing-room directly. Maria joined them, just then the stoutest of the three; for the very circumstance which had driven Julia away was to her the sweetest support. Henry Crawford's retaining her hand at such a moment was worth ages of doubt and anxiety. She hailed it as a sign of the most serious intent, and was equal even to encounter her father.

They walked off, heedless of Mr. Rushworth's repeated question of, "Shall I go too? Had not I better go too?" Henry Crawford answered the anxious inquiry, and, encouraging him to pay his respects to Sir Thomas, sent him after the others with delighted haste.

Fanny was left with the Crawfords and Mr. Yates. She had been quite overlooked; and as her own opinion of her claim on Sir Thomas's affection was much too humble to give her any idea of classing herself with his children, she was glad to remain behind. Her agitation was excessive. She was nearly fainting: all her habitual dread of her uncle was returning, and with it, compassion for him and for the others, with solicitude on Edmund's account indescribable. She sat, trembling, while the other three were giving vent to their feelings, lamenting over such an unlooked-for arrival, and wishing Sir Thomas were still in Antigua.

The Crawfords were more warm on the subject than Mr. Yates, from better understanding the family. The ruin of the play was to them a certainty: while Mr. Yates considered it only as an interruption for the evening, and suggested the possibility of the rehearsal being renewed after tea. The Crawfords laughed at the idea; and invited Mr. Yates to spend the evening with them at the Parsonage. But Mr. Yates, thanking them, said, "he preferred remaining, that he might pay his respects to the old gentleman; and besides, he did not think it would be fair by the others to have everybody run away."

Fanny was commissioned with the Crawfords' apology, and went to perform the dreadful duty of appearing before her uncle.

Too soon did she find herself at the drawing-room door. After pausing a moment for a courage which the outside of no door had ever supplied to her, she turned the lock in desperation, and the collected family were before her. Her own name caught her ear. Sir Thomas was looking round, and saying, "Why do not I see my little Fanny?"—and on perceiving her, came forward with a kindness which astonished her, calling her his dear Fanny, kissing her affectionately, and observing with pleasure how much she was grown!

Fanny knew not how to feel, nor where to look. She was quite oppressed. He had never been so kind to her in his life. His manner seemed changed, his voice was joyful; and his awful dignity seemed lost in tenderness. He led her nearer the light and looked at her again—inquired after her health, and then, correcting himself, observed that he need not inquire, for her appearance spoke sufficiently on that point.

He inquired next after her family, especially William: and his kindness made her reproach herself for loving him so little. When, on having courage to lift her eyes to his face, she saw that he was grown thinner, and looked worn and fatigued, every tender feeling was increased, and she was miserable in considering how much unsuspected vexation was ready to burst on him.

Sir Thomas was indeed the life of the party. His delight in being in the centre of his family, after such a separation, made him unusually communicative and chatty; and he was ready to answer every question of his two sons almost before it was put. His business in Antigua had prospered, and he came directly from Liverpool, having had an opportunity of making his passage in a private vessel, instead of waiting for the packet.

As he sat by Lady Bertram, he looked with heartfelt satisfaction on the faces around him—interrupting himself more than once, to remark on his good fortune in finding them all at home—all collected together exactly as he could have wished. Mr. Rushworth was not forgotten: a most friendly warmth of hand-shaking had already met him. There was nothing disagreeable in Mr. Rushworth's appearance, and Sir Thomas was liking him already.

By not one of the circle was he listened to with such unalloyed enjoyment as by his wife, who was really extremely happy to see him, and whose feelings were so warmed by his sudden arrival as to make her almost fluttered for a few minutes. She put away her work, moved Pug from her side, and gave all her attention to her husband. It was so agreeable to see him again, that she began to feel how dreadfully she must have missed him, and how impossible it would have been for her to bear a lengthened absence.

Mrs. Norris was not as happy as her sister. Not that she feared Sir Thomas's disapprobation when the present state of his house should be known, for her judgment had been so blinded that she had no alarm; but she was vexed by the manner of his return. It had left her nothing to do. Instead of her seeing him first, and spreading the happy news through the house, Sir Thomas had sought no confidant but the butler. Mrs. Norris felt herself defrauded of an office on which she had depended, whether his arrival or his death were to be the thing unfolded; and was now trying to be in a bustle without having anything to bustle about, and when nothing was wanted but tranquillity and silence. Would Sir Thomas have consented to eat, she might have gone to the housekeeper with troublesome directions; but Sir Thomas resolutely declined all dinner: he would rather wait for tea. Still Mrs. Norris was at intervals urging something; and in the most interesting moment of his passage to England, when the alarm of a French privateer was at its height, she burst through his recital with the proposal of soup.

Sir Thomas could not be provoked. "Still the same anxiety for everybody's comfort, my dear Mrs. Norris," was his answer. "But indeed I would rather have nothing but tea."

"Well, then, Lady Bertram, suppose you order tea directly." This done, Sir Thomas's narrative proceeded.

At length there was a pause. In her elation Lady Bertram became talkative, and what were the sensations of her children upon hearing her say, "How do you think the young people have been amusing themselves, Sir Thomas? They have been acting."

"Indeed! and what have you been acting?"

"Oh! they'll tell you all about it."

"The *all* will soon be told," cried Tom hastily; "but we will not bore my father with it now. You will hear enough of it to-morrow, sir. We have just been trying, by way of amusing my mother, to get up a few scenes, a mere trifle. We have had such incessant rains since October began, that we have been confined to the house for days together. I have hardly taken out a gun since the 3rd. Tolerable sport the first three days, but there has been no attempting anything since. The first day I went over Mansfield Wood, and Edmund took the copses beyond Easton, and we brought home six brace between us, and might have killed six times as many, but we respect your pheasants, sir, as much as you could desire. I never saw Mansfield Wood so full of pheasants as this year. I hope you will take a day's sport there yourself, sir, soon."

For the present the danger was over, and Fanny's sick feelings subsided; but when tea was brought in, and Sir Thomas, getting up, said that he would just look into his own dear room, every agitation returned. He was gone before anything had been said to prepare him for the change he must find; and a pause of alarm followed his disappearance.

"Something must be done," said Edmund.

"We must think of our visitors," said Maria, still feeling her hand pressed to Henry Crawford's heart. "Where did you leave Miss Crawford, Fanny?"

Fanny told of their departure, and delivered their message.

"Then poor Yates is all alone," cried Tom. "I will go and fetch him."

To the theatre he went, and reached it just in time to witness the first meeting of his father and his friend. Sir Thomas had been a good deal surprised to find candles burning in his room; and on casting his eye round it, to see a general air of confusion in the furniture. The removal of the bookcase from before the billiard-room door struck him especially, but he had scarcely time to feel astonished, before there were sounds from the billiard-room to astonish him still farther. Some one was talking there loudly; he did not know the voice.

He stepped to the door, and, opening it, found himself on the stage of a theatre, opposite a ranting young man, who appeared likely to knock him down backwards. At the very moment of Yates perceiving Sir Thomas, and giving perhaps the very best start he had ever given in the whole course of his rehearsals, Tom Bertram entered; and never had he found greater difficulty in keeping his countenance. The gradual metamorphosis of the impassioned Baron Wildenheim into the well-bred and easy Mr. Yates, making his bow and apology to Sir Thomas Bertram, was such a piece of true acting as he would not have lost upon any account. It would probably be the last scene on that stage; but he was sure there could not be a finer.

It was necessary for him to step forward and assist the introduction, and with awkward sensations he did his best. Sir Thomas received Mr. Yates with the appearance of cordiality, but was really far from pleased with the acquaintance. Mr. Yates's family were sufficiently known to him to render his introduction as the "particular friend" exceedingly unwelcome; and it needed all the joy of being at home to save Sir Thomas from anger.

Tom understood his father's thoughts, and began to see, more clearly than he had done before, that there might be some ground of offence, that there might be some reason for the glance his father gave towards the ceiling; and that when he inquired with mild gravity after the fate of the billiard-table, he was not proceeding beyond a very allowable curiosity. The three gentlemen returned to the drawing-room together, Sir Thomas with an increase of gravity which was not lost on all.

"I come from your theatre," said he composedly, as he sat down; "It took me by surprise, as I had not the smallest suspicion of your acting having assumed so serious a character. It appears a neat job, however, and does my friend Christopher Jackson credit." And then he would have changed the subject; but Mr. Yates, without discernment or discretion, would keep him on the topic of the theatre, would torment him with remarks about it, and finally would make him hear the whole history of his disappointment at Ecclesford. Sir Thomas listened most politely, but found much to confirm his ill-opinion of Mr. Yates.

"This was, in fact, the origin of our acting," said Tom. "My friend Yates brought the infection from Ecclesford, and it spread—as those things always spread, you know, sir—the faster, probably, from your having encouraged the sort of thing in us formerly. It was like treading old ground."

Mr. Yates immediately gave Sir Thomas an account of what they were doing: told him of the happy conclusion of their first difficulties, and present state of affairs; blind to the uneasy movements of his friends, the fidget, the hem! of unquietness, and even to the expression of the face on which his own eyes were fixed. Sir Thomas's dark brow contracted as he looked with inquiring earnestness at his daughters and Edmund, dwelling particularly on the latter with reproof.

Fanny, screened from notice herself, saw all that was passing. Such a look of reproach at Edmund from his father she could never have expected to witness; and to feel that it was in any way deserved was terrible indeed.

Mr. Yates was still talking. "To own the truth, Sir Thomas, we were in the middle of a rehearsal when you arrived. Nothing more can be done to-night; but if you will give us the honour of your company to-morrow, I should not be afraid of the result. We ask your indulgence as young performers."

"My indulgence shall be given, sir," replied Sir Thomas gravely, "but without any other rehearsal." And with a relenting smile, he added, "I come home to be happy and indulgent. Mr. and Miss Crawford were mentioned in my last letters from Mansfield. Do you find them agreeable acquaintance?"

Tom was the only one ready with an answer. "Mr. Crawford was a most pleasant, gentleman-like man; his sister a sweet, pretty, elegant, lively girl."

Mr. Rushworth could be silent no longer. "You should tell your father he is not above five feet eight, or he will be expecting a well-looking man."

Sir Thomas did not quite understand this, and looked with some surprise at the speaker.

Mr. Rushworth continued. "In my opinion it is very disagreeable to be always rehearsing. I think we are a great deal better employed, sitting comfortably here among ourselves, and doing nothing."

Sir Thomas replied with an approving smile, "I am happy to find our sentiments so much the same. It gives me sincere satisfaction. That I should feel scruples which my children do not feel, is perfectly natural; and equally my love of domestic tranquillity should exceed theirs. But at your time of life to feel all this, is a most favourable circumstance for yourself; and I am glad to have an ally of such weight."

Sir Thomas was aware that he must not expect a genius in Mr. Rushworth; but as a well-judging, steady young man, with better notions than his elocution would do justice to, he intended to value him very highly. Mr. Rushworth hardly knew what to do with so much meaning; but by looking exceedingly pleased with Sir Thomas's good opinion, and saying scarcely anything, he did his best towards preserving that good opinion a little longer.

CHAPTER 20

Edmund's first object the next morning was to see his father alone, and give him a fair statement of the whole acting scheme, defending his own share in it as far only as he could feel his motives to deserve. He was anxious to say nothing unkind of the others: but there was only one whose conduct he could mention without necessity of defence.

"We have all been to blame," said he, "excepting Fanny. Fanny has judged rightly throughout. Her feelings have been steadily against it from first to last. She never ceased to think of what was due to you. You will find Fanny everything you could wish."

Sir Thomas saw all the impropriety of the scheme as strongly as his son had supposed. Having shaken hands with Edmund, he meant to try to lose the disagreeable impression as soon as the house had been restored to its proper state. He did not remonstrate with his other children: he was willing to believe they felt their error.

There was one person, however, to whom he must speak. He hinted to Mrs. Norris that he hoped she might have advised the young people against the play. They ought to have been capable of a better decision themselves; but they were young; and, excepting Edmund, of unsteady characters. He was greatly surprised at her allowing their unsafe amusements.

Mrs. Norris was a little confounded and as close to being silenced as ever she had been in her life; for she was ashamed to confess to having never seen any of the impropriety which was so glaring to Sir Thomas. Her only resource was to get out of the subject as fast as possible. She had a great deal to say in her own praise as to her exertion and many sacrifices and economies, whereby a considerable saving had arisen.

But her chief strength lay in Sotherton. Her greatest glory was in having formed the connexion with the Rushworths. There she was impregnable. She took all the credit. "If I had not been active," said she, "and prevailed on my sister to pay the first visit, nothing would have come of it; for Mr. Rushworth is a modest young man who wants encouragement. But I left no stone unturned. I was ready to move heaven and earth to persuade my sister. You know the distance to Sotherton; it was in the middle of winter, and the roads almost impassable, but I did persuade her."

"I know how great your influence is with Lady Bertram and her children, and am the more concerned that it should not have been on the occasion of the play."

"My dear Sir Thomas, if you had seen the state of the roads that day! I thought we should never have got through, though we had the four horses; and poor old coachman would attend us, though he was hardly able to sit on account of the rheumatism which I had been doctoring him for ever since Michaelmas. I cured him at last; but he was very bad all the winter, and I said to him, 'Coachman, you had much better not go.' But he was bent upon going, and as I hate to be officious, I said no more; but my heart quite ached for him at every jolt, and when we got into the rough lanes about Stoke, I was quite in an agony about him. And then the poor horses too! You know how I always feel for the horses. When we got to the bottom of Sandcroft Hill, what do you think I did? You will laugh at me; but I got out and walked up. I did indeed. It might not be saving them much, but it was something, and I could not bear to sit at my ease and be dragged up at the expense of those noble animals. I caught a dreadful cold, but that I did not regard. My object was accomplished in the visit."

"I hope we shall always think the acquaintance worth any trouble that might be taken to establish it. There is nothing very striking in Mr. Rushworth's manners, but I was pleased last night with his opinion on one subject: his decided preference of a quiet family party to the bustle of acting."

"Yes, indeed. He is not a shining character, but he has a thousand good qualities; and is so disposed to look up to you, that I am quite laughed at about it, for everybody considers it as my doing. 'Upon my word, Mrs. Norris,' said Mrs. Grant the other day, 'if Mr. Rushworth were a son of your own, he could not hold Sir Thomas in greater respect.'"

Sir Thomas gave up, foiled by her evasions and disarmed by her flattery; and was obliged to be satisfied with the conviction that her kindness sometimes overpowered her judgment.

It was a busy morning for him. He had to reinstate himself in all the concerns of his Mansfield life: to see his steward and his bailiff; to visit his stables, gardens and plantations; but, active and methodical, he had not only done all this before dinner, he had also set the carpenter to work in pulling down the theatre. The scene-painter was gone, having only spoilt the floor of one room, ruined all the coachman's sponges, and made five of the under-servants idle and dissatisfied; and Sir Thomas hoped that another day or two would suffice to wipe away every outward memento of what had been, even to the destruction of every copy of Lovers' Vows in the house, for he was burning all that met his eye.

Mr. Yates was beginning now to understand Sir Thomas's intentions. He and his friend had been out with their guns, and Tom had explained what was to be expected. Mr. Yates felt it acutely. To be a second time disappointed in the same way was severe ill-luck; and had it not been for delicacy towards his friend, and his friend's youngest sister, he believed he should certainly attack the baronet on the absurdity of his proceedings.

He believed this very stoutly all the way home; but there was a something in Sir Thomas, when they sat round the table, which made Mr. Yates think it wiser to let him pursue his own way. He had known many disagreeable fathers before, but never had he seen one so tyrannical as Sir Thomas. He might be thankful to his fair daughter Julia that Mr. Yates meant to stay a few days longer under his roof.

The evening passed with external smoothness, though every mind was ruffled; and the music which Sir Thomas called for from his daughters helped to conceal the want of real harmony. Maria was in a good deal of agitation. It was of the utmost consequence to her that Crawford should now lose no time in declaring himself, and she was disturbed that even a day should go by without seeming to advance that point. She had been expecting to see him the whole day, and was still expecting him. Mr. Rushworth had set off for Sotherton; and she had fondly hoped for such an immediate declaration as might save him the trouble of ever coming back again. But they had seen no one from the Parsonage, and had heard no tidings beyond a friendly note from Mrs. Grant to Lady Bertram.

It was a sad, anxious day; and the morrow brought more evil for Maria. A few moments of feverish enjoyment were followed by hours of acute suffering. Henry Crawford was again in the house: he walked up with Dr. Grant, and they were ushered into the breakfast-room.

Sir Thomas appeared, and Maria saw with delight and agitation the introduction of the man she loved to her father. Her sensations were indefinable, and so were they a few minutes afterwards upon hearing Henry Crawford ask Tom in an undervoice whether there were any plans for resuming the play, because, in that case, he should

make a point of returning to Mansfield at any time required by the party. He was going away immediately to meet his uncle at Bath; but if there were any prospect of a renewal of Lovers' Vows, he should hold himself engaged, and break through every other claim.

"From Bath, Norfolk, London, wherever I may be," said he; "I will attend you at an hour's notice."

Tom said, "I am sorry you are going; but our play is entirely at an end. The painter was sent off yesterday, and little will remain of the theatre tomorrow. It is early for Bath. You will find nobody there."

"It is my uncle's usual time."

"When do you think of going?"

"I may, perhaps, get as far as Banbury to-day."

"Whose stables do you use at Bath?" was the next question; and while this was under discussion, Maria, who wanted neither pride nor resolution, prepared herself with tolerable calmness.

To her he soon turned, repeating what he had already said, with only a softened air and stronger expressions of regret. But what availed his expressions or his air? He was going, and intending to stay away; for, excepting what might be due to his uncle, his engagements were all self-imposed. He might talk of necessity, but she knew his independence. The hand which had so pressed hers to his heart! hand and heart were alike motionless and passive now! Her spirit supported her, but the agony of her mind was severe. She had not long to bury the tumult of her feelings; for the farewell visit was a very short one. He was gone—he had touched her hand for the last time. Henry Crawford was gone, gone from the house, and two hours afterwards from the parish; and so ended all the hopes his selfish vanity had raised in Maria and Julia Bertram.

Julia could rejoice that he was gone. His presence was beginning to be odious to her. Henry Crawford gone, she could even pity her sister.

With a purer spirit did Fanny rejoice in the news. She heard it at dinner, and felt it a blessing. By all the others it was mentioned with regret; Mrs. Norris began to wonder that his falling in love with Julia had come to nothing.

Another day or two, and Mr. Yates was gone likewise. Sir Thomas had been quite indifferent to Mr. Crawford's going or staying: but his goodbyes to Mr. Yates were given with genuine satisfaction. Sir Thomas hoped, in seeing him out of the house, to be rid of the worst object connected with the theatrical scheme, and now the theatre was dismantled, the last that must be reminding him of its existence.

Mrs. Norris contrived to remove one article from his sight that might have distressed him. The curtain, over which she had presided with such talent and success, went off with her to her cottage, where she happened to be particularly in want of green baize.

CHAPTER 21

Sir Thomas's return made a striking change in the ways of the family. Mansfield was an altered place; the spirits of many were saddened. There was little intercourse with the Parsonage, for Sir Thomas was disinclined for any engagements but in one quarter: the Rushworths.

Edmund did not wonder at his father's feelings, nor could he regret anything but the exclusion of the Grants.

"But they," he observed to Fanny, "have a claim. They seem to belong to us. I am afraid they may feel themselves neglected. If my father knew them better, he would value their society. My sisters seem out of spirits, and Tom is not at his ease. Dr. and Mrs. Grant would enliven us, and make our evenings pass with more enjoyment to my father."

"Do you think so?" said Fanny: "in my opinion, my uncle would not like any addition. I think he values the quietness you speak of. And we are no more serious than we used to be before my uncle went abroad; I cannot recollect that our evenings formerly were ever merry, except when my uncle was away."

"I believe you are right, Fanny," was his reply. "I believe our evenings are rather returned to what they were. The novelty was in their being lively. Yet, how strong the impression that a few weeks will give! I feel as if we had never lived so before."

"I suppose I am graver than other people," said Fanny. "The evenings do not appear long to me. I love to hear my uncle talk of the West Indies. I could listen to him for an hour together. I am unlike other people, I dare say."

"Why should you dare say that?" (smiling). "Do you want to be told that you are only unlike other people in being more wise? But when did you ever get a compliment from me, Fanny? Go to my father if you want to be complimented. From him you will hear compliments enough: and though they may be chiefly on your person, you must put up with it, and trust to his seeing as much beauty of mind in time."

Such language was so new to Fanny that it quite embarrassed her.

"Your uncle thinks you very pretty, dear Fanny. Your complexion is so improved!—and you have gained so much countenance!—and your figure—nay, Fanny, do not turn away. If you cannot bear an uncle's admiration, what is to become of you? You must really begin to harden yourself to the idea of being worth looking at. You must try not to mind growing up into a pretty woman."

"Oh! don't talk so," cried Fanny, distressed by more feelings than he was aware of; but seeing her distress, he stopped, and only added—

"I wish you would talk to your uncle more. You are too silent in the evening circle."

"But I do talk to him more than I used. Did not you hear me ask him about the slave-trade last night?"

"I did—and was in hopes the question would be followed up by others. It would have pleased your uncle."

"I longed to do it—but there was such a dead silence! And while my cousins were sitting by without speaking a word, I did not like—I thought it would appear as if I wanted to set myself off at their expense, by showing a pleasure in his information which he must wish his daughters to feel."

"Miss Crawford was very right in what she said the other day: that you seemed almost as fearful of notice as other women were of neglect. We were talking of you at the Parsonage. She has great discernment. For so young a woman it is remarkable! She certainly understands you better than you are understood by many here. I wonder what she thinks of my father! She must admire him as a fine-looking man, with gentlemanlike manners; but perhaps his reserve may be a little repulsive. Could they be much together, I feel sure of their liking each other. He would enjoy her liveliness. I wish they met more frequently! I hope she does not suppose there is any dislike on his side."

"She must know herself secure in the regard of the rest of you," said Fanny, with half a sigh. "And Sir Thomas's wishing at first to be only with his family will seem natural to her. After a little while, I dare say, we shall be meeting again."

"This is the first October that she has ever passed in the country. Mrs. Grant is very anxious for her not finding Mansfield dull as winter comes on."

Fanny could have said a great deal to that, but it was safer to say nothing about Miss Crawford's resources—her accomplishments, her importance, her friends, lest it should betray her into any observations that seemed unhandsome. Miss Crawford's kind opinion of herself deserved gratitude, and she began to talk of something else.

"To-morrow, my uncle dines at Sotherton. I hope he may continue to like Mr. Rushworth."

"That is impossible, Fanny. He must like him less after to-morrow's visit, for we shall be five hours in his company. He cannot much longer deceive himself. I wish that Rushworth and Maria had never met."

In this quarter, indeed, disappointment was impending for Sir Thomas. Not all his good-will for Mr. Rushworth could prevent him from soon discerning that he was an inferior young man, as ignorant in business as in books, without seeming aware of it.

He had expected a very different son-in-law; and beginning to feel grave on Maria's account, tried to understand her feelings. He observed that she was indifferent at best: her behaviour to Mr. Rushworth was careless and cold. She could not, did not like him. Sir Thomas resolved to speak seriously to her. Advantageous as would be the alliance, her happiness must not be sacrificed to it. Mr. Rushworth had, perhaps, been accepted on too short an acquaintance, and, on knowing him better, she was repenting.

With solemn kindness Sir Thomas addressed her: inquired into her wishes, entreated her to be open and sincere, and assured her that the connexion could be entirely given up, if she felt unhappy. He would act for her and release her.

Maria had a moment's struggle as she listened, and only a moment's: when her father ceased, she was able to give her answer decidedly. She thanked him for his kindness, but he was quite mistaken in supposing she had the smallest desire of breaking her engagement. She had the highest esteem for Mr. Rushworth's character, and could not doubt her happiness with him.

Sir Thomas was satisfied; too glad to be satisfied, perhaps, to urge the matter further. It was an alliance which he could not have relinquished without pain; and Mr. Rushworth was young enough to improve. If Maria could speak so securely of her happiness with him, without the blindness of love, she ought to be believed. He did not suppose her feelings to be acute; but if she could dispense with seeing her husband as a shining character, there would certainly be everything else in her favour. A young woman who did not marry for love, was in general but the more attached to her own family.

Such were the reasonings of Sir Thomas, happy to escape the embarrassment that must attend a rupture; happy to secure a respectable connexion, and very happy to think anything of his daughter that was most favourable for the purpose.

As for Maria, she was glad that she had secured her fate beyond recall: that she had pledged herself anew to Sotherton. She retired in proud resolve, determined only to behave more cautiously to Mr. Rushworth in future, that her father might not be again suspecting her.

Had Sir Thomas applied to his daughter within three or four days after Henry Crawford's leaving Mansfield, before she had given up every hope, her answer might have been different; but when there was no letter, no message, her mind became cool enough to seek all the comfort that pride and self revenge could give.

Henry Crawford had destroyed her happiness, but he should not know it; he should not destroy her credit and prosperity too. He should not think of her as pining for him. Independence was more needful than ever; she was less and less able to endure the restraint which her father imposed. Liberty was now become absolutely necessary. She must escape from Mansfield as soon as possible, and find consolation in fortune and consequence for a wounded spirit. She was quite determined.

To such feelings delay was an evil, and Mr. Rushworth could hardly be more impatient for the marriage than herself. Her mind was fully prepared for matrimony by a hatred of home, the misery of disappointed affection, and contempt of the man she was to marry.

It appeared that a very few weeks would be sufficient for the wedding arrangements. Mrs. Rushworth was ready to make way for the fortunate young woman whom her dear son had selected, and removed herself with true dowager propriety to Bath; and before the middle of November the ceremony had taken place which gave Sotherton another mistress.

It was a very proper wedding. The bride was elegantly dressed; the two bridesmaids were duly inferior; her father gave her away; her mother stood with salts in her hand, expecting to be agitated; her aunt tried to cry; and the service was impressively read by Dr. Grant.

It was done, and they were gone. Sir Thomas felt as an anxious father must feel, and was indeed experiencing much of the agitation which his wife had fortunately escaped. Mrs. Norris, most happy to assist by spending the day at the Park to support her sister's spirits, and drinking the health of Mr. and Mrs. Rushworth, was all joyous delight; for she had made the match; and no one would have supposed that she had ever heard of conjugal unhappiness in her life, or could have the smallest insight into the disposition of the niece who had been brought up under her eye.

The couple planned to proceed to Brighton, and take a house there for some weeks. When the novelty of amusement there was over, it would be time for the wider range of London.

Julia was to go with them to Brighton. Since rivalry between the sisters had ceased, they had been gradually recovering much of their former good understanding; and were exceedingly glad to be with each other at such a time. Some other companion than Mr. Rushworth was of great importance to his lady; and Julia was quite as eager for novelty and pleasure as Maria.

Their departure made another change at Mansfield, a chasm which required some time to fill up. Even their mother missed them; and how much more their tenderhearted cousin, who wandered about the house, and thought of them with an affectionate regret which they had never done much to deserve!

CHAPTER 22

Fanny's consequence increased on her cousins' departure. As the only young woman in the drawing-room, she was more attended to than she had ever been before; and "Where is Fanny?" became a common question.

Not only at home did her value increase, but at the Parsonage too. There she became a welcome guest, and in the gloom and dirt of November, most acceptable to Mary Crawford. Mrs. Grant, eager to get any change for her sister, persuaded herself that she was doing the kindest thing for Fanny, and giving her opportunities of improvement in frequently inviting her.

Fanny, having been sent into the village on some errand by her aunt Norris, was overtaken by a heavy shower close to the Parsonage; and being seen from one of the windows endeavouring to find shelter under an oak, was forced, with modest reluctance on her part, to come in. Dr. Grant himself went out with an umbrella; and to poor Miss Crawford, who had just been contemplating the dismal rain very despondently, the sound of a little bustle at the front door, and the sight of Miss Price dripping in the vestibule, was delightful. The value of an event on a wet day in the country was forcibly brought before her. She was alive again directly, and most active in being useful to Fanny and providing her with dry clothes. Since Fanny was obliged to stay for an hour while the rain continued, the blessing of something fresh to think of was extended.

The two sisters were so kind to her, that Fanny might have enjoyed her visit could she have believed herself not in the way, and could she have foreseen that the weather would certainly clear at the end of the hour, and save her from the shame of having Dr. Grant's carriage out to take her home. As her being out was known only to her two aunts, she was perfectly aware that no alarm would be felt by anyone.

It was beginning to look brighter, when Fanny, observing a harp, asked some questions about it, and acknowledged that she wished very much to hear it, for she had never yet heard it since its being in Mansfield. To Fanny this appeared very natural. She had scarcely been at the Parsonage since the instrument's arrival; but Miss Crawford was concerned at her own neglect; and "Shall I play to you now?" and "What will you have?" were questions immediately following with the readiest good-humour.

She played accordingly; happy to have a new listener who seemed so full of wonder at the performance, and who showed herself not wanting in taste. She played till Fanny's eyes strayed to the window.

"Another quarter of an hour," said Miss Crawford. "Those clouds look alarming."

"But they are passed over," said Fanny. "This weather is all from the south."

"I know a black cloud when I see it; and you must not set forward while it is so threatening. And besides, I want to play you a very pretty piece—your cousin Edmund's favourite."

Fanny felt that she must hear it; she fancied him sitting in that room, perhaps in the very spot where she sat now, listening with delight to the favourite air, played with superior tone and expression. Though glad to like whatever was liked by him, at the end she was more sincerely impatient to go away. She was so kindly asked to call again, and hear more of the harp, that she felt it must be done.

Such was the origin of the intimacy between them—an intimacy resulting chiefly from Miss Crawford's desire of something new, and which had little reality in Fanny's

feelings. Fanny went to her every two or three days: she could not be easy without going, and yet it was without loving her, or thinking like her; and deriving no higher pleasure from her conversation than occasional amusement, and that often at the expense of her judgment.

She went, however, and they sauntered about together in Mrs. Grant's shrubbery, venturing sometimes to sit down on one of the benches, and remaining there, perhaps, till in the midst of some tender remark of Fanny's on the sweets of autumn, they were forced to jump up and walk for warmth.

"This is very pretty," said Fanny, looking around her as they were sitting together one day; "every time I come into this shrubbery I am more struck with its beauty. Three years ago, this was nothing but a rough hedgerow, never thought of as capable of becoming anything; and now it is converted into a walk; and perhaps, in another three years, we may be forgetting what it was before. How very wonderful the operations of time, and the changes of the human mind! If any faculty of our nature may be called more wonderful than the rest, I do think it is memory. It is sometimes so retentive, so obedient; at others, so weak; and at others again, so tyrannic, so beyond control!"

Miss Crawford, untouched, had nothing to say; and Fanny returned to what she thought must interest.

"I must admire the taste Mrs. Grant has shown in all this. There is such a quiet simplicity in the plan of the walk!"

"Yes," replied Miss Crawford carelessly, "it does very well for a place of this sort. Till I came to Mansfield, I had not imagined a country parson ever aspired to a shrubbery."

"I am so glad to see the evergreens thrive!" said Fanny. "My uncle's gardener says the soil here is better than his own, and so it appears from the growth of the evergreens. How beautiful, how welcome, how wonderful the evergreen! How astonishing a variety of nature! In some countries we know the tree that sheds its leaf is the variety, but that does not make it less amazing that the same soil and sun should nurture plants so widely differing. You will think me rhapsodising; but when I am out of doors, I am very apt to get into this sort of wondering strain. One cannot fix one's eyes on the commonest natural object without finding food for a rambling fancy."

"To say the truth," replied Miss Crawford, "Like the famous Doge at the court of Lewis XIV, I see no wonder in this shrubbery equal to seeing myself in it. If anybody had told me a year ago that this place would be my home, I should not have believed them. I have now been here nearly five months; the quietest five months I ever passed."

"Too quiet for you, I believe."

"I should have thought so, but," and her eyes brightened, "all and all, I never spent so happy a summer. But then," more thoughtfully, "there is no saying what it may lead to."

Fanny's heart beat quick, and she could not speak. Miss Crawford, however, soon went on—

"I am better reconciled to a country residence than I had ever expected to be. I can even suppose it pleasant to spend half the year in the country, under certain circumstances. An elegant house in the centre of family connexions; continual engagements; commanding the first society in the neighbourhood; and turning from the cheerful round of such amusements to a tête-à-tête with the person one feels most agreeable in the world. There is nothing frightful in such a picture, is there, Miss Price? One need not envy the new Mrs. Rushworth with such a home as that."

"Envy Mrs. Rushworth!"

"I look forward to our owing her a great many brilliant, happy hours at Sotherton. The first pleasures of Mr. Rushworth's wife must be to fill her house, and give the best balls in the country."

Fanny was silent, and Miss Crawford relapsed into thoughtfulness, till suddenly looking up, she exclaimed, "Ah! here he is." It was not Mr. Rushworth, however, but Edmund, who appeared with Mrs. Grant. "I am so glad your eldest cousin is gone, that he may be Mr. Bertram again. There is something in the sound of Mr. Edmund Bertram so pitiful, so younger-brother-like, that I detest it."

"How differently we feel!" cried Fanny. "To me, the sound of Mr. Bertram is so cold and nothing-meaning! It just stands for a gentleman, and that's all. But there is nobleness in the name of Edmund. It is a name of heroism and renown; and seems to breathe the spirit of chivalry and warm affections."

"I grant you the name is good in itself, and *Lord* Edmund or *Sir* Edmund sound delightfully; but sink it under the annihilation of a Mr., and Mr. Edmund is no more than Mr. John or Mr. Thomas. Well, shall we join them?"

Edmund met them with pleasure. A friendship between two so very dear to him was exactly what he could have wished: and to his credit, he did not consider Fanny as the only, or even as the greater gainer by such a friendship.

"Well," said Miss Crawford, "do you not scold us for our imprudence in sitting outside?"

"Perhaps I might have scolded," said Edmund, "if either of you had been alone; but while you do wrong together, I can overlook a great deal."

"They cannot have been sitting long," cried Mrs. Grant, "for when I saw them from the staircase window, they were walking."

"And really," added Edmund, "the day is so mild, that your sitting down can be hardly thought imprudent."

"Upon my word," cried Miss Crawford, "you are two of the most unfeeling kind friends I ever met with! There is no giving you a moment's uneasiness. You do not know what chills we have felt! I had very little hope of Mr Bertram from the first; but you, Mrs. Grant, my own sister, I think I had a right to alarm you a little."

"My dearest Mary, you have not the smallest chance of moving me. If I could have altered the weather, you would have had a good sharp east wind blowing on you—for here are some of my plants which Robert *will* leave out, and I know that we shall have a sudden hard frost setting in, and I shall lose every one; and what is worse, cook has just been telling me that the turkey, which I particularly wished not to be dressed till Sunday, will not keep beyond to-morrow. These are grievances, and make me think the weather most unseasonably warm."

"The sweets of housekeeping in a country village!" said Miss Crawford archly.

"My dear child, what would you have me do?"

"Oh! nothing but what you do already: be plagued very often, and never lose your temper."

"Thank you; but there is no escaping these little vexations, Mary, wherever we live; and when you are settled in town, I dare say I shall find you with yours."

"I mean to be too rich to feel anything of the sort. A large income is the best recipe for happiness I ever heard of."

"You intend to be very rich?" said Edmund seriously.

"To be sure. Do not you? Do not we all?"

"I cannot intend anything which it is so completely beyond my power to command. Miss Crawford may choose her degree of wealth. She has only to fix on

her number of thousands a year, and there can be no doubt of their coming. My intentions are only not to be poor."

"By moderation and economy, and all that. And a very proper plan it is for a person at your time of life, with such limited means and poor connexions, with relations in no situation to do anything for you. Be honest and poor, by all means—but I shall not envy you. I have a much greater respect for those that are honest and rich."

"I do not mean to be poor. Honesty in the middle state, is all that I am anxious for your not looking down on."

"But I do look down upon it, if it might have been higher. I must look down upon anything contented with obscurity when it might rise to distinction."

"But how may it rise? How may my honesty rise to any distinction?"

This was not so very easy a question to answer, and occasioned an "Oh!" from the lady before she could add, "You ought to be in parliament, or you should have gone into the army ten years ago."

"That is not much to the purpose now; and as to parliament, I must wait till there is an especial assembly for younger sons with little to live on. No, Miss Crawford," he added more seriously, "there are distinctions which I should be miserable if I thought I could never obtain—but they are of a different character."

A look of consciousness as he spoke, and a consciousness of manner on Miss Crawford's side as she made some laughing answer, was sorrowful for Fanny to observe. She resolved on going home immediately, and began her adieus; on which Edmund recollected that his mother had been inquiring for her, and that he had walked down to the Parsonage to bring her back.

Fanny would have hastened away alone; but she found that Edmund meant to go with her. He took his leave of Dr Grant, and was invited to eat with him the next day. Then Mrs. Grant turned to her and asked for the pleasure of her company too.

This was so perfectly new a circumstance in Fanny's life, that she was all embarrassment; and while stammering out "but she did not suppose it would be in her power," was looking at Edmund for his help. But Edmund, delighted at the offer, could not imagine that his mother would make any difficulty, and therefore advised that the invitation should be accepted; and it was soon settled that Mrs. Grant might expect her.

"And you know what your dinner will be," said Mrs. Grant, smiling—"the turkey, which cook insists upon being dressed to-morrow."

"I am glad to hear it," cried Dr. Grant. "But a friendly meeting, and not a fine dinner, is all we have in view."

The two cousins walked home together; and, except in the discussion of this engagement, which Edmund spoke of with satisfaction, it was a silent walk; for having finished that subject, he grew thoughtful and indisposed for any other.

CHAPTER 23

"But why should Mrs. Grant ask Fanny?" said Lady Bertram. "Fanny never dines there. I cannot spare her, and I am sure she does not want to go. Fanny, you do not want to go, do you?"

"If you ask her," cried Edmund, "Fanny will immediately say No; but I am sure, my dear mother, she would like to go."

"Why should Mrs. Grant think of asking her? She never did before."

"If you cannot do without me, ma'am—" said Fanny, in a self-denying tone.

"Suppose you take my father's opinion, ma'am."

"So I will, Edmund. I will ask Sir Thomas, as soon as he comes in, whether I can do without her."

"As you please, ma'am; but I meant my father's opinion as to the propriety of the invitation's being accepted; and I think he will consider that it should be."

"I do not know. But he will be very much surprised that Mrs. Grant should ask Fanny at all."

Half an hour afterwards, on Sir Thomas's looking in for a minute, Lady Bertram called him back. "Sir Thomas, stop a moment—I have something to say."

Her tone of calm languor was always attended to; and Sir Thomas came back. Her story began; and Fanny immediately slipped out of the room; for to hear herself the subject of any discussion with her uncle was more than her nerves could bear. She was more anxious perhaps than she ought to be—for what was it after all whether she went or stayed? but if her uncle were to be a great while considering with grave looks, and at last decide against her, she might not be able to appear properly submissive.

Her cause, meanwhile, went on well. Lady Bertram began, "I have something to tell you that will surprise you. Mrs. Grant has asked Fanny to dinner."

"Well," said Sir Thomas, as if waiting more to accomplish the surprise.

"Edmund wants her to go. But how can I spare her?"

"What is your difficulty?"

Edmund found himself obliged to speak. He told the whole; and she added, "So strange! for Mrs. Grant never used to ask her."

"But is it not very natural," observed Edmund, "that Mrs. Grant should wish to procure so agreeable a visitor for her sister?"

"Nothing can be more natural," said Sir Thomas. "Mrs. Grant's showing civility to Lady Bertram's niece could never want explanation. The only surprise is, that this should be the first time of its being paid. Fanny was perfectly right in giving a conditional answer. But as I conclude that she must wish to go, since all young people like to be together, I can see no reason why she should be denied."

"But can I do without her, Sir Thomas? She always makes tea, you know, when my sister is not here."

"Your sister, perhaps, may be prevailed on to stay with us, and I shall be at home."

"Very well, then, Fanny may go."

The good news soon followed her. Edmund knocked at her door.

"Well, Fanny, it is all happily settled. You are to go."

"Thank you, I am so glad," was Fanny's instinctive reply; though when she had shut the door, she could not help feeling, "Yet why should I be glad? for am I not certain of hearing something there to pain me?"

In spite of this, however, she was glad. Simple as the engagement might appear in other eyes, it had novelty and importance in hers, for she had scarcely ever dined out before; and though going only half a mile, and only to three people, still it was dining out, and all the little preparations were enjoyments in themselves. She had no assistance from those who ought to have directed her taste; for Lady Bertram never thought of being useful to anybody, and Mrs. Norris, when she came on the morrow, was in a very ill humour, intent only on lessening her niece's pleasure.

"Upon my word, Fanny, you are in high luck! You ought to be very much obliged to Mrs. Grant for thinking of you, and to your aunt for letting you go; for there is no occasion for your going into company in this way, or ever dining out at all. Do not fancy that the invitation is meant as any compliment to you; the compliment is intended to your uncle and aunt and me. Mrs. Grant thinks it a civility due to us, and you may be very certain that, if your cousin Julia had been at home, you would not have been asked at all."

Mrs. Norris had now so ingeniously done away all Mrs. Grant's part of the favour, that Fanny could only say that she was very much obliged to her aunt Bertram for sparing her.

"Oh! your aunt can do very well without you, or you would not be allowed to go. I shall be here, so you may be quite easy. And I hope you will find it all mighty delightful. But I must observe that five is the very awkwardest of all possible numbers to sit down to table; and I am surprised at Mrs. Grant! And round their enormous great wide table, too, which fills up the room so dreadfully! Had the doctor been content to take my dining-table when I came away, instead of having that absurd new one of his own, how infinitely better it would have been! Only five to be sitting round that table. However, you will have dinner enough on it for ten, I dare say."

Mrs. Norris fetched breath, and went on again.

"I must give you a hint, Fanny, now that you are going into company; do not be putting yourself forward, and talking as if you were one of your cousins—as if you were dear Mrs. Rushworth or Julia. That will never do. Remember, wherever you are, you must be the lowest and last. And you are to stay just as long as Edmund chooses. Leave him to settle that."

"Yes, ma'am."

"And if it should rain, which I think exceedingly likely, you must manage as well as you can, and not be expecting the carriage to be sent for you."

Her niece thought it perfectly reasonable. She rated her own claims to comfort as low as Mrs. Norris could; and when Sir Thomas, just opening the door, said, "Fanny, at what time would you have the carriage come round?" she felt astonished.

"My dear Sir Thomas!" cried Mrs. Norris, red with anger, "Fanny can walk."

"Walk!" repeated Sir Thomas, in a tone of most unanswerable dignity. "My niece walk to a dinner engagement at this time of the year! Will twenty minutes after four suit you?"

"Yes, sir," was Fanny's humble answer, given with the feelings of a criminal towards Mrs. Norris; and as she followed her uncle out of the room, she heard these words spoken in angry agitation—

"Quite unnecessary! a great deal too kind! But Edmund goes; it is upon Edmund's account."

Fanny, however, felt that the carriage was for herself: and her uncle's consideration cost her some tears of gratitude when she was alone.

The coachman drove round promptly; and Sir Thomas saw Fanny and Edmund off in good time.

"Now I must look at you, Fanny," said Edmund, with the kind smile of a brother, "and tell you how I like you; and as well as I can judge by this light, you look very nicely indeed. What have you got on?"

"The new dress that my uncle kindly gave me on my cousin's marriage. I thought I ought to wear it, as I might not have another opportunity all winter. I hope you do not think me too fine."

"A woman can never be too fine while she is all in white. Your gown seems very pretty. I like these glossy spots. Has not Miss Crawford a gown something the same?"

In approaching the Parsonage they passed close by the stable-yard.

"Heyday!" said Edmund, "here's a carriage! who have they got to meet us? 'Tis Crawford's barouche! There are his men. This is quite a surprise, Fanny. I shall be very glad to see him."

There was no occasion for Fanny to say how differently she felt; but the idea of having such another to observe her caused a great increase of the trepidation with which she performed the awful ceremony of walking into the drawing-room.

In the drawing-room Mr. Crawford certainly was; and the smiles of the three others standing round him, showed how welcome was his sudden resolution of coming to them for a few days on leaving Bath. A very cordial meeting passed between him and Edmund; and with the exception of Fanny, the pleasure was general.

His presence at least meant that she could sit silent and unattended to. Though she must submit to being the principal lady in company, she found, while they were at table, a happy flow of conversation in which she was not required to take any part. There was so much to be said about Bath, and hunting, and politics, and everything else, as to leave her the fairest prospect of having only to listen in quiet, and of passing a very agreeable day.

She could not, however, show any eager interest in the gentleman's scheme for extending his stay at Mansfield, and sending for his hunters from Norfolk, which, urged by all the others, was in possession of his mind, and in which he seemed to want encouragement even from Fanny. Her answers to him were as short and indifferent as civility allowed. She would much rather not have him speak to her.

Her two absent cousins, especially Maria, were much in her thoughts; but no embarrassing remembrance affected *his* spirits. He was apparently as willing to stay and be happy without the Miss Bertrams, as if he had never known Mansfield in any other state. He spoke of them only in a general way, till they were all re-assembled in the drawing-room, when he began talking of them to Miss Crawford. With a significant smile, which made Fanny quite hate him, he said, "So! Rushworth and his fair bride are at Brighton, I understand; happy man!"

"Yes, they have been there a fortnight. Julia is with them."

"And Mr. Yates, I presume, is not far off."

"Oh! we hear nothing of Mr. Yates. I do not imagine he figures much in the letters to Mansfield Park; do you, Miss Price? I think Julia knows better than to entertain her father with Mr. Yates."

"Poor Rushworth and his two-and-forty speeches!" continued Crawford. "Nobody can ever forget them. Well, I am much mistaken if his lovely Maria will ever want him to make two-and-forty speeches to her"; adding, with a momentary seriousness, "She is too good for him—much too good." Then changing again to gentle gallantry, and addressing Fanny, he said, "You were Mr. Rushworth's best friend. Your kindness and patience to him can never be forgotten. He might not have sense enough himself to value your kindness, but it had honour from all the rest of the party."

Fanny coloured, and said nothing.

"It is as a dream, a pleasant dream!" he exclaimed, after a few minutes' musing. "I shall always look back on our theatricals with exquisite pleasure. There was such an interest, such an animation. We were all alive. There was employment, hope, bustle, for every hour of the day. I never was happier."

With silent indignation Fanny repeated to herself, "Never happier than when behaving so dishonourably and unfeelingly! Oh! what a corrupted mind!"

"We were unlucky, Miss Price," he continued, in a lower tone, not at all aware of her feelings. "Another week would have been enough for us. If Mansfield Park had had the government of the winds just for a week or two, there would have been a difference. Not that we would have endangered his safety by any tremendous weather—but I think, Miss Price, we would have indulged ourselves with a week's calm in the Atlantic."

Fanny, averting her face, said, with a firmer tone than usual, "I would not have delayed his return for a day, sir. My uncle disapproved it all so entirely when he did arrive, that in my opinion everything had gone quite far enough."

She had never spoken so much at once to him before, and never so angrily to any one; and she trembled at her own daring. He was surprised; but after a few moments' silent consideration of her, replied in a calmer, graver tone, "I believe you are right. It was more pleasant than prudent. We were getting too noisy." He would have engaged her on some other subject, but her answers were so shy and reluctant that he could not advance in any.

Miss Crawford, who had been repeatedly eyeing Dr. Grant and Edmund, now observed, "Those gentlemen must have some very interesting point to discuss."

"The most interesting in the world," replied her brother—"how to make money. Dr. Grant is giving Bertram instructions about the living he is to step into soon. He takes orders in a few weeks. He will have a very pretty income, earned without much trouble: seven hundred a year. That is a fine thing for a younger brother; and as of course he will still live at home, it will be all for small luxuries; and a sermon at Christmas and Easter, I suppose, will be the sum total of sacrifice."

His sister tried to laugh off her feelings by saying, "Nothing amuses me more than the easy manner with which everybody settles the abundance of those who have a great deal less than themselves. You would look rather blank, Henry, if your small luxuries were to be limited to seven hundred a year."

"Perhaps; but Bertram is certainly well off for a cadet of a baronet's family. By the time he is five and twenty he will have seven hundred a year, and nothing to do for it."

Miss Crawford could have said that there would be a something to do for it, which she could not think lightly of; but she let it pass; and tried to look unconcerned when the two gentlemen joined them.

"Bertram," said Henry Crawford, "I shall make a point of coming to Mansfield to hear you preach your first sermon. When is it to be? Miss Price, will not you join me? Will not you fix your eyes steadily on him the whole time—as I shall do—only looking down to note any sentence pre-eminently beautiful? We will provide ourselves with tablets and a pencil. When will it be?"

"I shall keep clear of you, Crawford, as long as I can," said Edmund; "for you would disconcert me, and I should be more sorry to see you trying at it than almost any other man."

"Will he not feel this?" thought Fanny. "No, he can feel nothing as he ought."

The party being now united, and the chief talkers attracting each other, she remained in tranquillity; and as a whist-table was formed after tea for the amusement

of Dr. Grant, and Miss Crawford took her harp, she had nothing to do but to listen. Her tranquillity remained undisturbed the rest of the evening, except when Mr. Crawford now and then addressed to her a question, which she could not avoid answering.

Miss Crawford was too much vexed to be in a humour for anything but music. Edmund's being so soon to take orders had come upon her like a blow; she had hoped it still uncertain, and felt resentment and mortification. She was very angry with him. She had thought her influence more. She had begun to think of him with great regard, with almost decided intentions; but she would now meet him with his own cool feelings. It was plain that he could have no true attachment, by fixing himself in a situation which he must know she would never stoop to. She would learn to match him in his indifference, and would henceforth admit his attentions without any idea beyond her immediate amusement.

CHAPTER 24

Henry Crawford had made up his mind by the next morning to give another fortnight to Mansfield. Having sent for his hunters, he looked round at his sister, and said, with a smile, "How do you think I mean to amuse myself, Mary, on the days that I do not hunt?"

"To walk and ride with me, to be sure."

"Not exactly, though I shall be happy to do both, but that would be all recreation, without the wholesome alloy of labour, and I do not like to eat the bread of idleness. No, my plan is to make Fanny Price in love with me."

"Fanny Price! Nonsense! No, no. You ought to be satisfied with her two cousins."

"But I cannot be satisfied without making a small hole in Fanny Price's heart. You do not seem properly aware of the wonderful improvement that has taken place in her looks. You see her every day, and therefore do not notice it; but I assure you she is quite a different creature from what she was in the autumn. She was then merely a quiet, modest girl, but she is now absolutely pretty. I used to think she had neither complexion nor countenance; but in that soft skin of hers, there is decided beauty; and I do not despair of her eyes being capable of expression when she has anything to express. And then, her air is so indescribably improved! She must be grown two inches since October."

"Phoo! phoo! This is only because there were no tall women to compare her with, and because she has got a new gown, and you never saw her so well dressed before. She is just what she was in October, believe me. The truth is, that she was the only girl in company for you to notice, and you must have a somebody. I have always thought her pretty enough; but as for this wonderful improvement, it may all be resolved into a better style of dress, and your having nobody else to look at. If you do set about a flirtation with her, it will proceed from nothing but your own idleness and folly."

Her brother only smiled, and said, "I do not quite know what to make of Miss Fanny. Is she solemn? Is she prudish? Why did she look so grave at me? I could hardly get her to speak. I never met with a girl who looked so grave on me! I must try to get the better of this. Her looks say, 'I will not like you, I am determined not to like you'; and I say she shall."

"Foolish fellow! So this is her attraction! It is her not caring about you, which produces all these charms! You must not make her really unhappy; a little love, perhaps, may animate her, but I will not have you plunge her deep, for she is a good little creature, and has a great deal of feeling."

"It can be but for a fortnight," said Henry; "and if a fortnight can kill her, she must have a constitution which nothing could save. No, I will not do her any harm, dear little soul! I only want her to look kindly on me, to give me smiles, to keep a chair for me wherever we are, and be all animation when I take it; to think as I think, be interested in all my pleasures, and feel when I go away that she shall be never happy again. I want nothing more."

"Moderation itself!" said Mary. "I can have no scruples now."

And without any farther remonstrance, she left Fanny to her fate, a fate which, had not Fanny's heart been guarded in a way unsuspected by Miss Crawford, might have been a little harder than she deserved; for although there doubtless are such unconquerable young ladies of eighteen as can never be persuaded into love by talent,

attention, and flattery, I have no inclination to believe Fanny one of them, or to think that she could have escaped heart-whole from the courtship of such a man as Crawford, if her affection had not been engaged elsewhere. His continued attentions, adapted to the gentleness of her character, obliged her soon to dislike him less than formerly. She had not forgotten the past, and she thought as ill of him as ever; but she felt his powers: he was entertaining; and his manners were so improved that it was impossible not to be civil to him in return.

A few days were enough to effect this; and then happy circumstances arose which disposed her to be pleased with everybody. William, the long absent and dearly loved brother, was in England. She had a letter from him, written as the ship came up the Channel; and when Crawford walked up with the newspaper in his hand, which he had hoped would bring the first tidings, he found her trembling with joy over this letter, and listening with a glowing countenance to the kind invitation to her brother which her uncle was dictating.

It was but the day before that Crawford had become aware of her having such a brother, or his being in such a ship; but he had hunted for information as to the probable date of the ship's return; and had found it in the newspaper the next morning. He proved, however, to be too late. All those fine first feelings, of which he hoped to be the exciter, were already given. But the kindness of his intention was thankfully acknowledged: for she was elevated beyond her usual timidity by her love for William.

This dear William would soon be amongst them. His reply came, fixing an early day for his arrival; and scarcely ten days later, Fanny found herself watching in the hall, in the lobby, on the stairs, for the first sound of the carriage which was to bring her a brother.

It came; and their meeting, and first minutes of exquisite feeling, had no interruption and no witnesses. This was exactly what Sir Thomas and Edmund had been conniving at, and why they both advised Mrs. Norris's staying where she was, instead of rushing out into the hall as soon as the noises of arrival reached them.

William and Fanny soon showed themselves; and Sir Thomas had the pleasure of receiving, in his protégé, a young man of an open, pleasant countenance, and frank, unstudied, but respectful manners.

It was long before Fanny could recover from the agitating happiness of such an hour; it was some time even before her happiness could be said to make her happy, and she could talk to him as her heart had been yearning to do through many a past year. That time, however, did come, aided by an affection on his side as warm as her own, and much less encumbered by self-distrust. She was the first object of his love, a love which his bolder temper made it natural for him to express. On the morrow they were walking about together with true enjoyment, and every succeeding morrow renewed a tête-à-tête which Sir Thomas observed with complacency.

Except for the moments of delight caused by any instance of Edmund's consideration of her, Fanny had never known so much joy, as in this unchecked, equal, fearless intercourse with the brother and friend who was opening all his heart to her, telling her all his hopes, fears and plans respecting his promotion; who could give her information of the family of whom she very seldom heard; who was interested in all the comforts and little hardships of her home at Mansfield; ready to think of every member of that home as she directed, or differing only by more noisy abuse of their aunt Norris, and with whom (perhaps the dearest indulgence of all) all their earliest years could be gone over again, and every former pain and pleasure fondly recollected. It must be by a long and unnatural estrangement, if such precious

memories shared by members of a family are outlived. Too often, alas! it is so. Fraternal love is at times worse than nothing. But with William and Fanny Price it was still in its prime and freshness.

Henry Crawford was much struck with their mutual affection. He honoured the warm-hearted, blunt fondness of the young sailor, which led him to say, with his hands stretched towards Fanny's head, "Do you know, I begin to like that queer fashion, though when the women at the Commissioner's at Gibraltar appeared in the same trim, I thought they were mad; but Fanny can reconcile me to anything". He saw, with admiration, the glow of Fanny's cheek, the brightness of her eye, the absorbed attention, while her brother was describing the hazards of his life at sea.

It was a picture which Henry Crawford had moral taste enough to value. Fanny's attractions increased twofold; for he no longer doubted the capabilities of her heart. She had feeling, genuine feeling. It would be something to be loved by such a girl, to excite the first ardours of her unsophisticated mind! She interested him more than he had foreseen. A fortnight was not enough. His stay became indefinite.

William was often called on by his uncle to be the talker. His recitals were amusing to Sir Thomas, but the chief object in seeking them was to understand the reciter, to know the young man; and he listened to his clear, simple, spirited details with satisfaction, seeing in them the proof of good principles, professional knowledge, energy, courage, and cheerfulness. Young as he was, William had already seen a great deal. He had been in the Mediterranean and the West Indies; had been often taken on shore by the favour of his captain, and in seven years had known every danger which sea and war could offer.

Though Mrs. Norris could fidget about the room, and disturb everybody in quest of thread or a shirt button in the midst of her nephew's account of a shipwreck, everybody else was attentive; and even Lady Bertram could not hear of such horrors without sometimes lifting her eyes from her work to say, "How disagreeable! I wonder anybody can ever go to sea."

To Henry Crawford they gave a different feeling. He longed to have seen and done as much. His heart was warmed, his fancy fired, and he felt the highest respect for a lad who, before he was twenty, had gone through such hardships. The glory of heroism, of usefulness, of exertion, of endurance, made his own habits appear in shameful contrast; and he wished he had been a William Price, instead of what he was!

The wish was not lasting. He was roused from his regret by some inquiry from Edmund as to the next day's hunting; and he found it was as well to be a man of fortune with horses and grooms at his command. In one respect it was better, as it gave him the means of conferring a kindness to William, who expressed a wish to hunt. Crawford could mount him without inconvenience to himself, and with only some alarms to reason away in Fanny. She feared for William; by no means convinced by all that he could relate of his own horsemanship in various rough countries, that he was at all equal to the management of a high-fed hunter in an English fox-chase. Till he returned safe and well, she could not feel any gratitude to Mr. Crawford for lending the horse.

When it was proved, however, to have done William no harm, she could reward the owner with a smile. With the greatest cordiality, Mr Crawford gave William the horse for his use so long as he remained in Northamptonshire.

CHAPTER 25

The intimacy between the two families was now nearly restored to its former state. Sir Thomas found the Grants and their young inmates really worth visiting; and though above scheming for any marriage, he could not avoid perceiving, in a grand and careless way, that Mr. Crawford was distinguishing his niece, and he assented more willingly to invitations on that account.

His readiness, however, in agreeing to dine at the Parsonage, when the general invitation was at last sent out, proceeded from goodwill alone, and had nothing to do with Mr. Crawford: for it was during that visit that he first began to think Mr Crawford was the admirer of Fanny Price.

The meeting was a pleasant one, and the dinner was elegant and plentiful, according to the usual style of the Grants, and enjoyed by everyone except Mrs. Norris, who could never behold either the wide table or the number of dishes on it with patience.

In the evening it was found that after making up the whist-table there would remain sufficient people for a round game. Speculation was decided on; and Lady Bertram soon found herself being asked to choose between the games. She hesitated.

"What shall I do, Sir Thomas? Whist and speculation; which will amuse me most?"

Sir Thomas, after a moment's thought, recommended speculation. He was a whist player himself, and perhaps might feel that it would not much amuse him to have her for a partner.

"Very well," was her ladyship's contented answer; "then speculation, if you please, Mrs. Grant. I know nothing about it, but Fanny must teach me."

Here Fanny interposed anxiously; she had never played the game; but upon everybody's assuring her that it was the easiest game on the cards, and Henry Crawford's stepping forward with an earnest request to sit between her ladyship and Miss Price, and teach them both, it was settled. Sir Thomas, Mrs. Norris, and Dr. and Mrs. Grant being seated at the table of prime intellectual state, the remaining six, under Miss Crawford's direction, were arranged round the other.

It was a fine arrangement for Henry Crawford, who was close to Fanny, and with two persons' cards to manage as well as his own; for though it was impossible for Fanny not to master the rules in three minutes, he had yet to sharpen her avarice and harden her heart, which, especially in any competition with William, was a work of some difficulty. As for Lady Bertram, he was in charge of her fortune through the whole evening.

He was in high spirits, doing everything with happy ease and playful impudence; and the round table was altogether a very comfortable contrast to the sobriety and orderly silence of the other.

Sir Thomas inquired into the enjoyment of his lady. "I hope your ladyship is pleased with the game."

"Oh dear, yes! very entertaining indeed. A very odd game. I do not know what it is all about. I am never to see my cards; and Mr. Crawford does all the rest."

"Bertram," said Crawford, some time afterwards, "I have never told you what happened to me yesterday in my ride home." They had been hunting together, and were at some distance from Mansfield, when his horse flung a shoe, and Henry Crawford had been obliged to give up and make his way back. "I lost my way after

passing that old farmhouse with the yew-trees, because I can never bear to ask; and I found myself in the very place which I was curious to see. I was suddenly in a retired little village between gently rising hills; a small stream before me, a church standing to my right—which church was strikingly large and handsome for the place, where there was no gentleman's house to be seen excepting one—to be presumed the Parsonage—within a stone's throw of the church. I found myself, in short, in Thornton Lacey."

"It sounds like it," said Edmund. "You inquired, then?"

"No, I never inquire. But I told a man mending a hedge that it was Thornton Lacey, and he agreed."

"You have a good memory. I had forgotten having ever told you half so much of the place."

Thornton Lacey was the name of his impending living, as Miss Crawford well knew; and her interest in a negotiation for William Price's knave increased.

"Well," continued Edmund, "and how did you like what you saw?"

"Very much indeed. You are a lucky fellow. There will be work for five summers at least before the place is liveable."

"No, no, not so bad as that. The farmyard must be moved, I grant you; but I am not aware of anything else. The house is by no means bad, and when the yard is removed, there may be a very tolerable approach to it."

"The farmyard must be cleared away entirely, and planted up. The house must be turned to face the east, where the view is really very pretty; I am sure it may be done. And your approach must be through what is at present the garden. You must make a new garden at the back of the house; which will give it the best aspect, sloping to the south-east. I rode fifty yards up the lane, between the church and the house, in order to look about me; and saw how it might all be. Nothing can be easier. The meadows must be all laid together, of course; very pretty meadows they are, finely sprinkled with timber. They belong to the living, I suppose; if not, you must purchase them. Then the stream—something must be done with the stream; but I could not quite determine what. I had two or three ideas."

"And I have two or three ideas also," said Edmund, "and one of them is, that very little of your plan for Thornton Lacey will ever be put in practice. I must be satisfied with rather less. I think the house may be made comfortable, and given the air of a gentleman's residence, without any very heavy expense, and that must suffice me; and, I hope, may suffice all who care about me."

Miss Crawford, a little suspicious and resentful of a certain half-look attending this last expression, made a hasty finish of her dealings with William Price, and exclaimed, "There, I will stake my last like a woman of spirit. No cold prudence for me. If I lose the game, it shall not be from not striving for it."

The game was hers, and only did not repay her what she had paid for it. Another deal proceeded, and Crawford began again about Thornton Lacey.

"My plan may not be the best possible: but you must do a good deal. The place deserves it. (Excuse me, your ladyship must not see your cards. There, let them lie before you.) You talk of giving it the air of a gentleman's residence. That will be done by the removal of the farmyard; for the house has the look of a something above a mere parsonage. It is a solid, roomy, mansion-like house, such as one might suppose a respectable old country family had lived in through two centuries at least." Miss Crawford listened, and Edmund agreed. "The air of a gentleman's residence, therefore, you cannot help giving it. But it is capable of much more. (Lady Bertram bids a dozen for that queen; no, no, a dozen is more than it is worth. Lady Bertram does not bid. Go

on, go on.) By some improvements you may give it a higher character. It may become the residence of a man of education, taste, and good connexions. All this may be stamped on it; and that house receive such an air as to make its owner be set down as the great landholder of the parish; especially as there is no real squire's house to dispute the point. You think with me, I hope," (turning with a softened voice to Fanny). "Have you ever seen the place?"

Fanny gave a quick negative, and tried to hide her interest by attending to her brother, who was driving a hard bargain; but Crawford pursued with "No, no, you must not part with the queen. Your brother does not offer half her value. Hands off, sir. Your sister does not part with the queen. The game will be yours," turning to her again; "it will certainly be yours."

"And Fanny had much rather it were William's," said Edmund, smiling. "Poor Fanny! not allowed to cheat herself as she wishes!"

"Mr. Bertram," said Miss Crawford, "you know Henry to be such a capital improver, that you cannot do anything at Thornton Lacey without his help. Only think how useful he was at Sotherton! Only think what grand things were produced there that one hot day in August. What was done there is not to be told!"

Fanny's eyes were turned on Crawford for a moment with an expression more than grave—even reproachful; but on catching his, were instantly withdrawn. With some consciousness he shook his head at his sister, and laughingly replied, "I cannot say there was much done at Sotherton; we were all walking after each other, and bewildered." He added, in a low voice, directed solely at Fanny, "I should be sorry to have my powers of planning judged of by the day at Sotherton. I see things very differently now. Do not think of me as I appeared then."

Sotherton was a word to catch Mrs. Norris, and she called out, in high good-humour, "Sotherton! Yes, that is a place, indeed, and we had a charming day there. William, the next time you come, I hope dear Mr. and Mrs. Rushworth will be at home, and I can answer for your being kindly received by both. They are at Brighton now, you know; in one of the best houses there. I do not exactly know the distance, but when you get back to Portsmouth, you ought to go over and pay your respects to them; and I could send a little parcel by you that I want to get to your cousins."

"I should be very happy, aunt; but Brighton is almost by Beachey Head; and if I could get so far, I could not expect to be welcome in such a smart place as that—poor scrubby midshipman as I am."

Mrs. Norris's eager assurance to the contrary was stopped by Sir Thomas's saying with authority, "I do not advise your going to Brighton, William, as I trust you may have more convenient opportunities of meeting. My daughters would be happy to see their cousins anywhere; and you will find Mr. Rushworth well disposed towards you."

"I would rather find him private secretary to the First Lord than anything else," was William's only answer, in an undervoice, and the subject dropped.

As yet Sir Thomas had seen nothing to remark in Mr. Crawford's behaviour; but when the whist-table broke up, he became a looker-on at the other, and found his niece the object of pointed attentions.

Henry Crawford was in the glow of another scheme about Thornton Lacey; and was detailing it to Fanny with a look of earnestness. His scheme was to rent the house himself the following winter, that he might have a home of his own in that neighbourhood; not merely for the use of it in the hunting-season, (as he said), for his attachment to that neighbourhood did not depend upon one amusement or one season of the year: he had set his heart upon having a place that he could come to at any time,

a home where his holidays might be spent, so that he might continue that friendship with the Mansfield Park family which was increasing in value to him every day.

Sir Thomas heard and was not offended. There was no want of respect in the young man's address; and Fanny's reception of it was so calm and uninviting, that he had nothing to censure in her. Finding by whom he was observed, Henry Crawford addressed himself on the subject to Sir Thomas.

"I want to be your neighbour, Sir Thomas, as you have, perhaps, heard me telling Miss Price. May I hope for your acquiescence?"

Sir Thomas, politely bowing, replied, "It is the only way, sir, in which I could not wish you established as a permanent neighbour; but I hope and believe that Edmund will occupy his own house at Thornton Lacey. Edmund, am I saying too much?"

"Certainly, sir, I have no idea but of residence," answered Edmund. "But, Crawford, though I refuse you as a tenant, come to me as a friend. Consider the house as half yours every winter, and we will add to the stables on your own improved plan."

"We shall be the losers," continued Sir Thomas. "Edmund's going, though only eight miles, will be an unwelcome contraction of our family circle; but I should have been deeply mortified if my son could reconcile himself to doing less. A parish has claims which can be known only by a clergyman constantly resident. Edmund might read prayers and preach, without giving up Mansfield Park: he might ride over every Sunday and go through divine service; he might be the clergyman of Thornton Lacey every seventh day, for three or four hours, if that would content him. But it will not. He knows that if he does not live among his parishioners, and prove himself their well-wisher and friend, he does very little either for their good or his own. Thornton Lacey, therefore, is the only house in the neighbourhood which I should not be happy for Mr. Crawford to occupy."

Mr. Crawford bowed.

Whatever effect Sir Thomas's little harangue might really produce on Mr. Crawford, it raised some awkward sensations in two of his most attentive listeners. Fanny, having not understood that Thornton was so soon to be his home, was pondering with downcast eyes on what it would be not to see Edmund every day; and Miss Crawford, startled from the agreeable fancies she had been indulging on the strength of her brother's description, was no longer able, in her picture of a future Thornton, to shut out the church, sink the clergyman, and see only the elegant, modernised residence of a man of independent fortune. She considered Sir Thomas as the destroyer of all this.

Her agreeable speculation was over. It was time to have done with cards, if sermons prevailed; and she was glad to refresh her spirits by a change of place and neighbour.

Most of the party were now collected round the fire. William and Fanny remained together at the deserted card-table, talking comfortably. Henry Crawford sat silently observing them for a few minutes; himself, in the meanwhile, observed by Sir Thomas.

"This is the assembly night," said William. "If I were at Portsmouth I should be at it, perhaps."

"But you do not wish yourself at Portsmouth, William?"

"No, Fanny, I do not. I shall have enough of Portsmouth later. And I do not know that there would be any good in going to the assembly, for the Portsmouth girls turn up their noses at anybody who has not a commission. A midshipman is nothing. You

remember the Gregorys; they are grown up amazing fine girls, but they will hardly speak to me, because Lucy is courted by a lieutenant."

"Oh! shame! But never mind, William" (her own cheeks in a glow of indignation). "It is not worth minding. It is no more than the greatest admirals have experienced, in their time. You must think of it as one of the hardships which fall to every sailor, but it will end when you are a lieutenant!"

"I begin to think I shall never be a lieutenant, Fanny. Everybody gets made but me."

"Oh! my dear William, do not talk so; do not be so desponding. My uncle says nothing, but I am sure he will do everything in his power to get you made."

She was checked by the sight of her uncle much nearer to them than she had supposed, and each began to talk of something else.

"Are you fond of dancing, Fanny?"

"Yes, very; only I am soon tired."

"I should like to go to a ball with you and see you dance. Have you never any balls at Northampton? I'd dance with you, for nobody would know who I was, and I should like to be your partner once more. We used to jump about together many a time, did not we? when the hand-organ was in the street? I am a pretty good dancer in my way, but I dare say you are a better." And turning to his uncle, "Is not Fanny a very good dancer, sir?"

Fanny did not know which way to look. Some very grave reproof must be coming to distress her brother, and sink her to the ground.

But, on the contrary, Sir Thomas answered, "I am sorry to say that I have never seen Fanny dance; but I trust she will acquit herself like a gentlewoman when we do see her, which, perhaps, we may have an opportunity of doing before long."

"I have had the pleasure of seeing your sister dance, Mr. Price," said Henry Crawford, leaning forward, "and will engage to answer your every inquiry on the subject. But I believe" (seeing Fanny looked distressed) "it must be at some other time. There is one person in company who does not like to have Miss Price spoken of."

True enough, he had once seen Fanny dance; and it was equally true that he would now have answered for her gliding about with quiet, light elegance; but, in fact, he could not for the life of him recall what her dancing had been.

He passed, however, for an admirer of her dancing; and Sir Thomas, pleased, prolonged the conversation, and was so well engaged in describing the balls of Antigua, that he did not hear his carriage announced, until Mrs. Norris began to bustle.

"Come, Fanny, what are you about? We are going. Quick, quick! I cannot bear to keep good old Wilcox waiting. My dear Sir Thomas, we have settled it that the carriage should come back for you, and Edmund and William."

Sir Thomas could not dissent, as it had been his own arrangement; but that seemed forgotten by Mrs. Norris, who must fancy that she had settled it all herself.

Fanny's last feeling was disappointment: for the shawl which Edmund was quietly taking from the servant to put round her shoulders was seized by Mr. Crawford, and she was obliged to be indebted to his more prominent attention.

CHAPTER 26

William's desire of seeing Fanny dance made an impression on his uncle. Sir Thomas wished to gratify him, and to give pleasure to the young people; and having thought the matter over, the next morning at breakfast he said, "William, I do not wish you to leave Northamptonshire without this indulgence. It would give me pleasure to see you both dance. I believe we must not think of a Northampton ball. A dance at home would be more eligible; and if—"

"Ah, my dear Sir Thomas!" interrupted Mrs. Norris, "I knew what you were going to say. If dear Julia were at home, or dearest Mrs. Rushworth, you would be tempted to give the young people a dance at Mansfield. If they were at home, a ball you would have this very Christmas. Thank your uncle, William, thank your uncle!"

"My daughters," replied Sir Thomas, "have their pleasures at Brighton, and I hope are very happy; but the dance which I think of giving at Mansfield will be for their cousins."

Mrs. Norris had not another word to say. Her surprise and vexation required some minutes' silence to be settled into composure. His daughters absent and herself not consulted! There was comfort, however, soon at hand. She must be the doer of everything: Lady Bertram must be spared exertion, and it would all fall upon her. This reflection restored much of her good-humour.

Edmund, William, and Fanny, in their different ways, expressed as much grateful pleasure in the promised ball as Sir Thomas could desire. Edmund's feelings were for the other two. His father had never shown a kindness more to his satisfaction.

Lady Bertram was perfectly contented, and had no objections. Mrs. Norris was ready with suggestions as to the rooms fittest to be used, but found it all arranged; and it appeared that the day was settled too. Sir Thomas had been amusing himself with shaping a very complete outline of the business; had planned for twelve or fourteen couples: and had fixed on the 22nd as the most eligible day. The 22nd would be the last day of William's visit; but where the days were so few it would be unwise to fix on any earlier. Mrs. Norris was obliged to be satisfied with thinking just the same, and with having been on the point of proposing the 22nd herself, as the best day for the purpose.

Invitations were sent, and many a young lady went to bed with her head full of happy cares, as well as Fanny. To her, the cares were almost beyond the happiness; for young and inexperienced, with small choice and no confidence in her own taste, the "how she should be dressed" was a point of painful worry; and the almost solitary ornament in her possession, a very pretty amber cross which William had brought her, was the greatest distress of all, for she had nothing but a bit of ribbon to fasten it to; and would that be allowable amidst of the rich ornaments which she supposed all the other young ladies would wear? And yet not to wear it! William had wanted to buy her a gold chain too, but the purchase had been beyond his means, and therefore not to wear the cross might mortify him. These were anxious considerations.

Edmund was at this time particularly full of cares: his mind being deeply occupied by two important events which were to fix his fate in life—ordination and matrimony. On the 23rd he was going to a friend near Peterborough, in the same situation as himself, and they were to receive ordination during Christmas week. Half his destiny would then be determined, but the other half might not go so smoothly. His duties

would be established, but the wife who was to share and reward those duties might yet be unattainable.

He knew his own mind, but he was not perfectly assured of knowing Miss Crawford's. There were points on which they did not quite agree; and though trusting to her affection, and resolving to ask her within a very short time, he had many anxious feelings as to the result. Sometimes doubt and alarm intermingled with his hopes; and when he thought of her decided preference of a London life, what could he expect but a determined rejection?

The issue depended on one question. Did she love him well enough to give up what used to be essential points? Did she love him well enough to make them no longer essential? And this question, which he was continually repeating to himself, though oftenest answered with a "Yes," had sometimes its "No."

Miss Crawford was soon to leave Mansfield, and on this circumstance the "no" and the "yes" had been in alternation. He had seen her eyes sparkle as she spoke of the dear friend's letter, which invited her to London; she spoke with pleasure of the journey with a "no" in every tone.

But this had been on the day of the invitation. He had since heard her express herself differently: he had heard her tell Mrs. Grant that she should leave with regret; that she believed neither the friends nor the pleasures she was going to were worth those she left behind; and that though she felt she must go, and knew she should enjoy herself when once away, she was already looking forward to being at Mansfield again. Was there not a "yes" in all this?

With such matters to ponder over, Edmund could not think very much of the evening which the rest of the family were looking forward to. The whirl of a ballroom was not particularly favourable to the expression of serious feelings. To engage her early for the two first dances was all the command of happiness which he felt in his power.

Thursday was the day of the ball; and on Wednesday morning Fanny, still unsure as to what she ought to wear, determined to apply to Mrs. Grant and her sister. As Edmund and William were gone to Northampton, and she had reason to think Mr. Crawford likewise out, she walked down to the Parsonage. The privacy of such a discussion was most important to Fanny.

She met Miss Crawford just setting out to call on her. She explained her business at once. Miss Crawford, gratified, cordially urged Fanny to return with her to the Parsonage, and proposed their going up into her room, where they might have a comfortable coze without disturbing Dr. and Mrs. Grant. It was just the plan to suit Fanny; and they proceeded upstairs, and were soon deep in the interesting subject.

Miss Crawford gave her all her best judgment and taste, made everything easy by her suggestions, and gave her encouragement. The dress being settled—"But what shall you have for a necklace?" said Miss Crawford. "Shall not you wear your brother's cross?" As she spoke she was undoing a small parcel, which Fanny had observed in her hand when they met. Fanny explained that she did not know how either to wear the cross, or to refrain from wearing it.

She was answered by having a small trinket-box placed before her, and being requested to choose from several gold chains and necklaces. This parcel had been the object of Miss Crawford's intended visit: and in the kindest manner she now urged Fanny's taking a chain for the cross.

"You see what a collection I have," said she; "more than I ever use. I offer nothing but an old necklace. You must oblige me."

Fanny resisted. The gift was too valuable. But Miss Crawford persevered, and argued the case with so much affectionate earnestness as to be finally successful. Fanny was obliged to yield; and proceeded to choose.

She looked and looked, longing to know which might be least valuable; and decided on her choice at last, by fancying there was one necklace more frequently placed before her eyes than the rest. It was of gold, prettily worked; and though Fanny would have preferred a longer and a plainer chain, she hoped, in fixing on this, to be choosing what Miss Crawford least wished to keep. Miss Crawford smiled, and put the necklace round her, making her see how well it looked.

Fanny was exceedingly pleased with it. She would rather, perhaps, have been obliged to some other person. But this was an unworthy feeling. Miss Crawford's kindness proved her a real friend.

"When I wear this necklace I shall always think of you," said she, "and feel how very kind you were."

"You must think of somebody else too, when you wear that necklace," replied Miss Crawford. "You must think of Henry, for it was his choice first. He gave it to me. The sister is not to be in your mind without the brother too."

Fanny, in great confusion, would have returned the present instantly. To take what had been the gift of a brother, impossible! and with an embarrassment quite diverting to her companion, she laid down the necklace again, and seemed resolved either to take another or none at all.

Miss Crawford thought she had never seen a prettier consciousness. "My dear child," said she, laughing, "what are you afraid of? Do you think Henry will claim you stole it? or perhaps"—looking archly—"you suspect a confederacy between us, and that what I am now doing is with his knowledge and at his desire?"

With the deepest blushes Fanny protested against such a thought.

"Well, then," replied Miss Crawford more seriously, but without believing her, "to convince me that you suspect no trick, take the necklace and say no more about it. Its being a gift of my brother's need not make the smallest difference. He is always giving me something or other. As for this necklace, I do not suppose I have worn it six times: it is very pretty, but I never think of it; and you have happened to fix on the very one which I would rather part with than any other. Say no more against it, I entreat you."

Fanny dared not make any farther opposition; and with less happy thanks accepted the necklace again, for there was an expression in Miss Crawford's eyes which she could not be satisfied with.

It was impossible for her to be unaware of Mr. Crawford's change of manners. She had long seen it. He tried to please her: he was gallant and attentive, as he had been to her cousins: he wanted, she supposed, to cheat her of her tranquillity as he had cheated them. She was convinced that he had some concern in this necklace, for Miss Crawford, an indulgent sister, was careless as a woman and a friend.

Feeling that the possession of it did not bring much satisfaction, she walked home again, with a change rather than a lessening of cares.

CHAPTER 27

On reaching home Fanny went upstairs to deposit this doubtful good of a necklace in a box in the East room, which held all her smaller treasures; but what was her surprise to find her cousin Edmund there, writing at the table! Such a sight was almost as astonishing as it was welcome.

"Fanny," said he, leaving his seat, and meeting her with something in his hand, "I beg your pardon. I came to look for you, and was writing to explain my errand. You will find the beginning of a note to yourself; but I can now speak my business, which is merely to beg your acceptance of this trifle—a chain for William's cross. I hope you will like it, Fanny. I tried to consult the simplicity of your taste; but I know you will be kind, and consider it, as it really is, a token of the love of one of your oldest friends."

And so saying, he was hurrying away, before Fanny, overpowered by a thousand feelings of pain and pleasure, could speak; but, she then called out, "Oh! cousin, stop a moment, pray stop!"

He turned back.

"I cannot attempt to thank you," she continued, very agitated; "I feel much more than I can possibly express. Your goodness in thinking of me—"

"If that is all you have to say, Fanny," smiling and turning away again.

"No, no. I want to consult you."

She had now undone the parcel he had given her, and seeing a plain gold chain, perfectly simple and neat, she burst forth, "Oh, this is beautiful indeed! This is precisely what I wished for! It will exactly suit my cross. It comes, too, at such an acceptable moment. Oh, cousin, you do not know how acceptable it is."

"My dear Fanny, you feel these things a great deal too much. I am most happy that you like the chain; but your thanks are far beyond the occasion. Believe me, I have no pleasure in the world greater than that of contributing to yours. I can safely say, I have no pleasure so complete, so unalloyed. It is without a drawback."

Upon such expressions of affection Fanny could have lived an hour without saying another word; but Edmund obliged her to bring down her mind from its heavenly flight by saying, "But what is it that you want to consult me about?"

It was about the necklace, which she was now longing to return. She gave the history of her recent visit, and now her raptures might well be over; for Edmund was so delighted with what Miss Crawford had done, that it was some time before Fanny could get him to attend to her plan: he was in a reverie of fond reflection, but when he did understand, he was very decided in opposing what she wished.

"Return the necklace! No, my dear Fanny, upon no account. It would mortify her."

"But being her brother's present, is not it fair to suppose that she would rather not part with it?"

"It makes no difference; for as she was not prevented from offering it on that account, it ought not to prevent you from keeping it. No doubt it is handsomer than my chain, and fitter for a ballroom."

"No, it is not handsomer at all, and not half so fit. The chain will agree with William's cross beyond all comparison better than the necklace."

"For one night only, Fanny, I am sure you will make the sacrifice rather than give pain to one who has been kind. Wear the necklace to-morrow evening, and let the chain be kept for commoner occasions. This is my advice. I would not have the

shadow of a coolness between the two whose intimacy I have been observing with the greatest pleasure, and in whose characters there is so much resemblance in true generosity and natural delicacy. I would not have the shadow of a coolness arise," he repeated, his voice sinking a little, "between the two dearest objects I have on earth."

He was gone as he spoke; and Fanny calmed herself as well as she could. She was one of his two dearest—that must support her. But the first! She had never heard him speak so openly before, and though it told her no more than what she had long perceived, it was a stab, for it told of his own views. They were decided.

He would marry Miss Crawford. Could she believe Miss Crawford to deserve him, how different would it be—how far more tolerable! But he was deceived in her: he gave her merits which she had not; her faults were what they had always been, but he saw them no longer. Fanny's dejection could only be relieved by fervent prayers for his happiness.

It was her duty, and her intention, to try to overcome all that was excessive in her affection for Edmund. To fancy it a loss, a disappointment, was a presumption for which she had not words strong enough. To think of him as Miss Crawford might be justified in thinking, would in her be insanity. To her he could be nothing dearer than a friend. Why did such an idea even occur to her? It ought never to have entered her imagination. She would endeavour to be rational.

She was determined to do her duty; but having also the feelings of youth and nature, let her not be wondered at, if, after making all these good resolutions, she seized the scrap of paper on which Edmund had begun writing, as a treasure. Reading with the tenderest emotion these words, "My very dear Fanny, you must do me the favour to accept", she locked it up with the chain, as the dearest part of the gift. It was the only thing approaching to a letter which she had ever received from him; she might never receive another. Two lines more prized had never fallen from the pen of the most distinguished author. There was a felicity in the flow of the first four words, in the arrangement of "My very dear Fanny," which she could have looked at for ever.

Having regulated her thoughts and comforted her feelings by this happy mixture of reason and weakness, she was able to go down to her aunt Bertram without any apparent want of spirits.

Thursday, the day of enjoyment, came; and opened with more kindness to Fanny than such self-willed, unmanageable days often volunteer, for after breakfast a very friendly note was brought from Mr. Crawford to William, stating that as he found himself obliged to go to London for a few days, he hoped that William would accept a place in his carriage, and dine with him at the Admiral's. The proposal was a very pleasant one to William, who enjoyed the idea of travelling post with four horses, and with such an agreeable friend.

Fanny, from a different motive, was pleased; for the original plan was that William should go up by the mail, which would not have allowed him an hour's rest; and though Mr. Crawford's offer would rob her of hours of his company, she was happy to have William spared the fatigue of such a journey.

Sir Thomas approved for another reason. His nephew's introduction to Admiral Crawford might be of service. Upon the whole, it was a very joyous note.

As for the ball, Fanny had too many fears to have half the enjoyment in anticipation which she ought to have had, or must have been supposed to have by the many young ladies looking forward to the same event. Miss Price was now to make her first appearance, and must be regarded as the queen of the evening. Who could be happier than Miss Price?

But Miss Price had not been brought up to the trade of coming out into society; and had she known in what light this ball was considered respecting her, it would very much have lessened her comfort by increasing her fears of doing wrong and being looked at. To dance without being observed, to have strength and partners for about half the evening, to dance a little with Edmund, and not a great deal with Mr. Crawford, to see William enjoy himself, and keep away from her aunt Norris, was the height of her ambition.

William, determined to make this a day of thorough enjoyment, went out snipe-shooting; Edmund was at the Parsonage; and Fanny, left alone to bear the worrying of Mrs. Norris, was worn down at last to think everything an evil belonging to the ball. When sent off to dress, she moved languidly and felt incapable of happiness.

As she walked slowly upstairs she thought of yesterday; at about the same hour she had returned from the Parsonage, and found Edmund in the East room. "Suppose I were to find him there again to-day!" said she to herself, in a fond indulgence of fancy.

"Fanny," said a voice at that moment. Starting and looking up, she saw, across the lobby, Edmund himself. He came towards her. "You look tired and fagged, Fanny. You have been walking too far."

"No, I have not been out."

"Then you have had fatigues within doors, which are worse."

Fanny, not liking to complain, made no answer; and though he looked at her with his usual kindness, she believed he had soon ceased to think of her. He did not appear in spirits. They proceeded upstairs together.

"I come from Dr. Grant's," said Edmund presently. "You may guess my errand there, Fanny." And he looked so conscious, that Fanny could think but of one errand, which turned her too sick for speech. "I wished to engage Miss Crawford for the two first dances," was the explanation that followed, and brought Fanny to life again, enabling her to utter something like an inquiry as to the result.

"Yes," he answered, "she is engaged to dance with me; but" (with a smile that did not sit easy) "she says it is the last time that she ever will. I think, I hope, she is not serious. She never has danced with a clergyman, she says, and she never will. For my own sake, I could wish there had been no ball just at—I mean not this very day; to-morrow I leave home."

Fanny struggled for speech, and said, "I am very sorry that anything has occurred to distress you. This ought to be a day of pleasure. My uncle meant it so."

"Oh yes, yes! and it will be a day of pleasure. I am only vexed for a moment. But, Fanny," stopping her, taking her hand, and speaking low and seriously, "you know what all this means. You could tell me, perhaps better than I could tell you, how and why I am vexed. Let me talk to you a little. You are a kind, kind listener. I have been pained by her manner this morning. I know her disposition to be as sweet and faultless as your own, but the influence of her former companions makes her seem—gives to her conversation sometimes a tinge of wrong. She does not think evil, but she speaks it in playfulness; and though I know it to be playfulness, it grieves me to the soul."

"The effect of education," said Fanny gently.

"Yes, that uncle and aunt! They have injured the finest mind; for sometimes, Fanny, I own to you, it appears as if the mind itself was tainted."

Fanny, after a moment, said, "If you only want me as a listener, cousin, I will be as useful as I can; but I am not qualified for an adviser."

"You need not be afraid. Fanny. It is a subject on which I should never ask advice. I only want to talk to you."

"One thing more. Excuse the liberty; but take care how you talk to me. Do not tell me anything now, which afterwards you may be sorry for. The time may come—"

The colour rushed into her cheeks as she spoke.

"Dearest Fanny!" cried Edmund, pressing her hand to his lips with almost as much warmth as if it had been Miss Crawford's, "you are all considerate thought! But it is unnecessary. The time will never come. I begin to think it most improbable: the chances grow less and less; and even if it should, there will be nothing to be remembered that we need be afraid of, for I can never be ashamed of my own scruples. You are the only being upon earth to whom I should say what I have said; but you have always known my opinion of her; you can bear me witness, Fanny, that I have never been blinded. How many a time have we talked over her little errors! You need not fear me; I have almost given up every serious idea of her; but I must be a blockhead indeed, if I could think of your kindness and sympathy without the sincerest gratitude."

He had said enough to shake the experience of eighteen. He had said enough to give Fanny some happier feelings than she had lately known, and with a brighter look, she answered, "I cannot be afraid of hearing anything you wish to say. Tell me whatever you like."

The appearance of a housemaid prevented any farther conversation. For Fanny's comfort it was concluded, perhaps, at the happiest moment: had he been able to talk another five minutes, he might have talked away all Miss Crawford's faults.

But as it was, they parted on his side with grateful affection, and with some very precious sensations on hers. Now everything was smiling. William's good fortune returned again to her mind. The ball, too—such an evening of pleasure before her! It was now a real animation; and she began to dress for it with the happy flutter which belongs to a ball.

All went well: she did not dislike her own looks; and when she came to the necklaces again, her good fortune seemed complete, for the one given her by Miss Crawford would not go through the ring of the cross. Edmund's therefore, must be worn; and having, with delightful feelings, joined the chain and the cross—those memorials of the two most beloved of her heart—and put them round her neck, she was able to resolve on wearing Miss Crawford's necklace too. She acknowledged it to be right. The necklace really looked very well; and Fanny left her room at last, comfortably satisfied.

Her aunt Bertram had recollected her on this occasion with an unusual degree of wakefulness. It had occurred to her, unprompted, that Fanny might be glad of better help than the upper housemaid's, and she actually sent her own maid to assist her; too late, of course, to be of any use. Mrs. Chapman had just reached the attic floor, when Miss Price came out of her room completely dressed; but Fanny felt her aunt's attention almost as much as Lady Bertram or Mrs. Chapman could do themselves.

CHAPTER 28

Her uncle and her aunts were in the drawing-room when Fanny went down. The former saw with pleasure the elegance of her appearance. The neatness and propriety of her dress was all that he would commend in her presence, but upon her leaving the room, he spoke of her beauty with decided praise.

"Yes," said Lady Bertram, "she looks very well. I sent Chapman to her."

"Look well! Oh, yes!" cried Mrs. Norris, "she has good reason to look well with all her advantages: brought up in this family as she has been, with all the benefit of her cousins' manners before her. What would she have been if we had not taken her in hand?"

When they sat down to table the eyes of the two young men told Fanny that she was approved; and the consciousness of looking well made her look still better. Edmund said, "You must dance with me, Fanny; keep two dances for me; any two that you like, except the first." She had nothing more to wish for. She had hardly ever been in a state so close to high spirits in her life. She felt that a ball was indeed very charming, and was actually practising her steps about the drawing-room.

Soon afterwards began the sweet expectation of a carriage, while they all stood about and talked and laughed, and every moment had its pleasure and its hope. Fanny felt that there must be a struggle in Edmund's cheerfulness, but it was delightful to see the effort so successfully made.

When the guests began to assemble, her own gaiety was much subdued: the sight of so many strangers threw her back into herself; and as she was introduced here and there by her uncle, she found herself forced to be spoken to, and to curtsy, and speak again. This was a hard duty, and she was never summoned to it without looking longingly at William, who walked about at his ease.

With the entrance of the Grants and Crawfords, stiffness gave way before their popular manners: everybody grew comfortable. Fanny would have been again most happy, could she have kept her eyes from wandering between Edmund and Mary Crawford. She looked all loveliness—and what might not be the end of it?

Her musings were ended on seeing Mr. Crawford before her; he engaged her for the first two dances. Her happiness on this occasion was finely chequered. To be secure of a partner at first was a most essential good—for she so little understood her own claims as to think that if Mr. Crawford had not asked her, she must have been the last to be sought after; but at the same time there was a pointedness in his manner of asking her which she did not like, and she saw his eye glancing for a moment at her necklace, with a smile which made her blush and feel wretched. Embarrassed, she had no composure till he turned away to some one else. Then she could gradually rise up to the genuine satisfaction of having a partner secured before the dancing began.

When the company were moving into the ballroom, she found herself near Miss Crawford, and hastened to explain the second necklace. Miss Crawford listened; and all her intended insinuations to Fanny were forgotten: she felt only one thing; and she exclaimed with eager pleasure, "Did Edmund? That was like himself. No other man would have thought of it. I honour him beyond expression." And she looked around as if longing to tell him so.

Fanny's heart sunk, but there was no leisure for thinking long. They were in the ballroom, the violins were playing, and her mind was in a flutter.

Sir Thomas came to her, and asked if she were engaged to dance; and the "Yes, sir; to Mr. Crawford," was exactly what he had intended to hear. He then told Fanny that she was to lead the way and open the ball; an idea that had never occurred to her before. She had assumed that Edmund would begin with Miss Crawford; and she could not help an exclamation of surprise, an entreaty even to be excused. Such was her horror, that she could actually look Sir Thomas in the face and say that she hoped it might be settled otherwise.

In vain, however: Sir Thomas smiled, and said decidedly, "It must be so, my dear"; and she found herself the next moment conducted by Mr. Crawford to the top of the room, and standing there to be joined by the rest of the dancers, couple after couple, as they were formed.

She could hardly believe it. To be placed above so many elegant young women! It was treating her like her cousins! And her thoughts flew to those absent cousins with truly tender regret, that they were not at home to share in a pleasure which would have been so delightful to them. So often she had heard them wish for a ball at home! And for her to be opening the ball—and with Mr. Crawford too! She hoped they would not envy her that distinction now; but when she looked back to the autumn, the present arrangement was almost more than she could understand.

The ball began. It was rather honour than happiness to Fanny, for the first dance at least: her partner was in excellent spirits, but she was too frightened to have any enjoyment till she could suppose herself no longer looked at. Young, pretty, and gentle, however, there were few persons present that did not praise her. She was attractive, she was modest, she was Sir Thomas's niece, and she was soon said to be admired by Mr. Crawford. It was enough to give her general favour.

Sir Thomas himself was proud of her; and without attributing her beauty, as Mrs. Norris did, to her transplantation to Mansfield, he was pleased with himself for having supplied everything else: education and manners she owed to him.

Miss Crawford saw much of Sir Thomas's thoughts, and wishing to recommend herself to him, stepped aside to say something agreeable of Fanny. Her praise was warm, and he certainly received it better than his lady did, when Mary turned to compliment her on Miss Price's looks.

"Yes, she looks very well," was Lady Bertram's placid reply. "Chapman helped her to dress. I sent Chapman to her." She was really pleased to have Fanny admired; but she was so struck with her own kindness in sending Chapman to her, that she could not get it out of her head.

Miss Crawford knew Mrs. Norris too well to think of gratifying *her* by commendation of Fanny; instead—"Ah! ma'am, how much we want dear Mrs. Rushworth and Julia to-night!" Mrs. Norris paid her with as many courteous words as she had time for amid her occupation in making up card-tables, giving hints to Sir Thomas, and trying to move all the chaperons across the room.

Miss Crawford blundered most towards Fanny herself in her intentions to please. She meant to be giving her little heart a happy flutter; and, misinterpreting Fanny's blushes, thought she must be doing so when she said, with a significant look, "Perhaps you can tell me why my brother goes to town to-morrow? He says he has business there, but will not tell me what. Now, I must ask you. Pray, what is Henry going for?"

Fanny protested her ignorance.

"Well, then," replied Miss Crawford, laughing, "I must suppose it to be purely for the pleasure of taking your brother, and talking about you on the way."

Fanny was confused; while Miss Crawford wondered that she did not smile, and thought her over-anxious, or thought her odd, or thought her anything rather than

insensible of pleasure in Henry's attentions. Fanny had a good deal of enjoyment in the course of the evening; but Henry's attentions had very little to do with it. She would rather not have been asked to dance by him again so soon. She could not say that it was unpleasantly done, and sometimes, when he talked of William, he was not unagreeable, and showed a warmth of heart which did him credit. But still his attentions made no part of her satisfaction. She was happy whenever she looked at William, and saw how he was enjoying himself; she was happy in knowing herself admired; and she was happy in having the two dances with Edmund to look forward to.

She was happy even when they did take place; but not from any expressions of tender gallantry on his side. Edmund's mind was weary, and her happiness sprung from being the friend with whom it could find repose.

"I am worn out with civility," said he. "I have been talking incessantly all night, and with nothing to say. But with you, Fanny, there may be peace. You will not want to be talked to. Let us have the luxury of silence."

Fanny would hardly even speak her agreement. His weariness was to be respected, and they went down their two dances together with such sober tranquillity as might satisfy any looker-on that Sir Thomas had been bringing up no wife for his younger son.

The evening had afforded Edmund little pleasure. Miss Crawford had been in gay spirits when they first danced together, but her gaiety rather sank than raised his comfort; and afterwards, she had absolutely pained him by her manner of speaking of the profession to which he was now on the point of belonging. He had reasoned, she had ridiculed; and they had parted at last with mutual vexation. Fanny had seen enough to be tolerably satisfied. It was barbarous to be happy when Edmund was suffering. Yet some happiness must arise from the very conviction that he did suffer.

When her two dances with him were over, her strength for more was pretty well at an end; and Sir Thomas, seeing her breathless, and with her hand at her side, gave his orders for her sitting down. Mr. Crawford sat down likewise.

"Poor Fanny!" cried William, coming to visit her, "how soon she is knocked up! Why, the sport is but just begun. How can you be tired so soon?"

"So soon! my good friend," said Sir Thomas, "it is three o'clock, and your sister is not used to these sort of hours."

"Well, then, Fanny, you shall not get up to-morrow before I go. Sleep as long as you can, and never mind me."

"What! Did she think of being up before you set off?"

"Oh! yes, sir," cried Fanny eagerly; "I must get up and breakfast with him. It will be the last time, you know."

"You had better not. He is to have gone by half-past nine. Mr. Crawford, I think you call for him at half-past nine?"

Fanny, however, had too many tears in her eyes for denial; and it ended in a gracious "Well, well!" which was permission. Sir Thomas then asked Crawford to join the early breakfast party: and the readiness with which his invitation was accepted convinced him that he was right: Mr. Crawford was in love with Fanny.

His niece, meanwhile, did not thank him for what he had just done. She had hoped to have William all to herself the last morning. But she was so totally unused to have her pleasure consulted, that she was more disposed to rejoice in having carried her point so far, than to repine.

Shortly afterward, Sir Thomas advised her to go to bed. It was the advice of absolute power, and she had only to rise, and pass quietly away; stopping at the entrance-door to take a last look at the five or six determined couples who were still hard at work; and then, creeping slowly up the staircase, feverish with hopes and fears, sore-footed and fatigued, restless and agitated, yet feeling, in spite of everything, that a ball was indeed delightful.

In thus sending her away, Sir Thomas perhaps might not be thinking merely of her health. It might occur to him that Mr. Crawford had been sitting by her long enough, or he might mean to recommend her as a wife by showing her persuadableness.

CHAPTER 29

The breakfast was soon over; the last kiss was given, and William was gone. Mr. Crawford had been very punctual, and short and pleasant had been the meal.

Fanny walked back to the breakfast-room with a very saddened heart; and there her uncle kindly left her to cry in peace, conceiving, perhaps, that the cold pork bones in William's plate might but divide her feelings with the broken egg-shells in Mr. Crawford's. She sat and cried as her uncle intended, but for her brother only. William was gone, and she felt as if she had wasted half his visit in idle cares.

It was a heavy, melancholy day. Edmund bade them good-bye for a week, and mounted his horse for Peterborough, and then all were gone. Nothing remained of last night but remembrances, which she had nobody to share in. She talked to her aunt Bertram, but it was heavy work. Lady Bertram was not certain of anybody's dress or anybody's place at supper but her own. Much of her conversation was a languid, "Yes, very well; did you? did he? I did not see that; I should not know one from the other." This was very bad. It was only better than Mrs. Norris's sharp answers would have been; but she was gone home with the leftover jellies to nurse a sick maid.

The evening was heavy like the day. "I cannot think what is the matter with me," said Lady Bertram. "I feel quite stupid. It must be sitting up so late last night. Fanny, you must do something to keep me awake. Fetch the cards; I feel so very stupid."

The cards were brought, and Fanny played at cribbage with her aunt till bedtime; and as Sir Thomas was reading to himself, no sounds were heard in the room for the next two hours beyond the reckonings of the game—"And that makes thirty-one; four in hand and eight in crib. You are to deal, ma'am; shall I deal for you?" Fanny thought of the difference which twenty-four hours had made. Last night it had been bustle and motion, noise and brilliancy, everywhere. Now it was languor, and all but solitude.

A good night's rest improved her spirits. She could think of William more cheerfully; and as she was able to talk over Thursday night with Mrs. Grant and Miss Crawford, with all the playfulness so essential to the shade of a departed ball, she could afterwards bring her mind back to its everyday tranquillity.

They were a small party now, with Edmund gone. But she must learn to endure this. He would soon be always gone; and she was thankful that she could now sit in the same room with her uncle and answer his questions without such wretched feelings as formerly.

"We miss our two young men," observed Sir Thomas on the first day; and seeing Fanny's swimming eyes, said nothing more than to drink their good health; but on the second day, William was kindly commended and his promotion hoped for.

"His visits to us may now be more frequent," said Sir Thomas. "As to Edmund, we must learn to do without him. This will be the last winter of his belonging to us."

"Yes," said Lady Bertram, "but I wish he was not going away. They are all going away, I think. I wish they would stay at home."

This wish was levelled principally at Julia, who had just asked to go to town with Maria; and as Sir Thomas had granted permission, Lady Bertram was lamenting the change it made in the prospect of Julia's return. Sir Thomas used much good sense to reconcile his wife to the arrangement. Everything that an affectionate mother must feel in promoting her children's enjoyment was attributed to her nature. Lady Bertram agreed to it all, and then observed, "Sir Thomas, I am very glad we took Fanny as we did, for now the others are away we feel the good of it."

Sir Thomas immediately added, "Very true. We show Fanny what a good girl we think her by praising her to her face; she is now a very valuable companion."

"Yes," said Lady Bertram; "and it is a comfort to think that we shall always have her."

Sir Thomas half smiled, glanced at his niece, and gravely replied, "She will never leave us, I hope, till invited to some other home that may promise her greater happiness."

"That is not very likely, Sir Thomas. Who should invite her? Maria would not think of asking her to live at Sotherton; and besides, I cannot do without her."

The week which passed so quietly at the great house in Mansfield had a very different character at the Parsonage. What was tranquillity and comfort to Fanny was tediousness and vexation to Mary. To Fanny's mind, Edmund's absence was really, in its cause and its tendency, a relief. To Mary it was every way painful. She felt the want of his society almost every hour, and was irritated when she considered why he went. They were now a miserable trio at the Parsonage, confined within doors by rain and snow, with nothing to do. Angry as she was with Edmund for adhering to his own notions, and acting on them in defiance of her (and she had been so angry that they had hardly parted friends at the ball), she could not help thinking of him continually when absent, dwelling on his merit and affection, and longing again for their almost daily meetings. He should not have planned such an absence, when her own departure from Mansfield was so near.

Then she began to blame herself. She wished she had not spoken so warmly in their last conversation. She was afraid she had used some strong, contemptuous expressions in speaking of the clergy, and that was ill-bred; it was wrong. She wished such words unsaid with all her heart.

All this was bad, but she had still more to feel when Friday came round again and brought no Edmund; Saturday, and still no Edmund; and when she learned that he had written home to defer his return, having promised to remain some days longer with his friend.

If she had felt impatience and regret before, she now felt it tenfold more. She had, moreover, to contend with an entirely new emotion—jealousy. His friend Mr. Owen had sisters; he might find them attractive. It became absolutely necessary for her to try to learn something more; and she made her way to the Park and Fanny, for the chance of hearing a little news, or at least hearing his name.

Miss Crawford thus began, with a voice as well regulated as she could—"And how do you like your cousin Edmund's staying away so long? You must miss him. Does his staying longer surprise you?"

"I do not know," said Fanny hesitatingly. "Yes; I had not particularly expected it."

"Perhaps he will stay longer than he talks of, as young men do."

"He did not, the only time he went to see Mr. Owen before."

"He finds the house more agreeable now. He is a very—a very pleasing young man himself, and I cannot help being rather concerned at not seeing him again before I go to London. As soon as Henry comes there will be nothing to detain me at Mansfield. I should like to have seen him once more, I confess. But you must give my compliments to him. Yes; I think it must be compliments. Is not there a something needed, Miss Price, in our language—a something between compliments and—and love—to suit the sort of friendly acquaintance we have had together? But compliments may be sufficient here. Was his letter a long one? Is it Christmas gaities that he is staying for?"

"I only heard a part of the letter; it was to my uncle; but I believe it was very short. All that I heard was that his friend had pressed him to stay a few days longer, and that he had agreed to do so."

"Oh! if he wrote to his father, no wonder he was concise. Who could write chat to Sir Thomas? If he had written to you, there would have been particulars of balls and parties. He would have sent you a description of everybody. How many Miss Owens are there?"

"Three grown up."

"Are they musical?"

"I do not at all know."

"That is the first question, you know," said Miss Crawford, trying to appear gay and unconcerned, "which every woman who plays herself is sure to ask about another. But one knows, without being told, exactly what any three sisters must be: all very accomplished and pleasing, and one very pretty. Two play on the pianoforte, and one on the harp; and all sing, or would sing if they were taught, or sing all the better for not being taught; or something like it."

"I know nothing of the Miss Owens," said Fanny calmly.

"You know nothing and you care less, as people say. Indeed, how can one care for those one has never seen? Well, when your cousin comes back, he will find Mansfield very quiet; all the noisy ones gone, myself included. Mrs. Grant does not like my going."

Fanny felt obliged to speak. "You cannot doubt your being missed by many," said she. "You will be very much missed."

Miss Crawford turned her eye on her, as if wanting to hear or see more, and then laughingly said, "Oh yes! missed as every noisy evil is missed when it is taken away. But I may be found by those who want to see me. I shall not be in any distant, or unapproachable region."

Now Fanny could not bring herself to speak, and Miss Crawford was disappointed; for she had hoped to hear some pleasant assurance of her power from one who she thought must know.

"The Miss Owens," said she, "suppose you were to have one of the Miss Owens settled at Thornton Lacey; how should you like it? I dare say they are trying for it. It would be a very pretty establishment for them. Their father is a clergyman, and their brother is a clergyman, and they are all clergymen together. You don't speak, Fanny; but honestly now, do not you rather expect it?"

"No," said Fanny stoutly, "I do not expect it at all."

"Not at all!" cried Miss Crawford with alacrity. "But I dare say you know—perhaps you do not think him likely to marry at all—or not at present."

"No, I do not," said Fanny softly, hoping she did not err.

Her companion looked at her keenly; and gathering greater spirit from Fanny's blush, only said, "He is best off as he is," and turned the subject.

CHAPTER 30

Miss Crawford's uneasiness was much lightened by this conversation, and she walked home in better spirits. As that very evening brought her brother down from London again in his usual cheerfulness, she had nothing farther to dismay her. He still refused to tell her what he had gone for; the day before it might have irritated, but now it was a pleasant joke—she suspected him of concealing some surprise to herself.

The next day did bring a surprise to her. Henry had said he would just go and ask the Bertrams how they did, and be back in ten minutes, but he was gone above an hour. When his sister, who had been waiting for him impatiently, cried out, "My dear Henry, where can you have been all this time?" he said that he had been sitting with Lady Bertram and Fanny.

"For an hour and a half!" exclaimed Mary.

"Yes, Mary," said he, drawing her arm within his: "I could not get away sooner; Fanny looked so lovely! I am quite determined, Mary. My mind is entirely made up. You must be aware that I am quite determined to marry Fanny Price."

The surprise was now complete; for his sister had never suspected his having any such views; and she looked so astonished that he was obliged to repeat what he had said. The surprise was not unwelcome. There was even pleasure with it. Mary was in a state of mind to rejoice in a connexion with the Bertram family, and to be not displeased with her brother's marrying a little beneath him.

"Yes, Mary," was Henry's assurance. "I am fairly caught. You know with what idle designs I began; but this is the end of them. I have, I flatter myself, made progress in her affections; but my own are entirely fixed."

"Lucky, lucky girl!" cried Mary; "what a match for her! I approve your choice from my soul. You will have a sweet little wife; all gratitude and devotion. Exactly what you deserve. What an amazing match for her! How her family will rejoice! But tell me all about it! When did you begin to think seriously about her?"

Nothing could be more impossible, yet more agreeable, than to answer such a question. "How the pleasing plague had stolen on him" he could not say.

"Ah, my dear Henry, this is what took you to London! You chose to consult the Admiral before you made up your mind."

But this he stoutly denied; the Admiral hated marriage.

"When Fanny is known to him," continued Henry, "he will dote on her. She is exactly the woman to do away every prejudice of such a man as the Admiral. But till it is absolutely settled, he shall know nothing of the matter. No, Mary, you have not discovered my business yet."

"Well, I am satisfied. I know now to whom it must relate, and am in no hurry for the rest. Fanny Price! quite wonderful! You could not have chosen better. There is not a better girl in the world; and as to her connexions, she is niece to Sir Thomas Bertram: that is enough. But go on. Tell me more. Does she know her own happiness?"

"No."

"What are you waiting for?"

"For very little more than opportunity. Mary, she is not like her cousins; but I think I shall not ask in vain."

"Oh no! you cannot. Even supposing her not to love you already (of which, however, I have little doubt)—you would be safe. Her gentleness and gratitude would

secure her immediately. I do not think she would marry you without love; but ask her to love you, and she will never have the heart to refuse."

A conversation followed almost as deeply interesting to her as to himself, though he had in fact nothing to relate but his own sensations, nothing to dwell on but Fanny's charms. Fanny's beauty, Fanny's graces of manner and goodness of heart, were the exhaustless theme. Her temper he had good reason to depend on. He had often seen it tried. Was there one of the family, excepting Edmund, who had not in some way exercised her patience? Her affections were evidently strong. To see her with her brother! Then, her understanding was quick and clear; and her manners were the mirror of her modest and elegant mind.

Nor was this all. Henry Crawford had too much sense not to feel the worth of good principles in a wife, though he might not know them by their proper name; but when he talked of her having a steadiness of conduct, and a high notion of honour and decorum, he expressed what was inspired by the knowledge of her being well principled and religious.

"I could so wholly and absolutely confide in her," said he; "and that is what I want."

Well might his sister rejoice in Fanny's prospects.

"I am convinced that you are doing right; and though I should never have selected Fanny Price as the girl to attach you, I am now persuaded she is the very one to make you happy. Your wicked project upon her peace turns out a clever thought indeed. You will both find your good in it."

"It was bad, very bad in me against such a creature; but I did not know her then; and I will make her very happy, Mary; happier than she has ever yet been. I will not take her from Northamptonshire. I shall let Everingham, and rent a place in this neighbourhood."

"Ha!" cried Mary; "settle in Northamptonshire! That is pleasant! Then we shall be all together."

When she had spoken it, she recollected herself, and wished it unsaid; but her brother saw her only as the inmate of Mansfield parsonage, and invited her in the kindest manner to his own house.

"You must give us more than half your time," said he. "I cannot admit Mrs. Grant to have an equal claim with Fanny and myself. Fanny will be so truly your sister!"

Mary gave grateful assurances; but she was now very fully purposed to be the guest of neither brother nor sister many months longer.

"In London, of course, you will have a house of your own: no longer with the Admiral. My dearest Henry, the advantage to you of getting away from the Admiral before your manners are hurt by contagion of his; before you have contracted any of his foolish opinions, or learned to sit over your dinner as if it were the best blessing of life! Your marrying early may be the saving of you. To have seen you grow like the Admiral would have broken my heart."

"Well, well, we do not think alike here. The Admiral has his faults, but he is a very good man, and has been more than a father to me. Few fathers would have let me have my own way half so much. You must not prejudice Fanny against him. I must have them love one another."

Mary refrained from saying that two people could not be less alike; but she could not help remarking, "Henry, if I supposed the next Mrs. Crawford were to be treated like my poor aunt, the Admiral's wife, I would prevent the marriage; but I know you. I know that a wife you loved would be the happiest of women, and that even when you ceased to love, she would still find in you the good-breeding of a gentleman."

The impossibility of ceasing to love Fanny Price was of course his eloquent answer.

"Had you seen her this morning, Mary, attending with such sweetness and patience to all the demands of her aunt's stupidity, her colour beautifully heightened as she leant over her work, with such unpretending gentleness, one little curl of hair falling forward as she wrote, which she now and then shook back; and in the midst of all this, still listening to what I said. Had you seen her so, Mary, you would not have thought her power over my heart could ever cease."

"My dearest Henry," cried Mary, "how glad I am to see you so much in love! But what will Mrs. Rushworth and Julia say?"

"I care not. They will now see what sort of woman it is that can attach me, that can attach a man of sense. I wish the discovery may do them good. They will now see their cousin treated as she ought to be, and I wish they may be heartily ashamed of their own abominable neglect and unkindness. They will be angry," he added, after a moment's silence, and in a cooler tone; "Mrs. Rushworth will be very angry. It will be a bitter pill to her; that is, it will have two moments' ill flavour, and then be swallowed and forgotten; for I do not suppose her feelings more lasting than other women's. My Fanny will feel a difference in the behaviour of everyone who approaches her; and I will be happy to know that I am the doer of it. Now she is dependent, friendless, neglected, forgotten."

"Nay, Henry, not by all. Her cousin Edmund never forgets her."

"Edmund! True, I believe he is generally kind to her, and so is Sir Thomas in his way; but it is the way of a rich, superior, long-worded uncle. What can Sir Thomas and Edmund do for her happiness, comfort, honour, and dignity, compared to what I shall do?"

CHAPTER 31

Henry Crawford was at Mansfield Park again early the next morning. Lady Bertram was quitting the breakfast-room as he entered.

Henry, overjoyed to have her go, bowed and watched her off, and then turned instantly to Fanny, and, taking out some letters, said, "I have been wishing to see you alone. Knowing what your feelings as a sister are, I could hardly have borne that any one should share with you in the first knowledge of the news I bring. Your brother is a lieutenant. I have the infinite satisfaction of congratulating you on your brother's promotion. Here are the letters which announce it. You will, perhaps, like to see them."

Fanny could not speak; but for him to see the expression of her eyes, the change of her complexion, was enough. She took the letters. The first was from the Admiral to inform his nephew of his having succeeded in the promotion of young Price, and enclosing two more, one from the Secretary of the First Lord to a friend, whom the Admiral had set to work in the business, the other from that friend to himself; in which it appeared that Sir Charles was delighted to prove his regard for Admiral Crawford, by the commission of Mr. William Price as Second Lieutenant.

While her hand was trembling under these letters, her heart swelling with emotion, Crawford thus continued eagerly—

"I will not talk of my own happiness," said he, "for I think only of yours. I have not lost a moment in bringing the news. How impatient, how anxious, how wild I have been; how cruelly disappointed, in not having the business finished while I was in London! I stayed there from day to day in the hope of it, for nothing less would have kept me from Mansfield. But there were difficulties and delays, and I came away on Monday, trusting that I should very soon be followed by such letters as these. My uncle, who is the very best man in the world, has exerted himself, as I knew he would, after seeing your brother. He was delighted with him. He gave William the highest commendation after the evening they passed together."

"Has this been all your doing, then?" cried Fanny. "How very, very kind! I beg your pardon, but I am bewildered. Did Admiral Crawford apply? How was it? I am stupefied."

Henry was happy to explain what he had done. His journey to London had been undertaken with no other view than that of introducing her brother to the Admiral and prevailing on him to exert his interest. This had been his business.

He spoke with such a glow, used such strong expressions, and was so abounding in twofold motives, that Fanny could not have remained unaware of his drift, had she been able to attend; but her heart was so full that she could only listen imperfectly, saying when he paused, "How very kind! Oh, Mr. Crawford, we are infinitely obliged to you! Dearest William!" She jumped up, crying out, "My uncle ought to know it as soon as possible."

But this could not be allowed. The opportunity was too fair, and his feelings too impatient. He was after her immediately. "She must not go, she must allow him five minutes longer." He led her back to her seat, and was in the middle of his farther explanation, before she had suspected for what she was detained.

When she did understand it, however, and found herself expected to believe that she had created sensations which his heart had never known before, and that everything he had done for William was because of his attachment to her, she was

exceedingly distressed, and for some moments unable to speak. She considered it all as nonsense, as mere trifling and gallantry; he was treating her improperly, and in a way that she had not deserved; but it was like himself, and entirely of a piece with what she had seen before; and she would not allow herself to show displeasure, after he had conferred such an obligation. While her heart was still bounding with joy and gratitude on William's behalf, she could not be severe; and after having twice drawn back her hand, and attempted in vain to turn away, she got up, and said only, with much agitation, "Don't, Mr. Crawford, pray don't! I beg you would not. This sort of talking is very unpleasant to me. I must go away. I cannot bear it."

But he was still talking on, describing his affection, and finally offering himself, hand, fortune, everything, to her acceptance. It was so; he had said it. Her astonishment and confusion increased; and though still not supposing him serious, she could hardly stand. He pressed for an answer.

"No, no, no!" she cried, hiding her face. "This is all nonsense. I can hear no more of this. Your kindness to William makes me more obliged to you than words can express; but I do not want, I cannot bear, I must not listen to such—No, no, don't think of me. But you are not thinking of me. I know it is all nothing."

She burst away from him, and at that moment Sir Thomas was heard speaking to a servant just outside the room. She rushed out at an opposite door from the one her uncle was approaching, and was walking up and down the East room in the utmost confusion of feeling, before Sir Thomas had reached the beginning of the joyful news which his visitor came to communicate.

She was feeling, thinking, trembling about everything; agitated, happy, miserable, infinitely obliged, absolutely angry. It was all beyond belief! He was inexcusable, incomprehensible! But such were his habits that he could do nothing without a mixture of evil. He had previously made her the happiest of human beings, and now he had insulted—she knew not how to regard it. She did not want him to be serious, and yet what could excuse his words, if they meant but to trifle?

But William was a lieutenant. That was a fact beyond a doubt. She would think of it and forget all the rest. Mr. Crawford would certainly never address her so again: he must have seen how unwelcome it was to her; and in that case, how gratefully she could esteem him for his friendship to William!

She would not stir from the East room till she had satisfied herself of Mr. Crawford's having left the house; but when convinced of his being gone, she was eager to go down and share her joy with her uncle. Sir Thomas was as joyful as she could desire, and she had so comfortable a talk with him about William as to make her feel as if nothing had occurred to vex her, till she found that Mr. Crawford was engaged to return and dine there that very day. This was most unwelcome.

She tried to get the better of it; tried very hard, as the dinner hour approached, to feel and appear as usual; but it was quite impossible for her not to look most shy and uncomfortable when their visitor entered the room.

Mr. Crawford was soon close to her; he had a note to deliver from his sister. Fanny could not look at him. She opened her note immediately, glad to have anything to do, and happy, as she read it, to feel that the fidgetings of her aunt Norris screened her from view.

"My dear Fanny,—for so I may now always call you—I cannot let my brother go without sending you a few lines of congratulation, and giving my most joyful consent and approval. Go on, my dear Fanny, and without fear; there can be no difficulties worth naming. I choose to suppose that my consent will be something; so you may

smile upon him with your sweetest smiles this afternoon, and send him back to me even happier than he goes.—Yours affectionately, M. C."

These were not expressions to do Fanny any good; for though she read in too much haste and confusion to form the clearest judgment of Miss Crawford's meaning, it was evident that she meant to compliment her on her brother's attachment, and believed it serious. Fanny did not know what to do. There was wretchedness in the idea of its being serious; there was perplexity every way. She was distressed whenever Mr. Crawford spoke to her, and he spoke to her much too often. She could hardly eat; and when Sir Thomas good-humouredly observed that joy had taken away her appetite, she was ready to sink with shame; for though nothing could have tempted her to turn her eyes to Mr. Crawford, she felt that his were immediately directed towards her.

She was more silent than ever, hardly joining even when William was the subject. She began to despair of ever getting away; but at last they were in the drawing-room, where her aunts finished the subject of William's appointment in their own style.

Mrs. Norris seemed delighted with the saving it would be to Sir Thomas. "Now William would be able to keep himself, which would make a vast difference to his uncle; and, indeed, it would make some difference in her presents too. She was very glad that she had given William something considerable at parting, for now it would be useful in helping to fit up his cabin."

"I am glad you gave him something considerable," said Lady Bertram, with most unsuspecting calmness, "for I gave him only £10."

"Indeed!" cried Mrs. Norris, reddening. "Upon my word, he must have gone off with his pockets well lined!"

"Sir Thomas told me £10 would be enough."

Mrs. Norris, being not at all inclined to question its sufficiency, began on another point.

"It is amazing," said she, "how much young people cost their friends, what with bringing them up and putting them out in the world! Now, take my sister Price's children; nobody would believe what they cost Sir Thomas every year, to say nothing of what I do for them."

"Very true, sister, as you say. But, poor things! they cannot help it; and you know it makes very little difference to Sir Thomas. Fanny, William must not forget my shawl if he goes to the East Indies. I wish he may go there, so that I may have my shawl. I think I will have two shawls, Fanny."

Fanny, meanwhile, was very earnestly trying to understand what Mr. and Miss Crawford were at. Everything reasonable was against their being serious. How could she have attached a man who had been admired by so many, and flirted with so many, infinitely her superiors; who seemed so little open to serious impressions; who thought so carelessly, so unfeelingly on all such points, who was everything to everybody, and seemed to find no one essential to him? And could his sister, with all her worldly notions of matrimony, be forwarding anything serious in such a quarter? It was not possible. She had quite convinced herself of this before Sir Thomas and Mr. Crawford joined them. The difficulty was in maintaining the conviction after Mr. Crawford was in the room.

She thought he was wishing to speak to her unheard by the rest. She fancied he was trying for it the whole evening, whenever Sir Thomas was engaged with Mrs. Norris, and she carefully refused him every opportunity.

At last he began to talk of going away; but turning to her the next moment, he said, "Have you nothing to send to Mary? No answer to her note? She will be disappointed if she receives nothing from you. Pray write to her, if it be only a line."

"Oh yes! certainly," cried Fanny, rising in embarrassed haste and wanting to get away—"I will write directly."

She went to the table, and prepared her writing materials without knowing what in the world to say. She had read Miss Crawford's note only once, and how to reply to anything so imperfectly understood was most distressing. Yet something must be written; and wishing not to appear to think anything really intended, she wrote thus, in great trembling both of spirits and hand—

"I am very much obliged to you, my dear Miss Crawford, for your kind congratulations, as far as they relate to my dearest William. The rest of your note I know means nothing; but I am so unequal to anything of the sort, that I hope you will excuse my begging you to take no farther notice. I have seen too much of Mr. Crawford not to understand his manners; if he understood me as well, he would, I dare say, behave differently. I do not know what I write, but it would be a great favour of you never to mention the subject again. With thanks for the honour of your note, I remain, dear Miss Crawford, etc., etc."

The conclusion was scarcely intelligible from increasing fright, for she found that Mr. Crawford was coming towards her.

"I do not mean to hurry you," said he, in an undervoice.

"Oh! I thank you; it will be ready in a moment; I am very much obliged; if you will be so good as to give that to Miss Crawford."

The note was held out, and must be taken; and as she instantly and with averted eyes walked towards the fireplace, he had nothing to do but to go.

Fanny thought she had never known a day of greater agitation, both of pain and pleasure; but happily the pleasure was not of a sort to die with the day; whereas the pain, she hoped, would return no more. She had no doubt that her note must appear excessively ill-written, that the language would disgrace a child; but at least it would assure them both of her being neither imposed on nor gratified by Mr. Crawford's attentions.

CHAPTER 32

Fanny had not forgotten Mr. Crawford when she awoke the next morning; but she was still sanguine as to its effect of her note. If Mr. Crawford would but go away! That was what she most earnestly desired: go and take his sister with him, as he had intended. And why it was not done already she could not think.

She was astonished to see Mr. Crawford coming up to the house again, at an hour as early as the day before. His coming might have nothing to do with her, but she must avoid seeing him if possible; and she resolved to remain upstairs during his visit, unless actually sent for.

She sat some time in a good deal of agitation, listening, trembling, and fearing to be sent for every moment; but as no footsteps approached the East room, she grew gradually composed, and was able to employ herself, and to hope that Mr. Crawford would go without her being obliged to know anything of the matter.

Nearly half an hour had passed, and she was growing very comfortable, when suddenly the sound of a heavy step was heard, an unusual step in that part of the house. It was her uncle's; and she began to tremble at the idea of his coming up to speak to her.

It was indeed Sir Thomas who opened the door and asked if he might come in. The terror of his former occasional visits to that room seemed all renewed, and she felt as if he were going to examine her again in French and English.

She was all attention, however, in placing a chair for him, and trying to appear honoured. Stopping short as he entered, he said, with much surprise, "Why have you no fire to-day?"

There was snow on the ground, and she was sitting in a shawl. She hesitated.

"I am not cold, sir: I never sit here long at this time of year."

"But you have a fire in general?"

"No, sir."

"How comes this about? Here must be some mistake. I understood that you had the use of this room by way of making you comfortable. It is highly unfit for you to sit, be it only half an hour a day, without a fire. You are not strong. You are chilly. Your aunt cannot be aware of this."

Fanny would rather have been silent; but being obliged to speak, she could not refrain, in justice to the aunt she loved best, from saying something about "my aunt Norris".

"I understand," cried her uncle, recollecting himself, and not wanting to hear more: "I understand. Your aunt Norris has always advised young people's being brought up without unnecessary indulgences; but there should be moderation in everything. She is also very hardy herself, and so course expects others to be likewise. And on another account, too, I can perfectly comprehend her sentiments. I am aware that there has been sometimes a misplaced distinction between you and your cousins; but I think too well of you, Fanny, to suppose you will ever harbour resentment on that account. You know that your friends were preparing you for that mediocrity of condition which seemed to be your lot. Though their caution may prove eventually unnecessary, it was kindly meant. But enough of this. Sit down, my dear. I must speak to you, but I will not detain you long."

Fanny obeyed, with eyes cast down and colour rising. Sir Thomas, trying to suppress a smile, went on.

"I have had a visitor this morning. Not long after breakfast, Mr. Crawford was shown in. His errand you may probably conjecture."

Fanny's colour grew deeper; and her uncle, perceiving her great embarrassment, turned away his own eyes, and proceeded in his account of Mr. Crawford's visit.

Mr. Crawford's business had been to declare himself the lover of Fanny, make decided proposals for her, and ask the blessing of the uncle, who seemed to stand in the place of her parents; and he had done it all so well, so properly, that Sir Thomas was happy to give the details of their conversation. Unaware of what was passing in his niece's mind, he thought that he must be gratifying her. He talked, therefore, for several minutes without Fanny's daring to interrupt him. With her eyes fixed intently on one of the windows, she listened to her uncle in the utmost perturbation and dismay.

Rising from his chair, he said, "And now, Fanny, having performed one part of my commission, I may execute the remainder by asking you to accompany me downstairs, where you may find a companion still better worth listening to. Mr. Crawford is in my room, and hoping to see you there."

There was a look, a start on hearing this, which astonished Sir Thomas; but his astonishment increased on hearing her exclaim—"Oh! no, sir, indeed I cannot go down to him. Mr. Crawford must know that: he spoke to me on this subject yesterday, and I told him that it was very disagreeable to me, and quite out of my power to return his good opinion."

"I do not catch your meaning," said Sir Thomas, sitting down again. "What is all this? I know he spoke to you yesterday, and (as I understand) received as much encouragement as a well-judging young woman could permit herself to give. I was very much pleased with your behaviour on the occasion; it showed a commendable discretion. But now, when he has made his overtures so properly—what are your scruples now?"

"You are mistaken, sir," cried Fanny, forced by her anxiety even to tell her uncle that he was wrong; "you are quite mistaken. How could Mr. Crawford say such a thing? I gave him no encouragement yesterday. On the contrary, I told him, I cannot recollect my exact words, but I am sure I told him that I would not listen to him, that it was very unpleasant to me in every respect, and that I begged him never to talk to me in that manner again. I should have said more, if I had been quite certain of his meaning anything seriously; but I did not like to be imputing more than might be intended. I thought it might all pass for nothing with him."

She could say no more.

"Am I to understand," said Sir Thomas, after a few moments' silence, "that you mean to refuse Mr. Crawford?"

"Yes, sir."

"Refuse him?"

"Yes, sir."

"Refuse Mr. Crawford! Upon what plea? For what reason?"

"I—I cannot like him, sir, well enough to marry him."

"This is very strange!" said Sir Thomas, in a voice of calm displeasure. "Here is a young man wishing to pay his addresses to you, with everything to recommend him: situation, fortune, and character, with more than common agreeableness, with address and conversation pleasing to everybody. His sister, moreover, is your intimate friend, and he has done *that* for your brother, which might have been almost sufficient recommendation to you, had there been no other."

"Yes," said Fanny, in a faint voice, and looking down with fresh shame.

"You must have been aware," continued Sir Thomas, "of a particularity in Mr. Crawford's manners to you. This cannot have taken you by surprise. You must have observed his attentions; and though you always received them very properly, I never perceived them to be unpleasant to you. I am half inclined to think, Fanny, that you do not know your own feelings."

"Oh yes, sir! indeed I do. His attentions were always—what I did not like."

Sir Thomas looked at her with deeper surprise. "This is beyond me," said he. "This requires explanation. Young as you are, and having seen scarcely any one, it is hardly possible that your affections—"

He paused and eyed her fixedly. He saw her lips formed into a no, though the sound was inarticulate, but her face was like scarlet. That, however, in so modest a girl, might be very compatible with innocence; and choosing at least to appear satisfied, he quickly added, "No, no, I know that is quite out of the question. Well, there is nothing more to be said."

And for a few minutes he did say nothing. He was deep in thought. His niece was deep in thought likewise, trying to harden and prepare herself against farther questioning. She would rather die than own the truth; and she hoped to fortify herself beyond betraying it.

"Quite apart from Mr. Crawford's choice," said Sir Thomas, beginning again, very composedly, "his wishing to marry so early is commendable. I am an advocate for early marriages, and would have every young man, with a sufficient income, settle as soon after four-and-twenty as he can. I am sorry to think how unlikely my own eldest son, Mr. Bertram, is to marry early; but at present, as far as I can judge, matrimony makes no part of his plans. I wish he were more likely to fix." Here was a glance at Fanny. "Edmund, I consider as much more likely to marry early than his brother. He, indeed, I have lately thought, has seen the woman he could love, which, I am convinced, my eldest son has not. Am I right? Do you agree with me, my dear?"

"Yes, sir."

It was gently, but it was calmly said, and Sir Thomas was easy on the score of the cousins. But with the removal of his alarm, his displeasure increased; and getting up and walking about with a frown, he said in a voice of authority, "Have you any reason, child, to think ill of Mr. Crawford's temper?"

"No, sir."

She longed to add, "But of his principles I have"; but her heart sunk under the appalling prospect of discussion, explanation, and probably non-conviction. Her ill opinion of him was founded chiefly on observations, which, for her cousins' sake, she could scarcely mention to their father. Maria and Julia, especially Maria, were so closely implicated in Mr. Crawford's misconduct, that she could not speak of it without betraying them. She had hoped that, to a man like her uncle, so discerning, so honourable, so good, the simple acknowledgment of settled dislike on her side would have been sufficient. To her infinite grief she found it was not.

Sir Thomas came towards the table where she sat trembling, and with cold sternness, said, "It is of no use, I perceive, to talk to you. We had better put an end to this mortifying conference. Mr. Crawford must not be kept longer waiting. I will, therefore, only add that you have disappointed every expectation I had formed, and proved your character the very reverse of what I had supposed. For I had, Fanny, formed a very favourable opinion of you since my return to England. I had thought you free from wilfulness of temper, self-conceit, and that modern independence of spirit which is so disgusting in young women. But you have now shown me that you can be wilful and perverse; that you can and will decide for yourself, without any

deference to those who have surely some right to guide you, without even asking their advice. You have shown yourself very, very different from anything that I had imagined. Your brothers and sisters seem never to have had a moment's share in your thoughts. How they might be benefited is nothing to you. You think only of yourself, and because you do not feel for Mr. Crawford exactly what a young heated fancy imagines to be necessary for happiness, you resolve to refuse him at once, without wishing even for a little time to consider. You are, in a wild fit of folly, throwing away such an opportunity as will probably never occur to you again.

"Here is a young man of sense, of character, of manners, and of fortune, exceedingly attached to you, and seeking your hand in the most handsome way; and let me tell you, Fanny, that you may live eighteen years longer without being addressed by a man of half Mr. Crawford's estate, or a tenth part of his merits. Gladly would I have bestowed either of my own daughters on him. Maria is nobly married; but had Mr. Crawford sought Julia's hand, I should have given it to him with more heartfelt satisfaction than I gave Maria's to Mr. Rushworth." After half a moment's pause: "And I should have been very much surprised had either of my daughters, on receiving a proposal of marriage half as eligible as this, peremptorily decided against it without any consultation. I should have been much hurt by such a proceeding. I should have thought it a gross violation of duty and respect. You are not to be judged by the same rule. You do not owe me the duty of a child. But, Fanny, if your heart can acquit you of ingratitude—"

He ceased. Fanny was by this time crying so bitterly that, angry as he was, he would not press farther. Her heart was almost broke by such accusations, so heavy, so multiplied, so dreadful! Self-willed, obstinate, selfish, and ungrateful. He thought her all this. She had lost his good opinion. What was to become of her?

"I am very sorry," said she inarticulately, through her tears, "I am very sorry indeed."

"Sorry! yes, I hope you are sorry; and you will probably have reason to be long sorry for this day's transactions."

"If it were possible for me to do otherwise" said she, with another strong effort; "but I am so perfectly convinced that I could never make him happy, and that I should be miserable myself."

Another burst of tears; but in spite of that burst, Sir Thomas began to think a little relenting might have something to do with it. He knew her to be very timid, and exceedingly nervous; and thought a little pressing and patience on the lover's side might work their effect on her, if the gentleman would but persevere.

These reflections having cheered Sir Thomas, "Well," said he, with gravity, but less anger, "well, child, dry up your tears. They can do no good. You must now come downstairs with me. Mr. Crawford has been kept waiting too long already. You must give him your own answer. I am totally unequal to it."

But Fanny showed such reluctance, such misery, at the idea of going down to him, that Sir Thomas judged it better to indulge her. When he looked at his niece, and saw the state which her crying had brought her into, he thought there might be as much lost as gained by an immediate interview. He walked off by himself, therefore, leaving his poor niece to sit and cry over what had passed, with very wretched feelings.

Her mind was all disorder. Everything was terrible. But her uncle's anger gave her the severest pain of all. Selfish and ungrateful! to have appeared so to him! She had no one to speak for her. Her only friend was absent. Edmund might have softened his father; but perhaps all would think her selfish and ungrateful. She might have to

endure the reproach again and again. She could not help feeling some resentment against Mr. Crawford; yet, if he really loved her, and were unhappy too! It was all wretchedness together.

In about a quarter of an hour her uncle returned; she was almost ready to faint at the sight of him. He spoke calmly, however, without reproach, and she revived a little. There was comfort, too, in his words, for he began with, "Mr. Crawford has just left me. I need not repeat what has passed. Suffice it, that he has behaved in the most gentlemanlike manner, and has confirmed me in a most favourable opinion of his heart and temper. Upon hearing what you were suffering, he immediately ceased to urge to see you for the present."

Here Fanny looked down again. "Of course," continued her uncle, "he requested to speak with you alone, if only for five minutes; a request too natural to be denied. But there is no time fixed; perhaps to-morrow, or whenever your spirits are composed enough. For the present you have only to tranquillise yourself. If you wish to please me, you will not give way to these emotions, but try to reason yourself into a stronger frame of mind. I advise you to go out for an hour: the air will do you good; you will have the shrubbery to yourself, and will be the better for exercise. And, Fanny, I shall make no mention below of what has passed; I shall not even tell your aunt Bertram. Say nothing about it yourself."

This was a kindness which Fanny felt at her heart. To be spared from her aunt Norris's interminable reproaches! he left her in a glow of gratitude.

She walked out as her uncle recommended, and followed his advice; did check her tears; did earnestly try to compose her spirits and strengthen her mind. She wished to prove to him that she sought to regain his favour; and he had given her another strong motive for exertion, in keeping the whole affair from the knowledge of her aunts. Not to excite suspicion by her manner was an object worth attaining; and she felt equal to almost anything that might save her from her aunt Norris.

She was struck, when, on returning from her walk and going into the East room, the first thing which caught her eye was a fire burning. A fire! to be giving her such an indulgence at that time was too much. She wondered that Sir Thomas could have leisure to think of such a trifle; but she soon found, from the housemaid, that so it was to be every day. Sir Thomas had given orders for it.

"I must be a brute, indeed, if I can be really ungrateful!" said she. "Heaven defend me from being ungrateful!"

She saw nothing more of her uncle, nor her aunt Norris, till dinner. Her uncle's behaviour to her was then as nearly as possible what it had been before; but her aunt was soon quarrelling with her; and when Fanny found how much and how unpleasantly her having only walked out without her aunt's knowledge could be dwelt on, she blessed the kindness which saved her from the same reproaches on a more momentous subject.

"If I had known you were going out, I should have got you to go to my house with some orders," said her aunt, "which I have since, to my very great inconvenience, been obliged to go and carry myself. I could very ill spare the time, and you might have saved me the trouble, if you would only have been so good as to let us know you were going out. It would have made no difference to you, I suppose, whether you had walked in the shrubbery or gone to my house."

"I recommended the shrubbery to Fanny as the driest place," said Sir Thomas.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Norris, with a moment's check, "that was very kind of you, Sir Thomas; but you do not know how dry the path is to my house. Fanny would have had quite as good a walk there, I assure you, with the advantage of being of some use,

and obliging her aunt: it is all her fault. If she would only have let us know she was going out—but there is a something about Fanny, I have often observed it before—she likes to go her own way; she does not like to be dictated to; she takes her own independent walk whenever she can; she certainly has a little spirit of secrecy, and nonsense, about her, which I would advise her to get the better of."

Sir Thomas thought nothing could be more unjust to Fanny, though he had been so lately expressing the same sentiments himself, and he tried repeatedly to turn the conversation: but Mrs. Norris had not discernment enough to perceive how well he thought of his niece. She was talking at Fanny, and resenting this private walk through half the dinner.

It was over, however, at last; and the evening brought more composure to Fanny than she could have hoped for. She trusted that she had done right: that her judgment had not misled her. She was sure of the purity of her intentions; and she hoped that her uncle's displeasure was abating, and would abate farther as he considered the matter, and felt, as a good man must feel, how wretched, how unpardonable, how hopeless, and how wicked it was to marry without affection.

When the threatened meeting with Mr Crawford was past, the subject would be finally concluded, and once Mr. Crawford was gone from Mansfield, everything would soon be as if no such subject had existed. She could not believe that Mr. Crawford's affection for her could distress him long. London would soon bring its cure. In London he would learn to wonder at his infatuation.

While Fanny's mind was engaged in these hopes, her uncle was called out of the room; she thought nothing of it till the butler reappeared, and advancing towards her, said, "Sir Thomas wishes to speak with you, ma'am, in his own room." Then a suspicion rushed over her mind which drove the colour from her cheeks.

Instantly rising, she was preparing to obey, when Mrs. Norris called out, "Stay, Fanny! where are you going? don't be in such a hurry. Depend upon it, it is not you who are wanted, but me. You are very eager to put yourself forward. What should Sir Thomas want you for? You mean me, Baddeley, I am sure; not Miss Price."

But Baddeley was stout. "No, ma'am, I am certain of its being Miss Price." And there was a half-smile with the words, which meant, "I do not think you would answer the purpose at all."

Mrs. Norris was much discontented; and Fanny, walking off in agitation, found herself in another minute alone with Mr. Crawford.

CHAPTER 33

The conference was neither so short nor so conclusive as the lady had designed. The gentleman was not so easily satisfied. He had vanity, which strongly inclined him to think she did love him, though she might not know it herself; and which, secondly, when forced at last to admit that she did know her own present feelings, convinced him that he should be able in time to make those feelings what he wished.

He was very much in love; and it was a love which made her affection appear of greater consequence because it was withheld, and determined him to have the glory, as well as the felicity, of forcing her to love him.

He would not despair: he would not desist. He knew her to have all the worth that could justify the warmest hopes of lasting happiness; her conduct at this time, by showing the delicacy of her character, heightened all his wishes, and confirmed his resolutions. He knew not that he had a pre-engaged heart to attack. Of that he had no suspicion. He considered her rather as one who had never thought on the subject; who had been guarded by youth; whose modesty had prevented her from understanding his attentions, and who was overpowered by the suddenness of a situation which she had never imagined.

Must it not follow that, of course, he should succeed? He believed it fully. Love such as his, in a man like himself, must be returned; and he had so much delight in the idea of obliging her to love him in a very short time, that her not loving him now was scarcely regretted. A little difficulty to be overcome was no evil to Henry Crawford. He had been apt to gain hearts too easily. His situation was new and animating.

To Fanny, however, who had known too much opposition all her life to find any charm in it, all this was unintelligible. She found that he did mean to persevere; but how he could was beyond her understanding. She told him that she did not love him, could not love him, was sure she never should love him; that a change was quite impossible; that the subject was most painful to her; that she must entreat him never to mention it again. She added that in her opinion they were totally unfitted for each other by nature, education, and habit. All this she had said; yet this was not enough, for he immediately denied there being anything uncongenial in their characters, and positively declared, that he would still love, and hope!

Fanny knew her own meaning, but was no judge of her own manner. Her manner was incurably gentle; and she was not aware how much it concealed the sternness of her purpose. Her diffidence and softness made every expression of indifference seem to be giving nearly as much pain to herself as to him. Mr. Crawford was no longer the Mr. Crawford who, as the clandestine, insidious, treacherous admirer of Maria Bertram, had been her abhorrence. He was now the Mr. Crawford who was addressing herself with ardent, disinterested love; whose feelings were apparently honourable and upright; who was describing and describing again his affection, proving that he sought her for her gentleness and her goodness; and to complete the whole, he was now the Mr. Crawford who had procured William's promotion!

Here were claims which must affect her! She might have disdained him in the grounds of Sotherton, or the theatre at Mansfield Park; but now she must be courteous and compassionate. She must feel gratitude. Her refusal was so expressive of obligation and concern, that Crawford might well question its truth; and he was not so irrational as Fanny considered him, in his professions of persevering attachment which closed the interview.

Now she was angry. Some resentment did arise at a perseverance so selfish and ungenerous. Here was again the want of delicacy and regard for others which had formerly so struck her; a gross want of feeling and humanity where his own pleasure was concerned. Had her own affections been free, he never could have engaged them.

So thought Fanny, in sober sadness, as she sat musing over her luxury of a fire upstairs: wondering at what was yet to come, and with nothing clear but the certainty of her being never able to love Mr. Crawford.

On the morrow, Sir Thomas received Mr. Crawford's account of what had passed. His first feeling was disappointment: he had thought that an hour's entreaty from Crawford could not have worked so little change on a gentle girl like Fanny; but there was comfort in the sanguine perseverance of the lover.

Sir Thomas omitted no civility or kindness that might assist the plan. Mr. Crawford's steadiness was honoured, and Fanny was praised, and the connexion was still the most desirable in the world. At Mansfield Park Mr. Crawford would always be welcome. Everything was said that could encourage, and the gentlemen parted the best of friends.

Satisfied that the cause was now on a hopeful footing, Sir Thomas resolved not to press his niece farther. He believed kindness might be the best way of working. The forbearance of her family on the point might be their surest means of forwarding it.

Accordingly, he took the first opportunity of saying to her, with gravity, "Well, Fanny, I have seen Mr. Crawford again, and learnt from him exactly how matters stand. He is a most extraordinary young man, and whatever happens, you must feel that you have created an attachment of no common character; though, young as you are, and little acquainted with the unsteady nature of love, as it generally exists, you cannot be struck as I am by a perseverance of this sort."

"Indeed, sir," said Fanny, "I feel most undeservedly honoured; but I am so perfectly convinced, and I have told him so, that it never will be in my power—"

"My dear," interrupted Sir Thomas, "there is no need for this. Your feelings are as well known to me as my wishes must be to you. There is nothing more to be said. From this hour the subject is never to be revived between us. You will have nothing to fear: you cannot suppose me capable of trying to persuade you to marry against your will. Your happiness and advantage are all that I have in view, and nothing is required of you but to bear with Mr. Crawford's endeavours to convince you. He proceeds at his own risk. You are on safe ground. I have engaged for your seeing him whenever he calls, as you might have done had nothing occurred. You will see him with the rest of us, in the same manner. He leaves Northamptonshire so soon, that even this slight sacrifice cannot be often demanded. And now, my dear Fanny, this subject is closed between us."

The promised departure was all that Fanny could think of with much satisfaction. Her uncle, though kind, had married a daughter to Mr. Rushworth: romantic delicacy was certainly not to be expected from him. She must do her duty, and trust that time might make her duty easier.

She could not, though only eighteen, suppose Mr. Crawford's attachment would hold out for ever. How much time she might, in her own fancy, allot for its dominion, is another concern. It would not be fair to inquire into a young lady's exact estimate of her own perfections.

In spite of his intended silence, Sir Thomas found himself once more obliged to mention the subject to his niece, to prepare her for its being imparted to her aunts; a measure which he would have avoided, if possible, but which became necessary from Mr. Crawford's opposition to any secrecy. He had no idea of concealment. It was all

known at the Parsonage, where he loved to talk over the future with his sisters: it would gratify him to have enlightened witnesses of the progress of his success. When Sir Thomas understood this, he felt he must tell his own wife and sister-in-law about the business without delay; though, on Fanny's account, he dreaded the effect of the communication to Mrs. Norris almost as much as Fanny herself.

Mrs. Norris, however, relieved him. He pressed for the strictest forbearance and silence towards their niece; she did observe it. She only looked her increased ill-will. Angry she was: bitterly angry; but she was more angry with Fanny for having received such an offer than for refusing it. It was an affront to Julia, who ought to have been Mr. Crawford's choice; and, independently of that, she disliked Fanny, because she had neglected her; and she would have grudged such an elevation to one whom she had been always trying to depress.

Lady Bertram took it differently. She had been a prosperous beauty all her life; and beauty and wealth were all that excited her respect. To know Fanny was sought in marriage by a man of fortune, raised her, therefore, very much in her opinion. By convincing her that Fanny was very pretty, which she had doubted before, and that she would be advantageously married, it made her feel a sort of credit in having her for a niece.

"Well, Fanny," said she, with extraordinary animation, when they were alone together; "Well, Fanny, I have had a very agreeable surprise this morning. I must just speak of it once, and then I shall have done. I give you joy, my dear niece. Humph, we certainly are a handsome family!"

Fanny coloured. "My dear aunt, you cannot wish me to marry, I am sure; for you would miss me, should not you?"

"No, my dear, I should not think of missing you, when such an offer as this comes in your way. You must be aware, Fanny, that it is every young woman's duty to accept such a very unexceptionable offer as this."

This was almost the only piece of advice which Fanny had ever received from her aunt. It silenced her. However, Lady Bertram was quite talkative.

"I will tell you what, Fanny," said she, "I am sure he fell in love with you at the ball. You did look remarkably well. Everybody said so. And you know you had Chapman to help you to dress. I am very glad I sent Chapman to you. I shall tell Sir Thomas that I am sure it was done that evening." And still pursuing her cheerful thoughts, she added, "And I will tell you what, Fanny: the next time Pug has a litter, you shall have a puppy."

CHAPTER 34

Edmund had great things to hear on his return. Many surprises were awaiting him. The first that occurred was not least in interest: the appearance of Henry Crawford and his sister walking together through the village as he rode into it. He had thought them to be far distant. His absence had been extended beyond a fortnight purposely to avoid Miss Crawford. He was returning to Mansfield ready to feed on melancholy remembrances, when her own fair self was before him, leaning on her brother's arm, and he found himself receiving a friendly welcome from the woman whom, two moments before, he had been thinking of as seventy miles off.

Her reception of him was of a sort which he could not have hoped for. Coming as he did from his ordainment, he would have expected anything rather than a look of satisfaction, and words of simple, pleasant meaning. It was enough to set his heart in a glow, and to bring him home in the right state for feeling the full value of the other joyful surprises at hand.

In William's promotion he found a source of cheerfulness all dinner-time. After dinner, when he and his father were alone, he had Fanny's history; and then all the great events of the last fortnight were known to him.

Fanny suspected what was going on. They sat so much longer than usual in the dining-parlour, that she was sure they must be talking of her; and when she saw Edmund again, she felt dreadfully guilty. He sat down by her, took her hand, and pressed it kindly; and she thought that, but for the occupation which the tea-things afforded, she must have betrayed her emotion.

He was not intending, however, to convey to her his unqualified encouragement. He wished only to express his interest and affection. He was, in fact, entirely on his father's side of the question. He was not so surprised as his father at her refusing Crawford, because he had never believed her to have a preference for him—rather the reverse; and he believed she had been completely unprepared; but the connexion had every recommendation to him. He earnestly hoped and believed that it would be a match at last, and that their dispositions were exactly fitted to make them blessed in each other. Crawford had been too hasty. He had not given her time to attach herself. He had begun at the wrong end. With such powers as his, however, and such a disposition as hers, Edmund trusted that everything would work out a happy conclusion. Meanwhile, he scrupulously guarded against saying anything to give Fanny further embarrassment.

Crawford called the next day, and Sir Thomas asked him to stay to dinner. Edmund had then ample opportunity for observing how much encouragement he received from Fanny's manner; and it was so little, so very, very little, that he was almost ready to wonder at his friend's perseverance. Fanny was worth it all; he held her to be worth every effort of patience, but he did not think he could have gone on himself with any woman breathing, without something more to warm his courage.

In the evening, circumstances occurred which he thought more promising. When he and Crawford walked into the drawing-room, his mother and Fanny were sitting silently at work, in apparently deep tranquillity.

"Fanny has been reading to me," said his mother. There was a volume of Shakespeare on the table. "She often reads to me; and she was in the middle of a very fine speech when we heard your footsteps."

Crawford took up the volume. "Let me have the pleasure of finishing that speech to your ladyship," said he. "I shall find it immediately." And he did find it, quite near enough to satisfy Lady Bertram, who assured him, as soon as he mentioned the name of Cardinal Wolsey, that he had got the very speech. Not a look or an offer of help had Fanny given. All her attention was for her work. She seemed determined to be interested by nothing else.

But taste was too strong in her. She was forced to listen; his reading was capital, and her pleasure in good reading extreme. Her uncle read well, Edmund very well, but in Mr. Crawford's reading there was excellence beyond what she had ever met with. The King, the Queen, Buckingham, Wolsey, Cromwell, all were given in turn; for with the happiest knack, he could alight at will on the best scene, or the best speeches; and whether it were dignity, or tenderness, or remorse to be expressed, he could do it with equal beauty. His acting had first taught Fanny what pleasure a play might give, and his reading brought all his acting before her again; nay, perhaps with greater enjoyment, for it came with no such drawback as she had suffered in seeing him on the stage with Miss Bertram.

Edmund watched, and was amused by seeing how she gradually slackened in the needlework: how it fell from her hand while she sat motionless, and at last, how her eyes were turned and fixed on Crawford—fixed on him, in short, till the attraction drew Crawford's eyes upon her, and the book was closed, and the charm was broken. Then she was shrinking again into herself, blushing and working as hard as ever; but it had been enough to give Edmund encouragement for his friend.

"That play must be a favourite with you," said he.

"It will be a favourite, I believe, from this hour," replied Crawford; "but I do not think I have had a volume of Shakespeare in my hand since I was fifteen. I once saw Henry the Eighth acted, or I heard of it from somebody who did, I am not certain which. But Shakespeare one gets acquainted with without knowing how. It is a part of an Englishman's constitution; one is intimate with him by instinct."

"No doubt one is familiar with Shakespeare in a degree," said Edmund, "from one's earliest years. His celebrated passages are quoted by everybody; and we all talk Shakespeare, use his similes, and describe with his descriptions. To know him in bits and scraps is common enough; but to read him well aloud is no everyday talent."

"Sir, you do me honour," was Crawford's answer, with a bow of mock gravity.

Both gentlemen glanced at Fanny, to see if a word of praise could be extorted from her; yet both feeling that it could not be. Her praise had been given in her attention; that must content them.

"It was really like being at a play," said Lady Bertram. "I wish Sir Thomas had been here."

Crawford was excessively pleased. If Lady Bertram, with all her languor, could feel this, her niece must feel much more.

"I will tell you what, Mr Crawford," said her ladyship, "I think you will have a theatre at your house in Norfolk, when you are settled there. I do indeed."

"Do you, ma'am?" cried he quickly. "No, that will never be. No theatre at Everingham! Oh no!" And he looked at Fanny with an expressive smile, which evidently meant, "That lady will never allow a theatre at Everingham."

Edmund saw it, and saw Fanny determined not to see it. Such a ready comprehension of a hint, he thought, was rather favourable than not.

The two young men, standing by the fire, talked over the too common neglect of reading aloud in the school-system, and the consequent ignorance of men when suddenly called to the necessity of reading aloud; giving instances of blunders and

failures, the lack of management of the voice, of proper emphasis, all proceeding from the want of early attention and habit. Fanny was listening again with great entertainment.

"Even in my profession," said Edmund, with a smile, "how little the art of reading has been studied! how little a clear manner, and good delivery, have been attended to! I speak rather of the past, however. There is now a spirit of improvement abroad. It is felt that distinctness and energy may help to convey the most solid truths; and besides, knowledge of good reading is more widespread than formerly; in every congregation there are more who know a little of the matter, and who can judge and criticise."

Edmund had already gone through the service once since his ordination; and upon this being understood, Crawford asked him many questions with the vivacity of friendly interest, and none of that levity which Edmund knew to be most offensive to Fanny. When Crawford asked his opinion as to the befitting manner in which particular passages in the service should be delivered, showing it to be a subject on which he had thought, Edmund was still more pleased. This would be the way to Fanny's heart. She was not to be won by gallantry and wit; or, at least, she would not be won by them so soon, without the assistance of seriousness on serious subjects.

"Our liturgy," observed Crawford, "has beauties which not even a careless style of reading can destroy; but it has also redundancies which require good reading not to be felt. I must confess to being not always so attentive as I ought to be" (here was a glance at Fanny); "nineteen times out of twenty I am thinking how such a prayer ought to be read, and longing to read it myself. Did you speak?" stepping eagerly to Fanny, and addressing her in a softened voice; and upon her saying "No," he added, "Are you sure you did not speak? I saw your lips move. I fancied you might be going to tell me I ought to be more attentive, and not allow my thoughts to wander. Are not you going to tell me so?"

"No, indeed, you know your duty too well for me to—even supposing—"

She stopped, felt herself getting into a puzzle, and could not be prevailed on to add another word. He returned to his former place, and went on.

"A sermon, well delivered, is more uncommon even than prayers well read. A thoroughly good sermon, thoroughly well delivered, is a capital pleasure. I can never hear such a one without the greatest admiration, and more than half a mind to take orders and preach myself. There is something in the eloquence of the pulpit which is entitled to the highest praise and honour. The preacher who can touch such a mass of hearers, on subjects limited, and long worn threadbare in all common hands; who can say anything new or striking, anything that rouses the attention without wearing out the feelings of his hearers, is a man whom one could not honour enough. I should like to be such a man."

Edmund laughed.

"I should indeed," said Crawford. "I never listened to a distinguished preacher in my life without envy. But I must have a London audience. I could only preach to the educated. And I should not be fond of preaching often; now and then, perhaps once or twice in the spring; but not for a constancy; it would not do for a constancy."

Here Fanny involuntarily shook her head, and Crawford was instantly by her side again, entreating to know her meaning; and as Edmund perceived that it was to be a very thorough attack, he sank as quietly as possible into a corner and took up a newspaper, sincerely wishing that dear little Fanny might be persuaded into explaining away that shake of the head to the satisfaction of her ardent lover; and he tried to bury every sound of the business in murmurs of his own, over the

advertisements of "A most desirable Estate in South Wales" and a "Capital season'd Hunter."

Fanny, meanwhile, vexed with herself, and grieved to see Edmund's arrangements, was trying by everything in the power of her modest, gentle nature, to repulse Mr. Crawford, and avoid both his looks and inquiries; and he, unrepulsable, was persisting in both.

"What did that shake of the head mean?" said he. "What was it meant to express? Disapprobation, I fear. What had I been saying to displease you? Did you think me speaking improperly, lightly on the subject? Only tell me if I was wrong. I want to be set right. Nay, nay, I entreat you; for one moment put down your work. What did that shake of the head mean?"

In vain was her "Pray, sir, don't; pray, Mr. Crawford," repeated; and in vain did she try to move away. In the same low, eager voice, he went on, reurging the same questions. She grew more agitated and displeased.

"How can you, sir? You quite astonish me; I wonder how you can—"

"Do I astonish you?" said he. "Do you wonder? I will explain to you instantly all that makes me urge you in this manner, all that gives me an interest in what you look and do. I will not leave you to wonder long."

In spite of herself, she could not help half a smile, but she said nothing.

"You shook your head at my saying that I should not like the duties of a clergyman for a constancy. Yes, that was the word. Constancy: I am not afraid of the word. I see nothing alarming in the word. Did you think I ought?"

"Perhaps, sir," said Fanny, wearied at last into speaking—"perhaps, sir, I thought it was a pity you did not always know yourself as well as you seemed to do at that moment."

Crawford, delighted to get her to speak at any rate, was determined to keep it up; and poor Fanny, who had hoped to silence him by such extreme reproof, found herself sadly mistaken, and that it was only a change from one set of words to another. He had always something to entreat the explanation of. The opportunity was too fair. None such might occur again before his leaving Mansfield. Lady Bertram's being just on the other side of the table was a trifle, for she was only half-awake, and Edmund's advertisements were still proving most useful.

"Well," said Crawford, after a course of rapid questions and reluctant answers; "I am happier than I was, because I now understand more clearly your opinion of me. You think me unsteady: easily swayed by the whim of the moment. But we shall see. My conduct shall speak for me; absence, distance, time shall speak for me. They shall prove that I do deserve you. You are infinitely my superior in merit, I know. You have qualities which I had not before supposed to exist in such a degree in any human creature. You have some touches of the angel in you. But still I am not frightened. It is not by equality of merit that you can be won. It is he who worships your merit the strongest, who loves you most devotedly, that has the best right to a return. There I build my confidence. By that right I do and will deserve you. Yes, dearest, sweetest Fanny. Nay" (seeing her draw back displeased), "forgive me; but by what other name can I call you? It is 'Fanny' that I think of all day, and dream of all night. You have given the name such sweetness, that nothing else can be descriptive of you."

Fanny could hardly have kept her seat any longer, had it not been for the sound of approaching relief, the sound which she had been long waiting for, and thinking strangely delayed.

The solemn procession, headed by Baddeley, of tea-board, urn, and cake-bearers, made its appearance, and delivered her. Mr. Crawford was obliged to move. She was at liberty, she was busy, she was protected.

Edmund was not sorry to be again able to speak and hear. On looking at Fanny he saw a flush of vexation; yet he hoped that so much could not have been said without some profit to the speaker.

CHAPTER 35

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Edmund had determined that if Fanny did not choose to speak of it, her situation should never be touched on by him; but after a day or two his father induced him to change his mind, and try what his influence might do for his friend.

An early day was fixed for the Crawfords' departure; and Sir Thomas thought it might be as well to make one more effort for the young man before he left Mansfield, so that his vows of unshaken attachment might have as much hope to sustain them as possible.

Sir Thomas was most anxious for the perfection of Mr. Crawford's character in that point. He wished him to be a model of constancy; and fancied the best means of ensuring it would be by not testing him too long.

Edmund was willingly persuaded to talk to Fanny; he wanted to know her feelings. She used to consult him in every difficulty, and he loved her too well to bear to be denied her confidence now. Whom else had she to open her heart to? Fanny estranged from him, silent and reserved, was an unnatural state of things; a state which he must break through. When she was walking alone in the shrubbery, therefore, he joined her.

"I am come to walk with you, Fanny," said he, drawing her arm within his. "It is a long while since we have had a comfortable walk together."

She assented rather by look than word. Her spirits were low.

"But, Fanny," he added, "in order to have a comfortable walk, you must talk to me. I know you have something on your mind. Am I to hear of it from everybody but Fanny herself?"

Fanny, at once agitated and dejected, replied, "If you hear of it from everybody, cousin, there can be nothing for me to tell."

"Not of facts, perhaps; but of feelings, Fanny. No one but you can tell me them. I do not mean to press you. I had thought it might be a relief."

"I am afraid we think too differently for me to find any relief in talking of what I feel."

"Do you suppose that we think differently? I have no idea of it. I dare say that our opinions are as much alike as ever: to the point—I consider Crawford's proposals as most desirable, if you could return his affection. It is natural that all your family should wish you could return it; but as you cannot, you have done exactly as you ought in refusing him. Can there be any disagreement between us here?"

"Oh no! But I thought you blamed me. I thought you were against me. This is such a comfort!"

"How could you possibly suppose me against you? How could you imagine me an advocate for marriage without love? Were I careless in general on such matters, how could you imagine me so where your happiness was at stake?"

"My uncle thought me wrong, and I knew he had been talking to you."

"As far as you have gone, Fanny, I think you perfectly right. I may be sorry, I may be surprised—but I think you perfectly right. You did not love him; nothing could have justified your accepting him."

Fanny had not felt so comfortable for days and days.

"So far your conduct has been faultless. But the matter does not end here. Crawford's is no common attachment; he perseveres, with the hope of winning your regard. This, we know, must be a work of time. But" (with an affectionate smile) "let

him succeed at last, Fanny. You have proved yourself upright, prove yourself grateful and tender-hearted; and then you will be the perfect model of a woman."

"Oh! never, never, never! he never will succeed with me." She spoke with a warmth which quite astonished Edmund, and she blushed when she saw his look, and heard him reply, "Never! Fanny!—so very determined! This is not like your rational self."

"I mean," she cried, sorrowfully correcting herself, "that I think I never shall, as far as the future can be answered for; I think I never shall return his regard."

"I must hope better things. I am aware that the man who means to make you love him must have very uphill work, for there are all your early attachments in battle array; and before he can get your heart he has to unfasten it from all the holds which are tightened by the very idea of separation. I know that the apprehension of being forced to quit Mansfield will be arming you against him. I wish Crawford had known you as well as I do, Fanny. Between us, I think we should have won you. My theoretical and his practical knowledge together could not have failed. I must hope, however, that time will give him his reward. I cannot suppose that you have no wish to love him—the natural wish of gratitude. You must have some feeling of that sort. You must be sorry for your own indifference."

"We are so totally unlike," said Fanny, avoiding a direct answer, "we are so very, very different in all our inclinations, that I consider it as quite impossible we should ever be happy together, even if I could like him. There never were two people more dissimilar. We have not one taste in common. We should be miserable."

"You are mistaken, Fanny. The dissimilarity is not so strong. You have moral and literary tastes in common. You have both warm hearts and benevolent feelings; and, Fanny, who that heard him read, and saw you listen to Shakespeare the other night, will think you unfitted as companions? There is a difference in your temperaments, I allow. He is lively, you are serious; but so much the better: his spirits will support yours. It is your nature to be easily dejected. His cheerfulness will counteract this; and his pleasantness and gaiety will be a constant support to you. Your being so far unlike, Fanny, is rather a favourable circumstance. I am convinced that in marriage, the temperaments had better be unlike, for opposites bring happiness. I exclude extremes, of course; but a very close resemblance in all points is the likeliest way to produce an extreme. A gentle counteraction is the best safeguard of manners and conduct."

Full well could Fanny guess where his thoughts were now: Miss Crawford's power was all returning. He had been speaking of her cheerfully ever since coming home. His avoiding her was quite at an end. He had dined at the Parsonage only the preceding day.

After leaving him to his happier thoughts for some minutes, she said, "It is not merely in temperament that I consider him as totally unsuited to myself; but there is something which I object to still more. I cannot approve his character. I have not thought well of him from the time of the play. I then saw him behaving so very improperly and unfeelingly by poor Mr. Rushworth, not seeming to care how he hurt him, and paying attentions to my cousin Maria, which—in short, I received an impression which will never be got over."

"My dear Fanny," replied Edmund, scarcely hearing her to the end, "let us not, any of us, be judged by that period of general folly. That is a time which I hate to recollect. Maria was wrong, Crawford was wrong, we were all wrong together; but none so wrong as myself. Compared with me, all the rest were blameless. I was playing the fool with my eyes open."

"I do think that Mr. Rushworth was sometimes very jealous."

"Very possibly. No wonder. Nothing could be more improper than the whole business. I am shocked whenever I think that Maria could be capable of it."

"Before the play, I am much mistaken if Julia did not think he was paying her attentions."

"Julia! I have heard before from some one of his being in love with Julia; but I could never see anything of it. And, Fanny, though I hope I do justice to my sisters' good qualities, I think it very possible that they might desire to be admired by Crawford, and might show that desire more unguardedly than was perfectly prudent. They were fond of his society; and with such encouragement, a man like Crawford, lively, and it may be, a little unthinking, might be led on to—there could be nothing very striking, because it is clear that his heart was reserved for you. And I must say, that its being for you has raised him in my opinion. It shows he understands the blessing of domestic happiness. It proves him unspoiled by his uncle. It proves him everything that I used to wish to believe him, and feared he was not."

"I am persuaded that he does not think as he ought, on serious subjects."

"Say, rather, that he has not thought at all upon serious subjects. How could it be otherwise, with such an adviser? Crawford's feelings, I acknowledge, have been too much his guides. Happily, those feelings have generally been good. You will supply the rest; and a most fortunate man he is to attach himself to such a woman, firm in her principles yet with gentleness of character. He will make you happy, Fanny; but you will make him everything."

"I would not engage in such a charge," cried Fanny, shrinking; "in such high responsibility!"

"As usual, believing yourself unequal to anything! Well, though I may not be able to persuade you to feel differently, I confess myself sincerely anxious that you may be persuaded. Next to your happiness, Fanny, his has the first claim on me. You are aware of my having no common interest in Crawford."

Fanny was too well aware of it to say anything; and they walked on together in silence. Edmund first began again—

"I was very much pleased by her manner of speaking of it yesterday, because I had not been certain of her seeing everything in so just a light. I knew she was very fond of you; but I was afraid of her not seeing your worth to her brother, and of her regretting that he had not fixed on some woman of fortune. But she spoke of you, Fanny, just as she ought. She desires the connexion as warmly as your uncle or myself. We had a long talk about it. I had not been in the room five minutes before she introduced the subject with all that openness of heart and spirit which are so much a part of herself. Mrs. Grant laughed at her for her rapidity."

"Was Mrs. Grant in the room, then?"

"Yes, I found the two sisters together."

"It is above a week since I saw Miss Crawford."

"Yes, she laments it; yet owns it may have been best. You will see her, however, before she goes. She is very angry with you, Fanny; you must be prepared for that. She calls herself very angry, but you can imagine her anger. It is the disappointment of a sister, who thinks her brother has a right to everything he may wish for. She is hurt, as you would be for William; but she loves and esteems you with all her heart."

"I knew she would be very angry with me."

"My dearest Fanny," cried Edmund, pressing her arm closer, "do not let the idea of her anger distress you. It is anger to be talked of rather than felt. Her heart is made

for love and kindness, not for resentment. I wish you could have heard her praise you; I wish you could have seen her face, when she said that you should be Henry's wife."

"And Mrs. Grant, did she speak; was she there all the time?"

"Yes, she agreed with her sister. That you could refuse such a man as Henry Crawford seems more than they can understand. I said what I could for you; but in good truth, you must prove yourself to be in your senses as soon as you can by a different conduct; nothing else will satisfy them. But this is teasing you. I have done. Do not turn away."

"I should have thought," said Fanny, after a pause of recollection and exertion, "that every woman must have felt the possibility of a man's not being loved by some one of her sex at least, let him be ever so generally agreeable. Let him have all the perfections in the world, I think it ought not to be set down as certain that a man must be acceptable to every woman he may happen to like himself. But, even supposing it is so, how was I to be prepared to meet Mr Crawford with any feeling like his own? He took me wholly by surprise. I had no idea that his behaviour to me before had any meaning. In my situation, it would have been vanity to be forming expectations of Mr. Crawford. How, then, was I to be—to be in love with him, the moment he said he was with me? How was I to have an attachment at his service, as soon as it was asked for?"

"My dear Fanny, now I have the truth; and most worthy of you are such feelings. You have given exactly the explanation which I ventured to make for you to your friend and Mrs. Grant. I told them that you were, of all people, the one over whom habit had most power and novelty least; and that the very novelty of Crawford's addresses was against him: that you could tolerate nothing that you were not used to. Miss Crawford made us laugh by her plans of encouragement for her brother. She meant to urge him to persevere in the hope of being loved in time, and of having his addresses most kindly received at the end of about ten years' happy marriage."

Fanny could with difficulty give the smile that was here asked for. Her feelings were all in revolt. She feared she had been saying too much, and overacting the caution which she had been fancying necessary; and in guarding against one evil, was laying herself open to another. To have Miss Crawford's liveliness repeated to her at such a moment, and on such a subject, was a bitter aggravation.

Edmund saw weariness and distress in her face, and immediately resolved to not mention the name of Crawford again, unless in connexion with what must be agreeable to her. So he observed—"They go on Monday. You are sure, therefore, of seeing your friend either to-morrow or Sunday. They really go on Monday; and I was almost persuaded to stay at Lessingby till that very day! What a difference it might have made! Those five or six days more at Lessingby might have been felt all my life."

"You spent your time pleasantly there?"

"Yes; they were all very pleasant. I doubt their finding me so. I took uneasiness with me, and there was no getting rid of it till I was in Mansfield again."

"The Miss Owens—you liked them, did not you?"

"Yes, very well. Pleasant, good-humoured, unaffected girls. But I am spoiled, Fanny, for common female society. Good-humoured, unaffected girls will not do for a man who has been used to intelligent women. They are two distinct orders of being. You and Miss Crawford have made me too exacting."

Still, however, Fanny was oppressed and wearied; he saw it in her looks, it could not be talked away; and attempting it no more, he led her, with the kind authority of a guardian, into the house.

CHAPTER 36

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Edmund now believed himself perfectly acquainted with all that Fanny could tell, and he was satisfied. Crawford had been too hasty. Once she was used to the idea of his being in love with her, a return of affection might not be very distant.

He gave this opinion to his father; and recommended that nothing more be said to her: but that everything should be left to Crawford's diligence, and the natural workings of her own mind.

Sir Thomas promised that it should be so. He believed Edmund's account of Fanny's nature to be just, but he considered it as unfortunate; for he could not help fearing that if such very long allowances of time were necessary for her, she might not have persuaded herself into receiving his addresses before the young man's inclination for paying them were over. There was nothing to be done, however, but to submit and hope for the best.

The promised visit from "her friend," as Edmund called Miss Crawford, was a formidable threat to Fanny. As a sister, so partial and so angry, and so little scrupulous of what she said, she was an object of painful alarm. The dependence of having others present when they met was Fanny's only support in looking forward to it. She absented herself as little as possible from Lady Bertram, kept away from the East room, and took no solitary walk in the shrubbery, in her caution to avoid any sudden attack.

She succeeded. She was safe in the breakfast-room, with her aunt, when Miss Crawford did come; and Fanny hoped there would be nothing worse to be endured than a half-hour of moderate agitation. But here she hoped too much; Miss Crawford was determined to see Fanny alone, and said to her, in a low voice, "I must speak to you for a few minutes somewhere"; words that Fanny felt all over her. Denial was impossible. Her habits of ready submission, on the contrary, made her instantly rise and lead the way out of the room.

They were no sooner in the hall than Miss Crawford shook her head at Fanny with arch, yet affectionate reproach, and took her hand: she said nothing, however, but, "Sad, sad girl! I do not know when I shall have done scolding you."

Fanny turned upstairs, and took her guest to the East Room, opening the door, however, with a most aching heart, and feeling that she had a distressing scene before her. But the evil was delayed by the sudden change in Miss Crawford's ideas; by the strong effect on her mind which the finding herself in the East room again produced.

"Ha!" she cried, "am I here again? Once only was I in this room before"; and after stopping to look about her, "Do you remember it? I came to rehearse. Your cousin came too; and you were our audience and prompter. A delightful rehearsal. I shall never forget it. Oh! why will such things ever pass away?"

Happily for her companion, she wanted no answer. Her mind was entirely self-engrossed, in a reverie of sweet remembrances.

"The scene we were rehearsing was so very remarkable! The subject of it so very—very—what shall I say? He was recommending matrimony to me, trying to be as demure and composed as Anhalt ought, through the two long speeches. 'When two sympathetic hearts meet in the marriage state, matrimony may be called a happy life.' I can never forget his looks and voice as he said those words. If I could relive any one week of my existence, it should be that week; for I never knew such exquisite happiness in any other. His sturdy spirit to bend as it did! Oh! it was sweet beyond

expression. But alas, that very evening destroyed it all, and brought your most unwelcome uncle. Yet, Fanny, do not imagine I would now speak disrespectfully of Sir Thomas, though I certainly did hate him for many a week. No, I do him justice now. He is just what the head of such a family should be. Nay, in sober sadness, I believe I now love you all." And with a degree of tenderness and consciousness which Fanny had never seen in her before, and now thought only too becoming, she turned away for a moment to recover herself.

"I have had a little fit since I came into this room, as you may perceive," said she presently, with a playful smile, "but it is over; so let us sit down and be comfortable; for as to scolding you, Fanny, I have not the heart for it when it comes to the point." And embracing her affectionately, "Good, gentle Fanny! when I think of this being the last time of seeing you for I do not know how long, I feel it quite impossible to do anything but love you."

Fanny had not foreseen this, and her feelings could seldom withstand the melancholy influence of the word "last." She cried as if she had loved Miss Crawford more than she possibly could; and Miss Crawford, farther softened by the sight of such emotion, said, "I hate to leave you. I shall see no one half so amiable where I am going. Who says we shall not be sisters? I know we shall. I feel that we are born to be connected; and those tears convince me that you feel it too, dear Fanny."

Fanny roused herself, and said, "But you are going to a very particular friend."

"Very true. Mrs. Fraser has been my intimate friend for years. But I have not the least inclination to go near her. I can think only of the friends I am leaving. You have all so much more heart among you than one finds in the world at large. You all give me a feeling of being able to trust and confide in you. I wish I had settled with Mrs. Fraser not to go till after Easter, but now I cannot put her off. And then I must go to her sister, Lady Stornaway, because she was my most particular friend of the two, but I have not cared much for her these three years."

After this speech the two girls sat silent, before Mary spoke again.

"How perfectly I remember resolving to look for you upstairs, and setting off to find my way to the East room, without having an idea whereabouts it was! How well I remember looking in and seeing you sitting at work; and then your cousin's astonishment, when he opened the door, at seeing me here! There never was anything quite like it."

Another short fit of abstraction followed; then she thus attacked her companion.

"Why, Fanny, you are absolutely in a reverie. Thinking, I hope, of one who is always thinking of you. Oh! if only I could transport you into our circle in town, that you might understand how your power over Henry is thought of there! Oh! the envyings and heartburnings of dozens and dozens; the incredulity that will be felt at hearing what you have done! For as to secrecy, Henry glories in his chains. If you were to see how he is courted in London! I shall not be half so welcome to Mrs. Fraser when she knows the truth; for she has a step-daughter whom she is wild to get married, and wants Henry to take. Oh! she has been trying for him to such a degree. Innocent and quiet as you sit here, you cannot have an idea of the curiosity there will be about you, of the endless questions I shall have to answer! Poor Margaret Fraser will be at me for ever about how you do your hair, and who makes your shoes. I wish Margaret were married, for my poor friend's sake, for I think the Frasers are about as unhappy as most married people. And yet it was a most desirable match for Janet at the time. She had to accept him, for he was rich, and she had nothing; but he turns out ill-tempered and demanding, and wants a young woman of five-and-twenty to be as steady as himself. And my friend does not seem to know how to make the best of it.

His irritation is certainly very ill-bred. Even Dr. Grant shows a confidence in my sister, and a consideration for her judgment, which makes one feel there is attachment; but of that I shall see nothing with the Frasers. Poor Janet has been sadly taken in, and yet she took three days to consider his proposals, and asked everyone's advice. I have not so much to say for my friend Flora, who jilted a very nice young man in the Blues for the sake of that horrid Lord Stornaway, who has about as much sense as Mr. Rushworth, but is much worse-looking, and with a blackguard character. Flora Ross was dying for Henry the first winter she came out. But were I to tell you of all the women who have been in love with him, I should never finish. It is only you, unfeeling Fanny, who can think of him with indifference. But are you so insensible as you profess yourself? No, I see you are not."

There was, indeed, a deep blush over Fanny's face at that moment.

"Excellent creature! I will not tease you. But, dear Fanny, you cannot have been so unprepared as your cousin fancies. You must have had some thoughts on the subject, some surmises. You must have seen that Henry was trying to please you by every attention in his power. Was not he devoted to you at the ball? And the necklace! Oh! you received it just as it was meant. You were as conscious as heart could desire. I remember it perfectly."

"Do you mean, then, that your brother knew of the necklace beforehand? Oh! Miss Crawford, that was not fair."

"Knew of it! It was his own doing entirely. I am ashamed to say that it had never entered my head, but I was delighted to act on his proposal."

"I was half afraid at the time of its being so," said Fanny; "but not at first; I was unsuspecting of it at first, indeed. If I had suspected it, nothing should have induced me to accept the necklace. As to your brother's behaviour, I had been aware of a particularity some two or three weeks, but I considered it as meaning nothing: I put it down as simply being his way. I observed what was passing between him and some of this family in the summer and autumn. I was not blind. I could not help seeing that Mr. Crawford allowed himself gallantries which did mean nothing."

"Ah! I cannot deny it. He has now and then been a sad flirt, and cared very little for the havoc he might be making in young ladies' affections. I have often scolded him for it, but it is his only fault; and there is this to be said, that very few young ladies have any affections worth caring for. And then, Fanny, the glory of fixing one who has been shot at by so many! Oh! it is not in woman's nature to refuse such a triumph."

Fanny shook her head. "I cannot think well of a man who sports with any woman's feelings; and there may often be a great deal more suffered than a stander-by can judge of."

"I do not defend him. I leave him entirely to your mercy, and when he has got you at Everingham, I do not care how much you lecture him. I do seriously and truly believe that he is attached to you in a way that he never was to any woman before; that he loves you with all his heart, and will love you as nearly for ever as possible. If any man ever loved a woman for ever, I think Henry will do as much for you."

Fanny could not avoid a faint smile, but had nothing to say.

"He was never happier," continued Mary, "than when he succeeded in getting your brother's commission."

She had made a sure push at Fanny's feelings here.

"Oh! yes. How very kind of him."

"I know he must have exerted himself very much, for the Admiral hates trouble, and scorns asking favours. What a happy creature William must be!"

Poor Fanny's mind was distressed. The recollection of what had been done for William was always the most powerful disturber of every decision against Mr. Crawford; and she sat thinking deeply till Mary said: "I should like to sit here talking to you all day, but we must not forget the ladies below: so good-bye, my dear, my amiable, my excellent Fanny, for I must take leave of you here. And I do take leave, trusting that when we meet again, it will be under circumstances which may open our hearts to each other without any shadow of reserve."

A very kind embrace accompanied these words.

"I shall see your cousin in town soon: he talks of being there; and Sir Thomas, I dare say, in the spring; and your eldest cousin, and the Rushworths, and Julia. I have two favours to ask, Fanny: one is, that you must write to me. And the other, that you will often call on Mrs. Grant, and make her amends for my being gone."

The first of these favours Fanny would rather not have been asked; but it was impossible for her to refuse. There was no resisting so much apparent affection. Having hitherto known so little of it, she was the more overcome by Miss Crawford's. Besides, she was grateful to her for having made their tête-à-tête so much less painful than she had feared.

It was over, and she had escaped without reproaches and without detection. Her secret was still her own.

In the evening there was another parting. Henry Crawford came and sat some time with them; and her heart was softened towards him, because he really seemed to feel. Quite unlike his usual self, he scarcely said anything. He was evidently oppressed, and Fanny must grieve for him, though hoping she might never see him again till he were the husband of some other woman.

When it came to the moment of parting, he took her hand; he said nothing, however, and left the room.

On the morrow the Crawfords were gone.

CHAPTER 37

Mr. Crawford gone, Sir Thomas's next object was that he should be missed; and he hoped that his niece would find a blank in the loss of his attentions, and that her sinking again into nothing would awaken wholesome regrets in her mind. He watched her with this idea; but he could hardly tell with what success. She was always so gentle and retiring that her emotions were beyond him. He did not understand her: and therefore applied to Edmund to tell him whether she were more or less happy than she had been.

Edmund did not see any symptoms of regret. What chiefly surprised him was that Crawford's sister, the friend who had been so much to her, should not be missed more. He wondered that Fanny spoke so seldom of her.

Alas! it was this sister, this friend, who was now the chief bane of Fanny's comfort. If she could have believed Mary's future fate unconnected with Mansfield, she would have been light of heart indeed; but the more she observed, the more deeply was she convinced that everything was now in a fair train for Miss Crawford's marrying Edmund. His objections, his scruples, seemed all done away, nobody could tell how; and his doubts about her ambition were equally got over—and equally without apparent reason. It could only be through increasing attachment. His good and her bad feelings yielded to love, and such love must unite them.

He was to go to town within a fortnight; he loved to talk of going; and when once with her again, Fanny could not doubt the rest. Her acceptance must be as certain as his offer; and yet the prospect of it was most sorrowful to her, independently of self.

In their last conversation, Miss Crawford, in spite of much personal kindness, had still been Miss Crawford; still shown a mind led astray and bewildered, and without any suspicion of being so; darkened, yet fancying itself light. She might love, but she did not deserve Edmund by any other sentiment. Fanny believed there was scarcely a second feeling in common between them; and felt that if Edmund's influence had already done so little in regulating her notions, his worth would be finally wasted on her even in years of matrimony. As Fanny was convinced of this, she suffered very much, and could never speak of Miss Crawford without pain.

Sir Thomas, meanwhile, still expected to see the effect of the loss of consequence on his niece's spirits. He was soon able to account for his not yet observing this, by the approach of another visitor to lift Fanny's spirits. William had obtained a ten days' leave of absence, and was coming, the happiest of lieutenants, to show his happiness and describe his uniform.

He came; and he would have been delighted to show his uniform too, had not cruel custom prohibited its appearance except on duty. So the uniform remained at Portsmouth, and Edmund thought that Fanny would not have any chance of viewing it, before its freshness was worn away; until Sir Thomas formed a scheme which meant Fanny could see the second lieutenant of HMS Thrush in all his glory.

This scheme was that she should accompany her brother back to Portsmouth, and spend some time with her own family. Sir Thomas consulted his son, who thought it would be highly agreeable to Fanny; but Sir Thomas had another motive in sending her away, which had nothing at all to do with any idea of making her happy. He certainly wished her to go willingly, but he as certainly wished her to be heartily sick of home before her visit ended; and hoped a little abstinence from the luxuries of

Mansfield Park would sober her mind, and help her to better appreciate Henry Crawford's offer.

It was a medicinal project, for he considered that his niece's understanding must at present be diseased. A residence of eight or nine years amidst wealth and plenty had disordered her powers of judging. Her father's house would teach her the value of a good income; and he trusted that she would be the wiser and happier woman all her life, for the experiment he had devised.

Had Fanny been at all addicted to raptures, she must have had a strong attack of them when her uncle first made her the offer of visiting the parents, brothers, and sisters, from whom she had been divided almost half her life; of returning to them with William as companion, and continuing to see William while he remained on land. She was indeed delighted, but her happiness was of a quiet, deep, heart-swelling sort. At the moment she could only thank and accept.

Afterwards, she could speak to William and Edmund of what she felt; but still there were tender emotions that could not be clothed in words. The remembrance of all her earliest pleasures, and of what she had suffered in being torn from them, came over her with renewed strength, and it seemed as if to be at home again would heal every pain that had grown out of the separation. To be in the centre of such a circle, loved by so many; to feel affection without restraint; to feel herself the equal of those who surrounded her; to be at peace from all mention of the Crawfords. This was a prospect to be dwelt on with fondness.

Edmund, too—to be two months from him must do her good. At a distance, unassailed by his looks or his kindness, she should be able to reason herself into a more proper state; she should be able to think of him as in London, and arranging everything there, without wretchedness. What might have been hard to bear at Mansfield was to become a slight evil at Portsmouth.

The only drawback was the doubt of her aunt Bertram's being comfortable without her. That part of the arrangement was, indeed, the hardest for Sir Thomas to accomplish.

But he was master at Mansfield Park. When he had really resolved on any measure, he could always carry it through; and now by dwelling on the duty of Fanny's sometimes seeing her family, he did induce his wife to let her go.

The next step was to communicate with Portsmouth. Fanny wrote to offer herself; and her mother's answer, though short, was so kind as to confirm all the daughter's views of happiness in being with her—convincing her that she should now find a warm friend in the "mama" who had certainly shown no remarkable fondness for her formerly; but this she could easily suppose to have been her own fault. She had probably alienated love by fretfulness, or been unreasonable in wanting a larger share than one among so many could deserve. Now, when she knew better how to be useful, and when her mother could be no longer occupied by the incessant demands of a house full of little children, there would be leisure for every comfort, and they should soon be what mother and daughter ought to be to each other.

William was almost as happy in the plan as his sister. It would be the greatest pleasure to have her there to the last moment before he sailed, and perhaps find her there still when he came in from his first cruise. And besides, he wanted her so very much to see the Thrush before she went out of harbour—the Thrush was certainly the finest sloop in the service—and the dockyard, too, which he quite longed to show her. In addition, her being at home for a while would be a great advantage to everybody.

"I do not know how it is," said he; "but we seem to want some of your orderliness at my father's. The house is always in confusion. You will set things going in a better way, I am sure. How right and comfortable it will all be!"

For a few hours the young travellers were in a good deal of alarm about their journey: Mrs. Norris found that in spite of her hints for a less expensive conveyance of Fanny, they were to travel post; and when she saw Sir Thomas give William money for the purpose, she was struck with the idea of there being room for a third in the carriage, and suddenly seized with a strong inclination to go with them to see her poor dear sister Price. She proclaimed her thoughts.

William and Fanny were horror-struck at the idea. All their comfort would be destroyed. With woeful countenances they looked at each other. Mrs. Norris was left to settle the matter by herself; and it ended, to the infinite joy of her nephew and niece, in the recollection that she could not possibly be spared from Mansfield Park at present.

It had, in fact, occurred to her, that though taken to Portsmouth for nothing, it would be hardly possible for her to avoid paying her own expenses back again. So her poor dear sister Price was left to all the disappointment of, perhaps, another twenty years' absence.

Edmund's plans were affected by this Portsmouth journey. He had intended, about this time, to be going to London; but he could not leave his father and mother just when everybody else of most importance to their comfort was leaving them. With an effort, felt but not boasted of, he delayed for a week or two longer a journey which he was looking forward to with the hope of its fixing his happiness for ever.

He told Fanny of it. She knew so much already, that she must know everything. Fanny was affected, feeling it to be the last time in which Miss Crawford's name would ever be mentioned between them with any liberty. Once afterwards he alluded to her. Lady Bertram had been telling her niece to write to her soon and often, and Edmund added in a whisper, "And I shall write to you, Fanny, when I have anything to say that I think you will like to hear." Had she doubted his meaning, the glow in his face, when she looked up at him, would have been decisive.

For this letter she must try to arm herself. That a letter from Edmund should be a subject of terror! She began to feel that the varied trials of the human mind had not yet been exhausted by her.

Poor Fanny! though going eagerly, the last evening at Mansfield Park must still be wretched. She had tears for every room in the house, and every beloved inhabitant. She clung to her aunt, because she would miss her; she kissed the hand of her uncle with struggling sobs, because she had displeased him; and as for Edmund, she could neither speak, nor look, nor think; and it was not till it was over that she knew he was giving her the affectionate farewell of a brother.

The journey began very early in the morning; and when the diminished party met at breakfast, William and Fanny were talked of as already advanced one stage.

CHAPTER 38

The novelty of travelling, and the happiness of being with William, soon raised Fanny's spirits; and by the time their first stage was ended, and they quit Sir Thomas's carriage, she was able to take leave of the old coachman, and send back proper messages, with cheerful looks.

Of pleasant talk between the brother and sister there was no end. Everything supplied amusement to the high glee of William's mind, and he was full of frolic and joke. All his talk ended in praise of the Thrush, schemes for battle, or speculations upon prize-money, which was to be generously distributed at home, keeping back only enough to make the little cottage comfortable, in which he and Fanny were to pass their later life together.

Fanny's immediate concerns involving Mr. Crawford made no part of their conversation. William knew what had passed, and lamented that his sister's feelings should be so cold towards a man whom he must consider as the first of human characters; but knowing her wish on the subject, he would not distress her by the slightest allusion to it.

She knew herself to be not yet forgotten by Mr. Crawford. She had heard repeatedly from his sister since their leaving Mansfield, and in each letter there had been a few lines from himself, warm and determined like his speeches.

It was a correspondence which Fanny found quite as unpleasant as she had feared. Miss Crawford's lively style of writing was itself an evil, for Edmund would never rest till she had read the letter to him; and then she had to listen to his admiration of her language and her warm attachments. There was, in fact, so much of message and allusion in every letter, that Fanny could only suppose it was meant for him to hear; and to find herself compelled into a correspondence which was bringing her the addresses of the man she did not love, and obliging her to administer to the passion of the man she did, was cruelly mortifying. Once she was no longer under the same roof as Edmund, she trusted that Miss Crawford would have less motive for writing, and that at Portsmouth their correspondence would dwindle into nothing.

With such thoughts as these, Fanny proceeded in her journey cheerfully. They made no stop till they reached Newbury, where a comfortable meal wound up the enjoyments and fatigues of the day.

The next morning saw them off again at an early hour; and they neared Portsmouth while there was yet daylight for Fanny to look around her, and wonder at the new buildings. They passed the drawbridge, and entered the town; and as the light was beginning to fail, they were rattled into a narrow street, and drawn up before the door of a small house now inhabited by Mr. Price.

Fanny was all fluttering hope and apprehension. A trollopy-looking maidservant stepped forward, and more intent on telling the news than giving them any help, immediately began with, "The Thrush is gone out of harbour, please sir, and one of the officers has been here to—"

She was interrupted by a fine tall boy of eleven years old, who, rushing out of the house, pushed the maid aside, and called out, "You are just in time, William. We have been looking for you this half-hour. The Thrush went out of harbour this morning. They think she will have her orders in a day or two. And Mr. Campbell was here at four o'clock to ask for you: he is going to her at six, and hoped you would be here in time to go with him."

A stare at Fanny, as William helped her out of the carriage, was all the notice which this brother gave her; but he made no objection to her kissing him, though still entirely engaged in detailing farther particulars of the Thrush's going out of harbour, in which he had a strong interest, being about to commence his career of seamanship in her at this very time.

Another moment and Fanny was in the narrow entrance-passage of the house, and in the arms of her mother, who met her with looks of true kindness, and with features which Fanny loved the more, because they were like her aunt Bertram's. There also were her two sisters: Susan, a well-grown fine girl of fourteen, and Betsey, the youngest of the family, about five—both glad to see her in their way, though without any polish to their manners in receiving her. But manner Fanny did not want. Would they but love her, she should be satisfied.

She was taken into a parlour, so small that she thought at first it was only a passage, and stood for a moment expecting to be invited on; but when she saw there was no other door, and that there were signs of habitation before her, she reproved herself, and grieved lest her thoughts should have been suspected. Her mother, however, could not stay long enough to suspect anything. She was gone again to welcome William.

"Oh! my dear William, how glad I am to see you. But have you heard about the Thrush? She is gone out of harbour already; and I do not know what I am to do about Sam's things, they will never be ready in time. And now you must be off for Spithead too. Campbell has been here, and now what shall we do? I thought to have had such a comfortable evening with you, and here everything comes upon me at once."

Her son answered cheerfully, making light of his own inconvenience in being obliged to hurry away so soon.

"To be sure, I had much rather she had stayed in harbour, that I might have sat a few hours with you in comfort; but as there is a boat ashore, I had better go off. Whereabouts does the Thrush lay at Spithead? But no matter; here's Fanny. Come, mother, you have hardly looked at your own dear Fanny yet."

Mrs. Price, having kindly kissed her daughter again, and commented on her growth, said with solicitude, "Poor dears! how tired you must both be! and now, what will you have? I began to think you would never come. Betsey and I have been watching for you this half-hour. And when did you get anything to eat? And what would you like to have now? I did not know what you would like, or else I would have got something ready. I am afraid Campbell will be here before there is time to dress a steak, and we have no butcher at hand. It is very inconvenient to have no butcher in the street. Perhaps you would like some tea."

They both declared they should prefer it to anything. "Then, Betsey, my dear, run into the kitchen and see if Rebecca has put the water on; and tell her to bring in the tea-things. I wish we could get the bell mended; but Betsey is a very handy little messenger."

Betsey went with alacrity, proud to show her abilities before her fine new sister.

"Dear me!" continued the anxious mother, "what a sad fire we have got, and I dare say you are both cold. Draw your chair nearer, my dear. I cannot think what Rebecca has been about. I am sure I told her to bring some coals half an hour ago. Susan, you should have taken care of the fire."

"I was upstairs, mama, moving my things," said Susan, in a fearless, self-defending tone, which startled Fanny. "You know you had settled that Fanny and I should have the other room; and I could not get Rebecca to give me any help."

Farther discussion was prevented by various bustles: first, the driver came to be paid; then there was a squabble between Sam and Rebecca about the manner of carrying up his sister's trunk, which he would manage all his own way; and lastly, in walked Mr. Price himself, his own loud voice preceding him, as with something of the oath kind he kicked away his son's bag and his daughter's hatbox in the passage, called out for a candle, and walked into the room.

Fanny had risen to meet him, but sank down again on finding herself undistinguished in the dusk, and unthought of. With a friendly shake of his son's hand, he instantly began—

"Ha! welcome back, my boy. Glad to see you. Have you heard the news? The Thrush went out of harbour this morning. By G—, you are just in time! The doctor has been here inquiring for you: he has got one of the boats, and is to be off for Spithead by six, so you had better go with him. I should not wonder if you had your orders to-morrow: but you cannot sail with this wind, if you are to cruise to the westward; and Captain Walsh thinks you will certainly have a cruise to the westward, with the Elephant. By G—, I wish you may! Well, we are ready, whatever happens. But by G—, you lost a fine sight by not being here in the morning to see the Thrush go out of harbour! If ever there was a perfect beauty afloat, she is one; and there she lays at Spithead, and anybody in England would take her for an eight-and-twenty. She lays close to the Endymion, between her and the Cleopatra."

"Ha!" cried William, "that's just where I should have put her myself. It's the best berth at Spithead. But here is Fanny, sir; it is so dark you do not see her."

With an acknowledgment that he had quite forgot her, Mr. Price now received his daughter; and having given her a cordial hug, and observed that she was grown into a woman, seemed inclined to forget her again. Fanny shrunk back to her seat, sadly pained by his language and his smell of spirits; and he talked on only to his son, and only of the Thrush, though William, warmly interested as he was in that subject, more than once tried to make his father think of Fanny, and her long absence and long journey.

After some time, a candle was obtained; but as there was still no appearance of tea, William decided to go and change his dress, and prepare for his removal on board, so that he might have his tea in comfort afterwards.

As he left the room, two rosy-faced boys, ragged and dirty, about eight and nine years old, rushed into it, just released from school, and coming eagerly to see their sister and tell that the Thrush was gone out of harbour; Tom and Charles. Charles had been born since Fanny's going away, but Tom she had often helped to nurse, and now felt a particular pleasure in seeing again. Both were kissed very tenderly, but Tom she wanted to keep by her, to try to trace the features of the baby she had loved. Tom, however, had no mind for such treatment: he came home not to stand and be talked to, but to run about and make a noise; and both boys had soon burst from her, and slammed the parlour-door till her temples ached.

She had now seen all that were at home; there remained only two brothers between herself and Susan, one of whom was a clerk in London, and the other a midshipman on board an Indiaman.

But though she had seen all the members of the family, she had not yet heard all the noise they could make. Another quarter of an hour brought her a great deal more. William was soon calling out from the landing for his mother and Rebecca. A key was mislaid, Betsey was accused of having got at his new hat, and some slight, but essential alteration of his uniform waistcoat, which he had been promised to have done for him, had been entirely neglected.

Mrs. Price, Rebecca, and Betsey all went up to defend themselves, all talking together, but Rebecca loudest; William trying in vain to send Betsey down again; the whole of which, as almost every door in the house was open, could be plainly distinguished in the parlour, except when drowned by the superior noise of Sam, Tom, and Charles chasing each other up and down stairs, and tumbling about and hallooing.

Fanny was almost stunned. The smallness of the house and thinness of the walls brought everything so close to her, that, added to the fatigue of her journey, she hardly knew how to bear it. Within the room all was tranquil enough, for there were only her father and herself remaining; and he, taking out a newspaper, applied himself to studying it, without seeming to recollect her existence. The solitary candle was held between himself and the paper; but she was glad to have the light screened from her aching head, as she sat in bewildered, broken contemplation.

She was at home. But, alas! it was not such a home, she had not such a welcome, as—she checked herself; she was unreasonable. What right had she to be of importance to her family? William's concerns must be dearest, and he had every right. Yet to have so little asked about herself, to have scarcely an inquiry made after Mansfield! It did pain her to have Mansfield forgotten; the friends who had done so much—the dear, dear friends!

Perhaps it must be so. The destination of the Thrush must be now pre-eminently interesting. A day or two might show the difference. She only was to blame. Yet she thought it would not have been so at Mansfield. No, in her uncle's house there would have been a propriety, an attention towards everybody which there was not here.

The only interruption which her thoughts received for half an hour was from a sudden burst of her father's. At a more than ordinary pitch of thumping and hallooing in the passage, he exclaimed, "Devil take those young dogs! How they are singing out! Holla, you there! Sam, stop your confounded pipe, or I shall be after you."

This threat was so palpably disregarded, that though five minutes afterwards the three boys all burst into the room together and sat down, Fanny could not consider it as a proof of anything more than their being for the time thoroughly fagged, which their panting breaths seemed to prove, especially as they were still kicking each other's shins, and hallooing out at sudden starts immediately under their father's eye.

The next opening of the door brought something more welcome: the tea-things, which she had begun almost to despair of seeing that evening. Susan and an attendant girl, whose inferior appearance informed Fanny, to her great surprise, that she had previously seen the upper servant, brought in everything necessary for the meal.

Susan, putting the kettle on the fire and glancing at her sister, looked as if divided between the triumph of showing her usefulness, and the dread of being thought to demean herself by such a task. "She had been into the kitchen," she said, "to hurry Sally and help make the toast, and spread the bread and butter, or she did not know when they should have got tea, and she was sure her sister must want something after her journey."

Fanny was very thankful. Susan immediately set about making the tea; and with only a little unnecessary bustle, and some injudicious attempts at keeping her brothers in order, acquitted herself very well. Fanny's spirit was as much refreshed as her body; her head and heart were soon the better for such well-timed kindness. Susan had an open, sensible countenance; she was like William, and Fanny hoped to find her like him in disposition and goodwill.

William re-entered, followed by his mother and Betsey. He, complete in his lieutenant's uniform, looking all the taller, firmer, and more graceful for it, and with

the happiest smile over his face, walked up directly to Fanny, who, rising from her seat in speechless admiration, threw her arms round his neck to sob out her pleasure.

Anxious not to appear unhappy, she soon recovered, and was able to admire his dress; listening with reviving spirits to his cheerful hopes of being on shore some part of every day before they sailed, and even of getting her to Spithead to see the ship.

The next bustle brought in Mr. Campbell, the surgeon of the Thrush, a very well-behaved young man, who came to call for his friend, and for whom there was with some contrivance found a chair, and with some hasty washing of the young tea-maker's, a cup and saucer; and after earnest talk between the gentlemen, noise rising upon noise, and bustle upon bustle, the moment came for setting off; everything was ready, William took leave, and all of them were gone; for the three boys were determined to see their brother and Mr. Campbell to the sally-port; and Mr. Price walked off at the same time.

Something like tranquillity might now be hoped for. Accordingly, when Rebecca had been prevailed on to carry away the tea-things, the small party of females was pretty well composed, and the mother was at leisure to think of her eldest daughter and the friends she had come from.

A few inquiries began: but one of the earliest—"How did sister Bertram manage about her servants?"—soon led her mind away from Northamptonshire, and fixed it on her own domestic grievances; and the shocking character of all the Portsmouth servants, of whom she believed her own two were the very worst, engrossed her completely.

Fanny was silent. As she sat looking at Betsey, she could not help thinking of another sister, a very pretty little girl, whom she had left when she went into Northamptonshire, and who had died a few years afterwards. Fanny in those days had preferred her to Susan; and when the news of her death had reached Mansfield, had been quite afflicted. The sight of Betsey brought the image of little Mary back again, but she would not have pained her mother by alluding to her for the world. Meanwhile Betsey was holding out something to catch her eyes, meaning to screen it at the same time from Susan's.

"What have you got there, my love?" said Fanny; "come and show it to me."

It was a silver knife. Up jumped Susan, claiming it as her own, and trying to get it away; but the child ran to her mother's protection, and Susan could only reproach. "It was very hard that she was not to have her own knife; little sister Mary had left it to her upon her deathbed, and she ought to have had it to keep. But mama kept it from her, and was always letting Betsey get hold of it; and the end of it would be that Betsey would spoil it, and get it for her own."

Fanny was quite shocked. Every feeling of duty, honour, and tenderness was wounded by her sister's speech and her mother's reply.

"Now, Susan," cried Mrs. Price, in a complaining voice, "how can you be so cross? You are always quarrelling about that knife. Poor little Betsey; how cross Susan is to you! But you should not have taken it out of the drawer, my dear. You know I told you not to touch it, because Susan is so cross about it. I must hide it another time, Betsey. Poor Mary little thought it would be such a bone of contention when she gave it me to keep. Poor little soul! She said, 'Let sister Susan have my knife, mama, when I am dead.' She was so fond of it, Fanny, that she would have it lay by her in bed, all through her illness. It was the gift of her godmother. Poor little sweet creature! Well, she was taken away from evil to come. My own Betsey, you have not the luck of such a good godmother. Aunt Norris lives too far off to think of such little people as you."

Indeed, Fanny had nothing to convey from aunt Norris, but a message to say she hoped that her god-daughter was a good girl, and learnt her book. Mrs. Norris had thought of sending her a prayer-book; had taken down two old prayer-books of her husband with that idea; but, upon examination, the ardour of generosity went off. One was found to have too small a print for a child's eyes, and the other to be too cumbersome.

Fanny, fatigued, was thankful to accept the first invitation of going to bed, leaving all below in confusion and noise again; the boys begging for toasted cheese, her father calling out for his rum and water, and Rebecca never where she ought to be.

There was nothing to raise her spirits in the confined and scantily furnished chamber that she was to share with Susan. The smallness of the rooms, and the narrowness of the passage and staircase, struck her. She thought with respect of her own little attic at Mansfield Park, which in that house was reckoned too small for anybody's comfort.

CHAPTER 39

Could Sir Thomas have seen his niece's feelings, he would not have despaired; for despite a good night's rest, the hope of soon seeing William again, and the comparatively quiet state of the house, from Tom and Charles being gone to school, home still held many drawbacks. Could he have seen only half that she felt before the end of a week, he would have been delighted with his own sagacity.

Before the week ended, it was all disappointment. William was gone. The Thrush had had her orders, and sailed within four days; and during those days she had seen him only twice, in a hurried way. There had been no free conversation, no walk on the ramparts, no visit to the dockyard, nothing of all that they had planned. Everything failed, except William's affection. His last words on leaving home were: "Take care of Fanny, mother. She is tender, and not used to rough it like the rest of us."

William was gone: and her home was the very reverse of what she could have wished. It was the abode of noise, disorder, and impropriety. Nobody was in their right place, nothing was done as it ought to be. She could not respect her parents as she had hoped. Her father was more negligent of his family, his habits were worse, and his manners coarser, than she had been prepared for. He did not lack abilities, but he had no curiosity; he read only the newspaper and the navy-list; he swore and he drank, he was dirty and gross. She had never been able to recall anything approaching to tenderness in his former treatment of herself; and now he scarcely ever noticed her, but to make her the object of a coarse joke.

Her disappointment in her mother was greater: there she had hoped much, and found almost nothing. Mrs. Price was not unkind; but her daughter never met with greater kindness from her than on the day of her arrival. Her heart and her time were already full; she had neither leisure nor affection to bestow on Fanny. Her daughters never had been much to her. She was fond of her sons, especially William, but Betsey was the first of her girls whom she had ever much regarded. To her she was most injudiciously indulgent. William was her pride; Betsey her darling; and John, Richard, Sam, Tom, and Charles occupied all the rest of her maternal solicitude. Her days were spent in a kind of slow bustle; she was busy without getting on; and dissatisfied with her servants, without skill to make them better, or any power of engaging their respect.

Mrs. Price resembled Lady Bertram more than Mrs. Norris. She was a manager by necessity, without any of Mrs. Norris's inclination for it. She was naturally indolent, like Lady Bertram; and Mrs. Norris would have been a more respectable mother of nine children on a small income.

Fanny could not but feel this. She might scruple to use the words, but she must feel that her mother was an ill-judging parent, a slattern, who neither taught nor restrained her children, whose house was the scene of mismanagement from beginning to end, and who had no talent, no conversation, no affection towards herself; and no curiosity to know her better.

Fanny was very anxious to be useful, and not to appear above her home, and therefore set about working for Sam immediately; and by sewing early and late, did so much that the boy was shipped off at last with more than half his linen ready.

Sam, loud and overbearing as he was, she rather regretted when he went, for he was clever and intelligent, and glad to be employed in errands; and though spurning the ill-timed though reasonable remonstrances of Susan, he was beginning to be

influenced by Fanny's gentle persuasions. She despaired of making the smallest impression on Tom or Charles; they were quite untameable. Every afternoon brought a return of their riotous games all over the house; and she learned to sigh at the approach of Saturday's constant half-holiday.

Betsey, too, a spoiled child, trained up to think the alphabet her greatest enemy, left with the servants, and then encouraged to report any evil of them, she was almost as ready to despair of; and of Susan's temper she had many doubts. Susan's continual disagreements with her mother, her squabbles with Tom and Charles, and petulance with Betsey, were so distressing to Fanny that she feared Susan's disposition must be far from amiable.

Such was the home which was to put Mansfield out of her head. On the contrary, she could think of nothing but Mansfield, its beloved inmates, its happy ways. The elegance, propriety, harmony, and above all, the peace and tranquillity of Mansfield, were brought to her remembrance every hour, by the prevalence of everything opposite to them here.

The incessant noise was, to a delicate temper like Fanny's, the greatest misery of all. At Mansfield, no raised voice, no tread of violence, was ever heard; everybody's feelings were consulted. If tenderness could be ever supposed wanting, good breeding supplied its place; and as to the little irritations of aunt Norris, they were trifling, compared with the ceaseless tumult of her present home. Here everybody was noisy, every voice was loud (excepting, perhaps, her mother's). Whatever was wanted was hallooed for, and the servants hallooed out their excuses from the kitchen. The doors were in constant banging, the stairs were never at rest, nothing was done without a clatter, nobody sat still, and nobody could command attention when they spoke.

At the end of a week, Fanny was tempted to say, that though Mansfield Park might have some pains, Portsmouth could have no pleasures.

CHAPTER 40

Fanny was right in not expecting to hear from Miss Crawford so regularly; Mary's next letter was after a decidedly longer interval than the last, but she was not right in supposing that such an interval would be a great relief. Here was another strange revolution of mind! She was really glad to receive the letter when it did come. In her present exile from good society, a letter from one belonging to the set where her heart lived, written with affection and elegance, was thoroughly acceptable.

"My letter will not be worth your reading," Mary wrote, "for there will be no little offering of love at the end from the most devoted H. C. in the world, as Henry is in Norfolk. Business called him to Everingham, and his absence may account for his sister's remissness in writing, for there has been no 'Well, Mary, when do you write to Fanny? Is not it time for you to write?' to spur me on. At last, I have seen your cousins, 'dear Julia and dearest Mrs. Rushworth'. We seemed very glad to see each other, and I do really think we were a little. We had a vast deal to say. Shall I tell you how Mrs. Rushworth looked when your name was mentioned? She had not quite self-possession enough for the demands of yesterday. Julia was in the best looks of the two, at least after you were spoken of.

"But Mrs. Rushworth's day of good looks will come; we have invitations for her first party on the 28th. Then she will be in beauty, for she will open one of the best houses in Wimpole Street. Henry could not have afforded her such a house. I hope she will be satisfied with being the queen of a palace, though the king may be best in the background. As I have no desire to tease her, I shall never force your name upon her again. From all that I hear, Baron Wildenheim's attentions to Julia continue, but without serious encouragement. She ought to do better. A poor honourable is no catch, and I cannot imagine that she likes him, for take away his rants, and the baron has nothing. If his rents were only equal to his rants!

"Your cousin Edmund moves slowly; detained, perchance, by parish duties. There may be some old woman at Thornton Lacey to be converted. I am unwilling to fancy myself neglected for a young one. Adieu! my dear sweet Fanny: write me a pretty reply to gladden Henry's eyes, and send me an account of all the dashing young captains whom you disdain for his sake."

There was great food for meditation in this letter; and yet, with all the uneasiness it supplied, it connected her with the absent, and she would have been glad to have such a letter every week. Her correspondence with her aunt Bertram was her only concern of higher interest.

As for any society in Portsmouth, there were none amongst her parents' acquaintance to afford her the smallest satisfaction. The men appeared to her all coarse, the women all pert; and she gave as little contentment as she received. The young ladies who approached her at first with some respect, were soon offended by what they termed "airs"; for, as she neither played on the pianoforte nor wore fine furs, they could admit no superiority.

The first consolation which Fanny received for the evils of home, was in a better knowledge of Susan, and a hope of being of service to her. Susan had always behaved pleasantly to Fanny, but the determined character of her general manners had astonished her, and it was a fortnight before she began to understand a disposition so totally different from her own.

Susan saw that much was wrong at home, and wanted to set it right. That a girl of fourteen, without guidance, should err in the method of reform, was not extraordinary; and Fanny soon came to admire the mind which could so early distinguish justly. Susan was only acting on the same truths which Fanny herself acknowledged, but which her more yielding temper would have shrunk from asserting. Susan tried to be useful, where she could only have gone away and cried; and that Susan was useful she could perceive. Bad as they were, things would have been worse without her intervention, and both her mother and Betsey were restrained from some excesses of very offensive vulgarity.

All this became evident, and gradually placed Susan before her sister as an object of compassion and respect. That her manner was wrong, her measures often ill-chosen and ill-timed, and her looks and language often indefensible, Fanny could not cease to feel; but she began to hope they might be rectified. Susan looked up to her and wished for her good opinion; and new as it was to Fanny to imagine herself capable of guiding anyone, she did resolve to give occasional hints to her.

Her influence began in an act of kindness to Susan, which, after many hesitations, she at last worked herself up to. It had occurred to her that a small sum of money might, perhaps, restore peace for ever on the sore subject of the silver knife; and the riches which her uncle had given her made her able to be generous. But she was so wholly unused to confer favours, and so fearful of appearing to elevate herself as a great lady, that it took some time to decide to make such a present.

It was made, however, at last. A silver knife was bought for Betsey, and accepted with great delight, its newness giving it every advantage over the other. Susan was established in the full possession of her own, Betsey handsomely declaring that now she had got one so much prettier herself, she should never want that again; and the mother was equally satisfied.

It was the means of opening Susan's heart, and giving Fanny something more to love and be interested in. Susan showed that she had delicacy: although she was pleased to be mistress of her property, she feared that her sister's judgment had been against her, and that a reproof was designed her in the purchase, made necessary for the tranquillity of the house.

Her temper was open. She acknowledged her fears and blamed herself for having argued so heatedly. Fanny, understanding her worth and perceiving how much she wished for her good opinion, began to hope of being useful to a mind so much needing and deserving help. She gave sound advice, yet so mildly and considerately as not to irritate an imperfect temper, and she had the happiness of observing its good effects. She saw with acute sympathy all that must be hourly grating to a girl like Susan. Her greatest wonder soon became—not that Susan should have been provoked into disrespect and impatience—but that so many good notions should have been hers at all; and that, brought up in the midst of negligence and error, she should have formed such proper opinions of what ought to be; even with no cousin Edmund to fix her principles.

The intimacy thus begun between them benefited each. By sitting together upstairs, they avoided much of the disturbance of the house; Fanny had peace, and Susan learned to enjoy being quietly employed. They sat without a fire; but that was a hardship familiar to Fanny, and she suffered less because reminded by it of the East room.

It was the only point of resemblance. In space, light, furniture, and prospect, there was nothing alike in the two apartments; and she often heaved a sigh as she remembered all her books and comforts. By degrees the girls came to spend most of the morning upstairs, working and talking, but after a few days, Fanny found it impossible not to try for books again. There were none in her father's house; but she became a subscriber to a circulating library, amazed at becoming a renter, a chooser of books! But so it was. Susan had read nothing, and Fanny longed to give her a share in her own first pleasures in biography and poetry.

She hoped, moreover, that it might be useful in diverting her own thoughts from pursuing Edmund to London, where she knew he was now gone. She had no doubt of what would follow. The postman's knock was beginning to bring daily terrors, and if reading could banish the idea for half an hour, it was something gained.

CHAPTER 41

A week was gone since Edmund might be supposed to be in London, and Fanny had heard nothing of him. Either his going had been again delayed, or he had as yet found no opportunity of seeing Miss Crawford alone, or he was too happy for letter-writing!

One morning, Fanny having now been nearly four weeks from Mansfield, a point which she never failed to calculate every day, there was the knock of a visitor.

It was a gentleman's voice; it was a voice that Fanny was just turning pale about, when Mr. Crawford walked into the room.

Good sense will always act when really called upon; and she found that she had been able to name him to her mother, as "William's friend," though she could not have believed herself capable of uttering a syllable. Having introduced him, however, her terror of what this visit might lead to became overpowering, and she fancied herself on the point of fainting.

Their visitor was wisely and kindly keeping his eyes away, giving her time to recover, while he devoted himself entirely to her mother, addressing her with the utmost politeness and propriety.

Mrs. Price's manners were also at their best. Warmed by the sight of such a friend to her son, and wishing to appear to advantage, she was overflowing with gratitude. Mr. Price was out, which she regretted very much. Fanny did not; for she felt ashamed of her home, and she would have been yet more ashamed of her father than of all the rest.

They talked of William; and Mr. Crawford was as warm in his commendation as even Mrs. Price could wish. She felt that she had never seen so agreeable a man; and was only astonished to find that it was no port-admiral, or any object of importance and wealth, that had brought him to Portsmouth. He had come for a day or two, was staying at the Crown, had accidentally met with a navy officer or two of his acquaintance, but had no object of that kind in coming.

By the time he had given all this information, Fanny was able to bear his gaze, and hear that he had spent half an hour with his sister the evening before his leaving London; that she had sent her best love, but had had no time for writing; that he thought himself lucky in seeing Mary for even half an hour, having spent scarcely twenty-four hours in London; that her cousin Edmund had been in town, he understood, a few days; that he had not seen him, but that Edmund was well, had left them all well at Mansfield, and was to dine, as yesterday, with Mary and the Frasers.

Fanny listened collectedly, even to the last-mentioned circumstance; nay, it seemed a relief; and "then by this time it is all settled," passed internally, without more evidence of emotion than a faint blush.

After talking a little more about Mansfield, Crawford began to hint at the convenience of an early walk. "It was a lovely morning, and at that season a fine morning so often changed, that it was wisest for everybody not to delay their exercise". Such hints producing nothing, he proceeded to a positive recommendation to Mrs. Price and her daughters to take their walk. But Mrs. Price, it appeared, scarcely ever stirred out of doors, except of a Sunday. "Would she not, then, persuade her daughters to take advantage of such weather, and allow him the pleasure of attending them?"

Mrs. Price agreed. "She knew they had some errands in the town, which they would be very glad to do." And the consequence was, that Fanny, strange and

distressing as it was, found herself and Susan, within ten minutes, walking towards the High Street with Mr. Crawford.

They were hardly there before they met her father, whose appearance was not the better from its being Saturday. He stopped; and Fanny was obliged to introduce him to Mr. Crawford.

She could not have a doubt of how Mr. Crawford must be struck. He must be ashamed and disgusted altogether. He must soon cease to have the smallest inclination for the match; and yet this cure would be almost as bad as the complaint. I believe there is scarcely a young lady living who would not rather put up with the misfortune of being sought by a clever, agreeable man, than have him driven away by the vulgarity of her relations.

However, (as Fanny instantly, and to her great relief, discerned) her father was a very different man in his behaviour to this highly respected stranger, from what he was at home. His manners were more than passable: they were grateful, animated, manly; his loud tones did very well in the open air, and there was not a single oath to be heard. Such was his instinctive compliment to the good manners of Mr. Crawford; and Fanny's feelings were infinitely soothed.

Mr. Price offered to take Mr. Crawford into the dockyard: Mr. Crawford, though he had seen the dockyard before, was still grateful to accept, hoping to be so much the longer with Fanny. Mr. Price would have turned thither directly, without the smallest consideration for his daughters' errands in the High Street. Mr. Crawford took care, however, that they should be allowed to go to the shops they came to visit.

They then set forward for the dockyard, and the walk would have been conducted in a singular manner, had Mr. Price been allowed the regulation of it, as the two girls would have been left to follow, and keep up with the gentlemen or not, as they could. Mr. Crawford was able to introduce some improvement; he would not walk away from them, and at any crossing, when Mr. Price was calling out, "Come, girls; come, Fan; come, Sue; keep a sharp lookout!" he would give them his particular attendance.

Once in the dockyard, he hoped for some happy conversation with Fanny, as they were joined by a brother loungee of Mr. Price's, who must prove a more worthy companion than himself; and the two officers seemed very well satisfied going about together, while the young people sat down upon some timbers in the yard.

Fanny was most conveniently in want of rest. Crawford could not have wished her more ready to sit down; but he could have wished her sister away. A quick-looking girl of Susan's age was the very worst third in the world: totally different from Lady Bertram, all eyes and ears; and there was no introducing the main point before her. He must content himself with being generally agreeable, and letting Susan have her share of entertainment, with a hint, now and then, for Fanny.

Norfolk was what he mostly talked of. Such a man could come from no place, without importing something to amuse; his journeys and his acquaintances entertained Susan in a way quite new to her.

For Fanny's approval, he gave the reason of his going into Norfolk at this unusual time of year. It related to the renewal of a lease in which the welfare of a large family was at stake. He had suspected his agent of some underhand dealing; and he had determined to go himself, and thoroughly investigate the case. He had gone, had done even more good than he had foreseen, and was now able to congratulate himself. He had introduced himself to some tenants whom he had never seen before; and he had made acquaintance with cottages whose very existence, though on his own estate, had been unknown to him.

This was aimed at Fanny. It was pleasing to hear him speak so properly; here he had been acting as he ought. To be the friend of the poor and the oppressed! She was on the point of giving him an approving look, when it was frightened off by his adding pointedly that he hoped soon to have a friend and guide in every plan of charity for Everingham.

She turned away, and wished he would not say such things. She began to feel the possibility of his turning out well at last; but he was and must ever be completely unsuited to her.

He perceived that enough had been said of Everingham, and turned to Mansfield. He could not have chosen better; that was a topic to bring back her attention instantly. She felt it the voice of a friend when he mentioned it, and by his honourable tribute to its inhabitants allowed her to gratify her own heart, in speaking of her uncle as all that was clever and good, and her aunt as having the sweetest of tempers.

He had a great attachment to Mansfield himself, he said; he hoped to spend much of his time there, or in the neighbourhood. He predicted a very happy summer and autumn there this year; he felt that it would be infinitely superior to the last.

"Mansfield, Sotherton, Thornton Lacey," he continued; "what a society will be comprised in those houses! And at Michaelmas, perhaps, a fourth may be added: some small hunting-box; for as to any partnership in Thornton Lacey, as Edmund Bertram once good-humouredly proposed, I hope I foresee two objections: two fair, excellent, irresistible objections to that plan."

Fanny was doubly silenced here; though she regretted that she had not encouraged him to say more of his sister and Edmund. It was a subject which she must learn to speak of.

By now, all were ready to return; and during their walk back, Mr. Crawford contrived a minute's privacy for telling Fanny that his only business in Portsmouth was to see her; it was on her account, because he could not endure a longer separation. She was really sorry; and yet in spite of this, she thought him improved since she had seen him; he was much more gentle, obliging, and attentive to other people's feelings than he had ever been at Mansfield; she had never seen him so near being agreeable. He was decidedly improved. She wished he had come only for one day; but it was not so very bad: the pleasure of talking of Mansfield was so great!

Her father asked him to do them the honour of taking his mutton with them, and Fanny had time for only one thrill of horror, before he declared himself prevented by a prior engagement. He should, however, wait on them again on the morrow, and so they parted—Fanny thankful to escape so horrible an evil!

To have had him join their family dinner-party, and see all their deficiencies, would have been dreadful! Fanny was not yet inured to Rebecca's cookery and Rebecca's waiting, and Betsey's eating at table without restraint, and pulling everything about as she chose.

CHAPTER 42

The Prices were just setting off for church the next day when Mr. Crawford appeared. He was asked to go with them to the Garrison chapel, which was exactly what he had intended, and they all walked there together.

The family were now seen to advantage. Nature had given them no inconsiderable share of beauty, and every Sunday dressed them in their cleanest skins and best attire. Sunday always brought this comfort to Fanny, and on this Sunday she felt it more than ever. Her poor mother now did not look so very unworthy of being Lady Bertram's sister. It often grieved her that where nature had made so little difference, circumstances should have made so much, and that her mother, as handsome as Lady Bertram, should have an appearance so much more worn and shabby. But Sunday made her a very creditable Mrs. Price, with a fine family of children.

In chapel they were obliged to divide, but Mr. Crawford took care not to be divided from the female branch; and after chapel he continued with them, and joined the family party on the ramparts.

Mrs. Price took her weekly walk on the ramparts every fine Sunday throughout the year. There she met her acquaintance, heard a little news, talked over the badness of the Portsmouth servants, and wound up her spirits for the six days.

Thither they now went; Mr. Crawford most happy to consider the Miss Prices as his charge; and before they had been there long, somehow or other, there was no saying how, he was walking between them with an arm of each under his. Fanny did not know how to put an end to it. It made her uncomfortable, but yet there were enjoyments in the day.

Everything looked so beautiful under the influence of such a fine March sky, with the ever-varying hues of the sea, now at high water, dancing in its glee and dashing against the ramparts; and produced altogether such a combination of charms for Fanny, as made her almost careless of the circumstances under which she felt them. Had she been without his arm, she would soon have known that she needed it, for she lacked strength for a two hours' saunter. Fanny was beginning to feel the effect of being debarred from her usual regular exercise; she had lost ground as to health since her being in Portsmouth.

They often stopped some minutes to look and admire; and considering he was not Edmund, Fanny had to allow that he was open to the charms of nature, and very well able to express his admiration. She had a few tender reveries now and then, during which he could sometimes look in her face without detection; and he concluded that, though as bewitching as ever, her face was less blooming than it ought to be. She said she was very well; but he was convinced that her residence could not be comfortable, and he was growing anxious for her being again at Mansfield.

"You have been here a month, I think?" said he.

"No; not quite. It is four weeks to-morrow."

"You are a most accurate reckoner. I should call that a month. It is to be a two months' visit, is not?"

"Yes. My uncle talked of two months."

"And how are you to be conveyed back again?"

"I do not know. I have heard nothing about it yet. Perhaps it may not be convenient for me to be fetched exactly at the two months' end."

After reflection, Mr. Crawford replied, "I know Mansfield, I know its faults towards you. I am aware that you may be left here week after week, if Sir Thomas cannot organize it without involving the slightest alteration of the arrangements which he has laid down for the next quarter of a year. This will not do. Two months is plenty; I should think six weeks quite enough. I am considering your sister's health," said he, addressing Susan. "She requires constant air and exercise, and ought never to be long banished from the free air of the country. If, therefore" (turning again to Fanny), "you find yourself growing unwell, and any difficulties arise about your returning, if you feel yourself at all less strong or comfortable than usual, and will only let my sister know it, give her only the slightest hint, she and I will immediately come down, and take you back to Mansfield. You know the pleasure with which this would be done."

Fanny thanked him, but tried to laugh it off.

"I am perfectly serious," he replied, "as you know. And I hope you will not conceal any indisposition. Indeed, so long as you positively say, in every letter to Mary, 'I am well,' since I know you cannot speak a falsehood, so long only shall you be considered well."

Fanny thanked him again, but was affected and distressed to a great degree. This was towards the close of their walk. He left them at the door of their own house.

"I wish you were not so tired," said he, detaining Fanny after the others were gone in—"I wish I left you in stronger health. Is there anything I can do for you in town? I have half an idea of going into Norfolk again soon. I am not satisfied about Maddison. I am sure he still means to impose on me if possible. The mischief such a man does on an estate, both to the credit of his employer and the welfare of the poor, is inconceivable. I have a great mind to go back into Norfolk directly. Shall I go? Do you advise it?"

"I advise! You know very well what is right."

"Yes. When you give me your opinion, I always know what is right."

"Oh, no! do not say so. We have all a better guide in ourselves, if we would attend to it, than any other person can be. Good-bye; I wish you a pleasant journey."

"Is there nothing I can do for you in London?"

"Nothing; I am much obliged to you."

"Have you no message for anybody?"

"My love to your sister, if you please; and when you see my cousin, my cousin Edmund, I wish you would be so good as to say that I suppose I shall soon hear from him."

"Certainly; and if he is lazy or negligent, I will write his excuses myself."

He could say no more. He pressed her hand, looked at her, and was gone.

Could he have suspected how many privations, besides that of exercise, she endured in her father's house, he would have wondered that her looks were not more affected. She was so little equal to Rebecca's puddings and Rebecca's hashes, brought to table, as they all were, with half-cleaned plates, and not even half-cleaned knives and forks, that she very often deferred her heartiest meal till she could send her brothers in the evening for biscuits and buns. Though Sir Thomas might have thought his niece in the most promising way of being starved into valuing Mr. Crawford's company, he would probably have feared to push his experiment farther, lest she might die under the cure.

Fanny was out of spirits all the rest of the day. It was parting with somebody of the nature of a friend; and though, in one light, glad to have him gone, it seemed as if she was now deserted by everybody. It was a sort of renewed separation from

Mansfield; and she could not think of his being in town with Mary and Edmund without feelings so close to envy as made her hate herself for having them.

Her dejection had no relief from anything around her; a friend or two of her father's spent the long, long evening there; and from six o'clock till half-past nine, there was little intermission of noise or grog. She was very low. The wonderful improvement which she fancied in Mr. Crawford was the nearest to comfort of anything in her thoughts. Not considering how much might be owing to contrast, she was quite persuaded of his being astonishingly more gentle and regardful of others than formerly. And, if in little things, must it not be so in great? So anxious for her health and comfort as he seemed, might she not suppose that he would not much longer persevere in a suit so distressing to her?

CHAPTER 43

Mr. Crawford was travelling back to London on the morrow; and two days afterwards, Fanny read a letter from his sister with anxious curiosity:—

"I have to inform you, my dearest Fanny, that Henry has been down to Portsmouth to see you; that he had a delightful walk with you to the dockyard last Saturday, and one still more delightful the next day, on the ramparts; when the balmy air, the sparkling sea, and your sweet looks and conversation were altogether in the most delicious harmony. This, as I understand, is to be the substance of my information. He makes me write, but I do not know what else is to be said, except his introduction to your family, especially to a fair sister of yours, a fine girl of fifteen, who was of the party on the ramparts, taking her first lesson, I presume, in love.

"I have not time for writing much, for this is to be a mere letter of business, penned for the purpose of conveying necessary information. My dear, dear Fanny, if I had you here, how I would talk to you! You should listen to me till you were tired, and advise me till you were still tired more. I ought to have sent you an account of your cousin Maria's first party, but I was lazy, and now it is too long ago; suffice it, that everything was just as it ought to be, and that her own dress and manners did her the greatest credit. My friend, Mrs. Fraser, is mad for such a house, and it would not make me miserable.

"I go to Lady Stornaway after Easter; she seems in high spirits, and very happy. I fancy Lord S. is very good-humoured in his own family, and I do not think him so very ill-looking as I did. However, he will not do by the side of your cousin Edmund. Of whom, what shall I say? If I avoided his name, it would look suspicious. I will say, then, that we have seen him two or three times, and that my friends are very struck with his gentlemanlike appearance. Mrs. Fraser (no bad judge) declares she knows but three men in town who have so good an appearance, height, and air; and I must confess, when he dined here the other day, there were none to compare with him. Luckily there is no distinction of dress nowadays to tell tales, but—but—but Yours affectionately."

"I had almost forgot (it was Edmund's fault: he gets into my head more than does me good) one thing I had to say from Henry and myself—I mean about our taking you back into Northamptonshire. My dear little creature, do not stay at Portsmouth to lose your pretty looks. Those vile sea-breezes are the ruin of beauty and health. I am at your service and Henry's, at an hour's notice. We would show you Everingham on our way, and perhaps you would not mind passing through London, and seeing the inside of St. George's church on Hanover Square. Only keep your cousin Edmund from me at such a time: I should not like to be tempted. What a long letter! one word more. Henry, I find, has some idea of going into Norfolk again upon some business that you approve; but he cannot be spared till after the 14th, for we have a party that evening. The value of a man like Henry, on such an occasion, is immense. He will see the Rushworths, which I own I am not sorry for—having a little curiosity, and so I think has he—though he will not acknowledge it."

This was a letter to be run through eagerly, to supply matter for much reflection, and to leave everything in greater suspense than ever. The only certainty to be drawn from it was that nothing decisive had yet taken place. Edmund had not yet spoken.

How Miss Crawford really felt, how she meant to act; whether his importance to her were quite what it had been before, and whether, if lessened, it were likely to

recover, were subjects for endless conjecture, and to be thought of for many days to come, without producing any conclusion. The idea that returned the oftenest was that Miss Crawford, though cooled by a return to London habits, would yet prove in the end too much attached to him to give him up. She would hesitate, she would tease, she would condition, she would require a great deal, but she would finally accept.

This was Fanny's most frequent expectation. A house in town—that must be impossible. Yet there was no saying what Miss Crawford might not ask. The prospect for her cousin grew worse and worse. To speak only of his appearance! To be deriving support from the commendations of Mrs. Fraser! She who had known him intimately half a year! Fanny was ashamed of her.

Those parts of the letter which related to Mr. Crawford and herself touched her, in comparison, only slightly. Whether Mr. Crawford went into Norfolk before or after the 14th was no concern of hers. That Miss Crawford should try to arrange a meeting between him and Mrs. Rushworth was grossly unkind and ill-judged; but she hoped he would not feel such degrading curiosity. His sister ought to have given him credit for better feelings than her own.

She was yet more impatient for another letter from town after receiving this; and for a few days was so unsettled altogether that her usual readings with Susan were much suspended. She could not command her attention as she wished. If Mr. Crawford remembered her message to her cousin Edmund, she thought it very likely that he would write to her; and till this idea gradually wore off, by no letters appearing in the course of several days, she was in a most restless, anxious state.

At length, a something like composure succeeded. Suspense must be submitted to, and must not make her useless. Time did something, her own exertions something more, and she resumed her attentions to Susan.

Susan was growing very fond of her, and though without any of Fanny's delight in books and information for information's sake, she had so strong a desire of not appearing ignorant, as, with a good clear understanding, made her an attentive pupil. Fanny was her oracle. Fanny's explanations were a most important addition to every chapter of history.

Their conversations, however, were not always on subjects so high. Of lesser matters, none returned so often as Mansfield Park, a description of its people, its manners, and its ways. Susan was eager to hear, and Fanny could not help indulging herself in dwelling on so beloved a theme. She hoped it was not wrong; though Susan's great admiration of everything said or done in her uncle's house, and earnest longing to go into Northamptonshire, made her fear she was creating feelings which could not be gratified.

Poor Susan was very little better fitted for home than her elder sister; and as Fanny grew to understand this, she began to feel that when her own release from Portsmouth came, her happiness would have a drawback in leaving Susan behind. That Susan should be left in such hands, distressed her more and more. If she had a home to invite her to, what a blessing it would be! And had it been possible for her to return Mr. Crawford's regard, his probable assent to such a measure would have been the greatest increase of all her own comforts. She thought he was really good-tempered, and could fancy his entering into a plan of that sort most pleasantly.

CHAPTER 44

Seven weeks of the two months were gone, when the letter, the letter from Edmund, so long expected, was put into Fanny's hands. As she saw its length, she prepared herself for a minute detail of happiness and a profusion of praise towards his future wife. These were the contents—

"My Dear Fanny,—Excuse my not writing before. Crawford told me that you wished to hear from me, but I found it impossible to write from London, and persuaded myself that you would understand my silence. Could I have sent a few happy lines, I should have done so, but nothing of that nature was ever in my power. I am returned to Mansfield in a less assured state than when I left it. My hopes are much weaker. You are probably aware of this already from your friend. I may tell you myself, however. Our confidences in you need not clash. There is something soothing in the idea that we have the same friend, and that whatever unhappy differences of opinion may exist between us, we are united in our love of you. It will be a comfort to me to tell you how things now are.

"I was three weeks in London, and saw her very often. I dare say I was not reasonable in bringing hopes of an intimacy like that of Mansfield. From the very first she was altered: my reception was so unlike what I had hoped, that I almost resolved on leaving London again directly. She was in high spirits, and surrounded by those who were giving the support of their own bad sense to her too lively mind. I do not like Mrs. Fraser. She is a cold-hearted, vain woman, who has married entirely from convenience, and though evidently unhappy in her marriage, blames her disappointment not on faults of judgment or temper, but to her being less affluent than her sister, Lady Stornaway; she is mercenary and ambitious. I look upon Miss Crawford's intimacy with those two sisters as the greatest misfortune of her life and mine. They have been leading her astray for years. If only she could be detached from them!—and sometimes I do not despair of it, for the affection appears to me principally on their side. I am sure she does not love them as she loves you. When I think of her great attachment to you, indeed, and her conduct as a sister, she appears a very different creature, capable of everything noble, and I am ready to blame myself for a too harsh construction of her playful manner. I cannot give her up, Fanny. She is the only woman in the world whom I could ever think of as a wife.

"If I did not believe that she had regard for me, of course I should not say this, but I do believe it. I am convinced that she is not without a decided preference. I have no jealousy of any individual. It is the influence of the fashionable world that I am jealous of. It is the habits of wealth that I fear. Her ideas are not higher than her own fortune may warrant, but they are beyond what our incomes united could authorise. There is comfort, however, even here. I could better bear to lose her because not rich enough, than because of my profession. Her prejudices, I trust, are not so strong as they were.

"You have my thoughts exactly as they arise, my dear Fanny; perhaps they are sometimes contradictory, but it will not be a less faithful picture of my mind. Having once begun, it is a pleasure to me to tell you all I feel. I cannot give her up. Connected as we already are, and, I hope, are to be, to give up Mary Crawford would be to give up the society of some of those most dear to me; to banish myself from the very houses and friends whom, under any other distress, I should turn to for consolation. The loss of Mary must include the loss of Crawford and of Fanny. Were it an actual

refusal, I hope I should know how to bear it, and how to endeavour to weaken her hold on my heart, and in the course of a few years—but I am writing nonsense. Were I refused, I must bear it; and till I am, I can never cease to try for her. This is the truth. The only question is how? I have sometimes thought of going to London again after Easter, and sometimes resolved on doing nothing till she returns to Mansfield. Even now, she speaks with pleasure of being in Mansfield in June; but June is at a great distance, and I believe I shall write to her. My present state is miserably irksome. Considering everything, I think a letter will be best. I shall be able to write much that I could not say, and shall be giving her time to reflect before she answers, and I am less afraid of the result of reflection than of an immediate hasty impulse; I think I am. My greatest danger would lie in her consulting Mrs. Fraser. Where the mind is short of perfect decision, an adviser may, in an unlucky moment, lead it to do what it may afterwards regret. I must think this matter over.

"This long letter, full of my own concerns, will be enough to tire even the friendship of a Fanny. The last time I saw Crawford was at Mrs. Fraser's party. I am more and more satisfied with all that I see and hear of him. There is not a shadow of wavering. He thoroughly knows his own mind, and acts up to his resolutions. I could not see him and my eldest sister in the same room without recollecting what you once told me, and I acknowledge that they did not meet as friends. There was marked coolness on her side. They scarcely spoke. I saw him draw back surprised, and I was sorry that Mrs. Rushworth should resent any former supposed slight to Miss Bertram.

"You will wish to hear my opinion of Maria's degree of comfort as a wife. There is no appearance of unhappiness. I hope they get on pretty well together. I dined twice in Wimpole Street, and might have been there oftener, but it is mortifying to be with Rushworth as a brother. Julia seems to enjoy London exceedingly. I had little enjoyment there, but have less here. We are not a lively party. You are very much wanted. I miss you more than I can express. My mother desires her best love, and hopes to hear from you soon. She talks of you every hour, and I am sorry to find how many weeks more she is likely to be without you. My father means to fetch you himself, but it will not be till after Easter. You are happy at Portsmouth, I hope, but I want you at home, that I may have your opinion about Thornton Lacey. I have little heart for extensive improvements till I know that it will ever have a mistress. I think I shall certainly write.—Yours ever, my dearest Fanny."

"I never will, no, I certainly never will wish for a letter again," was Fanny's declaration as she finished this. "What do they bring but disappointment and sorrow? Not till after Easter! How shall I bear it? And my poor aunt talking of me every hour!"

Fanny checked these thoughts as well as she could, but she almost considered that Sir Thomas was quite unkind, both to her aunt and to herself. As for the main subject of the letter, she was almost vexed into anger against Edmund.

"There is no good in this delay," said she. "Why is not it settled? He is blinded, and nothing will open his eyes. He will marry her, and be poor and miserable." She looked over the letter again. "'So very fond of me!' 'tis nonsense all. She loves nobody but herself and her brother. Her friends leading her astray for years! She is quite as likely to have led *them* astray. They have all, perhaps, been corrupting one another. 'The only woman in the world whom he could ever think of as a wife.' I firmly believe it. It is an attachment to govern his whole life. Accepted or refused, his heart is wedded to her for ever. 'The loss of Mary must include the loss of Crawford and of Fanny.' Edmund, you do not know me. The families would never be connected if you did not connect them! Oh! write, write. Finish it at once. Let there be an end of this suspense. Fix, commit, condemn yourself."

Such sensations, however, were too close to resentment to last long. She was soon more softened and sorrowful. His warm regard, his confidential treatment, touched her strongly. He was only too good to everybody. It was a letter, in short, which she would not but have had for the world, and which could never be valued enough. This was the end of it.

A few days after receiving Edmund's letter, Fanny had one from her aunt, beginning thus—

"My Dear Fanny,—I take up my pen to communicate some very alarming intelligence, which I make no doubt will give you much concern".

The intelligence was no less than the dangerous illness of her eldest son, of which they had received news a few hours before.

Tom had gone from London with a party of young men to Newmarket, where a neglected fall and a good deal of drinking had brought on a fever; and when the party broke up, he had been left by himself at the house of one of these young men, with the attendance only of servants. Instead of being soon well enough to follow his friends, as he had hoped, his disorder increased, and a letter was despatched to Mansfield.

"This distressing intelligence, as you may suppose," observed her ladyship, "has agitated us exceedingly, and we cannot prevent ourselves from being greatly alarmed for the poor invalid, whose state Sir Thomas fears may be very critical; and Edmund kindly proposes attending his brother immediately, but I am happy to add that Sir Thomas will not leave me on this distressing occasion, as it would be too trying for me. I trust and hope Edmund will find the poor invalid in a less alarming state than might be apprehended, and that he will be able to bring him to Mansfield shortly, which Sir Thomas thinks best on every account, and I flatter myself the poor sufferer will soon be able to bear the removal without material injury. As I have little doubt of your feeling for us, my dear Fanny, I will write again very soon."

Fanny's feelings on the occasion were indeed considerably more warm and genuine than her aunt's style of writing. She felt truly for them all. Tom dangerously ill, Edmund gone to attend him, and the sad party remaining at Mansfield, were cares to shut out almost every other care. She could just find selfishness enough to wonder whether Edmund had written to Miss Crawford before this summons came, but that sentiment did not dwell long.

Her aunt wrote again and again; they were receiving frequent accounts from Edmund, and these accounts were as regularly transmitted to Fanny, in the same diffuse style, and the same medley of trusts and hopes and fears. It was a sort of playing at being frightened. The sufferings which Lady Bertram did not see had little power over her fancy; and she wrote very comfortably about poor invalids, till Tom was actually conveyed to Mansfield, and her own eyes beheld his altered appearance. Then a letter which she had started to Fanny was finished in a different style, in the language of real feeling and alarm; then she wrote as she might have spoken.

"He is just come, my dear Fanny, and is taken upstairs; and I am so shocked to see him, that I do not know what to do. I am sure he has been very ill. Poor Tom! I am quite grieved for him, and very much frightened, and so is Sir Thomas; and how glad I should be if you were here to comfort me. But Sir Thomas hopes he will be better to-morrow, and says we must consider his journey."

This real solicitude was not soon over. Tom's impatience to be removed to Mansfield had probably led to his being brought there too early; a return of fever came on, and for a week he was in a more alarming state than ever. They were all very seriously frightened. Lady Bertram wrote her daily terrors to her niece, who might now be said to live upon letters. Without any particular affection for her eldest

cousin, her tenderness of heart made her feel that she could not spare him, and the purity of her principles added yet a keener solicitude, when she considered how little useful his life had (apparently) been.

Susan was her only listener on this, as on other occasions. Susan was always ready to hear and to sympathise. Nobody else could be interested in so remote an evil as illness a hundred miles off; not even Mrs. Price, beyond a brief question or two, and now and then the quiet observation of, "My poor sister Bertram must be in a great deal of trouble." So long divided and so differently situated, the ties of blood were little more than nothing.

CHAPTER 45

About a week after his return to Mansfield, Tom's immediate danger was over, and he was so far pronounced safe as to make his mother perfectly easy; for Lady Bertram was the happiest subject in the world for a little medical deceit. The fever was subdued; of course he would soon be well again. Lady Bertram could think nothing less, and Fanny shared her aunt's security, till she received a few lines from Edmund, written to give her a clearer idea of his brother's situation, and acquaint her with the worries which he and his father had imbibed from the physician. They judged it best that Lady Bertram should not be harassed by alarms which, it was to be hoped, would prove unfounded; but there was no reason why Fanny should not know the truth. They were apprehensive for his lungs.

A very few lines from Edmund showed her the patient in a clearer light than all Lady Bertram's sheets of paper could do. Edmund was the companion he preferred. His aunt worried him by her cares, and Sir Thomas knew not how to bring down his conversation to the level of irritation and feebleness. Edmund was all in all. Fanny certainly believed him so, and must find that she esteemed him more highly than ever when he appeared as the cheerer of a suffering brother. As she now learnt, Tom's nerves were also much affected; there were spirits much depressed to calm and raise, and her own imagination added that there must be a mind to be properly guided.

The family were not consumptive, and she was inclined to hope, except when she thought of Miss Crawford; but Miss Crawford seemed to be the child of good luck, and to her selfishness and vanity it would be good luck to have Edmund the only son.

Even in the sick chamber Mary was not forgotten. Edmund's letter had this postscript. "I had actually begun a letter to Miss Crawford when called away by Tom's illness, but I have now changed my mind, and fear the influence of her friends. When Tom is better, I shall go."

Such was the state of Mansfield, with scarcely any change, till Easter. Tom's amendment was alarmingly slow.

Easter came late this year, as Fanny had most sorrowfully considered, on learning that she had no chance of leaving Portsmouth till after it. It came, and she had still heard nothing of her return. Her aunt often expressed a wish for her, but there was no message from the uncle on whom all depended. She supposed he could not yet leave his son, but it was a cruel delay. The end of April was coming; it would soon be almost three months that she had been absent from them all; and who could say when there might be leisure to think of or to fetch her?

Before she came to Portsmouth, she had loved to call it her home; the word was still dear to her, but it must be applied to Mansfield. Portsmouth was Portsmouth; Mansfield was home. Nothing was more consoling than to find her aunt using the same language: "I very much regret your being from home at this distressing time. I sincerely wish you may never be absent from home so long again," were most delightful sentences to her.

However, delicacy to her parents made Fanny careful not to betray such a preference of her uncle's house. It was always: "When I return to Mansfield." But at last the longing grew stronger, it overthrew caution, and she found herself talking of what she should do when she went home. She coloured, and looked fearfully towards her father and mother. She need not have been uneasy. There was no sign of displeasure, or even of hearing her. They were perfectly free from any jealousy of Mansfield.

Fanny was sad to lose the pleasures of spring from being in town. She had not known before how much the beginnings and progress of vegetation had delighted her: what enjoyment she had derived from watching the increasing beauties of that season, from the earliest flowers in her aunt's garden, to the opening of leaves in her uncle's plantations, and the glory of his woods. To lose such pleasures was no trifle; to have confinement, bad air, bad smells, substituted for liberty, freshness, and verdure, was infinitely worse: but worst of all was the conviction of being missed by her best friends, and the longing to be useful to those who needed her!

At home, she might have been of use to every creature in the house. To all she must have saved some trouble; and were it only in supporting the spirits of her aunt Bertram, keeping her from the evil of solitude, or the greater evil of a restless, officious sister, too apt to heighten danger in order to enhance her own importance, Fanny's being there would have been a general good. She loved to fancy how she could have read to her aunt, and talked to her, and tried to make her feel the blessing of what was, and prepare her mind for what might be; and how many walks up and down stairs she might have saved her, and how many messages she might have carried.

It astonished her that Tom's sisters could be satisfied with remaining in London, through an illness which had now lasted several weeks. *They* might return to Mansfield when they chose; travelling could be no difficulty to *them*. Even if Mrs. Rushworth could imagine any interfering obligations, Julia was certainly able to quit London whenever she chose. It appeared from one of her aunt's letters that Julia had offered to return if wanted, but this was all. She would rather remain where she was.

Fanny thought the influence of London was at war with all respectable attachments. As well as her cousins, she saw proof of it in Miss Crawford. It was so long since Fanny had had any letter from her, that she had reason to think lightly of the friendship which had been so dwelt on. It was weeks since she had heard anything of Miss Crawford or of her other connexions in town, except through Mansfield, and she was beginning to suppose that she might never hear from her any more this spring, when the following letter was received to revive old and create some new sensations—

"Forgive me, my dear Fanny, as soon as you can, for my long silence. You are so good, that I depend upon being treated better than I deserve, and I write now to beg an immediate answer. I want to know the state of things at Mansfield Park. One should be a brute not to feel for their distress; and from what I hear, poor Mr. Bertram has a bad chance of recovery. I thought little of his illness at first. I looked upon him as the sort of person to make a fuss in any trifling disorder, and was chiefly concerned for those who had to nurse him; but now it seems that he is really in a decline, that the symptoms are most alarming, and that part of the family, at least, are aware of it. I am sure you must be included in that part, and therefore entreat you to let me know how far I have been rightly informed. I shall be rejoiced to hear there has been any mistake, but the report is so prevalent that I confess I cannot help trembling. To have such a fine young man cut off in the flower of his days is most melancholy. Poor Sir Thomas will feel it dreadfully. I really am quite agitated on the subject. Fanny, Fanny, I see you smile and look cunning, but, upon my honour, I never bribed a physician in my life. Poor young man! If he is to die, there will be two poor young men less in the world; and with a bold voice I would say that wealth and consequence could fall into no hands more deserving of them. It was a foolish haste last Christmas, but the evil of a few days may be blotted out in part. Varnish and gilding hide many stains. It will be

but the loss of the Esquire after his name. With real affection, Fanny, more might be overlooked.

"Write to me by return of post, judge of my anxiety, and do not trifle with it. Tell me the real truth. And do not be ashamed of either my feelings or your own. Believe me, they are not only natural, they are philanthropic and virtuous. I put it to your conscience, whether 'Sir Edmund' would not do more good with all the Bertram property than any other possible 'Sir.' You are now the only one I can apply to for the truth, his sisters not being within my reach. Mrs. R. has been spending the Easter with the Aylmers at Twickenham, and is not yet returned; and Julia is with the cousins who live near Bedford Square. Could I apply to either, however, I should still prefer you, because they have been so unwilling to have their amusements cut up, as to shut their eyes to the truth. I suppose Mrs. R.'s Easter holidays will not last much longer; with her husband away, she can have nothing but enjoyment. I give her credit for encouraging him to go dutifully down to Bath, to fetch his mother; but how will she and the dowager agree in one house? Henry is not at hand, so I have nothing to say from him. Do not you think Edmund would have been in town again long ago, but for this illness?—Yours ever, Mary."

"I had actually begun folding my letter when Henry walked in, but he brings no news to prevent my sending it. Mrs. R. knows a decline is feared; he saw her this morning: she returns to Wimpole Street to-day; the old lady, Mr. Rushworth's mother, is come. Now do not make yourself uneasy with any queer fancies because Henry has been spending a few days near Twickenham. He does it every spring. Be assured he cares for nobody but you. At this very moment he is wild to see you, and occupied only in contriving the means for doing so. He repeats, more eagerly, what he said at Portsmouth about our conveying you home, and I join him in it with all my soul. Dear Fanny, write directly, and tell us to come. It will do us all good. He and I can go to the Parsonage, you know, and be no trouble to our friends at Mansfield Park. It would really be gratifying to see them all again, and a little addition of society might benefit them; and as to yourself, you must feel yourself so wanted there, that you cannot in conscience keep away, when you have the means of returning. I have not time to give half Henry's messages; be satisfied that the spirit of each one is unalterable affection."

Fanny's disgust at the greater part of this letter, with her extreme reluctance to bring the writer of it and her cousin Edmund together, would have made her incapable of judging impartially whether the concluding offer should be accepted or not. It was most tempting. To find herself transported to Mansfield was an image of the greatest happiness, but it would be a drawback to owe such felicity to persons in whose feelings and conduct she saw so much to condemn: the sister's feelings, the brother's conduct, her cold-hearted ambition, his thoughtless vanity. To have him still the acquaintance, the flirt perhaps, of Mrs. Rushworth! She was mortified. She had thought better of him.

Happily, however, she was not left to weigh between doubtful notions of right. She had a rule to apply to, which settled everything. Her awe of her uncle, and her dread of taking a liberty with him, made it plain to her what she had to do. She must absolutely decline the proposal. If he wanted, he would send for her; and to offer an early return was a presumption. She thanked Miss Crawford, but gave a decided no. "Her uncle, she understood, meant to fetch her; and as her cousin's illness had continued so many weeks without her being thought necessary, she must suppose her return would be unwelcome at present, and that she should be felt an encumbrance."

Her representation of her cousin's state was according to her own belief of it, and such as she supposed would give Miss Crawford the hope of everything she was wishing for. Edmund would be forgiven for being a clergyman, it seemed, under certain conditions of wealth; and this, she suspected, was all the conquest of prejudice which he was so ready to congratulate himself upon. She had only learnt to think nothing of consequence but money.

CHAPTER 46

As Fanny could not doubt that her answer would give Miss Crawford real disappointment, she rather expected to be urged again; and though no second letter arrived for a week, she had still the same feeling when it did come.

On receiving it, she was instantly persuaded of its having the air of a brief letter of haste and business. In all probability it would be merely to give her notice that they should be in Portsmouth that very day, and to throw her into all the agitation of doubting what she ought to do. This was the letter—

"A most scandalous, ill-natured rumour has just reached me, and I write, dear Fanny, to warn you against giving the least credit to it. Depend upon it, there is some mistake, and a day or two will clear it up; Henry is blameless, and in spite of a moment's rashness, thinks of nobody but you. Say not a word of it; hear nothing, surmise nothing, whisper nothing till I write again. I am sure it will be all hushed up, and nothing proved but Rushworth's folly. If they are gone, I would lay my life they are only gone to Mansfield Park, and Julia with them. But why would not you let us come for you? I wish you may not repent it.—Yours, etc."

Fanny stood aghast. As no scandalous, ill-natured rumour had reached her, it was impossible for her to understand much of this strange letter. She could only perceive that it must relate to Wimpole Street and Mr. Crawford, and only conjecture that something very imprudent had just occurred in that quarter to draw the notice of the world, and to excite her jealousy, in Miss Crawford's apprehension.

Miss Crawford need not be alarmed for her. She was only sorry for the parties concerned and for Mansfield, if the report should spread that far; but she hoped it might not. If the Rushworths were gone to Mansfield, as she gathered from Miss Crawford's words, it was not likely that anything unpleasant should have preceded them.

As to Mr. Crawford, she hoped it might give him a knowledge of his own disposition, convince him that he was not capable of being steadily attached to any one woman in the world, and shame him from persisting any longer in addressing herself.

It was very strange! She had begun to think he really loved her, and to fancy his affection for her something more than common; and his sister still said that he cared for nobody else. Yet there must have been some marked display of attentions to her cousin, some strong indiscretion, since her correspondent was not of a sort to regard a slight one.

Very uncomfortable she was, and must continue, till she heard from Miss Crawford again. It was impossible to banish the letter from her thoughts, and she could not speak of it to anyone.

The next day came and brought no second letter. Fanny was disappointed. She could still think of little else all morning; but, when her father came back in the afternoon with the newspaper as usual, she was deep in musing. The remembrance of her first evening in that room, of her father and his newspaper, came across her. She felt that she had, indeed, been three months there; and the sun's rays falling strongly into the parlour made her still more melancholy, for sunshine appeared to her a totally different thing in a town from in the country. Here, its power was only a glare: a stifling, sickly glare, bringing neither health nor gaiety. She sat in a blaze of oppressive heat, in a cloud of moving dust, and her eyes could only wander from the

table cut and notched by her brothers, to the cups and saucers wiped in streaks, the milk a mixture of motes floating in thin blue, and the bread and butter growing every minute more greasy than even Rebecca's hands had first produced it. Her father read his newspaper, and Fanny was first roused by his calling out to her: "What's the name of your great cousins in town, Fan?"

"Rushworth, sir."

"And don't they live in Wimpole Street?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then, there's the devil to pay among them, that's all! There" (holding out the paper to her); "much good may such fine relations do you. I don't know what Sir Thomas may think of such matters; but, by G—! if she belonged to me, I'd give her the rope's end. A little flogging for man and woman too would be the best way of preventing such things."

Fanny read to herself that "it was with infinite concern the newspaper had to announce a matrimonial fracas in the family of Mr. R. of Wimpole Street; the beautiful Mrs. R., not long married, who had promised to become so brilliant a leader in the fashionable world, having quitted her husband's roof in company with the well-known and captivating Mr. C., the intimate friend of Mr. R., and it was not known even to the editor of the newspaper whither they were gone."

"It is a mistake, sir," said Fanny instantly; "it cannot be true; it must mean some other people."

She spoke from the instinctive wish of delaying shame; she spoke with a resolution which sprung from despair, for she spoke what she could not believe herself. It had been the shock of conviction as she read. The truth rushed on her; and how she could have spoken at all was afterwards a matter of wonder.

Mr. Price cared too little to make much answer. "It might be all a lie, but so many fine ladies were going to the devil nowadays, that there was no answering for anybody."

"Indeed, I hope it is not true," said Mrs. Price plaintively; "it would be so very shocking! If I have spoken once to Rebecca about that carpet, I am sure I have spoke at least a dozen times; have not I, Betsey? It would not be ten minutes' work."

The horror of Fanny's mind, as it received the conviction of such guilt, and began to take in the misery that must follow, can hardly be described. At first, it was a sort of stupefaction; but every moment was quickening her perception of the horrible evil. She dared not hope of the paragraph being false. Miss Crawford's letter was in frightful agreement with it. Her eager defence of her brother, her hope of its being hushed up, her evident agitation, were all of a piece with something very bad; and if there was a woman of character in existence, who could treat as a trifle this sin of the first magnitude, who would try to gloss it over, she could believe Miss Crawford to be the woman! Now she could see her own mistake as to who were gone. It was not Mr. and Mrs. Rushworth; it was Mrs. Rushworth and Mr. Crawford.

Fanny felt herself never to have been shocked before. The evening passed without a pause of misery, the night was totally sleepless. She passed only from feelings of sickness to shudderings of horror. The event was so shocking, that there were moments even when her heart revolted from it as impossible: it could not be. A woman married only six months ago; a man professing himself devoted to another; both families connected as they were by tie upon tie; all friends, all intimate together! It was too horrible a confusion of guilt, too gross a complication of evil, for civilized human nature to be capable of! yet her judgment told her it was so. His unsettled

affections, Maria's decided attachment, and no sufficient principle on either side, gave it possibility: Miss Crawford's letter stamped it a fact.

What would be the consequence? Whom would it not injure? Whose peace would it not cut up for ever? Miss Crawford, herself, Edmund; but it was dangerous, perhaps, to tread such ground. She tried to confine herself to the indubitable family misery which must envelop all. The mother's sufferings, the father's; there she paused. Julia's, Tom's, Edmund's; there a yet longer pause. They were the two on whom it would fall most horribly. Sir Thomas's high sense of honour and decorum, Edmund's upright principles, unsuspecting temper, and genuine strength of feeling, made her think it scarcely possible for them to support life and reason under such disgrace. She felt as if the greatest blessing for everyone related to Mrs. Rushworth would be instant annihilation.

Nothing happened the next day, or the next, to weaken her terrors. Two posts came in, and brought no denial, no second letter from Miss Crawford to explain away the first; there was no news from Mansfield, though it was now full time for her to hear again from her aunt. This was an evil omen. She had, indeed, scarcely the shadow of a hope to soothe her mind, and was reduced to so low and trembling a condition, as no mother except Mrs. Price could have overlooked, when the third day did bring the sickening knock, and a letter was put into her hands. It bore the London postmark, and came from Edmund.

"Dear Fanny,—You know our present wretchedness. May God support you under your share! We have been in London two days, but there is nothing to be done. They cannot be traced. You may not have heard of the last blow—Julia's elopement; she is gone to Scotland with Yates. She left London a few hours before we entered it. At any other time this would have been felt dreadfully. Now it seems nothing; yet it is a heavy aggravation. My father is not overpowered. More cannot be hoped. He is still able to think and act; and I write, by his desire, to propose your returning home. He is anxious to get you there for my mother's sake. I shall be at Portsmouth the morning after you receive this, and hope to find you ready to set off for Mansfield. My father wishes you to invite Susan to go with you for a few months. Settle it as you like; I am sure you will feel his kindness at such a moment! Do justice to his meaning, however I may confuse it. You may imagine something of my present state. There is no end of the evil let loose upon us. You will see me early by the mail.—Yours, etc."

Tomorrow! to leave Portsmouth tomorrow! She felt she was in the greatest danger of being exquisitely happy, while so many were miserable. The evil which brought such good to her! She dreaded lest she should learn to be careless of it. To be going so soon, sent for so kindly, and with permission to take Susan, was altogether such a combination of blessings as set her heart in a glow, and for a time seemed to distance every pain, and make her incapable of sharing the distress even of those she thought of most. Julia's elopement could affect her but little; she was amazed and shocked; but it could not dwell on her mind. She acknowledged it to be grievous, but it almost escaped her, in the midst of all the joyful cares attending this summons.

There is nothing like employment for relieving sorrow. Employment, even melancholy, may dispel melancholy, and her occupations were hopeful. She had so much to do that she had not time to be miserable. Her father and mother must be spoken to, Susan prepared, everything got ready. Business followed business; the day was hardly long enough. The happiness she was imparting, too,—the joyful consent of her father and mother to Susan's going with her, and the ecstasy of Susan herself, were all serving to support her spirits.

The affliction of the Bertrams was little felt in the family. Mrs. Price talked of her poor sister for a few minutes, but how to find anything to hold Susan's clothes was much more in her thoughts: and as for Susan, now unexpectedly gratified in the first wish of her heart, and knowing nothing personally of those who had sinned, or who were sorrowing—if she could help rejoicing from beginning to end, it was as much as ought to be expected from human virtue at fourteen.

Everything was duly accomplished, and the girls were ready for the morrow. They slept little: one was all happiness, the other all indescribable perturbation.

By eight in the morning Edmund was in the house, and Fanny went down to him. The idea of seeing him, with the knowledge of what he must be suffering, brought back all her own first feelings. He so near her, and in misery. She was ready to sink as she entered the parlour. He was alone; and she found herself pressed to his heart with these words, just articulate, "My Fanny, my only sister; my only comfort now!" She could say nothing; nor for some minutes could he say more.

He turned away to recover himself, and when he spoke again, though his voice still faltered, his manner showed the wish of self-command. "Have you breakfasted? When shall you be ready? Does Susan go?" were questions following each other rapidly. His great object was to be off as soon as possible. Time was precious; and the state of his mind made him find relief only in motion. It was settled that he should order the carriage to the door in half an hour. Fanny answered for their having breakfasted and being quite ready. He declined staying for their meal. He would walk round the ramparts, and join them with the carriage. He was gone again; glad to get away even from Fanny.

He looked very ill; evidently suffering under violent emotions, which he was determined to suppress. She knew it must be so, but it was terrible to her.

The carriage came; and he entered the house again, just in time to spend a few minutes with the family, and be a witness—except that he saw nothing—of the tranquil manner in which the daughters were parted with, and just in time to prevent their sitting down to the breakfast-table, which by dint of unusual activity was completely ready as the carriage drove from the door. Fanny's last meal in her father's house was in character with her first: she was dismissed from it as hospitably as she had been welcomed.

How her heart swelled with joy and gratitude as she left Portsmouth, and how Susan's face wore its broadest smiles, may be easily conceived. Sitting forwards, however, and screened by her bonnet, those smiles were unseen.

The journey was a silent one. Edmund's deep sighs often reached Fanny. Had he been alone with her, his heart must have opened; but Susan's presence drove him quite into himself, and his attempts to talk on indifferent subjects could never be long supported.

Fanny watched him with never-failing solicitude, and sometimes catching his eye, revived an affectionate smile, which comforted her; but the first day's journey passed without her hearing a word from him on the subjects that were weighing him down.

The next morning produced a little more. Just before their setting out from Oxford, while Susan was eagerly looking from a window, the other two were standing by the fire; and Edmund, struck by the alteration in Fanny's looks, and ignorant of the daily evils of her father's house, attributed the change in her to the recent event. He took her hand, and said in a low expressive tone, "No wonder—you must suffer. How a man who had once loved, could desert you! But your regard was new compared with—Fanny, think of *me!*"

The second part of their journey was soon over. They were close to Mansfield long before the usual dinner-time, and as they approached, the hearts of both sisters sank a little. Fanny began to dread the meeting with her aunts and Tom; and Susan to feel with some anxiety, that all her best manners were on the point of being called into action. Visions of good and ill breeding were before her; and she was meditating much upon silver forks, napkins, and finger-glasses.

It was full three months since Fanny's quitting Mansfield, and winter had changed to summer. Her eye fell everywhere on lawns and plantations of the freshest green; and the trees were in that delightful state when farther beauty is known to be at hand. Her enjoyment, however, was for herself alone. Edmund could not share it. She looked at him, but he was leaning back, sunk in a deeper gloom than ever, and with eyes closed, as if the lovely scenes of home must be shut out.

It made her melancholy again; and the knowledge of what the family must be enduring there, invested even the house with a melancholy aspect.

By one of the suffering party within, they were expected with such impatience as she had never known before. Fanny had scarcely passed the solemn-looking servants, when Lady Bertram came from the drawing-room to meet her; came almost hastily; and falling on her neck, said, "Dear Fanny! now I shall be comfortable."

CHAPTER 47

It had been a miserable group at Mansfield. Mrs. Norris, as most attached to Maria, was really the greatest sufferer. Maria was her first favourite; the match had been her own contriving, and this conclusion of it almost overpowered her.

She was an altered creature, quiet, stupefied, indifferent to everything that passed. She had been unable to direct or dictate, or even fancy herself useful. When really afflicted, her active powers had been all benumbed; and neither Lady Bertram nor Tom had received from her the smallest support. She had done no more for them than they had done for each other. They had been all solitary, helpless, and forlorn alike. Her companions were now relieved, but there was no good for her. Edmund was almost as welcome to his brother as Fanny was to her aunt; but Mrs. Norris was irritated by the sight of the person whom, in blind anger, she could have blamed as the daemon of the piece. Had Fanny accepted Mr. Crawford this could not have happened.

Susan too was a grievance. Mrs. Norris had not spirits to notice her much, but she felt her as a spy, an intruder, and everything most odious. By her other aunt, Susan was received with quiet kindness. Lady Bertram could not give her many words, but she was ready to kiss and like her; and Susan was satisfied; for she was so happy in her escape from many certain evils, that she could have stood against a great deal more indifference than she met with.

She was now left a good deal to herself, to get acquainted with the house and grounds as she could, and spent her days very happily in so doing, while those who might otherwise have attended to her were shut up, or wholly occupied with each other; Edmund trying to bury his own feelings in exertions for the relief of his brother's, and Fanny devoted to her aunt Bertram, and thinking she could never do enough for one who seemed so much to want her.

To talk over the dreadful business with Fanny, talk and lament, was all Lady Bertram's consolation. To listen and give her kindness and sympathy in return, was all that could be done for her. The case admitted of no other comfort. Lady Bertram did not think deeply, but, guided by Sir Thomas, she thought justly on all important points; and she saw, therefore, in all its enormity, what had happened, and neither endeavoured herself, nor required Fanny to advise her, to think little of guilt and infamy.

After a time, Fanny found it possible to direct her thoughts to other subjects, and revive some interest in her usual occupations; but whenever Lady Bertram thought of the event, she could see it only in one light, as comprehending the loss of a daughter, and a disgrace never to be wiped off.

Fanny learnt from her all the particulars; and with the help of some letters to and from Sir Thomas, she was soon able to understand quite as much as she wished of the circumstances attending the story.

Mrs. Rushworth had gone, for the Easter holidays, to Twickenham, with a family whom she had grown intimate with: a family of lively, agreeable manners, and probably of morals and discretion to suit, for to their house Mr. Crawford had constant access at all times. Mr. Rushworth had been gone at this time to Bath, to pass a few days with his mother, and bring her back to town, and Maria was with these friends without any restraint, without even Julia; for Julia had removed from Wimpole Street two or three weeks before, on a visit to some relations of Sir Thomas; a

removal which her father and mother were now disposed to attribute to Mr. Yates's account.

Very soon after the Rushworths' return to Wimpole Street, Sir Thomas had received a letter from an old friend in London, who hearing and witnessing a good deal to alarm him in that quarter, wrote to advise Sir Thomas to come to London himself, and use his influence with his daughter to put an end to the intimacy which was already exposing her to unpleasant remarks, and evidently making Mr. Rushworth uneasy.

Sir Thomas was preparing to act upon this letter, when it was followed by another, sent express from the same friend, to break to him the almost desperate situation in which affairs then stood. Mrs. Rushworth had left her husband's house: Mr. Rushworth had been in great anger and distress to him (Mr. Harding) for his advice; Mr. Harding feared there had been at least very flagrant indiscretion. The maidservant of Mrs. Rushworth, senior, threatened alarmingly. He was doing all in his power to quiet everything, with the hope of Mrs. Rushworth's return, but was so much counteracted in Wimpole Street by the influence of Mr. Rushworth's mother, that the worst consequences might be feared.

This dreadful communication could not be kept from the rest of the family. Sir Thomas set off with Edmund, and the others had been left in a state of wretchedness, made worse by the receipt of the next letters from London.

Everything was by that time public beyond a hope. The servant of Mrs. Rushworth, the mother, had exposure in her power, and supported by her mistress, was not to be silenced. The two Mrs. Rushworths, even in the short time they had been together, had disagreed; the bitterness of the elder against her daughter-in-law arising as much from the personal disrespect with which she had been treated as from her feelings for her son.

She was unmanageable. But had she been less obstinate, the case would still have been hopeless, for Maria did not appear again, and there was every reason to conclude her to be concealed somewhere with Mr. Crawford, who had quitted his uncle's house on the very day of her absenting herself.

Sir Thomas, however, remained a little longer in town, in the hope of discovering and snatching her from further vice, though all was lost on the side of character.

His present state Fanny could hardly bear to think of. There was only one of his children who was not at this time a source of misery to him. Tom's illness had been so heightened by the shock of his sister's conduct, that even Lady Bertram had been struck by the difference, and all her alarms were regularly sent off to her husband; and Julia's elopement, the additional blow, though its force had been deadened at the moment, must, she knew, be sorely felt. His letters expressed how much he deplored it. Under any circumstances it would have been an unwelcome alliance; but to have it so clandestinely formed, and at such a time, placed Julia in a most unfavourable light. He called it a bad thing, done in the worst manner, and at the worst time; and though Julia's act was more pardonable than Maria's, as folly rather than vice, he regarded it as probable that her state would end up like her sister's. Such was his opinion of the set into which she had thrown herself.

Fanny felt for him most acutely. He could have no comfort but in Edmund. Every other child must be racking his heart. His displeasure against herself, she trusted, would now be done away. She should be justified in refusing Mr. Crawford; but this, though important to herself, would be poor consolation to Sir Thomas. What could her justification or her attachment do for him? His support must be Edmund alone.

She was mistaken, however, in supposing that Edmund gave his father no present pain. It was of a less poignant nature than that caused by the others; but Sir Thomas considered Edmund's happiness as very deeply involved, cut off, as he must be, from the woman whom he had been pursuing with undoubted attachment and strong probability of success; and who, in everything but her despicable brother, would have been so eligible a connexion. He was aware of what Edmund must be suffering, when they were in town. He had guessed his feelings; and, having reason to think that one interview with Miss Crawford had taken place, from which Edmund derived only increased distress, had been anxious on that account to get him out of town, and had engaged him in taking Fanny home to her aunt, with a view to his relief no less than theirs.

Sir Thomas was not in the secret of Miss Crawford's character. Had he been privy to her conversation with his son, he would not have wished her to belong to him, though her twenty thousand pounds had been forty.

Fanny had no doubt that Edmund must be for ever divided from Miss Crawford; and yet, till she knew that he felt the same, her own conviction was not enough. She thought he did, but she wanted to be assured of it. If he would now speak to her, it would be most consoling; but that was not to be. She seldom saw him: never alone. He probably avoided being alone with her, his own affliction being too keenly felt to be communicated. This must be his state. He yielded, but with agonies which did not admit of speech. Long would it be before Miss Crawford's name passed his lips again.

It was long. They reached Mansfield on Thursday, and it was not till Sunday that Edmund began to talk to her on the subject. Sitting with her on a wet Sunday evening—the very time when the heart must be opened, and everything told; no one else in the room, except his mother, who was asleep, it was impossible not to speak. And so, with the declaration that if she would listen to him for a few minutes, he should be very brief, and never tax her kindness in the same way again; he entered upon the luxury of relating circumstances and sensations of the first interest to himself, to one of whose affectionate sympathy he was quite convinced.

How Fanny listened, with what curiosity and concern, what pain and what delight, how carefully her own eyes were fixed on any object but himself, may be imagined. The opening was alarming. He had seen Miss Crawford. He had received a note from Lady Stornaway begging him to call; and regarding it as what must be the last, last interview of friendship, and imagining the shame and wretchedness which Crawford's sister ought to have felt, he had gone to her in such a softened and devoted state of mind, as made it impossible to Fanny's fears that it should be the last.

But as he proceeded in his story, these fears were over. She had met him, he said, with a serious, even an agitated air; but before he had been able to speak one sentence, she had introduced the subject in a manner which had shocked him.

"I heard you were in town," said she; "I wanted to see you. Let us talk over this sad business. What can equal the folly of our two relations?" I could not answer, but I believe my looks spoke. She felt reproved. Sometimes how quick to feel! With a graver look she then added, "I do not mean to defend Henry at your sister's expense." So she began, but how she went on, Fanny, is hardly fit to be repeated to you. I cannot recall all her words. I would not dwell upon them if I could. Their substance was great anger at the folly of each. Her brother's folly in being drawn on by a woman whom he had never cared for, to do what must lose him the woman he adored; but still more the folly of poor Maria, in sacrificing such a situation, under the idea of being really loved by a man who had long ago made his indifference clear. Guess what I must have felt. To hear the woman whom—no harsher name than folly given, and so

coolly! No reluctance, no horror, no modest loathings? This is what the world does. For where, Fanny, shall we find a woman whom nature had so richly endowed? Spoilt, spoilt!"

After a little reflection, he went on with a sort of desperate calmness. "I will tell you everything, and then have done for ever. She saw it only as folly, and that folly stamped only by exposure. The want of caution: Maria's putting herself in the power of a servant; it was the detection, in short—oh, Fanny! it was the detection, not the offence, which she deplored. It was the imprudence which had brought things to extremity, and obliged her brother to give up every dearer plan in order to fly with her." He stopped.

"And what," said Fanny (believing herself required to speak), "what could you say?"

"Nothing. I was like a man stunned. She began to talk of you; regretting, as well she might, the loss of such a—. There she spoke very rationally. But she has always done justice to you. 'He has thrown away,' said she, 'such a woman as he will never see again. She would have fixed him; she would have made him happy for ever.' My dearest Fanny, I am giving you, I hope, more pleasure than pain by this retrospect of what might have been—but never can be now. You do not wish me to be silent? If you do, give me but a look, a word, and I have done."

No look or word was given.

"Thank God," said he. "It seems to have been the merciful gift of Providence that the heart which knew no guile should not suffer. She spoke of you with high praise and warm affection; yet, even here, there was a dash of evil; for in the midst of it she exclaimed, 'Why would not she have him? It is all her fault. Simple girl! I shall never forgive her. Had she accepted him as she ought, they might now have been on the point of marriage, and Henry would have been too happy and busy to want any other object. He would have taken no pains to be on terms with Mrs. Rushworth again. It would have all ended in a regular standing flirtation, in yearly meetings at Sotherton and Everingham.' Could you have believed it possible? But the charm is broken. My eyes are opened."

"Cruel!" said Fanny, "quite cruel. At such a moment to speak with lightness, and to you! Absolute cruelty."

"Cruelty, do you call it? We differ there. No, hers is not a cruel nature. I do not consider her as meaning to wound my feelings. The evil lies yet deeper: in her total ignorance, unsuspectingness of there being such feelings; in a perversion of mind which made it natural to her to treat the subject as she did. She was speaking only as she had been used to hear others speak, as she imagined everybody else would speak. Hers are not faults of temper. Hers are faults of principle, Fanny; of blunted delicacy and a corrupted, damaged mind. Perhaps it is best for me, since it leaves me so little to regret. Not so, however. Gladly would I submit to all the increased pain of losing her, rather than have to think of her as I do. When I left her, I told her so."

"How long were you together?"

"Five-and-twenty minutes. She went on to say that what remained now to be done was to bring about a marriage between them. She spoke of it, Fanny, with a steadier voice than I can." He was obliged to pause more than once as he continued.

"'We must persuade Henry to marry her,' said she; 'and what with honour, and the certainty of having shut himself out for ever from Fanny, I do not despair of it. Fanny he must give up. I do not think that even he could now hope to succeed with one of her stamp. My influence shall all go that way; and when once married, and properly supported by her own family, respectable as they are, she may recover her footing in

society to a certain degree. In some circles, we know, she would never be admitted, but there will always be those who will be glad of her acquaintance; and there is more liberality on those points than formerly. What I advise is, that your father be quiet. Persuade him to let things take their course. If by any interference of his, she is induced to leave Henry's protection, there will be much less chance of his marrying her than if she remain with him. I know how he is likely to be influenced. Let Sir Thomas trust to Henry's honour and compassion, and it may all end well; but if he get his daughter away, it will be destroying the chief hold."

After repeating this, Edmund was so much affected that Fanny, watching him with silent, but most tender concern, was almost sorry that the subject had been entered on at all.

It was long before he could speak again. At last, "Now, Fanny," said he, "I shall soon have done. I have told you the substance of all that she said. As soon as I could speak, I replied that I had not supposed it possible, coming in such a state of mind into that house as I had done, that anything could occur to make me suffer more, but that she had been inflicting deeper wounds in almost every sentence. That though I had been aware of some difference in our opinions, I had not imagined that the difference could be such as she had now proved it. That the manner in which she treated the dreadful crime committed, giving it every reproach but the right; considering its ill consequences only as they were to be braved by a defiance of decency; and last of all, recommending to us a compliance, an acquiescence in the continuance of the sin, on the chance of a marriage which, thinking as I now thought of her brother, should rather be prevented than sought; all this together most grievously convinced me that I had never understood her before, and that it had been the creature of my own imagination, not Miss Crawford, that I had been dwelling on for many months past. That, perhaps, it was best for me; I had less to regret in sacrificing feelings and hopes which must be torn from me now. And yet, I confessed that, could I have restored her to what she had appeared to me before, I would infinitely prefer any increase of the pain of parting, for the sake of carrying with me the right of tenderness and esteem.

"This is the purport of what I said; but, as you may imagine, not spoken so collectedly as I have repeated it to you. She was astonished—more than astonished. She turned extremely red. I imagined I saw a mixture of many feelings: a great, though short struggle; half a wish of yielding to truths, half a sense of shame; but habit, habit carried it. She would have laughed if she could. She answered, 'A pretty good lecture, upon my word. Was it part of your last sermon? At this rate you will soon reform everybody at Mansfield; and when I hear of you next, it may be as a celebrated preacher, or as a missionary into foreign parts.' She tried to speak carelessly, but she was not so careless as she wanted to appear. I said that from my heart I wished her well, and earnestly hoped that she might learn to think more justly, and not owe the most valuable knowledge any of us could acquire, the knowledge of ourselves and of our duty, to the lessons of affliction. I immediately left the room. I had gone a few steps, Fanny, when I heard the door open behind me. I looked back.

'Mr. Bertram,' said she, with a smile; but it was a smile ill-suited to the conversation that had passed, a saucy playful smile, seeming to invite in order to subdue me; at least it appeared so to me. I resisted; and still walked on. I have since, sometimes, for a moment, regretted that I did not go back, but I know I was right, and such has been the end of our acquaintance. And what an acquaintance has it been! How have I been deceived! I thank you for your patience, Fanny. This has been the greatest relief, and now we will have done."

And for five minutes she thought they *had* done. Then, however, it all came on again, or something very like it, and nothing less than Lady Bertram's rousing up could really close such a conversation. Till then, they continued to talk of Miss Crawford, and how she had attached him, and how delightful nature had made her, and how excellent she would have been, had she fallen into good hands earlier.

Fanny, now at liberty to speak openly, felt justified in adding to his knowledge of her real character, by some hint of what share his brother's state of health might have in her wish for a reconciliation. This was not an agreeable idea. Nature resisted it for a while. It would have been a vast deal pleasanter to have had her more disinterested in her attachment; but his vanity was not strong enough to fight long against reason. He submitted to believe that Tom's illness had influenced her, only consoling himself with the thought that considering the counteractions of opposing habits, she had certainly been more attached to him than could have been expected, and for his sake been more near doing right.

Fanny thought exactly the same; and they were also quite agreed in their opinion of the lasting and indelible impression which such a disappointment must make on his mind. Time would undoubtedly lessen his sufferings, but still it was something which he never could get entirely the better of; and as to his ever meeting with any other woman who could—but that was impossible. Fanny's friendship was all he had to cling to.

CHAPTER 48

Let other pens dwell on guilt and misery. I quit such odious subjects as soon as I can, impatient to restore everybody not greatly in fault themselves, to tolerable comfort, and to have done with all the rest.

My Fanny, indeed, at this very time, must have been happy in spite of everything. She had many sources of delight. She was returned to Mansfield Park, she was useful, she was beloved; she was safe from Mr. Crawford; and when Sir Thomas came back she had every proof that could be given in his melancholy state of spirits, of his perfect approbation and increased regard. Happy as all this must make her, she would still have been happy without any of it, for Edmund was no longer the dupe of Miss Crawford.

It is true that Edmund was very far from happy himself. He was grieving over what was, and wishing for what could never be. She knew it was so, and was sorry; but it was with a sorrow so founded on satisfaction, so tending to ease, that there are few who would not have been glad to exchange their greatest gaiety for it.

Poor Sir Thomas, a parent conscious of errors in his conduct as a parent, was the longest to suffer. He felt that he ought not to have allowed Maria's marriage; that his daughter's sentiments had been sufficiently known to him to render him culpable; that he had been governed by motives of selfishness and worldly wisdom. These were reflections that required some time to soften; but time will do almost everything; and though little comfort arose on Mrs. Rushworth's side for the misery she had caused, some comfort was to be found in his other children.

Julia's match became a less desperate business than he had considered it at first. She was humble, and wishing to be forgiven; and Mr. Yates, desirous of being received into the family, was disposed to look up to him and be guided. He was not very solid; but there was a hope of his becoming less trifling, of his being at least tolerably domestic and quiet; and there was comfort in finding his estate rather more, and his debts much less, than he had feared, and in being consulted as a respected friend.

There was comfort also in Tom, who gradually regained his health, without regaining the thoughtlessness of his previous habits. He was the better for ever for his illness. He had suffered, and he had learned to think: two advantages that he had never known before. He became what he ought to be: useful to his father, steady and quiet, and not living merely for himself.

Here was comfort indeed! and soon Edmund was contributing to his father's ease by improvement in his spirits. After wandering about and sitting under trees with Fanny all the summer evenings, he had so well talked his mind into submission as to be very tolerably cheerful again.

These were the circumstances which gradually reconciled Sir Thomas to himself; though the anguish arising from the conviction of his own errors in the education of his daughters was never to be entirely done away.

Too late he became aware how unfavourable must be the treatment of Maria and Julia at home, where the excessive indulgence and flattery of their aunt Norris had been continually contrasted with his own severity. He saw how ill he had judged, in expecting to counteract what was wrong in Mrs. Norris by its reverse in himself; clearly saw that he had merely increased the evil by teaching them to repress their spirits in his presence, so as to make their real disposition unknown to him; and

sending them to be indulged by a person who could attach them only by the blindness of her affection, and the excess of her praise.

Here had been grievous mismanagement; but he grew to feel that it had not been the worst mistake in his plan of education. Something must have been lacking within. He feared that principle had been wanting; that they had never been properly taught to govern their inclinations and tempers by a sense of duty. They had been instructed theoretically in their religion, but never required to bring it into daily practice. To be distinguished for elegance and accomplishments could have had no moral effect on the mind. He had meant them to be good, but his cares had been directed to the understanding and manners, not the disposition; and they had never been instructed in self-denial and humility.

Bitterly did he deplore this. Wretchedly did he feel, that with all the care of an anxious and expensive education, he had brought up his daughters without their understanding their first duties, or his being acquainted with their character and temper.

The high spirit and strong passions of Mrs. Rushworth, especially, were made known to him only in their sad result. She could not to be prevailed on to leave Mr. Crawford. She hoped to marry him, and they stayed together till she was obliged to be convinced that such hope was vain, and till the disappointment arising from the conviction rendered her temper so bad, and her feelings for him so like hatred, as to make them for a while each other's punishment, and then induce a voluntary separation.

She had lived with him to be reproached as the ruin of all his happiness in Fanny, and carried away no better consolation than that she had divided them. What can exceed the misery of such a mind in such a situation?

Mr. Rushworth had no difficulty in procuring a divorce. She had despised him, and loved another; and he had been very much aware that it was so. The indignities of stupidity can excite little pity. His punishment followed his conduct, as did a deeper punishment the deeper guilt of his wife. He was released to be mortified and unhappy, till some other pretty girl could attract him into matrimony again, and he might set forward on a second, and, it is to be hoped, more prosperous trial of the state; while Maria must withdraw to a retirement which could allow no second spring of hope or character.

Where she could be placed became a subject of melancholy consultation. Mrs. Norris would have had her received at home and countenanced by them all. Sir Thomas would not hear of it; and Mrs. Norris's anger against Fanny was great, from considering her residence there as the reason, even though Sir Thomas solemnly assured her that, had there been no young woman in question, he would never have offered so great an insult to the neighbourhood as to expect it to receive his daughter into its society. She should be protected by him, and secured in every comfort; but farther than that he could not go. Maria had destroyed her own character, and he would not, by a vain attempt to restore what never could be restored, be an accessory to introducing such misery in another man's family.

It ended in Mrs. Norris's resolving to quit Mansfield and devote herself to her unfortunate Maria, in an establishment formed for them in another country, remote and private, where, shut up together with little society, on one side no affection, and on the other no judgment, it may be reasonably supposed that their tempers became their mutual punishment.

Mrs. Norris's removal from Mansfield was the great supplementary comfort of Sir Thomas's life. His opinion of her had been sinking from the day of his return from

Antigua: ever since that period, she had been regularly losing ground in his esteem. He had felt her as an hourly evil, all the worse as there seemed no chance of its ceasing; it seemed she must be borne for ever. To be relieved from her, therefore, was a great felicity.

She was regretted by no one at Mansfield. She had never been able to attach even those she loved best; and since Mrs. Rushworth's elopement, her temper had been in a state of such irritation as to make her everywhere tormenting. Not even Fanny had tears for aunt Norris when she was gone for ever.

That Julia escaped better than Maria was owing, in some measure, to a favourable difference of disposition, but in a greater part to her having been less the darling of that very aunt, less flattered and less spoiled. She had held but a second place. She had been always used to think herself a little inferior to Maria. Her temper was naturally the easiest of the two; her feelings, though quick, were more controllable, and education had not given her so very hurtful a degree of self-consequence.

She had submitted the best to the disappointment in Henry Crawford. After the first bitterness of being slighted was over, she had been soon in a fair way of not thinking of him again; and when the acquaintance was renewed in town, and Mr. Rushworth's house became Crawford's object, she had had the merit of withdrawing herself from it, and of choosing that time to pay a visit to her other friends, in order to secure herself from being again too much attracted.

This had been her motive in going to her cousin's. Mr. Yates's convenience had had nothing to do with it. She had been allowing his attentions some time, but with very little idea of ever accepting him. Had not her sister's conduct burst forth as it did, and her made her fear the certain consequence of her father's greater severity and restraint, hastily resolving her to avoid such horrors, it is probable that Mr. Yates would never have succeeded. She had not eloped with any worse feelings than those of selfish alarm. Maria's guilt had induced Julia's folly.

Henry Crawford, ruined by early independence and bad domestic example, indulged in the freaks of a cold-blooded vanity a little too long. Could he have been satisfied with the conquest of one amiable woman's affections, could he have found sufficient exultation in gaining the esteem and tenderness of Fanny Price, there would have been every probability of success for him. His affection had already done something. There can be no doubt that he would have gained more success, especially when that marriage had taken place, which would have assisted him by subduing her first inclination, and brought them very often together. If he had persevered uprightly, Fanny must have been his reward, and a reward very voluntarily bestowed, within a reasonable period from Edmund's marrying Mary.

Had he done as he intended, and as he knew he ought, by going down to Everingham after his return from Portsmouth, he might have decided his own happy destiny. But he was pressed to stay for Mrs. Fraser's party; his staying was made of flattering consequence, and he was to meet Mrs. Rushworth there. Curiosity and vanity were both engaged, and the temptation of immediate pleasure was too strong for a mind unused to make any sacrifice to right: he resolved to defer his Norfolk journey, and stayed. He saw Mrs. Rushworth, was received by her with a coldness which ought to have been repulsive; but he was mortified, he could not bear to be thrown off by the woman whose smiles had been so wholly at his command: he must exert himself to subdue so proud a display of resentment; it was anger on Fanny's account; he must get the better of it, and make Mrs. Rushworth Maria Bertram again in her treatment of himself.

In this spirit he began the attack, and by animated perseverance had soon re-established the sort of familiar intercourse, of gallantry, of flirtation, which bounded his views; but in triumphing over Maria's discretion, which, though originating in anger, might have saved them both, he had put himself in the power of feelings on her side more strong than he had supposed. She loved him; there was no withdrawing attentions dear to her. He was entangled by his own vanity, with as little excuse of love as possible, and without the smallest inconstancy of mind towards her cousin. To keep Fanny and the Bertrams from a knowledge of what was passing became his first object. When he returned from Richmond, he would have been glad to see Mrs. Rushworth no more.

All that followed was the result of her imprudence; and he went off with her at last, because he could not help it, regretting Fanny even at the moment, but regretting her infinitely more when all the bustle of the intrigue was over, and a very few months had taught him, by the force of contrast, to place a yet higher value on the sweetness of her temper, the purity of her mind, and the excellence of her principles.

That the public punishment of disgrace should in a just measure attend his share of the offence is, we know, not customary in society. In this world the penalty is less equal than could be wished; but without presuming to look forward to a juster appointment hereafter, we may fairly consider Henry Crawford to be providing for himself no small portion of vexation and regret, in having so injured family peace, so forfeited his best, most esteemed and dearest friends, and so lost the woman whom he had rationally as well as passionately loved.

After what had passed to wound and alienate the two families, the continuance of the Bertrams and Grants in such close neighbourhood would have been most distressing; but there was soon a permanent removal of the latter. Dr. Grant succeeded to a post in Westminster Abbey, which as an excuse for residence in London, was highly acceptable to all concerned.

Mrs. Grant, with a temper to love and be loved, must have gone with some regret; but her disposition must in any place secure her a great deal to enjoy, and she had again a home to offer Mary; and Mary had had enough of her own friends, enough of vanity, ambition, love, and disappointment to be in need of the true kindness of her sister's heart, and the rational tranquillity of her ways. They lived together; for Mary, though resolved against ever attaching herself to a younger brother again, failed to find among the idle heir-apparents who were at the command of her beauty, and her twenty thousand pounds, any one who could satisfy the better taste she had acquired at Mansfield, or whose character and manners could put Edmund Bertram sufficiently out of her head.

Edmund had greatly the advantage of her in this respect. He had not to wait with vacant affections for an object worthy to succeed her in them. Scarcely had he done regretting Mary Crawford, and observing to Fanny how impossible it was that he should ever meet with such another woman, before it began to strike him whether a very different kind of woman might not do just as well, or a great deal better: whether Fanny herself were not growing as dear to him as Mary Crawford had ever been; and whether it might not be possible to persuade her that her warm and sisterly regard for him would be foundation enough for wedded love.

I purposely abstain from dates on this occasion, so that every one may be at liberty to fix their own, aware that the cure of unconquerable passions, and the transfer of unchanging attachments, must vary as to time in different people. I only entreat everybody to believe that exactly at the time when it was quite natural that it should

be so, and not a week earlier, Edmund did cease to care about Miss Crawford, and became as anxious to marry Fanny as Fanny herself could desire.

With such a regard for her, indeed, what could be more natural than the change? Loving, guiding, protecting her, as he had done ever since her being ten years old, an object to him of such close interest, dearer by all his own importance with her than any one else at Mansfield, what was there now to add, but that he should learn to prefer soft light eyes to sparkling dark ones. Being always with her, with his feelings exactly in that favourable state which a recent disappointment gives, those soft light eyes could not be very long in obtaining the pre-eminence.

There were no doubts of her deserving, no fears of opposition of taste. Her mind, opinions, and habits needed no half-concealment, no reliance on future improvement. Even in the midst of his infatuation, he had acknowledged Fanny's mental superiority. What must be his sense of it now, therefore? She was of course only too good for him; but as nobody minds having what is too good for them, he was very steadily earnest in the pursuit of the blessing, and it was not possible that encouragement from her should be long wanting. Timid, anxious, doubting as she was, he still held out strong hopes of success, though it remained for a later period to tell him the whole astonishing truth. His happiness in knowing himself to have been so long beloved, must have been delightful.

But there was happiness elsewhere which no description can reach. Let no one presume to give the feelings of a young woman on receiving the assurance of that affection of which she has scarcely allowed herself to entertain a hope.

There was no drawback of poverty or parent. It was a match which Sir Thomas now wished for. Sick of mercenary connexions, prizing more and more the sterling good of principle and temper, and anxious to bind all that remained to him of domestic felicity, he had pondered on the possibility of the two young friends finding consolation in each other; and the joyful consent which met Edmund's request, the high sense of having realised a great acquisition in Fanny for a daughter, formed a striking contrast with his early opinion on the subject when the poor little girl's coming had been first discussed.

Fanny was indeed the daughter that he wanted. His charitable kindness had been rearing a prime comfort for himself. He might have made her childhood happier; but it had been an error of judgment only which had given him the appearance of harshness, and deprived him of her early love; and now, on really knowing each other, their mutual attachment became very strong. After settling her at Thornton Lacey with every attention to her comfort, his object almost every day was to see her there, or to get her away from it.

No happiness of son or niece could make Lady Bertram wish the marriage. But it was possible to part with her, because Susan remained to supply her place. Susan became the stationary niece, delighted to be so; and well adapted for it by a readiness of mind, and an inclination for usefulness. Susan could never be spared. First as a comfort to Fanny, then as an auxiliary, and last as her substitute, she was established at Mansfield, with every appearance of equal permanency. Her more fearless disposition and happier nerves made everything easy to her. She was soon welcome and useful to all; and after Fanny's removal, succeeded so naturally to her, as gradually to become, perhaps, the most beloved of the two.

In her usefulness, in Fanny's excellence, in William's continued good conduct and rising fame, Sir Thomas saw repeated reason to rejoice in what he had done for them all, and acknowledge the advantages of early hardship and discipline, and the consciousness of being born to struggle and endure.

With so much true merit and true love, the happiness of the married cousins must appear as secure as earthly happiness can be. Equally formed for domestic life, and attached to country pleasures, their home was the home of affection and comfort; and to complete the picture of good, the acquisition of the Mansfield living, by the death of Dr. Grant, occurred just after they had been married long enough to begin to want an increase of income, and to feel their distance from their paternal home an inconvenience.

On that event they removed to Mansfield; and the Parsonage there, which, under each of its two former owners, Fanny had never been able to approach without some painful sensation or alarm, soon grew as dear to her heart, and as thoroughly perfect in her eyes, as everything else within the view and patronage of Mansfield Park.

THE END

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