

FANNY BURNNEY

THE WANDERER; OR,
FEMALE DIFFICULTIES
(VOLUME 1 OF 5)

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Difficulties (Volume 1 of 5)**

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Burney F.

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The Wanderer; or, Female Difficulties (Volume 1 of 5)

TO DOCTOR BURNEY,

*FRS and correspondent to the institute of France*¹

The earliest pride of my heart was to inscribe to my much-loved Father the first public effort of my pen; though the timid offering, unobtrusive and anonymous, was long unrepresented; and, even at last, reached its destination through a zeal as secret as it was kind, by means which he would never reveal; and with which, till within these last few months, I have myself been unacquainted.

With what grateful delight do I cast, now, at the same revered feet where I prostrated that first essay, this, my latest attempt!

Your name I did not dare then pronounce; and myself I believed to be 'wrapt up in a mantle of impenetrable obscurity².' Little did I foresee the indulgence that would bring me forward! and that my dear father himself, whom, even while, urged by filial feelings, and yet nameless, I invoked,³ I thought would be foremost to aid, nay, charge me to shun the public eye; that He, whom I dreaded to see blush at my production, should be the first to tell me not to blush at it myself! The happy moment when he spoke to me those unexpected words, is ever present, and still gay to my memory.

The early part of this immediate tribute has already twice traversed the ocean in manuscript: I had planned and begun it before the end of the last century but the bitter, and ever to be deplored affliction with which this new era opened to our family, in depriving us of the darling of our hearts,⁴ at the very moment – when – after a grievous absence, we believed her restored to us, cast it from my thoughts, and even from my powers, for many years. I took with me, nevertheless, my prepared materials in the year 1802, to France; where, ultimately, though only at odd intervals, I sketched the whole work; which, in the year 1812, accompanied me back to my native land. And, to the honour and liberality of both nations, let me mention, that, at the Custom-house on either – alas! – hostile shore, upon my given word that the papers contained neither letters, nor political writings; but simply a work of invention and observation; the voluminous manuscript was suffered to pass, without demur, comment, or the smallest examination.

A conduct so generous on one side, so trusting on the other, in time of war, even though its object be unimportant, cannot but be read with satisfaction by every friend of humanity, of either rival nation, into whose hands its narrative may chance to fall.

Such, therefore, – if any such there be, – who expect to find here materials for political controversy; or fresh food for national animosity; must turn elsewhere their disappointed eyes: for here, they will simply meet, what the Author has thrice sought to present to them already, a composition upon general life, manners, and characters; without any species of personality, either in the form of foreign influence, or of national partiality. I have felt, indeed, no disposition, – I ought

¹ To which honour Dr Burney was elected, by the wholly unsolicited votes of the members *des beaux arts*. His daughter brought over his diploma from Paris.

² Preface to *Evelina*.

³ Inscription of *Evelina*, 'O Author of my being!' &c.

⁴ Susanna Elizabeth Phillips.

rather, perhaps, to say talent, – for venturing upon the stormy sea of politics; whose waves, for ever either receding or encroaching, with difficulty can be stemmed, and never can be trusted.

Even when I began; – how unconsciously you, dear Sir, well know, – what I may now, perhaps, venture to style my literary career, nothing can more clearly prove that I turned, instinctively, from the tempestuous course, than the equal favour with which I was immediately distinguished by those two celebrated, immortal authors, Dr Johnson and the Right Honourable Edmund Burke; whose sentiments upon public affairs divided, almost separated them, at that epoch; yet who, then, and to their last hours, I had the pride, the delight, and the astonishment to find the warmest, as well as the most eminent supporters of my honoured essays. Latterly, indeed, their political opinions assimilated; but when each, separately, though at the same time, condescended to stand for the champion of my first small work; ere ever I had had the happiness of being presented to either; and ere they knew that I bore, my Father! your honoured name; that small work was nearly the only subject upon which they met without contestation⁵: – if I except the equally ingenious and ingenuous friend whom they vied with each other to praise, to appreciate, and to love; and whose name can never vibrate on our ears but to bring emotion to our hearts; – Sir Joshua Reynolds.

If, therefore, then, – when every tie, whether public or mental, was single; and every wish had one direction; I held political topics to be without my sphere, or beyond my skill; who shall wonder that now, – united, alike by choice and by duty, to a member of a foreign nation, yet adhering, with primæval enthusiasm, to the country of my birth, I should leave all discussions of national rights, and modes, or acts of government, to those whose wishes have no opposing calls; whose duties are undivided; and whose opinions are unbiased by individual bosom feelings; which, where strongly impelled by dependant happiness, insidiously, unconsciously direct our views, colour our ideas, and entangle our partiality in our interests.

Nevertheless, to avoid disserting upon these topics as matter of speculation, implies not an observance of silence to the events which they produce, as matter of act: on the contrary, to attempt to delineate, in whatever form, any picture of actual human life, without reference to the French Revolution, would be as little possible, as to give an idea of the English government, without reference to our own: for not more unavoidably is the last blended with the history of our nation, than the first, with every intellectual survey of the present times.

Anxious, however, – inexpressibly! – to steer clear, alike, of all animadversions that, to my adoptive country, may seem ungrateful, or, to the country of my birth unnatural; I have chosen, with respect to what, in these volumes, has any reference to the French Revolution, a period which, completely past, can excite no rival sentiments, nor awaken any party spirit; yet of which the stupendous iniquity and cruelty, though already historical, have left traces, that, handed down, even but traditionally, will be sought with curiosity, though reverted to with horror, from generation to generation.

Every friend of humanity, of what soil or what persuasion soever he may be, must rejoice that those days, though still so recent, are over; and truth and justice call upon me to declare, that, during the ten eventful years, from 1802 to 1812, that I resided in the capital of France, I was neither startled by any species of investigation, nor distressed through any difficulties of conduct. Perhaps unnoticed, – certainly unannoyed, – I passed my time either by my own small – but precious fire-side; or in select society; perfectly a stranger to all personal disturbance; save what sprang from the painful separation that absented me from you my dearest Father, from my loved family, and native friends and country. To hear this fact thus publicly attested, you, dear Sir, will rejoice; and few, I trust, amongst its readers, will disdain to feel some little sympathy in your satisfaction.

⁵ So strongly this coincidence of sentiment was felt by Mr Burke himself, that, some years afterwards, at an assembly at Lady Galloway's, where each, for a considerable time, had seemed to stimulate the other to a flow of partial praise on Evelina and – just then published – Cecilia; Mr Burke, upon Dr Johnson's endeavouring to detain me when I rose to depart, by calling out, 'Don't go yet, little character-monger!' followed me, gaily, but impressively exclaiming, 'Miss Burney, die to-night!'

With regard to the very serious subject treated upon, from time to time, in this work, some, – perhaps many, – may ask, Is a Novel the vehicle for such considerations? such discussions?

Permit me to answer; whatever, in illustrating the characters, manners, or opinions of the day, exhibits what is noxious or reprehensible, should scrupulously be accompanied by what is salubrious, or chastening. Not that poison ought to be infused merely to display the virtues of an antidote; but that, where error and mischief bask in the broad light of day, truth ought not to be suffered to shrink timidly into the shade.

Divest, for a moment, the title of Novel from its stationary standard of insignificance, and say! What is the species of writing that offers fairer opportunities for conveying useful precepts? It is, or it ought to be, a picture of supposed, but natural and probable human existence. It holds, therefore, in its hands our best affections; it exercises our imaginations; it points out the path of honour; and gives to juvenile credulity knowledge of the world, without ruin, or repentance; and the lessons of experience, without its tears.

And is not a Novel, permit me, also, to ask, in common with every other literary work, entitled to receive its stamp as useful, mischievous, or nugatory, from its execution? not necessarily, and in its changeless state, to be branded as a mere vehicle for frivolous, or seductive amusement? If many may turn aside from all but mere entertainment presented under this form, many, also, may, unconsciously, be allured by it into reading the severest truths, who would not even open any work of a graver denomination.

What is it that gives the universally acknowledged superiority to the epic poem? Its historic truth? No; the three poems, which, during so many centuries, and till Milton arose, stood unrivalled in celebrity, are, with respect to fact, of constantly disputed, or, rather, disproved authenticity. Nor is it even the sweet witchery of sound; the ode, the lyric, the elegiac, and other species of poetry, have risen to equal metrical beauty: —

'Tis the grandeur, yet singleness of the plan; the never broken, yet never obvious adherence to its execution; the delineation and support of character; the invention of incident; the contrast of situation; the grace of diction, and the beauty of imagery; joined to a judicious choice of combinations, and a living interest in every partial detail, that give to that sovereign species of the works of fiction, its glorious pre-eminence.

Will my dear Father smile at this seeming approximation of the compositions which stand foremost, with those which are sunk lowest in literary estimation? No; he will feel that it is not the futile presumption of a comparison that would be preposterous; but a fond desire to separate, – with a high hand! – falsehood, that would deceive to evil, from fiction, that would attract another way; – and to rescue from ill opinion the sort of production, call it by what name we may, that his daughter ventures to lay at his feet, through the alluring, but awful tribunal of the public.

He will recollect, also, how often their so mutually honoured Dr Johnson has said to her, 'Always aim at the eagle! – even though you expect but to reach a sparrow!'

The power of prejudice annexed to nomenclature is universal: the same being who, unnamed, passes unnoticed, if preceded by the title of a hero, or a potentate, catches every eye, and is pursued with clamorous praise, or, – its common reverberator! – abuse: but in nothing is the force of denomination more striking than in the term Novel; a species of writing which, though never mentioned, even by its supporter, but with a look that fears contempt, is not more rigidly excommunicated, from its appellation, in theory, than sought and fostered, from its attractions, in practice.

So early was I impressed myself with ideas that fastened degradation to this class of composition, that at the age of adolescence, I struggled against the propensity which, even in childhood, even from the moment I could hold a pen, had impelled me into its toils; and on my fifteenth birth-day, I made so resolute a conquest over an inclination at which I blushed, and that I

had always kept secret, that I committed to the flames whatever, up to that moment, I had committed to paper. And so enormous was the pile, that I thought it prudent to consume it in the garden.

You, dear Sir, knew nothing of its extinction, for you had never known of its existence. Our darling Susanna, to whom alone I had ever ventured to read its contents, alone witnessed the conflagration; and – well I remember! – and wept, with tender partiality, over the imaginary ashes of Caroline Evelyn, the mother of Evelina.

The passion, however, though resisted, was not annihilated: my bureau was cleared; but my head was not emptied; and, in defiance of every self-effort, Evelina struggled herself into life.

If then, even in the season of youth, I felt ashamed of appearing to be a votary to a species of writing that by you, Sir, liberal as I knew you to be, I thought condemned; since your large library, of which I was then the principal librarian, contained only one work of that class;⁶ how much deeper must now be my blush, – now, when that spring of existence has so long taken its flight, – transferring, I must hope, its genial vigour upon your grandson!⁷ – if the work which I here present to you, may not shew, in the observations which it contains upon various characters, ways, or eccentricities of human life, that an exterior the most frivolous may enwrap illustrations of conduct, that the most rigid preceptor need not deem dangerous to entrust to his pupils; for, if what is inculcated is right, it will not, I trust, be cast aside, merely because so conveyed as not to be received as a task. On the contrary, to make pleasant the path of propriety, is snatching from evil its most alluring mode of ascendancy. And your fortunate daughter, though past the period of chusing to write, or desiring to read, a merely romantic love-tale, or a story of improbable wonders, may still hope to retain, – if she has ever possessed it, – the power of interesting the affections, while still awake to them herself, through the many much loved agents of sensibility, that still hold in their pristine energy her conjugal, maternal, fraternal, friendly, and, – dearest Sir! – her filial feelings.

Fiction, when animating the design of recommending right, has always been permitted and cultivated, not alone by the moral, but by the pious instructor; not alone to embellish what is prophane, but to promulgate even what is sacred, from the first æra of tuition, to the present passing moment. Yet I am aware that all which, incidentally, is treated of in these volumes upon the most momentous of subjects, may HERE, in this favoured island, be deemed not merely superfluous, but, if indulgence be not shewn to its intention, impertinent; and HERE, had I always remained, the most solemn chapter of the work, – I will not anticipate its number, – might never have been traced; for, since my return to this country, I have been forcibly struck in remarking, that all sacred themes, far from being either neglected, or derided, are become almost common topics of common discourse; and rather, perhaps, from varying sects, and diversified opinions, too familiarly discussed, than defyingly set aside.

But what I observed in my long residence abroad, presented another picture; and its colours, not, indeed, with cementing harmony, but to produce a striking contrast, have forcibly, though not, I hope, glaringly tinted my pen.

Nevertheless, truth, and my own satisfaction, call upon me to mention, that, in the circle to which, in Paris, I had the honour, habitually, to belong, piety, generally, in practice as well as in theory, held its just pre-eminence; though almost every other society, however cultured, brilliant, and unaffectedly good, of which occasionally I heard, or in which, incidentally, I mixed, commonly considered belief and bigotry as synonymous terms.

They, however, amongst my adopted friends, for whose esteem I am most solicitous, will suffer my design to plead, I trust, in my favour; even where my essays, whether for their projection, or their execution, may most sarcastically be criticised.

Strange, indeed, must be my ingratitude, could I voluntarily give offence where, during ten unbroken years, I should, personally, have known nothing but felicity, had I quitted a country, or

⁶ Fielding's *Amelia*.

⁷ Alexander Charles Lewis d'Arblay.

friends, I, could have forgotten. For me, however, as for all mankind, concomitant circumstances took their usual charge of impeding any exception to the general laws of life.

And now, dear Sir, in leaving you to the perusal of these volumes, how many apprehensions would be hushed, might I hope that they would revive in your feelings the partial pleasure with which you cherished their predecessors!

Will the public be offended, if here, as in private, I conclude my letter with a prayer for my dearest Father's benediction and preservation? No! the public voice, and the voice of his family is one, in reverencing his virtues, admiring his attainments, and ardently desiring that health, peace of mind, and fulness of merited honours, may crown his length of days, and prolong them to the utmost verge of enjoyable mortality!

F. B. d'Arblay.

March 14. 1814

CHAPTER I

During the dire reign of the terrific Robespierre, and in the dead of night, braving the cold, the darkness and the damps of December, some English passengers, in a small vessel, were preparing to glide silently from the coast of France, when a voice of keen distress resounded from the shore, imploring, in the French language, pity and admission.

The pilot quickened his arrangements for sailing; the passengers sought deeper concealment; but no answer was returned.

'O hear me!' cried the same voice, 'for the love of Heaven, hear me!'

The pilot gruffly swore, and, repressing a young man who was rising, peremptorily ordered every one to keep still, at the hazard of discovery and destruction.

'Oh listen to my prayers!' was called out by the same voice, with increased and even frightful energy; 'Oh leave me not to be massacred!'

'Who's to pay for your safety?' muttered the pilot.

'I will!' cried the person whom he had already rebuffed, 'I pledge myself for the cost and the consequence!'

'Be lured by no tricks;' said an elderly man, in English; 'put off immediately, pilot.'

The pilot was very ready to obey.

The supplications from the land were now sharpened into cries of agony, and the young man, catching the pilot by the arm, said eagerly, "Tis the voice of a woman! where can be the danger? Take her in, pilot, at my demand, and my charge!"

'Take her in at your peril, pilot!' rejoined the elderly man.

Rage had elevated his voice; the petitioner heard it, and called – screamed, rather, for mercy.

'Nay, since she is but a woman, and in distress, save her, pilot, in God's name!' said an old sea officer. 'A woman, a child, and a fallen enemy, are three persons that every true Briton should scorn to misuse.'

The sea officer was looked upon as first in command; the young man, therefore, no longer opposed, separated himself from a young lady with whom he had been conversing, and, descending from the boat, gave his hand to the suppliant.

There was just light enough to shew him a female in the most ordinary attire, who was taking a whispering leave of a male companion, yet more meanly equipped.

With trembling eagerness, she sprang into the vessel, and sunk rather than sat upon a place that was next to the pilot, ejaculating fervent thanks, first to Heaven, and then to her assistant.

The pilot now, in deep hoarse accents, strictly enjoined that no one should speak or move till they were safely out at sea.

All obeyed; and, with mingled hope and dread, insensible to the weather, and dauntless to the hazards of the sea, watchful though mute, and joyful though filled with anxiety, they set sail.

In about half an hour, the grumbling of the pilot, who was despotic master of the boat, was changed into loud and vociferous oaths.

Alarmed, the passengers concluded that they were chaced. They looked around, – but to no purpose; the darkness impeded examination.

They were happily, however, mistaken; the lungs of the pilot had merely recovered their usual play, and his humour its customary vent, from a belief that all pursuit would now be vain.

This proved the signal to general liberty of speech; and the young lady already mentioned, addressing herself, in a low voice, to the gentleman who had aided the Incognita, said, 'I wonder what sort of a dulcinea you have brought amongst us! though, I really believe, you are such a complete knight-errant, that you would just as willingly find her a tawny Hottentot as a fair Circassian. She

affords us, however, the vivifying food of conjecture, – the only nourishment of which I never sicken! – I am glad, therefore, that 'tis dark, for discovery is almost always disappointment.'

'She seems to be at prayers.'

'At prayers? She's a nun, then, depend upon it. Make her tell us the history of her convent.'

'Why what's all this, woman?' said the pilot, in French, 'are you afraid of being drowned?'

'No!' answered she, in the same language, 'I fear nothing now – it is therefore I am thankful!'

Retreating, then, from her rude neighbour, she gently approached an elderly lady, who was on her other side, but who, shrinking from her, called out, 'Mr Harleigh, I shall be obliged to you if you will change places with me.'

'Willingly;' he answered; but the young lady with whom he had been conversing, holding his coat, exclaimed, 'Now you want to have all the stories of those monks and abbesses to yourself! I won't let you stir, I am resolved!'

The stranger begged that she might not incommode any one; and drew back.

'You may sit still now, Mr Harleigh,' said the elderly lady, shaking herself; 'I do very well again.'

Harleigh bit his lip, and, in a low voice, said to his companion, 'It is strange that the facility of giving pain should not lessen its pleasure! How far better tempered should we all be to others, if we anticipated the mischief that ill humour does to ourselves!'

'Now are you such a very disciple of Cervantes,' she replied, 'that I have no doubt but your tattered dulcinea has secured your protection for the whole voyage, merely because old aunt Maple has been a little ill bred to her.'

'I don't know but you are right, for nothing so uncontrollably excites resistance, as grossness to the unoffending.'

He then, in French, enquired of the new passenger, whether she would not have some thicker covering, to shelter her from the chill of the night; offering her, at the same time, a large wrapping coat.

She thanked him, but declared that she was perfectly warm.

'Are you so, faith?' cried the elderly man already mentioned, 'I wish, then, you would give me your receipt, Mistress; for I verily think that my blood will take a month's thawing, before it will run again in my veins.'

She made no answer, and, in a tone somewhat piqued, he added, 'I believe in my conscience those outlandish gentry have no more feeling without than they have within!'

Increasing coldness and darkness repressed all further spirit of conversation, till the pilot proclaimed that they were halfway over the straits.

A general exclamation of joy now broke forth from all, while the new comer, suddenly casting something into the sea, ejaculated, in French, 'Sink, and be as nothing!' And then, clasping her hands, added, 'Heaven be praised, 'tis gone for ever!'

The pilot scolded and swore; every one was surprised and curious; and the elderly man plumply demanded, 'Pray what have you thrown overboard, Mistress?'

Finding himself again unanswered, he rather angrily raised his voice, saying, 'What, I suppose you don't understand English now? Though you were pretty quick at it when we were leaving you in the lurch! Faith, that's convenient enough!'

'For all I have been silent so long,' cried the old sea officer, 'it has not been for want of something to say; and I ask the favour that you won't any of you take it ill, if I make free to mention what has been passing, all this time, in my mind; though it may rather have the air of a hint than a compliment; but as I owe to being as much in fault as yourselves, I hope you won't be affronted at a little plain dealing.'

'You are mighty good to us, indeed, Sir!' cried Mrs Maple, 'but pray what fault have you to charge Me with, amongst the rest?'

'I speak of us in a body, Madam, and, I hope, with proper shame! To think that we should all get out of that loathsome captivity, with so little reverence, that not one amongst us should have fallen

upon his knees, to give thanks, except just this poor outlandish gentlewoman; whose good example I recommend it to us all now to follow.'

'What, and so overturn the boat,' said the elderly man, 'that we may all be drowned for joy, because we have escaped being beheaded?'

'I submit to your better judgment, Mr Riley,' replied the officer, 'with regard to the attitude; and the more readily, because I don't think that the posture is the chief thing, half the people that kneel, even at church, as I have taken frequent note, being oftener in a doze than in a fit of devotion. But the fear of shaking the boat would be but a poor reason to fear shaking our gratitude, which seems to me to want it abundantly. So I, for one, give thanks to the Author of all things!'

'You are a fine fellow, noble Admiral!' cried Mr Riley, 'as fine a fellow as ever I knew! and I honour you, faith! for I don't believe there is a thing in the world that requires so much courage as to risk derision, even from fools.'

A young man, wrapped up in flannels, who had been undisguisedly enjoying a little sneering laugh, now became suddenly grave, and pretended not to heed what was passing.

Mrs Maple protested that she could not bear the parade of saying her prayers in public.

Another elderly lady, who had hitherto seemed too sick to speak, declared that she could not think of giving thanks, till she were sure of being out of danger.

And the young lady, laughing immoderately, vowed that she had never seen such a congress of quizzes in her life; adding, 'We want nothing, now, but a white foaming billow, or a shrill whistle from Boreas, to bring us all to confession, and surprise out our histories.'

'Apropos to quizzes,' said Mr Riley, addressing the hitherto silent young man, 'how comes it, Mr Ireton, that we have not had one word from you all this time?'

'What do you mean by aprôpos, Sir?' demanded the young man, somewhat piqued.

'Faith, I don't very well know. I am no very good French dictionary. But I always say aprôpos, when I am at a loss how to introduce any thing. Let us hear, however, where you have been passing your thoughts all this time. Are you afraid the sea should be impregnated with informers, instead of salt, and so won't venture to give breath to an idea, lest it should be floated back to Signor Robespierre, and hodge-podged into a conspiracy?'

'Ay, your thoughts, your thoughts! give us your thoughts, Ireton!' cried the young lady, 'I am tired to death of my own.'

'Why, I have been reflecting, for this last hour or two, what a singular circumstance it is, that in all the domains that I have scampered over upon the continent, I have not met with one young person who could hit my fancy as a companion for life.'

'And I, Sir, think,' said the sea officer, turning to him with some severity, 'that a man who could go out of old England to chuse himself a wife, never deserves to set foot on it again! If I knew any worse punishment, I should name it.'

This silenced Mr Ireton; and not another word was uttered, till the opening of day displayed the British shore.

The sea officer then gave a hearty huzza, which was echoed by Harleigh; while Riley, as the light gleamed upon the old and tattered garments of the stranger, burst into a loud laugh, exclaiming, 'Faith, I should like to know what such a demoiselle as this should come away from her own country for? What could you be afraid of, hay! demoiselle?' —

She turned her head from him in silence. Harleigh enquired, in French, whether she had escaped the general contagion, from which almost all in the boat had suffered, of sickness.

She cheerfully replied, Yes! She had escaped every evil!

'The demoiselle is soon contented,' said Riley; 'but I cannot for my life make out who she is, nor what she wants. Why won't you tell us, demoiselle? I should like to know your history.'

'Much obliged for the new fellow traveller you have given us, Mr Harleigh!' said Mrs Maple, contemptuously examining her; 'I have really some curiosity myself, to be informed what could put into such a body's mind as that, to want to come over to England.'

'The desire of learning the language, I hope!' cried Harleigh, 'for I should be sorry that she knew it already!'

'I wish, at least, she would tell us,' said the young lady, 'how she happened to find out our vessel just at the moment we were sailing.'

'And I should be glad to discover,' cried Riley, 'why she understands English on and off at her pleasure, now so ready, and now answering one never a word.'

The old sea officer, touching his hat as he addressed her, said, 'For my part, Madam, I hope the compliment you make our country in coming to it, is that of preferring good people to bad; in which case every Englishman should honour and welcome you.'

'And I hope,' cried Harleigh, while the stranger seemed hesitating how to answer, 'that this patriotic benevolence is comprehended; if not, I will attempt a translation.'

'I speak French so indifferently, which, however, I don't much mind,' cried the Admiral, 'that I am afraid the gentlewoman would hardly understand me, or else I would translate for myself.'

The stranger now, with a strong expression of gratitude, replied in English, but with a foreign accent, 'It is only how to thank you I am at a loss, Sir; I understand you perfectly.'

'So I could have sworn!' cried Riley, with a laugh, 'I could have sworn that this would be the turn for understanding English again! And you can speak it, too, can you, Mistress?'

'And pray, good woman,' demanded Mrs Maple, staring at her, 'how came you to learn English? Have you lived in any English family? If you have, I should be glad to know their names.'

'Ay, their names! their names!' was echoed from Mrs Maple by her niece.

The stranger looked down, and stammered, but said nothing that could distinctly be heard.

Riley, laughing again, though provoked, exclaimed, 'There! now you ask her a question, she won't comprehend a word more! I was sure how 'twould be! They are clever beings, those French, they are, faith! always playing fools' tricks, like so many monkees, yet always lighting right upon their feet, like so many cats!'

'You must resign your demoiselle, as Mr Riley calls her, for a heroine;' whispered the young lady to Mr Harleigh. 'Her dress is not merely shabby; 'tis vulgar. I have lost all hope of a pretty nun. She can be nothing above a house-maid.'

'She is interesting by her solitary situation,' he answered, 'be she what she may by her rank: and her voice, I think, is singularly pleasing.'

'Oh, you must fall in love with her, I suppose, as a thing of course. If, however, she has one atom that is native in her, how will she be choaked by our foggy atmosphere!'

'And has our atmosphere, Elinor, no purifying particles, that, in defiance of its occasional mists, render it salubrious?'

'Oh, I don't mean alone the foggy air that she must inhale; but the foggy souls whom she must see and hear. If she have no political bias, that sets natural feelings aside, she'll go off in a lethargy, from *ennui*, the very first week. For myself I confess, from my happiness in going forth into the world at this sublime juncture, of turning men into infants, in order to teach them better how to grow up, I feel as if I had never awaked into life, till I had opened my eyes on that side of the channel.'

'And can you, Elinor, with a mind so powerful, however – pardon me! – wild, have witnessed...'

'Oh, I know what you mean! – but those excesses are only the first froth of the cauldron. When once 'tis skimmed, you will find the composition clear, sparkling, delicious!'

'Has, then, the large draught which, in a two years' residence amidst that combustion, you have, perforce, quaffed, of revolutionary beverage, left you, in defiance of its noxious qualities, still thus...'

He hesitated.

'Inebriated, you would say, Albert,' cried she, laughing, 'if you blushed not for me at the idea. But, in this one point, your liberality, though matchless in every other, is terribly narrowed by adhesion to old tenets. You enjoy not therefore, as you ought, this glorious epoch, that lifts our minds from slavery and from nothingness, into play and vigour; and leaves us no longer, as heretofore, merely making believe that we are thinking beings.'

'Unbridled liberty, Elinor, cannot rush upon a state, without letting it loose to barbarism. Nothing, without danger, is suddenly unshackled: safety demands control from the baby to the despot.'

'The opening essays here,' she replied, 'have certainly been calamitous: but, when all minor articles are progressive, in rising to perfection, must the world in a mass alone stand still, because its amelioration would be costly? Can any thing be so absurd, so preposterous, as to seek to improve mankind individually, yet bid it stand still collectively? What is education, but reversing propensities; making the idle industrious, the rude civil, and the ignorant learned? And do you not, for every student thus turned out of his likings, his vagaries, or his vices, to be new modelled, call this alteration improvement? Why, then, must you brand all similar efforts for new organizing states, nations, and bodies of society, by that word of unmeaning alarm, innovation?'

'To reverse, Elinor, is not to new model, but to destroy. This education, with which you illustrate your maxims, does it begin with the birth? Does it not, on the contrary, work its way by the gentlest gradations, one part almost imperceptibly preparing for another, throughout all the stages of childhood to adolescence, and of adolescence to manhood? If you give Homer before the Primer, do you think that you shall make a man of learning? If you shew the planetary system to the child who has not yet trundled his hoop, do you believe that you will form a mathematician? And if you put a rapier into his hands before he has been exercised with foils, – what is your guarantee for the safety of his professor?'

Just then the stranger, having taken off her gloves, to arrange an old shawl, in which she was wrapt, exhibited hands and arms of so dark a colour, that they might rather be styled black than brown.

Elinor exultingly drew upon them the eyes of Harleigh, and both taking, at the same instant, a closer view of the little that was visible of the muffled up face, perceived it to be of an equally dusky hue.

The look of triumph was now repeated.

'Pray, Mistress,' exclaimed Mr Riley, scoffingly fixing his eyes upon her arms, 'what part of the world might you come from? The settlements in the West Indies? or somewhere off the coast of Africa?'

She drew on her gloves, without seeming to hear him.

'There!' said he, 'now the demoiselle don't understand English again! Faith, I begin to be entertained with her. I did not like it at first.'

'What say you to your dulcinea now, Harleigh?' whispered Elinor; 'you will not, at least, yelep her the Fair Maid of the Coast.'

'She has very fine eyes, however!' answered he, laughing.

The wind just then blowing back the prominent borders of a French night-cap, which had almost concealed all her features, displayed a large black patch, that covered half her left cheek, and a broad black ribbon, which bound a bandage of cloth over the right side of her forehead.

Before Elinor could utter her rallying congratulations to Harleigh, upon this sight, she was stopt by a loud shout from Mr Riley; 'Why I am afraid the demoiselle has been in the wars!' cried he. 'Why, Mistress, have you been trying your skill at fisty cuffs for the good of your nation? or only playing with kittens for your private diversion?'

'Now, then, Harleigh,' said Elinor, 'what says your quixotism now? Are you to become enamoured with those plaisters and patches, too?'

'Why she seems a little mangled, I confess; but it may be only by scrambling from some prison.'

'Really, Mr Harleigh,' said Mrs Maple, scarcely troubling herself to lower her voice as, incessantly, she continued surveying the stranger, 'I don't think that we are much indebted to you for bringing us such company as this into our boat! We did not pay such a price to have it made a mere common hoy. And without the least enquiry into her character, too! without considering what one must think of a person who could look out for a place, in a chance vessel, at midnight!'

'Let us hope,' said Harleigh, perceiving, by the down-cast eyes of the stranger, that she understood what passed, 'that we shall not make her repent her choice of an asylum.'

'Ah! there is no fear!' cried she, with quickness.

'Your prepossession, then, is, happily, in our favour?'

'Not my prepossession, but my gratitude!'

'This is true practical philosophy, to let the sum total of good outbalance the detail, which little minds would dwell upon, of evil.'

'Of evil! I think myself at this moment the most fortunate of human beings!'

This was uttered with a sort of transport that she seemed unable to control, and accompanied with a bright smile, that displayed a row of beautifully white and polished teeth.

Riley now, again heartily laughing, exclaimed, 'This demoiselle amuses me mightily! she does, faith! with hardly a rag to cover her this cold winter's night; and on the point of going to the bottom every moment, in this crazy little vessel; with never a friend to own her body if she's drowned, nor an acquaintance to say a word to before she sinks; not a countryman within leagues, except our surly pilot, who grudges her even life-room, because he's afraid he shan't be the better for her: going to a nation where she won't know a dog from a cat, and will be buffeted from pillar to post, if she don't pay for more than she wants; with all this, she is the most fortunate of human beings! Faith, the demoiselle is soon pleased! She is, faith! But why won't you give me your receipt, Mistress, for finding all things so agreeable?'

'You would be sorry, Sir, to take it!'

'I fear, then,' said Harleigh, 'it is only past suffering that bestows this character of bliss upon simple safety?'

'Pray, Mr Riley,' cried Mrs Maple, 'please to explain what you mean, by talking so freely of our all going to the bottom? I should be glad to know what right you had to make me come on board the vessel, if you think it so crazy?'

She then ordered the pilot to use all possible expedition for putting her on shore, at the very first jut of land; adding, 'you may take the rest of the company round, wherever you chuse, but as to me, I desire to be landed directly.'

She could not, however, prevail; but, in the panic which had seized her, she grew as incessant in reproach as in alarm, bitterly bewailing the moment that she had ever trusted herself to such an element, such a vessel, and such guides.

'See,' said Harleigh, in a low voice to the stranger, 'how little your philosophy has spread; and how soon every evil, however great, is forgotten when over, to aggravate the smallest discomfort that still remains! What recompence, or what exertion would any one of us have thought too great, for obtaining a place in this boat only a few hours ago! Yet you, alone, seem to have discovered, that the true art of supporting present inconvenience is to compare it with past calamity, – not with our disappointed wishes.'

'Calamity!' repeated she with vivacity, 'ah! if once I reach that shore, – that blessed shore! shall I have a sorrow left?'

'The belief that you will not,' said he, smiling, 'will almost suffice for your security, since, certainly, half our afflictions are those which we suffer through anticipation.'

There was time for nothing more; the near approach to land seeming to fill every bosom, for the instant, with sensations equally enthusiastic.

CHAPTER II

Upon reaching the British shore, while Mrs Maple, her niece, the elderly lady, and two maid-servants, claimed and employed the aid of the gentlemen, the Incognita, disregarding an offer of Harleigh to return for her, darted forward with such eagerness, that she was the first to touch the land, where, with a fervour that seemed resistless, she rapturously ejaculated, 'Heaven, Heaven be praised!'

The pilot, when he had safely disembarked his passengers, committed the charge of his vessel to a boy, and, abruptly accosting the stranger, demanded a recompence for the risk which he had run in saving her life.

She was readily opening her work bag to seek for her purse, but the old sea officer, approaching, and holding her arm, gravely asked whether she meant to affront him; and, turning to the pilot, somewhat dictatorially said, 'Harkee, my lad! we took this gentlewoman in ourselves; and I have seen no reason to be sorry for it: but she is our passenger, and not your's. Come to the inn, therefore, and you shall be satisfied, forthwith, for her and the rest of us, in a lump.'

'You are infinitely good, Sir,' cried the stranger, 'but I have no claim –.'

'That's your mistake, gentlewoman. An unprotected female, provided she's of a good behaviour, has always a claim to a man's care, whether she be born amongst our friends or our foes. I should be ashamed to be an Englishman, if I held it my duty to think narrower than that. And a man who could bring himself to be ashamed of being an Englishman, would find it a difficult solution, let me tell you, my good gentlewoman, to discover what he might glory in. However, don't think that I say this to affront you as a foreigner, for I hope I am a better Christian. I only drop it as a matter of fact.'

'Worthy Admiral,' said Mr Harleigh, now joining them, 'you are not, I trust, robbing me of my office? The pecuniary engagement with the pilot was mine.'

'But the authority which made him act,' returned the officer, 'was mine.'

A bright smile, which lightened up the countenance of the Incognita, again contrasted her white teeth with her dingy complexion; while dispersing the tears that started into her eyes, 'Fie upon me!' she cried, 'to be in England and surprised at generosity!'

'Gentlewoman,' said the Admiral, emphatically, 'if you want any help, command my services; for, to my seeming, you appear to be a person of as right a way of thinking, as if you had lisped English for your mother-tongue.'

He then peremptorily insisted that the boat's company should discharge the pilot, without any interference on the part of the lone traveller, as soon as it had done with the custom-house officers.

This latter business was short; there was nothing to examine: not a trunk, and scarcely a parcel, had the hurry and the dangers of escape hazarded.

They then proceeded to the principal inn, where the Admiral called all the crew, as he styled the party, to a spacious room, and a cheering fire, of which he undertook the discipline.

The sight of this meanly attired person, invited into the apartment both by the Admiral and Mr Harleigh, with a civility that seemed blind to her shabby appearance, proved so miraculous a restorative to Mrs Maple, that, rising from a great chair, into which, with a declaration that she was half dead from her late fright and sickness, she had thrown herself, she was endowed with sudden strength of body to stand stiffly upright, and of lungs to pronounce, in shrill but powerful accents, 'Pray, Mr Harleigh, are we to go on any farther as if we were to live all our lives in a stage coach? Why can't that body as well stay in the kitchen?'

The stranger would hastily have retired, but the Admiral, taking her softly by the shoulder, said, 'I have been a commanding officer the best part of my life, Gentlewoman; and though a devil of a wound has put me upon the superannuated list, I am not sunk into quite such a fair weather chap, as to make over my authority, in such a little pitiful skiff's company as this, to petticoat government; – though no man has a better respect for the sex, in its proper element; which, however, is not the sea.'

Therefore, Madam,' turning to Mrs Maple, 'this gentlewoman being my own passenger, and having comported herself without any offence either to God or man, I shall take it kind if you will treat her in a more Christian-like manner.'

While Mrs Maple began an angry reply, the stranger forced herself out of the apartment. The Admiral followed.

'I hope, gentlewoman,' he was beginning, 'you won't be cast down, or angry, at a few vagaries – ' when, looking in her face, he saw a countenance so gaily happy, that his condolence was changed into pleased astonishment. 'Angry!' she repeated, 'at a moment such as this! – a moment of so blessed an escape! – I should be the most graceless of wretches, if I had one sensation but of thankfulness and joy!'

'You are a very brave woman,' said the Admiral, 'and I am sorry,' looking at her tattered clothing, 'to see you in no better plight: though, perchance, if you had been born to more glitter without, you might have had less ore within. However, if you don't much like the vapouring of that ancient lady, which I have no very extraordinary liking to myself, neither, why stay in another room till we have done with the pilot; and then, if I can be of any use in helping you to your friends, I shall be glad to be at your service. For I take it for granted, though you are not in your own country, you are too good a woman to be without friends, as I know no worse sign of a person's character.'

He then joined his fellow-voyagers, and the stranger went on to enquire for the master of the house.

Sounds from without, that seemed to announce distress, catching, soon after, the attentive ear of Harleigh, he opened the door, and perceived that the stranger was returned to the passage, and in evident disorder.

The sea officer briskly advanced to her. 'How now!' he cried, 'disheartened at last? Well! a woman can be but a woman! However, unless you have a mind to see all my good opinion blown away – thus! – in a whiff, you won't think of drooping, now once you are upon British ground. For though I should scorn, I hope, to reproach you for not being a native born, still, not to be over-joyed that you can say, Here I am! would be a sure way to win my contempt. However, as I don't take upon me to be your governor, I'll send your own countryman to you, if you like him better, – the pilot?'

'Not for the universe! Not for the universe!' she eagerly cried, and, darting into an empty room, with a hasty apology, shut the door.

'Mighty well, indeed!' said Mrs Maple, who, catching the contagion of curiosity, had deigned to listen; 'so her own countryman, the only person that she ought to belong to, she shuts the door upon!'

She then protested, that if the woman were not brought forth, before the pilot, who was already paid and gone, had re-embarked, she should always be convinced that she had lost something, though she might not find out what had been taken from her, for a twelve-month afterwards.

The landlord, coming forward, enquired whether there were any disturbance; and, upon the complaint and application of Mrs Maple, would have opened the door of the closed apartment; but the Admiral and Harleigh, each taking him by an arm, declared the person in that room to be under their protection.

'Well, upon my word,' cried Mrs Maple, 'this is more than I could have expected! We are in fine hands, indeed, for a sea officer, and an Admiral, that ought to be our safe-guard, to take part with our native enemy, that, I make no doubt, is sent amongst us as a spy for our destruction!'

'A lady, Madam,' said the Admiral, looking down rather contemptuously, 'must have liberty to say whatever she pleases, a man's tongue being as much tied as his hands, not to annoy the weaker vessel; so that, let her come out with what she will, she is amenable to no punishment; unless she take some account of a man's inward opinion; in which case she can't be said to escape quite so free as she may seem to do. This, Madam, is all the remark that I think fit to make to you. But as for you, Mr Landlord, when the gentlewoman in this room has occasion to consult you, she speaks English, and can call you herself.'

He would then have led the way to a general retreat, but Mrs Maple angrily desired the landlord to take notice, that a foreigner, of a suspicious character, had come over with them by force, whom he ought to keep in custody, unless she would tell her name and business.

The door of the apartment was now abruptly opened by the stranger, who called out 'O no! no! no! – Ladies! – Gentlemen! – I claim your protection!'

'It is your's, Madam!' cried Harleigh, with emotion.

'Be sure of it, Gentlewoman!' cried the old officer; 'We did not bring you from one bad shore to another. We'll take care of you. Be sure of it!'

The stranger wept. 'I thought not,' she cried, 'to have shed a tear in England; but my heart can find no other vent.'

'Very pretty! very pretty, indeed, Gentlemen!' said Mrs Maple; 'If you can answer all this to yourselves, well and good; but as I have not quite so easy a conscience, I think it no more than my duty to inform the magistrates myself, of my opinion of this foreigner.'

She was moving off; but the stranger rushed forth, and with an expression of agonized affright, exclaimed, 'Stay! Madam, stay! hear but one word! I am no foreigner, – I am English!' —

Equal astonishment now seized every one; but while they stared from her to each other, the Admiral said: 'I am cordially glad to hear it! cordially! though why you should have kept secret a point that makes as much for your honour as for your safety, I am not deep enough to determine. However, I won't decide against you, while I am in the dark of your reasons; though I own I have rather a taste myself for things more above board. But for all that, Ma'am, if I can be of any use to you, make no scruple to call upon me.'

He walked back to the parlour, where all now, except Harleigh, assembled to a general breakfast, of which, during this scene, Riley, for want of an associate, had been doing the honors to himself. The sick lady, Mrs Ireton, was not yet sufficiently recovered to take any refreshment; and the young man, her son, had commanded a repast on a separate table.

Harleigh repeated to the stranger, as she returned, in trembling, to her room, his offer of services.

'If any lady of this party,' she answered, 'would permit me to say a few words to her not quite in public, I should thankfully acknowledge such a condescension. And if you, Sir, to whom already I owe an escape that calls for my eternal gratitude, if you, Sir, could procure me such an audience –'

'What depends upon me shall surely not be left undone,' he replied; and, returning to the parlour, 'Ladies,' he said, 'this person whom we have brought over, begs to speak with one of you alone.'

'Alone!' repeated Mrs Maple, 'How shocking! Who can tell what may be her designs?'

'She means that we should go out to hold a conference with her in the passage, I suppose?' said Mrs Ireton, the sick lady, to whom the displeasure raised by this idea seemed to restore strength and speech; 'or, perhaps, she would be so good as to receive us in the kitchen? Her condescension is really edifying! I am quite at a loss how I shall shew my sense of such affability.'

'What, is that black insect buzzing about us still?' cried her son, 'Why what the deuce can one make of such a grim thing?'

'O, it's my friend the demoiselle, is it?' said Riley; 'Faith, I had almost forgotten her. I was so confoundedly numbed and gnawn, between cold and hunger, that I don't think I could have remembered my father, I don't, faith! before I had recruited. But where's poor demoiselle? What's become of her? She wants a little bleaching, to be sure; but she has not bad eyes; nor a bad nose, neither.'

'I am no great friend to the mystical,' said the Admiral, 'but I promised her my help while she stood in need of my protection, and I have no tide to withdraw it, now that I presume she is only in need of my purse. If any of the ladies, therefore, mean to go to her, I beg to trouble them to carry this.' He put a guinea upon the table.

'Now that she is so ready to tell her story,' said Elinor, 'I am confident that there is none to tell. While she was enveloped in the mystical, as the Admiral phrases it, I was dying with curiosity to make some discovery.'

'O the poor demoiselle!' cried Riley, 'why you can't think of leaving her in the lurch, at last, ladies, after bringing her so far? Come, lend me one of your bonnets and your fardingales, or what is it you call your things? And twirl me a belt round my waist, and something proper about my neck, and I'll go to her myself, as one of your waiting maids: I will, faith!'

'I am glad, at least, niece Elinor, that this once,' said Mrs Maple, 'you are reasonable enough to act a little like me and other people. If you had really been so wild as to sustain so glaring an impostor –'

'If, aunt? – don't you see how I am scalding my throat all this time to run to her?' replied Elinor, giving her hand to Harleigh.

As they re-entered the passage, the stranger, rushing from her room with a look the most scared and altered, exclaimed, that she had lost her purse.

'This is complete!' cried Elinor, laughing; 'and will this, too, Harleigh, move your knight-errantry? If it does – look to your heart! for I won't lose a moment in becoming black, patched, and penniless!'

She flew with this anecdote to the breakfast parlour; while the stranger, yet more rapidly, flew from the inn to the sea-side, where she carefully retraced the ground that she had passed; but all examination was vain, and she returned with an appearance of increased dismay.

Meeting Harleigh at the door, his expression of concern somewhat calmed her distress, and she conjured him to plead with one of the ladies, to have the charity to convey her to London, and thence to help her on to Brighthelmstone. 'I have no means,' she cried, 'now, to proceed unaided; my purse, I imagine, dropt into the sea, when, so unguardedly! in the dark, I cast there –' She stopt, looked confused, and bent her eyes upon the ground.

'To Brighthelmstone?' repeated Harleigh; 'some of these ladies reside not nine miles from that town. I will see what can be done.'

She merely entreated, she said, to be allowed to travel in their suite, in any way, any capacity, as the lowest of attendants. She was so utterly reduced by this dreadful loss, that she must else beg her way on foot.

Harleigh hastened to execute this commission; but the moment he named it, Elinor called out, 'Do, pray, Mr Harleigh, tell me where you have been secreting your common sense? – Not that I mean to look for it! – 'twould despoil me of all the dear freaks and vagaries that give zest to life!'

'Poor demoiselle!' cried Riley, throwing half a crown upon the table, 'she shall not be without my mite, for old acquaintance sake.'

'What! has she caught even you, Mr Cynical Riley?' cried Elinor; 'you, who take as much pleasure in lowering or mortifying your fellow-creatures, as Mr Harleigh does in elevating, or relieving them?'

'Every one after his own fashion, Miss Nelly. The best amongst us has as little taste for being thwarted as the worst. He has, faith! We all think our own way the only one that has any common sense. Mine, is that of a diver: I seek always for what is hidden. What is obvious soon surfeits me. If this demoiselle had named herself, I should never have thought of her again; but now, I'm all agog to find her out.'

'Why does she not say who she is at once?' cried Mrs Maple. 'I give nothing to people that I know nothing of; and what had she to do in France? Why don't she tell us that?'

'Can such a skin, and such a garb, be worth so much breath?' demanded Ireton, taking up a news-paper.

Harleigh enquired of Mrs Ireton, whether she had succeeded in her purposed search, of a young woman to replace the domestic whom she had left in France, and to attend her till she arrived at her house in town.

'No, Sir,' she answered; 'but you don't mean, I presume, to recommend this vagabond to be about my person? I should presume not; I should presume you don't mean that? Not but that I should be very sensible to such a mark of distinction. I hope Mr Harleigh does not doubt that? I hope he does not suspect I should want a proper sensibility to such an honour?'

'If you think her a vagabond, Madam,' replied Harleigh, 'I have not a word to offer: but neither her language nor her manners incline me to that opinion. You only want an attendant till you reach your family, and she merely desires and supplicates to travel free. Her object is to get to Brighthelmstone. And if, by waiting upon you, she could earn her journey to London, Mrs Maple, perhaps, in compassion to her penniless state, might thence let her share the conveyance of some of her people to Lewes, whence she might easily find means to proceed.'

The two elderly ladies stared at each other, not so much as if exchanging enquiries how to decline, but in what degree to resent this proposition; while Elinor, making Harleigh follow her to a window, said, 'No, do inform me, seriously and candidly, what it is that urges you to take the pains to make so ridiculous an arrangement?'

'Her apparently desolate state.'

'Now do put aside all those fine sort of sayings, which you know I laugh at, and give me, instead, a little of that judgment which you so often quarrel with me for not giving to you; and then honestly tell me, can you really credit that any thing but a female fortune-hunter, would travel so strangely alone, or be so oddly without resource?'

'Your doubts, Elinor, are certainly rational; and I can only reply to them, by saying, that there are now and then uncommon causes, which, when developed, shew the most extraordinary situations to be but their mere simple effect.'

'And her miserable accoutrement? – And all those bruises, or sores, and patches, and bandages? –'

'The detail, I own, Elinor, is unaccountable and ill looking: I can defend no single particular, even to myself; but yet the whole, the all-together, carries with it an indescribable, but irresistible vindication. This is all I can say for befriending her.'

'Nay, if you think her really distressed,' cried Elinor, 'I feel ready enough to be her handmaid; and, at all events, I shall make a point to discover whom and what she may be, that I may know how to value your judgment, in odd cases, for the future. Who knows, Harleigh, but I may have some to propose for your decision of my own?'

The Admiral, after some deliberation, said, that, as it was certainly possible that the poor woman might really have lost her purse, which he, for one, believed to be the simple truth, he could not refuse to help her on to her friends; and, ringing for the landlord, he ordered that a breakfast should be taken to the gentlewoman in the other room, and that a place should be secured for her in the next day's stage to London; for all which he would immediately deposit the money.

'And pray, Mr Landlord,' said Mrs Maple, 'let us know what it was that this body wanted, when she desired to speak with you?'

'She asked me to send and enquire at the Post-office if there were any letter directed for L.S., to be left till called for; and when she heard that there was none, I thought, verily, that she would have swooned.'

Elinor now warmly united with Harleigh, in begging that Mrs Maple would let her servants take charge of the young woman from London to Lewes, when, through the charity of the Admiral, she should arrive in town. Mrs Maple pronounced an absolute negative; but when Elinor, not less absolutely, declared that, in that case, she would hire the traveller for her own maid; and the more readily because she was tired to death of Golding, her old one, Mrs Maple, though with the utmost

ill will, was frightened into compliance; and Elinor said that she would herself carry the good news to the Incognita.

The landlord desired to know in what name the place was to be taken.

This, also, Elinor undertook to enquire, and, accompanied by Harleigh, went to the room of the stranger.

They found her standing pensively by the window; the breakfast, which had been ordered for her by the Admiral, untouched.

'I understand you wish to go to Brighthelmstone?' said Elinor.

The stranger courtied.

'I believe I know every soul in that place. Whom do you want to see there? – Where are you to go?'

She looked embarrassed, and with much hesitation, answered, 'To ... the Post-office, Madam.'

'O! what, you are something to the post-master, are you?'

'No, Madam ... I ... I ... go to the Post-office only for a letter!'

'A letter? Well! an hundred or two miles is a good way to go for a letter!'

'I am not without hopes to find a friend. – The letter I had expected here was only to contain directions for the meeting.'

'O! if your letter is to be personified, I have nothing more to say. A man, or a woman? – which is it?'

'A woman, Madam.'

'Well, if you merely wish to go to Brighthelmstone, I'll get you conveyed within nine miles of that place, if you will come to me, at Mrs Maple's, in Upper Brooke-street, when you get to town.'

Surprise and pleasure now beamed brightly in the eyes of the stranger, who said that she should rejoice to pass through London, where, also, she particularly desired to make some enquiries.

'But we have no means for carrying you thither, except by the stage; and one of our gentlemen offers to take a place in it for you.'

The stranger looked towards Harleigh, and confusion seemed added to her embarrassment.

Harleigh hastily spoke. 'It is the old officer, – that truly benevolent veteran, who wishes to serve you, and whose services, from the nobleness of his character, confer still more honour than benefit.'

Again she courtied, and with an air in which Harleigh observed, with respect, not displeasure, her satisfaction in changing the object of this obligation.

'Well, that's settled,' said Elinor; 'but now the landlord wants your name, for taking your place.'

'My place? – Is there no machine, Madam, that sets off immediately?'

'None sooner than to-morrow. What name am I to tell him?'

'None sooner than to-morrow?'

'No; and if you do not give in your name, and secure it, you may be detained till the next day.'

'How very unfortunate!' cried she, walking about the room.

'Well, but what is your name?'

A crimson of the deepest hue forced its way through her dark complexion: her very eyes reddened with blushes, as she faintly answered, 'I cannot tell my name!'

She turned suddenly away, with a look that seemed to expect resentment, and anticipate being abandoned.

Elinor, however, only laughed, but laughed 'in such a sort' as proclaimed triumph over Harleigh, and contempt for the stranger.

Harleigh drew Elinor apart, saying, 'Can this, really, appear to you so ridiculous?'

'And can you, really, Harleigh, be allured by so glaring an adventurer? a Wanderer, – without even a name!'

'She is not, at least, without probity, since she prefers any risk, and any suspicion, to falsehood. How easily, otherwise, might she assume any appellation that she pleased!'

'You are certainly bewitched, Harleigh!'

'You are certainly mistaken, Elinor! yet I cannot desert her, till I am convinced that she does not merit to be protected.'

Elinor returned to the stranger. 'You do not chuse, then, to have your place secured?'

'O yes Madam! – if it is impossible for me to attend any lady to town.'

'And what name shall you like for the book-keeper? Or what initials? – What think you of L.S.?'

She started; and Harleigh, again taking Elinor aside, more gravely said, 'Elinor, I am glad I am not – at this moment – my brother! – for certainly I could not forbear quarrelling with you!'

'I heartily wish, then,' cried she, with quickness, 'that, – at this moment! – you were your brother!'

Harleigh, now, addressing the stranger, in whose air and manner distress seemed palpably gaining ground, gently said, 'To save you any further trouble, I will take a place in my own name, and settle with the landlord, that, if I do not appear to claim it, it is to be made over to the person who produces this card. The book-keeper shall have such another for a check.'

He put into her hand a visiting ticket, on which was engraven Mr Harleigh, and, not waiting for her thanks, conducted Elinor back to the parlour, saying, 'Pardon me, Elinor, that I have stopt any further enquiries. It is not from a romantic admiration of mystery, but merely from an opinion that, as her wish of concealment is open and confessed, we ought not, through the medium of serving her, to entangle her into the snares of our curiosity.'

'Oh, you are decided to be always right, I know!' cried Elinor, laughing, though piqued; 'and that is the very reason I always hate you! However, you excite my curiosity to fathom her; so let her come to me in town, and I'll take her under my own care, if only to judge your discernment, by finding out how she merits your quixotism.'

Harleigh then returned to the young woman, and hesitatingly said, 'Pardon my intrusion, but – permit me, as you have so unfortunately lost your purse-'

'If my place, Sir,' hastily interrupted the stranger, 'is taken, I can require nothing else.'

'Yet – you have the day to pass here; and you will with difficulty exist merely upon air, even where so delightedly you inhale it; and Miss Joddrel, I fear, has forgotten to bring you the little offering of your veteran friend; therefore –'

'If he has the infinite goodness to intend me any, sir, permit, at least, that he may be my only pecuniary creditor! I shall want no addition of that sort, to remember, – gratefully and for ever! to whom it is I owe the deepest obligation of my life!'

Is this a house-maid? thought Harleigh; and again he rejoiced in the perseverance with which he had supported her; and, too much respecting her refusal to dispute it, expressed his good wishes for her welfare, and took leave; yet would not set out upon his journey till he had again sought to interest the old officer in her favour.

The guinea was still upon the tea-table; but the Admiral, who, in the fear of double dealing, had conceived some ideas to the disadvantage of the Incognita, no sooner heard that she had declined receiving any succour except from himself, than, immediately softened, he said that he would take care to see her well treated.

Harleigh then drove after the carriage of Mrs Maple and Elinor, who were already on their way to London.

CHAPTER III

The Admiral immediately repaired to the stranger. 'Young woman,' he cried, 'I hope you don't take it into your mind, that I was more disposed to serve you while I thought you of foreign culture, than now I know you to be of our own growth? If I came forwarder then, it was only because I was afraid that those who have had less occasion than I have had, to get the upper hand of their prejudices, would keep backwarder.'

The stranger bowed her thanks.

'But as to me,' he continued, 'I have had the experience of what it is to be in a strange land; and, moreover, a prisoner: in which time I came to an agreement with myself – a person over whom I keep a pretty tight hand! because why? If I don't the devil will! So I came, I say, to an agreement with myself, to remember all the ill-usage I then met with, as a memento to forbear exciting in others, those black passions which sundry unhandsome tricks excited, in those days, in myself.'

Observing her breakfast to be utterly neglected, he demanded, with an air of some displeasure, whether she had no longing to taste the food of her mother country again?

The fulness of her mind, she answered, had deprived her of appetite.

'Poor girl! poor woman!' cried he, compassionately, 'for I hardly know which to call you, those cap-flounces pon the cheeks making a young woman look no better than an old one. However, be you which you may, I can't consent to see you starve in a land of plenty; which would be a base ingratitude to our Creator, who, in dispensing the most to the upper class; grants us the pleasure of dispensing the overplus, ourselves, to the under class; which I take to be the true reason of Providence for ordering that difference between the rich and the poor; as, most like, we shall all find, when we come to give in our accounts in t'other world.'

He then enquired what it was she intended to do; adding, 'I don't mean as to your secrets, because they are what I have no right to meddle with; though I disapprove your having any, they being of little service, except to keep foul deeds from the light; for what is fair loves to be above board. Besides, as every thing is sure to come out, sooner or later, it only breeds suspicion and trouble for nothing, to procrastinate telling to-day with your own free will, what you may be certain will be known to-morrow, or next day, with or without it. Don't be discomposed, however, for I don't say this by way of a sift, nor yet for a reproach; I merely drop it as a piece of advice.'

'And I should be happy, Sir, to endeavour to deserve it, by frankly explaining my situation, but that the least mistake, the smallest imprudence, might betray me to insupportable wretchedness.'

'Why then, if that's the case, you are very right to hold your tongue. If the law never makes a person condemn himself, much less ought a little civility. There are dangers enough in the world without running risks out of mere compliment.'

Then putting his guinea before her, upon the table, he charged her to keep it unbroken till she set out, assuring her that he should himself order whatever she could require for her dinner, supper, and lodging, and settle for the whole with the landlord; as well as with the book-keeper for her journey to London.

The stranger seemed almost overpowered with gratitude; but interrupting what she attempted to say, 'No thankings,' he cried, 'young woman! it's a bad sign when a good turn surprises a person. I have not escaped from such hard fare with my body, to leave my soul behind me; though, God knows, I may forget it all fast enough. There's no great fear of mortal man's being too good.'

Then, wishing her farewell, he was quitting the room, but, thoughtfully turning back, 'Before we part,' he said, 'it will be but Christian-like to give you a hint for your serious profit. In whatever guise you may have demeaned yourself, up to this present date, which is a solution I don't mean to meddle with, I hope you'll always conduct yourself in a becoming manner, for the rest of your days, in remembrance of your great good fortune, in landing safely upon this happy shore.'

He was going, but the Incognita stopt him, and again the dark hue of her skin, was inadequate to disguise the deep blushes that were burning upon her cheeks, as she replied, 'I see, Sir, through all your benevolence, that you believe me to be one of those unhappy persons, whose misfortunes have been the effect of their crimes: I have no way to prove my innocence; and assertion may but make it seem more doubtful; yet –'

'You are right! you are right!' interrupted he; 'I am no abettor of assertions. They are but a sort of cheap coinage, to make right and wrong pass current together.'

'I find I have been too quick,' she answered, 'in thinking myself happy! to receive bounty under so dreadful a suspicion, proves me to be in a desolate state indeed!'

'Young woman,' said the Admiral, in a tone approaching to severity, 'don't complain! We must all bear what we have earned. I can't but see what you are, though it's what I won't own to the rest of the crew, who think a flaw in the character excuse plenty for letting a poor weak female starve alive; for which, to my seeming, they deserve to want a crust of bread themselves. But I hope I know better than that where the main fault is apt to lie; for I am not ignorant how apt our sex is to misbehave to yours; especially in slighting you, if you don't slight them; a thing not to be defended, either to God or man. But for all that, young woman, I must make free to remark, that the devil himself never yet put it into a man's head, nor into the world's neither, to abandon, or leave, as you call it, desolate, a woman who has kept tight to her own duty, and taken a modest care of herself.'

The eyes of the stranger were now no longer bright from their mere natural lustre, nor from the beams of quick surprize, or of sudden vivacity; 'twas with trembling emotion that they shone, and with indignation that they sparkled. She took up the guinea, from which her sight seemed averted with horror, and said, 'Pardon me, Sir, but I must beg you to receive this again.'

'Why, what now? do you think, because I make no scruple to give you an item that I don't fancy being imposed upon; do you think, I say, because of that, I have so little Christian charity, as not to know that you may be a very good sort of woman in the main, for all some flaunty coxcomb may have played the scoundrel, and left you to the wide world, after teaching you to go so awry, that he knows the world will forsake you too? a thing for which, however, he'll pay well in time; as I make no doubt but the devil takes his own notes of all such actions.'

She now cast the guinea upon the table. 'I would rather, Sir,' she cried, 'beg alms of every passenger that I may meet, than owe succour to a species of pity that dishonours me!'

The Admiral looked at her with earnestness. 'I don't well know,' he said, 'what class to put you in; but if you are really a virtuous woman, to be sure I ought to ask your pardon for that little hint I let drop; and, moreover, if I asked it upon my knees, I can't say I should think it would be over-much, for affronting a virtuous woman, without cause. And, indeed, if I were free to confess the truth, I must own there's something about you, which I don't over-much know what to call, but that is so agreeable, that it goes against me to think ill of you.'

'Ah, Sir! think well of me, then! – let your benevolence be as liberal as it is kind, and try, for once, to judge favourably of a stranger upon trust!'

'Well, I will! I will, then! if you have the complaisance to wish for my good opinion, I will!' cried he, nodding, while his eyes glistened; 'though it's not my general method, I can tell you, young woman, to go the direct opposite road to my understanding. But, out of the way as things may look, you seem to me, in the main, to be an innocent person; so pray, Ma'am, don't refuse to accept this little token of my good will.'

The countenance of the stranger exhibited strong indecision. He enjoined her, however, to keep the guinea, and, after struggling vainly to speak, she sighed, and seemed distressed, but complied.

He nodded again, saying, 'Be of good cheer, my dear. Nothing comes of being faint-hearted. I give you my promise I'll see you in town. And, if I find that you turn out to be good; or, moreover, if you turn good, after having unluckily been t'other thing, I'll stand your friend. You may depend upon it.'

With a look of mingled kindness and concern, he then left the room.

And here, shocked, yet relieved, and happy, however forlorn, she remained, till a waiter brought her a fowl, a tart, and a pint of white wine, according to commands issued by the Admiral. She then heard that the whole of the boat-party had set off for London, except Mrs Ireton, the sick lady, who did not think herself sufficiently recovered to travel till the next day, and who had enquired for some genteel young lady to attend her to town; but she was so difficult, the waiter said, to please, that she had rejected half-a-dozen candidates who had been presented to her successively. She seemed very rich, he added, for she ordered things at a great rate, though she found fault with them as fast as they were carried to her; but what had put her the most out of humour of all, was that the young gentleman, her son, had set off without her, in a quarrel: which was not, however, so much to be wondered at, for the maids of the two other ladies said that the gentlewoman was of so aggravating a humour, that nobody could live with her; which had provoked her own woman to leave her short in France, and hire herself to a French lady.

The little repast of the stranger was scarcely over, when the waiter brought her word that the sick lady desired to see her up stairs.

Extremely surprised, she demanded for what purpose.

He answered, that a seventh young person whom he had taken into the lady's room, with an offer to serve her, upon being sharply treated, had as sharply replied; which had so affronted her, that she had ordered that no one else should be brought into her presence; though in two minutes more, she had rung the bell, said she was too ill to be left alone, and bid him fetch her the woman who came over from France.

The stranger, at first, refused to obey this imperious summons; but the wish of placing herself under female protection during her journey, presently conquered her repugnance, and she accompanied the messenger back.

Mrs Ireton was reclining upon an easy chair, still somewhat disordered from her voyage, though by no means as much in need of assistance for her shattered frame, as of amusement for her restless mind.

'So!' she cried, 'you are here still? Pray, – if I may ask so confidential a question, – what acquaintance may you have found in this inn? – The waiters? – or the grooms?'

'I was told, Madam, that you had some commands for me.'

'O, you are in haste, are you? you want to be shewing off those patches and bandages, perhaps? You won't forget a veil, I hope, to preserve your white skin? Not but 'twould be pity to make any sort of change in your dress, 'tis so prodigiously tasty!'

The stranger, offended, was now moving off, but, calling her back, 'Did not the waiter,' Mrs Ireton demanded, 'give you to understand that I sent for you?'

'Yes, Madam; and therefore – '

'Well, and what do you suppose it was for? To let you open and shut the door, just to give me all the cold wind of the passages? You suppose it was for that, do you? You surmize that I have a passion for the tooth-ache? You conclude that I delight in sneezing? – coughing? – and a stuff-up nose?'

'I am sorry, Madam, – '

'Or perhaps you think me so robust, that it would be kind to give me a little indisposition, to prevent my growing too boisterous? You may deem my strength and health to be overbearing? and be so good as to intend making me more delicate? You may be of opinion that it would render me more interesting?'

'Indeed, Madam,' —

'Or, you may fancy that a friendly catarrh might be useful, in furnishing me with employment, from ordering water-gruel, and balm-tea, and barley-water, and filling up my leisure in devising successive slops?'

The difficulty of being heard made the stranger now cease to attempt speaking; and Mrs Ireton, after sundry similar interrogatories, angrily said, 'So you really don't think fit to initiate me into your motives for coming to me, without troubling yourself to learn mine for admitting you into my presence?'

'On the contrary, Ma'am, I desire –'

'O! I am mistaken, am I? It's on the contrary, is it? You are vastly kind to set me right; vastly kind, indeed! Perhaps you purpose to give me a few lessons of behaviour?'

'I am so wholly at a loss, Madam, why I have been summoned, that I can divine no reason why I should stay. I beg, therefore, to take my leave.'

Again she was retreating; but Mrs Ireton, struck by her courage, began to conceive that the mystery of her birth and business, might possibly terminate in a discovery of her belonging to a less abject class than her appearance announced; and therefore, though firmly persuaded that what might be diminished in poverty, would be augmented in disgrace, her desire was so inflamed to develop the secret, that, softening her tone, she asked the young person to take a chair, and then entered into discourse with some degree of civility.

Yet with all this restraint, inflicted upon a nature that, to the privilege of uttering whatever it suggested, claimed that of hearing only what it liked, she could gather no further intelligence, than that the stranger had received private information of the purposed sailing of the vessel, in which they all came over: but her birth, her name, her connexions, her actual situation, and her object in making the voyage, resisted enquiry, eluded insinuation, and baffled conjecture. Nevertheless, her manners were so strikingly elevated above her attire, that, notwithstanding the disdain with which, in the height of her curiosity, Mrs Ireton surveyed her mean apparel, and shrunk from her dusky skin, she gave up her plan of seeking for any other person to wait upon her, during her journey to town, and told the Incognita that, if she could make her dress a little less shocking, she might relinquish her place in the stage-coach, to occupy one in a post-chaise.

To avoid new and untried risks, in travelling wholly alone, the stranger acceded to this proposal; and immediately, by the assistance of the maid of the inn, appropriated the guinea of the Admiral to purchasing decent clothing, though of the cheapest and coarsest texture.

The next morning they set off together for London.

CHAPTER IV

The good understanding with which the eagerness of curiosity on one side, and the subjection of caution on the other, made the travellers begin their journey, was of too frail a nature to be of long endurance. 'Tis only what is natural that flows without some stimulus; what is factitious prospers but while freshly supplied with such materials as gave it existence. Mrs Ireton, when she found that neither questions, insinuations, nor petty artifices to surprise confessions, succeeded in drawing any forth, cast off a character of softness that so little paid the violence which its assumption did her humour; while the stranger, fatigued by finding that not one particle of benevolence, was mixed with the avidity for amusement which had given her a place in the chaise, ceased all efforts to please, and bestowed no further attentions, than such as were indispensably due to the mistress of the vehicle in which she travelled.

At a little distance from Rochester, the chaise broke down. No one was hurt; but Mrs Ireton deemed the mere alarm an evil of the first magnitude; remarking that this event might have brought on her death; and remarking it with the resentment of one who had never yet considered herself as amenable to the payment of that general, though dread debt to nature. She sent on a man and horse for another carriage, and was forced to accept the arm of the stranger, to support her till it arrived. But so deeply was she impressed with her own ideas of the hardships that she endured, that she put up at the first inn, went to bed, sent for an apothecary, and held it to be an indispensable tribute to the delicacy of her constitution, to take it for granted that she could not be removed for some days, without the most imminent hazard to her life.

Having now no other resource, she hung for comfort, as well as for assistance, upon her fellow-traveller, to whom she gave the interesting post of being the repository of all her complaints, whether against nature, for constructing her frame with such exquisite daintiness, or against fate, for its total insensibility to the tenderness which that frame required. And though, from recently quitting objects of sorrow, and scenes of woe, in the dreadful apparel of awful reality, the Incognita had no superfluous pity in store for the distresses of offended self-importance, she yet felt relief from experiencing milder usage, and spared no assiduity that might purchase its continuance.

It was some days before Mrs Ireton thought that she might venture to travel, without appearing too robust. And, in this period, one only circumstance called forth, with any acrimony, the ill humour of her disposition. This was a manifest alteration in the complexion of her attendant, which, from a regular and equally dark hue, appeared, on the second morning, to be smeared and streaked; and, on the third, to be of a dusky white. This failed not to produce sundry inquisitive comments; but they never succeeded in obtaining any explanatory replies. When, however, on the fourth day, the shutters of the chamber, which, to give it a more sickly character, had hitherto been closed, were suffered to admit the sun-beams of a cheerful winter's morning, Mrs Ireton was directed, by their rays, to a full and marvellous view, of a skin changed from a tint nearly black, to the brightest, whitest, and most dazzling fairness. The band upon the forehead, and the patch upon the cheek, were all that remained of the original appearance.

The first stare at this unexpected metamorphosis, was of unmingled amazement; but it was soon succeeded by an expression of something between mockery and anger, evinced, without ceremony or reserve, by the following speech: 'Upon my word, Ma'am, you are a very complete figure! Beyond what I could have conjectured! I own that! I can't but own that. I was quite too stupid to surmise so miraculous a change. And pray, Ma'am, if I may take the liberty to enquire, – who are you?'

The stranger looked down.

'Nay, I ought not to ask, I confess. It's very indelicate, I own; very rude, I acknowledge; but, I should imagine, it can hardly be the first time that you have been so good as to pardon a little rudeness. I don't know, I may be mistaken, to be sure, but I should imagine so.'

The Incognita now raised her eyes. A sense of ill treatment seemed to endue her with courage; but her displeasure, which, though not uttered, was not disguised, no sooner reached the observation of Mrs Ireton, than she conceived it to be an insolence to justify redoubling her own.

'You are affronted, I hope, Ma'am? Nay, you have reason enough, I acknowledge; I can't but acknowledge that! to see me impressed with so little awe by your wonderful powers; for 'twas but an hour or two since, that you were the blackest, dirtiest, raggedest wretch I ever beheld; and now – you are turned into an amazing beauty! Your cheeks are all bedaubed with *rouge*, and you are quite a belle! and wondering, I suppose, that I don't beseech you to sit on the sofa by my side! And, to be sure, it's very ill bred of me: I can't deny that; only as it is one of the rudenesses that I conceive you to have had the goodness to submit to before, I hope you'll forgive it.'

The young woman begged leave to retire, till she should be called for the journey.

'O! what, you have some other metamorphosis to prepare, perhaps? Those bandages and patches are to be converted into something else? And pray, if it will not be too great a liberty to enquire, what are they to exhibit? The order of Maria Theresa? or of the Empress of all the Russias? If I did not fear being impertinent, I should be tempted to ask how many coats of white and red you were obliged to lay on, before you could cover over all that black.'

The stranger, offended and tired, without deigning to make any answer, walked back to the chamber which she had just quitted.

The astonished Mrs Ireton was in speechless rage at this unbidden retreat; yet anger was so inherently a part of her composition, that the sight she saw with the most lively sensation was whatever authorized its vent. She speedily, therefore, dispatched a messenger, to say that she was taken dangerously ill, and to desire that the young woman would return.

The Incognita, helpless for seeking any more genial mode of travelling, obeyed the call, but had scarcely entered the apartment, when Mrs Ireton, starting, and forgetting her new illness, exclaimed, in a powerful voice, 'Why, what is become of your black patch?'

The young woman, hastily putting her hand to her cheek, blushed extremely, while she answered, 'Bless me, it must have dropt off! – I will run and look for it.'

Mrs Ireton peremptorily forbade her to move; and, staring at her with a mixture of curiosity and harshness, ordered her to draw away her hand. She resisted for some time, but, overpowered by authoritative commands, was reduced, at length, to submit; and Mrs Ireton then perceived, that neither wound, scar, nor injury of any sort, had occasioned the patch to have been worn.

The excess of her surprize at this discovery, led her to apprehend some serious imposition. She fearfully, therefore, rose, to ring the bell, still fixing her eyes upon the face of the young woman, who, in her confusion, accidentally touching the bandage which crossed her forehead, displaced it, and shewed that feature, also, as free from any cause for having been bound up, as the cheek.

It was now rather consternation than amazement with which Mrs Ireton was seized, till the augmenting disorder, and increasing colour of her new attendant, changed all fear of any trick into personal pique at having been duped; and she protested that if such beggar-stratagems were played upon her any more, she would turn over the impostor to the master of the inn.

The paleness of terror with which this menace overspread the complexion of the stranger, forced a certain, however unwilling conviction upon the mind of Mrs Ireton, that *rouge*, at least, was not amongst the artifices of which she had to complain. But, though relieved from her own alarm, by the alarm which she inspired, she was rather irritated than appeased in finding something less to detect, and, scoffingly perusing her face, 'You are a surprising person, indeed!' she cried, 'as surprising a person as ever I had the honour to see! So you had disfigured yourself in that horrid manner, only to extort money from us upon false pretences? Very ingenious, indeed! mighty ingenious, I confess! Why that new skin must have cost you more than your new gown. Pray which did you get the best bargain?'

The stranger did not dare risk any sort of reply.

'O, you don't chuse to tell me? But how could I be so indiscreet as to ask such a thing? Will it be impertinent, too, if I enquire whether you always travel with that collection of bandages and patches? and of black and white outsides? or whether you sometimes change them for wooden legs and broken arms?'

Not a word of answer was returned.

'So you won't tell me that, neither? Nay, you are in the right, I own. What business is it of mine to confine your genius to only one or two methods of maiming or defacing yourself? as if you did not find it more amusing to be one day lame, and another blind; and, to-day, it should seem, dumb? The round must be entertaining enough. Pray do you make it methodically? or just as the humour strikes you?'

A fixed silence still resisted all attack.

'O, I am diving too deeply into the secrets of your trade, am I? Nay, I ought to be contented, I own, with the specimens with which I have already been indulged. You have not been niggardly in varying them. You have been bruised and beaten; and dirty and clean; and ragged and whole; and wounded and healed; and a European and a Creole, in less than a week. I suppose, next, you will dwindle into a dwarf; and then, perhaps, find some surprising contrivance to shoot up into a giantess. There is nothing that can be too much to expect from so great an adept in metamorphoses.'

The pleasure of giving vent to spleen, disguised from Mrs Ireton, that by rendering its malignancy so obvious, she blunted its effect. She continued, therefore, her interrogatories a considerable time, before she discovered, that the stillness with which they were heard was produced by resolution, not awe. Almost intolerably offended when a suspicion of this truth occurred, she assumed a tone yet more imperious. 'So I am not worth an answer? You hold it beneath you to waste your breath upon me? And do you know whom it is you dare treat in this manner? Do you imagine that I am a fellow-adventurer?'

The hand of the young woman was now upon the lock of the door, but there, trembling, it stopt, withheld by a thousand terrors from following its first impulse; and the entrance of a waiter, with information that a chaise was at the door, interrupted any further discourse. The journey was resumed, and the rest of the way was only rendered supportable to the stranger, from the prospect that its conclusion would terminate all intercourse with one who, so wilfully and so wantonly, seemed to revel in her powers of mockery and derision.

CHAPTER V

Upon the entrance of the travellers into London, the curiosity of Mrs Ireton was more than ever inflamed, to find that the journey, with all its delays, was at an end, before she had been able to gratify that insatiable passion in a single point. Yet every observation that she could make tended to redouble its keenness. Neither ill humour nor haughtiness, now the patches and bandages were removed, could prevent her from perceiving that the stranger was young and beautiful; nor from remarking that her air and manner were strikingly distinguished from the common class. One method, however, still remained for diving into this mystery; it was clear that the young woman was in want, whatever else might be doubtful. Mrs Ireton, therefore, resolved to allow no recompense for her attendance, but in consideration of what she would communicate of her history.

At a large house in Grosvenor Square they stopt. Mrs Ireton turned exultingly to the stranger: but her glance met no gratification. The young woman, instead of admiring the house, and counting the number of steps that led to the vestibule, or of windows that commanded a view of the square, only cast her eyes upwards, as if penetrated with thankfulness that her journey was ended.

Surprised that stupidity should thus be joined with cunning, Mrs Ireton now intently watched the impression which, when her servants appeared, would be made by their rich liveries.

The stranger, however, without regarding them, followed their mistress into the hall, which that lady was passing through in stately silence, meaning to confound the proud vagrant more completely, by dismissing her from the best drawing-room; when the words, 'Permit me, Madam, to wish you good morning,' made her look round. She then saw that her late attendant, without waiting for any answer, was tranquilly preparing to be gone. Amazed and provoked, she deigned to call after her, and desired that she would come the next day to be paid.

'I am more than paid already, Madam,' the Incognita replied, 'if my little services may be accepted as cancelling my obligation for the journey.'

She had no difficulty, now, to leave the house without further interruption, so astonished was Mrs Ireton, at what she thought the effrontery of a speech, that seemed, in some measure, to level her with this adventurer; though, in her own despite, she was struck with the air of calm dignity with which it was uttered.

The Wanderer obtained a direction to the house of Mrs Maple, from a servant; and demanded another to Titchfield Street. To the latter she rapidly bent her steps; but, there arrived, her haste ended in disappointment and perplexity. She discovered the apartment in which, with her husband and child, the lady whom she sought had resided; but it was no longer inhabited; and she could not trace whether her friend had set off for Brighthelmstone, or had only changed her lodging. After a melancholy and fruitless search, she repaired, though with feet and a mind far less eager, to Upper Brooke Street, where she soon read the name of Mrs Maple upon the door of one of the capital houses. She enquired for Miss Joddrel, and begged that young lady might be told, that a person who came over in the same boat with her from France, requested the honour of admission.

To this message she presently heard the voice of Elinor, from the landing-place, answer, 'O, she's come at last! Bring her up Tomlinson, bring her up!'

'Yes, Ma'am; but I'll promise you she is none of the person you have been expecting.'

'How can you tell that Tomlinson? What sort of figure is she?'

'As pretty as can be.'

'As pretty as can be, is she? Go and ask her name.'

The man obeyed.

The stranger, disconcerted, answered, 'My name will not be known to Miss Joddrel, but if she will have the goodness to receive, I am sure she will recollect me.'

Elinor, who was listening, knew her voice, and, calling Tomlinson up stairs, and heartily laughing, said, 'You are the greatest fool in the whole world, Tomlinson! It is she! Bid her come to me directly.'

Tomlinson did as he was ordered, but grinned, with no small satisfaction, at sight of the surprise with which, when they reached the landing-place, his young mistress looked at the stranger.

'Why, Tomlinson,' she cried, 'who have you brought me hither?'

Tomlinson smirked, and the Incognita could not herself refrain from smiling, but with a countenance so little calculated to excite distrust, that Elinor, crying, 'Follow me,' led the way into her dressing room.

The young woman, then, with an air that strongly supplicated for indulgence, said, 'I am truly shocked at the strange appearance which I must make; but as I come now to throw myself upon your protection, I will briefly – though I can enter into no detail – state to you how I am circumstanced.'

'O charming! charming!' cried Elinor, clapping her hands, 'you are going, at last, to relate your adventures! Nay, no drawing back! I won't be disappointed! If you don't tell me every thing that ever you did in your life, and every thing that ever you said, and every thing that ever you thought, – I shall renounce you!'

'Alas!' answered the Incognita, 'I am in so forlorn a situation, that I must not wonder if you conclude me to be some outcast of society, abandoned by my friends from meriting their desertion, – a poor destitute Wanderer, in search of any species of subsistence!'

'Don't be cast down, however,' cried Elinor, 'for I will help you on your way. And yet you have exactly spoken Aunt Maple's opinion of you.'

'And I have no right, I acknowledge, to repine, at least, none for resentment: yet, believe me, Madam, such is not the case! and if, as you have given me leave to hope, you will have the benevolence to permit me to travel in your party, or in whatever way you please, to Brighthelmstone, I may there meet with a friend, under whose protection I may acquire courage to give a more intelligible account of myself.'

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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