FANNY BURNEY

THE WANDERER; OR, FEMALE DIFFICULTIES (VOLUME 3 OF 5)

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CHAPTER XLI

From the time of this arrangement, the ascendance which Mr Naird obtained over the mind of Elinor, by alternate assurances and alarms, relative to her chances of living to see Harleigh again, produced a quiet that gave time to the drafts, which were administered by the physician, to take effect, and she fell into a profound sleep. This, Mr Naird said, might last till late the next day; Ellis, therefore, promising to be ready upon any summons, returned to her lodging.

Miss Matson, now, endeavoured to make some enquiries relative to the public suicide projected, if not accomplished, by Miss Joddrel, which was the universal subject of conversation at Brighthelmstone; but when she found it vain to hope for any details, she said, 'Such accidents, Ma'am, make one really afraid of one's life with persons one knows nothing of. Pray, Ma'am, if it is not impertinent, do you still hold to your intention of giving up your pretty apartment?'

Ellis answered in the affirmative, desiring, with some surprise,

to know, whether the question were in consequence of any apprehension of a similar event.

'By no means, Ma'am, from you,' she replied; 'you, Miss Ellis, who have been so strongly recommended; and protected by so many of our capital gentry; but what I mean is this. If you really intend to take a small lodging, why should not you have my little room again up stairs?'

'Is it not engaged to the lady I saw here this morning?'

'Why that, Ma'am, is precisely the person I have upon my mind to speak about. Why should I let her stay, when she's known to nobody, and is very bad pay, if I can have so genteel a young lady as you, Ma'am, that ladies in their own coaches come visiting?'

Ellis, recoiling from this preference, uttered words the most benevolent that she could suggest, of the unknown person who had excited her compassion: but Miss Matson gave them no attention. 'When one has nothing better to do with one's rooms, Ma'am,' she said, 'it's sometimes as well, perhaps, to let them to almost one does not know who, as to keep them uninhabited; because living in them airs them; but that's no reason for letting them to one's own disadvantage, if can do better. Now this person here, Ma'am, besides being poor, which, poor thing, may be she can't help; and being a foreigner, which, you know, Ma'am, is no great recommendation; – besides all this, Miss Ellis, she has some very suspicious ways with her, which I can't make out at all; she goes abroad in a morning, Ma'am, by five of the clock,

without giving the least account of her haunts. And that, Ma'am, has but an odd look with it!'

'Why so, Miss Matson? If she takes time from her own sleep to enjoy a little air and exercise, where can be the blame?'

'Air and exercise, Ma'am? People that have their living to get, and that a'n't worth a farthing, have other things to think of than air and exercise! She does not, I hope, give herself quite such airs as those!'

Ellis, disgusted, bid her good night; and, filled with pity for a person who seemed still more helpless and destitute than herself, resolved to see her the next day, and endeavour to offer her some consolation, if not assistance.

Before, however, this pleasing project could be put into execution, she was again, nearly at day break, awakened by a summons from Selina to attend her sister, who, after quietly reposing many hours, had started, and demanded Harleigh and Ellis.

Ellis obeyed the call with the utmost expedition, but met the messenger returning to her a second time, as she was mounting the street which led to the lodging of Mrs Maple, with intelligence that Elinor had almost immediately fallen into a new and sound sleep; and that Mr Naird had ordered that no one should enter the room, till she again awoke.

Glad of this reprieve, Ellis was turning back, when she perceived, at some distance, Miss Matson's new lodger. The opportunity was inviting for her purposed offer of aid, and she

determined to make some opening to an acquaintance.

This was not easy; for though the light feet of Ellis might soon have overtaken the quick, but staggering steps of the apparently distressed person whom she pursued, she observed her to be in a state of perturbation that intimidated approach, as much as it awakened concern. Her handkerchief was held to her face; though whether to conceal it, or because she was weeping, could not readily be discovered: but her form and air penetrated Ellis with a feeling and an interest far beyond common curiosity; and she anxiously studied how she might better behold, and how address her.

The foreigner went on her way, looking neither to the right nor to the left, till she had ascended to the church-yard upon the hill. There stopping, she extended her arms, seeming to hail the full view of the wide spreading ocean; or rather, Ellis imagined, the idea of her native land, which she knew, from that spot, to be its boundary. The beauty of the early morning from that height, the expansive view, impressive, though calm, of the sea, and the awful solitude of the place, would have sufficed to occupy the mind of Ellis, had it not been completely caught by the person whom she followed; and who now, in the persuasion of being wholly alone, gently murmured, 'Oh ma chère patrie! – malheureuse, coupable, – mais toujours chère patrie! – ne te reverrai-je jamais!'[1] Her voice thrilled to

[1] 'Oh my loved country! – unhappy, guilty – but for ever loved country! – shall I never see thee more!'

the very soul of Ellis, who, trembling, suspended, and almost breathless, stood watching her motions; fearing to startle her by an unexpected approach, and waiting to catch her eye.

But the mourner was evidently without suspicion that any one was in sight. Grief is an absorber: it neither seeks nor makes observation; except where it is joined with vanity, that always desires remark; or with guilt, by which remark is always feared.

Ellis, neither advancing nor receding, saw her next move solemnly forward, to bend over a small elevation of earth, encircled by short sticks, intersected with rushes. Some of these, which were displaced, she carefully arranged, while uttering, in a gentle murmur, which the profound stillness of all around alone enabled Ellis to catch, 'Repose toi bien, mon ange! mon enfant! le repos qui me fuit, le bonheur que j'ai perdu, la tranquilité precieuse de l'ame qui m'abandonne – que tout cela soit à toi, mon ange! mon enfant! Je ne te rappellerai plus ici! Je ne te rappellerais plus, même si je le pouvais. Loin de toi ma malheureuse destinée! je priai Dieu pour ta conservation quand je te possedois encore; quelques cruelles que fussent tes souffrances, et toute impuissante que J'etois pour les soulager, je priai Dieu, dans l'angoisse de mon ame, pour ta conservation! Tu n'est plus pour moi – et je cesse de te reclamer. Je te vois une ange! Je te vois exempt à jamais de douleur, de crainte, de pauvreté et de regrets; te reclamerai-je, donc, pour partager encore mes malheurs? Non! ne reviens plus à moi! Que je te retrouve là – où ta félicité sera la mienne! Mais toi, prie pour

ta malheureuse mère! que tes innocentes prières s'unissent à ses humbles supplications, pour que ta mère, ta pauvre mère, puisse se rendre digne de te rejoindre!'[2]

How long these soft addresses, which seemed to soothe the pious petitioner, might have lasted, had she not been disturbed, is uncertain: but she was startled by sounds of more tumultuous sorrow; by sobs, rather than sighs, that seemed bursting forth from more violent, at least, more sudden affliction. She looked round, astonished; and saw Ellis leaning over a monument, and bathed in tears.

She arose, and, advancing towards her, said, in an accent of pity, 'Helas, Madame, vous, aussi, pleurez vous votre enfant?'[3]

'Ah, mon amie! ma bien! ameè amie!' cried Ellis, wiping her eyes, but vainly attempting to repress fresh tears; 't'aì-jè chercheè, t'aì-jè attendue, t'aì-jè si ardemment desireè, pour te retrouver ainsi? pleurant sur un tombeau? Et toi! – ne me rappelle

[2] 'Sleep on, sleep on, my angel child! May the repose that flies me, the happiness that I have lost, the precious tranquillity of soul that has forsaken me – be thine! for ever thine! my child! my angel! I cease to call thee back. Even were it in my power, I would not call thee back. I prayed for thy preservation, while yet I had the bliss of possessing thee; cruel as were thy sufferings, and impotent as I found myself to relieve them, I prayed, – in the anguish of my soul, – I prayed for thy preservation! Thou art lost to me now! – yet I call thee back no more! I behold thee an angel! I see thee rescued for ever from sorrow, from alarm, from poverty, and from bitter recollections; – and shall I call thee back, to partake again my sufferings? – No! return to me no more! There, only, let me find thee, where thy felicity will be mine! – but thou! O pray for thy unhappy mother! Let thy innocent prayers be united to her humble supplications, that thy mother, thy hapless mother, may become worthy to join thee!'

[3] 'Alas, Madam! are you, also, deploring the loss of a child?'

tu pas? M'a tu oubliee? – Gabrielle! ma chère Gabrielle!'[4]

'Juste ciel!' exclaimed the other, 'que vois-je? Ma Julie! ma chère, ma tendre amie? Est il bien vrai? – O! peut il être vrai, qu'il y ait encore du bonheur ici bas pour moi?'[5]

Locked in each other's arms, pressed to each other's bosoms, they now remained many minutes in speechless agony of emotion, from nearly overpowering surprise, from gusts of ungovernable, irrepressible sorrow, and heart-piercing recollections; though blended with the tenderest sympathy of joy.

This touching silent eloquence, these unutterable conflicts between transport and pain, were succeeded by a reciprocation of enquiry, so earnest, so eager, so ardent, that neither of them seemed to have any sensation left of self, from excess of solicitude for the other, till Ellis, looking towards the little grave, said, 'Ah! que ce ne soit plus question de moi?'[6]

'Ah, oui, mon amie,' answered Gabriella, 'ton histoire, tes malheurs, ne peuvent jamais être aussi terribles, aussi dechirants que les miens! tu n'as pas encore eprouvé le bonheur d'être mère – comment aurois-tu, donc, eprouvé, le plus accablant des malheurs? Oh! ce sont des souffrances qui n'ont point de nom;

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[4] 'Ah, my friend! my much loved friend! have I sought thee, have I awaited thee, have I so fervently desired thy restoration – to find thee thus? Weeping over a grave? And thou – dost thou not recollect me? Hast thou forgotten me? – Gabriella! my loved Gabriella!'

[5] 'Gracious heaven! what do I behold? My Juliet! my tender friend? Can it be real? – O! can it, indeed, be true, that still any happiness is left on earth for me!'

[6] 'Ah! – upon me can you, yet, bestow a thought?'

des douleurs qui rendent nulles toutes autres, que la perte d'un Etre pûr comme un ange, et tout à soi![7]

The fond embraces, and fast flowing tears of Ellis, evinced the keen sensibility with which she participated in the sorrows of this afflicted mother, whom she strove to draw away from the fatal spot; reiterating the most urgent enquiries upon every other subject, to attract her, if possible, to yet remaining, to living interests. But these efforts were utterly useless. 'Restons, restons où nous sommes!' she cried: 'c'est ici que je te parlerai; c'est ici que je t'écôuterai; ici, où je passe les seuls momens que j'arrache à la misere, et au travail. Ne crois pas que de pleurer est ce qu'il y a le plus à craindre! Oh! qu'il ne t'arrive jamais de savoir que de pleurer, même sur le tombeau de tout ce qui vous est le plus cher, est un soulagement, un dèlice, auprès du dur besoin de travailler, la mort dans le cœur, pour vivre, pour exister, lorsque la vie a perdu toutes ses charmes![8]

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[7] 'True, my dear friend, true! thy history, thy misfortunes, can never be terrible, never be lacerating like mine! Thou hast not yet known the bliss of being a mother; – how, then, canst thou have experienced the most overwhelming of calamities! a suffering that admits of no description! a woe that makes all others seem null – the loss of a being pure, spotless as a cherub – and wholly our own!'

[8] 'Here, here let us stay! 'tis here I can best speak to thee! 'tis here, I can best listen; – here, where I pass every moment that I can snatch from penury and labour! Think not that to weep is what is most to be dreaded; oh never mayst thou learn, that to weep – though upon the tomb of all that has been most dear to thee upon earth, is a solace, is a feeling of softness, nay of pleasure, compared with the hard necessity of toiling, when death has seized upon the very heart, merely to breathe, to exist, after life has lost all its charms!'

Seated then upon the monument which was nearest to the little grave, Gabriella related the principal events of her life, since the period of their separation. These, though frequently extraordinary, sometimes perilous, and always touchingly disastrous, she recounted with a rapidity almost inconceivable; distinctly, nevertheless, marking the several incidents, and the courage with which she had supported them: but when, these finished, she entered upon the history of the illness that had preceded the death of her little son, her voice tremblingly slackened its velocity, and unconsciously lowered its tones; and, far from continuing with the same quickness or precision, every circumstance was dwelt upon as momentous; every recollection brought forth long and endearing details; every misfortune seemed light, put in the scale with his loss; every regret seemed concentrated in his tomb!

Six o'clock, and seven, had tolled unheeded, during this afflicting, yet soothing recital; but the eighth hour striking, when the tumult of sorrow was subsiding into the sadness of grief, the sound caught the ear of Gabriella, who, hastily rising, exclaimed, 'Ah, voilà que je suis encore susceptible de plaisir, puisque ta société m'a fait oublier les tristes et penibles devoirs, qui m'appellent à des tâches qui – à peine – m'empêchent de mourir de faim!'[9]

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[9] 'See, if I am not still susceptible of pleasure! Thy society has made me forget the sad and painful duties that call me hence, to tasks that snatch me, – with difficulty, – from perishing by famine!'

At these words, all the fortitude hitherto sustained by Juliet, – for the borrowed name of Ellis will now be dropt, – utterly forsook her. Torrents of tears gushed from her eyes, and lamentations, the bitterest, broke from her lips. She could bear, she cried, all but this; all but beholding the friend of her heart, the daughter of her benefactress, torn from the heights of happiness and splendour; of merited happiness, of hereditary splendour; to be plunged into such depths of distress, and overpowered with anguish.

'Ah! que je te reconnois bien à ce trait!' cried Gabriella, while a tender smile tried to force its way through her tears: 'cette ame si noble! si inebralable pour elle-même, si douce, si compatissante pour tout autre! que de souvenirs chers et touchans ne se presentent, à cet instant, à mon cœur! Ma chère Julie! il est bien vrai, donc, que je te vois, que je te retrouve encore! et, en toi, tout ce qú'il y a de plus aimable, de plus pûr, et de plus digne! Comment ai-je pû te revoir, sans retrouver la felicité? Je me sens presque coupable de pouvoir t'embrasser, – et de pleurer encore!'[10]

Forcing herself, then, from the fatal but cherished spot, she must hasten, she said, to her daily labour, lest night should

[10] 'Ah, how I know thee by that trait! thy soul so noble! so firm in itself; so soft, so commiserating for every other! what tender, what touching recollections present themselves at this instant to my heart! Dearest Juliet! is it, then, indeed no dream, that I have found – that I behold thee again? and, in thee, all that is most exemplary, most amiable, and most worthy upon earth! How is it I can recover thee, and not recover happiness? I almost feel as if I were criminal, that I can embrace thee, – yet weep on!'

surprise her, without a roof to shelter her head. But Juliet now detained her; clung and wept round her neck, and could not even endeavour to resign herself to the keen woes, and deplorable situation of her friend. She had come over, she said, buoyed up with the exquisite hope of joining the darling companion of her earliest youth; of sharing her fate, and of mitigating her hardships: but this softening expectation was changed into despondence, in discovering her, thus, a prey to unmixt calamity; not alone bowed down by the general evils of revolutionary events; punished for plans in which she had borne no part, and for crimes of which she had not even any knowledge; – not only driven, without offence, or even accusation, from prosperity and honours, to exile, to want, to misery, and to labour; but suffering, at the same time, the heaviest of personal afflictions, in the immediate loss of a darling child; the victim, in all probability, to a melancholy change of life, and to sudden privation of customary care and indulgence!

The task of consolation seemed now to devolve upon Gabriella: the feelings of Juliet, long checked by prudence, by fortitude, by imperious necessity; and kept in dignified but hard command; having once found a vent, bounded back to nature and to truth, with a vivacity of keen emotion that made them nearly uncontrollable. Nature and truth, – which invariably retain an elastic power, that no struggles can wholly subdue; and that always, however curbed, however oppressed, – lie in wait for opportunity to spring back to their rights. Her tears, permitted,

therefore, at length, to flow, nearly deluged the sad bosom of her friend.

'Helas, ma Julie! sœur de mon ame!' cried Gabriella, 'ne t'abandonne pas à la douleur pour moi! mais parles moi, ma tendre amie, paries moi de ma mère! Où l'a tu quitte? Et comment? Et à quelle epoque? – La plus digne, la plus cherie des mères! Helas! eloignée de nous deux, comment saura-t-elle se resigner á tant de malheurs?'[11]

Juliet uttered the tenderest assurances, that she had left the Marchioness well; and had left her by her own injunctions, to join her darling daughter; to whom, by a conveyance that had been deemed secure, she had previously written the plan of the intended journey; with a desire that a few lines of direction, relative to their meeting, under cover to L.S., to be left till called for, might be sent to the post-offices both of Dover and Brighthelmstone; as it was not possible to fix at which spot Juliet might land. The initials L.S. had been fixed upon by accident.

Filial anxiety, now, took place of maternal sufferings, and Gabriella could only talk of her mother; demanding how she looked, and how she supported the long separation, the ruinous sacrifices, and the perpetual alarms, to which she must have been condemned since they had parted; expressing her own surprise, that she had borne to dwell upon any other subject than this,

[11] 'Alas, my Juliet! sister of my soul! abandon not myself to sorrow for me! but speak to me, my tender friend, speak to me of my mother! where didst thou leave her? And how? And at what time? The most precious of mothers! Alas! separated from us both, – how will she be able to support such accumulation of misfortunes!'

which now was the first interest of her heart; yet ceasing to wonder, when she contemplated the fatal spot where her meeting with Juliet had taken place.

Each, now, deeply lamented the time and consolation that had been lost, from their mutual ignorance of each other's abode. Juliet related her fruitless search upon arriving in London; and Gabriella explained, that, during three lingering, yet ever regretted months, she had watched over her dying boy, without writing a single line; to spare her absent friends the knowledge of her suspensive wretchedness. Since the irreparable certainty which had followed, she had sent two letters to her beloved mother, with her address at Brighthelmstone; but both must have miscarried, as she had received no answer. That Juliet had not traced her in London was little wonderful, as, to elude the curiosity excited by a great name, she had passed, in setting out for Brighthelmstone, by a common one. And to that change, joined to one so similar on the part of Juliet, it must have been owing that they had never heard of each other, though residents of the same place. Juliet, nevertheless, was astonished, in defiance of all alteration of attire and appearance, that she had not instantly recognized the air and form of her elegant and high bred Gabriella. But, equally unacquainted with her indigence, which was the effect of sundry cruel accidents, and with the loss of her child; no expectation was awakened of finding her either in so distressed or so solitary a condition. Now, however, Juliet continued, that fortunately, though, alas! not happily, they

had met, they would part no more. Juliet was fully at liberty to go whithersoever her friend would lead, the hope of obtaining tidings of that beloved friend, having alone kept her stationary thus long at Brighthelmstone; where she could now leave the address of Gabriella, at the post-office, for their mutual letters: and, as insuperable obstacles impeded her writing herself, at present, to the Marchioness, Gabriella might make known, in a covert manner, that they were together, and were both safe.

And why, Gabriella demanded, could not Juliet write herself?

'Alas!' Juliet replied, 'I must not even be named!'

'Eh, pour quoi? – n'a-t-tu pas vu tes parens? – Peut on te voir sans t'aimer? te connoître sans te cherir? Non, ma Julie, non! tu n'a qu'à te montrer.'[12]

Juliet, changing colour, dejectedly, and not without confusion, besought her friend, though for reasons that could neither be assigned nor surmounted, to dispense, at present, with all personal narration. Yet, upon perceiving the anxious surprise occasioned by a request so little expected, she dissolved into tears, and offered every communication, in preference to causing even transitory pain to her best friend.

'O loin de moi cette exigence!' cried Gabriella, with energy, 'Ne sais-je pas bien que ton bon esprit, juste émule de ton excellent cœur, te fera parler lorsqu'il le faudra? Ne me confierai-

[12] 'And why? Hast thou not seen thy relations? – Canst thou be seen, and not loved? – known, and not cherished? No, my Juliet, no! thou hast only to appear!'

je pas à toi, dont la seule étude est le bonheur des autres?'[13]

Juliet, not more penetrated by this kindness, than affected by a facile resignation, that shewed the taming effect of misfortune upon the natural vivacity of her friend, could answer only by caresses and tears.

'Eh mon oncle?' continued Gabriella; 'mon tout-aimable et si pieux oncle? où est il?'[14]

'Monseigneur l'Eveque?' cried Juliet, again changing colour; 'Oh oui! tout-aimable! sans tâche et sans reproche! – Il sera bientôt, je crois, ici; – ou j'aurois de ses nouvelles; et alors – ma destinée me sera connue!'[15]

A deep sigh tried to swallow these last words. Gabriella looked at her, for a moment, with re-awakened earnestness, as if repentant of her own acquiescence; but the sight of encreasing disturbance in the countenance of Juliet, checked her rising impatience; and she quietly said, 'Ah! s'il arrive ici! – si je le revois, – j'éprouverai encore, au milieu de tant de désolation, un mouvement de joie! – tel que toi, seule, jusqu'à ce moment, a su

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[13] 'Oh far from me by any such insistence! Know I not well that thy admirable judgment, just counterpart of thy excellent heart, will guide thee to speak when it is right? Shall I not entirely confide in thee? – In thee, whose sole study has been always the good and happiness of others?'

[14] 'And my uncle! My so amiable, so pious uncle? Where is he?'

[15] 'My lord the Bishop? – Oh yes! yes! – amiable indeed! – pure! – without blemish! – He will soon, I believe, be here; or I shall have some intelligence from him; and then – my fate will be known to me!'

m'en inspirer!'[16]

Juliet, with fond delight, promised to be governed wholly, in her future plans, occupations, and residence, by her beloved friend.

'C'est à Brighthelmstone, donc,' cried Gabriella, returning to the little grave; 'c'est ici que nous demeurions! ici, où il me semble que je n'ai pas encore tout à fait perdu mon fils!'

Then, tenderly embracing Juliet, 'Ah, mon amie!' she cried, with a smile that blended pleasure with agony; 'ah, mon amie! c'est à mon enfant que je te dois! c'est en pleurant sur ses restes que je t'ai retrouvée! Ah, oui!' passionately bending over the grave; 'c'est à toi, mon ange! mon enfant! que je dois mon amie! Ton tombeau, même, me porte bonheur! tes cendres veulent me bénir! tes restes, ton ombre veulent du bien à ta pauvre mère!'[17]

With difficulty, now, Juliet drew her away from the fond, fatal spot; and slowly, and silently, while clinging to each other with heartfelt affection, they returned together to their lodgings.

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[16] 'Ah, should he come hither! – should I be blest again by his sight, I should feel, once more, even in the midst of my desolation, a sensation of joy – such as thou, only, as yet, hast been able to re-awaken!'

[17] "Tis at Brighthelmstone, then, – 'tis here that we must dwell! Here, where I seem not yet, entirely, to have lost my darling boy! Oh my friend! my dearest, best loved friend! 'tis to him – to my child, that I am indebted for seeing thee again! 'tis in visiting his remains that I have met my Juliet! – Oh thou! my child! my angel! 'tis to thee, to thee, I am indebted for my friend! Even thy grave offers me comfort! even thy ashes desire to bless me! Thy remains, thy shadow, would do good, would bring peace to thy unhappy mother!'

CHAPTER XLII

Elinor, kept in order by a continual expectation of seeing Harleigh, ceased to require the presence of Juliet; who, but for the sorrows of her friend, would have experienced a felicity to which she had long been a stranger, the felicity of being loved because known; esteemed and valued because tried and proved. The consideration that is the boon of even the most generous benevolence, however it may soothe the heart, cannot elevate the spirits: but here, good opinion was reciprocated, trust was interchanged, confidence was mutual.

The affliction of Gabriella, though of a more permanent nature, because from an irreparable cause, was yet highly susceptible of consolation from friendship; and when once the acute emotions, arising from the tale of woe which she had had to relate, at the meeting, were abated, the charm which the presence of Juliet dispensed, and the renewal of early ideas, pristine feelings, and first affections, soon reflected back their influence upon her own mind; which gradually strengthened, and insensibly revived.

Juliet immediately resigned her large apartment, and fixed herself in the small room of Gabriella. There they settled that they would live together, work together, share their little profits, and endure their failures, in common. There they hoped to recover their peace of mind, if not to re-animate their native

spirits; and to be restored to the harmony of social sympathy, if not to that of happiness.

Yet, it was with difficulty that they learnt to enjoy each other's society, upon such terms as their altered condition now exacted; where the eye must never be spared from laborious business, to search, or to reciprocate a sentiment, in those precious moments of endearing converse, which, unconsciously, swell into hours, ere they are missed as minutes. Their intercourse was confined to oral language alone. The lively intelligence, the rapid conception, the arch remark, the cordial smile; which give grace to kindness, playfulness to counsel, gentleness to raillery, and softness even to reproach; these, the expressive sources of delight, and of comprehension, in social commerce, they were fain wholly to relinquish; from the hurry of unremitting diligence, and undivided attention to manual toil.

Nevertheless, to inhale the same air, and to feel the consoling certitude, that they were no longer cast wholly upon pity, or charity, for good opinion, were blessings that filled their thoughts with gratitude to Providence, and brought back calm and comfort to their minds.

Still, at every sun-rise, Gabriella visited the ashes of her little son; where she poured forth, in maternal enthusiasm, thanks and benedictions upon his departed spirit, that her earliest friend, the chosen sharer of her happier days, was restored to her in the hour of her desolation; and restored to her There, – on that fatal, yet adored spot, which contained the ever loved, though lifeless

remains of her darling boy.

Juliet, in this peaceful interval, learnt, from the voluble Selina, all that had been gathered from Mrs Golding relative to the seclusion of Elinor.

Elinor had travelled post to Portsmouth, whence she had sailed to the Isle of Wight. There, meeting with a foreign servant out of place, she engaged him in her service, and bid him purchase some clothes of an indigent emigrant. She then dressed herself grotesquely yet, as far as she could, decently, in man's attire; and, making her maid follow her example, returned to the neighbourhood of Brighthelmstone, and took lodgings, in the character of a foreigner, who was deaf and dumb, at Shoreham; where, uninterruptedly, and unsuspectedly, she resided. Here, by means of her new domestic, she obtained constant intelligence of the proceedings of Juliet; and she was no sooner informed of the musical benefit, in which an air, with an harp-accompaniment, was to be performed by Miss Ellis, than she sent her new attendant to the assembly-room, to purchase a ticket. Golding, who went thither with the lackey, met Harleigh in the street, as he was quitting the lodgings of Juliet.

The disguise of the maid saved her from being recognised; but her tidings set her mistress on fire. The moment seemed now arrived for the long-destined catastrophe; and the few days preceding the benefit, were spent in its preparation. Careless of what was thought, Elinor, had since, casually, though not confidentially, related, that her intention had been to mount

suddenly into the orchestra, during the performance of Juliet; and thence to call upon Harleigh, whom she could not doubt would be amongst the audience; and, at the instant of his joining them, proclaim to the whole world her immortal passion, and expire between them. But the fainting fit of Juliet, and its uncontrollable effect upon Harleigh, had been so insupportable to her feelings, as to precipitate her design. She acknowledged that she had studied how to die without torture, by inflicting a wound by which she might bleed gently to death, while indulging herself, to the last moment, in pouring forth to the idol of her heart, the fond effusions of her ardent, but exalted passion.

The tranquillity of Elinor, built upon false expectations, could not be long unshaken: impatience and suspicion soon took its place, and Mr Naird was compelled to acknowledge, that Mr Harleigh had set out upon a distant tour, without leaving his address, even at his own house; where he had merely given orders that his letters should be forwarded to a friend.

The rage, grief, and shame of the wretched Elinor, now nearly destroyed, in a moment, all the cares and the skill of Mr Naird, and of her physician. She impetuously summoned Juliet, to be convinced that she was not a party in the elopement; and was only rescued from sinking into utter despair, by adroit exhortations from Mr Naird, to yield patiently to his ordinances, lest she should yet die without a last view of Harleigh. This plea led her, once more, though with equal disgust to herself and to the whole world, to submit to every medical direction, that might give her

sufficient strength to devise means for her ultimate project; and to put them into practice.

Mr Naird archly confessed, in private, to Juliet, that the real danger or safety of Miss Joddrel, so completely hung upon giving the reins, or the curb, to her passions, that she might, without much difficulty, from her resolution to die no other death than that of heroic love, in the presence of its idol, be spurred on, while awaiting, or pursuing, its object, to the verge of a very comfortable old age.

He acknowledged himself, also, secretly entrusted with the abode of Mr Harleigh.

Elinor, when somewhat calmed, demanded of Juliet when, and how, her meetings with Harleigh had been renewed.

Juliet recounted what had passed; sparing such details as might be hurtful, and solemnly protesting that all intercourse was now at an end.

With a view to draw Elinor from this agitating subject, she then related, at full length, her meeting, in the church-yard, with the friend whom she had so long vainly sought.

In a short time afterwards, feeling herself considerably advanced towards a recovery, Elinor, impetuously, again sent for Juliet, to say, 'What is your plan? Tell it me sincerely! What is it you mean to do?'

Juliet answered, that her choice was small, and that her means were almost null: but when she lamented the severe DIFFICULTIES of a FEMALE, who, without fortune or

protection, had her way to make in the world, Elinor, with strong derision, called out, 'Debility and folly! Put aside your prejudices, and forget that you are a dawdling woman, to remember that you are an active human being, and your FEMALE DIFFICULTIES will vanish into the vapour of which they are formed. Misery has taught me to conquer mine! and I am now as ready to defy the world, as the world can be ready to hold me up to ridicule. To make people wise, you must make them indifferent; to give them courage, you must make them desperate. 'Tis then, only, that we throw aside affectation and hypocrisy, and act from impulse.'

Laughing, now, though with bitterness, rather than gaiety, 'What does the world say,' she cried, 'to find that I still live, after the pompous funeral orations, declaimed by myself, upon my death? Does it suspect that I found second thoughts best, and that I delayed my execution, thinking, like the man in the song,

> That for sure I could die whenever I would,
> But that I could live but as long as I could?

'Well, ye that laugh, laugh on! for I, when not sick of myself, laugh too! But, to escape mockery, we must all be guided one by another; all do, and all say, the very same thing. Yet why? Are we alike in our thoughts? Are we alike in our faces? No. Happily, however, that soporiferous monotony is beginning to get obsolete. The sublimity of Revolution has given a greater shake to the minds of men, than to the kingdoms of the earth.'

After pausing, then, a few minutes, 'Ellis,' she cried, 'if you are really embarrassed, why should you not go upon the stage? You know how transcendently you act.'

'That which might seem passable in a private representation,' Juliet answered, 'might, at a public theatre – '

'Pho, pho, you know perfectly well your powers. But you blight them, I suppose, yourself, with anathemas, from excommunicating scruples? You are amongst the cold, the heartless, the ungifted, who, to discredit talents, and render them dangerous, leave their exercise to vice, by making virtue fear to exert, or even patronize them?'

'No, Madam, indeed,' cried Juliet: 'I admire, most feelingly, the noble art of declamation: – how, then, can I condemn the profession which gives to it life and soul? which personifies the most exalted virtues, which brings before us the noblest characters, and makes us witnesses to the sublimest actions? The stage, well regulated, would be the school of juvenile emulation; would soothe sorrow in the unhappy, and afford merited relaxation to the laborious. Reformed, indeed, I wish it, and purified; but not destroyed.'

'Why, then, do you disdain to wear the buskins?'

'Disdain is by no means the word. Talents are a constant source to me of delight; and those who, – rare, but in existence, – unite, to their public exercise, private virtue and merit, I honour and esteem even more than I admire; and every mark I could shew, to such, of consideration, – were I so situated as to bestow, not

require protection! – I should regard as reflecting credit not on them, but on myself.'

'Pen and ink!' cried Elinor, impatiently: 'I'll write for you to the manager this moment! – '

'Hold, Madam!' cried Juliet smiling: 'Much as I am enchanted with the art, I am not going to profess it! On the contrary, I think it so replete with dangers and improprieties, however happily they may sometimes be combatted by fortitude and integrity, that, when a young female, not forced by peculiar circumstances, or impelled by resistless genius, exhibits herself a willing candidate for public applause; – she must have, I own, other notions, or other nerves, than mine!'

'Ellis, Ellis! you only fear to alarm, or offend the men – who would keep us from every office, but making puddings and pies for their own precious palates! – Oh woman! poor, subdued woman! thou art as dependant, mentally, upon the arbitrary customs of man, as man is, corporally, upon the established laws of his country!'

She now grew disturbed, and went on warmly, though nearly to herself.

'By the oppressions of their own statutes and institutions, they render us insignificant; and then speak of us as if we were so born! But what have we tried, in which we have been foiled? They dare not trust us with their own education, and their own opportunities for distinction: – I except the article of fighting; against that, there may, perhaps, be some obstacles: but to be

condemned, as weaker vessels in intellect, because, inferiour in bodily strength and stature, we cannot cope with them as boxers and wrestlers! They appreciate not the understandings of one another by such manual and muscular criterions. They assert not that one man has more brains than another, because he is taller; that he is endowed with more illustrious virtues, because he is stouter. They judge him not to be less ably formed for haranguing in the senate; for administering justice in the courts of law; for teaching science at the universities, because he could ill resist a bully, or conquer a footpad! No! – Woman is left out in the scales of human merit, only because they dare not weigh her!'

Then, turning suddenly to Ellis, 'And you, Ellis, you!' she cried, 'endowed with every power to set prejudice at defiance, and to shew and teach the world, that woman and man are fellow-creatures, you, too, are coward enough to bow down, unresisting, to this thraldom?'

Juliet hazarded not any reply.

'Yet what futile inconsistency dispenses this prejudice! This Woman, whom they estimate thus below, they elevate above themselves. They require from her, in defiance of their examples! – in defiance of their lures! – angelical perfection. She must be mistress of her passions; she must never listen to her inclinations; she must not take a step of which the purport is not visible; she must not pursue a measure of which she cannot publish the motive; she must always be guided by reason, though they deny her understanding! – Frankness, the noblest of our

qualities, is her disgrace; – sympathy, the most exquisite of our feelings, is her bane! – '

She stopt here, conscious, colouring, indignant, and dropt the subject, to say, 'Tell me, I again demand, what is it you mean to do? Return to your concert-singing and harping?'

'Ah, Madam,' cried Juliet, reproachfully, 'can you believe me not yet satisfied with attempting any sort of public exhibition?

'Nay, nay,' cried Elinor, resuming her careless gaiety, 'what passed that evening will only have served to render you more popular. You may make your own terms, now, with the managers, for the subscription will fill, merely to get a stare at you. If I were poor myself, I would engage to acquire a large fortune, in less than a week, by advertising, at two-pence a head, a sight of the lady that stabbed herself.'

'What, however,' she continued, 'is your purpose? Will you go and live with Mrs Ireton? She is just come hither to give her favourite lap-dog a six weeks' bathing. What say you to the place of her toad-eater? It may be a very lucrative thing; and I can procure it for you with the utmost ease. It is commonly vacant every ten days. Besides, she has been dying to have you in her toils, ever since she had known that you spurned the proposition, when it was started by Mrs Howel.'

Juliet protested, that any species of fatigue would be preferable to subservience of such a sort.

'Perhaps you are afraid of seeing too much of Ireton? Be under no apprehension. He makes it a point not to visit her. He cannot

endure her. Besides, 'tis so rustic, he says, to have a mother!'

Juliet answered, that her sole plan, now, was to be guided by her friend.

'And who is this friend? Is she of the family of the Incognitas, also? What do you call her? – L.S.?'

Juliet only replied by stating their project of needle-work.

Elinor scoffed the notion; affirming that they would not obtain a morsel of bread to a glass of water, above once in three days. She felt, nevertheless, sufficient respect to the design of the noble fugitive, to send her a sealed note of what she called her approbation.

This note Juliet took in charge. It contained a draft for fifty pounds.

Ah, generous Elinor! thought Juliet, tears of gratitude glistening in her eyes: what a mixture of contrasting qualities sully, and ennoble your character in turn! Ah, why, to intellects so strong, a heart so liberal, a temper so gay, is there not joined a better portion of judgment, a larger one of diffidence, a sense of feminine propriety, and a mind rectified by religion, – not abandoned, uncontrolled, to imagination?

Gabriella, though truly touched by a generosity so unexpected, declined accepting its fruits; not being yet, she said, so helpless, however poor, as to prefer pecuniary obligation to industry. She would leave, therefore, the donation, for those who had lost the resources of independence which she yet possessed – youth and strength.

The tender admiration of Juliet forbade all remonstrance, and excluded any surprise. She well knew, and had long seen, that the distress which is the offspring of public calamity, not of private misfortune, however it may ruin prosperity, never humbles the mind.

Gabriella, in a letter of elegant acknowledgements, to obviate any accusation of undue pride, solicited the assistance of Elinor, in procuring orders for embroidery, amongst the ladies of her acquaintance.

Elinor, zealous to serve, and fearless to demand, instantly attacked, by note or by message, every rich female at Brighthelmstone; urging the generous, and shaming the niggardly, till there was scarcely a woman of fortune in the place, who had not given, or promised, a commission for some fine muslin-work.

The two friends, through this commanding protection, began their new plan of life under the most favourable auspices; and had soon more employment than time, though they limited themselves to five hours for sleep; though their meals were rather swallowed than eaten; and though they allowed not a moment for any kind of recreation, of rest, or of exercise; save the sacred visit, which they unfailingly made together, at break of day, to the little grave in the church-yard upon the hill.

Yet here first, since her arrival on the British shores, the immediate rapturous moment of landing, and the fortnight passed with Lady Aurora Granville excepted, here first sweet

contentment, soft hopes, and gentle happiness visited the bosom of Juliet. No privation was hard, no toil was severe, no application was tedious, while the friend of her heart was by her side; whose sorrows she could mitigate, whose affections she could share, and whose tears she could sometimes chase.

But the relief was not more exquisite than it was transitory; a week only had passed in delicious repose, when Gabriella received intelligence that her husband was taken ill.

Whatever was her reluctance to quitting the spot, where her memory was every moment fed with cherished recollections, she could not hesitate to depart; but, when Juliet, in consonance with her inclination and her promise, prepared to accompany her, that hydra-headed intruder upon human schemes and desires, Difficulty, arose, in as many shapes as she could form projects, to impede her wishes. Money they had none: even for the return to town of Gabriella, her husband was fain to have recourse for aid to certain admirable persons, whose benevolence had enabled her, upon the illness of her son, to quit it for Brighthelmstone: and, in a situation of indigence so obvious, could they propose carrying away with them the work with which they were entrusted? Juliet, indeed, had still Harleigh's bank notes in her possession; but she turned inflexibly from the temptation of adopting a mode of conduct, which she had always condemned as weak and degrading; that of investing circumstance with decision, in conscientious dilemmas.

These terrible obstacles broke into all their plans, their wishes,

their happiness; involved them in new distress, deluged them in tears, and, after every effort with which ingenious friendship could combat them, ended in compelling a separation. Gabriella embraced, with pungent affliction, the sorrowing Juliet; shed her last bitter tears over the grave of her lost darling, and, by the assistance of the angelic beings[18] already hinted at, whose delicacy, whose feeling, whose respect for misfortune, made their beneficence as balsamic to sensibility, as it was salutary to want, returned alone to the capital.

Juliet thus, perforce, remaining, and once again left to herself, was nearly overwhelmed with grief at a stroke so abrupt and unexpected; so ruinous to her lately acquired contentment, and dearly prized social enjoyment. Yet she suffered not regret and disappointment to consume her time, however cruelly they preyed upon her spirits, and demolished her comfort. Solitarily she continued the employment which she had socially begun; but without relaxing in diligence and application, without permitting herself the smallest intermission that could be avoided: urged not alone to maintain herself, and to replace what she had touched of the deposit of Harleigh, but excited, yet more forcibly, by the fond hope of rejoining her friend; to which she eagerly looked forward, as the result and reward of her activity and labour.

[18] Residing in, and, – in 1795! – at the foot of Norbury Park.

CHAPTER XLIII

Left thus to herself, and devoted to incessant work, Juliet next, had the vexation to learn, how inadequate for entering into any species of business was a mere knowledge of its theory.

She had concluded that, in consecrating her time and her labours to so simple an employment as needle-work, she secured herself a certain, though an hardly earned maintenance: but, as her orders became more extensive, she found that neither talents for what she undertook, nor even patronage to bring them into notice, was sufficient; a capital also was requisite, for the purchase of frames, patterns, silver and gold threads, spangles, and various other articles; to procure which, she was forced, in the very commencement of her new career, again to run in debt.

Alas! she cried, where business is not necessary to subsistence, how little do we know, believe, or even conceive, its various difficulties! Imagination may paint enjoyments; but labours and hardships can be judged only from experience!

She was equally, also, unprepared for continual and vexatious delays of payment. Her work was frequently, when best executed; or set apart for some distant occasion, and forgotten; or received and worn, with no retribution but by promise. Even the few who possessed more consideration, seemed to estimate her time and her toil as nothing, because she was brought forward by recommendation; and to pay debts of common justice, with the

parade of generosity.

Yet, vanity and false reasoning set apart, the ladies for whom she worked were neither hard of heart nor illiberal; but they had never known distress! and were too light and unreflecting to weigh the circumstances by which it might be produced, or prevented.

To save time, and obviate innumerable mortifications, Juliet, at first, employed a commissioner to carry home her work, and to deliver her bills; but he returned always with empty messages, that if Miss Ellis would call herself, she should be paid. Yet when, with whatever reluctance, she complied, she was ordinarily condemned to wait in passages, or anti-chambers, for whole hours, and even whole mornings; which were commonly ended by an excuse, through a footman, or lady's maid, that Lady or Miss such a one was too much engaged, or too much indisposed, to see her till the next day. The next day, when, with renewed expectation, she again presented herself, the same scene was re-acted; though the passing to and fro of various comers and goers, proved that it was only to herself her fair creditor was invisible.

Nevertheless, if she mentioned that she had some pattern, or some piece of work, finished for any other lady to exhibit, she was immediately admitted; though still, with regard to payment, she was desired to call again in the evening, or the next morning, with a new bill; her old one happening, unluckily, to be always lost or mislaid; and not seldom, while stopping in an anti-room, to arrange her packages, she heard exclamations of 'How amazingly

tiresome is that Miss Ellis! pestering one so, always, for her money!'

Is it possible, thought Juliet, that common humanity, nay, common sense, will not tell these careless triflers, that their complaint is a lampoon upon themselves? Will no reflexion, no feeling point out to them, that the time which they thus unmercifully waste in humiliating attendance, however to themselves it may be a play-thing, if not a drug, is, to those who subsist but by their use of it, shelter, clothing, and nourishment?

If sometimes, in the hope of exciting more attention from this dissipated set, she ventured to drop a mournful hint, that she was a novice to this hard kind of life; the warm compassion that seemed rapidly kindled, raised expectations of immediate assistance; but the emotion, though good, took a direction that made it useless; it merely played about in exclamations of pity; then blazed into curiosity, vented itself in questions, – and evaporated.

She soon, therefore, ceased all attempt to obtain regard through personal representations; feeling yet more mortified to be left in passages, or recommended to domestics, after avowing that her lowly state was the effect of misfortune; than while she permitted it to be presumed, that she had nothing to brook but what she had been born and bred to bear.

Some, indeed, while leaving their own just debts unpaid and unnoticed, would have collected, from their friends, a few straggling half-crowns; but when Juliet, declining such aid,

modestly solicited her right, they captiously disputed a bill which had been charged by the strictest necessity; or offered half what they would have dared propose to any ordinary and hired day-jobber. And whatever admiration they bestowed upon the taste and execution of work prepared for others, all that she finished for themselves, was received with that wary precursor of under-valuing its price, contempt; and looked over with fault-finding eyes, and unmeaning criticism.

Yet, if the following day, or even the following hour, some sudden invitation to a brilliant assembly, made any of these ladies require her services, they would give their orders with caressing solicitations for speed; rush familiarly into her room, three or four times in a day, to see how she went on; supplicate her to touch nothing for any other human being; load her with professions of regard; confound her with hurrying entreaties; shake her by the hand; tap her on the shoulder; call her the best of souls; assure her of their eternal gratitude; and torment her out of any time for sleep or food: – yet, the occasion past, and the work seen and worn, it was thought of no more! Her pains and exertions, their promises and fondness, sunk into the same oblivion; and the commonest and most inadequate pay was murmured at, if not contested.

Now and then, however, she was surprised by sudden starts of kindness, and hasty enquiries, eagerly made, though scarcely demanding any answer, into her situation and affairs; followed by drawing her, with an air of confidence, into a dressing-room

or closet: – but there, when prepared for some mark of favour or esteem, she was only asked, in a mysterious whisper, whether she could procure any cheap foreign lace, or French gloves? or whether she could get over from France, any particularly delicate paste for the hands.

To ladies and to behaviour of this cast, there were, however, exceptions; especially amongst the residents of the place and its neighbourhood, who were not there, like the visitors, for dissipation or irregular extravagance, that, alternately, causes money to be loosely squandered, and meanly held back. But this better sort was rare, and sufficed not to supply employment to Juliet for her maintenance, though the most parsimonious. Nor were there any amongst them that had the leisure, or the discernment, to discover, that her mind both required and merited succour as much as her circumstances.

Yet there was the seat of what she had most to endure, and found hardest to sustain. Her short, but precious junction with her Gabriella, gave poignancy to every latent regret, and added disgust to her solitary toil. Thoughts uncommunicated, ideas unexchanged, fears unrevealed, and sorrows unparticipated, infused a heaviness into her existence, that not all her activity in business could conquer; while slackness of pay, by rendering the result of her labours distant and precarious, robbed her industry of cheerfulness, and her exertions of hope. With an ardent love of elegant social intercourse, she was doomed to pass her lonely days in a room that no sound of kindness ever cheered; with

enthusiastic admiration of the beauties of Nature, she was denied all prospect, but of the coarse red tilings of opposite attics: with an innate taste for the fine arts, she was forced to exist as completely out of their view or knowledge, as if she had been an inhabitant of some uncivilized country: and fellow-feeling, that most powerful master of philanthropy! now taught her to pity the lamentations of seclusion from the world, that she had hitherto often contemned as weak and frivolous; since now, though with time always occupied, and a mind fully stored, she had the bitter self-experience of the weight of solitude without books, and of the gloom of retirement without a friend.

During this period, the only notice that she attracted, was that of a gouty old gentleman, whom she frequently met upon the stairs, when forced to mount or descend them in pursuit of her fair heedless creditors. She soon found, by the manner in which he entered, or quitted, at pleasure, the apartment that she had recently given up, that he was her successor. He was evidently struck by her beauty, and, upon their first meeting, looked earnestly after her till she was out of sight; and then, descended into the shop, to enquire who she was of Miss Matson. Miss Matson, always perplexed what to think of her, gave so indefinite, yet so extraordinary an account, that he eagerly awaited an opportunity of seeing her again. Added examination was less calculated to diminish curiosity, than to change it into pleasure and interest; and soon, during whole hours together, he perseveringly watched, upon the landing-places, for the moments

of her going out, or coming back to the house; that, while smiling and bowing to her as she passed, he might obtain yet another, and another view of so singular and so lovely an Incognita.

As he annexed no fixed idea himself to this assiduity, he impressed none upon Juliet; who, though she could not but observe it, had a mind too much occupied within, for that mental listlessness that applies for thoughts, conjectures, or adventures from without.

Soon, however, becoming anxious to behold her nearer, and, soon after, to behold her longer, he contrived to place himself so as somewhat to obstruct, though not positively to impede, her passage. The modest courtesy, which she gave to his age, when, upon her approach, he made way for her, he pleased himself by attributing to his palpable admiration; and his bow, which had always been polite, became obsequious; and his smile, which had always spoken pleasure, displayed enchantment.

Still, however, there was nothing to alarm, and little to engage the attention of Juliet; for though ostentatiously gallant, he was scrupulously decorous. His manners and deportment were old-fashioned, but graceful and gentleman-like; and his eyes, though they had lost their brilliancy, were still quick, scrutinizing, and, where not softened by female attractions, severe.

One day, upon her return from a fruitless expedition, as fearfully, while ascending the stairs, she opened a paper that had just been delivered to her in the shop, her deeply absorbed and perplexed air, and the sigh with which she looked at its contents,

induced him, with heightened interest, to attempt following her, that he might make some enquiry into her situation. He had discerned, as she passed, that what she held was a bill; he could not doubt her poverty from her change of apartment; and he wished to offer her some assistance: but finding that he had no chance of overtaking her, before she reached her chamber, he gently called, 'Young lady!' and begged that she would stop.

With that alacrity of youthful purity, which is ever disposed to consider age and virtue as one, she not only complied, but, seeing the difficulty with which he mounted the stairs, respected his infirmities, and descended herself to meet him, and hear his business.

To a younger man, or to one less experienced, or less sagacious, this action might have appeared the effect of forwardness, of ignorance, or of levity; but to a man of the world, hackneyed in its ways, and penetrating into the motives by which it is ordinarily influenced, it seemed the result of innocence without suspicion; yet of an innocence to which her air and manner gave a dignity that destroyed, in its birth, all interpretation to her disadvantage. His purse, therefore, which already he held in his hand, he felt must be offered with more delicacy than he had at first supposed to be necessary; and, though he was by no means a man apt to be embarrassed, he hesitated, for a moment, how to address a forlorn young stranger.

That moment, however, sufficed to determine him upon making an apology, with the most marked respect, for the liberty

which he had taken in claiming her attention. The look with which she listened rewarded his judgment: it expressed the gratitude of feelings to which politeness was a pleasure; but not a novelty.

'I think – I understand, Ma'am,' he then said, 'you are the lady who inhabited the apartment to which, most unworthily, I have succeeded?'

Juliet bowed.

'I am truly concerned, Ma'am, at a mistake so preposterous in our destinies, so diametrically in opposition to our merits, as that which immures so much beauty and grace, which every one must wish to behold, in the attics; while so worn-out, and good-for-nothing an old fellow as I am, from whom every body must wish to turn their eyes, is perched, full in front, and precisely on the very spot so every way your superiour due. Whatever wicked Elf has done this deed, I confess myself heartily ashamed of my share in its operation; and humbly ready, should any better genius come amongst us, with a view to putting things into their proper places, to agree, either that you should be lodged, in the face of day, in the drawing-room, and I be jammed, out of sight, in the garret; or – that you should become gouty and decrepit, and I grow suddenly young and beautiful.'

Juliet could not but smile, yet waited some explanation without speaking.

Charmed with the smile, which his own rigid features immediately caught, 'I have so frequently,' he continued,

'pondered and ruminated upon the good which those little aerial beings I speak of might do; and the wrongs which they might redress; were they permitted to visit us, now and then, as we read of their doing in days of yore; that, sometimes, I dream while wide awake, and fancy I see them; and feel myself at the mercy of their antic corrections; or receive courteous presents, or wholesome advice. Just this moment, as you were passing, methought one of them appeared to me!'

Juliet, surprised, involuntarily looked round.

'And it said to me, "Whence happens it, my worthy antique, that you grow as covetous as you are rich? Bear, for your pains, the punishment due to a miser, of receiving money that you must not hoard; and of presenting, with your own avaricious hand, this purse to the fair young creature whose dwelling you have usurped; yet who resides nearest to those she most resembles, the gods and goddesses."'

With these words, and a low bow, he would have put his purse into her hand; but upon her starting back, it dropt at her feet.

Surprized, yet touched, as well as amused, by a turn so unexpected to his pleasantry, Juliet, gracefully restoring, though firmly declining his offer, uttered her thanks for the kindness of his intentions, with a sweetness so unsuspicious of evil, that they separated with as strong an impression of wonder upon his part, as, upon hers, of gratitude.

Anxious to relieve the perplexity thus excited, and to settle his opinion, he continued to watch, but could not again address her;

for aware, now, of his purpose, she fled down, or darted up stairs, with a swiftness that defied pursuit; yet with a passing courtesy, that marked respectful remembrance.

Thus, in a life of solitary hardship, with no intermission but for mortifying disappointment, passed nearly three weeks, when Juliet found, with affright and astonishment, that all orders for work seemed at an end. It was no longer the season for Brighthelmstone, whose visitors were only accidental stragglers, that, here to-day, and gone to-morrow, had neither care nor leisure but for rambling and amusement. The residents, though by no means inconsiderable, were soon served; for Elinor was removed to Lewes, and her influence was lost with her presence. Some new measure, therefore, for procuring employment, became necessary; and Juliet, once more, was reduced to make application to Miss Matson.

In passing, therefore, one morning, through the shop, with some work prepared for carrying home, she stopt to open upon the subject; but the appearance of Miss Bydel at the door, induced her, with an hasty apology, to make an abrupt retreat; that she might avoid an encounter which, with that lady, was always irksome, if not painful, from her unconstrained curiosity; joined to the grossness of her conceptions and remarks.

CHAPTER XLIV

Juliet, in re-mounting the stairs, was stopt, by her new acquaintance, before the door of his apartment.

'If you knew,' he said, 'how despitefully I have been treated, and how miserably black and blue I have been pinched, by the little Imp whose offer you have rejected, sleep would fly your eyes at night, from remorse for your hardness of heart. Its Impship insists upon it, that the fault must all be mine. What! it cries, would you persuade me, that a young creature whose face beams with celestial sweetness, whose voice is the voice of melody, whose eyes have the softness of the Dove's – '

Juliet, though she smiled, would have escaped; but he told her he must be heard.

'Would you persuade me, quoth my sprite, that such an angelic personage, would rather let my poor despised coin canker and rust in your miserly coffers, than disperse it about in the world, in kind, generous, or useful activity? No, my antique, continues my little elf, you have presented it in some clumsy, hunchy, awkward mode, that has made her deem you an unworthy bearer of fairy gifts; and she flies the downy wings of my gentle succour, from the fear of falling into your rough and uncooth claws.'

Juliet, who now, through the ill-closed fingers of his gouty hand, discerned his prepared purse, seriously begged to decline this discussion.

'What malice you must bear me!' he cried. 'You are surely in the pay of my evil genius! and I shall be whipt with nettles, or scratched with thorns, all night, in revenge of my failure! And that parcel, too, – which strains the fine fibres of your fair hands, – cast it but down, and millions of my little elves will struggle to convey it safely to your chamber.'

'I doubt not their dexterity,' answered Juliet, 'nor the benevolence of their fabricator; but I assure you, Sir, I want no help.'

'If you will not accept their aerial services, deign, at least, not to refuse mine!'

He endeavoured, now, to take the gown-packet into his own hands; laughingly saying, upon her grave resistance, 'Beware, fair nymph, of the dormant sensations which you may awaken, if you should make me suppose you afraid of me! Many a long day is past, alas! and gone, since I could flatter myself with the idea of exciting fear in a young breast!'

Ceasing, however, the attempt, after some courteous apologies, he respectfully let her pass.

But, upon entering her room, she heard something chink as she deposited her parcel upon a table; and, upon examination, found that he had managed to slip into it, during the contest, a little green purse.

Vexed at this contrivance, and resolved not to lose an instant in returning what no distress could induce her to retain, she immediately descended; but the staircase was vacant, and

the door was closed. Fearful any delay might authorize a presumption of acceptance, she assumed courage to tap at the door.

A scampering, at the same moment, up the stairs, made her instantly regret this measure; and by no means the less, for finding herself recognized, and abruptly accosted by young Gooch, the farmer's son, at the very moment that her gouty admirer had hobbled to answer to her summons.

'Well, see if I a'n't a good marksman!' he cried; 'for else, Ma'am, I might have passed you; for they told me, below, you were up there, at the very top of the house. But I'd warrant to pick you out from a hundred, Ma'am; as neat as my father would one of his stray sheep. But what I come for, Ma'am, is to ask the favour of your company, if it's agreeable to you, to a little junket at our farm.'

Then, rubbing his hands with great glee, unregarding the surprised look of Juliet, at such an invitation, or the amused watchfulness of the observant old beau, he went glibly on.

'Father's to give it, Ma'am. You never saw old dad, I believe, Ma'am? The old gentleman's a very good old chap; only he don't like our clubs: for he says they make me speak quite in the new manner; so that the farmers, he says, don't know what I'd be at. He's rather in years, Ma'am, poor man. He don't know much how things go. However, he's a very well meaning old gentleman.'

Juliet gravely enquired, to what unknown accident she might attribute an invitation so unexpected?

'Why, Ma'am,' answered Gooch, delighted at the idea of having given her an agreeable surprize, 'Why it's the 'Squire, Ma'am, that put it into my head. You know who I mean? our rich cousin, 'Squire Tedman. He's a great friend of yours, I can assure you, Ma'am. He wants you to take a little pleasure sadly. And he's sadly afraid, too, he says, that you'll miss him, now he's gone to town; for he used often, he says, to bring you one odd thing or another. He's got a fine fortune of his own, my cousin the 'Squire. And he's a widower. – And he's taken a vast liking to you, I can tell you, Ma'am; – so who knows…'

Juliet would have been perfectly unmoved by this ignorant forwardness, but for the presence of a stranger, to whose good opinion, after her experience of his benevolence, she could not be indifferent. With an air, therefore, that marked her little satisfaction at this familiar jocoseness, she declined the invitation; and begged the young man to acquaint Mr Tedman, that, though obliged to his intentions, she should feel a yet higher obligation in his forbearance to forward to her, in future, any similar proposals.

'Why, Ma'am,' cried young Gooch, astonished, 'this i'n't a thing you can get at every day! We shall have all the main farmers of the neighbourhood! for it's given on account of a bargain that we've made, of a nice little slip of land, just by our square hay-field. And I've leave to choose six of the company myself. But they won't be farmers, Ma'am, I can tell you! They'll be young fellows that know better how the world goes. And we shall

have your good friend 'Squire Stubbs; for it's he that made our bargain.'

Juliet, now, turning from him to the silent, remarking stranger, said, 'I am extremely ashamed, Sir, to obtrude thus upon your time, but the person for whom you so generously destined this donation commissions me to return it, with many thanks, and an assurance that it is not at all wanted.'

She held out her hand with the purse, but, drawing back from receiving it, 'Madam,' he cried, 'I would upon no account offend any one who has the honour of being known to you; but you will not, therefore, I hope, insist that I should quarrel with myself, by taking what does not belong to me?'

While Juliet, now, looked wistfully around, to discover some place where she might drop the purse, unseen by the young man, whose misinterpretations might be injurious, the youth volubly continued his own discourse.

'We shall give a pretty good entertainment in the way of supper, I assure you, Ma'am; for we shall have a goose at top, and a turkey at bottom, and as fine a fat pig as ever you saw in your life in the middle; with as much ale, and mead, and punch, as you can desire to drink. And, as all my sisters are at home, and a brace or so of nice young lasses of their acquaintance, besides ever so many farmers, and us seven stout young fellows of my club, into the bargain, we intend to kick up a dance. It may keep you out a little late, to be sure, Ma'am, but you shall have our chay-cart to bring you home. You know our chay-cart of old, Ma'am?'

'I, Sir?'

'Why, lauk! have you forgot that, Ma'am? Why it's our chay-cart that brought you to Brighton, from Madam Maple's at Lewes, as good as half a year ago. Don't you remember little Jack, that drove you? and that went for you again the next day, to fetch you back?'

Juliet now found, that this was the carriage procured for her by Harleigh, upon her first arrival at Lewes; and, though chagrined at the air of former, or disguised intimacy, which such an incident might seem to convey to her new friend, she immediately acknowledged recollecting the circumstance.

'Well, I'm only sorry, Ma'am, I did not drive you myself; but I had not the pleasure of your acquaintance then, Ma'am; for 'twas before of our acting together.'

The surprise of the listening old gentleman now altered its expression, from earnest curiosity to suppressed pleasantry; and he leant against his door, to take a pinch of snuff, with an air that denoted him to be rather waiting for some expected amusement, than watching, as heretofore, for some interesting explanation.

Juliet, in discerning the passing change in his ideas, became more than ever eager to return the purse; yet more than ever fearful of misconstruction from young Gooch; whom she now, with encreased dissatisfaction, begged to lose no time in acquainting Mr Tedman, that business only ever took her from home.

'Why, that's but moping for you, neither, Ma'am,' he

answered, in a tone of pity. 'You'd have double the spirits if you'd go a little abroad; for staying within doors gives one but a hippish turn. It will go nigh to make you grow quite melancholick, Ma'am.'

Hopeless to get rid either of him or of the purse, Juliet, now, was moving up stairs, when the voice of Miss Bydel called out from the passage, 'Why, Mr Gooch, have you forgot I told you to send Mrs Ellis to me?'

'That I had clean!' he answered. 'I ask your pardon, I'm sure, Ma'am. – Why, Ma'am, Miss Bydel told me to tell you, when I said I was coming up to ask you to our junket, that she wanted to say a word or two to you, down in the shop, upon business.'

Juliet would have descended; but Miss Bydel, desiring her to wait, mounted herself, saying, 'I have a mind to see your little new room:' stopping, however, when she came to the landing-place, which was square and large, 'Well-a-day!' she exclaimed: 'Sir Jaspar Herrington! – who'd have thought of seeing you, standing so quietly at your door? Why I did not know you could stand at all! Why how is your gout, my good Sir? And how do you like your new lodgings? I heard of your being here from Miss Matson. But pray, Mrs Ellis, what has kept you both, you and young Mr Gooch, in such close conference with Sir Jaspar? I can't think what you've been talking of so long. Pray how did you come to be so intimate together? I should like to know that.'

Sir Jaspar courteously invited Miss Bydel to enter his apartment; but that lady, not aware that nothing is less delicate

than professions of delicacy; which degrade a just perception, and strict practice of propriety, into a display of conscious caution, or a suspicion of evil interpretation; almost angrily answered, that she could not for the world do such a thing, for it would set every body a talking: 'for, as I'm not married, Sir Jaspar, you know, and as you're a single gentleman, too, it might make Miss Matson and her young ladies think I don't know what. For, when once people's tongues are set a-going, it's soon too late to stop them. Besides, every body's always so prodigious curious to dive into other people's affairs, that one can't well be too prudent.'

Sir Jaspar, with an arched brow, of which she was far from comprehending the meaning, said that he acquiesced in her better judgment; but, as she had announced that she came to speak with this young lady upon business, he enquired, whether there would be any incongruity in putting a couple of chairs upon the landing-place.

'Well,' she cried, 'that's a bright thought, I declare, Sir Jaspar! for it will save me the trouble of groping up stairs;' and then, seizing the opportunity to peep into his room, she broke forth into warm exclamations of pleasure, at the many nice and new things with which it had been furnished, since it had been vacated by Mrs Ellis.

A look, highly commiserating, shewed him shocked by these observations; and the air, patiently calm, with which they were heard by Juliet, augmented his interest, as well as wonder, in her

story and situation.

He ordered his valet to fetch an arm-chair for Miss Bydel; while, evidently meant for Juliet, he began to drag another forward himself.

'Bless me, Sir Jaspar!' cried Miss Bydel, looking, a little affronted, towards Juliet, 'have you no common chairs?'

'Yes,' he answered, still labouring on, 'for common purposes!'

This civility was not lost upon Juliet, who declining, though thankful for his attention, darted forward, to take, for herself, a seat of less dignity; hastily, as she passed, dropping the purse upon a table.

A glance at Sir Jaspar sufficed to assure her, that this action had not escaped his notice; and though his look spoke disappointment, it shewed him sensible of the propriety of avoiding any contest.

Relieved from this burthen, she now cheerfully waited to hear the orders of Miss Bydel: young Gooch waited to hear them also; seated, cross-legged, upon the balustrade; though Sir Jaspar sent his valet away, and, retired, scrupulously, himself, to the further end of his apartment.

Miss Bydel, as little struck with the ill breeding of the young farmer, as with the good manners of the baronet, forgot her business, from recollecting that Mr Scope was waiting for her in the shop. 'For happening,' said she, 'to pass by, and see me, through the glass-door, he just stept in, on purpose to have a little chat.'

'O ho, what, is 'Squire Scope here?' cried young Gooch; and, rapidly sliding down the banisters, seized upon the unwilling and precise Mr Scope, whom he dragged up to the landing-place.

'Well, this is droll enough!' cried Miss Bydel, palpably enchanted, though trying to look displeased; 'only I hope you have not told Mr Scope 'twas I that sent you for him, Mr Gooch? for, I assure you, Mr Scope, I would not do such a thing for the world. I should think it quite improper. Besides, what will Miss Matson and the young milliners say? Who knows but you may have set them a prating, Mr Gooch? It's no joke, I can assure you, doing things of this sort.'

'I'm sure, Ma'am,' said Gooch, 'I thought you wanted to see the 'Squire; for I did not do it in the least to make game.'

'There can be no doubt, Madam,' said Mr Scope, somewhat offended, 'that all descriptions of sport are not, at all times, advisable. For, in small societies, as in great states, if I may be permitted to compare little things with great ones, danger often lurks unseen, and mischief breaks out from trifles. In like manner, for example, if one of those young milliners, misinterpreting my innocence, in obeying the supposed commands of the good Miss Bydel, should take the liberty to laugh at my expence, what, you might ask, could it signify that a young girl should laugh? Young persons, especially of the female gender, being naturally given to laughter, at very small provocatives; not to say sometimes without any whatsoever. Whereupon, persons of an ordinary judgment, may

conclude such an action, by which I mean laughing, to be of no consequence. – '

'But I think it very rude!' cried Miss Bydel, extremely nettled.

'Please to hear me, Madam!' said Mr Scope. 'Persons, I say, of deeper knowledge in the maxims and manners of the moral world, would look forward with watchfulness, on such an occasion, to its future effects; for one laugh breeds another, and another breeds another; for nothing is so catching as laughing; I mean among the vulgar; in which class I would be understood to include the main mass of a great nation. What, I ask, ensues? – '

'O, as to that, Mr Scope,' cried Miss Bydel, rather impatiently, 'I assure you if I knew any body that took such a liberty as to laugh at me, I should let them know my thoughts of such airs without much ceremony!'

'My very good lady,' said Mr Scope, formally bowing, 'if I may request such a favour, I beg you to be silent. The laugh, I observe, caught thus, from one to another, soon spreads abroad; and then, the more aged, or better informed, may be led to enquire into its origin: and the result of such investigation must needs be, that the worthy Miss Bydel, having sent her commands to her humble servant, Mr Scope, to follow her up stairs – '

'But if they said that,' cried Miss Bydel, looking very red, 'it would be as great a fib as ever was told, for I did not send my commands, nor think of such a thing. It was Mr Gooch's own doing, only for his own nonsense. And I am curious to know, Mr Gooch, whether any body ever put such thoughts into your head?

Pray did you ever hear any body talk, Mr Gooch? For, if you have, I should be glad to know what they said.'

Mr Scope, waving his hand to demand attention, again begged leave to remark, that he had not finished what he purposed to advance.

'My argument, Madam,' he resumed, 'is a short, but, I hope, a clear one, for 'tis deduced from general principles and analogy; though, upon a merely cursory view, it may appear somewhat abstruse. But what I mean, in two words, is, that the laugh raised by Mr Gooch, and those young milliners; taking it for granted that they laughed; which, indeed, I rather think I heard them do; may, in itself, perhaps, as only announcing incapacity, not be condemnable; but when it turns out that it promulgates false reports, and makes two worthy persons, if I may take the liberty to name myself with the excellent Miss Bydel, appear to be fit subjects for ridicule; then, indeed, the laugh is no longer innocent; and ought, in strict justice, to be punished, as seriously as any other mode of propagating false rumours.'

Miss Bydel, after protesting that Mr Scope talked so prodigiously sensible, that she was never tired of hearing him, for all his speeches were so long; abruptly told Juliet, that she had called to let her know, that she should be glad to be paid, out of hand, the money which she had advanced for the harp.

Sir Jaspar, who, during the harangue of Mr Scope, which was uttered in too loud and important a manner, to leave any doubt of its being intended for general hearing; had drawn his chair to

join the party, listened to this demand with peculiar attention; and was struck with the evident distress which it caused to Juliet; who fearfully besought a little longer law, to collect the debts of others, that she might be able to discharge her own.

Young Gooch, coming behind her, said, in a half whisper, 'If you'll tell me how much it is you owe, Ma'am, I'll help you out in a trice; for I can have what credit I will in my father's name; and he'll never know but what 'twas for some frolic of my own; for I don't make much of a confidant of the old gentleman.'

The most icy refusal was insufficient to get rid of this offer, or offerer; who assured her that, if the worst came to the worst, and his father, by ill luck, should find them out, he would not make a fuss for above a day or two; 'because,' he continued, 'he has only me, as one may say, for the rest are nothing but girls; so he can't well help himself. He gave me my swing too long from the first, to bind me down at this time of day. Besides, he likes to have me a little in the fashion, I know, though he won't own it; for he is a very good sort of an old gentleman, at bottom.'

Sir Jaspar sought to discover, whether the colour which heightened the cheeks of Juliet at this proposal, which now ceased to be delivered in a whisper, was owing to confusion at its publicity, or to disdain at the idea of conspiring either at deceiving or braving the young man's father; while Miss Bydel, whose plump curiosity saved her from all species of speculative trouble, bluntly said, 'Why should you hesitate at such an offer, my dear? I'm sure I don't see how you can do better than accept it.

Mr Gooch is a very worthy young man, and so are all his family. I'm sure I only wish he'd take to you more solidly, and make a match of it. That would put an end to your troubles at once; and I should get my money out of hand.'

This was an opportunity not to be passed over by the argumentative but unerring Mr Scope, for trite observations, self-evident truths, and hackneyed calculations, upon the mingled dangers and advantages of matrimony, 'which, when weighed,' said he, 'in equal scales, and abstractedly considered, are of so puzzling a nature, that the wise and wary, fearing to risk them, remain single; but which, when looked upon in a more cursory way, or only lightly balanced, preponderate so much in favour of the state, that the great mass of the nation, having but small means of reflection, or forethought, ordinarily prefer matrimony. If, therefore, young Mr Gooch should think proper to espouse this young person, there would be nothing in it very surprising; nevertheless, in summing up the expences of wedlock, and a growing family, it might seem, that to begin the married state with debts already contracted, on the female side, would appear but a shallow mark of prudence on the male, where the cares of that state reasonably devolve; he being naturally supposed to have the most sense.'

'O, as to that, Mr Scope,' cried Miss Bydel, 'if Mr Gooch should take a liking to this young person, she has money enough to pay her debts, I can assure you: I should not have asked her for it else; but the thing is, she don't like to part with it.'

Juliet solemnly protested, that the severest necessity could alone have brought her into the pecuniary difficulties under which she laboured; the money to which Miss Bydel alluded being merely a deposit which she held in her hands, and for which she was accountable.

'Well, that's droll enough,' said Miss Bydel, 'that a young person, not worth a penny in the world, should have the care of other people's money! I should like to know what sort of persons they must be, that can think of making such a person their steward!'

Young Gooch said that it would not be his father, for one, who would do it; and Mr Scope was preparing an elaborate dissertation upon the nature of confidence, with regard to money-matters, in a great state; when Miss Bydel, charmed to have pronounced a sentence which seemed to accord with every one's opinion, ostentatiously added, 'I should like, I say, Mrs Ellis, to know what sort of person it could be, that would trust a person with one's cash, without enquiring into their circumstances? for though, upon hearing that a person has got nothing, one may give 'em something, one must be no better than a fool to make them one's banker.'

Juliet, who could not enter into any explanation, stammered, coloured, and from the horrour of seeing that she was suspected, wore an air of seeming apprehensive of detection.

A short pause ensued, during which every one fixed his eyes upon her face, save Sir Jaspar; who seemed studying a portrait

upon his snuff-box.

Her immediate wish, in this disturbance, was to clear herself from so terrible an aspersion, by paying Miss Bydel, as she had paid her other creditors, from the store of Harleigh; but her wishes, tamed now by misfortune and disappointment, were too submissively under the controul of fear and discretion, to suffer her to act from their first dictates: and a moment's reflection pointed out, that, joined to the impropriety of such a measure with respect to Harleigh himself, it would be liable, more than any other, to give her the air of an impostor, who possessed money that she could either employ, or disclaim all title to, at her pleasure. Calling, therefore, for composure from conscious integrity, she made known her project of applying once more to Miss Matson, for work; and earnestly supplicated for the influence of Miss Bydel, that this second application might not, also, be vain.

The eyes of the attentive Sir Jaspar, as he raised them from his snuff-box, now spoke respect mingled with pity.

'As to recommending you to Miss Matson, Mrs Ellis,' answered Miss Bydel, 'it's out of all reason to demand such a thing, when I can't tell who you are myself; and only know that you have got money in your hands nobody knows how, nor what for.'

An implication such as this, nearly overpowered the fortitude of Juliet; and, relinquishing all further effort, she rose, and, silently, almost gloomily, began ascending the stairs. Sir Jaspar

caught the expression of her despair by a glance; and, in a tone of remonstrance, said to Miss Bydel, 'In your debt, good Miss Bydel? Have you forgotten, then, that the young lady has paid you?'

'Paid me? good Me! Sir Jaspar,' cried Miss Bydel, staring; 'how can you say such a thing? Do you think I'd cheat the young woman?'

'I think it so little,' answered he, calmly, 'that I venture to remind you, thus publicly, of the circumstance; in full persuasion that I shall merit your gratitude, by aiding your memory.'

'Good Me! Sir Jaspar, why I never heard such a thing in my life! Paid me? When? Why it can't be without my knowing it?'

'Certainly not; I beg you, therefore, to recollect yourself.'

The stare of Miss Bydel was now caught by Mr Scope; and her 'Good Me!' was echoed by young Gooch; while the surprised Juliet, turning back, said, 'Pardon me, Sir! I have never been so happy as to be able to discharge the debt. It remains in full force.'

'Over you, too, then,' cried Sir Jaspar, with quickness, 'have I the advantage in memory? Have you forgotten that you delivered, to Miss Bydel, the full sum, not twenty minutes since?'

Miss Bydel now, reddening with anger, cried, 'Sir Jaspar, I have long enough heard of your ill nature; but I never suspected your crossness would take such a turn against a person as this, to make people believe I demand what is not my own!'

Juliet again solemnly acknowledged the debt; and Mr Scope opened an harangue upon the merits of exactitude between

debtor and creditor, and the usefulness of settling no accounts, without, what were the only legal witnesses to obviate financial controversy, receipts in full; when Sir Jaspar, disregarding, alike, his rhetoric or Miss Bydel's choler, quietly patting his snuff-box, said, that it was possible that Miss Bydel had, inadvertently, put the sum into her work-bag, and forgotten that it had been refunded.

Exulting that means, now, were open for vindication and redress, Miss Bydel eagerly untied the strings of her work-bag; though Juliet entreated that she would spare herself the useless trouble. But Sir Jaspar protested, with great gravity, that his own honour was now as deeply engaged to prove an affirmative, as that of Miss Bydel to prove a negative: holding, however, her hand, he said that he could not be satisfied, unless the complete contents of the work-bag were openly and fairly emptied upon a table, in sight of the whole party.

Miss Bydel, though extremely affronted, consented to this proposal; which would clear her, she said, of so false a slander. A table was then brought upon the landing-place; as she still stiffly refused risking her reputation, by entering the apartment of a single gentleman; though he might not, as she observed, be one of the youngest.

Sir Jaspar demanded the precise amount of the sum owed. A guinea and a half.

He then fetched a curious little japan basket from his chamber, into which he desired that Miss Bydel would put her work-bag;

though he would not suffer her to empty it, till, with various formalities, he had himself placed it in the middle of the table; around which he made every one draw a chair.

Miss Bydel now triumphantly turned her work-bag inside out; but what was her consternation, what the shock of Mr Scope, and how loud the shout of young Gooch, to see, from a small open green purse, fall a guinea and a half!

Miss Bydel, utterly confounded, remained speechless; but Juliet, through whose sadness Sir Jaspar saw a smile force its way, that rendered her beauty dazzling, recollecting the purse, blushed, and would have relieved Miss Bydel, by confessing that she knew to whom it belonged; had she not been withheld by the fear of the strange appearance which so sudden a seeming intimacy with the Baronet might wear.

Sir Jaspar, again patting her snuff-box, composedly said, 'I was persuaded Miss Bydel would find that her debt had been discharged.'

Miss Bydel remained stupified; while Mr Scope, with a look concerned, and even abashed, condolingly began an harangue upon the frail tenure of the faculty of human memory.

Miss Bydel, at length, recovering her speech, exclaimed, 'Well, here's the money, that's certain! but which way it has got into my work-bag, without my ever seeing or touching it, I can't pretend to say: but if Mrs Ellis has done it to play me a trick – '

Juliet disavowed all share in the transaction.

'Then it's some joke of Sir Jaspar's! for I know he dearly loves

to mortify; so I suppose he has given me false coin, or something that won't go, just to make me look like a fool.'

'The money, I have the honour to assure you, is not mine,' was all that, very tranquilly, Sir Jaspar replied: while Mr Scope, after a careful examination of each piece, declared each to be good gold, and full weight.

Sundry 'Good me's!' and other expressions of surprise, though all of a pleasurable sort, now broke forth from Miss Bydel, finishing with, 'However, if nobody will own the money, as the debt is fairly my due, I don't see why I may not take it; though as to the purse, I won't touch it, because as that's a thing I have not lent to any body, I've no right to it.'

Juliet here warmly interfered. The purse, she said, and the money belonged to the same proprietor; and, as neither of them were hers, both ought to be regarded as equally inadmissible for the payment of a debt which she alone had contracted. This disinterested sincerity made even Mr Scope turn to her with an air of profound, though surprised respect; while Sir Jaspar fixed his eyes upon her face with encreased and the most lively wonder; young Gooch stared, not perfectly understanding her; but Miss Bydel, rolling up the purse, which she put back into the basket, said, 'Well, if the money is not yours, Mrs Ellis, my dear, it can be nobody's but Sir Jaspar's; and if he has a mind to pay your debt for you, I don't see why I should hinder him, when 'twould be so much to my disadvantage. He's rich enough, I assure you; for what has an old bachelor to do with his money? So I'll take

my due, be it which way it will.' And, unmoved by all that Juliet could urge, she put the guinea and the half-guinea carefully into her pocket.

Juliet declared, that a debt which she had not herself discharged, she should always consider as unpaid, though her creditor might be changed.

Confused then, ashamed, perplexed, – yet unavoidably pleased, she mounted to her chamber.

CHAPTER XLV

With whatever shame, whatever chagrin, Juliet saw herself again involved in a pecuniary obligation, with a stranger, and a gentleman, a support so efficacious, at a moment of such alarm, was sensibly and gratefully felt. Yet she was not less anxious to cancel a favour which still was unfitting to be received. She watched, therefore, for the departure of Miss Bydel, and the restoration of stillness to the staircase, to descend, once more, in prosecution to her scheme with Miss Matson.

The anxious fear of rejection, and dread of rudeness, with which she then renewed her solicitation, soon happily subsided, from a readiness to listen, and a civility of manner, as welcome as they were unexpected, in her hostess; by whom she was engaged, without difficulty, to enter upon her new business the following morning.

Thus, and with cruel regret, concluded her fruitless effort to attain a self-dependence which, however subject to toil, might be free, at least, from controul. Every species of business, however narrow its cast, however limited its wants, however mean its materials; required, she now found, some capital to answer to its immediate calls, and some steady credit for encountering the unforeseen accidents, and unavoidable risks, to which all human undertakings, whether great or insignificant, are liable.

With this conviction upon her mind, she strove to bear the

disappointment without murmuring; hoping to gain in security all that she lost in liberty. Little reason, indeed, had she for regretting what she gave up: she had been worn by solitary toil, and heavy rumination; by labour without interest, and loneliness without leisure.

Nevertheless, the beginning of her new career promised little amelioration from the change. She was summoned early to the shop to take her work; but, when she begged leave to return with it to her chamber, she was stared at as if she had made a demand the most preposterous, and told that, if she meant to enter into business, she must be at hand to receive directions, and to learn how it should be done.

To enter into business was far from the intention of Juliet; but the fear of dismission, should she proclaim how transitory were her views, silenced her into acquiescence; and she seated herself behind a distant counter.

And here, perforce, she was initiated into a new scene of life, that of the humours of a milliner's shop. She found herself in a whirl of hurry, bustle, loquacity, and interruptions. Customers pressed upon customers; goods were taken down merely to be put up again; cheapened but to be rejected; admired but to be looked at, and left; and only bought when, to all appearance, they were undervalued and despised.

It was here that she saw, in its unmasked futility, the selfishness of personal vanity. The good of a nation, the interest of society, the welfare of a family, could with difficulty have

appeared of higher importance than the choice of a ribbon, or the set of a cap; and scarcely any calamity under heaven could excite looks of deeper horrour or despair, than any mistake committed in the arrangement of a feather or a flower. Every feature underwent a change, from chagrin and fretfulness, if any ornament, made by order, proved, upon trial, to be unbecoming; while the whole complexion glowed with the exquisite joy of triumph, if something new, devised for a superiour in the world of fashion, could be privately seized as a model by an inferiour.

The ladies whose practice it was to frequent the shop, thought the time and trouble of its mistress, and her assistants, amply paid by the honour of their presence; and though they tried on hats and caps, till they put them out of shape; examined and tossed about the choicest goods, till they were so injured that they could be sold only at half price; ordered sundry articles, which, when finished, they returned, because they had changed their minds; or discovered that they did not want them; still their consciences were at ease, their honour was self-acquitted, and their generosity was self-applauded, if, after two or three hours of lounging, rummaging, fault-finding and chaffering, they purchased a yard or two of ribbon, or a few skanes of netting silk.

The most callous disregard to all representations of the dearness of materials, or of the just price of labour, was accompanied by the most facile acquiescence even in demands that were exorbitant, if they were adroitly preceded by, 'Lady – , or the Duchess of – , gave that sum for just such another cap,

hat, &c., this very morning.'

Here, too, as in many other situations into which accident had led, or distress had driven Juliet, she saw, with commiseration and shame for her fellow-creatures, the total absence of feeling and of equity, in the dissipated and idle, for the indigent and laborious. The goods which demanded most work, most ingenuity, and most hands, were last paid, because heaviest of expence; though, for that very reason, the many employed, and the charge of materials, made their payment the first required. Oh that the good Mr Giles Arbe, thought Juliet, could arraign, in his simple but impressive style, the ladies who exhibit themselves with unpaid plumes, at assemblies and operas; and enquire whether they can flatter themselves, that to adorn them alone is sufficient to recompense those who work for, without seeing them; who ornament without knowing them; and who must necessarily, if unrequited, starve in rendering them more brilliant!

Upon further observation, nevertheless, her compassion for the milliner and the work-women somewhat diminished; for she found that their notions of probity were as lax as those of their customers were of justice; and saw that their own rudeness to those who had neither rank nor fortune, kept pace with the haughtiness which they were forced to support, from those by whom both were possessed. Every advantage was taken of inexperience and simplicity; every article was charged, not according to its value, but to the skill or ignorance of the

purchaser; old goods were sold as if new; cheap goods as if dear; and ancient, or vulgar ornaments, were presented to the unpractised chafferer, as the very pink of the mode.

The rich and grand, who were capricious, difficult, and long in their examinations, because their time was their own; or rather, because it hung upon their hands; and whose utmost exertion, and sole practice of exercise consisted in strolling from a sofa to a carriage, were instantly, and with fulsome adulation, attended; while the meaner, or economical, whose time had its essential appropriations, and was therefore precious, were obliged to wait patiently for being served, till no coach was at the door, and every fine lady had sauntered away. And even then, they were scarcely heard when they spoke; scarcely shewn what they demanded; and scarcely thanked for what they purchased.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.