BURNEY FANNY

CECILIA; OR, MEMOIRS OF AN HEIRESS. VOLUME 3

Fanny Burney

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Burney F.

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Содержание

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BOOK VIII. *Continued*

CHAPTER ii. – AN EVENT

Scarce less unhappy in her decision than in her uncertainty, and every way dissatisfied with her situation, her views and herself, Cecilia was still so distressed and uncomfortable, when Delvile called the next morning, that he could not discover what her determination had been, and fearfully enquired his doom with hardly any hope of finding favour.

But Cecilia was above affectation, and a stranger to art. “I would not, Sir,” she said, “keep you an instant in suspense, when I am no longer in suspense myself. I may have appeared trifling, but I have been nothing less, and you would readily exculpate me of caprice, if half the distress of my irresolution was known to you. Even now, when I hesitate no more, my mind is so ill at ease, that I could neither wonder nor be displeased should you hesitate in your turn.”

“You hesitate no more?” cried he, almost breathless at the sound of those words, “and is it possible—Oh my Cecilia!—is it possible your resolution is in my favour?”

“Alas!” cried she, “how little is your reason to rejoice! a dejected and melancholy gift is all you can receive!”

“Ere I take it, then,” cried he, in a voice that spoke joy; pain, and fear all at once in commotion, “tell me if your reluctance has its origin in *me*, that I may rather even yet relinquish you, than merely owe your hand to the selfishness of persecution?”

“Your pride,” said she, half smiling, “has some right to be alarmed, though I meant not to alarm it. No! it is with myself only I am at variance, with my own weakness and want of judgment that I quarrel,—in *you* I have all the reliance that the highest opinion of your honour and integrity can give me.”

This was enough for the warm heart of Delvile, not only to restore peace, but to awaken rapture. He was almost as wild with delight, as he had before been with apprehension, and poured forth his acknowledgments with so much fervour of gratitude, that Cecilia imperceptibly grew reconciled to herself, and before she missed her dejection, participated in his contentment.

She quitted him as soon as she had power, to acquaint Mrs Charlton with what had passed, and assist in preparing her to accompany them to the altar; while Delvile flew to his new acquaintance, Mr Singleton, the lawyer, to request him to supply the place of Mr Monckton in giving her away.

All was now hastened with the utmost expedition, and to avoid observation, they agreed to meet at the church; their desire of secrecy, however potent, never urging them to wish the ceremony should be performed in a place less awful.

When the chairs, however, came, which were to carry the two ladies thither, Cecilia trembled and hung back. The greatness of her undertaking, the hazard of all her future happiness, the disgraceful secrecy of her conduct, the expected reproaches of Mrs Delvile, and the boldness and indelicacy of the step she was about to take, all so forcibly struck, and so painfully wounded her, that the moment she was summoned to set out, she again lost her resolution, and regretting the hour that ever Delvile was known to her, she sunk into a chair, and gave up her whole soul to anguish and sorrow.

The good Mrs Charlton tried in vain to console her; a sudden horror against herself had now seized her spirits, which, exhausted by long struggles, could rally no more.

In this situation she was at length surprised by Delvile, whose uneasy astonishment that she had failed in her appointment, was only to be equalled by that with which he was struck at the sight of her tears. He demanded the cause with the utmost tenderness and apprehension; Cecilia for some time could not speak, and then, with a deep sigh, “Ah!” she cried, “Mr Delvile! how weak are we all when unsupported by our own esteem! how feeble, how inconsistent, how changeable, when our courage has any foundation but duty!”

Delvile, much relieved by finding her sadness sprung not from any new affliction, gently reproached her breach of promise, and earnestly entreated her to repair it. “The clergyman,” cried he, “is waiting; I have left him with Mr Singleton in the vestry; no new objections have started, and no new obstacles have intervened; why, then, torment ourselves with discussing again the old ones, which we have already considered till every possible argument upon them is exhausted? Tranquillize, I conjure you, your agitated spirits, and if the truest tenderness, the most animated esteem, and the gratefullest admiration, can soften your future cares, and ensure your future peace, every anniversary of this day will recompense my Cecilia for every pang she now suffers!”

Cecilia, half soothed and half ashamed, finding she had in fact nothing new to say or to object, compelled herself to rise, and, penetrated by his solicitations, endeavoured to compose her mind, and promised to follow him.

He would not trust her, however, from his sight, but seizing the very instant of her renewed consent, he dismissed the chairs, and ordering a hackney-coach, preferred any risk to that of her again wavering, and insisted upon accompanying her in it himself.

Cecilia had now scarce time to breathe, before she found herself at the porch of–church. Delvile hurried her out of the carriage, and then offered his arm to Mrs Charlton. Not a word was spoken by any of the party till they went into the vestry, where Delvile ordered Cecilia a glass of water, and having hastily made his compliments to the clergyman, gave her hand to Mr Singleton, who led her to the altar.

The ceremony was now begun; and Cecilia, finding herself past all power of retracting, soon called her thoughts from wishing it, and turned her whole attention to the awful service; to which though she listened with reverence, her full satisfaction in the object of her vows, made her listen without terror. But when the priest came to that solemn adjuration, *If any man can shew any just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together*, a conscious tear stole into her eye, and a sigh escaped from Delvile that went to her heart: but, when the priest concluded the exhortation with *let him now speak, or else hereafter for-ever hold his peace*, a female voice at some distance, called out in shrill accents, “I do!”

The ceremony was instantly stopt. The astonished priest immediately shut up the book to regard the intended bride and bridegroom; Delvile started with amazement to see whence the sound proceeded; and Cecilia, aghast, and struck with horror, faintly shriekt, and caught hold of Mrs Charlton.

The consternation was general, and general was the silence, though all of one accord turned round towards the place whence the voice issued: a female form at the same moment was seen rushing from a pew, who glided out of the church with the quickness of lightning.

Not a word was yet uttered, every one seeming rooted to the spot on which he stood, and regarding in mute wonder the place this form had crossed.

Delvile at length exclaimed, “What can this mean?”

“Did you not know the woman, Sir?” said the clergyman.

“No, Sir, I did not even see her.”

“Nor you, madam?” said he, addressing Cecilia.

“No, Sir,” she answered, in a voice that scarce articulated the two syllables, and changing colour so frequently, that Delvile, apprehensive she would faint, flew to her, calling out, “Let *me* support you!”

She turned from him hastily, and still, holding by Mrs Charlton, moved away from the altar.

"Whither," cried Delvile, fearfully following her, "whither are you going?"

She made not any answer; but still, though tottering as much from emotion as Mrs Charlton from infirmity, she walked on.

"Why did you stop the ceremony, Sir?" cried Delvile, impatiently speaking to the clergyman.

"No ceremony, Sir," he returned, "could proceed with such an interruption."

"It has been wholly accidental," cried he, "for we neither of us know the woman, who could not have any right or authority for the prohibition." Then yet more anxiously pursuing Cecilia, "why," he continued, "do you thus move off?—Why leave the ceremony unfinished?—Mrs Charlton, what is it you are about?—Cecilia, I beseech you return, and let the service go on!"

Cecilia, making a motion with her hand to forbid his following her, still silently proceeded, though drawing along with equal difficulty Mrs Charlton and herself.

"This is insupportable!" cried Delvile, with vehemence, "turn, I conjure you!—my Cecilia!—my wife!—why is it you thus abandon me?—Turn, I implore you, and receive my eternal vows!—Mrs Charlton, bring her back,—Cecilia, you *must* not go!—"

He now attempted to take her hand, but shrinking from his touch, in an emphatic but low voice, she said, "Yes, Sir, I must!—an interdiction such as this!—for the world could I not brave it!"

She then made an effort to somewhat quicken her pace.

"Where," cried Delvile, half frantic, "where is this infamous woman? This wretch who has thus wantonly destroyed me!"

And he rushed out of the church in pursuit of her.

The clergyman and Mr Singleton, who had hitherto been wondering spectators, came now to offer their assistance to Cecilia. She declined any help for herself, but gladly accepted their services for Mrs Charlton, who, thunderstruck by all that had past, seemed almost robbed of her faculties. Mr Singleton proposed calling a hackney coach, she consented, and they stopt for it at the church porch.

The clergyman now began to enquire of the pew-opener, what she knew of the woman, who she was, and how she had got into the church? She knew of her, she answered, nothing, but that she had come in to early prayers, and she supposed she had hid herself in a pew when they were over, as she had thought the church entirely empty.

An hackney coach now drew up, and while the gentlemen were assisting Mrs Charlton into it, Delvile returned.

"I have pursued and enquired," cried he, "in vain, I can neither discover nor hear of her.—But what is all this? Whither are you going?—What does this coach do here?—Mrs Charlton, why do you get into it?—Cecilia, what are you doing?"

Cecilia turned away from him in silence. The shock she had received, took from her all power of speech, while amazement and terror deprived her even of relief from tears. She believed Delvile to blame, though she knew not in what, but the obscurity of her fears served only to render them more dreadful.

She was now getting into the coach herself, but Delvile, who could neither brook her displeasure, nor endure her departure, forcibly caught her hand, and called out, "You are *mine*, you are my *wife*!—I will part with you no more, and go whithersoever you will, I will follow and claim you!"

"Stop me not!" cried she, impatiently though faintly, "I am sick, I am ill already,—if you detain me any longer, I shall be unable to support myself!"

"Oh then rest on *me*!" cried he, still holding her; "rest but upon me till the ceremony is over!—you will drive me to despair and to madness if you leave me in this barbarous manner!"

A crowd now began to gather, and the words bride and bridegroom reached the ears of Cecilia; who half dead with shame, with fear, and with distress, hastily said "You are determined to make me miserable!" and snatching away her hand, which Delvile at those words could no longer hold, she threw herself into the carriage.

Delvile, however, jumped in after her, and with an air of authority ordered the coachman to Pall-Mall, and then drew up the glasses, with a look of fierceness at the mob.

Cecilia had neither spirits nor power to resist him; yet, offended by his violence, and shocked to be thus publickly pursued by him, her looks spoke a resentment far more mortifying than any verbal reproach.

"Inhuman Cecilia!" cried he, passionately, "to desert me at the very altar!—to cast me off at the instant the most sacred rites were uniting us!—and then thus to look at me!—to treat me with this disdain at a time of such distraction!—to scorn me thus injuriously at the moment you unjustly abandon me!"

"To how dreadful a scene," said Cecilia, recovering from her consternation, "have you exposed me! to what shame, what indignity, what irreparable disgrace!"

"Oh heaven!" cried he with horror, "if any crime, any offence of mine has occasioned this fatal blow, the whole world holds not a wretch so culpable as myself, nor one who will sooner allow the justice of your rigour! my veneration for you has ever equalled my affection, and could I think it was through *me* you have suffered any indignity, I should soon abhor myself, as you seem to abhor me. But what is it I have done? How have I thus incensed you? By what action, by what guilt, have I incurred this displeasure?

"Whence," cried she, "came that voice which still vibrates in my ear? The prohibition could not be on *my* account, since none to whom I am known have either right or interest in even wishing it."

"What an inference is this! over *me*, then, do you conclude this woman had any power?"

Here they stopt at the lodgings. Delvile handed both the ladies out. Cecilia, eager to avoid his importunities, and dreadfully disturbed, hastily past him, and ran up stairs; but Mrs Charlton refused not his arm, on which she lent till they reached the drawing-room.

Cecilia then rang the bell for her servant, and gave orders that a post-chaise might be sent for immediately.

Delvile now felt offended in his turn; but suppressing his vehemence, he gravely and quietly said "Determined as you are to leave me, indifferent to my peace, and incredulous of my word, deign, at least, before we part, to be more explicit in your accusation, and tell me if indeed it is possible you can suspect that the wretch who broke off the ceremony, had ever from me received provocation for such an action?"

"I know not what to suspect," said Cecilia, "where every thing is thus involved in obscurity; but I must own I should have some difficulty to think those words the effect of chance, or to credit that their speaker was concealed without design."

"You are right, then, madam," cried he, resentfully, "to discard me! to treat me with contempt, to banish me without repugnance, since I see you believe me capable of duplicity, and imagine I am better informed in this affair than I appear to be. You have said I shall make you miserable,—no, madam, no! your happiness and misery depend not upon one you hold so worthless!"

"On whatever they depend," said Cecilia, "I am too little at ease for discussion. I would no more be daring than superstitious, but none of our proceedings have prospered, and since their privacy has always been contrary both to my judgment and my principles, I know not how to repine at a failure I cannot think unmerited. Mrs Charlton, our chaise is coming; you will be ready, I hope, to set off in it directly?"

Delvile, too angry to trust himself to speak, now walked about the room, and endeavoured to calm himself; but so little was his success, that though silent till the chaise was announced, when he heard that dreaded sound, and saw Cecilia steady in her purpose of departing, he was so much shocked and afflicted, that, clasping his hands in a transport of passion and grief, he exclaimed. "This, then, Cecilia, is your faith! this is the felicity you bid me hope! this is the recompense of my sufferings, and the performing of your engagement!"

Cecilia, struck by these reproaches, turned back; but while she hesitated how to answer them, he went on, “You are insensible to my misery, and impenetrable to my entreaties; a secret enemy has had power to make me odious in your sight, though for her enmity I can assign no cause, though even her existence was this morning unknown to me! Ever ready to abandon, and most willing to condemn me, you have more confidence in a vague conjecture, than in all you have observed of the whole tenour of my character. Without knowing why, you are disposed to believe me criminal, without deigning to say wherefore, you are eager to banish me your presence. Yet scarce could a consciousness of guilt itself, wound me so forcibly, so keenly, as your suspecting I am guilty!”

“Again, then,” cried Cecilia, “shall I subject myself to a scene of such disgrace and horror? No, never!—The punishment of my error shall at least secure its reformation. Yet if I merit your reproaches, I deserve not your regard; cease, therefore, to profess any for me, or make them no more.”

“Shew but to them,” cried he, “the smallest sensibility, shew but for me the most distant concern, and I will try to bear my disappointment without murmuring, and submit to your decrees as to those from which there is no appeal: but to wound without deigning even to look at what you destroy,—to shoot at random those arrows that are pointed with poison,—to see them fasten on the heart, and corrode its vital functions, yet look on without compunction, or turn away with cold disdain,—Oh where is the candour I thought lodged in Cecilia! where the justice, the equity, I believed a part of herself!”

“After all that has past,” said Cecilia, sensibly touched by his distress, “I expected not these complaints, nor that, from me, any assurances would be wanted; yet, if it will quiet your mind, if it will better reconcile you to our separation–”

“Oh fatal prelude!” interrupted he, “what on earth can quiet my mind that leads to our separation?—Give to me no condescension with any such view,—preserve your indifference, persevere in your coldness, triumph still in your power of inspiring those feelings you can never return,—all, every thing is more supportable than to talk of our separation!”

“Yet how,” cried she, “parted, torn asunder as we have been, how is it now to be avoided?”

“Trust in my honour! Shew me but the confidence which I will venture to say I deserve, and then will that union no longer be impeded, which in future, I am certain, will never be repented!”

“Good heaven, what a request! faith so implicit would be frenzy.”

“You doubt, then, my integrity? You suspect–”

“Indeed I do not; yet in a case of such importance, what ought to guide me but my own reason, my own conscience, my own sense of right? Pain me not, therefore, with reproaches, distress me no more with entreaties, when I solemnly declare that no earthly consideration shall ever again make me promise you my hand, while the terror of Mrs Delvile’s displeasure has possession of my heart. And now adieu.”

“You give me, then, up?”

“Be patient, I beseech you; and attempt not to follow me; ‘tis a step I cannot permit.”

“Not follow you? And who has power to prevent me?”

“*I* have, Sir, if to incur my endless resentment is of any consequence to you.”

She then, with an air of determined steadiness, moved on; Mrs Charlton, assisted by the servants, being already upon the stairs.

“O tyranny!” cried he, “what submission is it you exact!—May I not even enquire into the dreadful mystery of this morning?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“And may I not acquaint you with it, should it be discovered?”

“I shall not be sorry to hear it. Adieu.”

She was now half way down the stairs; when, losing all forbearance, he hastily flew after her, and endeavouring to stop her, called out, “If you do not hate and detest me,—if I am not loathsome

and abhorrent to you, O quit me not thus insensibly!—Cecilia! my beloved Cecilia!—speak to me, at least, one word of less severity! Look at me once more, and tell me we part not for-ever!"

Cecilia then turned round, and while a starting tear shewed her sympathetic distress, said, "Why will you thus oppress me with entreaties I ought not to gratify?—Have I not accompanied you to the altar,—and can you doubt what I have thought of you?"

"*Have* thought?—Oh Cecilia!—is it then all over?"

"Pray suffer me to go quietly, and fear not I shall go too happily! Suppress your own feelings, rather than seek to awaken mine. Alas! there is little occasion!—Oh Mr Delvile! were our connection opposed by no duty, and repugnant to no friends, were it attended by no impropriety, and carried on with no necessity of disguise,—you would not thus charge me with indifference, you would not suspect me of insensibility,—Oh no! the choice of my heart would then be its glory, and all I now blush to feel, I should openly and with pride acknowledge!"

She then hurried to the chaise, Delvile pursuing her with thanks and blessings, and gratefully assuring her, as he handed her into it, that he would obey all her injunctions, and not even attempt to see her, till he could bring her some intelligence concerning the morning's transaction.

The chaise then drove off.

CHAPTER iii. – A CONSTERNATION

The journey was melancholy and tedious: Mrs Charlton, extremely fatigued by the unusual hurry and exercise both of mind and body which she had lately gone through, was obliged to travel very slowly, and to lie upon the road. Cecilia, however, was in no haste to proceed: she was going to no one she wished to see, she was wholly without expectation of meeting with any thing that could give her pleasure. The unfortunate expedition in which she had been engaged, left her now nothing but regret, and only promised her in future sorrow and mortification.

Mrs Charlton, after her return home, still continued ill, and Cecilia, who constantly attended her, had the additional affliction of imputing her indisposition to herself. Every thing she thought conspired to punish the error she had committed; her proceedings were discovered, though her motives were unknown; the Delvile family could not fail to hear of her enterprize, and while they attributed it to her temerity, they would exult in its failure: but chiefly hung upon her mind the unaccountable prohibition of her marriage. Whence that could proceed she was wholly without ability to divine, yet her surmizes were not more fruitless than various. At one moment she imagined it some frolic of Morrice, at another some perfidy of Monckton, and at another an idle and unmeaning trick of some stranger to them all. But none of these suppositions carried with them any air of probability; Morrice, even if he had watched their motions and pursued them to the church, which his inquisitive impertinence made by no means impossible, could yet hardly have either time or opportunity to engage any woman in so extraordinary an undertaking; Mr Monckton, however averse to the connection, she considered as a man of too much honour to break it off in a manner so alarming and disgraceful; and mischief so wanton in any stranger, seemed to require a share of unfeeling effrontery, which could fall to the lot of so few as to make this suggestion unnatural and incredible.

Sometimes she imagined that Delvile might formerly have been affianced to some woman, who having accidentally discovered his intentions, took this desperate method of rendering them abortive: but this was a short-lived thought, and speedily gave way to her esteem for his general character, and her confidence in the firmness of his probity.

All, therefore, was dark and mysterious; conjecture was baffled, and meditation was useless. Her opinions were unfixed, and her heart was miserable; she could only be steady in believing Delvile as unhappy as herself, and only find consolation in believing him, also, as blameless.

Three days passed thus, without incident or intelligence; her time wholly occupied in attending Mrs Charlton; her thoughts all engrossed upon her own situation: but upon the fourth day she was informed that a lady was in the parlour, who desired to speak with her.

She presently went down stairs,—and, upon entering the room, perceived Mrs Delvile!

Seized with astonishment and fear, she stopt short, and, looking aghast, held by the door, robbed of all power to receive so unexpected and unwelcome a visitor, by an internal sensation of guilt, mingled with a dread of discovery and reproach.

Mrs Delvile, addressing her with the coldest politeness, said, “I fear I have surprised you; I am sorry I had not time to acquaint you of my intention to wait upon you.”

Cecilia then, moving from the door, faintly answered, “I cannot, madam, but be honoured by your notice, whenever you are pleased to confer it.”

They then sat down; Mrs Delvile preserving an air the most formal and distant, and Cecilia half sinking with apprehensive dismay.

After a short and ill-boding silence, “I mean not,” said Mrs Delvile, “to embarrass or distress you; I will not, therefore, keep you in suspense of the purport of my visit. I come not to make enquiries, I come not to put your sincerity to any trial, nor to torture your delicacy; I dispense with all explanation, for I have not one doubt to solve: I *know* what has passed, I *know* that my son loves you.”

Not all her secret alarm, nor all the perturbation of her fears, had taught Cecilia to expect so direct an attack, nor enabled her to bear the shock of it with any composure: she could not speak, she could not look at Mrs Delvile; she arose, and walked to the window, without knowing what she was doing.

Here, however, her distress was not likely to diminish; for the first sight she saw was Fidel, who barked, and jumped up at the window to lick her hands.

"Good God! Fidel here!" exclaimed Mrs Delvile, amazed.

Cecilia, totally overpowered, covered her glowing face with both her hands, and sunk into a chair.

Mrs Delvile for a few minutes was silent; and then, following her, said, "Imagine not I am making any discovery, nor suspect me of any design to develop your sentiments. That Mortimer could love in vain I never, believed; that Miss Beverley, possessing so much merit, could be blind to it in another, I never thought possible. I mean not, therefore, to solicit any account or explanation, but merely to beg your patience while I talk to you myself, and your permission to speak to you with openness and truth."

Cecilia, though relieved by this calmness from all apprehension of reproach, found in her manner a coldness that convinced her of the loss of her affection, and in the introduction to her business a solemnity that assured her what she should decree would be unalterable. She uncovered her face to shew her respectful attention, but she could not raise it up, and could not utter a word.

Mrs Delvile then seated herself next her, and gravely continued her discourse.

"Miss Beverley, however little acquainted with the state of our family affairs, can scarcely have been uninformed that a fortune such as hers seems almost all that family can desire; nor can she have failed to observe, that her merit and accomplishments have no where been more felt and admired: the choice therefore of Mortimer she could not doubt would have our sanction, and when she honoured his proposals with her favour, she might naturally conclude she gave happiness and pleasure to all his friends."

Cecilia, superior to accepting a palliation of which she felt herself undeserving, now lifted up her head, and forcing herself to speak, said "No, madam, I will not deceive you, for I have never been deceived myself: I presumed not to expect your approbation,—though in missing it I have for ever lost my own!"

"Has Mortimer, then," cried she with eagerness, "been strictly honourable? has he neither beguiled nor betrayed you?"

"No, madam," said she, blushing, "I have nothing to reproach him with."

"Then he is indeed my son!" cried Mrs Delvile, with emotion; "had he been treacherous to you, while disobedient to us, I had indisputably renounced him."

Cecilia, who now seemed the only culprit, felt herself in a state of humiliation not to be borne; she collected, therefore, all her courage, and said, "I have cleared Mr Delvile; permit me, madam, now, to say something for myself."

"Certainly; you cannot oblige me more than by speaking without disguise."

"It is not in the hope of regaining your good opinion,—that, I see, is lost!—but merely—"

"No, not lost," said Mrs Delvile, "but if once it was yet higher, the fault was my own, in indulging an expectation of perfection to which human nature is perhaps unequal."

Ah, then, thought Cecilia, all is over! the contempt I so much feared is incurred, and though it may be softened, it can never be removed!

"Speak, then, and with sincerity," she continued, "all you wish me to hear, and then grant me your attention in return to the purpose of my present journey."

"I have little, madam," answered the depressed Cecilia, "to say; you tell me you already know all that has past; I will not, therefore, pretend to take any merit from revealing it: I will only add, that my consent to this transaction has made me miserable almost from the moment I gave it; that I meant

and wished to retract as soon as reflection pointed out to me my error, and that circumstances the most perverse, not blindness to propriety, nor stubbornness in wrong, led me to make, at last, that fatal attempt, of which the recollection, to my last hour, must fill me with regret and shame."

"I wonder not," said Mrs Delvile, "that in a situation where delicacy was so much less requisite than courage, Miss Beverley should feel herself distressed and unhappy. A mind such as hers could never err with impunity; and it is solely from a certainty of her innate sense of right, that I venture to wait upon her now, and that I have any hope to influence *her* upon whose influence alone our whole family must in future depend. Shall I now proceed, or is there any thing you wish to say first?"

"No, madam, nothing."

"Hear me, then, I beg of you, with no predetermination to disregard me, but with an equitable resolution to attend to reason, and a candour that leaves an opening to conviction. Not easy, indeed, is such a task, to a mind pre-occupied with an intention to be guided by the dictates of inclination,–"

"You wrong me, indeed, madam!" interrupted Cecilia, greatly hurt, "my mind harbours no such intention, it has no desire but to be guided by duty, it is wretched with a consciousness of having failed in it! I pine, I sicken to recover my own good opinion; I should then no longer feel unworthy of yours; and whether or not I might be able to regain it, I should at least lose this cruel depression that now sinks me in your presence!"

"To regain it," said Mrs Delvile, "were to exercise but half your power, which at this moment enables you, if such is your wish, to make me think of you more highly than one human being ever thought of another. Do you condescend to hold this worth your while?"

Cecilia started at the question; her heart beat quick with struggling passions; she saw the sacrifice which was to be required, and her pride, her affronted pride, arose high to anticipate the rejection; but the design was combated by her affections, which opposed the indignant rashness, and told her that one hasty speech might separate her from Delvile for ever. When this painful conflict was over, of which Mrs Delvile patiently waited the issue, she answered, with much hesitation, "To regain your good opinion, madam, greatly, truly as I value it,—is what I now scarcely dare hope."

"Say not so," cried she, "since, if you hope, you cannot miss it. I purpose to point out to you the means to recover it, and to tell you how greatly I shall think myself your debtor if you refuse not to employ them."

She stopt; but Cecilia hung back; fearful of her own strength, she dared venture at no professions; yet, how either to support, or dispute her compliance, she dreaded to think.

"I come to you, then," Mrs Delvile solemnly resumed, "in the name of Mr Delvile, and in the name of our whole family; a family as ancient as it is honourable, as honourable as it is ancient. Consider me as its representative, and hear in me its common voice, common opinion, and common address.

"My son, the supporter of our house, the sole guardian of its name, and the heir of our united fortunes, has selected you, we know, for the lady of his choice, and so fondly has, fixed upon you his affections, that he is ready to relinquish us all in preference to subduing them. To yourself alone, then, can we apply, and I come to you—"

"O hold, madam, hold!" interrupted Cecilia, whose courage now revived from resentment, "I know, what you would say; you come to tell me of your disdain; you come to reproach my presumption, and to kill me with your contempt! There is little occasion for such a step; I am depressed, I am self-condemned already; spare me, therefore, this insupportable humiliation, wound me not with your scorn, oppress me not with your superiority! I aim at no competition, I attempt no vindication, I acknowledge my own littleness as readily as you can despise it, and nothing but indignity could urge me to defend it!"

"Believe me," said Mrs Delvile, "I meant not to hurt or offend you, and I am sorry if I have appeared to you either arrogant or assuming. The peculiar and perilous situation of my family has perhaps betrayed me into offensive expressions, and made me guilty myself of an ostentation which

in others has often disgusted me. Ill, indeed, can we any of us bear the test of experiment, when tried upon those subjects which call forth our particular propensities. We may strive to be disinterested, we may struggle to be impartial, but self will still predominate, still shew us the imperfection of our natures, and the narrowness of our souls. Yet acquit me, I beg, of any intentional insolence, and imagine not that in speaking highly of my own family, I, mean to depreciate yours: on the contrary, I know it to be respectable, I know, too, that were it the lowest in the kingdom, the first might envy it that it gave birth to such a daughter."

Cecilia, somewhat soothed by this speech, begged her pardon for having interrupted her, and she proceeded.

"To your family, then, I assure you, whatever may be the pride of our own, *you* being its offspring, we would not object. With your merit we are all well acquainted, your character has our highest esteem, and your fortune exceeds even our most sanguine desires. Strange at once and afflicting! that not all these requisites for the satisfaction of prudence, nor all these allurements for the gratification of happiness, can suffice to fulfil or to silence the claims of either! There are yet other demands to which we must attend, demands which ancestry and blood call upon us aloud to ratify! Such claimants are not to be neglected with impunity; they assert their rights with the authority of prescription, they forbid us alike either to bend to inclination, or stoop to interest, and from generation to generation their injuries will call out for redress, should their noble and long unsullied name be voluntarily consigned to oblivion!"

Cecilia, extremely struck by these words, scarce wondered, since so strong and so established were her opinions, that the obstacle to her marriage, though but one, should be considered as insuperable.

"Not, therefore, to *your* name are we averse," she continued, "but simply to our own more partial. To sink that, indeed, in *any* other, were base and unworthy:—what, then, must be the shock of my disappointment, should Mortimer Delvile, the darling of my hopes, the last survivor of his house, in whose birth I rejoiced as the promise of its support, in whose accomplishments I gloried, as the revival of its lustre,—should *he*, should, *my* son be the first to abandon it! to give up the name he seemed born to make live, and to cause in effect its utter annihilation!—Oh how should I know my son when an alien to his family! how bear to think I had cherished in my bosom the betrayer of its dearest interests, the destroyer of its very existence!"

Cecilia, scarce more afflicted than offended, now hastily answered, "Not for me, madam, shall he commit this crime, not on *my* account shall he be reprobated by his family! Think of him, therefore, no more, with any reference to me, for I would not be the cause of unworthiness or guilt in him to be mistress of the universe!"

"Nobly said!" cried Mrs Delvile, her eyes sparkling with joy, and her cheeks glowing with pleasure, "now again do I know Miss Beverley! now again see the refined, the excellent young woman, whose virtues taught me to expect the renunciation even of her own happiness, when found to be incompatible with her duty!"

Cecilia now trembled and turned pale; she scarce knew herself what she had said, but, she found by Mrs Delvile's construction of her words, they had been regarded as her final relinquishing of her son. She ardently wished to quit the room before she was called upon to confirm the sentence, but, she had not courage to make the effort, nor to rise, speak, or move.

"I grieve, indeed," continued Mrs Delvile, whose coldness and austerity were changed into mildness and compassion, "at the necessity I have been under to draw from you a concurrence so painful: but no other resource was in my power. My influence with Mortimer, whatever it may be, I have not any right to try, without obtaining your previous consent, since I regard him myself as bound to you in honour, and only to be released by your own virtuous desire. I will leave you, however, for my presence, I see, is oppressive to you. Farewell; and when you *can* forgive me, I think you *will*."

"I have nothing, madam," said Cecilia, coldly, "to forgive; you have only asserted your own dignity, and I have nobody to blame but myself, for having given you occasion."

"Alas," cried Mrs Delvile, "if worth and nobleness of soul on your part, if esteem and tenderest affection on mine, were all which that dignity which offends you requires, how should I crave the blessing of such a daughter! how rejoice in joining my son to excellence so like his own, and ensuring his happiness while I stimulated his virtue!"

"Do not talk to me of affection, madam," said Cecilia, turning away from her; "whatever you had for me is past,—even your esteem is gone,—you may pity me, indeed, but your pity is mixed with contempt, and I am not so abject as to find comfort from exciting it."

"O little," cried Mrs Delvile, looking at her with the utmost tenderness, "little do you see the state of my heart, for never have you appeared to me so worthy as at this moment! In tearing you from my son, I partake all the wretchedness I give, but your own sense of duty must something plead for the strictness with which I act up to mine."

She then moved towards the door.

"Is your carriage, madam," said Cecilia, struggling to disguise her inward anguish under an appearance of sullenness, "in waiting?"

Mrs Delvile then came back, and holding out her hand, while her eyes glistened with tears, said, "To part from you thus frigidly, while my heart so warmly admires you, is almost more than I can endure. Oh gentlest Cecilia! condemn not a mother who is impelled to this severity, who performing what she holds to be her duty, thinks the office her bitterest misfortune, who forsees in the rage of her husband, and the resistance of her son, all the misery of domestic contention, and who can only secure the honour of her family by destroying its peace!—You will not, then, give me your hand?—"

Cecilia, who had affected not to see that she waited for it, now coldly put it out, distantly [courtseying], and seeking to preserve her steadiness by avoiding to speak. Mrs Delvile took it, and as she repeated her adieu, affectionately pressed it to her lips; Cecilia, starting, and breathing short, from encreasing yet smothered agitation, called out "Why, why this condescension?—pray,—I entreat you, madam!—"

"Heaven bless you, my love!" said Mrs Delvile, dropping a tear upon the hand she still held, "heaven bless you, and restore the tranquillity you so nobly deserve!"

"Ah madam!" cried Cecilia, vainly striving to repress any longer the tears which now forced their way down her cheeks, "why will you break my heart with this kindness! why will you still compel me to love!—when now I almost wish to hate you!"—

"No, hate me not," said Mrs Delvile, kissing from her cheeks the tears that watered them, "hate me not, sweetest Cecilia, though in wounding your gentle bosom, I am almost detestable to myself. Even the cruel scene which awaits me with my son will not more deeply afflict me. But adieu,—I must now prepare for him!"

She then left the room: but Cecilia, whose pride had no power to resist this tenderness, ran hastily after her, saying "Shall I not see you again, madam?"

"You shall yourself decide," answered she; "if my coming will not give you more pain than pleasure, I will wait upon you whenever you please."

Cecilia sighed and paused; she knew not what to desire, yet rather wished any thing to be done, than quietly to sit down to uninterrupted reflection.

"Shall I postpone quitting this place," continued Mrs Delvile, "till to-morrow morning, and will you admit me this afternoon, should I call upon you again?"

"I should be sorry," said she, still hesitating, "to detain you,"—

"You will rejoice me," cried Mrs Delvile, "by bearing me in your sight."

And she then went into her carriage.

Cecilia, unfitted to attend her old friend, and unequal to the task of explaining to her the cruel scene in which she had just been engaged, then hastened to her own apartment. Her hitherto stifled

emotions broke forth in tears and repinings: her fate was finally determined, and its determination was not more unhappy than humiliating; she was openly rejected by the family whose alliance she was known to wish; she was compelled to refuse the man of her choice, though satisfied his affections were her own. A misery so peculiar she found hard to support, and almost bursting with conflicting passions, her heart alternately swelled from offended pride, and sunk from disappointed tenderness.

CHAPTER iv. – A PERTURBATION

Cecelia was still in this tempestuous state, when a message was brought her that a gentleman was below stairs, who begged to have the honour of seeing her. She concluded he was Delvile, and the thought of meeting him merely to communicate what must so bitterly afflict him, redoubled her distress, and she went down in an agony of perturbation and sorrow.

He met her at the door, where, before he could speak, "Mr Delvile," she cried, in a hurrying manner, "why will you come? Why will you thus insist upon seeing me, in defiance of every obstacle, and in contempt of my prohibition?"

"Good heavens," cried he, amazed, "whence this reproach? Did you not permit me to wait upon you with the result of my enquiries? Had I not your consent—but why do you look thus disturbed? —Your eyes are red,—you have been weeping.—Oh my Cecilia! have I any share in your sorrow? —Those tears, which never flow weakly, tell me, have they—has *one* of them been shed upon my account?"

"And what," cried she, "has been the result of your enquiries?—Speak quick, for I wish to know,—and in another instant I must be gone."

"How strange," cried the astonished Delvile, "is this language! how strange are these looks! What new has come to pass? Has any fresh calamity happened? Is there yet some evil which I do not expect?"

"Why will you not answer first?" cried she; "when *I* have spoken, you will perhaps be less willing."

"You terrify, you shock, you amaze me! What dreadful blow awaits me? For what horror are you preparing me?—That which I have just experienced, and which tore you from me even at the foot of the altar, still remains inexplicable, still continues to be involved in darkness and mystery; for the wretch who separated us I have never been able to discover."

"Have you procured, then, no intelligence?"

"No, none; though since we parted I have never rested a moment."

"Make, then, no further enquiry, for now all explanation would be useless. That we *were* parted, we know, though *why* we cannot tell: but that again we shall ever meet–"

She, stopt; her streaming eyes cast upwards, and a deep sigh bursting from her heart.

"Oh what," cried Delvile, endeavouring to take her hand, which she hastily withdrew from him, "what does this mean? loveliest, dearest Cecilia, my betrothed, my affianced wife! why flow those tears which agony only can wring from you? Why refuse me that hand which so lately was the pledge of your faith? Am I not the same Delvile to whom so few days since you gave it? Why will you not open to him your heart? Why thus distrust his honour, and repulse his tenderness? Oh why, giving him such exquisite misery, refuse him the smallest consolation?"

"What consolation," cried the weeping Cecilia, "can I give? Alas! it is not, perhaps, *you* who most want it!—"

Here the door was opened by one of the Miss Charltons, who came into the room with a message from her grandmother, requesting to see Cecilia. Cecilia, ashamed of being thus surprised with Delvile, and in tears, waited not either to make any excuse to him, or any answer to Miss Charlton, but instantly hurried out of the room;—not, however, to her old friend, whom now less than ever she could meet, but to her own apartment, where a very short indulgence of grief was succeeded by the severest examination of her own conduct.

A retrospection of this sort rarely brings much subject of exultation, when made with the rigid sincerity of secret impartiality: so much stronger is our reason than our virtue, so much higher our sense of duty than our performance!

All she had done she now repented, all she had said she disapproved; her conduct, seldom equal to her notions of right, was now infinitely below them, and the reproaches of her judgment made her forget for a while the afflictions which had misled it.

The sorrow to which she had openly given way in the presence of Delvile, though their total separation but the moment before had been finally decreed, she considered as a weak effusion of tenderness, injurious to delicacy, and censurable by propriety. “His power over my heart,” cried she, “it were now, indeed, too late to conceal, but his power over my understanding it is time to cancel. I am not to be his,—my own voice has ratified the renunciation, and since I made it to his mother, it must never, without her consent, be invalidated. Honour, therefore, to her, and regard for myself, equally command me to fly him, till I cease to be thus affected by his sight.”

When Delvile, therefore, sent up an entreaty that he might be again admitted into her presence, she returned for answer that she was not well, and could not see any body.

He then left the house, and, in a few minutes, she received the following note from him.

To Miss Beverley. You drive me from you, Cecilia, tortured with suspense, and distracted with apprehension, you drive me from you, certain of my misery, yet leaving me to bear it as I may! I would call you unfeeling, but that I saw you were unhappy; I would reproach you with tyranny, but that your eyes when you quitted me were swollen with weeping! I go, therefore, I obey the harsh mandate, since my absence is your desire, and I will shut myself up at Biddulph’s till I receive your commands. Yet disdain not to reflect that every instant will seem endless, while Cecilia must appear to me unjust, or wound my very soul by the recollection of her in sorrow. MORTIMER DELVILE.

The mixture of fondness and resentment with which this letter was dictated, marked so strongly the sufferings and disordered state of the writer, that all the softness of Cecilia returned when she perused it, and left her not a wish but to lessen his inquietude, by assurances of unalterable regard: yet she determined not to trust herself in his sight, certain they could only meet to grieve over each other, and conscious that a participation of sorrow would but prove a reciprocation of tenderness. Calling, therefore, upon her duty to resist her inclination, she resolved to commit the whole affair to the will of Mrs Delvile, to whom, though under no promise, she now considered herself responsible. Desirous, however, to shorten the period of Delvile’s uncertainty, she would not wait till the time she had appointed to see his mother, but wrote the following note to hasten their meeting.

To the Hon. Mrs Delvile. MADAM,—Your son is now at Bury; shall I acquaint him of your arrival? or will you announce it yourself? Inform me of your desire, and I will endeavour to fulfil it. As my own Agent I regard myself no longer; if, as yours, I can give pleasure, or be of service, I shall gladly receive your commands. I have the honour to be, Madam, your most obedient servant, CECILIA BEVERLEY.

When she had sent off this letter, her heart was more at ease, because reconciled with her conscience: she had sacrificed the son, she had resigned herself to the mother; it now only remained to heal her wounded pride, by suffering the sacrifice with dignity, and to recover her tranquility in virtue, by making the resignation without repining.

Her reflections, too, growing clearer as the mist of passion was dispersed, she recollected with confusion her cold and sullen behaviour to Mrs Delvile. That lady had but done what she had believed was her duty, and that duty was no more than she had been taught to expect from her. In the beginning of her visit, and while doubtful of its success, she had indeed, been austere, but the moment victory appeared in view, she became tender, affectionate and gentle. Her justice, therefore, condemned the resentment to which she had given way, and she fortified her mind for the interview which was to follow, by an earnest desire to make all reparation both to Mrs Delvile and herself for that which was past.

In this resolution she was not a little strengthened, by seriously considering with herself the great abatement to all her possible happiness, which must have been made by the humiliating circumstance of forcing herself into a family which held all connection with her as disgraceful. She desired not

to be the wife even of Delvile upon such terms, for the more she esteemed and admired him, the more anxious she became for his honour, and the less could she endure being regarded herself as the occasion of its diminution.

Now, therefore, her plan of conduct settled, with calmer spirits, though a heavy heart, she attended upon Mrs Charlton; but fearing to lose the steadiness she had just acquired before it should be called upon, if she trusted herself to relate the decision which had been made, she besought her for the present to dispense with the account, and then forced herself into conversation upon less interesting subjects.

This prudence had its proper effect, and with tolerable tranquility she heard Mrs Delvile again announced, and waited upon her in the parlour with an air of composure.

Not so did Mrs Delvile receive her; she was all eagerness and emotion; she flew to her the moment she appeared, and throwing her arms around her, warmly exclaimed "Oh charming girl! Saver of our family! preserver of our honour! How poor are words to express my admiration! how inadequate are thanks in return for such obligations as I owe you!"

"You owe me none, madam," said Cecilia, suppressing a sigh; "on my side will be all the obligation, if you can pardon the petulance of my behaviour this morning."

"Call not by so harsh a name," answered Mrs Delvile, "the keenness of a sensibility by which you have yourself alone been the sufferer. You have had a trial the most severe, and however able to sustain, it was impossible you should not feel it. That you should give up any man whose friends solicit not your alliance, your mind is too delicate to make wonderful; but your generosity in submitting, unasked, the arrangement of that resignation to those for whose interest it is made, and your high sense of honour in holding yourself accountable to me, though under no tie, and bound by no promise, mark a greatness of mind which calls for reverence rather than thanks, and which I never can praise half so much as I admire."

Cecilia, who received this applause but as a confirmation of her rejection, thanked her only by courtsying; and Mrs Delvile, having seated herself next her, continued her speech.

"My son, you have the goodness to tell me, is here,—have you seen him?"

"Yes, madam," answered she, blushing, "but hardly for a moment."

"And he knows not of my arrival?" No,—I believe he certainly does not."

"Sad then, is the trial which awaits him, and heavy for me the office I must perform! Do you expect to see him again?"

"No,—yes,—perhaps—indeed I hardly—" She stammered, and Mrs Delvile, taking her hand, said "Tell me, Miss Beverley, *why* should you see him again?"

Cecilia was thunderstruck by this question, and, colouring yet more deeply, looked down, but could not answer.

"Consider," continued Mrs Delvile, "the *purpose* of any further meeting; your union is impossible, you have nobly consented to relinquish all thoughts of it why then tear your own heart, and torture his, by an intercourse which seems nothing but an ill-judged invitation to fruitless and unavailing sorrow?"

Cecilia was still silent; the truth of the expostulation her reason acknowledged, but to assent to its consequence her whole heart refused.

"The ungenerous triumph of little female vanity," said Mrs Delvile, "is far, I am sure, from your mind, of which the enlargement and liberality will rather find consolation from lessening than from embittering his sufferings. Speak to me, then, and tell me honestly, judiciously, candidly tell me, will it not be wiser and more right, to avoid rather than seek an object which can only give birth to regret? an interview which can excite no sensations but of misery and sadness?" Cecilia then turned pale, she endeavoured to speak, but could not; she wished to comply,—yet to think she had seen him for the last time, to remember how abruptly she had parted from him, and to fear she had treated

him unkindly;—these were obstacles which opposed her concurrence, though both judgment and propriety demanded it.

"Can you, then," said Mrs Delvile, after a pause, "can you wish to see Mortimer merely to behold his grief? Can you desire he should see you, only to sharpen his affliction at your loss?"

"O no!" cried Cecilia, to whom this reproof restored speech and resolution, "I am not so despicable, I am not, I hope, so unworthy!—I will—be ruled by you wholly; I will commit to you every thing;—yet *once*, perhaps,—no more!"—

"Ah, my dear Miss Beverley! to meet confessedly for *once*,—what were that but planting a dagger in the heart of Mortimer? What were it but infusing poison into your own?

"If you think so, madam," said she, "I had better—I will certainly—" she sighed, stammered, and stopt.

"Hear me," cried Mrs Delvile, "and rather let me try to convince than persuade you. Were there any possibility, by argument, by reflection, or even by accident, to remove the obstacles to our connection, then would it be well to meet, for then might discussion turn to account, and an interchange of sentiments be productive of some happy expedients: but here—"

She hesitated, and Cecilia, shocked and ashamed, turned away her face, and cried "I know, madam, what you would say,—here all is over! and therefore—"

"Yet suffer me," interrupted she, "to be explicit, since we speak upon, this matter now for the last time. Here, then, I say, where not ONE doubt remains, where ALL is finally, though not happily decided, what can an interview produce? Mischief of every sort, pain, horror, and repining! To Mortimer you may think it would be kind, and grant it to his prayers, as an alleviation of his misery; mistaken notion! nothing could so greatly augment it. All his passions would be raised, all his prudence would be extinguished, his soul would be torn with resentment and regret, and force, only, would part him from you, when previously he knew that parting was to be eternal. To yourself—"

"Talk not, madam, of me," cried the unhappy Cecilia, "what you say of your son is sufficient, and I will yield–"

"Yet hear me," proceeded she, "and believe me not so unjust as to consider him alone; you, also, would be an equal, though a less stormy sufferer. You fancy, at this moment, that once more to meet him would soothe your uneasiness, and that to take of him a farewell, would soften the pain of the separation: how false such reasoning! how dangerous such consolation! acquainted ere you meet that you were to meet him no more, your heart would be all softness and grief, and at the very moment when tenderness should be banished from your intercourse, it would bear down all opposition of judgment, spirit, and dignity: you would hang upon every word, because every word would seem the last, every look, every expression would be rivetted in your memory, and his image in this parting distress would-be painted upon your mind, in colours that would eat into its peace, and perhaps never be erased."

"Enough, enough," said Cecilia, "I will not see him,—I will not even desire it!"

"Is this compliance or conviction? Is what I have said true, or only terrifying?"

"Both, both! I believe, indeed, the conflict would have overpowered me,—I see you are right,—and I thank you, madam, for saving me from a scene I might so cruelly have rued."

"Oh Daughter of my mind!" cried Mrs Delvile, rising and embracing her, "noble, generous, yet gentle Cecilia! what tie, what connection, could make you more dear to me? Who is there like you? Who half so excellent? So open to reason, so ingenuous in error! so rational! so just! so feeling, yet so wise!"

"You are very good," said Cecilia, with a forced serenity, "and I am thankful that your resentment for the past obstructs not your lenity for the present."

"Alas, my love, how shall I resent the past, when I ought myself to have foreseen this calamity! and I *should* have foreseen it, had I not been informed you were engaged, and upon your engagement built our security. Else had I been more alarmed, for my own admiration would have bid me look

forward to my son's. You were just, indeed, the woman he had least chance to resist, you were precisely the character to seize his very soul. To a softness the most fatally alluring, you join a dignity which rescues from their own contempt even the most humble of your admirers. You seem born to have all the world wish your exaltation, and no part of it murmur at your superiority. Were any obstacle but this insuperable one in the way, should nobles, nay, should princes offer their daughters to my election, I would reject without murmuring the most magnificent proposals, and take in triumph to my heart my son's nobler choice!"

"Oh madam," cried Cecilia, "talk not to me thus!—speak not such flattering words!—ah, rather scorn and upbraid me, tell me you despise my character, my family and my connections,—load, load me with contempt, but do not thus torture me with approbation!"

"Pardon me, sweetest girl, if I have awakened those emotions you so wisely seek to subdue. May my son but emulate your example, and my pride in his virtue shall be the solace of my affliction for his misfortunes."

She then tenderly embraced her, and abruptly took her leave.

Cecilia had now acted her part, and acted it to her own satisfaction; but the curtain dropt when Mrs Delvile left the house, nature resumed her rights, and the sorrow of her heart was no longer disguised or repressed. Some faint ray of hope had till now broke through the gloomiest cloud of her misery, and secretly flattered her that its dispersion was possible, though distant: but that ray was extinct, that hope was no more; she had solemnly promised to banish Delvile her sight, and his mother had absolutely declared that even the subject had been discussed for the last time.

Mrs Charlton, impatient of some explanation of the morning's transactions, soon sent again to beg Cecilia would come to her. Cecilia reluctantly obeyed, for she feared encreasing her indisposition by the intelligence she had to communicate; she struggled, therefore, to appear to her with tolerable calmness, and in briefly relating what had passed, forbore to mingle with the narrative her own feelings and unhappiness.

Mrs Charlton heard the account with the utmost concern; she accused Mrs Delvile of severity, and even of cruelty; she lamented the strange accident by which the marriage ceremony had been stopt, and regretted that it had not again been begun, as the only means to have rendered ineffectual the present fatal interposition. But the grief of Cecilia, however violent, induced her not to join in this regret; she mourned only the obstacle which had occasioned the separation, and not the incident which had merely interrupted the ceremony: convinced, by the conversations in which she had just been engaged, of Mrs Delvile's inflexibility, she rather rejoiced than repined that she had put it to no nearer trial: sorrow was all she felt; for her mind was too liberal to harbour resentment against a conduct which she saw was dictated by a sense of right; and too ductile and too affectionate to remain unmoved by the personal kindness which had softened the rejection, and the many marks of esteem and regard which had shewn her it was lamented, though considered as indispensable.

How and by whom this affair had been betrayed to Mrs Delvile she knew not; but the discovery was nothing less than surprising, since, by various unfortunate accidents, it was known to so many, and since, in the horror and confusion of the mysterious prohibition to the marriage, neither Delvile nor herself had thought of even attempting to give any caution to the witnesses of that scene, not to make it known: an attempt, however, which must almost necessarily have been unavailing, as the incident was too extraordinary and too singular to have any chance of suppression.

During this conversation, one of the servants came to inform Cecilia, that a man was below to enquire if there was no answer to the note he had brought in the forenoon.

Cecilia, greatly distressed, knew not upon what to resolve; that the patience of Delvile should be exhausted, she did not, indeed, wonder, and to relieve his anxiety was now almost her only wish; she would therefore instantly have written to him, confessed her sympathy in his sufferings, and besought him to endure with fortitude an evil which was no longer to be withstood: but she was uncertain whether he was yet acquainted with the journey of his mother to Bury, and having agreed to commit

to her the whole management of the affair, she feared it would be dishonourable to take any step in it without her concurrence. She returned, therefore, a message that she had yet no answer ready.

In a very few minutes Delvile called himself, and sent up an earnest request for permission to see her.

Here, at least, she had no perplexity; an interview she had given her positive word to refuse, and therefore, without a moment's hesitation, she bid the servant inform him she was particularly engaged, and sorry it was not in her power to see any company.

In the greatest perturbation he left the house, and immediately wrote to her the following lines.

To Miss Beverley. I entreat you to see me! if only for an instant, I entreat, I implore you to see me! Mrs Charlton may be present, all the world, if you wish it, may be present,—but deny me not admission, I supplicate, I conjure you!

I will call in an hour; in that time you may have finished your present engagement. I will otherwise wait longer, and call again. You will not, I think, turn me from' your door, and, till I have seen you, I can only live in its vicinity. M. D.

The man who brought this note, waited not for any answer.

Cecilia read it in an agony of mind inexpressible: she saw, by its style, how much Delvile was irritated, and her knowledge of his temper made her certain his irritation proceeded from believing himself ill-used. She ardently wished to appease and to quiet him, and regretted the necessity of appearing obdurate and unfeeling, even more, at that moment, than the separation itself. To a mind priding in its purity, and animated in its affections, few sensations can excite keener misery, than those by which an apprehension is raised of being thought worthless or ungrateful by the objects of our chosen regard. To be deprived of their society is less bitter, to be robbed of our own tranquillity by any other means, is less afflicting.

Yet to this it was necessary to submit, or incur the only penalty which, to such a mind, would be more severe, self-reproach: she had promised to be governed by Mrs Delvile, she had nothing, therefore, to do but obey her.

Yet *to turn*, as he expressed himself, *from the door*, a man who, but for an incident the most incomprehensible, would now have been sole master of herself and her actions, seemed so unkind and so tyrannical, that she could not endure to be within hearing of his repulse: she begged, therefore, the use of Mrs Charlton's carriage, and determined to make a visit to Mrs Harrel till Delvile and his mother had wholly quitted Bury. She was not, indeed, quite satisfied in going to the house of Mr Arnott, but she had no time to weigh objections, and knew not any other place to which still greater might not be started.

She wrote a short letter to Mrs Delvile, acquainting her with her purpose, and its reason, and repeating her assurances that she would be guided by her implicitly; and then, embracing Mrs Charlton, whom she left to the care of her grand-daughters, she got into a chaise, accompanied only by her maid, and one man and horse, and ordered the postilion to drive to Mr Arnott's.

CHAPTER v. – A COTTAGE

The evening was already far advanced, and before she arrived at the end of her little journey it was quite dark. When they came within a mile of Mr Arnott's house, the postilion, in turning too suddenly from the turnpike to the cross-road, overset the carriage. The accident, however, occasioned no other mischief than delaying their proceeding, and Cecilia and her maid were helped out of the chaise unhurt. The servants, assisted by a man who was walking upon the road, began lifting it up; and Cecilia, too busy within to be attentive to what passed without, disregarded what went forward, till she heard her footman call for help. She then hastily advanced to enquire what was the matter, and found that the passenger who had lent his aid, had, by working in the dark, unfortunately slipped his foot under one of the wheels, and so much hurt it, that without great pain he could not put it to the ground.

Cecilia immediately desired that the sufferer might be carried to his own home in the chaise, while she and the maid walked on to Mr Arnott's, attended by her servant on horseback.

This little incident proved of singular service to her upon first entering the house; Mrs Harrel was at supper with her brother, and hearing the voice of Cecilia in the hall, hastened with the extremest surprise to enquire what had occasioned so late a visit; followed by Mr Arnott, whose amazement was accompanied with a thousand other sensations too powerful for speech. Cecilia, unprepared with any excuse, instantly related the adventure she had met with on the road, which quieted their curiosity, by turning their attention to her personal safety. They ordered a room to be prepared for her, entreated her to go to rest with all speed, and postpone any further account till the next day. With this request she most gladly complied, happy to be spared the embarrassment of enquiry, and rejoiced to be relieved from the fatigue of conversation. Her night was restless and miserable: to know how Delvile would bear her flight was never a moment from her thoughts, and to hear whether he would obey or oppose his mother was her incessant wish. She was fixt, however, to be faithful in refusing to see him, and at least to suffer nothing new from her own enterprize or fault.

Early in the morning Mrs Harrel came to see her. She was eager to learn why, after invitations repeatedly refused, she was thus suddenly arrived without any; and she was still more eager to talk of herself, and relate the weary life she led thus shut up in the country, and confined to the society of her brother.

Cecilia evaded giving any immediate answer to her questions, and Mrs Harrel, happy in an opportunity to rehearse her own complaints, soon forgot that she had asked any, and, in a very short time, was perfectly, though imperceptibly, contented to be herself the only subject upon which they conversed.

But not such was the selfishness of Mr Arnott; and Cecilia, when she went down to breakfast, perceived with the utmost concern that he had passed a night as sleepless as her own. A visit so sudden, so unexpected, and so unaccountable, from an object that no discouragement could make him think of with indifference, had been a subject to him of conjecture and wonder that had revived all the hopes and the fears which had lately, though still unextinguished, lain dormant. The enquiries, however, which his sister had given up, he ventured not to renew, and thought himself but too happy in her presence, whatever might be the cause of her visit.

He perceived, however, immediately, the sadness that hung upon her mind, and his own was redoubled by the sight: Mrs Harrel, also, saw that she looked ill, but attributed it to the fatigue and fright of the preceding evening, well knowing that a similar accident would have made her ill herself, or fancy that she was so.

During breakfast, Cecilia sent for the postilion, to enquire of him how the man had fared, whose good-natured assistance in their distress had been so unfortunate to himself. He answered that he had turned out to be a day labourer, who lived about half a mile off. And then, partly to gratify her own humanity, and partly to find any other employment for herself and friends than uninteresting

conversation, she proposed that they should all walk to the poor man's habitation, and offer him some amends for the injury he had received. This was readily assented to, and the postilion directed them whither to go. The place was a cottage, situated upon a common; they entered it without ceremony, and found a clean looking woman at work.

Cecilia enquired for her husband, and was told that he was gone out to day-labour.

"I am very glad to hear it," returned she; "I hope then he has got the better of the accident he met with last night?"

"It was not him, madam," said the woman, "met with the accident, it was John;—there he is, working in the garden."

To the garden then they all went, and saw him upon the ground, weeding.

The moment they approached he arose, and, without speaking, began to limp, for he could hardly walk; away.

"I am sorry, master," said Cecilia, "that you are so much hurt. Have you had anything put to your foot?"

The man made no answer, but still turned away from her; a glance, however, of his eye, which the next instant he fixed upon the ground, startled her; she moved round to look at him again,—and perceived Mr Belfield!

"Good God!" she exclaimed; but seeing him still retreat, she recollected in a moment how little he would be obliged to her for betraying him, and suffering him to go on, turned back to her party, and led the way again into the house.

As soon as the first emotion of her surprise was over, she enquired how long John had belonged to this cottage, and what was his way of life.

The woman answered he had only been with them a week, and that he went out to day-labour with her husband.

Cecilia then, finding their stay kept him from his employment, and willing to save him the distress of being seen by Mr Arnott or Mrs Harrel, proposed their returning home. She grieved most sincerely at beholding in so melancholy an occupation a young man of such talents and abilities; she wished much to assist him, and began considering by what means it might be done, when, as they were walking from the cottage, a voice at some distance called out "Madam! Miss Beverley!" and, looking round, to her utter amazement she saw Belfield endeavouring to follow her.

She instantly stopt, and he advanced, his hat in his hand, and his whole air indicating he sought not to be disguised.

Surprised at this sudden change of behaviour, she then stept forward to meet him, accompanied by her friends: but when they came up to each other, she checked her desire of speaking, to leave him fully at liberty to make himself known, or keep concealed.

He bowed with a look of assumed gaiety and ease, but the deep scarlet that tinged his whole face manifested his internal confusion; and in a voice that attempted to sound lively, though its tremulous accents betrayed uneasiness and distress, he exclaimed, with a forced smile, "Is it possible Miss Beverley can deign to notice a poor miserable day-labourer such as I am? how will she be justified in the beau monde, when even the sight of such a wretch ought to fill her with horror? Henceforth let hysterics be blown to the winds, and let nerves be discarded from the female vocabulary, since a lady so young and fair can stand this shock without hartshorn or fainting!"

"I am happy," answered Cecilia, "to find your spirits so good; yet my own, I must confess, are not raised by seeing you in this strange situation."

"My spirits!" cried he, with an air of defiance, "never were they better, never so good as at this moment. Strange as seems my situation, it is all that I wish; I have found out, at last, the true secret of happiness! that secret which so long I pursued in vain, but which always eluded my grasp, till the instant of despair arrived, when, slackening my pace, I gave it up as a phantom. Go from me, I cried, I will be cheated no more! thou airy bubble! thou fleeting shadow! I will live no longer in thy

sight, since thy beams dazzle without warming me! Mankind seems only composed as matter for thy experiments, and I will quit the whole race, that thy delusions may be presented to me no more!"

This romantic flight, which startled even Cecilia, though acquainted with his character, gave to Mrs Harrel and Mr Arnott the utmost surprize; his appearance, and the account they had just heard of him, having by no means prepared them for such sentiments or such language.

"Is then this great secret of happiness," said Cecilia, "nothing, at last, but total seclusion from the world?"

"No, madam," answered he, "it is Labour with Independence."

Cecilia now wished much to ask some explanation of his affairs, but was doubtful whether he would gratify her before Mrs Harrel and Mr Arnott, and hurt to keep him standing, though he leant upon a stick; she told him, therefore, she would at present detain him no longer, but endeavour again to see him before she quitted her friends.

Mr Arnott then interfered, and desired his sister would entreat Miss Beverley to invite whom she pleased to his house.

Cecilia thanked him, and instantly asked Belfield to call upon her in the afternoon.

"No, madam, no," cried he, "I have done with visits and society! I will not so soon break through a system with much difficulty formed, when all my future tranquility depends upon adhering to it. The worthlessness of mankind has disgusted me with the world, and my resolution in quitting it shall be immoveable as its baseness."

"I must not venture then," said Cecilia, "to enquire—"

"Enquire, madam," interrupted he, with quickness, "what you please: there is nothing I will not answer to you,—to this lady, to this gentleman, to any and to every body. What can I wish to conceal, where I have nothing to gain or to lose? When first, indeed, I saw you, I involuntarily shrunk; a weak shame for a moment seized me, I felt fallen and debased, and I wished to avoid you: but a little recollection brought me back to my senses, And where, cried I, is the disgrace of exercising for my subsistence the strength with which I am endued? and why should I blush to lead the life which uncorrupted Nature first prescribed to man?"

"Well, then," said Cecilia, more and more interested to hear him, "if you will not visit us, will you at least permit us to return with you to some place where you can be seated?"

"I will with pleasure," cried he, "go to any place where you may be seated yourselves; but for me, I have ceased to regard accommodation or inconvenience."

They then all went back to the cottage, which was now empty, the woman being out at work.

"Will you then, Sir," said Cecilia, "give me leave to enquire whether Lord Vannelt is acquainted with your retirement, and if it will not much surprize and disappoint him?"

"Lord Vannelt," cried he, haughtily, "has no right to be surprised. I would have quitted *his* house, if no other, not even this cottage, had a roof to afford me shelter!"

"I am sorry, indeed, to hear it," said Cecilia; "I had hoped he would have known your value, and merited your regard."

"Ill-usage," answered he, "is as hard to relate as to be endured. There is commonly something pitiful in a complaint; and though oppression in a general sense provokes the wrath of mankind, the investigation of its minuter circumstances excites nothing but derision. Those who give the offence, by the worthy few may be hated; but those who receive it, by the world at large will be despised. Conscious of this, I disdained making any appeal; myself the only sufferer, I had a right to be the only judge, and, shaking off the base trammels of interest and subjection, I quitted the house in silent indignation, not chusing to remonstrate, where I desired not to be reconciled."

"And was there no mode of life," said Cecilia, "to adopt, but living with Lord Vannelt, or giving up the whole world?"

"I weighed every thing maturely," answered he, "before I made my determination, and I found it so much, the most eligible, that I am certain I can never repent it. I had friends who would with

pleasure have presented me to some other nobleman; but my whole heart revolted against leading that kind of life, and I would not, therefore, idly rove from one great man to another, adding ill-will to disgrace, and pursuing hope in defiance of common sense; no; when I quitted Lord Vannelt, I resolved to give up patronage for ever.

"I retired to private lodgings to deliberate what next could be done. I had lived in many ways, I had been unfortunate or imprudent in all. The law I had tried, but its rudiments were tedious and disgusting; the army, too, but there found my mind more fatigued with indolence, than my body with action; general dissipation had then its turn, but the expence to which it led was ruinous, and self-reproach baffled pleasure while I pursued it; I have even—yes, there are few things I have left untried, —I have even,—for why now disguise it?—"

He stopt and coloured, but in a quicker voice presently proceeded.

"Trade, also, has had its share in my experiments; for that, in truth, I was originally destined, —but my education had ill suited me to such a destination, and the trader's first maxim I reversed, in lavishing when I ought to have accumulated.

"What, then, remained for me? to run over again the same irksome round I had not patience, and to attempt any thing new I was unqualified: money I had none; my friends I could bear to burthen no longer; a fortnight I lingered in wretched irresolution,—a simple accident at the end of it happily settled me; I was walking, one morning, in Hyde Park, forming a thousand plans for my future life, but quarrelling with them all; when a gentleman met me on horseback, from whom, at my Lord Vannelt's, I had received particular civilities; I looked another way not to be seen by him, and the change in my dress since I left his Lordship's made me easily pass unnoticed. He had rode on, however, but a few yards, before, by some accident or mismanagement, he had a fall from his horse. Forgetting all my caution, I flew instantly to his assistance; he was bruised, but not otherwise hurt; I helpt him up, and he leant 'pon my arm; in my haste of enquiring how he had fared, I called him by his name. He knew me, but looked surprised at my appearance; he was speaking to me, however, with kindness, when seeing some gentlemen of his acquaintance galloping up to him, he hastily disengaged himself from me, and instantly beginning to recount to them what had happened, he sedulously looked another way, and joining his new companions, walked off without taking further notice of me. For a moment I was almost tempted to trouble him to come back; but a little recollection told me how ill he deserved my resentment, and bid me transfer it for the future from the pitiful individual to the worthless community.

"Here finished my deliberation; the disgust to the world which I had already conceived, this little incident confirmed; I saw it was only made for the great and the rich;—poor, therefore, and low, what had I to do in it? I determined to quit it for ever, and to end every disappointment, by crushing every hope.

"I wrote to Lord Vannelt to send my trunks to my mother; I wrote to my mother that I was well, and would soon let her hear more: I then paid off my lodgings, and 'shaking the dust from my feet,' bid a long adieu to London; and, committing my route to chance, strole on into the country, without knowing or caring which way.

"My first thought was simply to seek retirement, and to depend for my future repose upon nothing but a total seclusion from society: but my slow method of travelling gave me time for reflection, and reflection soon showed me the error of this notion.

"Guilt, cried I, may, indeed, be avoided by solitude; but will misery? will regret? will deep dejection of mind? no, they will follow more assiduously than ever; for what is there to oppose them, where neither business occupies the time, nor hope the imagination? where the past has left nothing but resentment, and the future opens only to a dismal, uninteresting void? No stranger to life, I knew human nature could not exist on such terms; still less a stranger to books, I respected the voice of wisdom and experience in the first of moralists, and most enlightened of men, [Footnote: Dr

Johnson.] and reading the letter of Cowley, I saw the vanity and absurdity of *panting after solitude*. [Footnote: Life of Cowley, p.34.]

"I sought not, therefore, a cell; but, since I purposed to live for myself, I determined for myself also to think. Servility of imitation has ever been as much my scorn as servility of dependence; I resolved, therefore, to strike out something new, and no more to retire as every other man had retired, than to linger in the world as every other man had lingered.

"The result of all you now see. I found out this cottage, and took up my abode in it. I am here out of the way of all society, yet avoid the great evil of retreat, *having nothing to do*. I am constantly, not capriciously employed, and the exercise which benefits my health, imperceptibly raises my spirits in despight of adversity. I am removed from all temptation, I have scarce even the power to do wrong; I have no object for ambition, for repining I have no time:—I have, found out, I repeat, the true secret of happiness, Labour with Independence."

He stopt; and Cecilia, who had listened to this narrative with a mixture of compassion, admiration and censure, was too much struck with its singularity to be readily able to answer it. Her curiosity to hear him had sprung wholly from her desire to assist him, and she had expected from his story to gather some hint upon which her services might be offered. But none had occurred; he professed himself fully satisfied with his situation; and though reason and probability contradicted the profession, she could not venture to dispute it with any delicacy or prudence.

She thanked him, therefore, for his relation, with many apologies for the trouble she had given him, and added, "I must not express my concern for misfortunes which you seem to regard as conducive to your contentment, nor remonstrate at the step you have taken, since you have been led to it by choice, not necessity: but yet, you must pardon me if I cannot help hoping I shall some time see you happier, according to the common, however vulgar ideas of the rest of the world."

"No, never, never! I am sick of mankind, not from theory, but experience; and the precautions I have taken against mental fatigue, will secure me from repentance, or any desire of change; for it is not the active, but the indolent who weary; it is not the temperate, but the pampered who are capricious."

"Is your sister, Sir, acquainted with this change in your fortune and opinions?"

"Poor girl, no! She and her unhappy mother have borne but too long with my enterprizes and misfortunes. Even yet they would sacrifice whatever they possess to enable me to play once more the game so often lost; but I will not abuse their affection, nor suffer them again to be slaves to my caprices, nor dupes to their own delusive expectations. I have sent them word I am happy; I have not yet told them how or where. I fear much the affliction of their disappointment, and, for a while, shall conceal from them my situation, which they would fancy was disgraceful, and grieve at as cruel."

"And is it not cruel?" said Cecilia, "is labour indeed so sweet? and can you seriously derive happiness from what all others consider as misery?"

"Not sweet," answered he, "in itself; but sweet, most sweet and salutary in its effects. When I work, I forget all the world; my projects for the future, my disappointments from the past. Mental fatigue is overpowered by personal; I toil till I require rest, and that rest which nature, not luxury demands, leads not to idle meditation, but to sound, heavy, necessary sleep. I awake the next morning to the same thought-exiling business, work again till my powers are exhausted, and am relieved again at night by the same health-recruiting insensibility."

"And if this," cried Cecilia, "is the life of happiness, why have we so many complaints of the sufferings of the poor, and why so eternally do we hear of their hardships and distress?"

"They have known no other life. They are strangers, therefore, to the felicity of their lot. Had they mingled in the world, fed high their fancy with hope, and looked forward with expectation of enjoyment; had they been courted by the great, and offered with profusion adulation for their abilities, yet, even when starving, been offered nothing else!—had they seen an attentive circle wait all its entertainment from their powers, yet found themselves forgotten as soon as out of sight, and perceived themselves avoided when no longer buffoons!—Oh had they known and felt provocations such as

these, how gladly would their resentful spirits turn from the whole unfeeling race, and how would they respect that noble and manly labour, which at once disentangles them from such subjugating snares, and enables them to fly the ingratitude they abhor! Without the contrast of vice, virtue unloved may be lovely; without the experience of misery, happiness is simply a dull privation of evil."

"And are you so content," cried Cecilia, "with your present situation, as even to think it offers you reparation for your past sufferings?"

"Content!" repeated he with energy, "O more than content, I am proud of my present situation! I glory in chewing to the world, glory still more in shewing to myself, that those whom I cannot but despise I will not scruple to defy, and that where I have been treated unworthily, I will scorn to be obliged."

"But will you pardon me," said Cecilia, "should I ask again, why in quitting Lord Vannelt, you concluded no one else worthy a trial?"

"Because it was less my Lord Vannelt, madam, than my own situation, that disgusted me: for though I liked not his behaviour, I found him a man too generally esteemed to flatter myself better usage would await me in merely changing my abode, while my station was the same. I believe, indeed, he never meant to offend me; but I was offended the more that he should think me an object to receive indignity without knowing it. To have had this pointed out to him, would have been at once mortifying and vain; for delicacy, like taste, can only partially be taught, and will always be superficial and erring where it is not innate. Those wrongs, which though too trifling to resent, are too humiliating to be borne, speech can convey no idea of; the soul must feel, or the understanding can never comprehend them."

"But surely," said Cecilia, "though people of refinement are rare, they yet exist; why, then, remove yourself from the possibility of meeting with them?"

"Must I run about the nation," cried he, "proclaiming my distress, and describing my temper? telling the world that though dependent I demand respect as well as assistance; and publishing to mankind, that though poor I will accept no gifts if offered with contumely? Who will listen to such an account? who will care for my misfortunes, but as they may humble me to his service? Who will hear my mortifications, but to say I deserve them? what has the world to do with my feelings and peculiarities? I know it too well to think calamity will soften it; I need no new lessons to instruct me that to conquer affliction is more wise than to relate it."

"Unfortunate as you have been," said Cecilia, "I cannot wonder at your asperity; but yet, it is surely no more than justice to acknowledge, that hard-heartedness to distress is by no means the fault of the present times: on the contrary, it is scarce sooner made known, than every one is ready to contribute to its relief."

"And how contribute?" cried he, "by a paltry donation of money? Yes, the man whose only want is a few guineas, may, indeed, obtain them; but he who asks kindness and protection, whose oppressed spirit calls for consolation even more than his ruined fortune for repair, how is his struggling soul, if superior to his fate, to brook the ostentation of patronage, and the insolence of condescension? Yes, yes, the world will save the poor beggar who is starving; but the fallen wretch, who will not cringe for his support, may consume in his own wretchedness without pity and without help!"

Cecilia now saw that the wound his sensibility had received was too painful for argument, and too recent immediately to be healed. She forbore, therefore, to detain him any longer, but expressing her best wishes, without venturing to hint at her services, she arose, and they all took their leave;—Belfield hastening, as they went, to return to the garden, where, looking over the hedge as they passed, they saw him employed again in weeding, with the eagerness of a man who pursues his favourite occupation.

Cecilia half forgot her own anxieties and sadness, in the concern which she felt for this unfortunate and extraordinary young man. She wished much to devise some means for drawing him from a life of such hardship and obscurity; but what to a man thus "jealous in honour," thus scrupulous

in delicacy, could she propose, without more risk of offence, than probability of obliging? His account had, indeed, convinced her how much he stood in need of assistance, but it had shewn her no less how fastidious he would be in receiving it.

Nor was she wholly without fear that an earnest solicitude to serve him, his youth, talents, and striking manners considered, might occasion even in himself a misconstruction of her motives, such as she already had given birth to in his forward and partial mother.

The present, therefore, all circumstances weighed, seemed no season for her liberality, which she yet resolved to exert the first moment it was unopposed by propriety.

CHAPTER vi. – A CONTEST

The rest of the day was passed in discussing this adventure; but in the evening, Cecilia's interest in it was all sunk, by the reception of the following letter from Mrs Delvile.

To Miss Beverley.

I grieve to interrupt the tranquillity of a retirement so judiciously chosen, and I lament the necessity of again calling to trial the virtue of which the exertion, though so captivating, is so painful; but alas, my excellent young friend, we came not hither to enjoy, but to suffer; and happy only are those whose sufferings have neither by folly been sought, nor by guilt been merited, but arising merely from the imperfection of humanity, have been resisted with fortitude, or endured with patience.

I am informed of your virtuous steadiness, which corresponds with my expectations, while it excites my respect. All further conflict I had hoped to have saved you; and to the triumph of your goodness I had trusted for the recovery of your peace: but Mortimer has disappointed me, and our work is still unfinished.

He avers that he is solemnly engaged to you, and in pleading to me his honour, he silences both expostulation and authority. From your own words alone will he acknowledge his dismission; and notwithstanding my reluctance to impose upon you this task, I cannot silence or quiet him without making the request.

For a purpose such as this, can you, then, admit us? Can you bear with your own lips to confirm the irrevocable decision? You will feel, I am sure, for the unfortunate Mortimer, and it was earnestly my desire to spare you the sight of his affliction; yet such is my confidence in your prudence, that since I find him bent upon seeing you, I am not without hope, that from witnessing the greatness of your mind, the interview may rather calm than inflame him.

This proposal you will take into consideration, and if you are able, upon such terms, to again meet my son, we will wait upon you together, where and when you will appoint; but if the gentleness of your nature will make the effort too severe for you, scruple not to decline it, for Mortimer, when he knows your pleasure, will submit to it as he ought.

Adieu, most amiable and but too lovely Cecilia; whatever you determine, be sure of my concurrence, for nobly have you earned, and ever must you retain, the esteem, the affection, and the gratitude of AUGUSTA DELVILE.

"Alas," cried Cecilia, "when shall I be at rest? when cease to be persecuted by new conflicts! Oh why must I so often, so cruelly, though so reluctantly, reject and reprove the man who of all men I wish to accept and to please!"

But yet, though repining at this hard necessity, she hesitated not a moment in complying with Mrs Delvile's request, and immediately sent an answer that she would meet her the next morning at Mrs Charlton's.

She then returned to the parlour, and apologized to Mrs Harrel and Mr Arnott for the abruptness of her visit, and the suddenness of her departure. Mr Arnott heard her in silent dejection; and Mrs Harrel used all the persuasion in her power to prevail with her to stay, her presence being some relief to her solitude: but finding it ineffectual, she earnestly pressed her to hasten her entrance into her own house, that their absence might be shortened, and their meeting more sprightly.

Cecilia passed the night in planning her behaviour for the next day; she found how much was expected from her by Mrs Delvile, who had even exhorted her to decline the interview if doubtful of her own strength. Delvile's firmness in insisting the refusal should come directly from herself, surprised, gratified and perplexed her in turn; she had imagined, that from the moment of the discovery, he would implicitly have submitted to the award of a parent at once so reverenced and so beloved, and how he had summoned courage to contend with her she could not conjecture: yet that courage and that contention astonished not more than they soothed her, since, from her knowledge

of his filial tenderness, she considered them as the most indubitable proofs she had yet received of the fervour and constancy of his regard for her. But would he, when she had ratified the decision of his mother, forbear all further struggle, and for ever yield up all pretensions to her? this was the point upon which her uncertainty turned, and the ruling subject of her thoughts and meditation.

To be steady, however, herself, be his conduct what it might, was invariably her intention, and was all her ambition: yet earnestly she wished the meeting over, for she dreaded to see the sorrow of Delvile, and she dreaded still more the susceptibility of her own heart.

The next morning, to her great concern, Mr Arnott was waiting in the hall when she came down stairs, and so much grieved at her departure, that he handed her to the chaise without being able to speak to her, and hardly heard her thanks and compliments but by recollection after she was gone.

She arrived at Mrs Charlton's very early, and found her old friend in the same state she had left her. She communicated to her the purpose of her return, and begged she would keep her granddaughters up stairs, that the conference in the parlour might be uninterrupted and unheard.

She then made a forced and hasty breakfast, and went down to be ready to receive them. They came not till eleven o'clock, and the time of her waiting was passed in agonies of expectation.

At length they were announced, and at length they entered the room.

Cecilia, with her utmost efforts for courage, could hardly stand to receive them. They came in together, but Mrs Delvile, advancing before her son, and endeavouring so to stand as to intercept his view of her, with the hope that in a few instants her emotion would be less visible, said, in the most soothing accents, "What honour Miss Beverley does us by permitting this visit! I should have been sorry to have left Suffolk without the satisfaction of again seeing you; and my son, sensible of the high respect he owes you, was most unwilling to be gone, before he had paid you his devoirs."

Cecilia courtsied; but depressed by the cruel task which awaited her, had no power to speak; and Mrs Delvile, finding she still trembled, made her sit down, and drew a chair next to her.

Mean while Delvile, with an emotion far more violent, because wholly unrestrained, waited impatiently till the ceremonial of the reception was over, and then, approaching Cecilia, in a voice of perturbation and resentment, said, "In this presence, at least, I hope I may be heard; though my letters have been unanswered, my visits refused, though inexorably you have flown me—"

"Mortimer," interrupted Mrs Delvile, "forget not that what I have told you is irrevocable; you now meet Miss Beverley for no other purpose than to give and to receive a mutual release of all to or engagement with each other."

"Pardon me, madam," cried he, "this is a condition to which I have never assented. I come not to release, but to claim her! I am hers, and hers wholly! I protest it in the face of the world! The time, therefore, is now past for the sacrifice which you demand, since scarce are you more my mother, than I consider her as my wife."

Cecilia, amazed at this dauntless declaration, now almost lost her fear in her surprise; while Mrs Delvile, with an air calm though displeased, answered, "This is not a point to be at present discussed, and I had hoped you knew better what was due to your auditors. I only consented to this interview as a mark of your respect for Miss Beverley, to whom in propriety it belongs to break off this unfortunate connexion."

Cecilia, who at this call could no longer be silent, now gathered fortitude to say, "Whatever tie or obligation may be supposed to depend upon me, I have already relinquished; and I am now ready to declare—"

"That you wholly give me up?" interrupted Delvile, "is that what you would say?—Oh how have I offended you? how have I merited a displeasure that can draw upon me such a sentence?—Answer, speak to me, Cecilia, what is it I have done?"

"Nothing, Sir," said Cecilia, confounded at this language in the presence of his mother, "you have done nothing,—but yet—"

"Yet what?—have you conceived to me an aversion? has any dreadful and horrible antipathy succeeded to your esteem?—tell, tell me without disguise, do you hate, do you abhor me?"

Cecilia sighed, and turned away her head; and Mrs Delvile indignantly exclaimed, "What madness and absurdity! I scarce know you under the influence of such irrational violence. Why will you interrupt Miss Beverley in the only speech you ought to hear from her? Why, at once, oppress her, and irritate me, by words of more passion than reason? Go on, charming girl, finish what so wisely, so judiciously you were beginning, and then you shall be released from this turbulent persecution."

"No, madam, she must not go on!" cried Delvile, "if she does not utterly abhor me, I will not suffer her to go on;—Pardon, pardon me, Cecilia, but your too exquisite delicacy is betraying not only my happiness, but your own. Once more, therefore, I conjure you to hear me, and then if, deliberately and unbiassed, you renounce me, I will never more distress you by resisting your decree."

Cecilia, abashed and changing colour, was silent, and he proceeded.

"All that has past between us, the vows I have offered you of faith, constancy and affection, the consent I obtained from you to be legally mine, the bond of settlement I have had drawn up, and the high honour you conferred upon me in suffering me to lead you to the altar,—all these particulars are already known to so many, that the least reflection must convince you they will soon be concealed from none: tell me, then, if your own fame pleads not for me, and if the scruples which lead you to refuse, by taking another direction, will not, with much more propriety, urge, nay enjoin you to accept me!—You hesitate at least,—O Miss Beverley!—I see in that hesitation—"

"Nothing, nothing!" cried she, hastily, and checking her rising irresolution; "there is nothing for you to see, but that every way I now turn I have rendered myself miserable!"

"Mortimer," said Mrs Delvile, seized with terror as she penetrated into the mental yielding of Cecilia, "you have now spoken to Miss Beverley; and unwilling as I am to obtrude upon her our difference of sentiment, it is necessary, since she has heard you, that I, also, should claim her attention."

"First let her speak!" cried Delvile, who in her apparent wavering built new hopes, "first let her answer what she has already deigned to listen to."

"No, first let her hear!" cried Mrs Delvile, "for so only can she judge what answer will reflect upon her most honour."

Then, solemnly turning to Cecilia, she continued: "You see here, Miss Beverley, a young man who passionately adores you, and who forgets in his adoration friends, family, and connections, the opinions in which he has been educated, the honour of his house, his own former views, and all his primitive sense of duty, both public and private!—A passion built on such a defalcation of principle renders him unworthy your acceptance; and not more ignoble for him would be a union which would blot his name from the injured stock whence he sprung, than indelicate for you, who upon such terms ought to despise him."

"Heavens, madam," exclaimed Delvile, "what a speech!"

"O never," cried Cecilia, rising, "may I hear such another! Indeed, madam, there is no occasion to probe me so deeply, for I would not now enter your family, for all that the whole world could offer me!"

"At length, then, madam," cried Delvile, turning reproachfully to his mother, "are you satisfied? is your purpose now answered? and is the dagger you have transfixed in my heart sunk deep enough to appease you?"

"O could I draw it out," cried Mrs Delvile, "and leave upon it no stain of ignominy, with what joy should my own bosom receive it, to heal the wound I have most compulsatorily inflicted!—Were this excellent young creature portionless, I would not hesitate in giving my consent; every claim of interest would be overbalanced by her virtues, and I would not grieve to see you poor, where so conscious you were happy; but here to concede, would annihilate every hope with which hitherto I have looked up to my son."

"Let us now, then, madam," said Cecilia, "break up this conference. I have spoken, I have heard, the decree is past, and therefore,"—

"You are indeed an angel!" cried Mrs Delvile, rising and embracing her; "and never can I reproach my son with what has passed, when I consider for what an object the sacrifice was planned. *You* cannot be unhappy, you have purchased peace by the exercise of virtue, and the close of every day will bring to you a reward, in the sweets of a self-approving mind.—But we will part, since you think it right; I do wrong to occasion any delay."

"No, we will *not* part!" cried Delvile, with encreasing vehemence; "if you force me, madam, from her, you will drive me to distraction! What is there in this world that can offer me a recompense? And what can pride even to the proudest afford as an equivalent? Her perfections you acknowledge, her greatness of mind is like your own; she has generously given me her heart,—Oh sacred and fascinating charge! Shall I, after such a deposite, consent to an eternal separation? Repeal, repeal your sentence, my Cecilia! let us live to ourselves and our consciences, and leave the vain prejudices of the world to those who can be paid by them for the loss of all besides!"

"Is this conflict, then," said Mrs Delvile, "to last for-ever? Oh end it, Mortimer, finish it, and make me happy! she is just, and will forgive you, she is noble-minded, and will honour you. Fly, then, at this critical moment, for in flight alone is your safety; and then will your father see the son of his hopes, and then shall the fond blessings of your idolizing mother soothe all your affliction, and soften all your regret!"

"Oh madam!" cried Delvile, "for mercy, for humanity, forbear this cruel supplication!"

"Nay, more than supplication, you have my commands; commands you have never yet disputed, and misery, ten-fold misery, will follow their disobedience. Hear me, Mortimer, for I speak prophetically; I know your heart, I know it to be formed for rectitude and duty, or destined by their neglect to repentance and horror."

Delvile, struck by these words, turned suddenly from them both, and in gloomy despondence walked to the other end of the room. Mrs Delvile perceived the moment of her power, and determined to pursue the blow: taking, therefore, the hand of Cecilia, while her eyes sparkled with the animation of reviving hope, "See," she cried, pointing to her son, "see if I am deceived! can he bear even the suggestion of future contrition! Think you when it falls upon him, he will support it better? No; he will sink under it. And you, pure as you are of mind, and steadfast in principle, what would your chance be of happiness with a man who never erring till he knew you, could never look at you without regret, be his fondness what it might?"

"Oh madam," cried the greatly shocked Cecilia, "let him, then, see me no more!—take, take him all to yourself! forgive, console him! I will not have the misery of involving him in repentance, nor of incurring the reproaches of the mother he so much reverences!"

"Exalted creature!" cried Mrs Delvile; "tenderness such as this would confer honour upon a monarch." Then, calling out exultingly to her son, "See," she added, "how great a woman can act, when stimulated by generosity, and a just sense of duty! Follow then, at least, the example you ought to have led, and deserve my esteem and love, or be content to forego them."

"And can I only deserve them," said Delvile, in a tone of the deepest anguish, "by a compliance to which not merely my happiness, but my reason must be sacrificed? What honour do I injure that is not factitious? What evil threatens our union, that is not imaginary? In the general commerce of the world it may be right to yield to its prejudices, but in matters of serious importance, it is weakness to be shackled by scruples so frivolous, and it is cowardly to be governed by the customs we condemn. Religion and the laws of our country should then alone be consulted, and where those are neither opposed nor infringed, we should hold ourselves superior to all other considerations."

"Mistaken notions!" said Mrs Delvile; "and how long do you flatter yourself this independent happiness would endure? How long could you live contented by mere self-gratification, in defiance of the censure of mankind, the renunciation of your family, and the curses of your father?"

"The curses of my father!" repeated he, starting and shuddering, "O no, he could never be so barbarous!"

"He could," said she, steadily, "nor do I doubt but he would. If now, however, you are affected by the prospect of his disclaiming you, think but what you will feel when first forbid to appear before either of us! and think of your remorse for involving Miss Beverley in such disgrace!"

"O speak not such words!" cried he, with agonizing earnestness, "to disgrace her,—to be banished by you,—present not, I conjure you, such scenes to my imagination!"

"Yet would they be unavoidable," continued she; "nor have I said to you all; blinded as you now are by passion, your nobler feelings are only obscured, not extirpated; think, then, how they will all rise in revenge of your insulted dignity, when your name becomes a stranger to your ears, and you are first saluted by one so meanly adopted!—"

"Hold, hold, madam," interrupted he, "this is more than I can bear!"

"Heavens!" still continued she, disregarding his entreaty, "what in the universe can pay you for that first moment of indignity! Think of it well ere you proceed, and anticipate your sensations, lest the shock should wholly overcome you. How will the blood of your wronged ancestors rise into your guilty cheeks, and how will your heart throb with secret shame and reproach, when wished joy upon your marriage by the name of *Mr Beverley*!"

Delvile, stung to the soul, attempted not any answer, but walked about the room in the utmost disorder of mind. Cecilia would have retired, but feared irritating him to some extravagance; and Mrs Delvile, looking after him, added "For myself, I would still see, for I should pity your wife,—but NEVER would I behold my son when sunk into an object of compassion!"

"It shall not be!" cried he, in a transport of rage; "cease, cease to distract me!—be content, madam,—you have conquered!"

"Then you are my son!" cried she, rapturously embracing him; "now I know again my Mortimer! now I see the fair promise of his upright youth, and the flattering completion of my maternal expectations!"

Cecilia, finding all thus concluded, desired nothing so much as to congratulate them on their reconciliation; but having only said "Let *me*, too,—" her voice failed her, she stopt short, and hoping she had been unheard, would have glided out of the room.

But Delvile, penetrated and tortured, yet delighted at this sensibility, broke from his mother, and seizing her hand, exclaimed, "Oh Miss Beverley, if *you* are not happy–"

"I am! I am!" cried she, with quickness; "let me pass,—and think no more of me."

"That voice,—those looks,—" cried he, still holding her, "they speak not serenity!—Oh if I have injured your peace,—if that heart, which, pure as angels, deserves to be as sacred from sorrow, through my means, or for my sake, suffers any diminution of tranquility—"

"None, none!" interrupted she, with precipitation.

"I know well," cried he, "your greatness of soul; and if this dreadful sacrifice gives lasting torture only to myself,—if of *your* returning happiness I could be assured,—I would struggle to bear it."

"You *may*, be assured of it," cried she, with reviving dignity, "I have no right to expect escaping all calamity, but while I share the common lot, I will submit to it without repining."

"Heaven then bless, and hovering angels watch you!" cried he, and letting go her hand, he ran hastily out of the room.

"Oh Virtue, how bright is thy triumph!" exclaimed Mrs Delvile, flying up to Cecilia, and folding her in her arms; "Noble, incomparable young creature! I knew not that so much worth was compatible with human frailty!"

But the heroism of Cecilia, in losing its object, lost its force; she sighed, she could not speak, tears gushed into her eyes, and kissing Mrs Delvile's hand with a look that shewed her inability to converse with her, she hastened, though scarce able to support herself, away, with intention to

shut herself up in her own apartment: and Mrs Delvile, who perceived that her utmost fortitude was exhausted, opposed not her going, and wisely forbore to encrease her emotion, by following her even with her blessings.

But when she came into the hall, she started, and could proceed no further; for there she beheld Delvile, who in too great agony to be seen, had stopt to recover some composure before he quitted the house.

At the first sound of an opening door, he was hastily escaping; but perceiving Cecilia, and discerning her situation, he more hastily turned back, saying, "Is it possible?—To *me* were you coming?"

She shook her head, and made a motion with her hand to say no, and would then have gone on.

"You are weeping!" cried he, "you are pale!—Oh Miss Beverley! is this your happiness!"

"I am very well,—" cried she, not knowing what she answered, "I am quite well,—pray go,—I am very—" her words died away inarticulated.

"O what a voice is that!" exclaimed he, "it pierces my very soul!"

Mrs Delvile now came to the parlour door, and looked aghast at the situation in which she saw them: Cecilia again moved on, and reached the stairs, but tottered, and was obliged to cling to the banisters.

"O suffer me to support you," cried he; "you are not able to stand,—whither is it you would go?"

"Any where,—I don't know,—" answered she, in faltering accents, "but if you would leave me, I should be well."

And, turning from him, she walked again towards the parlour, finding by her shaking frame, the impossibility of getting unaided up the stairs.

"Give me your hand, my love," said Mrs Delvile, cruelly alarmed by this return; and the moment they re-entered the parlour, she said impatiently to her son, "Mortimer, why are you not gone?"

He heard her not, however; his whole attention was upon Cecilia, who, sinking into a chair, hid her face against Mrs Delvile: but, reviving in a few moments, and blushing at the weakness she had betrayed, she raised her head, and, with an assumed serenity, said, "I am better,—much better,—I was rather sick,—but it is over; and now, if you will excuse me, I will go to my own room."

She then arose, but her knees trembled, and her head was giddy, and again seating herself, she forced a faint smile, and said, "Perhaps I had better keep quiet."

"Can I bear this!" cried Delvile, "no, it shakes all my resolution!—loveliest and most beloved Cecilia! forgive my rash declaration, which I hear retract and forswear, and which no false pride, no worthless vanity shall again surprise from me!—raise, then, your eyes—"

"Hot-headed young man!" interrupted Mrs Delvile, with an air of haughty displeasure, "if you cannot be rational, at least be silent. Miss Beverley, we will both leave him."

Shame, and her own earnestness, how restored some strength to Cecilia, who read with terror in the looks of Mrs Delvile the passions with which she was agitated, and instantly obeyed her by rising; but her son, who inherited a portion of her own spirit, rushed between them both and the door, and exclaimed, "Stay, madam, stay! I cannot let you go: I see your intention, I see your dreadful purpose; you will work upon the feelings of Miss Beverley, you will extort from her a promise to see me no more!"

"Oppose not my passing!" cried Mrs Delvile, whose voice, face and manner spoke the encreasing disturbance of her soul; "I have but too long talked to you in vain; I must now take some better method for the security of the honour of my family."

This moment appeared to Delvile decisive; and casting off in desperation all timidity and restraint, he suddenly sprang forward, and snatching the hand of Cecilia from his mother, he exclaimed, "I cannot, I will not give her up!—nor now, madam, nor ever!—I protest it most solemnly! I affirm it by my best hopes! I swear it by all that I hold sacred!"

Grief and horror next to frenzy at a disappointment thus unexpected, and thus peremptory, rose in the face of Mrs Delvile, who, striking her hand upon her forehead, cried, “My brain is on fire!” and rushed out of the room.

Cecilia had now no difficulty to disengage herself from Delvile, who, shocked at the exclamation, and confounded by the sudden departure of his mother, hastened eagerly to pursue her: she had only flown into the next parlour; but, upon following her thither, what was his dread and his alarm, when he saw her extended, upon the floor, her face, hands and neck all covered with blood! “Great Heaven!” he exclaimed, prostrating himself by her side, “what is it you have done!—where are you wounded?—what direful curse have you denounced against your son?”

Not able to speak, she angrily shook her head, and indignantly made a motion with her hand, that commanded him from her sight.

Cecilia, who had followed, though half dead with terror, had yet the presence of mind to ring the bell. A servant came immediately; and Delvile, starting up from his mother, ordered him to fetch the first surgeon or physician he could find.

The alarm now brought the rest of the servants into the room, and Mrs Delvile suffered herself to be raised from the ground, and seated in a chair; she was still silent, but shewed a disgust to any assistance from her son, that made him deliver her into the hands of the servants, while, in speechless agony, he only looked on and watched her.

Neither did Cecilia, though forgetting her own sorrow, and no longer sensible of personal weakness, venture to approach her: uncertain what had happened, she yet considered herself as the ultimate cause of this dreadful scene, and feared to risk the effect of the smallest additional emotion.

The servant returned with a surgeon in a few minutes: Cecilia, unable to wait and hear what he would say, glided hastily out of the room; and Delvile, in still greater agitation, followed her quick into the next parlour; but having eagerly advanced to speak to her, he turned precipitately about, and hurrying into the hall, walked in hasty steps up and down it, without courage to enquire what was passing.

At length the surgeon came out: Delvile flew to him, and stopt him, but could ask no question. His countenance, however, rendered words unnecessary; the surgeon understood him, and said, “The lady will do very well; she has burst a blood vessel, but I think it will be of no consequence. She must be kept quiet and easy, and upon no account suffered to talk, or to use any exertion.”

Delvile now let him go, and flew himself into a corner to return thanks to heaven that the evil, however great, was less than he had at first apprehended. He then went into the parlour to Cecilia, eagerly calling out, “Heaven be praised, my mother has not voluntarily cursed me!”

“O now then,” cried Cecilia, “once more make her bless you! the violence of her agitation has already almost destroyed her, and her frame is too weak for this struggle of contending passions;—go to her, then, and calm the tumult of her spirits, by acquiescing wholly in her will, and being to her again the son she thinks she has lost!”

“Alas!” said he, in a tone of the deepest dejection; “I have been preparing myself for that purpose, and waited but your commands to finally determine me.”

“Let us both go to her instantly,” said Cecilia; “the least delay may be fatal.”

She now led the way, and approaching Mrs Delvile, who, faint and weak, was seated upon an arm chair, and resting her head upon the shoulder of a maid servant, said, “Lean, dearest madam, upon *me*, and speak not, but hear us!”

She then took the place of the maid, and desired her and the other servants to go out of the room. Delvile advanced, but his mother’s eye, recovering, at his sight, its wonted fire, darted upon him a glance of such displeasure, that, shuddering with the apprehension of inflaming again those passions which threatened her destruction, he hastily sank on one knee, and abruptly exclaimed, “Look at me with less abhorrence, for I come but to resign myself to your will.”

"Mine, also," cried Cecilia, "that will shall be; you need not speak it, we know it, and here solemnly we promise that we will separate for ever."

"Revive, then, my mother," said Delvile, "rely upon our plighted honours, and think only of your health, for your son will never more offend you."

Mrs Delvile, much surprised, and strongly affected, held out her hand to him, with a look of mingled compassion and obligation, and dropping her head upon the bosom of Cecilia, who with her other arm she pressed towards her, she burst into an agony of tears.

"Go, go, Sir!" said Cecilia, cruelly alarmed, "you have said all that is necessary; leave Mrs Delvile now, and she will be more composed."

Delvile instantly obeyed, and then his mother, whose mouth still continued to fill with blood, though it gushed not from her with the violence it had begun, was prevailed upon by the prayers of Cecilia to consent to be conveyed into her room; and, as her immediate removal to another house might be dangerous, she complied also, though very reluctantly, with her urgent entreaties, that she would take entire possession of it till the next day.

This point gained, Cecilia left her, to communicate what had passed to Mrs Charlton; but was told by one of the servants that Mr Delvile begged first to speak with her in the next room.

She hesitated for a moment whether to grant this request; but recollecting it was right to acquaint him with his mother's intention of staying all night, she went to him.

"How indulgent you are," cried he, in a melancholy voice, as she opened the door; "I am now going post to Dr Lyster, whom I shall entreat to come hither instantly; but I am fearful of again disturbing my mother, and must therefore rely upon you to acquaint her what is become of me."

"Most certainly; I have begged her to remain here to-night, and I hope I shall prevail with her to continue with me till Dr Lyster's arrival; after which she will, doubtless, be guided either in staying longer, or removing elsewhere, by his advice."

"You are all goodness," said he, with a deep sigh; "and how I shall support—but I mean not to return hither, at least not to this house,—unless, indeed, Dr Lyster's account should be alarming. I leave my mother, therefore, to your kindness, and only hope, only entreat, that your own health,—your own peace of mind—neither by attendance upon her—by anxiety—by pity for her son—"

He stopt, and seemed gasping for breath; Cecilia turned from him to hide her emotion, and he proceeded with a rapidity of speech that shewed his terror of continuing with her any longer, and his struggle with himself to be gone: "The promise you have made in both our names to my mother, I shall hold myself bound to observe. I see, indeed, that her reason or her life would fall the sacrifice of further opposition: of myself, therefore, it is no longer time to think.—I take of you no leave—I cannot! yet I would fain tell you the high reverence—but it is better to say nothing—"

"Much better," cried Cecilia, with a forced and faint smile; "lose not, therefore, an instant, but hasten to this good Dr Lyster."

"I will," answered he, going to the door; but there, stopping and turning round, "one thing I should yet," he added, "wish to say,—I have been impetuous, violent, unreasonable,—with shame and with regret I recollect how impetuous, and how unreasonable: I have persecuted, where I ought in silence to have submitted; I have reproached, where I ought in candour to have approved; and in the vehemence with which I have pursued you, I have censured that very dignity of conduct which has been the basis of my admiration, my esteem, my devotion! but never can I forget, and never without fresh wonder remember, the sweetness with which you have borne with me, even when most I offended you. For this impatience, this violence, this inconsistency, I now most sincerely beg your pardon; and if, before I go, you could so far condescend as to pronounce my forgiveness, with a lighter heart, I think, I should quit you."

"Do not talk of forgiveness," said Cecilia, "you have never offended me; I always knew—always was sure—always imputed—" she stopt, unable to proceed.

Deeply penetrated by her apparent distress, he with difficulty restrained himself from falling at her feet; but after a moment's pause and recollection, he said, "I understand the generous indulgence you have shewn me, an indulgence I shall ever revere, and ever grieve to have abused. I ask you not to remember me,—far, far happier do I wish you than such a remembrance could make you; but I will pain the humanity of your disposition no longer. You will tell my mother—but no matter!—Heaven preserve you, my angelic Cecilia!—Miss Beverley, I mean, Heaven guide, protect, and bless you! And should I see you no more, should this be the last sad moment–"

He paused, but presently recovering himself, added, "May I hear, at least, of your tranquillity, for that alone can have any chance to quiet or repress the anguish I feel here!"

He then abruptly retreated, and ran out of the house.

Cecilia for a while remained almost stupified with sorrow; she forgot Mrs Delvile, she forgot Mrs Charlton, she forgot her own design of apologizing to one, or assisting the other: she continued in the posture in which he had left her, quite without motion, and almost without sensibility.

CHAPTER vii. – A MESSAGE

From this lethargy of sadness Cecilia was soon, however, awakened by the return of the surgeon, who had brought with him a physician to consult upon Mrs Delvile's situation. Terror for the mother once more drove the son from her thoughts, and she waited with the most apprehensive impatience to hear the result of the consultation. The physician declined giving any positive opinion, but, having written a prescription, only repeated the injunction of the surgeon, that she should be kept extremely quiet, and on no account be suffered to talk.

Cecilia, though shocked and frightened at the occasion, was yet by no means sorry at an order which thus precluded all conversation; unfitted for it by her own misery, she was glad to be relieved from all necessity of imposing upon herself the irksome task of finding subjects for discourse to which she was wholly indifferent, while obliged with sedulity to avoid those by which alone her mind was occupied.

The worthy Mrs Charlton heard the events of the morning with the utmost concern, but charged her grand-daughters to assist her young friend in doing the honours of her house to Mrs Delvile, while she ordered another apartment to be prepared for Cecilia, to whom she administered all the consolation her friendly zeal could suggest.

Cecilia, however unhappy, had too just a way of thinking to indulge in selfish grief, where occasion called her to action for the benefit of others: scarce a moment, therefore now did she allow to sorrow and herself, but assiduously bestowed the whole of her time upon her two sick friends, dividing her attention according to their own desire or convenience, without consulting or regarding any choice of her own. Choice, indeed, she had none; she loved Mrs Charlton, she revered Mrs Delvile; the warmest wish with which her heart glowed, was the recovery of both, but too deep was her affliction to receive pleasure from either.

Two days passed thus, during which the constancy of her attendance, which at another time would have fatigued her, proved the only relief she was capable of receiving. Mrs Delvile was evidently affected by her vigilant tenderness, but seemed equally desirous with herself to make use of the prohibition to speech as an excuse for uninterrupted silence. She enquired not even after her son, though the eagerness of her look towards the door whenever it was opened, shewed either a hope, or an apprehension that he might enter. Cecilia wished to tell her whither he was gone, but dreaded trusting her voice with his name; and their silence, after a while, seemed so much by mutual consent, that she had soon as little courage as she had inclination to break it.

The arrival of Dr Lyster gave her much satisfaction, for upon him rested her hopes of Mrs Delvile's re-establishment. He sent for her down stairs, to enquire whether he was expected; and hearing that he was not, desired her to announce him, as the smallest emotion might do mischief.

She returned up stairs, and after a short preparation, said, "Your favourite Dr Lyster, madam, is come, and I shall be much the happier for having you under his care."

"Dr Lyster?" cried she, "who sent for him?"

"I believe—I fancy—Mr Delvile fetched him."

"My son?—is he here, then?"

"No,—he went, the moment he left you, for Dr Lyster,—and Dr Lyster is come by himself."

"Does he write to you?"

"No, indeed!—he writes not—he comes not—dearest madam be satisfied, he will do neither to me ever more!"

"Exemplary young man!" cried she, in a voice hardly audible, "how great is his loss!—unhappy Mortimer!—ill-fated, and ill-rewarded!"

She sighed, and said no more; but this short conversation, the only one which had passed between them since her illness, agitated her so much, that Dr Lyster, who now came up stairs, found

her in a state of trembling and weakness that both alarmed and surprised him. Cecilia, glad of an opportunity to be gone, left the room, and sent, by Dr Lyster's desire, for the physician and surgeon who had already attended.

After they had been some time with their patient, they retired to a consultation, and when it was over, Dr Lyster waited upon Cecilia in the parlour, and assured her he had no apprehension of danger for Mrs Delvile, "Though, for another week," he added, "I would have her continue your *patient*, as she is not yet fit to be removed. But pray mind that she is kept quiet; let nobody go near her, not even her own son. By the way he is waiting for me at the inn, so I'll just speak again to his mother, and be gone."

Cecilia was well pleased by this accidental information, to learn both the anxiety of Delvile for his mother, and the steadiness of his forbearance for himself. When Dr Lyster came down stairs again, "I shall stay," he said, "till to-morrow, but I hope she will be able in another week to get to Bristol. In the mean time I shall leave her, I see, with an excellent nurse. But, my good young lady, in your care of her, don't neglect yourself; I am not quite pleased with your looks, though it is but an old fashioned speech to tell you so.—What have you been doing to yourself?"

"Nothing;" said she, a little embarrassed; "but had you not better have some tea?"

"Why yes, I think I had;—but what shall I do with my young man?"

Cecilia understood the hint, but coloured, and made no answer.

"He is waiting for me," he continued, "at the inn; however, I never yet knew the young man I would prefer to a young woman, so if you will give me some tea here, I shall certainly jilt him."

Cecilia instantly rang the bell, and ordered tea.

"Well now," said he, "remember the sin of this breach of appointment lies wholly at your door. I shall tell him you laid violent hands on me; and if that is not, enough to excuse me, I shall desire he will try whether he could be more of a stoic with you himself."

"I think I must unorder the tea," said she, with what gaiety she could assume, "if I am to be responsible for any mischief from your drinking it."

"No, no, you shan't be off now; but pray would it be quite out of rule for you to send and ask him to come to us?"

"Why I believe—I think—" said she, stammering, "it's very likely he may be engaged."

"Well, well, I don't mean to propose any violent incongruity. You must excuse my blundering; I understand but little of the etiquette of young ladies. 'Tis a science too intricate to be learned without more study than we plodding men of business can well spare time for. However, when I have done *writing* prescriptions, I will set about *reading* them, provided you will be my instructress."

Cecilia, though ashamed of a charge in which prudery and affectation were implied, was compelled to submit to it, as either to send for Delvile, or explain her objections, was equally impossible. The Miss Charltons, therefore, joined them, and they went to tea.

Just as they had done, a note was delivered to Dr Lyster; "see here," cried he, when he had read it, "what a fine thing it is to be a *young* man! Why now, Mr Mortimer understands as much of all this *etiquette* as you ladies do yourselves; for he only writes a note even to ask how his mother does."

He then put it into Cecilia's hand.

To Dr Lyster.

Tell me, my dear Sir, how you have found my mother? I am uneasy at your long stay, and engaged with my friend Biddulph, or I should have followed you in person.

M.D.

"So you see," continued the doctor, "I need not do penance for engaging myself to you, when this young gentleman can find such good entertainment for himself."

Cecilia who well knew the honourable motive of Delvile's engagement, with difficulty forbore speaking in his vindication. Dr Lyster immediately began an answer, but before he had finished it,

called out, “Now as I am told you are a very good young woman, I think you can do no less than assist me to punish this gay spark, for playing the macaroni, when he ought to visit his sick mother.”

Cecilia, much hurt for Delvile, and much confused for herself, looked abashed, but knew not what to answer.

“My scheme,” continued the doctor, “is to tell him, that as he has found one engagement for tea, he may find another for supper; but that as to me, I am better disposed of, for you insist upon keeping me to yourself. Come, what says *etiquette*? may I treat myself with this puff?”

“Certainly,” said Cecilia, endeavouring to look pleased, “if you will favour us with your company, Miss Charltons and myself will think the *puffing* should rather be ours than yours.”

“That, then,” said the doctor, “will not answer my purpose, for I mean the puff to be my own, or how do I punish him? So, suppose I tell him I shall not only sup with three young ladies, but be invited to a *tete-a-tete* with one of them into the bargain?”

The young ladies only laughed, and the doctor finished his note, and sent it away; and then, turning gaily to Cecilia, “Come,” he said, “why don’t you give me this invitation? surely you don’t mean to make me guilty of perjury?”

Cecilia, but little disposed for pleasantry, would gladly now have dropt the subject; but Dr Lyster, turning to the Miss Charltons, said, “Young ladies, I call you both to witness if this is not very bad usage: this young woman has connived at my writing a downright falsehood, and all the time took me in to believe it was a truth. The only way I can think of to cure her of such frolics, is for both of you to leave us together, and so make her keep her word whether she will or no.”

The Miss Charltons took the hint, and went away; while Cecilia, who had not at all suspected he meant seriously to speak with her, remained extremely perplexed to think what he had to say.

“Mrs Delvile,” cried he, continuing the same air of easy good humour, “though I allowed her not to speak to me above twenty words, took up near ten of them to tell me that you had behaved to her like an angel. Why so she ought, cried I; what else was she sent for here to look so like one? I charged her, therefore, to take all that as a thing of course; and to prove that I really think what I say, I am now going to make a trial of you, that, if you are any thing less, will induce you to order some of your men to drive me into the street. The truth is, I have had a little commission given me, which in the first place I know not how to introduce, and which, in the second, as far as I can judge, appears to be absolutely superfluous.”

Cecilia now felt uneasy and alarmed, and begged him to explain himself. He then dropt the levity with which he had begun the discourse, and after a grave, yet gentle preparation, expressive of his unwillingness to distress her, and his firm persuasion of her uncommon worthiness, he acquainted her that he was no stranger to her situation with respect to the Delvile family.

“Good God!” cried she, blushing and much amazed; “and who”–

“I knew it,” said he, “from the moment I attended Mr Mortimer in his illness at Delvile Castle. He could not conceal from me that the seat of his disorder was his mind; and I could not know that, without readily conjecturing the cause, when I saw who was his father’s guest, and when I knew what was his father’s character. He found he was betrayed to me, and upon my advising a journey, he understood me properly. His openness to counsel, and the manly firmness with which he behaved in quitting you, made me hope the danger was blown over. But last week, when I was at the Castle, where I have for some time attended Mr Delvile, who has had a severe fit of the gout, I found him in an agitation of spirits that made me apprehend it would be thrown into his stomach. I desired Mrs Delvile to use her influence to calm him; but she was herself in still greater emotion, and acquainting me she was obliged to leave him, desired I would spend with him every moment in my power. I have therefore almost lived at the Castle during her absence, and, in the course of our many conversations, he has acknowledged to me the uneasiness under which he has laboured, from the intelligence concerning his son, which he had just received.”

Cecilia wished here to enquire *how* received, and from whom, but had not the courage, and therefore he proceeded.

"I was still with the father when Mr Mortimer arrived post at my house to fetch me hither. I was sent for home; he informed me of his errand without disguise, for he knew I was well acquainted with the original secret whence all the evil arose. I told him my distress in what manner to leave his father; and he was extremely shocked himself when acquainted with his situation. We agreed that it would be vain to conceal from him the indisposition of Mrs Delvile, which the delay of her return, and a thousand other accidents, might in some unfortunate way make known to him. He commissioned me, therefore, to break it to him, that he might consent to my journey, and at the same time to quiet his own mind, by assuring him all he had apprehended was wholly at an end."

He stopt, and looked to see how Cecilia bore these words.

"It is all at an end, Sir;" said she, with firmness; "but I have not yet heard your commission; what, and from whom is that?"

"I am thoroughly satisfied it is unnecessary;" he answered, "since the young man can but submit, and you can but give him up."

"But still, if there is a message, it is fit I should hear it."

"If you chase it, so it is. I told Mr Delvile whither I was coming, and I repeated to him his son's assurances. He was relieved, but not satisfied; he would not see him, and gave me for him a prohibition of extreme severity, and to *you* he bid me say—"

"From *him*, then, is my message?" cried Cecilia, half frightened, and much disappointed.

"Yes," said he, understanding her immediately, "for the son, after giving me his first account, had the wisdom and forbearance not once to mention you."

"I am very glad," said she, with a mixture of admiration and regret, "to hear it. But, what, Sir, said Mr Delvile?"

"He bid me tell you that either *he*, or *you* must see his son never more."

"It was indeed unnecessary," cried she, colouring with resentment, "to send me such a message. I meant not to see him again, he meant not to desire it. I return him, however, no answer, and I will make him no promise; to Mrs Delvile alone I hold myself bound; to him, send what messages he may, I shall always hold myself free. But believe me, Dr Lyster, if with his name, his son had inherited his character, his desire of our separation would be feeble, and trifling, compared with my own!"

"I am sorry, my good young lady," said he, "to have given you this disturbance; yet I admire your spirit, and doubt not but it will enable you to forget any little disappointment you may have suffered. And what, after all, have you to regret? Mortimer Delvile is, indeed, a young man that any woman might wish to attach; but every woman cannot have him, and you, of all women, have least reason to repine in missing him, for scarcely is there another man you may not chuse or reject at your pleasure."

Little as was the consolation Cecilia could draw from this speech, she was sensible it became not her situation to make complaints, and therefore, to end the conversation she proposed calling in the Miss Charltons.

"No, no," said he, "I must step up again to Mrs Delvile, and then be-gone. To-morrow morning I shall but call to see how she is, and leave some directions, and set off. Mr Mortimer Delvile accompanies me back: but he means to return hither in a week, in order to travel with his mother to Bristol. Mean time, I purpose to bring about a reconciliation between him and his father, whose prejudices are more intractable than any man's I ever met with."

"It will be strange indeed," said Cecilia, "should a reconciliation *now* be difficult!"

"True; but it is long since he was young himself, and the softer affections he never was acquainted with, and only regards them in his son as derogatory to his whole race. However, if there were not some few such men, there would hardly be a family in the kingdom that could count a great grand-father. I am not, I must own, of his humour myself, but I think it rather peculiarly stranger, than peculiarly worse than most other peoples; and how, for example, was that of *your* uncle a whit

the better? He was just as fond of *his* name, as if, like Mr Delvile, he could trace it from the time of the Saxons."

Cecilia strongly felt the truth of this observation, but not chusing to discuss it, made not any answer, and Dr Lyster, after a few good-natured apologies, both for his friends the Delviles and himself, went up stairs.

"What continual disturbance," cried she, when left alone, "keeps me thus for-ever from rest! no sooner is one wound closed, but another is opened; mortification constantly succeeds distress, and when my heart is spared; my pride is attacked, that not a moment of tranquility may ever be allowed me! Had the lowest of women won the affections of Mr Delvile, could his father with less delicacy or less decency have acquainted her with his inflexible disapprobation? To send with so little ceremony a message so contemptuous and so peremptory!—but perhaps it is better, for had he, too, like Mrs Delvile, joined kindness with rejection, I might still more keenly have felt the perverseness of my destiny."

CHAPTER vii. – A PARTING

The next morning Dr Lyster called early, and having visited Mrs Delvile, and again met the two gentlemen of the faculty in whose care she was to remain, he took his leave. But not without contriving first to speak a few words to Cecilia in private, in which he charged her to be careful of her health, and re-animate her spirits. “Don’t suppose,” said he, “that because I am a friend of the Delvile family, I am either blind to your merits, or to their foibles, far from it; but then why should they interfere with one another? Let them keep their prejudices, which, though different, are not worse than their neighbours, and do you retain your excellencies, and draw from them the happiness they ought to give you. People reason and refine themselves into a thousand miseries, by chusing to settle that they can only be contented one way; whereas, there are fifty ways, if they would but look about them, that would commonly do as well.”

“I believe, indeed, you are right,” answered Cecilia, “and I thank you for the admonition; I will do what I can towards studying your scheme of philosophy, and it is always one step to amendment, to be convinced that we want it.”

“You are a sensible and charming girl,” said Dr Lyster, “and Mr Delvile, should he find a daughter-in-law descended in a right line from Egbert, first king of all England, won’t be so well off as if he had satisfied himself with you. However, the old gentleman has a fair right, after all, to be pleased his own way, and let us blame him how we will, we shall find, upon sifting, it is for no other reason but because his humour happens to clash with our own.”

“That, indeed,” said Cecilia, smiling, “is a truth incontrovertible! and a truth to which, for the future, I will endeavour to give more weight. But will you permit me now to ask one question?—Can you tell me from whom, how, or when the intelligence which has caused all this disturbance–”

She hesitated, but, comprehending her readily, he answered “How they got at it, I never heard, for I never thought it worth while to enquire, as it is so generally known, that nobody I meet with seems ignorant of it.”

This was another, and a cruel shock to Cecilia, and Dr Lyster, perceiving it, again attempted to comfort her. “That the affair is somewhat spread,” said he, “is now not to be helped, and therefore little worth thinking of; every body will agree that the choice of both does honour to both, and nobody need be ashamed to be successor to either, whenever the course of things leads Mr Mortimer and yourself to make another election. He wisely intends to go abroad, and will not return till he is his own man again. And as to you, my good young lady, what, after a short time given to vexation, need interrupt your happiness? You have the whole world before you, with youth, fortune, talents, beauty and independence; drive, therefore, from your head this unlucky affair, and remember there can hardly be a family in the kingdom, this one excepted, that will not rejoice in a connection with you.”

He then good-humouredly shook hands with her, and went into his chaise.

Cecilia, though not slow in remarking the ease and philosophy with which every one can argue upon the calamities, and moralize upon the misconduct of others, had still the candour and good sense to see that there was reason in what he urged, and to resolve upon making the best use in her power of the hints for consolation she might draw from his discourse.

During the following week, she devoted herself almost wholly to Mrs Delvile, sharing with the maid, whom she had brought with her from the Castle, the fatigue of nursing her, and leaving to the Miss Charltons the chief care of their grandmother. For Mrs Delvile appeared every hour more sensible of her attention, and more desirous of her presence, and though neither of them spoke, each was endeared to the other by the tender offices of friendship which were paid and received.

When this week was expired, Dr Lyster was prevailed upon to return again to Bury, in order to travel himself with Mrs Delvile to Bristol. “Well,” cried he, taking Cecilia by the first opportunity aside, “how are you? Have you studied my scheme of philosophy, as you promised me?”

"O yes," said she, "and made, I flatter myself, no little proficiency."

"You are a good girl," cried he, "a very extraordinary girl! I am sure you are; and upon my honour I pity poor Mortimer with all my soul! But he is a noble young fellow, and behaves with a courage and spirit that does me good to behold. To have obtained you, he would have moved heaven and earth, but finding you out of his reach, he submits to his fate like a man."

Cecilia's eyes glistened at this speech; "Yes," said she, "he long since said 'tis suspence, 'tis hope, that make the misery of life,—for there the Passions have all power, and Reason has none. But when evils are irremediable, and we have neither resources to plan, nor castle-building to delude us, we find time for the cultivation of philosophy, and flatter ourselves, perhaps, that we have found inclination!"

"Why you have considered this matter very deeply," said he; "but I must not have you give way to these serious reflections. Thought, after all, has a cruel spite against happiness; I would have you, therefore, keep as much as you conveniently can, out of its company. Run about and divert yourself, 'tis all you have for it. The true art of happiness in this most whimsical world, seems nothing more nor less than this—Let those who have leisure, find employment, and those who have business, find leisure."

He then told her that Mr Delvile senior was much better, and no longer confined to his room: and that he had had the pleasure of seeing an entire reconciliation take place between him and his son, of whom he was more fond and more proud than any other father in the universe.

"Think of him, however, my dear young lady," he continued, "no more, for the matter I see is desperate: you must pardon my being a little officious, when I confess to you I could not help proposing to the old gentleman an expedient of my own; for as I could not drive you out of my head, I employed myself in thinking what might be done by way of accommodation. Now my scheme was really a very good one, only when people are prejudiced, all reasoning is thrown away upon them. I proposed sinking *both* your names, since they are so at variance with one another, and so adopting a third, by means of a title. But Mr Delvile angrily declared, that though such a scheme might do very well for the needy Lord Ernolf, a Peer of twenty years, his own noble ancestors should never, by his consent, forfeit a name which so many centuries had rendered honourable. His son Mortimer, he added, must inevitably inherit the title of his grandfather, his uncle being old and unmarried; but yet he would rather see him a beggar, than lose his dearest hope that *Delvile*, Lord *Delvile*, would descend, both name and title, from generation to generation unsullied and uninterrupted."

"I am sorry, indeed," said Cecilia, "that such a proposal was made, and I earnestly entreat that none of any sort may be repeated."

"Well, well," said he, "I would not for the world do any mischief, but who would not have supposed such a proposal would have done good?"

"Mr Mortimer," he then added, "is to meet us at—for he would not, he said, come again to this place, upon such terms as he was here last week, for the whole worth of the king's dominions."

The carriage was now ready, and Mrs Delvile was prepared to depart. Cecilia approached to take leave of her, but Dr Lyster following, said "No talking! no thanking! no compliments of any sort! I shall carry off my patient without permitting one civil speech, and for all the rudeness I make her guilty of, I am willing to be responsible."

Cecilia would then have retreated, but Mrs Delvile, holding out both her hands, said "To every thing else, Dr Lyster, I am content to submit; but were I to die while uttering the words, I cannot leave this inestimable creature without first saying how much I love her, how I honour, and how I thank her! without entreating her to be careful of her health, and conjuring her to compleat the greatness of her conduct, by not suffering her spirits to sink from the exertion of her virtue. And now my love, God bless you!"

She then embraced her, and went on; Cecilia, at a motion of Dr Lyster's, forbearing to follow her.

"And thus," cried she, when they were gone, "thus ends all my connection with this family! which it seems as if I was only to have known for the purpose of affording a new proof of the insufficiency of situation to constitute happiness. Who looks not upon mine as the perfection of human felicity?—And so, perhaps, it is, for it may be that Felicity and Humanity are never permitted to come nearer."

And thus, in philosophic sadness, by reasoning upon the universality of misery, she restrained, at least, all violence of sorrow, though her spirits were dejected, and her heart was heavy.

But the next day brought with it some comfort that a little lightened her sadness; Mrs Charlton, almost wholly recovered, was able to go down stairs, and Cecilia had at least the satisfaction of seeing an happy conclusion to an illness of which, with the utmost concern and regret, she considered herself as the cause. She attended her with the most unremitting assiduity, and being really very thankful, endeavoured to appear happy, and flattered herself that, by continual effort, the appearance in a short time would become reality.

Mrs Charlton retired early, and Cecilia accompanied her up stairs: and while she was with her, was informed that Mr Monckton was in the parlour.

The various, afflicting, and uncommon scenes in which she had been engaged since she last saw him, had almost wholly driven him from her remembrance, or when at any time he recurred to it, it was only to attribute the discontinuance of his visits to the offence she had given him, in refusing to follow his advice by relinquishing her London expedition.

Full, therefore, of the mortifying transactions which had passed since their parting, and fearful of his enquiries into disgraces he had nearly foretold, she heard him announced with chagrin, and waited upon him in the most painful confusion.

Far different were the feelings of Mr Monckton; he read in her countenance the dejection of disappointment, which impressed upon his heart the vivacity of hope: her evident shame was to him secret triumph, her ill-concealed sorrow revived all his expectations.

She hastily began a conversation by mentioning her debt to him, and apologising for not paying it the moment she was of age. He knew but too well how her time had been occupied, and assured her the delay was wholly immaterial.

He then led to an enquiry into the present situation of her affairs; but unable to endure a disquisition, which could only be productive of censure and mortification, she hastily stopt it, exclaiming, "Ask me not, I entreat you, Sir, any detail of what has passed,—the event has brought me sufferings that may well make blame be dispensed with;—I acknowledge all your wisdom, I am sensible of my own error, but the affair is wholly dropt, and the unhappy connection I was forming is broken off for-ever!"

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.