

**CHARLES
BROCKDEN
BROWN**

JANE TALBOT

Charles Brown
Jane Talbot

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Jane Talbot:

Содержание

Letter I	4
Letter II	7
Letter III	9
Letter IV	32
Letter VI	53
Letter VII	72
Letter VIII	75
Letter IX	79
Letter X	85
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	86

Charles Brockden Brown

Jane Talbot

Letter I

To Henry Colden

Philadelphia, Monday Evening, October 3.

I am very far from being a wise girl. So conscience whispers me, and, though vanity is eager to refute the charge, I must acknowledge that she is seldom successful. Conscience tells me it is folly, it is guilt, to wrap up my existence in one frail mortal; to employ all my thoughts, to lavish all my affections, upon one object; to dote upon a human being, who, as such, must be the heir of many frailties, and whom I know to be not without his faults; to enjoy no peace but in his presence, to be grateful for his permission to sacrifice fortune, ease, life itself, for his sake.

From the humiliation produced by these charges, vanity endeavours to relieve me by insinuating that all happiness springs from affection; that nature ordains no tie so strong as that between the sexes; that to love without bounds is to confer bliss not only on ourselves but on another; that conjugal affection is the genuine sphere not only of happiness but duty.

Besides, my heart will not be persuaded but that its fondness for you is nothing more than simple justice. Ought I not to love excellence, and does my poor imagination figure to itself any thing in human shape more excellent than thou?

But yet there are bounds beyond which passion cannot go without counteracting its own purposes. I am afraid mine goes beyond those bounds. So far as it produces rapture, it deserves to be cherished; but when productive of impatience, repining, agony, on occasions too that are slight, trivial, or unavoidable, 'tis surely culpable.

Methinks, my friend, I would not have had thee for a witness of the bitterness, the tumult of my feelings, during this day; ever since you left me. You cannot conceive any thing more forlorn, more vacant, more anxious, than this weak heart has been and still is. I was terrified at my own sensations, and, with my usual folly, began to construe them into omens of evils; so inadequate, so disproportioned was my distress to the cause that produced it.

Ah! my friend! a weak—very weak—creature is thy Jane. From excess of love arises that weakness; *that* must be its apology with thee, for, in thy mind, my fondness, I know, needs an apology.

Shall I scold you a little? I have held in the rein a long time, but my overflowing heart must have relief, and I shall find a sort of comfort in chiding you. Let me chide you, then, for coldness, for insensibility: but no; I will not. Let me enjoy the rewards of self-denial and forbearance, and seal up my accusing lips. Let me forget the coldness of your last salute, your ill-concealed effort to

disengage yourself from my foolishly-fond arms. You have got
at your journey's end, I hope. Farewell.

J. TALBOT.

Letter II

To Henry Colden

Tuesday Morning, October 4.

I must write to you, you said, frequently and copiously: you did not mean, I suppose, that I should always be scribbling, but I cannot help it. I can do nothing but converse with you. When present, my prate is incessant; when absent, I can prate to you with as little intermission; for the pen, used so carelessly and thoughtlessly as I use it, does *but* prate.

Besides, I have not forgotten my promise. 'Tis true the story you wished me to give you is more easily communicated by the pen than by the lips. I admit your claim to be acquainted with all the incidents of my life, be they momentous or trivial. I have often told you that the retrospect is very mournful; but that ought not to prevent me from making it, when so useful a purpose as that of thoroughly disclosing to you the character of one, on whom your future happiness is to depend, will be affected by it. I am not surprised that calumny has been busy with my life, and am very little anxious to clear myself from unjust charges, except to such as you.

At this moment, I may add, my mood is not unfriendly to

the undertaking. I can do nothing in your absence but write to you. To write what I have ten thousand times spoken, and which can be perfectly understood only when accompanied by looks and accents, seems absurd. Especially while there is a subject on which my *tongue* can never expatiate, but on which it is necessary that you should know all that I can tell you.

The prospect of filling up this interval with the relation of the most affecting parts of my life somewhat reconciled me to your necessary absence, yet I know my heart will droop. Even this preparation to look back makes me shudder already. Some reluctance to recall tragical or humiliating scenes, and, by thus recalling to endure them, in some sense, a second time, I must expect to feel.

But let me lay down the pen for the present. Let me take my favourite and lonely path, and, by a deliberate review of the past, refresh my memory and methodize my recollections. Adieu till I return. J. T.

Letter III

To Henry Colden

Tuesday Morning, 11 o'clock.

I am glad I left not word how soon I meant to return, for here has been, it seems, during my short absence, a pair of gossips. They have just gone, lamenting the disappointment, and leaving me a world of complimentary condolences.

I shall take care to prevent future interruption by shutting up the house and retiring to my chamber, where I am resolved to remain till I have fully disburdened my heart. Disburden it, said I? I shall load it, I fear, with sadness, but I will not regret an undertaking which my duty to you makes indispensable.

One of the earliest incidents that I remember is an expostulation with my father. I saw several strange people enter the chamber where my mother was. Somewhat suggested to my childish fancy that these strangers meant to take her away, and that I should never see her again. My terror was violent, and I thought of nothing but seizing her gown or hand, and holding her back from the rude assailants. My father detained me in his arms, and endeavoured to soothe my fears, but I would not be appeased. I struggled and shrieked, and, hearing some movements in my

mother's room, that seemed to betoken the violence I so much dreaded, I leaped, with a sudden effort, from my father's arms, but fainted before I reached the door of the room.

This may serve as a specimen of the impetuosity of my temper. It was always fervent and unruly, unacquainted with moderation in its attachments, violent in its indignation and its enmity, but easily persuaded to pity and forgiveness.

When I recovered from my swoon, I ran to my mother's room; but she was gone. I rent the air with my cries, and shocked all about me with importunities to know whither they had carried her. They had carried her to the grave, and nothing would content me but to visit the spot three or four times a day, and to sit in the room in which she died, in stupid and mopeful silence, all night long.

At this time I was only five years old,—an age at which, in general, a deceased parent is quickly forgotten; but, in my attachment to my mother, I showed none of the volatility of childhood. While she lived, I was never at ease but when seated at her knee, or with my arms round her neck. When dead, I cherished her remembrance for years, and have paid, hundreds of times, the tribute of my tears at the foot of her grave.

My brother, who was three years older than myself, behaved in a very different manner. I used to think the difference between us was merely that of sex; that every boy was boisterous, ungrateful, imperious, and inhuman, as every girl was soft, pliant, affectionate. Time has cured me of that mistake, and,

as it has shown me females unfeeling and perverse, so it has introduced me to men full of gentleness and sensibility. My brother's subsequent conduct convinced me that he was at all times selfish and irascible beyond most other men, and that his ingratitude and insolence to his mother were only congenial parts of the character he afterwards displayed at large.

My brother and I passed our infancy in one unintermitted quarrel. We were never together but he played some cruel and mischievous prank, which I never failed to resent to the utmost of my little power. I soon found that my tears only increased his exultation, and my complaints only grieved my mother. I, therefore, gave word for word and blow for blow; but, being always worsted in such conflicts, I shunned him whenever it was possible, and whatever his malice made me suffer I endeavoured to conceal from her.

My mother, on her death-bed, was anxious to see him, but he had strolled away after some boyish amusement, with companions as thoughtless as himself. The news of her death scarcely produced an hour's seriousness. He made my affliction a topic of sarcasm and contempt.

To soften my grief, my father consented to my living under the care of her whom I now call my mother. Mrs. Fielder was merely the intimate from childhood of my own mother, with whom, however, since her marriage, contracted against Mrs. Fielder's inclination and remonstrances, she had maintained but little intercourse. My mother's sudden death and my helpless age

awakened all her early tenderness, and induced her to offer an asylum to me. Having a considerable fortune and no family, her offer, notwithstanding ancient jealousies, was readily accepted by my father.

My new residence was, in many respects, the reverse of my former one. The treatment I received from my new parent, without erasing the memory of the old one, quickly excited emotions as filial and tender as I had ever experienced. Comfort and quiet, peace and harmony, obsequious and affectionate attendants and companions, I had never been accustomed to under the paternal roof.

From this period till I was nearly sixteen years of age, I merely paid occasional visits to my father. He loved me with as much warmth as his nature was capable of feeling, which I repaid him in gratitude and reverence. I never remitted my attention to his affairs, and studied his security and comfort as far as these were within my power.

My brother was not deficient in talents, but he wanted application. Very early he showed strong propensities to active amusement and sensual pleasures. The school and college were little attended to, and the time that ought to have been appropriated to books and study was wasted in frolics and carousals. As soon as he was able to manage a gun and a horse, they were procured; and these, and the company to which they introduced him, afforded employment for all his attention and time.

My father had devoted his early years to the indefatigable pursuit of gain. He was frugal and abstemious, though not covetous, and amassed a large property. This property he intended to divide between his two children, and to secure my portion to his nephew, whom his parents had left an orphan in his infancy, and whom my father had taken and treated as his own child by marrying him to me. This nephew passed his childhood among us. His temper being more generous than my brother's, and being taught mutually to regard each other as destined to a future union, our intercourse was cordial and affectionate.

We parted at an age at which nothing like passion could be felt. He went to Europe, in circumstances very favourable to his improvement, leaving behind him the expectation of his returning in a few years. Meanwhile, my father was anxious that we should regard each other and maintain a correspondence as persons betrothed. In persons at our age, this scheme was chimerical. As soon as I acquired the power of reflection, I perceived the folly of such premature bonds, and, though I did not openly oppose my father's wishes, held myself entirely free to obey any new impulse which circumstances might produce. My mother (so let me still call Mrs. Fielder) fully concurred in my views.

You are acquainted, my friend, with many events of my early life. Most of those not connected with my father and his nephew, I have often related. At present, therefore, I shall omit all collateral and contemporary incidents, and confine myself

entirely to those connected with these two persons.

My father, on the death of his wife, retired from business, and took a house in an airy and secluded situation. His household consisted of a housekeeper and two or three servants, and apartments were always open for his son.

My brother's temper grew more unmanageable as he increased in years. My father's views with regard to him were such as parental foresight and discretion commonly dictate. He wished him to acquire all possible advantages of education, and then to betake himself to some liberal profession, in which he might obtain honour as well as riches. This sober scheme by no means suited the restless temper of the youth. It was his maxim that all restraints were unworthy of a lad of spirit, and that it was far more wise to spend freely what his father had painfully acquired, than, by the same plodding and toilsome arts, to add to the heap.

I scarcely know how to describe my feelings in relation to this young man. My affection for him was certainly without that tenderness which a good brother is sure to excite. I do not remember a single direct kindness that I ever received from him; but I remember innumerable ill offices and contempts. Still, there was some inexplicable charm in the mere tie of kindred, which made me more deplore his errors, exult in his talents, rejoice in his success, and take a deeper interest in his concerns than in those of any other person.

As he advanced in age, I had new cause for my zeal in his

behalf. My father's temper was easy and flexible; my brother was at once vehement and artful. Frank's arguments and upbraidings created in his father an unnatural awe, an apprehension and diffidence in thwarting his wishes and giving advice, which usually distinguish the filial character. The youth perceived his advantages, and employed them in carrying every point on which his inclination was set.

For a long time this absurd indulgence was shown in allowing his son to employ his time as he pleased, in refraining from all animadversions on his idleness and dissipation, and supplying him with a generous allowance of pocket-money. This allowance required now and then to be increased. Every year and every month, by adding new sources of expense, added something to the stipend.

My father's revenue was adequate to a very splendid establishment; but he was accustomed to live frugally, and thought it wise to add his savings to the principal of his estate. These savings gradually grew less and less, till at length my brother's numerous excursions, a French girl whom he maintained in expensive lodgings, his horses, dogs, and *friends*, consumed the whole of it.

I never met my brother but by accident. These interviews were, for the most part, momentary, either in the street or at my father's house; but I was too much interested in all that befell him, not to make myself, by various means, thoroughly acquainted with his situation.

I had no power to remedy the evil: as my elder brother, and as a man, he thought himself entitled to govern and despise me. He always treated me as a frivolous girl, with whom it was waste of time to converse, and never spoke to me at all except to direct or admonish. Hence I could do nothing but regret his habits. Their consequences to himself it was beyond my power to prevent.

For a long time I was totally unaware of the tendencies of this mode of life. I did not suspect that a brother's passions would carry him beyond the bound of vulgar prudence, or induce him to encroach on those funds from which his present enjoyments were derived. I knew him to be endowed with an acute understanding, and imagined that this would point out, with sufficient clearness, the wisdom of limiting his expenses to his income.

In my daily conversations with my father, I never voluntarily introduced Frank as our topic, unless by the harmless and trite questions of "When was he here?" "Where has he gone?" and the like. We met only by accident, at his lodgings; when I entered the room where he was, he never thought of bestowing more than a transient look on me, just to know who it was that approached. Circumstances at length, however, occurred, which put an end to this state of neutrality.

I heard, twice or thrice a year, from my cousin Risberg. One day a letter arrived in which he obscurely intimated that the failure of remittances from my father, for more than half a year, had reduced him to great distress. My father had always taught him to regard himself as entitled to all the privileges of a son; had

sent him to Europe under express conditions of supplying him with a reasonable stipend, till he should come of age, at which period it was concerted that Risberg should return and receive a portion with me, enabling him to enter advantageously on the profession of the law, to which he was now training. This stipend was far from being extravagant, or more than sufficient for the decent maintenance of a student at the Temple; and Risberg's conduct had always been represented, by those under whose eye he had been placed, as regular and exemplary.

This intimation surprised me a good deal. I could easily imagine the embarrassments to which a failure of this kind must subject a generous spirit, and thought it my duty to remove them as soon as possible. I supposed that some miscarriage or delay had happened to the money, and that my father would instantly rectify any error, or supply any deficiency. I hastened, therefore, to his house, with the opened letter. I found him alone, and immediately showed him that page of the letter which related to this affair. I anxiously watched his looks while he read it.

I observed marks of great surprise in his countenance, and, as soon as he laid down the letter, I began to expatiate on the inconveniences which Risberg had suffered. He listened to me in gloomy silence, and, when I had done, made no answer but by a deep sigh and downcast look.

"Pray, dear sir," continued I, "what could have happened to the money which you sent? You had not heard, I suppose, of its miscarriage."

"No, I had not heard of it before. I will look into it, and see what can be done." Here further conversation was suspended by a visitant. I waited with impatience till the guest had retired; but he had scarcely left the room when my brother entered. I supposed my father would have immediately introduced this subject, and, as my brother usually represented him in every affair of business, and could of course throw some light upon the present mystery, I saw no reason why I should be excluded from a conference in which I had some interest, and was therefore somewhat surprised when my father told me he had no need of my company for the rest of the day, and wished to be alone with Francis. I rose instantly to depart, but said, "Pray, sir, tell my brother what has happened. Perhaps he can explain the mystery."

"What!" cried my brother, with a laugh, "has thy silly brain engendered a mystery which I am to solve? Thou mayest save thyself the trouble of telling me, for, really, I have no time to throw away on thee or thy mysteries."

There was always something in my brother's raillery which my infirm soul could never support. I ought always to have listened and replied without emotion, but a fluttering indignation usually deprived me of utterance. I found my best expedient was flight, when I *could* fly, and silence when obliged to remain: I therefore made no answer to this speech, but hastily withdrew.

Next morning, earlier than usual, I went to my father. He was thoughtful and melancholy. I introduced the subject that was nearest my heart; but he answered me reluctantly, and in

general terms, that he had examined the affair, and would take the necessary measures.

"But, dear sir," said I, "how did it happen? How did the money miscarry?"

"Never mind," said he, a little peevishly: "we shall see things put to rights, I tell you; and let that satisfy you."

"I am glad of it. Poor fellow! Young, generous, disdainful of obligation, never knowing the want of money, how must he have felt on being left quite destitute, penniless, running in arrear for absolute necessaries; in debt to a good woman who lived by letting lodgings, and who dunned him, after so long a delay, in so indirect and delicate a manner!—What must he have suffered, accustomed to regard you as a father, and knowing you had no personal calls for your large revenue, and being so solemnly enjoined by you not to stir himself in any rational pleasure! for you would be always ready to exceed your stated remittances, when there should be just occasion. Poor fellow! my heart bleeds for him. But how long will it be before he hears from you? His letter is dated seven weeks ago. It will be another six or eight weeks before he receives an answer,—at least three months in all; and during all this time he will be without money. But perhaps he will receive it sooner."

My father frequently changed countenance, and showed great solicitude. I did not wonder at this, as Risberg had always been loved as a son. A little consideration, therefore, ought to have shown me the impropriety of thus descanting on an evil without

remedy; yet I still persisted. At length, I asked to what causes I might ascribe his former disappointments, in the letter to Risberg, which I proposed writing immediately.

This question threw him into much confusion. At last he said, peevishly, "I wish, Jane, you would leave these matters to me: I don't like your interference."

This rebuke astonished me. I had sufficient discernment to suspect something extraordinary, but was for a few minutes quite puzzled and confounded. He had generally treated me with tenderness and even deference, and I saw nothing peculiarly petulant or improper in what I had said.

"Dear sir, forgive me: you know I write to my cousin, and, as he stated his complaints to me it will be natural to allude to them in my answer to his letter; but I will only tell him that all difficulties are removed, and refer him to your letter for further satisfaction; for you will no doubt write to him."

"I wish you would drop the subject. If you write, you may tell him—but tell him what you please, or rather it would be best to say nothing on the subject; but drop the subject, I beseech you."

"Certainly, if the subject displeases you, I will drop it." Here a pause of mutual embarrassment succeeded, which was, at length, broken by my father:—

"I will speak to you to-morrow, Jane, on this subject. I grant your curiosity is natural, and will then gratify it. To-morrow, I may possibly explain why Risberg has not received what, I must own, he had a right to expect. We'll think no more of it at present,

but play a game at *draughts*."

I was impatient, you may be sure, to have a second meeting. Next day my father's embarrassment and perplexity was very evident. It was plain that he had not forgotten the promised explanation, but that something made it a very irksome task. I did not suffer matters to remain long in suspense, but asked him, in direct terms, what had caused the failure of which my cousin complained, and whether he was hereafter to receive the stipulated allowance?

He answered, hesitatingly, and with downcast eyes,—why—he did not know. He was sorry. It had not been his fault. To say truth, Francis had received the usual sums to purchase the bills. Till yesterday, he imagined they had actually been purchased and sent. He always understood them to have been so from Francis. He had mentioned, after seeing Risberg's complaining letter, he had mentioned the affair to Francis. Francis had confessed that he had never sent the bills. His own necessities compelled him to apply the money given him for this purpose to his own use. To-be-sure, Risberg was his nephew,—had always depended on him for his maintenance; but somehow or another the wants of Francis had increased very much of late years, and swallowed up all that he could *rap* and *rend* without encroaching on his principal. Risberg was but his nephew; Frank was his own and only son. To-be-sure, he once thought that he had enough for his *three* children; but times, it seems, were altered. He did not spend on his own wants more than he used to do; but Frank's expenses

were very great, and swallowed up every thing. To-be-sure, he pitied the young man, but he was enterprising and industrious, and could, no doubt, shift for himself; yet he would be quite willing to assist him, were it in his power; but really it was no longer in his power.

I was, for a time, at a loss for words to express my surprise and indignation at my brother's unfeeling selfishness. I could no longer maintain my usual silence on his conduct, but inveighed against it, as soon as I could find breath, with the utmost acrimony.

My father was embarrassed, confounded, grieved. He sighed, and even wept.—"Francis," said he, at last, "to-be-sure, has not acted quite right. Bat what can be done? Is he not my child? and, if he has faults, is he altogether without virtue? No; if he did not find a lenient and forgiving judge in me, his father, in whom could he look for one? Besides, the thing is done, and therefore without remedy. This year's income is nearly exhausted, and I really fear, before another quarter comes round, I shall want myself."

I again described, in as strong and affecting terms as I could, Risberg's expectations and disappointment, and insinuated to him, that, in a case like this, there could be no impropriety in selling a few shares of his bank-stock.

This hint was extremely displeasing, but I urged him so vehemently that he said, "Francis will perhaps consent to it; I will try him this evening."

"Alas!" said I, "my brother will never consent to such a measure. If he has found occasion for the money you had designed for my poor cousin, and of all your current income, his necessities will not fail to lay hold of this."

"Very true;" (glad, it seemed, of an excuse for not thwarting his son's will;) "Frank will never consent. So, you see, it will be impossible to do any thing."

I was going to propose that he should execute this business without my brother's knowledge, but instantly perceived the impossibility of that. My father had for some years devolved on his son the management of all his affairs, and habit had made him no longer qualified to act for himself. Frank's opinion of what was proper to be done was infallible, and absolute in all cases.

I returned home with a very sad heart. I was deeply afflicted with this new instance of my brother's selfishness and of my father's infatuation. "Poor Risberg!" said I; "what will become of thee? I love thee as my brother. I feel for thy distresses. Would to Heaven I could remove them! And cannot I remove them? As to contending with my brother's haughtiness in thy favour, that is a hopeless task. As to my father, he will never submit to my guidance."

After much fruitless meditation, it occurred to me that I might supply Risberg's wants from my own purse. My mother's indulgence to me was without bounds. She openly considered and represented me as the heiress of her fortunes, and confided fully in my discretion. The chief uses I had hitherto found for

money were charitable ones. I was her almoner. To stand in the place of my father with respect to Risberg, and supply his customary stipend from my own purse, was an adventurous undertaking for a young creature like me. It was impossible to do this clandestinely; at least, without the knowledge and consent of Mrs. Fielder. I therefore resolved to declare what had happened, and request her counsel. An opportunity suitable to this did not immediately offer.

Next morning, as I was sitting alone in the parlour, at work, my brother came in. Never before had I received a visit from him. My surprise, therefore, was not small. I started up with the confusion of a stranger, and requested him, very formally, to be seated.

I instantly saw in his looks marks of displeasure, and, though unconscious of meriting it, my trepidation increased. He took a seat without speaking, and after some pause addressed me thus:—

"So, girl, I hear that you have been meddling with things that do not concern you,—sowing dissension between the old man and me; presuming to dictate to us how we are to manage our own property. He retailed to me, last night, a parcel of impertinence with which you had been teasing him, about this traveller Risberg, assuming, long before your time, the province of his care-taker. Why, do you think," continued he, contemptuously, "he'll ever return to marry you? Take my word for't, he's no such fool. I *know* that he never will."

The infirmity of my temper has been a subject of eternal

regret to me; yet it never displayed itself with much force, except under the lash of my brother's sarcasms. My indignation on those occasions had a strange mixture of fear in it, and both together suffocated my speech. I made no answer to this boisterous arrogance.

"But come,' continued he, "pray, let us hear your very wise objections to a man's applying his own property to his own use. To rob himself and spend the spoil upon another is thy sage maxim, it seems, for which thou deservest to be dubbed a *she Solomon*. But let's see if thou art as cunning in defending as in coining maxims. Come; there is a chair: lay it on the floor, and suppose it a bar or rostrum, which thou wilt, and stand behind it, and plead the cause of foolish prodigality against common sense."

I endeavoured to muster up a little spirit, and replied, "I could not plead before a more favourable judge. An appeal to my brother on behalf of foolish prodigality could hardly fail of success. Poor common sense must look for justice at some other tribunal."

His eyes darted fire. "Come, girl; none of your insolence. I did not come here to be insulted."

"No; you rather came to commit than to receive an insult."

"Paltry distinguisher! to jest with you, and not chide you for your folly, is to insult you, is it? Leave off romance, and stick to common sense, and you will never receive any thing but kindness from me. But come; if I must humour you, let me hear how you

have found yourself out to be wiser than your father and brother."

"I do not imagine, brother, that any good will result from our discussing this subject. Education, or sex, if you please, has made a difference in our judgments, which argument will never reconcile."

"With all my heart. A truce everlasting let there be; but, in truth, I merely came to caution you against inter-meddling in *my affairs*, to tell you to beware of sowing jealousy and ill-will between the *old man* and me. Prate away on other subjects as much as you please; but on this affair of Risberg's hold your tongue for the future."

"I thank you for your brotherly advice, but I am afraid I never shall bring myself to part with the liberty of *prating* on every subject that pleases me; at least, my forbearance will flow from my own discretion, and not from the imperious prohibition of another."

He laughed. "Well said, oddity. I am not displeased to see you act with some spirit: but I repeat my charge; *be quiet*. Your interference will do no good."

"Indeed, I firmly believe that it will not; and *that* will be a motive for my silence that shall always have its due weight with me. Risberg, I see, must look elsewhere for a father and a brother."

"Poor thing! do; put its finger in its eye and weep. Ha! ha! ha! poor Risberg! how would he laugh to see these compassionate tears! It seem she has written in a very doleful strain to thee,—

talked very pathetically about his debts to his laundress and his landlady. I have a good mind to leave thee in this amiable ignorance; but I'll prove for once a kind brother, by telling you that Risberg is a profligate and prodigal; that he neglects every study but that of dice; that this is the true reason why I have stood in the way of the old man's bounty to him. I have unquestionable proof of his worthlessness, and see no reason to throw away money upon London prostitutes and gamblers. I never mentioned this to the old man, because I would not needlessly distress him, for I know he loves Jack at least as well as his own children. I tell it you to justify my conduct, and hope that I may for once trust to your good sense not to disclose it to your father."

My heart could not restrain its indignation at these words.

"'Tis false!" I exclaimed; "'tis a horrid calumny against one who cannot defend himself! I will never believe the depravity of my absent brother, till I have as good proof of it as my present brother has given me of his."

"Bravo, my girl! who could have thought you could give the lie with such a grace? Why don't you spit in the face of the vile calumniator? But I am not angry with you, Jane; I only pity you; yet I'll not leave you before I tell you my mind. I have no doubt Risberg means to return. He knows on what footing you are with Mrs. Fielder, and will take care to return; but, mind me, Jane, you shall never throw yourself and your fortune away upon Risberg, while I have a voice or an arm to prevent it. And now—good-by to you."

So ended this conversation. He left me in a hurry and confusion of spirits not to be described. For a time I felt nothing but indignation and abhorrence for what I thought a wicked and cruel calumny; but in proportion as I regained my tranquillity, my reflections changed. Did not my brother speak truth? Was there not something in his manner very different from that of an impostor? How unmoved was he by the doubts which I ventured to insinuate of his truth! Alas! I fear 'tis too true.

I told you before that we parted at an age when love could not be supposed to exist between us. If I know myself, I felt no more for him than for a mere brother; but then I felt all the solicitude and tenderness of a sister. I knew not scarcely how to act in my present situation; but at length determined to disclose the whole affair to my mother. With her approbation I enclosed an order on a London merchant in a letter to this effect:—

"I read your letter, my friend, with the sentiments of one who is anxious for your happiness. The difficulties you describe will, I am afraid, be hereafter prevented only by your own industry. My father's and brother's expenses consume the whole of that income in which you have hitherto had a share, and I am obliged to apprise you that the usual remittances will no longer be made. You are now advancing to manhood, and, I hope, will soon be able to subsist upon the fruits of your own learning and industry.

"I have something more to say to you, which I scarcely know how to communicate. Somebody here has loaded your character with very heavy imputations. You are said to be addicted to

gaming, sensuality, and the lowest vices. How much grief this intelligence has given to all who love you, you will easily imagine. To find you innocent of these charges would free my heart from the keenest solicitude it has hitherto felt. I leave to you the proper means of doing this, if you can do it without violation of truth.

"I am very imperfectly acquainted with your present views. You originally designed, after having completed your academical and legal education, to return to America. If this should still be your intention, the enclosed will obviate some of your pecuniary embarrassments, and my mother enjoins me to tell you that, as you may need a few months longer to make the necessary preparations for returning, you may draw on her for an additional sum of five hundred dollars. Adieu."

My relation to Risberg was peculiarly delicate. His more lively imagination had deceived him already into a belief that he was in love. At least, in all his letters, he seemed fond of recognising that engagement which my father had established between us, and exaggerated the importance, to his happiness, of my regard. Experience had already taught me to set their just value on such professions. I knew that men are sanguine and confident, and that the imaginary gracefulness of passion naturally prompts them to make their words outstrip their feelings. Though eager in their present course, it is easy to divert them from it; and most men of an ardent temper can be dying of love for half a dozen different women in the course of a year.

Women feel deeply, but boast not. The supposed indecency

of forwardness makes their words generally fall short of their sentiments, and passion, when once thoroughly imbibed, is as hard to be escaped from as it was difficultly acquired. I felt no passion, and endeavoured not to feel any, for Risberg, till circumstances should make it proper and discreet. My attachment was to his interest, his happiness, and not to his person, and to convince him of this was extremely difficult. To persuade him that his freedom was absolute and entire, that no tie of honour or compassion bound him to me, but that, on the contrary, to dispose of his affections elsewhere would probably be most conducive to the interests of both.

These cautious proceedings were extremely displeasing to my cousin, who pretended to be deeply mortified at any thing betokening indifference, and terribly alarmed at the possibility of losing me. On the whole, I confess to you, that I thought my cousin and I were destined for each other, and felt myself, if I may so speak, not in love with him, but prepared, at the bidding of discretion, to love him.

My brother's report, therefore, greatly distressed me. Should my cousin prove a reprobate, no power on earth should compel me to be his. If his character should prove blameless, and my heart raise no obstacles, at a proper time I should act with absolute independence of my brother's inclinations. The menace that while he had voice or arm he would hinder my choice of Risberg made the less impression as it related to an event necessarily distant, and which probably might never happen.

The next letter from Risberg put an end to all further intercourse between us. It informed us of his being on the eve of marriage into an opulent family. It expressed much indignation at the calumny which had prevailed with my father to withdraw his protection; declared that he deemed himself by no means equitably or respectfully treated by him; expressed gratitude to my mother for the supply she had remitted, which had arrived very seasonably and prevented him from stooping to humiliations which might have injured his present happy prospects; and promised to repay the sum as soon as possible. This promise was punctually performed, and Risberg assured me that he was as happy as a lovely and rich wife could make him.

I was satisfied with this result, and bestowed no further thought on that subject. From morn to midnight have I written, and have got but little way in my story. Adieu.

Letter IV

To Henry Colden

Wednesday Morning, October 5.

I continued my visits to my father as usual. Affairs proceeded nearly in their old channel. Frank and I never met but by accident, and our interviews began and ended merely with a good-morrow. I never mentioned Risberg's name to my father, and observed that he as studiously avoided lighting on the same topic.

One day a friend chanced to mention the greatness of my fortune, and congratulated me on my title to two such large patrimonies as those of Mrs. Fielder and my father. I was far from viewing my condition in the same light with my friend. My mother's fortune was indeed large and permanent, but my claim to it was merely through her voluntary favour, of which a thousand accidents might bereave me. As to my father's property, Frank had taken care very early to suggest to him that I was amply provided for in Mrs. Fielder's good graces, and that it was equitable to bequeath the whole inheritance to him. This disposition, indeed, was not made without my knowledge; but though I was sensible that I held of my maternal friend but a very precarious tenure, that my character and education were likely to

secure a much wiser and more useful application of money than my brother's habits, it was impossible for me openly to object to this arrangement; so that, as things stood, though the world, in estimating my merits, never forgot that my father was rich, and that Frank and I were his only children, I had in reality no prospect of inheriting a farthing from him.

Indeed, I always entertained a presentiment that I should one day be poor, and have to rely for subsistence on my own labour. With this persuasion, I frequently busied my thoughts in imagining the most lucrative and decent means of employing my ingenuity, and directed my inquiries to many things of little or no use but on the irksome supposition that I should one day live by my own labour. But this is a digression.

In answer to my friend's remarks, I observed that my father's property was much less considerable than some people imagined; that time made no accession to it; and that my brother's well-known habits were likely to reduce it much below its present standard, long before it would come to a division.

"There, Jane, you are mistaken," said my friend, "or rather you are willing to mislead me; for you must know that, though your father appears to be idle, yet your brother is speculating with his money at an enormous rate."

"And pray," said I, (for I did not wish to betray all the surprise that this intelligence gave me,) "in what speculations is he engaged?"

"How should I tell you, who scarcely know the meaning of

the word? I only heard my father say that young Talbot, though seemingly swallowed up in pleasure, knew how to turn a penny as well as another, and was employing his father's wealth in *speculation*; that, I remember, was his word, but I never, for my part, took the trouble to inquire what *speculation* meant. I know only that it is some hazardous or complicated way of getting money."

These hints, though the conversation passed immediately to other subjects, made a deep impression on my mind. My brother's character I knew to be incompatible with any sort of industry, and had various reasons for believing my father's property to be locked up in bank-stock. If my friend's story were true, there was a new instance of the influence which Frank had acquired over his father. I had very indistinct ideas of speculation, but was used to regard it as something very hazardous, and almost criminal.

I told my mother all my uneasiness. She thought it worth while to take some means of getting at the truth, in conversation with my father. Agreeably to her advice, on my next visit I opened the subject, by repeating exactly what I heard, I concluded by asking if it were true.

"Why, yes," said he; "it is partly true, I must confess. Some time ago Frank laid his projects before me, and they appeared so promising and certain of success, that I ventured to give him possession of a large sum."

"And what scheme, sir, was it, if I may venture to ask?"

"Why, child, these are subjects so much out of thy way, that thou wouldst hardly comprehend any explanation that I could give."

"Perhaps so; but what success, dear sir, have you met with?"

"Why, I can't but say that affairs have not been quite as expeditious in their progress as I had reason, at first, to expect. Unlooked-for delays and impediments will occur in the prosecution of the best schemes; and these, I must own, have been well enough accounted for."

"But, dear sir, the scheme, I doubt not, was very beneficial that induced you to hazard your whole fortune. I thought you had absolutely withdrawn yourself from all the hazards and solitudes of business."

"Why, indeed, I had so, and should never have engaged again in them of my own accord. Indeed, I trouble not myself with any details at present. I am just as much at my ease as I used to be. I leave every thing to Frank."

"But, sir, the hazard, the uncertainty, of all projects! Would you expose yourself at this time of life to the possibility of being reduced to distress? And had you not enough already?"

"Why, what you say, Jane, is very true: these things did occur to me, and they strongly disinclined me, at first, from your brother's proposals; but, I don't know how it was, he made out the thing to be so very advantageous; the success of it so infallible; and his own wants were so numerous that my whole income was insufficient to supply them; the Lord knows how it has happened.

In my time, I could live upon a little. Even with a wife and family, my needs did not require a fourth of the sum that Frank, without wife or child, contrives to spend; yet I can't object neither. He makes it out that he spends no more than his rank in life, as he calls it, indispensably requires. Rather than encroach upon my funds, and the prospects of success being so very flattering, and Frank so very urgent and so very sanguine, whose own interest it is to be sure of his footing, I even, at last, consented."

"But I hope, dear sir, your prudence provided in some degree against the possibility of failure. No doubt you reserved something which might serve as a stay to your old age in case this hopeful project miscarried. Absolutely to hazard *all* on the faith of any project whatever was unworthy of one of your experience and discretion."

My father, Henry, was a good man,—humane, affectionate, kind, and of strict integrity; but I scarcely need to add, after what I have already related, that his understanding was far from being vigorous, or his temper firm. His foibles, indeed, acquired strength as he advanced in years, while his kindness and benevolence remained undiminished.

His acquiescence in my brother's schemes can hardly be ranked with follies: you, who know what scheme it was, who know the intoxicating influence of a specious project, and, especially, the wonderful address and plausibility of Catling, the adventurer who was my brother's prime minister and chief agent in that ruinous transaction, will not consider their adopting the

phantom as any proof of the folly of either father or son. But let me return. To my compliment to his experience and discretion, my father replied, "Why, truly, I hardly know how it may turn out in the long run. At first, indeed, I only consented to come down with a few thousands, the total loss of which would not break my heart; but this, it seems, though it was all they at first demanded, did not prove quite sufficient. Some debts they were obliged to contract,—to no great amount, indeed,—and these must be paid or the scheme relinquished. Having gone so far into the scheme, it was absurd to let a trifle stop me. I must own, had I foreseen all the demands that have been made from time to time, I should never have engaged in it; but I have been led on from one step to another, till I fear it would avail me nothing to hesitate or hold back; and Frank's representations are so very plausible!"

"Does your whole subsistence, then, my dear sir, depend on the success of this scheme? Suppose it should utterly fail: what will be the consequences to yourself?"

"Fail! That is impossible. It cannot fail but through want of money, and I am solemnly assured that no more will be necessary."

"But how often, sir, has this assurance been given? No doubt with as much solemnity the first time as the last."

My father began to grow impatient:—"It is useless, Jane, to start difficulties and objections now. It is too late to go back, even if I were disinclined to go forward; and I have no doubt of ultimate success. Be a good girl, and you shall come in for a share

of the profit. Mrs. Fielder and I, between us, will make you the richest heiress in America. Let that consideration reconcile you to the scheme."

I could not but smile at this argument. I well knew that my brother's rapacity was not to be satisfied with millions. To sit down and say, "I have enough," was utterly incompatible with his character. I dropped the conversation for the present.

My thoughts were full of uneasiness. The mere sound of the word "project" alarmed me. I had little desire of knowing the exact nature of the scheme, being nowise qualified to judge of its practicability; but a scheme in which my brother was the agent, in which my father's whole property was hazarded, and which appeared, from the account I had just heard, at least not to have fulfilled the first expectations, could not be regarded with tranquillity.

I took occasion to renew the subject with my father, some time after this. I could only deal in general observations on the imprudence of putting independence and subsistence to hazard: though the past was not to be recalled, yet the future was his own, and it would not be unworthy of him to act with caution. I was obliged to mingle this advice with much foreign matter, and convey it in the most indirect and gentle terms. His pride was easily offended at being thought to want the counsel of a girl.

He replied to my remarks with confidence, that no further demand would be made upon him. The last sum was given with extreme reluctance, and nothing but the positive assurance that

it would absolutely be the last had prevailed with him.

"Suppose, sir," said I, "what you have already given should prove insufficient. Suppose some new demand should be made upon you."

"I cannot suppose that, after so many solemn and positive assurances."

"But were not assurances as positive and solemn on every former occasion as the last?"

"Why, yes, I must own they were; but new circumstances arose that could not be foreseen?"

"And, dear sir, may not new circumstances arise hereafter that could not be foreseen?"

"Nay, nay," (with some impatience;) "I tell you there cannot be any."

I said no more on this subject at this time; but my father, notwithstanding the confidence he expressed, was far from being at ease.

One day I found him in great perturbation. I met my brother, who was going out as I entered, and suspected the cause of his disquiet. He spoke less than usual, and sighed deeply. I endeavoured, by various means, to prevail on him to communicate his thoughts, and at last succeeded. My brother, it seems, had made a new demand upon his purse, and he had been brought reluctantly to consent to raise the necessary sum by a mortgage on his house, the only real property he possessed. My brother had gone to procure a lender and prepare the deeds.

I was less surprised at this intelligence than grieved. I thought I saw my father's ruin was inevitable, and knew not how to prevent or procrastinate it. After a long pause, I ventured to insinuate that, as the thing was yet to be done, as there was still time for deliberation—

"No, no," interrupted he; "I must go on. It is too late to repent. Unless new funds are supplied, all that we have hitherto done will go for nothing; and Frank assures me that one more sacrifice and all will be well."

"Alas, sir, are you still deceived by that language? Can you still listen to assurances which experience has so often shown to be fallacious? I know nothing of this fine project; but I can see too clearly that unless you hold your hand you will be undone. Would to Heaven you would hesitate a moment!" I said a great deal more to the same purpose, and was at length interrupted by a message from my brother, who desired to see me a few minutes in the parlour below. Though at a loss as to what could occasion such an unusual summons, I hastened down.

I found my brother with a strange mixture of pride, perplexity, and solicitude in his looks. His "how d'ye?" was delivered in a graver tone than common, and he betrayed a disposition to conciliate my good-will, far beyond what I had ever witnessed before. I waited with impatience to hear what he had to communicate.

At last, with many pauses and much hesitation, he said, "Jane, I suppose your legacy is untouched. Was it two or three thousand

Mrs. Matthews put you down for in her will?"

"The sum was three thousand dollars. You know that, though it was left entirely at my own disposal, yet the bequest was accompanied with advice to keep it unimpaired till I should want it for my own proper subsistence. On that condition I received, and on that condition shall keep it."

"I am glad of it with all my heart," replied he, with affected vivacity. "I was afraid you had spent it by this time on dolls, trinkets, and baby-things. The sum is entire, you say? In your drawer? I am surprised you could resist the temptation to spend it. I wonder nobody thought of robbing you."

"You cannot suppose, brother, I would keep that sum in my possession? You know it was in bank at my aunt's death, and there it has remained."

"At what bank, pr'ythee?"

I told him.

"Well, I am extremely glad thou hadst wit enough to keep it snug, for now the time has come to put it to some use. My father and I have a scheme on foot by which we shall realize immense profit. The more engines we set to work, the greater and more speedy will be the ultimate advantage. It occurred to me that you had some money, and that, unless it were better employed, it would be but justice to allow you to throw it into stock. If, therefore, you are willing, it shall be done. What say you, Jane?"

This proposal was totally unexpected. I harboured not a moment's doubt as to the conduct it became me to pursue; but

how to declare my resolutions, or state my reasons for declining his offer, I knew not.

At last I stammered out that my aunt had bequeathed me this money with views as to the future disposition of it from which I did not think myself at liberty to swerve.

"And pray," said he, with some heat, "what were these profound views?"

"They were simple and obvious views. She knew my sex and education laid me under peculiar difficulties as to subsistence. As affairs then stood, there was little danger of my ever being reduced to want or dependence; but still there was a possibility of this. To insure me against this possible evil, she left me this sum, to be used only for subsistence, and when I should be deprived of all other means."

"Go on," said my brother. "Repeat the clause in which she forbids you, if at any time the opportunity should be offered of doubling or trebling your money and thereby effectually securing that independence which she wished to bequeath to you, to profit by the offer. Pray, repeat that clause."

"Indeed," said I, innocently, "there is no such clause."

"I am glad to hear it. I was afraid that she was silly enough to insert some such prohibition. On the contrary, the scheme I propose to you will merely execute your aunt's great purpose. Instead of forbidding, she would have earnestly exhorted you, had she been a prophetess as well as a saint, to close with such an offer as I now make you, in which, I can assure you, I have

your own good as well as my own in view."

Observing my silent and perplexed air, "Why, Jane," said he, "surely you cannot hesitate? What is your objection? Perhaps you are one of those provident animals who look before they leap, and, having gained a monopoly of wisdom, will take no scheme upon trust. You must examine with your own eyes. I will explain the affair to you, if you choose, and convince you beyond controversy that your money may be trebled in a twelvemonth."

"You know, brother, I can be no judge of any scheme that is at all intricate."

"There is no intricacy here. All is perfectly simple and obvious. I can make the case as plain to you, in three minutes, as that you have two thumbs. In the English cottons, in the first place, there is—"

"Nay, brother, it is entirely unnecessary to explain the scheme. My determinations will not be influenced by a statement which no mortal eloquence will make intelligible to me."

"Well, then, you consent to my proposal?"

"I would rather you would look elsewhere for a partner in your undertaking."

"The girl's a fool!—Why, what do you fear? suspect? You surely cannot doubt my being faithful to your interest? You will not insult me so much as to suppose that I would defraud you of your money? If you do,—for I know I do not stand very high in your opinion,—if you doubt my honesty, I will give you the common proofs of having received your money. Nay, so certain

am I of success, that I will give you my note, bond, what you please, for thrice the amount, payable in one year."

"My brother's bond will be of no use to me; I shall never go to law with my brother."

"Well, then, what will satisfy you?"

"I am easily satisfied, brother. I am contented with things just as they are. The sum, indeed, is a trifle, but it will answer all my humble purposes."

"Then you will," replied he, struggling with his rage, "you will not agree?"

My silence was an unequivocal answer.

"You turn out to be what I always thought you,—a little, perverse, stupid, obstinate—But take time;" (softening his tone a little;) "take time to consider of it.

"Some unaccountable oddity, some freak, must have taken hold of you just now and turned your wits out of door. 'Tis impossible you should deliberately reject such an offer. Why, girl, three thousand dollars has a great sound, perhaps, to your ears, but you'll find it a most wretched pittance if you should ever be obliged to live upon it. The interest would hardly buy you garters and topknots. You live, at this moment, at the rate of six times the sum. You are now a wretched and precarious dependant on Mrs. Fielder: her marriage (a very likely thing for one of her habits, fortune, and age) will set you afloat in the world; and then where will be your port? Your legacy, in any way you can employ it, will not find you bread. Three times the sum might answer,

perhaps; and that, if you will fall on my advice, you may now attain in a single twelvemonth. Consider these things, and I will call on you in the evening for your final answer."

He was going, but I mustered resolution enough to call him back:—"Brother, one word. All deliberation in this case is superfluous. You may think my decision against so plausible a scheme perverse and absurd; but, in this instance, I am fully sensible that I have a right to do as I please, and shall exert that right, whatever censure I may incur."

"So, then, you are determined not to part with your paltry legacy?"

"I am determined not to part with it."

His eyes sparkled with rage, and, stamping on the floor, he exclaimed, "Why, then, let me tell you, miss, you are a damned idiot. I knew you were a fool, but could not believe that your folly would ever carry you to these lengths!"—Much more in this style did poor Frank utter on this occasion. I listened trembling, confounded, vexed, and, as soon as I could recover presence of mind, hastened out of his presence.

This dialogue occupied all my thoughts during that day and the following. I was sitting, next evening, at twilight, pensively, in my own apartment, when, to my infinite surprise, my brother was announced. At parting with him the day before, he swore vehemently that he would never see my face again if he could help it. I supposed this resolution had given way to his anxiety to gain my concurrence with his schemes, and would fain have shunned

a second interview. This, however, was impossible. I therefore composed my tremors as well as I was able, and directed him to be admitted. The angry emotions of yesterday had disappeared from his countenance, and he addressed me with his customary carelessness. After a few trifling preliminaries, he asked me if I had considered the subject of our yesterday's conversation. I answered that I had supposed that subject to have been dismissed forever. It was not possible for time or argument to bring us to the same way of thinking on it. I hoped, therefore, that he would not compel me to discuss it a second time.

Instead of flying into rage, as I expected, he fixed his eyes thoughtfully on the floor, and, after a melancholy pause, said, "I expected to find you invincible on that head. To say truth, I came not to discuss that subject with you anew. I came merely to ask a trifling favour." Here he stopped. He was evidently at a loss how to proceed. His features became more grave, and he actually sighed.

My heart, I believe thou knowest, Harry, is the sport, the mere plaything, of gratitude and pity. Kindness will melt my firmest resolutions in a moment. Entreaty will lead me to the world's end. Gentle accents, mournful looks, in my brother, was a claim altogether irresistible. The mildness, the condescension which I now witnessed thrilled to my heart. A grateful tear rushed to my eye, and I almost articulated, "Dear, dear brother, be always thus kind and thus good, and I will lay down my life for you."

It was well for us both that my brother had too much

pride or too little cunning to profit by the peculiarities of my temper. Had he put a brotherly arm around me, and said, in an affectionate tone, "Dear sister, oblige me," I am afraid I should have instantly complied with the most indiscreet and extravagant of his requests.

Far otherwise, however, was his deportment. This condescension was momentary. The words had scarcely escaped him before he seemed to recollect them as having been unworthy of his dignity. He resumed his arrogant and careless air, half whistled "ça ira," and glanced at the garden, with, "A tall poplar that. How old?"

"Not very old, for *I* planted it."

"Very likely. Just such another giddy head and slender body as the planter's. But, now I think of it, Jane, since your money is idle, suppose you lend me five hundred dollars of it till to-morrow. Upon my honour, I'll repay it then. My calls just now are particularly urgent. See here; I have brought a *check* ready filled. It only wants your signature."

I felt instant and invincible repugnance to this request. I had so long regarded my brother as void of all discretion, and as habitually misapplying money to vicious purposes, that I deemed it a crime of no inconsiderable degree to supply the means of his prodigality. Occasions were daily occurring in which much good was effected by a few dollars, as well as much evil produced by the want of them. My imagination pondered on the evils of poverty much oftener than perhaps was useful, and had thence

contracted a terror—of it not easily controlled. My legacy I had always regarded as a sacred deposit,—an asylum in distress which nothing but the most egregious folly would rob or dissipate. Yet now I was called upon to transfer, by one stroke of the pen, to one who appeared to me to be engaged in ruinous vices or chimerical projects, so large a portion as five hundred dollars.

I was no niggardly hoarder of the allowance made me by my mother; but so diffident was I of my own discernment, that I never laid out twenty dollars without her knowledge and concurrence. Could I then give away *five hundred* of this sacred treasure, bestowed on me for very different purposes, without her knowledge? It was useless to acquaint her with my brother's request and solicit her permission. She would never grant it.

My brother, observing me hesitate, said, "Come, Jane; make haste. Surely this is no such mighty favour, that you should stand a moment. 'Twill be all the same to you, since I return it to-morrow. May I perish if I don't!"

I still declined the offered pen:—"For what purpose, brother, surely I may ask?—so large a sum?"

He laughed:—"A mere trifle, girl;'tis a bare nothing. But, much or little, you shall have it again, I tell you, to-morrow. Come; time flies. Take the pen, I say, and make no more words about the matter."

"Impossible, till I know the purpose. Do not urge me to a wrong thing."

His face reddened with indignation. "A wrong thing! you

are fool enough to tire the patience of a saint. What do I ask, but the loan of a few dollars for a single day? Money that is absolutely idle; for which you have no use. You know that my father's property is mine, and that my possessions are twenty times greater than your own; yet you refuse to lend this paltry sum for one day. Come, Jane, sister; you have carried your infatuation far enough. Where a raw girl should gain all these scruples and punctilios I can't imagine. Pray, what is your objection?"

In these contests with my brother, I was never mistress of my thoughts. His boisterous, negligent, contemptuous manners awed, irritated, embarrassed me. To say any thing which implied censure of his morals or his prudence would be only raising a storm which my womanish spirit could not withstand. In answer to his expostulations, I only repeated, "Impossible! I cannot."

Finding me inflexible, he once more gave way to indignation:—"What a damned oaf! to be thus creeping and cringing to an idiot—a child—an ape! Nothing but necessity, cruel necessity, would have put me on this task." Then turning to me, he said, in a tone half supplicating, half threatening, "Let me ask you once more: will you sign this check? Do not answer hastily; for much, very much, depends on it. By all that is sacred, I will return it to you to-morrow. Do it, and save me and your father from infamy; from ruin; from a prison; from death. *He* may have cowardice enough to live and endure his infamy, but *I* have spirit enough to die and escape it."

This was uttered with an impetuosity that startled me. The

words ruin, prison, death, rung in my ears, and, almost out of breath, I exclaimed, "What do you mean? my father go to prison? my father ruined? What do you mean?"

"I mean what I say. Your signing this check may save me from irretrievable ruin. This trifling supply, which I can nowhere else procure, if it comes to-night, may place us out of danger. If delayed till to-morrow morning, there will be no remedy. I shall receive an adequate sum to-morrow afternoon, and with that I will replace this."

"My father ruined! In danger of a jail! Good Heaven! Let me fly to him. Let me know from himself the full extent of the evil." I left my seat with this purpose, but he stopped me:—"Are you mad, girl? He does not know the full extent of the evil. Indeed, the evil will be perfectly removed by this trifling loan. He need not know it." "Ah! my poor father," said I, "I see thy ruin indeed. Too fatally secure hast thou been; too doting in thy confidence in others." These words, half articulated, did not escape my brother. He was at once astonished and enraged by them, and even in these circumstances could not suppress his resentment.

He had, however, conjured up a spirit in me which made me deaf to his invective. I made towards the door.

"Where are you going? You shall not leave the room till you have signed this paper."

"Nothing but force shall keep me from my father. I will know his true situation this instant, from his own lips. Let me go. I *will* go."

I attempted to rush by him, but he shut the door and swore I should not leave the room till I had complied with his request.

Perceiving me thoroughly in earnest, and indignant in my turn at his treatment, he attempted to soothe me, by saying that I had misunderstood him in relation to my father; that he had uttered words at random; that he was really out of cash at this moment; I should inexpressibly oblige him by lending him this trifling sum till to-morrow evening.

"Brother, I will deal candidly with you. You think me childish, ignorant, and giddy. Perhaps I am so; but I have sense enough to resolve, and firmness enough to adhere to my resolution, never to give money without thoroughly knowing and fully approving of the purposes to which it is to be applied. You tell me you are in extreme want of an immediate supply. Of what nature is your necessity? What has occasioned your necessity? I will not withhold what will really do you good,—what I am thoroughly convinced will do you good; but I must first be convinced."

"What would you have more than my word? I tell you it will save your—I tell you it will serve me essentially. It is surely needless to enter into long and intricate details, which, ten to one, you will not understand."

"As you please," said L "I have told you that I will not act in the dark."

"Well, then, I will explain my situation to you as clearly as possible."

He then proceeded to state transactions of which I understood

nothing. All was specious and plausible; but I easily perceived the advantages under which he spoke, and the gross folly of suffering my conduct to be influenced by representations of whose integrity I had no means of judging.

I will not detain you longer by this conversation. Suffice it to say, that I positively refused to comply with his wishes. The altercation that ensued was fortunately interrupted by the entrance of two or three visitants, and, after lingering a few minutes, he left the house gloomy and dissatisfied.

I have gone into these incidents with a minuteness that I fear has tired you; but I will be more concise for the future. These incidents are chiefly introductory to others of a more affecting nature, and to those I must now hasten. Meanwhile, I will give some little respite to my fingers.

Letter VI

[Editorial note: The observant reader will have noted there is no Letter V. The original text did not contain one, and we have chosen to let the letters retain their original numbers, rather than renumber them.]

To Henry Colden

Thursday Morning, October 6.

As soon as my visitants had gone, I hastened to my father. I immediately introduced the subject of which my heart was full. I related the particulars of my late interview with my brother; entreated him with the utmost earnestness to make the proper inquiries into the state of my brother's affairs, with whose fate it was too plain that his own were inextricably involved.

He was seized with extreme solicitude on hearing my intelligence. He could not keep his chair one moment at a time, but walked about the floor trembling. He called his servant, and directed him, in a faltering voice, to go to my brother's house and request him to come immediately.

I was sensible that what I had done was violently adverse to my brother's wishes. Nevertheless, I urged my father to an immediate explanation, and determined to be present at the conference.

The messenger returned. My brother was not at home. We waited a little while, and then despatched the messenger again, with directions to wait till his return. We waited, in vain, till nine; ten; eleven o'clock. The messenger then came back, informing us that Prank was still abroad. I was obliged to dismiss the hope of a conference this night, and returned in an anxious and melancholy mood to Mrs. Fielder's.

On my way, while ruminating on these events, I began to fear that I had exerted an unjustifiable degree of caution. I knew that those who embark in pecuniary schemes are often reduced to temporary straits and difficulties; that ruin and prosperity frequently hang on the decision of the moment; that a gap may be filled up by a small effort seasonably made, which, if neglected, rapidly widens and irrevocably swallows up the ill-fated adventurer.

It was possible that all my brother had said was literally true; that he merited my confidence in this instance, and that the supply he demanded would save both him and my father from the ruin that impended over them. The more I pondered on the subject, the more dissatisfied I became with my own scruples. In this state of mind I reached home. The servant, while opening the door, expressed her surprise at my staying out so late, telling me that my brother had been waiting my return for several hours, with marks of the utmost impatience. I shuddered at this intelligence, though just before I had almost formed the resolution of going to his house and offering him the money he

wanted.

I found him in my apartment. "Good God!" cried he; "where have you been till this time of night?"

I told him frankly where I had been, and what had detained me. He was thunder-struck. Instead of that storm of rage and invective which I expected, he grew pale with consternation, and said, in a faint voice,—

"Jane, you have ruined me beyond redemption. Fatal, fatal rashness! It was enough to have refused me a loan which, though useless to you, is as indispensable to my existence as my heart's blood. Had you quietly lent me the trifling pittance I asked, all might yet have been well,—my father's peace have been saved and my own affairs been completely re-established."

All arrogance and indignation were now laid aside. His tone and looks betokened the deepest distress. All the firmness, reluctance, and wariness of my temper vanished in a moment. My heart was seized with an agony of compunction. I came close to him, and, taking his hand involuntarily, said, "Dear brother, forgive me."

Strange what influence calamity possesses in softening the character! He made no answer, but, putting his arms around me, pressed me to his breast, while tears stole down his cheek.

Now was I thoroughly subdued. I am quite an April girl, thou knowest, Harry, and the most opposite emotions fill, with equal certainty, my eyes. I could scarcely articulate, "Oh, my dear brother, forgive me. Take what you ask. If it can be of any service

to you, take all I have."

"But how shall I see my father? Infinite pains have I taken to conceal from him a storm which I thought could be easily averted, which his knowledge of it would only render more difficult to resist; but my cursed folly, by saying more than I intended to you, has blasted my designs."

I again expressed my regret for the rashness of my conduct, and entreated him to think better of my father than to imagine him invincible to argument. I promised to go to him in the morning, and counteract, as much as I could, the effects of my evening conversation. At length he departed, with somewhat renovated spirits, and left me to muse upon the strange events of this day.

I could not free myself from the secret apprehension of having done mischief rather than good by my compliance. I had acted without consulting my mother, in a case where my youth and inexperience stood in the utmost need of advice. On the most trivial occasions I had hitherto held it a sacred duty to make her the arbitress and judge of my whole conduct; and now shame for my own precipitance and regard for my brother's feelings seemed to join in forbidding me to disclose what had passed. A most restless and unquiet night did I pass.

Next morning was I to go to my father, to repair as much as possible the breach I had thoughtlessly made in his happiness. I knew not what means to employ for this purpose. What could I say? I was far from being satisfied, myself, with my brother's

representations. I hoped, but had very little confidence that any thing in my power to do would be of permanent advantage.

These doubts did not make me defer my visit. I was greatly surprised to find my father as cheerful and serene as usual, which he quickly accounted for by telling me that he had just had a long conversation with Frank, who had convinced him that there was no ground for the terrors I had inspired him with the night before. He could not forbear a little acrimony on the impropriety of my interference, and I tacitly acquiesced in the censure. I found that he knew nothing of the sum I had lent, and I thought not proper to mention it.

That day, notwithstanding his promises of payment, passed away without hearing from my brother. I had never laid any stress upon the promise, but drew a bad omen from this failure.

A few days elapsed without any material incident. The next occasion on which my brother was introduced into conversation with Mrs. Fielder took place one evening after my friend had returned from spending the day abroad. After a pause, in which there was more significance than usual,—“Pray, have you seen Frank lately?”

I made some vague answer.

“He has been talked about this afternoon, very little, as usual, to his advantage.”

I trembled from head to foot.

“I fear,” continued she, “he is going to ruin, and will drag your father down the same precipice.”

"Dearest madam! what new circumstance?"

"Nothing very new. It seems Mr. Frazer—his wife told the story—sold him, a twelvemonth ago, a curricule and pair of horses. Part of the money, after some delay, was paid. The rest was dunned for unavailingly a long time. At length curricule and horses scoured the roads under the management of Monsieur Petitgrave, brother to Frank's *housekeeper*, the handsome mustec. This gave Frazer uneasiness, and some importunity extorted from Frank a note, which, being due *last Tuesday*, was, at Frank's importunity, withdrawn from bank to prevent protest. Next day, however, it was paid."

I ventured to ask if Mrs. Frazer had mentioned any sum. "Yes; a round sum,—*five hundred dollars*."

Fortunately the dark prevented my mother from perceiving my confusion. It was Tuesday evening on which I had lent the money to Frank. He had given me reason to believe that his embarrassments arose from his cotton-weaving scheme, and that the sum demanded from me was to pay the wages of craving but worthy labourers.

While in the first tumult of these reflections, some one brought a letter. It was from my brother. This was the tenor:—

"I fear, Jane, I have gained but little credit with you for punctuality. I ought to have fulfilled my promise, you will say. I will not excuse my breach of it by saying (though I might say so, perhaps, with truth) that you have no use for the money; that I have pressing use for it, and that a small delay, without being

of any importance to you, will be particularly convenient to me. No; the true and all-sufficient reason why I did not return the money was—because I had it not. To convince you that I am really in need, I enclose you a check for another five hundred, which you'll much oblige me by signing. I can repay you both sums together by Saturday,—if you needs must have it so soon. The bearer waits."

In any state of my thoughts, there was little likelihood of my complying with a request made in these terms. With my present feelings, it was difficult to forbear returning an angry and reproachful answer. I sent him back these lines:—

"I am thoroughly convinced that it is not in my power to afford you any effectual aid in your present difficulties. It will be very easy to injure myself. The request you make can have no other tendency. I must therefore decline complying."

The facility with which I had yielded up my first resolutions probably encouraged him to this second application, and I formed very solemn resolutions not to be seduced a second time.

In a few minutes after despatching my answer, he appeared. I need not repeat our conversation. He extorted from me, without much difficulty, what I had heard through my mother, and—methinks I am ashamed to confess it—by exchanging his boisterous airs for pathetic ones, by appealing to my sisterly affection and calling me his angel and saviour, and especially by solemnly affirming that Frazer's story was a calumny, I at length did as he would have me: yet only for *three* hundred; I would not

go beyond that sum.

The moment he left me, I perceived the weakness and folly of my conduct in the strongest light, I renewed all my prudent determinations; yet, strange to tell, within less than a week, the same scene of earnest importunity on his side, and of foolish flexibility on mine, was re-acted.

With every new instance of folly, my shame and self-condemnation increased, and the more difficult I found it to disclose the truth to my mother.

In the course of a very few days, one-half of my little property was gone. A sum sufficient, according to my system of economy, to give me decent independence of the world for at least three years, had been dissipated by the prodigality of a profligate woman. At the time, indeed, I was ignorant of this. It was impossible not to pay some regard to the plausible statements and vehement asseverations of my brother, and to suffer them to weigh something against charges which might possibly be untrue. As soon as accident had put me in full possession of the truth on this head, I was no longer thus foolishly obsequious.

The next morning after our last interview I set out, as usual, to bid good-morrow to my father. My uneasy thoughts led me unaware to extend my walk, till I reached the door of a watchmaker with whom my servant had, some time before, left a watch to be repaired. It occurred to me that, since I was now on the spot, I might as well stop and make some inquiry about it. On entering the shop I almost repented of my purpose, as

two persons were within the bar, if I may call it so, seated in a lounging posture, by a small stove, smoking cigars and gazing at me with an air of indolent impertinence. I determined to make my stay as short as possible, and hurried over a few questions to the artist, who knew me only as the owner of the watch. My attention was quickly roused by one of the loungers, who, having satisfied his curiosity by gazing at me, turned to the other and said, "Well, you have hardly been to Frank's this morning, I suppose?"

"Indeed, but I have," was the reply.

"Why, damn it, you pinch too hard. Well, and what success?"

"Why, what do you think?"

"Another *put-off*; another *call-again*, to-be-sure."

"I would not go till he downed with the stuff."

"No!" (with a broad stare;) "it a'n't possible."

"Seeing is believing, I hope;" (producing a piece of paper.)

"Why, so it is. A check!—but—what's that name?—let's see," (stooping to examine the signature:)—"*Jane Talbot*. Who the devil is she?"

"Don't you know her? She's his sister. A devilish rich girl."

"But how? does *she* lend him money?"

"Yes, to-be-sure. She's his sister, you know."

"But how does she get money? Is she a widow?"

"No. She is a girl, I've heard, not eighteen. 'Tis not my look-out how she gets money, so as her check's good; and that I'll fix as soon as the door's open."

"Why, damn it if I don't think it a forgery. How should such a girl as that get so much money?"

"Can't conceive. Coax or rob her aunt of it, I suppose. If she's such another as Frank, she is able to outwit the devil. I hope it may be good. If it isn't, he sha'n't be his own man one day longer."

"But how did you succeed so well?"

"He asked me yesterday to call once more. So I called, you see, betimes, and, finding that he had a check for a little more than my debt, I teased him out of it, promising to give him the balance. I pity the fellow from my soul. It was all for trinkets and furniture bought by that prodigal jade, Mademoiselle Couteau. She would ruin a prince, if she had him as much at her command as she has Frank. Little does the sister know for what purpose she gives her money: however, that, as I said before, be her look-out."

During this dialogue, my eye was fixed upon the artist, who, with the watch open in one hand, and a piece of wire in the other, was describing, with great formality, the exact nature of the defect and the whole process of the cure; but, though I looked steadfastly at him, I heard not a syllable of his dissertation. I broke away when his first pause allowed me.

The strongest emotion in my heart was resentment. That my name should be prostituted by the foul mouths of such wretches, and my money be squandered for the gratification of a meretricious vagabond, were indignities not to be endured. I was carried involuntarily towards my brother's house. I had lost all that awe in his presence and trepidation at his scorn which

had formerly been so troublesome. His sarcasms or revilings had become indifferent to me, as every day's experience had of late convinced me that in no valuable attribute was he anywise superior to his sister. The consciousness of having been deceived and wronged by him set me above both his anger and his flattery. I was hastening to his house to give vent to my feelings, when a little consideration turned my steps another way. I recollected that I should probably meet his companion, and that was an encounter which I had hitherto carefully avoided. I went, according to my first design, to my father's; I was in hopes of meeting Frank there some time in the day, or of being visited by him at Mrs. Fielder's.

My soul was in a tumult that unfitted me for conversation. I felt hourly-increasing remorse at having concealed my proceedings from my mother. I imagined that, had I treated her from the first with the confidence due to her, I should have avoided all my present difficulties. Now the obstacles to confidence appeared insurmountable, and my only consolation was, that by inflexible resolution I might shun any new cause for humiliation and regret.

I had purposed to spend the greater part of the day at my father's, chiefly in the hope of a meeting with my brother; but, after dinner, my mother sent for me home. Something, methought, very extraordinary, must have happened, as my mother was well: as, according to the messenger's account, she had just parted with a gentleman who seemed to have visited her

on private business, my heart misgave me.

As soon as I got home, my mother took me into her chamber, and told me, after an affecting preface, that a gentleman in office at – Bank had called on her and informed her that checks of my signing to a very large amount had lately been offered, and that the last made its appearance to-day, and was presented by a man with whom it was highly disreputable for one in my condition to be thought to have any sort of intercourse.

You may suppose that, after this introduction, I made haste to explain every particular. My mother was surprised and grieved. She rebuked me, with some asperity, for my reserves. Had I acquainted her with my brother's demands, she could have apprized me of all that I had since discovered. My brother, she asserted, was involved beyond any one's power to extricate him, and his temper, his credulity, were such that he was forever doomed to poverty.

I had scarcely parted with my mother on this occasion, to whom I had promised to refer every future application, when my brother made his appearance. I was prepared to overwhelm him with upbraidings for his past conduct, but found my tongue tied in his presence. I could not bear to inflict so much shame and mortification; and besides, the past being irrevocable, it would only aggravate the disappointment which I was determined every future application should meet with. After some vague apology for non-payment, he applied for a new loan. He had borrowed, he said, of a deserving man, a small sum, which he was now

unable to repay. The poor fellow was in narrow circumstances; was saddled with a numerous family; had been prevailed upon to lend, after extreme urgency on my brother's part; was now driven to the utmost need, and by a prompt repayment would probably be saved from ruin. A minute and plausible account of the way in which the debt originated, and his inability to repay it shown to have proceeded from no fault of his.

I repeatedly endeavoured to break off the conversation, by abruptly leaving the room; but he detained me by importunity, by holding my hand, by standing against the door.

How irresistible is supplication! The glossings and plausibilities of eloquence are inexhaustible. I found my courage wavering. After a few ineffectual struggles, I ceased to contend. He saw that little remained to complete his conquest; and, to effect that little, by convincing me that his tale was true, he stepped out a moment, to bring in his creditor, whose anxiety had caused him to accompany Frank to the door.

This momentary respite gave me time to reflect. I ran through the door, now no longer guarded; up-stairs I flew into my mother's chamber, and told her from what kind of persecution I had escaped.

While I was speaking, some one knocked at the door. It was a servant, despatched by my brother to summon me back. My mother went in my stead. I was left, for some minutes, alone.

So persuasive had been my brother's rhetoric, that I began to regret my flight.

I felt something like compunction at having deprived him of an opportunity to prove his assertions. Every gentle look and insinuating accent reappeared to my memory, and I more than half repented my inflexibility.

While buried in these thoughts, my mother returned. She told me that my brother was gone, after repeatedly requesting an interview with me, and refusing to explain his business to any other person.

"Was there anybody with him, madam?"

"Yes. One Clarges,—a jeweller,—an ill-looking, suspicious person."

"Do you know any thing of this Clarges?"

"Nothing but what I am sorry to know. He is a dissolute fellow, who has broken the hearts of two wives, and thrown his children for maintenance on their maternal relations. 'Tis the same who carried your last check to the bank."

I just then faintly recollected the name of Clarges, as having occurred in the conversation at the watchmaker's, and as being the name of him who had produced the paper. This, then, was the person who was to have been introduced to me as the friend in need, the meritorious father of a numerous family, whom the payment of a just debt was to relieve from imminent ruin! How loathsome, how detestable, how insecure, are fraud and treachery! Had he been confronted with me, no doubt he would have recognised the person whom he stared at at the watchmaker's.

Next morning I received a note, dated on the preceding evening. These were the terms of it:—

"I am sorry to say, Jane, that the ruin of a father and brother may justly be laid at your door. Not to save them, when the means were in your power, and when entreated to use the means, makes you the author of their ruin. The crisis has come. Had you shown a little mercy, the crisis might have terminated favourably. As it is, we are undone. You do not deserve to know the place of my retreat. Your unsisterly heart will prompt you to intercept rather than to aid or connive at my flight. Fly I must; whither, it is pretty certain, will never come to your knowledge. Farewell."

My brother's disappearance, the immediate ruin of my father, whose whole fortune was absorbed by debts contracted in his name, and for the most part without his knowledge, the sudden affluence of the adventurer who had suggested his projects to my brother, were the immediate consequences of this event. To a man of my father's habits and views, no calamity can be conceived greater than this. Never did I witness a more sincere grief, a more thorough despair. Every thing he once possessed was taken away from him and sold. My mother, however, prevented all the most opprobrious effects of poverty, and all in my power to alleviate his solitude, and console him in his distress, was done.

Would you have thought, after this simple relation, that there was any room for malice and detraction to build up their inventions?

My brother was enraged that I refused to comply with any of his demands; not grateful for the instances in which I did comply. Clarges resented the disappointment of his scheme as much as if honour and integrity had given him a title to success.

How many times has the story been told, and with what variety of exaggeration, that the sister refused to lend her brother money, when she had plenty at command, and when a seasonable loan would have prevented the ruin of her family, while, at the same time, she had such an appetite for toys and baubles, that ere yet she was eighteen years old she ran in debt to Clarges the jeweller for upwards of five hundred dollars'-worth!

You are the only person to whom I have thought myself bound to tell the whole truth. I do not think my reluctance to draw the follies of my brother from oblivion a culpable one. I am willing to rely, for my justification from malicious charges, on the general tenor of my actions, and am scarcely averse to buy my brother's reputation at the cost of my own. The censure of the undistinguishing and undistinguished multitude gives me little uneasiness. Indeed, the disapprobation of those who have no particular connection with us is a very faint, dubious, and momentary feeling. We are thought of, now and then, by chance, and immediately forgotten. Their happiness is unaffected by the sentence casually pronounced on us, and we suffer nothing, since it scarcely reaches our ears, and the interval between the judge and the culprit hinders it from having any influence on their actions. Not so when the censure reaches those who love us. The

charge engrosses their attention, influences their happiness, and regulates their deportment towards us. My self-regard, and my regard for you, equally lead me to vindicate myself to you from any charge, however chimerical or obsolete it may be.

My brother went to France. He seemed disposed to forget that he ever had kindred or country; never informed us of his situation and views. All our tidings of him came to us indirectly. In this way we heard that he procured a commission in the republican troops, had made some fortunate campaigns, and had enriched himself by lucky speculations in the forfeited estates.

My mother was informed, by some one lately returned from Paris, that Frank had attained possession of the whole property of an emigrant Comte de Puysegur, who was far from being the poorest of the ancient nobles; that he lived? with princely luxury, in the count's hotel; that he had married, according to the new mode, the comte's sister, and was probably, for the remainder of his life, a Frenchman. He is attentive to his countrymen, and this reporter partook of several entertainments at his house.

Methinks the memory of past incidents must sometimes intrude upon his thoughts. Can he have utterly forgotten the father whom he reduced to indigence, whom he sent to a premature grave? Amidst his present opulence, one would think it would occur to him to inquire into the effects of his misconduct, not only to his own family, but on others.

What a strange diversity there is among human characters! Frank is, I question not, gay, volatile, impetuous as ever. The

jovial carousal and the sound sleep are never molested, I dare say, by the remembrance of the incidents I have related to you.

Methinks, had I the same heavy charges to make against my conscience, I should find no refuge but death from the goadings of remorse. To have abandoned a father to the jail or the hospital, or to the charity of strangers,—a father too who had yielded him an affection and a trust without limits; to have wronged a sister out of the little property on which she relied for support to her unprotected youth or helpless age,—a sister who was virtually an orphan, who had no natural claim upon her present patroness, but might be dismissed penniless from the house that sheltered her, without exposing the self-constituted mother to any reproach.

And has not this event taken place already? What can I expect but that, at *least*, it will take place as soon as she hears of my resolution with regard to thee? She ought to know it immediately. I myself ought to tell it, and this was one of the tasks which I designed to perform in your absence: yet, alas! I know not how to set about it.

My fingers are for once thoroughly weary. I must lay down the pen. But first; why don't I hear from you? Every day since Sunday, when you left me, have I despatched an enormous packet, and have not received a sentence in answer. 'Tis not well done, my friend, to forget and neglect me thus. You gave me some reason, indeed, to expect no very sudden tidings from you; but there is inexpiable treason in the silence of four long days. If you do not offer substantial excuses for this delay, woe be to thee!

Take this letter, and expect not another syllable from my pen
till I hear from you.

Letter VII

To Henry Golden

Thursday Night.

What a little thing subverts my peace,—dissipates my resolutions! Am I not an honest, foolish creature, Hal? I uncover this wayward heart to thy view as promptly as if the disclosure had no tendency to impair thy esteem and forfeit thy love; that is, to devote me to death,—to ruin me beyond redemption.

And yet, if the unveiling of my follies should have this effect, I think I should despise thee for stupidity and hate thee for ingratitude; for whence proceed my irresolution, my vicissitudes of purpose, but from my love? and that man's heart must be made of strange stuff that can abhor or contemn a woman for loving him too much. Of such stuff the heart of my friend, thank Heaven, is *not* made. Though I love him far—*far* too much, he will not trample on or scoff at me.

But how my pen rambles!—No wonder; for my intellects are in a strange confusion. There is an acute pain just here. Give me your hand and let me put it on the very spot. Alas! there is no dear hand within my reach. I remember feeling just such a pain but once before. Then you chanced to be seated by my side. I

put your hand to the spot, and, strange to tell, a moment after I looked for the pain and 'twas gone,—utterly vanished! Cannot I imagine so strongly as to experience that relief which your hand pressed to my forehead would give? Let me lay down the pen and try.

Ah! my friend! when present, thou'rt an excellent physician; but as thy presence is my cure, so thy absence is my only, my fatal malady.

My desk is, of late, always open; my paper spread; my pen moist. I must talk to you, though you give me no answer, though I have nothing but gloomy forebodings to communicate, or mournful images to call up. I must talk to you, even when you cannot hear; when invisible; when distant many a mile. It is some relief even to corporal agonies. Even the pain which I just now complained of is lessened since I took up the pen. Oh, Hal! Hal! if you ever prove ungrateful or a traitor to me, and there be a state retributive hereafter, terrible will be thy punishment.

But why do I talk to thee thus wildly? Why deal I in such rueful prognostics? I want to tell you why, for I have a reason for my present alarms: they all spring from one source,—my doubts of thy fidelity. Yes, Henry, since your arrival at Wilmington you have been a frequent visitant of Miss Secker, and have kept a profound silence towards me.

Nothing can be weaker and more silly than these disquiets. Cannot my friend visit a deserving woman a few times but my terrors must impertinently intrude?—Cannot he forget the pen,

and fail to write to me, for half a week together, but my rash resentments must conjure up the phantoms of ingratitude and perfidy?

Pity the weakness of a fond heart, Henry, and let me hear from you, and be your precious and long-withheld letter my relief from every disquiet. I believe, and do *not* believe, what I have heard, and what I have heard teems with a thousand mischiefs, or is fair and innocent, according to my reigning temper.—Adieu; but let me hear from you immediately.

Letter VIII

To Jane Talbot

Wilmington, Saturday, October 9.

I thought I had convinced my friend that a letter from me ought not to be expected earlier than Monday. I left her to gratify no fickle humour, nor because my chief pleasure lay anywhere but in her company. She knew of my design to make some stay at this place, and that the business that occasioned my stay would leave me no leisure to write.

Is it possible that my visits to Miss Secker have given you any concern? Why must the source of your anxiety be always so mortifying and opprobrious to me? That the absence of a few days, and the company of another woman, should be thought to change my sentiments, and make me secretly recant those vows which I offered to you, is an imputation on my common sense which—I suppose I deserve. You judge of me from what you know of me. How can you do otherwise? If my past conduct naturally creates such suspicions, who am I to blame but myself? Reformation should precede respect; and how should I gain confidence in my integrity but as the fruit of perseverance in well-doing?

Alas! how much has he lost who has forfeited his own esteem!

As to Miss Secker, your ignorance of her, and, I may add, of yourself, has given her the preference. You think her your superior, no doubt, in every estimable and attractive quality, and therefore suspect her influence on a being so sensual and volatile as poor Hal. Were she really more lovely, the faithless and giddy wretch might possibly forget you; but Miss Secker is a woman whose mind and person are not only inferior to yours, but wholly unfitted to inspire love. If it were possible to smile in my present mood, I think I should indulge *one smile* at the thought of falling in love with a woman who has scarcely had education enough to enable her to write her name, who has been confined to her bed about eighteen months by a rheumatism contracted by too assiduous application to the wash-tub, and who often boasts that she was born, not above forty-five years ago, in an upper story of the mansion at Mount Vernon.

You do not tell me who it was that betrayed me to you. I suspect, however, it was Miss Jessup. She was passing through this town, in her uncle's carriage, on Wednesday, on her way home. Seeing me come out of the poor woman's lodgings, she stopped the coach, prated for five minutes, and left me with ironical menaces of telling you of my frequent visits to a single lady, of whom it appeared that she had some knowledge. Thus you see that your disquiets have had no foundation but in the sportive malice of your talkative neighbour.

Hannah Secker chanced to be talked of at Mr. Henshaw's

as a poor creature, who was sick and destitute, and lay, almost deserted, in a neighbouring hovel. She existed on charity, which was the more scanty and reluctant as she bore but an indifferent character either for honesty or gratitude.

The name, when first mentioned, struck my ear as something that had once been familiar, and, in my solitary evening walk, I stopped at her cottage. The sight of her, though withered by age and disease, called her fully to mind. Three years ago, she lived in the city, and had been very serviceable to me in the way of her calling. I had dismissed her, however, after receiving several proofs that a pair of silk stockings and a muslin cravat offered too mighty a temptation for her virtue. You know I have but little money to spare from my own necessities, and all the service I could render her was to be her petitioner and advocate with some opulent families in this place. But enough—and too much—of Hannah Secker.

Need I say that I have read your narrative, and that I fully acquit you of the guilt laid to your charge? That was done, indeed, before I heard your defence, and I was anxious to hear your story, merely because all that relates to you is in the highest degree interesting to me.

This letter, notwithstanding my engagements, should be longer, if I were not in danger, by writing on, of losing the post. So, dearest love, farewell, and tell me in your next (which I shall expect on Tuesday) that every pain has vanished from your head and from your heart. You may as well delay writing to your

mother till I return. I hope it will be permitted me to do so very shortly. Again, my only friend, farewell.

HENRY COLDEN.

Letter IX

To Henry Colden

Philadelphia, Monday, October 11.

I am ashamed of myself, Henry. What an inconsistent creature am I! I have just placed this dear letter of yours next my heart. The sensation it affords, at this moment, is delicious; almost as much so as I once experienced from a certain somebody's hand placed on the same spot. But that somebody's hand was never (if I recollect aright) so highly honoured as this paper. Have I not told you that your letter is deposited *next* my heart?

And with all these proofs of the pleasure your letter affords me, could you guess at the cause of those tears which, even now, have not ceased flowing? Your letter has so little tenderness—is so *very* cold. But let me not be ungrateful for the preference you grant me, merely because it is not so enthusiastic and unlimited as my own.

I suppose, if I had not extorted from you some account of this poor woman, I should never have heard a syllable of your meeting with her. It is surely possible for people to be their own calumniators, to place their own actions in the worst light, to exaggerate their faults and conceal their virtues. If the fictions

and artifices of vanity be detestable, the concealment of our good actions is surely not without guilt. The conviction of our guilt is painful to those that love us: wantonly and needlessly to give this pain is very perverse and unjustifiable. If a contrary deportment argue vanity, self-detraction seems to be the offspring of pride.

Thou art the strangest of men, Henry. Thy whole conduct with regard to me has been a tissue of self-upbraidings. You have disclosed not only a thousand misdeeds (as you have thought them) which could not possibly have come to my knowledge by any other means, but have laboured to ascribe even your commendable actions to evil or ambiguous motives. Motives are impenetrable, and a thousand cases have occurred in which every rational observer would have supposed you to be influenced by the best motives, but where, if credit be due to your own representations, your motives were far from being laudable.

Why is my esteem rather heightened than depressed by this deportment? In truth, there is no crime which remorse will not expiate, and no more shining virtue in the whole catalogue than sincerity. Besides, your own account of yourself, with all the exaggerations of humility, proved you, on the whole, and with the allowances necessarily made by every candid person, to be a very excellent man.

Your deportment to me ought chiefly to govern my opinion of you; and have you not been uniformly generous, sincere, and upright?—not quite passionate enough, perhaps; no blind and precipitate enthusiast. Love has not banished discretion, or

blindfolded your sagacity; and, as I should forgive a thousand errors on the score of love, I cannot fervently applaud that wisdom which tramples upon love. Thou hast a thousand excellent qualities, Henry; that is certain: yet a little more impetuosity and fervour in thy tenderness would compensate for the want of the whole thousand. *There* is a frank confession for thee! I am confounded at my own temerity in making it. Will it not injure me in thy esteem? and, of all evils which it is possible for me to suffer, the loss of *that* esteem would soonest drive me to desperation.

The world has been liberal of its censure, but surely a thorough knowledge of my conduct could not condemn me. When my father and mother united their entreaties to those of Talbot, my heart had never known a preference. The man of their choice was perfectly indifferent to me, but every individual of his sex was regarded with no less indifference. I did not conceal from him the state of my feelings, but was always perfectly ingenuous and explicit. Talbot acted like every man in love. He was eager to secure me on these terms, and fondly trusted to his tenderness and perseverance to gain those affections which I truly acknowledged to be free. He would not leave me for his European voyage till he had extorted a solemn promise.

During his absence I met you. The nature of those throbs, which a glance of your very shadow was sure to produce, even previous to the exchange of a single word between us, was entirely unknown to me. I had no experience to guide me. The

effects of that intercourse which I took such pains to procure could not be foreseen. My heart was too pure to admit even such a guest as apprehension, and the only information I possessed respecting you impressed me with the notion that your heart already belonged to another.

I sought nothing but your society and your esteem. If the fetters of my promise to Talbot became irksome after my knowledge of you, I was unconscious of the true cause. This promise never for a moment lost its obligation with me. I deemed myself as much the wife of Talbot as if I had stood with him at the altar.

At the prospect of his return, my melancholy was excruciating, but the cause was unknown to me. I had nothing to wish, with regard to you, but to see you occasionally, to hear your voice, and to be told that you were happy. It never occurred to me that Talbot's return would occasion any difference in this respect. Conscious of nothing but rectitude in my regard for you, always frank and ingenuous in disclosing my feelings, I imagined that Talbot would adopt you as warmly for his friend as I had done.

I must grant that I erred in this particular, but my error sprung from ignorance unavoidable. I judged of others by my own heart, and very sillily imagined that Talbot would continue to be satisfied with that cold and friendly regard for which only my vows made me answerable. Yet my husband's jealousies and discontents were not unreasonable. He loved me with passion; and, if that sentiment can endure to be unrequited, it will never

tolerate the preference of another, even if that preference be less than love.

In compliance with my husband's wishes—Ah! my friend! why cannot I say that I *did* comply with them? what a fatal act is that of plighting hands when the heart is estranged! Never, never let the placable and compassionate spirit be seduced into a union to which the affections are averse. Let it not confide in the afterbirth of love. Such a union is the direst cruelty even to the object who is intended to be benefited.

I have not yet thoroughly forgiven you for deserting me. My heart swells with anguish at the thought of your setting more lightly by my resentment than by that of another; of your willingness to purchase any one's happiness at the cost of mine. You are too wise, too dispassionate, by far. Don't despise me for this accusation, Henry; you know my unbiassed judgment has always been with you. Repeated proofs have convinced me that my dignity and happiness are safer in your keeping than in my own.

You guess right, my friend. Miss Jessup told me of your visits to this poor sick woman. There is something mysterious in the character of this Polly Jessup. She is particularly solicitous about every thing which relates to you. It has occurred to me, since reading your letter, that she is not entirely without design in her prattle. Something more, methinks, than the mere tattling, gossiping, inquisitive propensity in the way in which she introduces you into conversation.

She had not alighted ten minutes before she ran into my apartment, with a face full of intelligence. The truth respecting the washwoman was very artfully disguised, and yet so managed as to allow her to elude the imputation of direct falsehood. She will, no doubt, in this as in former cases, cover up all under the appearance of a good-natured jest; yet, if she be in jest, there is more of malice, I suspect, than of good nature in her merriment.

Make haste back, my dear Hal. I cannot bear to keep my mother in ignorance of our resolutions, and I am utterly at a loss in what manner to communicate them so as to awaken the least reluctance. Oh, what would be wanting to my felicity if my mother could be won over to my side? And is so inestimable a good utterly hopeless? Come, my friend, and dictate such a letter as may subdue those prejudices which, while they continue to exist, will permit me to choose only among deplorable evils.

JANE TALBOT.

Letter X

To Jane Talbot

New York, October 13.

I have just heard something which has made me very uneasy. I am afraid of seeming to you impertinent. You have declared your resolution to persist in conduct which my judgment disapproved. I have argued with you and admonished you, hitherto, in vain, and you have (tacitly indeed) rejected my interference; yet I cannot forbear offering you my counsel once more.

To say truth, it is not so much with a view to change your resolution, that I now write, as to be informed what your resolution is. I have heard what I cannot believe; yet, considering your former conduct, I have misgivings that I cannot subdue. Strangely as you have acted of late, I am willing to think you incapable of what is laid to your charge. In few words, Jane, they tell me that you mean to be actually married to Colden.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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