


# The Forbidden Marriage

By

Catherine Anne Hubback, 1851

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[Table of Contents in PDF Bookmarks](#) 

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## Chapter 1

It was in the height of the London season, in the year 1831, that a large and brilliant party was assembled in a house in Grafton Street. All that was beautiful, and fair, and bright, bewitching to the senses, and intoxicating to the youthful mind, was there collected. Yet amidst the crowd, stood apart, abstracted, silent, a young man, who neither saw nor heard the united fascinations which surrounded him. His eyes, it is true, were fixed in earnest gaze on an exquisite painting of Raphael's, but he was unconscious even of its charms, for his heart was far away, and he was listening to the soft low murmurs of memory, which rendered all sounds inaudible to him.

While thus wrapped in his own thoughts, and abstracted from the general throng, there was one as attentively observing him. A graceful and lovely woman, having for some time regarded him with interest, softly approached him, and placed herself by his side.

Crowded as were the reception rooms, the spot where he stood was slightly removed from view, for a marble column formed a small recess, and behind this he stood, to contemplate the painting before mentioned, which hung in this corner, as if in a temple devoted to itself alone.

Perhaps it was no wonder that this retreat was shunned by the greater part of the assembly; the soft eyes of the Virgin Mother seemed to gaze almost reproachfully on the giddy triflers around, and even to the most careless observer, the impression was conveyed that either it or they were out of place.

"You were deeply engrossed, my dear cousin," said the young lady, who thus broke on Cecil's reverie, laying the tip of her finger half playfully on his arm as she spoke. "Have you come to worship in this quiet little sanctum? Why will you ever retreat from life and merriment?"

He turned on her his deep black eyes, with a gaze as of one awakened from a long sleep, but which gradually acquired more interest and animation as he regarded her, until the look of warm admiration — that look which all women are so pleased to read, and which once seen, no woman can mistake — made her drop her eyes, and brought a still richer blush to her glowing cheeks.

"I was under a spell, Laura," he replied, recovering himself, "and your voice has broken the illusion; you know a word spoken would at once dissipate the moving pictures in the magic mirror."

"I hardly know whether to wish your visions may have been pleasant or the reverse," replied Laura Mansfield, "since I would as much regret that you had been distressed by what was painful, as that I should have put to flight what was agreeable. May I ask if this fair-faced Madonna was the cause, or the subject of your reverie?"

Cecil again raised his eyes to the painting, and the former seriousness of his expression returned immediately. She observed it.

"The painting, no doubt, calls up reminiscences," said she, as he continued silent. "May I guess, Cecil? Is it like my late cousin, that you gaze so sadly?"

Her tone of *deep sympathy* touched his heart.

"You guess rightly, Laura," replied he, still fascinated by the canvas; "those loving eyes, that pure and delicate expression — yes, such was my Mary — and such is still — " He paused, and did not complete the sentence.

"Yes, it is an angel face," replied Laura, looking for one moment at the painting, and then turning her own brilliant eyes on him with an expression of the deepest interest. "It must be a pleasure to you to think that such she is still. No wonder you dwell on her likeness — "

"Her likeness," repeated he, absently, "her very image — air — voice and gesture are the same; thought — feeling — affection — everything external and internal, serves only to remind me of her."

Laura thought her cousin gone a little mad upon the subject of *his late wife*, and the likeness to her which he had discovered in Raphael's painting; but she was too polite, or too amiable to hint at such an idea, and after a short silence she began again:

"I suppose you feel no inclination to dance, Cecil?"

"Dance! oh, no! please excuse me. Allow me a momentary respite from the toils of civility; surely there is no one here to whom I have any chance of making myself agreeable. I shrink from the attempt."

"No wonder, dear Cecil; you shall do as you please here; I can quite comprehend how the scenes you trod with her at your side must now seem solitary and distasteful to you. But do not stand and indulge in sad and lonely reverie. Come with me into the conservatory; we shall have it almost to ourselves, and you shall tell me all your past sorrows, and teach me to feel with you."

She drew him away as she spoke, and they were soon standing in the small but mirthful conservatory, where they had no other companions than birds and flowers.

"Now tell me," said Laura, "all about my poor cousin." Then seeing he hesitated, she exclaimed: "Ah! I see you will not trust me; perhaps you think me too light and giddy to deserve such a confidence; but you do not know me. I have feelings — deep and lasting feelings; and where my heart is concerned — "

She stopped abruptly, and colored over brow, and face, and neck.

"I do not doubt your feelings, dear Laura," said her cousin, kindly, "but I mistrust my own; it is that which keeps me silent, and inclines me to repay your offered *sympathy* with my best thanks, and nothing more."

Laura was silent; pride and affection struggled in her bosom, but the latter conquered, and she resumed, after a short space:

"If you will not talk to me of one whose goodness and angelic virtues have reached even to my ears, tell me of your children. Talk of them, dear Cecil — what are they like?"

"Little cherubs," replied he, with enthusiasm. "You may smile, and call it *parental vanity*, if you please, but I boldly confess I think them beautiful, angelic — almost too much so — it makes me tremble to look at them."

"How I would like to see them!" cried Laura, "twins are so interesting. Which is most like you, the boy or girl?"

"I believe my little girl is considered most to resemble me; at least her eyes are dark, which of course gives a great resemblance."

"Poor little darlings, how they must want a *mother's care*," sighed Laura. "Ah! Cecil, I can sympathize with them; such has been my lot through life. I never even had that shadow of maternal care which a second marriage affords. Yet —" She stopped.

"Yet you do not know whether you would have liked it if you had. Was not that what you left unsaid, Laura?" demanded her cousin.

"No. I was going to say, where such a step is well advised, it is the best and kindest to very young children."

Cecil was silent, and Laura felt disappointed. She would have had no objection to undertake the office of step-mother to her little cousins; and being altogether of opinion that she was the fittest object for that office that their father could select, was rather inclined to wonder that he did not take the present tempting opportunity to tell her so himself. Finding, however, that Cecil gave no proof that he agreed with her in opinion, she suddenly remembered that they had been sitting there quite long enough, and she therefore proposed that they should return to the company. Cecil made no objection, but very soon afterwards he took his leave of her, and returned alone to his melancholy lodgings.

*Cecil Mansfield* was a young man of good family and fortune, with a handsome person, prepossessing address, and very amiable temper. With these qualifications, it was no wonder that his cousin, Laura, should regard his present sorrows with interest, or long to console him for them.

Cousins certainly are privileged relations, and a very great degree of latitude is always allowed in the sympathy and affection manifested between them. A great deal more of tenderness than she demonstrated might, however, have passed unheeded by Cecil, who, engrossed by his own thoughts, feelings, wishes, and fears, scarcely *heeded* her attentions, certainly never *solicited* them.

From his boyhood he had been his own master, and been accustomed to receive the submissive attention of all around him; for though he had a guardian who actually resided in the same house with himself, the temper of this gentleman was so easy, his habits were so indolent, and his pursuits so confined to the library and the arm-chair — that he and Cecil never interfered with one another in the least. It was true that Cecil's natural disposition made the guardian's interposition apparently unnecessary. He had never shown any inclination for habits of dissipation; had never been suspected of immoral or disreputable pursuits; but it was unfortunate for him, perhaps, that this outward correctness gave so fair a ground of excuse and self-apology for the supineness of his guardian. Habits of *self-indulgence* and *luxurious refinement* were formed, which, though apparently justified by his fortune and station in the world, were but a bad preparation for the struggle with difficulties and sorrows which in some shape or other assail every individual; and the custom of always following his own will, although that will had hitherto been tolerably correct, was likely to be inimical to his strength of mind, should there hereafter arise a contest between *inclination* and *principle*. It is not in such a school that we can train those characters which shall triumph over themselves and their passions.

Among Cecil's earliest friends, most agreeable playfellows, and most yielding companions — were the twin daughters of a gentleman resident in the same village. They were charming girls, and it was so natural that he should seek their society as a change from his more manly pursuits, that their father took little notice of the fact. Having no companions at home, and apparently no near relatives, he naturally selected *Mary* and *Fanny Ellis* to fill up the vacuum which the lack of the fraternal tie occasioned. At that time there was no *cousin Laura* to rival them, for Cecil's uncle, Mr. Henry Mansfield, had quarreled with his only brother about their father's will, and the breach had not yet been made up.

To assist the two girls in their gardens, train dogs and birds for them, accompany them on sketching or botanizing excursions, attend them at picnics, and dance with them at balls — was as much his delight as it seemed to be his duty; and when he left them for the University, each departure was honored by tears on their parts, and promises of steadfastness on his.

That he would marry one of these, his constant companions, had long been settled by the neighborhood; and though the choice between them puzzled most people, they trusted he would have less difficulty in deciding which he preferred.

And so apparently he had, for, just when he had attained his twenty-second year, and the sisters were entering their twentieth, it was announced in the neighborhood that *Mary* Ellis was betrothed to Cecil Mansfield, and that a very mirthful wedding at the Park might soon be expected.

It was an event to give general satisfaction, not only to the guests at the wedding-breakfast, but more particularly to such as could assert that “they had always said it would be *Mary*,” and it was surprising how many claimed the merit of correct prophecies on the subject.

But of all who heard it with satisfaction, there was none whose pleasure was so intense at the choice, as was that experienced by a certain young lawyer then studying in Lincoln’s Inn. It was not the gratification of a love of gaiety, nor the justification of a favorite prediction; it was the *relief* from an acute feeling of *jealousy* which gave him this pleasure.

*Frank Linwood* had likewise from his boyhood been the neighbor of the fair twins, and his attachment to Fanny was quite as sincere as that of Cecil to her sister, but not quite so prosperous, as he was not possessed of a ready-made income, and could only hope, by steady perseverance and unwearied industry, to work his way to such a fortune as might qualify him to address the object of his love.

Nothing could exceed the happiness of the young couple, except the profound misery of Cecil, when *death* put a sudden close to the marriage.

Mary had died, after two years of unclouded felicity, when giving birth to twins. Such, likewise, had been the mother’s fate.

This was the *first sorrow* Cecil had ever known, and its violence overwhelmed him. For a time, he seemed nearly frantic, could listen to no consolation, attend to no business, and see no one but his father-in-law and Fanny. But such passionate sorrow cannot last forever; the *more violent* the torrent — the *sooner* is it spent; and as the flood of despair subsided, one by one former *objects of interest* made their appearance, and again became prominent with him.

It had been a great addition to the domestic happiness of Mrs. Mansfield, that her marriage had been but a nominal separation from her own family; for such was the tender affection existing between the two sisters, that to live apart would have seemed impossible. They had never been sundered before Mrs. Mansfield accompanied her young husband on a wedding tour of a few weeks, the *conclusion* of which was hailed with delight by both sisters.

Living in the same village, and meeting every day, the wife had not experienced those sensations of loneliness, and uneasy pining for intimate female companionship, which too often oppress a young girl when removed entirely from her domestic circle, and separated from the tender sympathies of mother and sisters.

Of course, young ladies about to marry consider that their husbands will be *all in all* to them — that they can never need another friend or counselor, and give up their family ties with rapture; but when the husband has them all to himself, and female friends are banished, or at least absent, then the lack of them begins to be experienced; and it would be strange indeed — strange and unnatural — were the bonds of the whole lifetime to be thus lightly cast aside for perhaps a very recent acquaintance.

But none of this was the case with Mary Ellis, and her *short matrimonial career* seemed scarcely to be dimmed by a single cloud, until the moment of its sudden termination.

Fifteen months had passed since Cecil became a widower, and having been obliged to leave his beloved home in Brookensha Park, for a few weeks’ residence in London, he had, for the first time, been sought by his uncle, Mr. *Henry* Mansfield. He had at this time so far recovered his spirits, as to be able to make himself a very agreeable companion to his lovely cousin, and though they never arrived at the verge of a mutual flirtation, a good deal of tenderness on the lady’s side had been expended in her efforts to captivate him. She attributed his moments of silence, absence, and melancholy, to recollections of his loss, and was at much pains to give a livelier turn to his thoughts, or to persuade him that a *second relationship* would be the best cure for his sorrows.

She might have spared herself the trouble. He had already tried the experiment, and it was only the obstacles in his present pursuit which now distressed him. These, however, were serious. He loved, but hitherto he had not dared to address the object of his love, for she was *his sister-in-law*.

From the time of his wife’s death, his father-in-law, *Mr. Ellis* and *Fanny* had been inhabitants of his house. To soothe his sorrows, and watch over his children, had been at first the object of their removal there, and their abode had been prolonged from the circumstance of their having no other home. The lease of the house in which Mr. Ellis had hitherto lived having expired, unexpected difficulties arose respecting its renewal, and for some time they had been in considerable uncertainty as to where their future home would be. This point had, however, been lately decided, and Mr. Ellis intended to remove very shortly to some property which had recently come into his possession in the south of Scotland. It was this prospect which had first opened the eyes of Cecil Mansfield both to his feelings and his fears. As his wishes became distinct, so also became the magnitude of the difficulties he must encounter. The doubt which assailed him was not so much as to *Fanny’s feelings* — of those he was tolerably assured; it was the *principles* of his father-in-law which stood in his way. Often had he revolved the question as to this marriage in his own mind, and thinking over all the arguments

which he could muster to prove its *legality*, its *expediency*, and its *morality* — he had told himself that Mr. Ellis must yield to such opinions.

But his courage invariably failed him when an opportunity was presented for putting it to the proof; he shrank from the trial, and by thus shrinking, he showed at once how hollow were his self-assurances and his secret flattering hopes.

Something told him that had Mr. Ellis imagined such a connection possible, he would never have allowed his daughter to reside under her brother-in-law's roof. The connection between them, alone rendered such a residence permissible; and this could only screen the fact from censure, because it was supposed to banish love and marriage from their thoughts.

But something must be done immediately; some decisive step must be taken, for if Fanny were removed to Scotland, the difficulties in his way would be increased tenfold.

Full of these thoughts, he had returned pensively to his lodgings from his uncle's house, and spent a great part of the night in fruitless ruminations on his future conduct. The morning brought him some relief. A letter arrived by post from Mr. Ellis acquainting him that urgent business called him suddenly to his new property; and not liking to take Fanny from the children during their father's absence, he had determined that she should remain at Brookensha until Cecil's return, when she might follow her father, who did not expect to revisit Brookensha.

This announcement all at once opened a new train of ideas to Cecil. Here was Fanny left alone; unguarded by her father — might she not be persuaded, when thus situated, to take a step which never could receive the sanction of his presence? With a heart softened by the dread of a speedy separation, an event which must afflict her with the keenest sorrow, would she not be peculiarly in a state to yield to the temptation, and avert forever the threatened evil? Could he not convince her by the reasonings which satisfied himself, and induce her for once to follow the dictates of her feelings without looking too closely into the *propriety* of the action? Oh, yes; if, as he was persuaded, her heart beat with the same passion which was consuming his, there would be little difficulty in the task. Not a moment should be lost; and accordingly summoning his servant and giving the necessary orders for the journey, he employed himself meanwhile in purchasing some costly presents for the little group at home.

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 2

We must now transport the scene to Brookensha Hall, where the object of his thoughts and wishes was residing.

There could not have been found a more graceful group, nor a more charming subject for a painter's pencil than was formed by Fanny Ellis and her two infant relatives, on that summer evening. Bright rays from a golden sun streamed through the old stone-mullioned windows, and depicted on the chequered floor those heraldic bearings of many dyes with which the small panes were charged.

Antique paintings were suspended round the oaken paneled walls, and, uninteresting as they might be in themselves, they enlivened the otherwise somber tone of the wainscot.

Many *useful moral lessons* might wisdom have gravely deduced from those records of the past, rising in importance, from hints on the advantage of simplicity of dress, to lectures on the mutability and vanity of earthly distinctions. Of many paintings, the names were forgotten, and of some they were only remembered to be detested, while nearly the whole were so fantastically or unnaturally attired as to raise a sort of contemptuous pity for the taste which could have tolerated such a costume. But there they hung now, and wonderfully well they harmonized with the carved cornices, old armor and weapons, antlers of enormous deer, and other trophies which decked the walls.

There was the old furniture too — not the *imitations* which were just then the rage — but the *genuine* old chairs of massy carved oak, captivating to all lovers of the antique, much too high and stiff to be sat on with ease, and too heavy to be moved by ordinary strength, but matching perfectly the handsome and richly carved balustrade of the magnificent staircase, which swept in two graceful branches across one side of the hall.

The air of antique grandeur which such a garniture of the place imparted, was softened and relieved by the elegant modern flower-stands, crowded with all that was gayest and richest from the conservatory and hot-house, filling the air with a luxurious fragrance, which in a less lofty room would have been oppressive.

But as lovely as were the flowers, they could not attract the eye a moment from the more lovely living group which I am about to describe.

Half kneeling, half sitting on a large, low, Moorish cushion in the center of the hall, was a young woman of a remarkably interesting, rather than a beautiful countenance. Of a delicate complexion, and light brown hair, with a slender and graceful figure, and exquisitely beautiful hands and arms — she might have served a painter for the model of a Grace sporting with a pair of Cupids, or a Saint caressed by a couple of cherubs, according as his taste led him to dwell on the poetical images of ancient Greece or modern Rome, and his imagination were heathen or Christian in its cast.

Sporting she certainly was with a pair of the prettiest infants of fifteen months that ever tottered over marble floor, or velvet carpeting; they were alike in size and dress, complexion and features, except that the large dark eyes of the girl were indicative of a milder and more timorous disposition, than was shown in the open, fearless, penetrating blue eyes of her baby brother.

They laughed and clapped their graceful hands, and pattered their tiny feet upon the floor, sometimes flinging their round rosy arms about their grown-up playfellow's waist, then leaving her to follow, with slow, puny, and quaintly grave self-importance, the ball which she threw for them to chase, returning breathless and joyful with their prize, which, fit emblem of what might probably be the future object of their wishes, owed its value alone to the difficulty of obtaining it, and was no sooner possessed than again spurned from them.

These were *Fanny Ellis*, and her *niece* and *nephew*, who were now concluding the day with a game of romps; and, to complete the group, there stood at a short distance, a grave, respectable, middle-aged female, evidently *nurse* to the children, whose air of interest and affection towards Fanny, as well as the infants, showed her to be superior to the ordinary class of hired servants, and seemed to indicate that she had been long in the family. And so in fact she had, having been the nurse of the twin sisters from their birth, and feeling something of a mother's tenderness towards them.

At this moment Fanny Ellis was *mirthful*, but she was not *happy*. Her feelings were agitated and perturbed. She was missing Cecil every hour, and yet *dreading* his return, which was to be the signal for her own departure. How she should be able to bear this threatened separation, she could not imagine. For fifteen months, she had been the companion of Cecil, the guardian, and the almost mother of his children. Every object, every occupation had been subordinate to the great employment of consoling the widowed father, or attending to the motherless infants: and now she was looking forward to a speedy and a complete rupture of this tender bond. She must leave the children, and she must leave dear, dear Cecil; how could *she*, how could *they* bear it? Her father told her Cecil would marry again; and once more be as happy as he ought to be; but an indefinable and inexplicable feeling stole over her heart at the idea; she did not comprehend her own sensations, but the suggestion of his marrying again seemed as *improbable* as it was *painful*. Meanwhile, she was hoping that his prolonged absence in London, the termination of which was quite uncertain, would defer for some time at least, the dreaded departure.

She had spent the long hot summer's day alone, except for the children, and yet it had appeared brief to her. She had written to her father, had re-arranged the flowers in their usual sitting-room, bringing from the conservatory fresh

blossoms of the kind Cecil loved, more luxuriant heliotropes, fresher mignonette, cape jessamine, blossomed myrtle and tea-roses — then she had finished the watch-case, which was to be a parting souvenir to him, and completed a miniature copy of his large portrait, which hung in the state drawing-room, a memorial which she intended to carry away for her own satisfaction. She had caressed his favorite dog, driven out his children in the pony cart, not forgetting to call at the village carpenters, to know if the rustic chairs for which Cecil had been so impatient, were yet complete. And now she was about to see her little darlings laid in their quiet beds, and for that purpose was rising to accompany the nurse, Betty, when an exclamation from the children made her look around, and there behind her, beneath the arch which communicated with the vestibule and porch, stood Cecil himself.

The little ones immediately rushed forward to clasp their father's knees, and after hastily kissing them, he passed his arm around Fanny's waist, and pressed his lips to hers with something more than brotherly affection, which made her blush and shrink back ashamed. Of course the going to bed must be delayed for half an hour at least, that papa might have time to see a little of his darlings, and then the children disappeared, and to his disappointment, the *aunt* was going with them.

"Do come and walk with me, Fanny," said he, stopping her; "the children can go to bed without you for one night."

"Oh, Cecil, and so soon as I may have to leave them!" said Fanny.

"Do you not leave *me* at the same time?" said he, half reproachfully.

"Well, I will come," said she. She could never resist that look of entreaty which Cecil called up; and in five minutes she was at his side, equipped for a walk.

The day had been intensely hot, and the cool balmy evening was most refreshing, especially to Cecil, who had been traveling the greatest part of the day. For some time, they proceeded in silence: Fanny was the first to speak.

"I did not expect you so soon, Cecil; we thought your stay in town was to have lasted another week at least."

"And you are *sorry* to see me now?" said he, inquiringly.

"If I ever would be happy to see you, I certainly would be now," replied Fanny. "Why did you hurry away from London?"

"Because I learned you were alone here, Fanny, and I wanted to be with you. I did not expect you would reproach me for coming."

"Reproach you! oh, Cecil! you know I did not mean that," said poor Fanny, looking distressed. "You have a right to come when you please to your own house; but, indeed, I do love Brookensha so much that I cannot bear the thoughts of leaving it," and her eyes filled with tears as she looked round upon the well-known scenery.

"And must my coming home, hurry you away, dear Fanny?" inquired he, tenderly pressing the hand which leaned on his arm against his bosom. "Shall you leave the place you say you love, an hour sooner because I am here to share your pleasures with you?"

"Yes, indeed," replied Fanny, sorrowfully; "for my father desired me to have everything ready for leaving, as soon as possible after your return."

"But when did he expect that would take place, Fanny?" inquired Cecil.

"Not until next week, certainly; you know you talked of next Tuesday, or Wednesday, and he thought it possible that you might delay even longer than that. But at all events, I was to stay *until* your return," was her reply.

"Then from your own statement, dear Fanny," replied her brother-in-law, "he will certainly not expect you *this* week, and probably will not be prepared to receive you."

"He will not *expect* me," returned Fanny, "until he hears you have returned; but, when he learns that, of course he will."

"I do not think so at all; and I feel no doubt but that your coming a week sooner than he expects will *inconvenience* him considerably. Think what a state he must be in, just taking possession of his new house — all bustle and confusion — probably his servants not hired, his rooms not furnished, no room prepared for you, nothing as it should be. Depend upon it, you will inconvenience him materially if you go down, without notice, a week before you are expected."

"Ah, but if his affairs were really in the state of confusion you picture them, Cecil," replied Fanny, "I ought to be there to help him; you know I am his housekeeper, and certainly ought not to desert him just when my cares are most necessary. But I am quite sure that will not be the case. Papa is much too methodical and correct in everything he does, for his affairs to get into any such awful state of disorder; and there will be no difficulty about lodging me and my maid when we get there. He will have settled all that already. I am not afraid of meeting with any inordinate bustle, or confusion."

"Then your plea that he requires your help is quite groundless," observed Cecil, "so that one part of your argument goes for nothing, Fanny; and if you are not necessary to him, I assure you that you are so to me and my children — we shall be lost without you."

"Don't, Cecil, don't talk so!" cried poor Fanny, almost choked with her emotion; "you know I *must* go, do not for pity's sake make it more difficult to tear myself away."

"I do not know that you *must* go, at least before next week," persisted her companion; "on the contrary, as your father appointed next week for you to join him, it seems to me an unwarrantable departure from his plans for you to set off this week without giving him notice of the change. I see no necessity for it; and attention to his wishes should rather induce you to delay, at least until you can send him word of your determination."

"But I can easily do that," replied Fanny, who could argue decidedly and with self-possession on the subject, as long as she only thought of her father and his wishes, "I can easily do that if I write tomorrow. It is two days' post only — so he will get my letter before I reach him, as I shall not certainly be able to get everything ready tomorrow, and I shall be two days on the road."

"Then I presume you mean to travel on *Sunday*, Fanny," observed Cecil; "for as this is Thursday, and you admit that you cannot start tomorrow, you must intend to spend Sunday on the road."

"I had not thought of that," replied Fanny, in a voice which showed she was considering, "that makes a difference indeed. Perhaps I had better hurry my departure; I might manage to get off tomorrow afternoon, and by traveling late, and starting early on Saturday, I dare say I could reach Jedburgh in tolerable time on Saturday night."

"Which of all times and seasons I would think would be most inconvenient to reach a new house," argued Cecil. "Preserve me from suffering, or causing such a distress!"

"Oh, if I were a grand visitor," replied Fanny, smiling, "very likely papa would say the same; but my father knows my ways, and I know his, and I dare say I shall not distress him much — not more than my presence will amply compensate."

Cecil said no more; he was determined not to be conquered, but he knew the way to persuade Fanny was to touch her *heart*, not work against her *reason*. He felt confident that he could gain his point, and his present silence was the first step towards his anticipated victory. He assumed a thoughtful and injured expression of countenance, as if he felt deeply hurt at the determination to leave him which she evinced. For a considerable period, she did not notice this change; absorbed in her own reflections she did not look at him, and her own thoughts were so busily, and at the same time so sadly employed, that she was insensible to their mutual silence; and they finished their walk and re-entered the hall without another word being spoken between them.

Here they separated, and Fanny immediately repaired to the nursery, to see her heart's treasures asleep in their little cot. Now indeed she felt the threatened separation; and the agony of her grief, as she gazed on her sister's children, for what she thought might be the last time, was so great, that, half-choked with sobs, she was forced to withdraw, that she might not disturb the peaceful slumberers.

In her own room, she endeavored to compose herself, to fortify her heart by *prayer* and reflection to what seemed her inevitable duty; and she then returned to seek her brother-in-law, without trusting herself with another glance at the children.

She found Cecil in the library, seated in the recess of a window, apparently engrossed by gazing at the beautiful moon which was sailing in the quiet sky. A lamp was burning on the table at a little distance; but the corner he occupied being rather in the shade, was lighted chiefly by the moonbeams. The western horizon still glowed with the departing sun, the air was perfectly calm, and through the open window floated in the rich scent of the dewy flowers on the terrace beneath. The whistle of a blackbird, the distant lowing of cattle, the rushing of the stream over its rocky bed in the glen beneath — were the only sounds audible; and all in the room was so tranquil, and profoundly still, that the beating of her own heart seemed distinctly audible to Fanny, as she seated herself by the side of the window. After a minute's silence, she exclaimed: "Oh, Cecil, when I am gone, you must write to me very, very often, that I may know how everything goes on. Write about the children especially — my poor little darlings: all, everything connected with them will be interesting."

"I would certainly do so, with great pleasure," replied Cecil, in a cold and constrained voice, "could I really suppose that you desire it; but though you are so polite as to say so now, I do not imagine — I have not the vanity to flatter myself that you will feel any lasting interest in me or my children."

"Cecil!" exclaimed Fanny, in a tone of amazement.

"Yes," he continued, "you will soon have other thoughts to occupy your mind — other employments, and more amusing ones, I trust, to diversify your life — other ties, no doubt, to engross your affections. Let me, however, thank you now, in the name of my children and myself, for the care and kindness of the past. We are deeply indebted to you."

"Cecil! Cecil!" gasped Fanny, almost bewildered by his words, "what do you mean? How can you speak so?"

"I know I can never thank you enough," he proceeded in the same tone, "for all the *sacrifices* of the past — all that you have done and undergone for those who cannot repay you in any way; but my gratitude will only be extinct with my life, and the first words which my children shall learn to lisp, shall be a prayer for blessings on their *aunt* — they shall never forget her, though she may leave them, and cease to care at all about them."

"Oh! how can you talk so?" sobbed Fanny, unable to restrain her tears. "How can you be so cruel and unjust? You know I cannot help it — I must leave you; but you cannot know how it breaks my heart to do so — and then to hear you talk in this way —"



“But when you will not stay even twenty-four hours after I enter the house — when you are ready to run any risk, incur any trouble, so that you do but leave us all at the very earliest moment — how can I imagine that you really care for me, Fanny?” remonstrated Cecil, still in the same cold tone.

“Cecil, rather than that you should doubt my affection, I will yield that point — I will stay until Monday,” exclaimed she, much agitated, “only do not speak so to me — do not use such cruel words again!”

He had conquered — the first step was gained, and it was with an inexpressible feeling of *inward triumph* and hope that he seated himself by her side, passed his arm round her waist, and pressed her to him, as he whispered: “And may I then believe that Fanny really loves me?”

There was something in the action, the tone, the look, that accompanied these words, which startled Fanny, which sent the blood thrilling to her heart, and made her nerves quiver all through her frame. She tried to free herself from the arm which encircled her, and, averting her face, she replied:

“You know, Cecil, how dear *both* you and your children are to me.”

“Then why leave us, Fanny? Stay with us always.”

“How can you talk so, Cecil? You know I must go.”

“No, no — I know you must *not* go,” he said with eagerness, “unless you mean to break my heart — or drive me totally to despair.”

“Cecil, are you in your senses?” cried Fanny, gazing at him with looks which denoted her excessive surprise at his present language.

“Yes, Fanny, I am indeed — I am perfectly sensible that without your presence to bless and soothe me, there is no hope, no peace, no security for me; *I and my children must pine away in misery and regret*, without the only being who can make us happy, who can fill a mother’s place to them, or — ” he stopped, and only continued gazing earnestly at her.

“How can you be so very cruel to me, Cecil?” replied Fanny, the tears streaming from her eyes. “You know if it depended only on myself, how gladly I would devote my whole life to your children and to you. You are aware I *cannot* now remain with you, and yet you talk as if I were unkind in going away. How can I help it?”

“Fanny, do you *love* me?”

“Yes, Cecil, as truly as ever a sister loved a brother, I do!”

“Love me as a *brother*,” repeated he; “and is it *only* as a brother that I am loved?” and he looked at her as he spoke with eyes glowing with the passionate love he felt for her.

“Don’t, Cecil, don’t — for mercy’s sake — do not speak to me, do not look at me in that way!” and the agitated girl hid her face in her hands from his ardent gaze.

“Fanny,” said he earnestly, and withdrawing her hands from her face as he spoke, “do not *trifle* with me in an affair where the whole of our future happiness is at stake. You do love me, I am convinced, though you turn away your head, and refuse to answer me; I *feel*, I *know* that you must love me, as I love you, ardently, passionately, beyond all other objects in this world. Become my *wife*, then — stay with me and with my children, and be to us the blessing which you ever have been — my love — my wife. Speak, Fanny — say that you will!”

“In the name of all that is sacred, Cecil, in the name of her who is a saint in Heaven, your wife — my sister, cease to talk to me thus, cease to tempt me — it is wrong, surely it is so very wrong,” exclaimed Fanny, starting to her feet, and trying to release her hands from his grasp.

“It is in her name, that I appeal to you — in the name of my lost Mary, that I beseech you to hear me patiently and fairly. Who in all the world would she so much desire to see in her place, as the sister who so nearly resembles her? To whom would she have so willingly confided her children? Oh, depend upon it, her blessed spirit would smile on a union so *natural*, so *right* as ours.”

Fanny sighed, and hesitated.

“Say you love me, Fanny,” whispered Cecil, coming close to her.

“Alas! Cecil,” murmured she, “is not such love a *crime*?”

She had not time to add another word, for he caught her to his bosom, and stifled her remonstrances with the kisses he pressed upon her lips. The admission of her affection, which her words implied, was not to be retracted: she had owned she loved him, and she felt only too truly how much, how deeply he was loved. The words of passionate fondness which he in his transport poured out to her, were re-echoed in her heart by her own inmost feelings; there was no being so dear to her in all the world as Cecil; and to secure his affections, and enjoy his society, was for her the only prospect of happiness on earth.

Until this moment, she had been unconscious of the state of her own affection; she had called her attachment, the love of a sister — she had believed it to be no more; but Cecil’s declaration had opened her eyes, his questions had forced her *heart* to answer before they had wrung a confession from her *lips*.

For a few minutes, her reason and her conscience were silenced by the voice of passion; her delighted ear took in tones and words of endearment alike new and bewitching, and she forgot everything in the ecstasy of feeling which love alone

can produce. But suddenly a *doubt* — a *hesitation* crossed her mind. Was this *right*? — was it not a *criminal* love to which she was yielding? Stung with the idea, she suddenly tore herself from Cecil's arms, rushed from the room, and only paused when she had reached her own room, and was safely shut in with her own reflections.

There, throwing herself on her knees, and burying her face in her hands, she strove to still her throbbing heart, with all its tumultuous passions. She tried to think of what she ought to do; but Cecil's words were ringing in her ears. She tried to pray for strength; but his expressive eyes seemed still before her. She ever seemed to hear the words: "*Stay with me, and be my wife!*" and imagination was busy in picturing the felicity of such a lot, before she knew where it had wandered.

By degrees, however, she grew calmer. She was able to reflect and consider. And now a host of scruples and doubts assailed her. The idea of *marrying her brother-in-law* had never before entered her mind, and her notions on the subject of such a marriage were extremely vague and indefinite. Two opposing doubts agitated her. Would Cecil ask it if it were really wrong? To which her *heart* and *feelings* urged an eager negative. This was one question, but opposed to this there rose the reflection: Would her *father* have sanctioned her residence at Brookensha, had he not considered such a connection as impossible? To this question conscience answered: Never!

If to take him for a husband was *permissible*, to have been so long his guest was clearly and decidedly wrong. And if her father considered it thus, if his disapproval was thus ensured by his past conduct, what was her situation, now that she had owned the passion which *should* never have existed, which it must surely be *criminal* to feel? What could she do — how could she meet Cecil again after what was past? She must have forfeited his esteem — sunk in his regard; she must have *disgraced* herself forever in his eyes.

"I will leave him!" she cried, "I will leave him forever! Yes, tomorrow I will go. I will leave this *dangerous place* — his beloved home — his darling children! I will leave everything connected with him, too happy if, by tearing myself away, I can in time lessen *his hold upon my heart!*"

She spent the night in tears and agitation, and only occasionally sank into a troubled sleep, which was as painful as even her waking reflections.

Her brother-in-law himself was not in a much happier frame of mind. He had gained something, it was true, by *extorting* from Fanny the confession of her love; but how much more remained to be accomplished! Hour after hour he spent in pacing his library, devising plans, and inventing arguments by which he was to win upon her *reason*, or influence her *heart*. He knew the difficulties in his way, and he tried to view them calmly. The chief obstacle was her father. He had not the shadow of a hope that Mr. Ellis would ever be persuaded to consent to the marriage, but he felt secure from any disturbance from that quarter when it had once taken place. And he had no one else to fear. There was not another human being allied to either Fanny or himself who would have the right of interposition to disturb his peace, when once his object was obtained. Could he, therefore, persuade Fanny to *act without her father's knowledge* — he would be safe. The marriage once celebrated — who would have any right to challenge its propriety, or to bring the question of its validity before any tribunal?

The persuading Fanny to an *immediate* and a *clandestine* marriage seemed the only difficulty in his way: it was this which made him doubt and hesitate. How to propose such a thing to her; how to clothe the idea in language which she would not feel an insult, which would not at once startle her into a conviction that it was *wrong*, was the question; and it was a question which he seemed less and less able to answer as he revolved it in his mind. In vain he tried to frame his words and arrange his arguments in such a way that they would not shock her delicacy. The effort was fruitless, and he gave it up, resolving to trust to *feeling* and *impulse* in his attempt to persuade her.

He knew if she once went to Scotland, she was lost to him, probably forever; the fears of her father once roused, Cecil could never hope to see her again. To complete their union, therefore, without any reference to Mr. Ellis, was all he could determine on: cost what it might, this must be effected.

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 3

It was after a night as restless and disturbed as that which Fanny had experienced, that Cecil sought her at the breakfast-table; but she was not there. Unwilling to meet him, wretched and ashamed, she had not dared to descend at the usual time; but passing to the nursery, endeavored to drive away thought by caressing the children. The tears in her eyes, the traces of agitation in her air and manner, excited no surprise in the nurse, for it was natural she should feel acutely the separation from the beautiful infants, whom she had nursed from the cradle. Indeed, the nurse herself was decidedly of opinion that this separation was both cruel and unnecessary. Quite ignorant that there existed any legal impediment to the marriage, she had always considered the union of Cecil and Miss Ellis as the most proper event which could occur, and she had watched with interest those marks of affection between them which gave her some foundation for her hopes on the subject.

“Miss Fanny,” she began, “it’s ten thousand pities you should have to leave these sweet babes, poor dear little souls. I am sure I shall be at my wits’ end what to do with them when you are gone.”

Miss Ellis sighed, and looked miserable; so Betty proceeded:

“And then, only think, if Master were to go and marry some fine lady, who would not care a straw for these innocents, but would just make him neglect them, too, do you think I could stand that?”

Fanny turned eagerly round: “Promise me, Betty, you will never leave these children while you can be of use to them. Oh! do promise me that.”

“I’m sure I’d promise with all my heart and soul, Ma’am, if that would do any good, or give you any pleasure, Miss Fanny, dear. But that would not prevent my being sent away, you know; and I could not help that.”

“But Mr. Mansfield will never do so; he will never marry anyone who would treat you so,” murmured Fanny.

“Bless your heart, Miss Fanny, how can one tell? for, you see, I always says, these young gentlemen, even the best of them, never bear to be contradicted. You know they always want everything in the world, and that directly; and if they cannot get just what they like, they go and do something quite contrary-like, and think to spite other folks in spiting themselves. They are all alike, every one.”

“You think men are all alike, do you?” said Fanny, almost smiling.

“Yes, in some things, and again in others they are just as different; but *all men are selfish*, and like their own way vastly too well.”

“I am afraid,” replied Miss Ellis, gravely, “that is a fault common to women as well as men, Betty.”

“Why, Miss Fanny, I’m not going to say we women do not like our own way when we can get it; but you see, I always say, what with fathers first, and brothers, and then husbands, we have but little chance of getting our way at all; and I suppose we were made weak on purpose that we might not rule. But if men are contradicted, they get so fractious and unreasonable, that there is no knowing what they will be at next.”

Betty paused a minute, but Fanny made no answer, so she went on again:

“In all my life, I always noticed *second wives* have more their own way than first; it’s a wonderful thing that, but so they have. I never could make out why at all; but I always thought it must be a happy thing to be a second wife. Don’t you, Miss Fanny?”

“It would depend so much upon circumstances,” replied Fanny, much confused. “One could not answer beforehand.”

“I dare say,” replied Betty, sagaciously, “it would depend upon who the gentleman was. Now I should think Master would make his next wife *very happy*.”

“Suppose he should not marry again?” suggested Fanny.

“Ah! but I think he will. Men mostly like to have a wife; and he is a winning sort of gentleman, so handsome and agreeable, I would not think the ladies would often say ‘No’ to him, with his fine property and all. I dare say he might marry a Duke’s daughter, if he tried; but he need not look far. You know there’s a saying about ‘Go further, and fare worse.’”

Fanny colored deeply, and remained silent. Betty would have continued, however, had not Cecil’s entrance put a stop to her gossip, and called forth her powers of observation.

The confusion of consciousness made Fanny turn away to the window, after a very brief salutation to her brother-in-law; and he, unwilling to attract more attention to their feelings than was unavoidable, addressed Betty, and occupied himself for some minutes with the children, before he turned to Fanny, and said:

“By the way, I am forgetting what I came for, which was to tell you, Fanny, that breakfast is ready. I suppose you do not know how late it is; but,” smiling as he spoke, “when once you get to the nursery, nothing else has a chance of being remembered.”

“I really beg your pardon,” replied Fanny, coloring. “Why did you wait for me? I am quite ashamed and sorry.”

“Such a very grievous offence,” said Cecil, laughing, “deserves a severe penance, so I shall insist on your coming immediately,” drawing her arm under his as he spoke, and leading her away. His look was one of happy triumph, for the

sight of her distress and consciousness gave him additional courage, and he pressed the hand he held, as if he already felt sure it was his own.

At the breakfast-table, however, scarce a syllable was said, the only questions and answers exchanged relating to the meal. Fanny had no appetite, and could only pretend to eat; while she was equally uncomfortable in the continuance of a meal which detained her face to face to Cecil, and in the prospect of its termination, which might be followed by she knew not what. He was evidently watching her intently, for though she dared not look up, she felt his eyes upon her, and her hand trembled so much as to make it almost impossible for her steadily to pour out the tea. When at last this uncomfortable meal had concluded, her most dreadful anticipations were realized by Cecil's saying:

"Now, Fanny, come to the library with me, we have much to say."

Her heart beat to a degree which was most oppressive. The decisive moment had come; she must be firm in her purpose, she must *leave* Cecil; she must tell him this unwelcome, this most painful resolution. It was with the feelings of a criminal that she accompanied him: it seemed to her that she had ill-used him in allowing him for a moment to suppose she could consent to any other termination.

He led her to the same recess where they had conversed before, seated her in the same place, and resuming his station at her side, he began, while she was trying to find a voice to address him.

"Dearest, sweetest Fanny — my own darling — how happy you have made me. There is not more difference between the darkness of the earth last night, and its bright and glittering surface now in the clear sunshine, than between my feelings then and now. The *sweet admission of your love* has driven away the murky shadows of despair, and taught me again to hope for happiness."

Fanny struggled for strength to speak, and vainly tried, by pressing her hands upon her palpitating heart, to quiet the throbbing which seemed to take away her breath.

"But I must not forget, in the rapture of this moment, that there is business of importance before us, which admits of no delay. You have promised to be mine: I must take instant steps to *secure my treasure*."

"No, no, no!" cried Fanny, roused to instant exertion; "you misunderstood — I did not. Oh! give me time — " She could say no more.

"Do not alarm yourself, darling," said he, soothingly. "I knew your delicacy would shrink from such precipitate measures; but there are cases, dear Fanny, when the ordinary decorums of life yield to higher duties. This is one."

"Yes, Cecil, it is," said Fanny, with more firmness; "duty calls — and passion and every other voice must give way. I must *leave* you!"

"Leave me!" exclaimed Cecil, in such a tone as conveyed something of his astonishment and concern.

"Yes, I must return instantly to my father, and never see you again."

"Good heavens! Fanny, what do you mean?" he cried in turn.

"I mean," she continued, struggling for speech, "that we — that I — have been wrong — very wrong, in owning the existence of an attachment which ought never to have arisen; and that the only step which now remains for me, is an instant and eternal separation from you, Cecil."

With this declaration her courage failed, her voice gave way, and a flood of tears just saved her from fainting.

Cecil arose, and stood before her in an attitude of mute despair. She could not look at him, however; she could not bear to see how miserable she had made him, and silence, only broken by her sobs, continued for some minutes between them.

Then Cecil spoke; spoke slowly, and in a tone of misery which cut Fanny to the heart.

"What have I done, Fanny — how have I sinned against you, that you should thus torment, thus torture me? Have I wronged you? Oh! you are doubly revenged. I had not thought you could thus have *trifled* with a heart which is so entirely devoted to you. You will leave me — go then — and oh, Fanny! may the blessings of Heaven go with you; and may you never, never know the *misery* you have inflicted on a heart whose only feeling is for you!"

Fanny's sobs increased, but to speak was impossible.

"I pray Heaven that you may be happy in your determination, and that the love which you refuse to me may be bestowed on one who loves you as well as I do; and may no regret for what you leave me to suffer, dim your future. Go, and be happy."

"Happy!" sobbed Fanny. "Happy with a broken heart. Oh! cruel, unjust Cecil! how can you speak so, when I have owned I love you more — more than any other creature?"

"And what good does such an avowal do to me, if you will not *act* upon it; if you persist in leaving me — coldly leaving me — to my misery? Why, why act thus? can I believe in a love which prompts you to such a course? Oh, no!"

"It is my duty — we cannot, must not marry, Cecil. We are brother and sister, you know."

"We are not — I deny it — it is an *imaginary tie* which binds us; one which Mary's death forever severed," cried he, impetuously.

"But the law *forbids* it," murmured she.

“No, the law *allows* it!” he exclaimed. “I grant there is an old, obsolete forgotten statute on the subject; but even this in our case would have no influence on us. I cannot stay to explain it now. Believe me, if this is your only scruple — ”

He paused.

“Then come to my father’s, and seek me there, for there I must go,” said Fanny, resolutely.

“Anything but that, Fanny; if you once go there, you will never be my wife,” said Cecil in an accent of despair.

“You are then conscious that my father would object,” said she, turning deadly pale; “you know he would refuse you.”

“No, no!” exclaimed Cecil, eagerly; “but there is a difference between the laws of Scotland and of England which would create a difficulty. You could not marry me in Scotland; you must not go there.”

“Cecil, you are deceiving me,” said Fanny; “what is wrong in Scotland, must be wrong in England. I cannot stay and listen to you.”

“Fanny, you will drive me to desperation if you talk thus. You will not trust me; how can you say you love me? Do you imagine I would lead you astray; you, my pure, my angel-minded Fanny? oh, no! I would not tempt you to do what is wrong; but if you shrink from the proposal I make — if you do not love me, do not wish to be my wife — if you will leave me, then go. You know what you are about; you know that *you will crush an already nearly broken heart*; drive desperate a man bereaved of every blessing. Leave me! satisfy the *scruples of a cold propriety*; and try if that will make you happy. It matters not for me, when Fanny abandons me. If we are never to meet again, Britain shall not hold us both, nor will this world long contain me; but you will be safe and happy. I did not expect it, I own. I imagined that you have cared for me, and for those helpless children; but it is over now — the *delusion* is past. We part — we must say farewell; but that you may not be hurried from the home, because it contains *my obnoxious self*, I will leave it instantly; and I vow I will never enter it again. Farewell.”

He took her hand as he spoke these words in a voice of smothered emotion. She could not bear it.

“Oh, Cecil! I cannot bear to make you wretched. I will, I will be yours! tell me what you wish, but do not talk so to me.”

“No, Fanny, do not *delude me with false hopes*, lest the reverse should once more crush me to the ground,” replied he, gravely and mournfully.

“No, no; it is not false. I promise, Cecil, I promise to be your wife,” whispered she, the crimson blood flushing her forehead, cheeks, neck, and even to the top of her fingers.

“You promise? Oh, angel Fanny! now you give me life.”

His rapture must however be *imagined*, for it would be impossible to describe it. His unutterable triumph in having won the victory, in having conquered the prudence, the decorum, the principles of Fanny.

There was not, however, much time to be spent in rapture; a little must be given to sober thought, and important discussion. He told her that she must not go home; that there must be no delay; propriety required that if they were to be united it should be as speedily as possible; that even to delay so long as to write to her father would be impossible, but that *tomorrow*, if he could accomplish it, she should be his. Meantime, he had business which would take him away — much must be done before the next twenty-four hours had passed over their heads, and he had not a moment to spare.

Fanny listened, and tried to be convinced; she had promised to be his wife, but why this *indecorous haste*, this appearance of *clandestine proceedings*? Her *heart* was on his side, but her feelings of *propriety* all rebelled against it. Could he not wait for her father’s consent? it would take but five days, and it would make her so much more happy. He eagerly affirmed this to be an impossible delay — a thing not to be contemplated for a moment — she was of age; she was her own mistress, and he was certain her father could not consider it as any slight on him, that under such peculiar, such trying circumstances, she should venture to dispose of her hand without his sanction to her proceedings.

He besought her to trust all to him, the delicacy of her mind should be respected; he would arrange everything in such a way as should be most agreeable to her; but to wait under their present circumstances for five whole days would be worse than useless, it would be wrong! The eagerness of his arguments bore down her scruples — she was *silenced*, though not *convinced* — she listened and yielded, because she loved; her *heart* carried the day over her *conscience* — affection decided the cause. And so it ever will be with woman, where the *heart* is concerned.

*Affection* for her lover present, proved more powerful than *duty* to her father absent; she could not resist his pleading looks, his words of tenderness, his arguments of love. Her promise at length was given; a promise *wrung* from her, however, with a difficulty which he had hardly anticipated, which bound her to be his as soon as the necessary license could be procured.

To smother her minor difficulties, and arrange everything in a way the most agreeable to her feelings, was now Cecil’s first object; and among other plans for her comfort, he proposed that the mother and sister of the before mentioned Frank Linwood, should be invited to spend the few hours which must pass before their marriage at Brookensha. Mrs. Linwood was a kind-hearted, good-natured elderly lady, of the rigidity of whose principles Cecil felt no fear, and her daughter having been intimate with Fanny from childhood, was much attached to her.

Cecil was altogether unsuspecting that any member of the Linwood family would feel pain at his proceedings. Frank's affection had never been noticed by him, for Frank Linwood's was not a nature to display its deepest feelings, and of late he had been little in the country; and never in Cecil's presence had he met Fanny since Cecil became a widower.

Cecil's first step on leaving Fanny was to drive over to Mrs. Linwood's home, and offer his earnest request that the ladies would go to the hall and bear Fanny company for the rest of the day.

"We had no idea you were in the country, Cecil," observed Olivia: "when we saw Fanny two days ago, she did not expect you until next week."

"Yes, my return was sudden," replied he, "I arrived only last night; and the same business which brought me to Brookensha yesterday, takes me away today. But may I hope my request will be granted? Fanny ought not to be left alone. She is low-spirited and nervous, and requires a cheerful companion like yourself, Miss Linwood."

"Yes, poor dear," cried Mrs. Linwood, "I am sure I do not wonder at it — yes, indeed, she must feel parting so, and I suppose she will go soon?"

"Tomorrow or next day," replied Cecil, slightly confused.

"Yes, then, no wonder she should be nervous — yes, I can understand it — dear child, we will go to her at once, yes — shall we not?"

Olivia made no objection, and Cecil offered his pony carriage to convey them back to the park, as he was going into the village, and would not need it; indeed, he had brought it chiefly for their use.

Having seen them making immediate preparations for their little visit, which was to last until he returned home, his next step was to walk down to the rectory to secure the services of his old and excellent friend, Rev. Hughes.

Here, to his utter astonishment, he met with a total and absolute refusal. No arguments could induce Rev. Hughes to do what he considered *wrong* in every point of view. No, it was unlawful; and let Cecil Mansfield say what he pleased, Rev. Hughes, as a clergyman, was bound to obey the church law.

In vain Cecil urged that this was an unnecessary scruple, that the thing had been done over and over again, and no one questioned the propriety or legality of such marriages.

"They are liable to question, as you well know," said Rev. Hughes, "the Church Court holds them as invalid."

But Cecil replied that the Church Court would not interfere uncalled for, and that there were none, except Mr. Ellis, whose interest or whose relationship could give them a claim to dispute this question.

That made no difference in the simple fact that they were held *illegal*, replied the clergyman. Besides, he considered them *immoral*, and he rejoiced that his duty commanded, what his conscience enforced, that he should oppose a union between parties so connected.

"This is a mere *question of opinion*," observed Cecil, impatiently. "I think quite differently, and so do thousands of others, and in such cases each man must follow the dictates of his conscience."

"Yes, of his *conscience*," said Rev. Hughes, pointedly, "not of his *passions*. I, at least, follow mine in refusing to assist at such a marriage."

But Cecil declared that he could not now draw back, that he would be the lowest of men, if, after having received Fanny's avowal of affection and promise of fidelity, he were to be the first to discover that the marriage was illegal; scruples which she did not feel, he could not urge, even had he entertained them himself — affection and delicacy alike forbade it.

"Then allow me to interpose, Mr. Mansfield," suggested the clergyman. "My duty as her pastor, and my affection as her father's friend, alike give me a claim on her attention and regard. Let me set before her the impropriety and the danger of the step she is about to take. The double impropriety — for under any circumstances this *haste*, this *secrecy*, were there no other objection, are most highly indecorous. To marry without the sanction of her father's presence, without his consent, without even his knowledge, is indecent, and when to the recollection of this are added all the other considerations which I should urge, she must surely yield."

"In your warmth to prevent this marriage, Rev. Hughes," replied Cecil, struggling to conceal the alarm and uneasiness which he felt, "you seem to give us no credit for any proper feeling; whatever you may think of me, you have no ground to question her propriety of conduct, or delicacy of mind; you must know her well enough to be aware how peculiarly undeserving she is of such a reproach. The haste which you condemn is the result of this very feeling, she is peculiarly and distressingly circumstanced."

"Deeply as I grieve for her distress, as I am certain this step is more likely to augment than remove it, I must try to prevent it. You must be aware that Mr. Ellis himself would never sanction this marriage."

"I never heard him express an opinion on the subject," replied Cecil, evasively.

"Probably not, but his whole conduct expresses his opinion: his continuing to reside in your house, his trusting his daughter there alone. Did he not regard you only as a brother, would he have acted in this way? I must see Miss Ellis, and if she is what I always found her, I have no doubt but I shall succeed in opening her eyes to the *danger* of her position."

“Of course,” replied Cecil, in a carefully guarded tone, which tolerably concealed the fear and indignation trembling in his mind. “Of course, you may see her if you choose, and say what you think proper. But I must request that you will defer your visit until tomorrow, as she has been suffering from agitation and excitement almost too powerful for her delicate frame. I am certain she would not be equal to seeing you today.”

He then took a hasty leave of Rev. Hughes, and, as he walked down the village to his steward’s house, he vented his indignation in mental abuse of the clergyman, for his obstinate determination to interfere in what did not concern him. To prevent the risk of such an interview was now a primary object with him, and he considered earnestly how he should accomplish all that he had before him. From his steward’s he despatched a messenger to his stables for a horse, and wrote a few lines to Fanny, which he charged Mr. Dennis to deliver with his own hand, and at the same time to give his positive orders that no visitors whatever should be admitted in Brookensha Park during his absence, which would probably continue until the next day. He could think of no other measure to secure his success, but with some fears for the event he rode over to the residence of a friend in the neighborhood, a young clergyman, who he thought could assist him in procuring the necessary license, and would probably not trouble him with what he considered *unnecessary scruples*.

Left to herself, Fanny’s spirits totally gave way; joy and trouble, hopes and fears, pleasant anticipations and painful doubts, crowded on her mind, leaving her quite unequal to exertion, and incapable of checking the tears which flowed almost unconsciously down her cheeks. By degrees, however, she grew calmer, the violence and tumult of her feelings subsided, and she began to think. Then happiness slowly diffused itself over her heart; she pictured to herself what would *be a life devoted to Cecil and his children*, never to be parted from them; to be first, dearest, everything to Cecil, and to be a mother to her sister’s infants. The idea was soothing and delightful. She dwelt on it with increasing satisfaction, and that her father might be prevailed to relinquish his Scotch home, and for the remainder of his days reside with them, was the only other object which seemed left to desire.

Her pleasant reveries were cut short by the announcement of Mrs. Linwood’s arrival with her daughter, and Fanny left her dressing room that she might receive and welcome them.

“And so poor child, you are going away?” said Mrs. Linwood. “Yes, it is very hard upon you, I am sure; and very great our loss will be too — yes — when do you go, my dear?”

Confused by the question, Fanny replied it was uncertain, and depended entirely on the length of time Cecil was absent.

“Then I hope he will experience all manner of difficulty in his business,” cried Olivia, “to delay him as much as possible, for we are to stay here until his return; and I suppose this is the last, last visit I shall ever pay you here, dear Fanny.”

To assent to such a supposition was impossible, since she believed it would be untrue; and to differ from it was impolitic, as she must not assign the reason of her expectations. Fanny, therefore, prudently refrained from answering at all, and only looked a shade more thoughtful than before.

“I wish we could have contrived that you should stay with us,” continued Olivia, “or have changed places with me. I would like uncommonly to visit Scotland, if you would stay and be a daughter to mamma.”

Fanny was too unconscious to see the point of Olivia’s observation, and the color which tinged her cheek, had no reference to Frank Linwood, or his admiration of her.

“Only think,” said Olivia, after a pause, “Frank talks of favoring us with his company some part of next long vacation: we shall not know how to make enough of him, for you know it is two years since he was here.”

“Is it indeed?” said Fanny: “it does not seem so long to me.”

“How extremely ill you are looking!” cried Mrs. Linwood, at this moment struck with Fanny’s pale cheeks. “Yes, indeed you are, dear child. What has been the matter with you? You seem quite worn out — yes, you do.”

Fanny pleaded to having a headache, and her visitors insisted that she should rest on a sofa, with half-closed curtains, to relieve her head; Olivia proposing to read to her, as a sedative to her nerves. This suited Fanny particularly well, as she did not attempt to listen, but was able to indulge in her own thoughts without interruption.

About an hour passed in this way, when she was informed that Mr. Dennis particularly wished to see her; and, on joining him in the business-room, she received from him the note from Cecil. She inquired, of course, particularly where he was gone, and how long he expected to be absent; heard his orders that no visitors should be admitted, and confirmed them; then retiring to her dressing-room, she opened and read the following note:

“My sweetest Fanny, To expedite the happy hour which unites us forever, I must leave you now, perhaps for a day; but you may guess my heart remains behind. I told your friends nothing, use your own discretion; perhaps it will comfort you to explain your situation. You had, however, better avoid seeing any other person, as the surest means of escaping impertinent surmises and foolish gossip. Until we meet once more, I am ever

Your most devoted, Cecil Mansfield.”

“Dear, darling Cecil,” murmured Fanny, as with true womanish feeling she pressed the paper to her lips: “how kind, how considerate he is!”



She felt it would certainly be a comfort to discuss her situation with Mrs. Linwood, but she shrank from communicating it to her daughter, without being able to define to herself why she wished to avoid it. As soon as she had composed her feelings, after reading this note, she returned to her visitors; but while she was debating whether she should seek an interview with Mrs. Linwood alone, she was spared the trouble of deciding, by Olivia suddenly remembering that she had an indispensable letter to write, and for that purpose adjourning to her own room.

When Mrs. Linwood had again persuaded Fanny to lay herself on a sofa, and was quietly seated by her side with her work, Fanny began:

“Dear Mrs. Linwood, I want to tell you something, which I think will surprise you. I hope you will not think it wrong, but Cecil is — that is, I am — I mean we do not like to separate.”

“Yes, my dear, so I know,” placidly observed Mrs. Linwood: “it is very natural — yes — just what I always thought it would come to. What do you mean to do? To marry? Ah, yes — I suppose to marry.”

“Then you are not surprised?” said Fanny, raising her blushing cheek from the pillow.

“Not in the least — yes — not in the least, my dear,” said her friend. “It is so natural; I always foresaw it; yes — I always expected it.”

“And you quite *approve* it?” observed Fanny again.

“Oh, yes, quite — yes, indeed — it is much the best thing you can do. Is he gone to get the license? Yes — and Olivia is to be bridesmaid — is she? When is it all to be?”

This question, of course, Fanny could not answer. Then she begged Mrs. Linwood to say nothing about it at present to Olivia; when Cecil came back, she should know all; but her nerves were at present not in a state to bear much discussion on the subject. Of course, the promise of secrecy was readily given, and the entrance of Olivia soon afterwards prevented much more being said between the other two.

Fanny would have been puzzled to say how the hours of that day were passed. To her each minute seemed a weary length, for she was in a state of excitement which entirely prevented occupation, and rendered her unequal to rational conversation; yet the afternoon appeared quickly over, and the night soon came; for she hardly knew whether she had not something to fear for the morrow. A presentiment of evil, a dread of some unknown impending calamity, hung over her. She thought she ought to be happy, and yet was conscious that she did not feel so: she knew not exactly what was lacking to complete her satisfaction; Cecil’s love ought to be sufficient, and of this she was assured. It must be her father’s absence which distressed her — the lack of his approbation which she felt so keenly. Could he only have known the step which she was about to take — could he only have given her the blessing which he had once bestowed on Mary — then she would have had nothing more to desire. Then she blamed herself for her unreasonable wishes, for the restlessness and dissatisfaction she experienced, the discontent of which she ought to be ashamed, which, when so much was granted to her wishes, made her crave still one blessing more.

Alas! that she should so *deceive* herself; that affection, passion, should so have *blinded her eyes*; that she should not discover that it was the voice of conscience which rendered her uneasy; it was the low murmur not to be quieted — the feeling which she would not own that she was acting wrong.

The hours passed at length, and morning came, and that too slipped away, and Fanny’s nerves became more and more disquieted. She expected every moment would bring her lover, and what would he bring with him? Her fluttered manner and increasing agitation was of course perceived by both her companions, and every time that an opportunity was offered by the absence of Olivia, Mrs. Linwood tried to soothe her by agreeable anticipations. At length the clock struck twelve, and she became more composed; it was, she thought, impossible now that Cecil should ask for a marriage today, she would have a few more hours’ respite; come when he would now, the awful ceremony must be postponed until tomorrow.

She had just come to this comforting conclusion, when, without any warning or sound to give her a moment’s preparation, he walked into the room. Her breath came and went quickly, she could hardly see or feel, she did not know what she was doing; but though his eye was upon her the moment of his entrance, his first paying his compliments to the other ladies, gave her a brief space to prepare herself, and she was too much accustomed to self-control to allow her feelings entirely to overcome her, when exertion was necessary. She compelled herself to speak, to extend her hand calmly, to raise her eyes to his; but the look of happy, of triumphant love, was too much for her, she dared not meet it again, and sat down in some confusion.

Olivia was drawing near the window, and Mrs. Linwood working on the opposite side of the table; so drawing a chair close to Fanny, he sat down beside her.

“Did I startle you?” said he, in a low voice, “did you expect me so soon?”

“I do not know; I did not hear you come,” was her reply, hardly trusting her voice, lest its trembling should betray her agitation.

“You do not ask me how I have sped,” continued he; “have you no interest, no curiosity?”

She looked the question which she could not speak.



“Ah! I see you have,” whispered he, “you have not forgotten what I went about; I have been quite successful,” and drawing forth a parchment from his pocket, he laid it on her embroidery frame. She saw at a glance it was a license, and blushing very deeply, she pushed it away, looking first at her companions, who could not, however, have seen the document, and then laying her fingers on her watch, with a half smile.

“I know what you mean,” whispered Cecil, “but you do not understand me; come with me into the library, and I will explain everything to you.”

She went with a palpitating heart, wondering what Cecil was going to do, and what Olivia would think of all this whispering and mystery. When the doors were safely closed, however, and as a preliminary to his explanations, he had kissed her repeatedly, he desired her once more to look at the parchment which he held in his hand. But she replied she knew what it was; it was a license, but it was no use today, for it was long past noon, so it would do just as well to look at it on Monday.

“But you do not know anything about it, Fanny,” said he, with a very triumphant smile, and unfolding the parchment as he spoke. “Look, this is a special license, and by virtue of this invaluable document, I am entitled to make you mine at any hour, and in any place we please.”

“Oh! Cecil, how could you?” cried Fanny, her breath going away with astonishment and confusion.

“How could I, dearest? By a few guineas, which will save us the loss of many precious hours, worth more to me than all the gold in the world. That there might be no delay, and no mistake, I have brought with me the kind friend to whose good offices I am indebted for procuring this expeditious passport to our mutual happiness; and all you have to do is to accompany me to the private chapel and at once become mine!”

Fanny did not answer, a death-like paleness was in her cheeks, and her lips were silent. He looked at her with surprise and agitation.

“What is the matter, dearest?” cried he. “Do you repent your promises? are you now going to retract — to disappoint me, when there needs only the one word of consent from you to complete my happiness? Speak, my own, my darling, my betrothed; look at me, speak to me, I implore you!”

“Your precipitance overpowered me,” said Fanny, struggling to speak. “Such *hasty* measures — can they not be avoided — the appearance of *secrecy* — oh! Cecil, must it be so?”

“Dearest Fanny, delay in our case must surely be a far worse evil than any little disregard of the usual formalities attending such an event. You have your friends with you, I thought their presence would obviate every fear on your part, every objection with regard to secrecy. I have allowed myself no rest; I have traveled all night to procure this license; do you mean now to reject the fruits of my efforts to please you, to doom me to disappointment and most unnecessary delay?”

“But, Cecil, why not Rev. Hughes — my dear, dear old friend, Rev. Hughes? and our own parish church?” urged Fanny.

“Now do be reasonable,” said he, impatiently, “and do not make nonsensical objections; such difficulties might sound very well from a romantic girl, but from you, Fanny, I expected a more rational mode of proceeding.”

She was hurt by his *tone* — he had never spoken so to her before, and she colored highly, without answering. He read her feelings in her looks, and repented his speech immediately.

“Forgive me, sweetest, dearest Fanny,” said he, pressing his arm closer round her waist. “I did not mean to hurt you — I am ashamed of my impatience, and forgot you did not know all I have done. I did speak to Rev. Hughes, and it was only because he had it not in his power to comply with my request, that I had recourse to my friend, Rev. Anderson; and as to the chapel, so many of my family have been married there, that I am very partial to the place. Look up, dearest, with your own sweet smile, and say that you forgive me!”

Of course she did look up, and did forgive, and as a proof of her forgiveness, she gave her consent, and in less than half an hour she was standing beside Cecil in the old chapel of Brookensha; and very shortly afterwards their hands were joined, the ring was on her finger, she was pronounced his wife.

The astonishment of Olivia Linwood when thus suddenly called on to fill the office of bridesmaid to her friend, when the bridegroom was so different a person from him who she had hoped would take that place, can only be adequately described by her own pen; and as her letter likewise tells parts of my story I shall transcribe it here.

“I charge you, my dearest Frank, as you value your happiness and peace of mind, to banish forever from your heart the sentiments with which I know you have so long regarded Fanny Ellis; for she is now the wife of another. You are astonished — pained — what will you say when you know all the truth? If you feel with me, your pain will be redoubled when you know *whose* wife she is. She, this morning, married Cecil Mansfield. But is she, can she really be his wife? I heard the ceremony performed, and saw their hands joined; but it all was so quickly, so unexpectedly done, that it seems to me like a dream. I knew nothing of what was coming until Cecil told me I was needed in the chapel, and so innocent was I then, that I went in my drawing apron, and without stopping to wash my hands, so that I made rather an uncommon figure as a bridesmaid. My astonishment chained my tongue, and suspended my faculties, I believe, or I would certainly

have protested against the marriage; but as I did not then speak, I suppose I must henceforth hold my peace. But after all, I have not in the least explained to you how we came there. Yesterday afternoon Cecil came, and surprised us when we thought he was in London, to ask us to pay Fanny a visit, as he was obliged to leave home again. We were happy to spend what we supposed would be her last hours at Brookensha in her company, and went immediately. It appears now that she at once confided to mamma what she was about to do; why she did not treat me with equal confidence I do not know, unless she was afraid of my censure, for I certainly would have received the news in rather a different way from mother. She, you know, never thinks any evil until it is proved, and never believes it even then, and she quite approves of this marriage. Oh, it is all so very strange. I used to think Fanny the pattern of *delicacy*, the model of *propriety* in woman; and now she has been acting in a way which seems most strangely at variance with decorum, which every unprejudiced observer must condemn — clandestine. Cecil returned about noon today, and after some secret conferences between Fanny and him, of which, of course, I can tell you nothing, I was suddenly requested to accompany him to the chapel; and I left my room with no other feeling than curiosity to know for what I was wanted. There stood Rev. Anderson in his surplice, and some other people — I hardly know who — before I had time to look round the service began; and so soon it seemed over, that it took away my breath. I was thinking so much what you would feel, that I hardly know what was said or done. Fanny, poor thing, seemed much overcome; and when I tried to wish her joy, and said something of her father, she could not answer, and began to cry, and Cecil came and took her away, looking much displeased. They are gone for a tour to the Lakes. Answer me, dear Frank, tell me how you feel, are you unhappy? and is she really his wife? There must be something wrong here — why was not Rev. Hughes present? why this *secrecy*, this *haste*? I must finish, for mamma is calling me, and I wish to put this in the post as I pass through the village. Adieu, write soon, my dear brother. Ever yours, Olivia.”

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 4

It had been from no remissness on the part of Rev. Hughes the minister, that Fanny heard no remonstrances from him previously to her marriage. Notwithstanding the request of Cecil that he would not that day seek an interview with Fanny, a request delivered in a tone which almost amounted to a command, he had after some deliberation determined to proceed to the hall, and try at least to see her. The little gate which permitted a short cut through the pleasant grounds to the house was locked, and Rev. Hughes was forced to go some way around to reach another entrance; but there likewise he was disappointed, the gate was closed, and the lodge-keeper informed him she dared not open it to anyone, her orders were so strict on this subject.

Suspicious as to Cecil's object for this seclusion of Fanny, did not render him at all less earnest to carry his point, and having carefully prepared a note of remonstrance and urgent entreaty to be permitted to see her, he left it in charge of the lodge-keeper with particular recommendations to send it up to the hall instantly. The woman readily promised this, but concealed from him the fact that her children being all at school, it was impossible for her to comply with his directions at present. She put the note in her pocket, intending to dispatch it at the earliest opportunity; and being much occupied in household matters of far more importance to herself, she quite forgot everything about it, until she saw the carriage drive away the next afternoon, containing her master and the young bride. This reminding her of her charge, she was careful instantly to send off the note, which would consequently have to wait until the young couple returned home from their excursion.

Rev. Hughes, meantime, was conscientiously remaining at home, in hopes of an answer from Fanny, determined to lose no time when the opportunity was offered for a meeting, and to spare no argument which could influence her mind to take his own view of the subject.

Uneasy at receiving no news, he again set out the next day, and reached the park-gates about ten minutes after the bride had left the place. The woman, conscious of her neglect, took care to keep out of his way; and he was proceeding up the drive to the hall, quite unaware of what had occurred, when he met the Linwoods.

"Ah!" cried the mother, "you are too late, Rev. Hughes, they are gone: yes, they have started this half-hour."

"They! who?" exclaimed he, surprised and agitated.

"Mr. Mansfield and his bride: they are married, and gone on their wedding tour."

He was too startled to speak; but Mrs. Linwood hastily gave him a narrative of their proceedings.

"Are they — can they be married?" inquired Olivia, when her mother ceased.

"Yes," said he, gravely and mournfully, "they are married at present."

"I thought it was *illegal*," returned she.

"So it is; but still, unless the question is brought to an outcome in the proper court, they are man and wife."

"Then do you think anybody will dispute the point?"

"Probably not," replied he, "for *anybody* cannot do it. I apprehend the only one authorized by law to call it in question is Mr. Ellis, and it is not probable that he will."

"No, I suppose not," said Olivia.

"He must feel safe from future disturbance from that quarter," continued Rev. Hughes. "That he would never have consented, but that he will not now part them, Cecil is probably as fully persuaded as myself; and it was this hope of *impunity*, no doubt, which tempted him to this course."

"Well, since they are married," said Olivia, "I sincerely hope that this painful conclusion to it may be avoided."

"Certainly," exclaimed Mrs. Linwood; "but surely no one could be so *wicked*, even if they had the power, to cause so much distress. It is *impossible* — quite impossible — yes, quite so."

"But, were this the case," again inquired Olivia — "were the Church Court to pass a sentence on them, what would be their situation then?"

"A sentence of the Church Court would declare the marriage void," replied Rev. Hughes, gravely.

"Give them a divorce," said Mrs. Linwood. "It is the same thing."

"No, it would not be the same thing," said Rev. Hughes: "a divorce supposes a marriage to have existed. The sentence of which I speak would declare there had never been one. You can at once understand the difference which this makes to the children in either case."

"But is it not strange that our laws should be in such a state?" inquired Olivia; "there must be something wrong surely in this matter. Is this uncertainty general in the world?"

"No, it is peculiar to England. Scotland forbids such marriages entirely. Germany and other countries permit them. But things ought not to be left as they are; it is too strong a temptation for human nature to withstand. They should be either permitted — or directly forbidden."

"And which do you think should be done?" said Mrs. Linwood. "You would not forbid them, surely?"

“I am not sure. It is dangerous to multiply prohibitions, but I believe I rather incline to a Presbyterian view of the question.”

“So do I,” said Olivia; “but mamma thinks differently. But surely if it was made quite illegal, brothers and sisters-in-law would no more think of falling in love, than brothers and sisters in blood.”

“I am not sure; the early habit, the sentiment of fraternal affection, which grows from the cradle, would be lacking,” said Rev. Hughes.

“And Cecil knew perfectly well what he risked, and the nature of the action he was tempting Fanny to commit,” said Olivia, taking up another branch of the subject.

“Undoubtedly, but I do not think she did. He might have worked on her *feelings*, and overpowered her sense of what was due to her father; but I think, had she fully understood the subject, he would not have succeeded with her. I thought so at least, and therefore was so particularly anxious to see her.”

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 5

“Poor Fanny! I am quite indignant with him: and after all, he risks much less than she does in this matter,” said Olivia; “for were they hereafter to be parted, how much worse her situation would be than his. It is so unfair that women should suffer more when they go astray, than men.”

“It is the consequence of the artificial state of society around us,” replied Rev. Hughes, “and does at first sight, perhaps, appear unfair; but, my dear Miss Linwood, if you reflect for a moment, I think you will retract your opinion. Look at crime in its true colors, not as it affects our comfort and respectability in this world, but as it concerns our *eternal destiny* in the world to come. Can you, in this point of view, consider the double or treble penalty with which the world visits the errors of your gender as an evil or an advantage?”

“Yes,” replied Olivia thoughtfully. “I can see that the distribution of good and evil is more equal than at the first glance appears. Since women are undoubtedly the greatest sufferers in this world, the knowledge of this inevitable punishment may strengthen their principles in the hour of temptation, and assist their too yielding natures. Our Creator deals with us as a kind parent to some delicate child, supplying aid in performing a difficult task, which his stronger offspring must fulfill alone.”

“These are right feelings,” replied Rev. Hughes, “and will lead you to consider the restrictions and penalties with which the world threatens your errors, as so many kind warnings on the part of your Heavenly Father; and you will be very far from wishing to abolish them, or to claim the privilege of doing wrong without shame, which has been too often yielded to men.”

“But why should you blame Fanny, Rev. Hughes?” asked Mrs. Linwood, “since you acknowledge that she may have been acting in ignorance.”

“Because she acted with impetuosity, and without seeking the advice of her parent, whom she ought to have consulted. Were she perfectly ignorant of the existence of any impediment to her marriage, she ought certainly to have waited for *his sanction* to her actions.”

“I am quite sure that her situation was an ample apology for her impetuosity, and so no doubt Mr. Ellis will feel,” said Mrs. Linwood; “he is much too kind to raise unnecessary scruples, I am sure. Yes, I am certain that he is.”

“And I am convinced that he would certainly have withheld his consent,” said Rev. Hughes, decidedly. “Hoping that his intervention would prove effectual, I yesterday dispatched news to him of their intentions, for I expected my refusal to officiate on the occasion would create delay enough to allow of his prohibition reaching them. The idea of a special license never occurred to me. Now I almost regret that I took this step, as it can do no good; but I thought it my duty to neglect no efforts in such a cause.”

They had reached the gate of Mrs. Linwood’s grounds, and she invited Rev. Hughes to enter, but in vain: sorrowful and pensive, the good old man returned home, leaving his two companions to reflect on what he had been saying, which had produced very different feelings in their minds. Olivia, more than ever regretting that Frank had not proposed to Fanny, or at least gained her affections, by which all this might have been prevented; and her mother, with a strong feeling of satisfaction that Rev. Hughes’ efforts had been so entirely unavailing, and as much of condemnation of the whole of his interference as she was capable of feeling towards anyone, especially one so long known and so much revered as the old clergyman.

Within a few days, Olivia received a letter from her brother, which conveyed to her all the news she was ever likely to receive with regard to his sentiments on learning Fanny’s marriage. It was in the following words:

“Dear Olivia, I quite agree with you that our dear mother has far more candor and charity in her disposition than yourself, and I wish in this respect you more nearly resembled her; had you done so, you would have made far more allowance for the peculiar temptation to which Mrs. Mansfield has yielded, and not judged her so harshly as you now do. Their affection appears to me the most natural result of an uninterrupted fellowship for fifteen months, at a time when sorrow had softened their hearts, and their mutual loss had led to mutual sympathy. To know her intimately without loving her, must be impossible; and so far from wondering at the result, I have always foreseen it, since I learned that they were constantly together. The only thing that has always appeared astonishing to me, is that Mr. Ellis himself would not have foreseen it also. As to the question of what they now are to one another, there can be but one answer: they are most certainly husband and wife; and earnestly do I hope that they may never have the question disputed in such a way as to cause her a moment’s uneasiness, and that Cecil Mansfield himself will always fully estimate the *treasure* which, according to your account, he has been at so much trouble to win. As to my own feelings, I am grateful for the sympathy you express; but in cases such as this, where to conquer former hopes and wishes becomes a positive duty, you will perhaps agree with me that the less they are dwelt on, the better. Let this, therefore, dear Olivia, be the last time that the subject is ever alluded to between us. I shall always rejoice to hear of Mrs. Mansfield’s welfare and happiness, and I hope you will never have anything else to tell me of her fate. Ever yours, your affectionate brother.”

If ever two people were completely happy in themselves and in each other, it was Cecil Mansfield and his young bride. The devotion of her husband in the *early* days of their married life, was only to be exceeded by the tenderness with which Fanny received and returned his affection; and the first three weeks seemed to fly with unheard-of quickness, while enjoying together some of the best blessings of existence. Young, ardent, and equally in love, possessing health and spirits, which made existence a pleasure; able to indulge every imagination, and gratify every wish, what more could they desire? They lived in a dream of delight, an exquisite, but a *transitory* dream; and in the calmer moments of after-life, Fanny could never look back on these few weeks without a feeling of astonishment at the total oblivion to which, for the time, were consigned all the doubts, regrets, and hesitations attending her marriage.

They spent their time in a lovely cottage, hired for the occasion on the banks of the Windermere, from whence they made excursions to the surrounding country, and became acquainted with its principal beauties. Cecil's ardent and enthusiastic admiration of what was grand and lovely in nature, was second only to his admiration of his gentle wife; and Fanny, independent of her own taste, felt every pleasure of his with double force. They rambled — they sketched — they admired together. Poetry and love occupied their hours; and Cecil, intoxicated with the enjoyment, wished to prolong it, as if such feelings and sensations could ever be prolonged, and proposed to seek in North Wales additional variety and excitement.

When, however, with this view they turned their steps southwards, and came within the attraction of their own home, the remembrance of the well-known scenes they so dearly loved, and still more their desire to see the children, overcame the wish to ramble farther, and they returned by mutual agreement to Brookensha Hall.

Here a shock awaited Fanny, which awoke other feelings, and at once roused a remorse, which had until now been dormant.

She had written to her father to announce and apologize for her hasty marriage, but no answer had been received. This painful silence, Cecil readily attributed to accidents at the post-office, though Fanny could not altogether suppress a fear that it arose from displeasure, for conscience did suggest that the excuses she had to offer for her haste appeared poor and unsatisfactory on paper. She looked forward with agitating eagerness to receiving some communication from him on reaching home, nor was she mistaken in her expectations.

When the first rapture of again meeting her darling children was over, and Fanny had retired to her dressing-room to rest herself, she found among sundry letters awaiting her arrival, the long-expected one from her father, which she hastily opened. The date astonished and alarmed her. It was written at Brookensha — and that on the third day after her marriage. Her father had been there, then — why had he come? what could this portend? Breathless and palpitating, with a hand which from trembling could scarcely hold the paper, and a degree of agitation amounting to terror, she read the letter.

It was not long, but it was *bitter* indeed. It told her that anxious to save his only child from the guilty step, which he learned she was about to take, he had hurried to Brookensha; but it was too late — and that now he must return a heart-broken, and childless old man, to that home which would not only be desolate but the abode of shame. What more he said Fanny did not know, a dimness came over her eyes, a confused sound was in her ears, and she fainted completely away.

In this situation she was shortly found by her husband, who, surprised at her prolonged absence, sought her in her dressing-room, and was exceedingly alarmed at the state of total insensibility in which he discovered her. But the hasty glance which he threw over the letter which was lying beside her, led him immediately to guess the cause of her suffering, and his first motion was to conceal it entirely from her, that in case she had not become fully acquainted with its contents, she might be saved from ever knowing them.

It was long before Fanny exhibited any sign of consciousness; but as soon as animation returned in some degree, Cecil dismissed all the attendants who had crowded around her, and to whom he had spoken of *fatigue*, and the effects of excitement. He sent them away lest her first words should betray the cause of her emotion; and himself supporting her head on his bosom, he continued to apply the stimulants to her temples and hands.

At length she unclosed her eyes, and looking round, attempted to recall her wandering recollection.

“Are you better, love?” inquired her husband, tenderly pressing his lips to her forehead.

His voice recalled the memory of all that had passed; she shuddered, and, shrinking from his arm, turned away her head to conceal her face on the sofa-pillow, and shut her eyes, as if by excluding the light she could chase the dreadful thoughts which crowded on her mind, and seemed to threaten her reason.

Alarmed by her looks and manner, Cecil threw himself on his knees beside her, and sought by the tenderest words and caresses to win her to turn towards him. For some time heavy sighs, and broken sobs, were her only answer; her face was averted, her hand hung passive beside her — she was quite unable to speak; but at length, won by his passionate entreaties for one word — one single word — she turned towards him, and with difficulty articulated:

“Cecil, why have you *deceived* me?” Hesitating, and alarmed, he at length replied: “Deceived you? — -how, Fanny, what do you mean?”

“Yes — deceived me!” she replied, with bitter emphasis; “did you not tell me we were married; did you not call me your wife! — and now what — what am I?”

She fell back on the sofa in a state of agitation indescribable, fixing her eyes on Cecil, as if from him she expected to hear her doom.

“Good heavens, Fanny! what infatuation — what madness possesses you?” cried he, with vehemence. “Do you doubt that you are my wife? or, what can you mean?”

“I mean,” replied Fanny, summoning all her strength and firmness, “that you know that you assured me there was no real impediment to our marriage, that you — but why should I blame you; did I not rush willfully into the *snare* you set, shutting my eyes to the danger — and yet — oh, no, no, no! I did not make myself the thing I am — deceived, degraded! Heaven have pity on me! Oh, Cecil, Cecil, what have you done?”

“Made you my wife, Fanny, my lawful wife; because I loved you better — do love you more than all the world contains,” replied Cecil, standing before her with folded arms.

“Deceived! misled me — is that love?” murmured Fanny, with bitterness. “Made me a shame to my parent, and a shame to myself — my dear, dear father, might I but kneel at your feet — entreat your forgiveness — have once more your blessing — oh, father, father! your words will break my heart!”

Cecil drew himself up, and in a tone that betrayed his wounded feelings, he replied;

“Fanny, if you love your father so much better than your husband, go to him at once. If your plighted faith — your marriage vow is thus early burdensome to you, leave me. Since your affection as a daughter supersedes your duty as a wife, follow it; no matter if in doing so you break your husband’s heart!”

“My husband!” repeated she.

“Yes, Fanny, your husband! What extraordinary delusion has seized you I cannot tell; but as sure as there is a bright sun above us — as sure as I am now addressing you, so surely are you my wife! Ask anyone, Rev. Hughes, Rev. Anderson — your father himself, they will all tell you the same thing!”

“May I believe this?” inquired Fanny, doubtfully.

“Do you suppose I would tell you a deliberate falsehood?” said Cecil. “Fanny, I cannot tell you how much your suspicion hurts me.

He turned away and walking to the window, waited for the effect which he fully calculated his words would produce. Nor was he mistaken; she sprang from her seat, and was at his side in a moment.

“Cecil, forgive me,” she laid her clasped hands upon his arm, as she spoke; “oh, do not speak thus — do not look thus at me.”

He made no effort to retain her hands, no motion to return her caress.

“Cecil, my love, my husband,” whispered Fanny, earnestly; “will you not turn to me — will you not forgive me. I do, indeed I do, believe you; call me your wife again. I was wrong — I own that I was wrong; but forgive me and call me your wife.”

“Fanny, you have deeply disappointed me,” said he in the same cold tone; then relenting a little he added, “Could I expect the only welcome to my home would be the reproaches of my wife!”

He seemed about to leave the room as he spoke, but she, pierced to the heart, both by his looks and words, and fully convinced that her suspicions were as unjust as they were dreadful, would not now allow him thus to leave her.

She clung to him; she urged her prayer for forgiveness in a thousand tones of tenderness, and with looks of love which he could not resist. His anger, indeed, had been entirely pretended; he was not at all surprised that on discovering how much he had misled her, she should have suspected him still more. He had been prepared for some such outbreak; but he did not desire that it should be repeated. He had no inclination to share her *remorse*, or listen to her *regrets* for the past. Unconscious that in checking the spontaneous utterance of her feelings, he was laying the foundation of a *barrier*, which might hereafter entirely interpose between them, and prevent all attempts at confidence — he thought only of his present feelings, and as the subject was disagreeable to him, he determined at once to put a stop to it.

So completely was Fanny subdued and overcome by his manner, that she dared not from that time make any allusion to her feelings, or even so much as inquire for her father’s letter, which she concluded had fallen into his hands.

From Betty she learned some more particulars as to her father’s visit there. He had only stayed a short time; had left the letter with orders that it should await their return home, and he had then proceeded to the rectory, where Betty believed he had passed the night.

A strong desire seized Fanny on hearing this to have some conversation with Rev. Hughes. She longed to see him, to learn from his lips everything her father had said; how he had looked, and a number of other particulars which she could not rest without knowing, though the knowledge would surely pain her.

But she trembled lest Cecil would not approve her wish; and though the day before they had seemed to have every thought in common, she now hesitated to make this request to him.

She did, however, take courage the next day to propose, as he was going down to his steward’s house, to accompany him.

Cecil smilingly inquired whether she, too, had business with Mr. Dennis. She colored a little, but answered firmly, that if he had no objection she wished to call on Rev. Hughes. Cecil was for a moment startled, but feeling that the first interview must be got over, he had the firmness to resolve that the sooner it was so the better, and after a hardly perceptible hesitation he gave a very gracious consent.

With feelings of mingled pain and shame, Fanny found herself once more in the well-known little parlor, where, as a light-hearted girl, she had so often ran in and out, arranged the old man's flowers, or disarranged his books and papers. She had some minutes to wait before he appeared, and she felt some alarm lest he should intend altogether to refuse to see her.

At length he came. There was a shade of gravity in his manner and look, a something different from former times, so she thought at least, but he extended his hand, and addressed her kindly:

"My dear Mrs. Mansfield, I am glad to see you well. I hope your husband has returned in good health."

This address was an inexpressible relief to Fanny, the lingering doubt which she had not been able to dispel, as to the reality of her marriage was thus driven away; if Rev. Hughes called Cecil her husband, then all must be right: and she need not dishonor either herself or him by expressing the fears which she had entertained.

But on the subject of her father, she could not be so easily satisfied; she soon led to the point, first making inquiries as to his appearance, and then with faltering voice alluding to his feelings. She wished to express her penitence, but how to explain the past without incriminating Cecil, she did not know. Rev. Hughes saw, or guessed her embarrassment.

"Your father left a message with me for you," he said. "There is no question but he would have *prevented* your marriage if he could, but since that was not in his power, he desired me to say that he *forgave* you; and he charged you to fulfill with fidelity the new duties of wife and mother, which you had taken on yourself, with more fidelity than you had those of a daughter to a parent."

Fanny turned deadly pale, and trembled visibly; Mr. Hughes kindly took her hand.

"I grieve to pain you," said he; "it is the last time this unpleasant subject need be discussed between us. Mr. Mansfield and you may rest assured, that no attempt will be made on the part of Mr. Ellis to disturb your peace; and for myself, I am not called on by my office, nor inclined by my wishes to interfere between husband and wife."

Fanny returned from this interview with a heart so much lightened, a look so much more cheerful, that Cecil congratulated himself on having allowed her to go. Her father forgave her, and her marriage was acknowledged by him: she had reason, indeed, to be thankful. It was still too true that she had erred, and *secret remorse*, and a never-ceasing feeling of *penitence* must be her portion for the future. But she must not, she need not despair. She had duties to perform, and one of the first of these was to shield her husband's name and fame from any portion of the condemnation which their marriage might incur.

It was exquisitely painful to her to think that Cecil, her honored and beloved husband, had deceived her — had concealed from her the truth, and led her astray. Earnestly did she wish to forget it, and resolutely was she determined that through her, at least, no one should know the fact. No murmur of remorse would cross her lips; no whisper of reproach would in future distress him. With a true woman's heart it did not shake her love; she seemed to cling only the closer to him, because he had ill-used her. Attributing to him the secret feelings of regret which distressed herself, she sought by every means in her power to charm them away, and redoubled her tenderness, because she supposed him unhappy.

Thus days and weeks passed on unvaried by any particular incident subsequent to their return home. Mr. and Mrs. Mansfield were generally well received, and much courted in the neighborhood, though some few families looked coldly on him, and a few more drew back from his wife. Devoted with all her heart to the duties of her station, Fanny's time was fully occupied: the unremitting attention of a mother to her children; the unvarying complaisance of a tender companion to her husband; the cares of a considerate mistress, and the more active exertions expected of the patroness and head of a large village, these were her employments, and her pleasures.

She was almost adored by her husband's dependents and tenants, and universally recognized as the best and sweetest lady who ever reigned over Brookensha Hall. No petitioner was too humble for her ear, or too tedious for her patience; no form of poverty too revolting for her care; no sickness too trying or too lengthened for her zeal.

She had compassion for the suffering, for the weak, and even for the wicked; forbearance for the dull, the ignorant, and the obstinate. Their inattention to her wishes, opposition to her plans, and ingratitude for her benefits — seemed neither to weary nor provoke her. She felt no anger when detecting deception or imposition, no wonder when meeting with frailty or crime.

Of course her situation gave her many advantages for carrying out her plans of *charity*: she had money, she had influence, she had leisure. Cecil's unbounded love for her made everything she wished seem easy — everything she proposed appear right; had her plans been far more expensive, they would have been unchecked: he was always generous with regard to money, and accustomed to indulge in any luxury which his taste dictated. Had Fanny taken pleasure in balls and parties, he would have readily supplied her expenses; and since charity was the object of her preference, his fortune was equally at her service.



Conscious that his wife must be secretly longing for a meeting with her father, and feeling really grateful for the self-command with which she refrained from annoying him by regrets on this subject, Cecil had more than once desired her to write and invite him to Brookensha; but Mr. Ellis had invariably declined the visit. He said he did not feel equal to encounter the agitation inevitable on such a meeting. At length, however, he suggested a sort of compromise. He was unwell, and should his medical adviser recommend change of air, at which he had already hinted, it was possible he might try Harrogate or Cheltenham. In that case, he proposed that his daughter and son-in-law should visit him there, which would be altogether far more agreeable to him than encountering the many painful reminiscences connected with his former home, and on many accounts far better than their visiting him in Scotland at the present time.

To this promised meeting, therefore, Fanny was obliged to confine her wishes; but the state of her father's health gave her serious uneasiness, more than she could bear even to own to herself. His handwriting and his style alike indicated weakness, and she longed for some other account of what he only alluded to as a *slight indisposition*. Here, as in many other cases, Cecil seemed intuitively to guess her wishes; and for her satisfaction, he wrote to Mr. Ellis' medical attendant, to inquire if there was any serious cause for apprehension — any dangerous symptoms exhibited by the patient.

The answer was highly satisfactory. Dr. Campbell did not think that there was any real cause for alarm, or any symptom which he did not feel confident would be speedily alienated under the judicious and skillful course of treatment to which Mr. Ellis was now submitting himself. Dr. Campbell would supply all that medicine could do, and time, he had no doubt, would complete the cure. To judge indeed from the strain of the Doctor's letters, nothing could be more improbable than that any illness should prove fatal, even to a man of seventy-five, when under his care.

With this verdict, Fanny tried to be satisfied, and she anticipated their meeting in the autumn with more composure after the receipt of this letter. But her wishes on this point were not destined to be gratified: she never beheld her father again. Very shortly afterwards, an express arrived to say that Mr. Ellis was no more. He had been sitting alone one evening after dinner, and when his servant brought in candles at the accustomed hour, he found his master insensible. Every effort to restore animation was unavailing; he was already a corpse. His disease had been of the heart, and this sudden termination had been for some time anticipated by himself.

Fanny's sorrow must be left to the imagination, for it was indescribable. So many causes combined to add bitterness to her grief; but it was entirely undemonstrative, for hers was not a nature to indulge in *selfish excesses of woe*. The luxury of hysterical affections and nervous attacks, which would engross the attention and weary alike the minds and bodies of her attendants, was unknown to her. Her consideration for all around seemed only to increase with her sorrows. She moved about her darkened house more softly, and spoke more gently to those who surrounded her.

Even her first parting from her husband was borne with patience and resolution; he started immediately for Jedburgh, and she remained at Brookensha Park to shed silent tears, and offer humble prayers for pardon of those errors which had grieved her parent's heart, and she too much feared had hurried him to the grave.

There was little difficulty in arranging the financial affairs of the deceased; all that he possessed, including the proceeds of his recently acquired property near Jedburgh, was left by him in the hands of trustees for the benefit of his daughter and grand-daughter, and in case they should both die without issue, it was to revert to another branch of the family, as he considered Cecil's son was sufficiently provided for through the inheritance of his father's estates.

Considering his father-in-law's income, and the very *moderate* style in which he lived, it was natural for Cecil to expect to find large funded property, or investments of some other kind, and it was not until he became accidentally aware of the extensive system of charity which Mr. Ellis had practiced, that he could account for the disappointment of these expectations; for, thinking both his daughters were amply provided for, he had indulged his inclination in dispensing the remainder of his income in the way most agreeable to his charitable feelings and his principles.

Among the other documents which fell into his hands, Cecil found one addressed to himself, and very recently penned. Its purpose was to request, that since by circumstances, on which it was now unnecessary to dwell, Cecil had become master of the sum, ten thousand pounds in amount, which *Fanny* had inherited from her maternal grandfather — he would now do his wife the justice to secure it to her and her children, should she have any, by settlements similar to those which had been made on her sister.

With this entreaty, Cecil of course intended to comply; but, as he thought it would do as well to set about the business on his return home, he did not then write to his lawyer on the subject; and the same spirit of *procrastination* which produced this resolution, continued to operate after his return to Brookensha, where he found it easier and more agreeable to ride, walk, read, and converse with his wife, enjoy her smiles and indulge her wishes — than set about any business which affected only her *future* comfort, at some possibly remote period.

Autumn and winter passed away, and in spring Fanny became the mother of a little girl, whose birth increased her parents' happiness, and did not diminish the affectionate care with which her step-children were reared.

During the interval of her confinement, and while Cecil was left of necessity a good deal to himself, he suddenly formed a plan which, in Fanny's foreboding imagination, threatened to encroach very much on her domestic felicity.

He had long entertained vague wishes of getting into *Parliament*; but without taking any steps towards attaining this object, when a vacancy occurring in the representation of a neighboring borough, induced him to think more seriously of the project. It is possible that the opportunity now offered might have passed unheeded, but for some peculiar circumstances connected with it.

There was within a few miles of his residence, a noble and ancient family, who had formerly been on terms of intimacy with him; but since his second marriage, the acquaintance had been dropped; they had never come to Brookensha — and barely acknowledged himself when they met, and decidedly *shunned* his wife. This conduct galled Cecil all the more, because he did not choose either to complain or remonstrate; though silent, his indignation was deep; and, now on learning that a son of this family was canvassing for the vacant seat, and that no opposition was expected, he determined to come forward immediately, and spare neither time, trouble, nor money to secure his own election, and disappoint the wishes of one whose family had so deeply offended him.

Little do men foresee, when indulging their inclinations or their passions, the consequences which they draw upon themselves! This step of Cecil's was the first in that downward course which was destined to terminate so fatally for all concerned. Even to his wife, however, he did not acknowledge the *secret motive* by which he was principally actuated. To her it was sufficient to say, that he felt it his duty to exert himself for the benefit of his country; and though she was secretly of opinion that his country was far more likely to benefit, through his spending his time and money among his tenantry and dependents, she received his communication, if not without a sigh, at least without a murmur, or remonstrance.

He was as successful as his utmost anger or ambition could desire; but it cost him a considerable sum, a circumstance to the probability of which, he had not adverted, and for which he was not exactly prepared.

He had always lived up to his income: and his expenses had continued rather to increase than diminish, since his second marriage; so that but for the sums accumulated in his minority he would actually have been in debt at this crisis; and even now he had no funds of his own at command, to meet the expenses he had so wantonly incurred.

But none of this was communicated to Fanny, and a house in town was taken, to which they removed in the latter end of May, being as soon as her health allowed it. She feared a summer residence in London for the children; but he would not hear of a separation, and the whole family were to continue there for the remainder of the session.

This was quite a new life for Fanny, and she felt almost bewildered amidst the gaiety and bustle to which she was now introduced. Her husband's acquaintance in London was large, and of course increasing, and she was generally very well received. But of those she met, few excited much interest; and her *greatest pleasure* was still found in her home and her children. But there were one or two incidents worthy of record.

The first of these was meeting with *Frank Linwood*. It was at a dinner-party that they encountered, and they sat next each other. She had never seen him since her marriage; for he had not spent the last vacation in Yorkshire, as he had once proposed.

It was natural that she should feel pleasure on again meeting her early friend, of whose peculiar affection for herself she had always been ignorant, but whose many acts of kindness were impressed on her memory; and as her neighbor on the other side was a stranger, she felt the more inclined to turn her whole attention towards Frank. He bore it all with admirable composure, his countenance did not vary, nor his voice falter when she reverted to the painful past — the days when they were all children together, so long ago; and so perfect was his self-possession, that he convinced himself he did not feel at all, but that the treasured affection of so many years' growth was completely eradicated from his heart.

"Why have you never come to see me?" inquired she; "I think it is almost unkind of you to neglect me so. If you do not call now, however, I shall be quite affronted."

"I would have called before," was his grave reply, "could I have imagined that it would give you pleasure; but you who have so many acquaintances, could not surely miss a poor solitary lawyer like myself."

"Ah, but my many acquaintances are nearly all strangers to me; and amidst the wilderness of new faces and new names in which I find myself, you cannot imagine how refreshing it is to meet one familiar to me in my earlier days."

A long conversation ensued concerning her impressions of the society, amusements, and novelties which she had encountered in London, and Frank was greatly interested by the feelings which she described. In consequence of this meeting, he became a frequent visitor at her house, and always a welcome one, both to Cecil and Fanny; the latter especially, and with some justice, reckoned him among the warmest of her friends.

There was another incident which however awakened different feelings.

Almost the only relatives with whom Cecil was acquainted, were his uncle and cousin, Mr. Henry Mansfield, and his daughter Laura.

This latter was not only lovely, but clever and accomplished; and gifted with a degree of energy and resolution in carrying out a project once formed, quite uncommon in her gender. Her father held a good situation under Government, but the future provision for his daughter was likely to be quite unsuitable to her habits and tastes, unless she were able to

secure opulence by some wealthy marriage; for the contingency of her father or herself inheriting the Brookensha property, to which they were next in the inheritance, after Cecil's children, appeared too remote for her to calculate upon.

In every respect she had been of opinion that a marriage with her cousin was the most desirable step she could take; and as she really liked him exceedingly, when he had been in town the preceding year, she was proportionally hurt and offended at his marrying Miss Ellis.

Quite unsuspecting of having given rise to such feelings, however, Cecil Mansfield, who had really liked and admired his cousin very much, readily sought them again on his return to town, and was received by both father and daughter, with apparent cordiality; for Mr. Henry Mansfield had no wish to quarrel with his nephew, and Laura was too proud to betray her disappointment. But though he was welcomed to their house, and caressed when there, they never entered his house; Laura never left her card with her cousin's wife, nor was Fanny ever hinted at in the invitations bestowed on Cecil. At first, he felt inclined to be affronted for Fanny's sake; but she, sensitive on the subject, and guessing their reason, would not permit him to quarrel on her account with these his nearest relations.

That it was from positive dislike towards herself, or disapproval of her marriage, that this coldness arose, was not left entirely to conjecture, for the incident alluded to which occurred one evening, placed it beyond a doubt, and while gratifying her wish to see her husband's cousin, left behind it extremely painful sensations.

She was at an evening party, where she expected to be joined by Cecil, when the House rose, and being surrounded for the greater part by total strangers, her eyes rested on them with a feeling of indifference, until she was attracted by the appearance of a very lovely girl, standing immediately in front of her. There was something in her air and features familiar to her, and she attempted to remember when and where they had met before, but without success; she was puzzling herself on this subject, when two ladies approached, one of whom happened to be a particular friend and near neighbor of the Mansfields.

While *Mrs. Compton* was expressing her pleasure at having met Fanny at last, her companion addressed the young lady who had engrossed Fanny's attention.

"Can you tell me where papa is?" inquired the latter; "he has left me here without a single acquaintance near me to speak to, and I would be glad if he would come and release me."

"No, really," said Lady Ellerton, "I have not seen him; but," lowering her voice, though it was still quite audible to Fanny, "you are wrong in saying you have no acquaintance surely, for there is your cousin sitting within two yards of you."

"My cousin!" repeated the young lady, aloud, and turning half round as she spoke; "dear Lady Ellerton, I have but one cousin in the world, and he is in the House of Commons, I imagine."

"Your cousin's *wife*, I should have said," replied Lady Ellerton; "do you not know her?"

"His wife," replied Laura Mansfield, for she it was, "no, indeed; nor do I wish it," a scornful smile curled her lovely mouth as she spoke, and her voice was loud enough to show that she rather wished to make her sentiments *known* to those whom they concerned.

Fanny could not help feeling uncomfortable at such a demonstration of unfriendly feeling; but she was relieved by *Mrs. Compton* observing:

"I am going home, Fanny, almost immediately; shall I take you in my carriage to Grafton Street, as you say yours must wait for your husband?"

She gladly accepted the offer, and prepared to retreat. Miss Mansfield moved away with Lady Ellerton; but before Fanny left the room she saw Cecil enter, and almost immediately approach his cousin.

That he had a very gracious reception, was evident; he passed on to address Fanny, who told him she was leaving, in company with her friend, unless he wished her to stay. He declared he would not detain her if she was tired; but would follow as soon as he had spoken to some friends of his, and then left her hastily again to return to *Laura*.

She saw him before she left the room, engaged in lively conversation with his cousin, and she sighed as she turned away her head.

"Good heavens!" cried *Mrs. Compton*, "what could make your cousin so *abominably rude* to you?"

Fanny was silent.

"To refuse to own you in that scornful way, it does not say much for her manners as a lady; tell me, is there a feud between the cousins; family quarrels are so common; maybe she was not at liberty to speak to you?"

"Oh, no," replied Fanny, "my husband is on very intimate terms with both his uncle and cousin; he was speaking to her when we left the room."

"Then, my dear *Mrs. Mansfield*, allow me to observe that the sooner such an *intimacy* is put to a stop, the better. I recommend you to tell him immediately how she behaved to you."

"But that would vex him, and perhaps he might quarrel with them about it, which would only make things worse," said Fanny.

"A quarrel would be the very thing I would desire," observed *Mrs. Compton*.

“But he is very fond of them,” urged Fanny.

“So much the worse for you. I would insist on his breaking with them immediately, after such an insult, if I were in your place.”

“Oh, I cannot do that for what concerns only myself; I would not give him a moment’s pain, if I could help it,” exclaimed Fanny, anxiously.

“You are much too good to him, and though I have been married a shorter time, I am certain I know the rights of a wife better than you,” replied Mrs. Compton. “Would I allow my husband to visit a girl who treated me with such marked scorn — No! I would require that he should never speak to her again, until she had learned better manners at least!”

“You might,” said Fanny, but it is different with me; I cannot force my acquaintance on those who shrink from me. The best and safest course for me is to submit in silence.”

“And the best and safest course for Cecil is to take your part, and stand by you; depend upon it, those are not safe acquaintances for him, who treat you rudely,” said Mrs. Compton decisively.

“I am afraid his manners may be hurt,” said Fanny with a faint smile.

Her friend had not time to assure her that it would be for his *morals*, not his *manners*, they should fear, for they had reached Grafton-street, and Fanny had only to wish her good night, and enter her own house.

It was not from any insensibility that Fanny refrained from complaint; she keenly felt her cousin’s rude conduct, and the consequences were an extreme inclination to avoid the possibility of again encountering her, by remaining in almost entire seclusion. But she could not have been able to gratify this wish, had not another circumstance occurred which rendered the seclusion inevitable. The two elder children, after pining a few days, were seized with an attack of *measles*, then very prevalent in the neighborhood. The frightened parents gave up everything to attend to them; and Laura was forgotten by each in their anxiety for the little sufferers. The attack proved severe, but the children struggled through it; and as soon as they could be removed with safety, the doctors strongly recommending country air, Fanny set out with them to Brookensha, leaving Cecil alone to finish his Parliamentary duties.

What he did in London, besides attending the House of Commons, Fanny never knew; his letters did not inform her, though she inferred that he saw a good deal of his uncle and cousin.

The close of the Session, early in August, brought him down into the country; and as the children, though still delicate, were no longer to be considered *invalids*, his house was rapidly filled with a succession of visitors, some of whom Fanny had met in London, but many more were quite unknown to her even by name. This was a great disappointment to her. She had hoped to have enjoyed Cecil’s society in peace; and now she saw but little of him, and it was really hard work to her to try and make her visitors comfortable, because she set about it with all her heart.

It was a great comfort to her that the Linwoods had returned to the village again from the continent, where they had been traveling; both the brother and sister were a great deal at Brookensha, and assisted her in planning amusements for her numerous guests. They were very general favorites; Frank especially with ladies, and Olivia with all.

The gravity which marked Frank’s usual manners was considered charming and interesting by young ladies: he was clever, amusing, complaisant; could get up charades; write complimentary verses, and understood music; sketched to perfection, and could read, ride, drive, or row, according as was desired. No wonder that he was popular in a country house, where so many other gentlemen preferred sporting to any other pursuits. And then he was so amiable; he was as ready to ride with a plain girl as a pretty one, and danced generally with one whom nobody else had asked.

Fanny often expressed her great obligation to him; and more than once said that now Cecil had become so occupied with Parliamentary business, and so engrossed by those terrible reports of commissions, and such things — she did not know what she would have done without Frank.

Cecil was certainly altered, and Fanny was glad to lay the blame of his absence of mind, and uncertain manners on the engrossing nature of his public duties; but though she tried thus to persuade herself, she was not really quite convinced, and secretly feared, that some other *unknown cause* led to the result which she deplored.

But another care now assailed her. As autumn advanced the twins showed renewed symptoms of ill-health; their constitutions had never recovered the effects of their previous illness, and an alarming cough now induced the medical attendants to recommend a softer air than Yorkshire. The party at Brookensha was broken up; the visitors dispersed, and the family removed without any delay to South Devon.

The danger of his children aroused Cecil from the state of *dreamy discontent* which had been growing on him, and which had excited the uneasiness of his wife, and Fanny’s sorrow and alarm seemed to revive all his former passionate attachment to her. Ever the creature of impulse, he now could not do enough for his wife to promote her happiness, or fulfill her wishes, and Fanny’s tears for her step-children were sweetened by the gratitude which such unbounded love called forth.

Their solicitude for the twins was unavailing; they gradually sank, and before Christmas the little innocents were laid in one grave.

The father suffered much in this event, but the mother far more. She seemed to see in the early death of her sister's children, another proof of the anger of Heaven at a marriage which ought never to have taken place. Cecil consoled himself with the earnest hope that she would bring him sons to perpetuate his name; she could not take comfort in such an idea. The dread that her children would grow up to be a shame and reproach to her seized on her mind, and she could not shake it off, struggle as she would. This burden, too, must be borne in secret, for she could not impart such feelings to Cecil. So she hid her sorrow in her heart, and dried her eyes to comfort him, and he was comforted.

But much as they both felt, little did either foresee or suspect, how much misery of the acutest kind those children's deaths entailed upon them!

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 6

“Laura,” said Mr. Henry Mansfield one evening to his daughter, “when you are quite at leisure to hear me, I have something to say to you.”

The young lady gave a slight nod, demonstrative of hearing this speech, but did not interrupt the Italian song which she was engaged in practicing. When, however, she had satisfied herself with the accurate performance of a difficult cadenza, she returned to a seat near the fire, and having arranged herself in a comfortable attitude in the peculiarly easy chair which she always appropriated, she quietly ejaculated:

“Well, papa!”

“That is a very pretty air you have been treating me to, but I am glad you have stopped at last,” said her father.

“It is one of Rossini’s,” observed Laura, carelessly. “Of course it is pretty.”

“But my object is to talk to you about heirs of a different kind,” continued he. “Do you know that your *cousin Cecil* has just lost his two children?”

“Yes, I saw their death in the ‘Morning Post’” replied Laura, with affected carelessness, twisting her fingers in her long dark ringlets, and settling her feet more comfortably on the fender.

“But are you aware, Laura, that, in case of his leaving no child to inherit, I, or at least you, will succeed to his property at his death?”

“I never thought about it much,” said she; “nor do I see any use in doing so now, as his wife is young enough to bring him a dozen children, and has, you know, already produced number one! If he were not married, indeed — ”

She paused, and her father took up her words:

“If he were not married, indeed — what then, Laura?”

“Why, then, I would not be sorry to marry him myself,” replied she, pretending to laugh, and yet coloring highly; “for he is beyond comparison the most agreeable man of my acquaintance, and I would much rather enjoy the estate with him at once, even were he less pleasant, than wait for the death of a man only a few years older than myself. But what is the use of thinking of such idle dreams, while he is tied to that horrid, dull, moping wife of his, who will bring him a child once a year, no doubt!”

“The use of thinking on the subject, Laura, is this, that, by taking proper steps, I may get his marriage *annulled*, and all the children by it will be then swept out of our way.”

“Can you, indeed,” cried Laura, starting up in her chair, and opening wide her large dark eyes. “Why, I always thought you could not interfere. How in the world shall you do it?”

“The *Church Court*, Laura, will stand our friend, and pronounce his marriage void, when I bring the case before it.”

“Is it possible?” exclaimed Laura. “I had no idea the Church Court would do anything half so pleasant; but why have you not set about it long ago, papa?”

“Because, while his eldest children lived, I could do nothing. I inquired long ago on the subject, but it is only a direct interest in the affair which can entitle one to interfere. But now, there is no doubt, I shall succeed. He marries his sister-in-law; such marriages are *voidable*; it is *annulled*, and his estate is ours.”

“I see,” said Laura; but after a moment’s pause, she added: “After all, you are reckoning without your host, for if you succeed in getting rid of one wife, what is there to prevent his marrying again, and having a dozen more children in due course of time?”

“His attachment to Fanny, which I have no doubt is very strong,” replied her father, “to which we must trust for preventing such a contingency.”

“Attachment to a fiddle-stick,” cried Laura, impatiently. “I beg your pardon, my dear father; but when, in the name of the hundred wonders of the world, did you ever hear of a man’s attachment to one wife preventing his seeking another: not Cecil’s, certainly, for I have no doubt of his great attachment to the first Mrs. Mansfield.”

“They are different cases altogether, Laura; the feelings of a man for a dead wife or a living mistress, are not to be compared.”

“But Mrs. Mansfield is much too good to continue to live with him on such questionable terms, papa. She is very pious, I assure you. Mary Annesley, who was at Brookensha last autumn, says she cares for nothing but her domestic duties, and relieving the sick, making flannel petticoats, and distributing gospel tracts; so you see that plan will not do.”

“But perhaps he may persuade her to accompany him abroad to some country where such marriages are recognized, Germany or America;” replied Henry Mansfield.

“I have a notion those very good people think such evasions wrong; depend upon it she will leave him, and he, if he has a spark of the true Mansfield spirit, he will marry someone else just to spite you. At least, I know I would in his case.”

“I daresay you would, my love; but since you give no credit to my hopes, please suggest some feasible plan of your own as an amendment to mine. What would you advise under present circumstances?”

Laura mused for a few minutes, and then said, but looking slightly embarrassed as she spoke:

“The best way by far to secure the property to me, would be for *me* to marry Cecil myself.”

“Undoubtedly, my dear, if you can persuade him to do it; but I would imagine that the *Mansfield spirit* you talk of would incline him to anyone rather than the disturber of his domestic peace, for his third wife.”

“Very true, if you begin at the wrong end of the matter; but give me time and opportunity, and see if I do not teach him to consider the dissolution of his present engagement, not as a dreadful deprivation, but a desirable event — a door of admission to unexpected enjoyments which he shall be as anxious to open as ourselves.”

“So fond as he is of his wife, do you expect to make any impression on him?” inquired her father, who had not noticed what was passing in the summer.

“I question much if his fidelity to his wife is of quite so unchangeable a nature,” replied Laura, with a shade of irritation in her tone.

“I did not mean to undervalue your attractions, Laura,” said her father, laughing. “I have a high respect for your talents, and if your plan can be carried out, shall give it my full consent. But how much time shall you require?”

“Why really, papa, I cannot exactly say — how can I estimate my own charms? Do not hurry me. I dare say he will be in town soon, and then I can try. If I cannot persuade him to go with us to Richmond at Easter, instead of returning for the recess to Brookensha, I will give him up as incurably attached to his wife. You may then try to break his heart by a legal process, as I cannot bend it to my wishes. May I ask how long you have been meditating this plan?”

“Ever since his second marriage I have had it in contemplation, in case his children should not live. I saw them in London, and was then convinced that they would not long stand in our way.”

“Then I suppose your peremptory refusal to allow me to visit them, either here or in Yorkshire, was in some way connected with these plans?”

“Precisely so. I was resolved not to countenance the connection, or in any way notice his so-called wife!”

“Well, I own that in this instance you judged right; bitterly as I felt such an overthrow of all my plans for a campaign among the wealthy squires of Yorkshire.”

But *Cecil Mansfield* was not in town quite so soon as Laura anticipated; his grief for the loss of his children was too sincere to be so very quickly overcome, and having paired off on the meeting of Parliament, he accompanied his wife back to Yorkshire, and continued to reside with her there until after Easter.

Fanny was very far from well, and he felt much anxiety on her account: the sorrow and fatigue she had gone through while nursing her step-children had been too much for her, for she had been allowed no rest; the children could not bear her out of their sight, and she had not the heart to thwart them in any way. But the effects of her exertions were now plainly visible in the pallid cheek and languid movements, and her husband was miserable on her account. He flattered himself that the child that was expected in the course of the summer would prove a son, and was sincerely anxious that she should perfectly regain her health previous to this desirable event.

It was not, therefore, until the middle of April that Cecil felt himself obliged to go to London, and then Fanny earnestly desired to accompany him; but, though much better, he did not think her well enough to run such a risk, and was so anxious that she should continue in the quiet and healthful air of Brookensha, that she could not resist his persuasions, though it was with a sad foreboding, a presentiment of evil, such as she had never felt before, that she saw him leave her now. Her heart seemed to tell her that she would never see him more. She struggled, however, with the feeling, and endeavored, in the fulfillment of her various duties, to forget it entirely; and though not quite successful in this point, she regained both health and composure in time.

She had little society except the Linwoods and Mrs. Compton, in addition to that of good old Rev. Hughes, whom she saw constantly; and she avoided, as much as possible, all visiting; her deep mourning, her health, and her situation without her husband, giving her a very available excuse for her *seclusion*.

That Cecil’s hours, meanwhile, were disposed of in a very different manner, was well known to some of Fanny’s friends, though she herself was ignorant of it. Mrs. Compton had been in town during April and May, and was aware that he devoted all his leisure time to the very cousin Laura, who had formerly excited her indignation; and some other of his acquaintances had remarked with astonishment, that both Laura and her father seemed to encourage a devotion which in a married man they judged not only useless, but *scandalous*. To Frank Linwood, Mrs. Compton had more than once expressed her discontent at the way in which Cecil was going on; and he, though more cautious than the lady in making known his opinions, could not view his conduct without wonder, disgust, and alarm. He was brought several times in contact with him in the society which they frequented, and he constantly saw him in the Park in attendance on his cousin. Perhaps *concern for Fanny’s happiness* made Frank more inclined to watch Cecil, than he would have been any other man, but it seemed to him as if they were fated always to meet.

But in June he was almost lost sight of in London, for Mr. Henry Mansfield took a villa on the banks of the Thames, and Cecil removed there with his relatives.

Fanny learned none of this however, for at the earnest persuasion of her own husband, Mrs. Compton refrained from enlightening her by detailing her own observations while in town; nevertheless Mrs. Mansfield had her full share of

anxiety. Cecil's letters, when they arrived, were too brief and unsatisfactory to afford any compensation for their rarity, or account for his long intervals of silence; and she looked forward, with an impatient longing, quite unnatural to her, to the period when she might reasonably expect his return to Brookensha. Her confinement was to take place in August, and she hoped he would be with her before that time. Thus June and part of July slipped away, and left behind them no record except for uneasy sensations.

One afternoon, just as she was preparing for a drive, Fanny was informed that a person desired to speak with her on business. Ordering him to be shown into her husband's room of business, she completed her dressing previous to descending, and then prepared to see some humble petitioner, troubled with a sick child or a dead cow, she walked into the room where he was waiting. But she was rather surprised to find herself confronted with a young man quite unknown to her, with the dress of a gentleman, and an address which only required a little less of constraint, and rather more self-possession, to be pleasing. He looked, indeed, dreadfully frightened, and vainly attempted to assume an air of assurance, as advancing towards her, and placing in her hands a *slip of paper*, he hurriedly muttered some words, which she could not catch, about the head of the firm, and then hastily and awkwardly left the room.

Bewildered and aghast at this sudden apparition, and its results, Fanny cast her eyes over the paper which she held in her hand — if her comprehension did not fail her, it was a notice — a threat of a nature to chill her heart, and deprive her of all power to form a distinct idea. She rushed from the room — the intruder was gone; but seeing her own carriage at the door, she sprang into it, and hastily desiring to be driven to Mrs. Linwood's, sat until they reached her door, insensible to everything around her, with one only idea, which seemed burning in her brain, and almost driving her to the verge of distraction, "Was her marriage after all to be disputed?"

Without waiting for ceremony, or inquiring who was within, she entered Mrs. Linwood's drawing-room, and there was Frank, having come to the north on business connected with his profession, he was spending twelve hours at his mother's house on his way back to London.

"Frank," exclaimed she in a low hoarse voice, approaching close to him, "tell me, in the name of mercy, what does this mean?"

She placed in his hands, as she spoke, the paper which almost unconsciously she had until now held crushed in her own, and then sinking on a sofa, she threw back her bonnet, pressing her long ringlets from her forehead, as if she needed air, and fixing her eyes in unutterable agony on Frank, quite unable to speak another syllable.

Her sudden appearance; her strange address; her wild and unnatural looks, amazed and alarmed him so much, that he could not command his feelings, and scarcely conscious of what he said or did, instead of examining the paper she had given him, he dropped it on the table, and taking her hand, exclaimed:

"Good heavens, dearest Fanny, what is the matter? are you ill? what can I do for you? a glass of water!" and turning to a table near, he hastily poured out one, and presented it to her lips.

She tasted a sip, for her mouth was parched from terror, and then putting it away, she pointed again to the fatal paper, and in a half-smothered voice she articulated:

"Look at that, and tell me what it means!"

Mechanically he took it up; his sudden startle, when he unfolded it, and saw its contents, his change of countenance, the look of inexpressible compassion that he cast on her — told what he lacked words and courage to express.

It was a notice served on her, that Mr. Henry Mansfield intended to commence a suit in the Church Court of York, to annul her marriage. Of the result of such a suit, there could scarcely be any doubt — it seemed almost unkind to suppose any; but who could have expected *this act of cruelty*?

The evils which it would entail flashed through Frank's mind in a moment; her husband neglecting her; her passionate love for him, and her certain despair at the idea of a separation; her situation, and delicate health, which might make such a shock even dangerous to her life; the dreadful change to her daughter, and the disgrace to herself; he thought of it all. And there she sat before him to hear her doom; her lips parted; her eyes fixed on his face; her pale sad countenance expressing such unutterable suspense and woe — and must he speak the words which might break her heart? he who would have sacrificed his life to save her from this pain? why should he witness it?

"Frank," said she at last, with a sort of desperate energy, finding he did not speak, "tell me what am I to expect; speak to me, Frank?"

She rose, and grasping his arm, gazed earnestly at him as she whispered:

"What does that paper threaten? are they going to annul my marriage?"

Her touch, and her voice, the address by his name, which, since her marriage, she had discontinued, how they thrilled through him! he looked at her with eyes of deep compassion, and faltered out, hardly knowing what he said:

"Fanny, I could not have believed in such cruelty."

"But they cannot! they shall not! they dare not!" — cried she in an accent of agony. "I am Cecil's wife; his by every tie which can unite us; I love him with my whole heart; he is the father of my child; I am, indeed I am his wife — who will, who can part us?"



She sank again upon the sofa, and he feared she was about to faint; but though pale and silent, she continued perfectly sensible, and after a few minutes' consideration, she said, with clasped hands, and raised eyes, though with a heavy sigh:

"May God's will be done; yes, I have deserved this, too. Frank, you need not fear to speak; I can bear it all now; tell me plainly what am I to expect?"

With hesitation and pain, he tried to explain the meaning of the threat held out to her.

"I see you feel for me," said she gently, "and, indeed, I am grateful; but I must trespass a little more on your kindness." She paused for breath, and he answered as he felt:

"Anything, Fanny; anything in the world that I can do for you."

"I would only ask, is there anything to be done by me?" said she.

"Nothing," replied he, more deeply affected by her gentle submission than by the wildness of her first despair.

"God grant me patience, then!" was her reply. "And if this cruel act proceeds, what am I, what shall I be to my husband — I mean to Cecil?"

"His sister-in-law," said Frank, most reluctantly.

"And not his wife?" inquired she, in a faint voice.

"Not his wife," replied Frank, more and more painfully struck by her dreadful situation, and affected alike by the subject and the manner of her inquiries.

"Then, what have I been?"

He was silent.

"What name will the law give me?" pursued she.

Not for worlds would he have answered such a question.

"You fear to speak," cried she; "but your silence tells me only too well."

Then holding up her left hand, and looking at her wedding-ring, she murmured:

"He placed it there, Cecil — my Cecil — my love — my husband; oh, why are you not here? how will you bear this? what will you not suffer? Cruel, cruel uncle! inhuman, barbarous man! Oh, Cecil, come to me, comfort and support me, as you have so often done before."

She fell back upon the sofa, her features convulsed with pain and grief; and Frank, distracted by his alarm, hastily rang the bell for assistance. At this moment his mother and sister entered the room, and after a very few hurried questions from Mrs. Linwood, he was enjoined to lose not a moment in galloping to the nearest doctor, as her situation required instant medical attendance.

It was some relief to him to be engaged in active exertion; and as he spurred his horse across the country in the direct route to the house of Mr. Blackwood, Fanny's usual medical attendant, he ran over again in his mind the painful scene he had gone through.

Meantime Mrs. Linwood and her daughter remained in a state of alarm and perplexity not to be described. Frank had not explained the nature of the shock to which he had attributed Fanny's sufferings. *Distressing news* was all he had said, and even had she been equal to explain, they would have feared to ask a question.

The effect was evident, however, though the cause was unknown, and their alarm and distress for Fanny, for a time, superseded their curiosity.

Fortunately, Frank found the doctor at home, and, unwilling that he should delay even while his own coach was preparing, he insisted on Mr. Blackwood's mounting his horse, determining himself to return on foot. But he had not gone far when he was overtaken by Mrs. Compton in her coach, who offered him a seat, as she was going to Brookensha. He accepted the offer, that he might explain to her what had passed; but, before he had found words to begin, she exclaimed, with her usual impetuosity:

"What on earth is the matter, Mr. Linwood? for though never a very lively personage, you seem today worse than usual; have you seen a Spirit?"

"Worse than that," said he, with a darkened brow. "I left Mrs. Mansfield ill, at my mother's house. I just sent Mr. Blackwood to her —"

"Good heavens, ill? what has happened? Drive, Griffiths, drive like the wind to Mrs. Linwood's! Tell me, Mr. Linwood, you alarm me dreadfully."

Frank explained, as briefly as he could, what had just taken place.

Mrs. Compton was, at first, too much shocked to speak; she was quite overcome, and, hiding her face, she sobbed almost convulsively. It was rather a hard lot for poor Frank Linwood to have perpetually to console and strengthen other men's wives: but what could he say to Mrs. Compton; it seemed to him most natural to go on talking of Fanny.

"She bore it like an angel," said he.

"Then she bore it like herself, for she is an angel," cried Mrs. Compton, raising her head. "If ever there was a woman with an angelic nature, it is Fanny Mansfield, Mr. Linwood; I know her well."

Frank did not think it necessary to assert that he did too.

“But where is Cecil?” cried Mrs. Compton; “he must know of this; why is he not here? what is he doing?”

Frank shook his head.

“Ah! I see it all,” pursued she; “I knew no good would come of that cousin, and his visits there: he is faithless — he is deserting Fanny for Laura Mansfield; he has planned — he has contrived this all — ”

“Oh, no! that would be too horrible!” exclaimed he.

“Yes, yes, depend upon it: I have long suspected him — now I am convinced. Oh, the wretch — the detestable wretch! it must be so, or why is he still visiting — living with the contrivers of this mischief. You shall not say a word in his defense; he is a perjured, faithless wretch; and if it costs his dear wife her life, he will as much have killed her as if he had fired a pistol at her head. Poor, darling Fanny!”

Her companion was silent.

“Praise her, Mr. Linwood; I cannot bear that you should listen and look so coldly on the subject,” said Mrs. Compton vehemently. “Do you not admire her — do you not pity her?”

“How can you ask the question?” exclaimed he, with some difficulty repressing forbidden emotions.

“I beg your pardon, but you are only a man,” said she “and cannot be expected to appreciate her sweetness as I do.”

“But I have known her from the time I could carry her in my arms,” replied Frank, with uncontrollable emotion; “can you be so unjust as to suppose that if I *say* little, it is because I *feel* little on the subject. But here we are at my mother’s; in another minute we shall learn how she is.”

There was nothing satisfactory to learn, however. Fanny was dangerously ill; and in another hour her newly born *son*, once so much desired by Cecil Mansfield, had breathed his first and last breath in this weary world, while his hapless mother lay in a state hovering between life and death.

It is easy to imagine the sorrowful and indignant feelings with which her friends together reviewed Fanny’s dreadful situation. Their opinions might vary as to the original contrivers of this outrage, but they could not differ as to the sentiments of *abhorrence* which it created. Mrs. Linwood, though the least bitter against the offending parties, could not excuse Henry Mansfield’s lack of feeling. Olivia was persuaded that it was his concern to secure the *Brookensha estate* which influenced him. Frank believed that Laura’s affection for her cousin had some share in their motives, and Mrs. Compton laid the whole blame on Cecil’s infidelity, and considered him the most criminal of all the parties concerned. But, whatever was the motive, whether the avarice of the father, the criminal passion of the daughter, or the still more criminal faithlessness of the husband — it was clear that Fanny’s life was in danger of being sacrificed, while that of her newly born infant had actually been the victim of these wicked plots, and their untimely announcement!

One thing appeared necessary; that Cecil should be made acquainted with these events, their causes, and probable consequences; and Frank owned that if he did not then immediately leave London, and fly to the bedside of his suffering wife, he must be considered as a participator in his uncle’s plots. He prepared, therefore, himself to be the bearer of this news, determined to announce it in person, if possible, that there might be no mistake, or misapprehension as to Mrs. Mansfield’s danger; and for this purpose he set out to town that night, intending to stop no where on the way; but traveling post and with four horses, he might reach London in less time than the mail, which indeed would not leave Brookensha until some hours later. It was painful, but necessary to leave Fanny in such a state; his own business would admit of no further delay, and Olivia promised him an account by every post.

Mrs. Compton, warmly shaking hands with him as she took leave, charged him by all means to make Cecil thoroughly ashamed of himself before he left him.

The variety of conflicting emotions which filled Frank’s mind, and agitated his bosom during his hurried journey, prevented him from feeling it tedious. Fanny had been his boyhood’s love, and the idol of his heart from the earliest period of their acquaintance; he could not remember the period when he did not love her better than anyone in the world; and most painful had been his emotions when he first began to fear he would lose her entirely. But he had no right to complain; gentle and amiable to all, she had never been more so to him than to others; and, as his circumstances precluded an early marriage, he had honorably forborne to attempt winning a heart, which he could not have endured to see tortured with the suspense of a long engagement.

The struggle had been bitter, but it had been apparently successful. When thrown again into her society, he had learned to view her as the wife of another, and to converse with her as such without pain; and, though his early disappointment had cast a shadow over his manners, and rendered him more grave than was usual at his age, it seemed to have left no other trace on his mind.

But the painful scene he had gone through had called up feelings, into the nature of which he dared hardly inquire. Fanny, beloved and happy, he could view with calmness — but Fanny, deserted and betrayed, clinging to him for encouragement which he could not give, calling him by his name, as in old times, and seeming to shelter herself under his protection from the cruelty of others — these thoughts awoke sensations from which it required the greatest resolution to turn away — an effort which only true principle could prompt. Oh! that he had been endowed with the blessed right of

shielding her from the misery which threatened — that he could have stood in Cecil's place, and fulfilled the duties which he so cruelly neglected!

But this was an idle — a culpable wish, in which he dared not indulge: he recalled the tenderness which she still expressed towards her husband — the thrilling tone in which she called upon his name. He thought he might never hear that voice, or see that face again — that pale, sad face, convulsed with grief, or distorted by pain, but still, in his eyes, inexpressibly lovely!

She might now be dying — she might be dead! — murdered, yes murdered — by the cruel blow which her husband's nearest relatives had dealt her! And yet this seemed by far the happiest conclusion to her sufferings: for was her *life* to be desired under such circumstances?

What! live to be disgraced and discarded, as a mistress of whom Cecil had grown tired! — live to see herself, perhaps, superseded in the affections of a man to whom she was still so faithfully attached, and that man one who had taken such pains to make her his own! — live to be a mark for wondering or scornful pity to point at — to be despised by those who once might have envied her lot! — live that her innocent child should share her mother's disgrace — should lose her station, her name, her inheritance, her father! — should become the reproach of her parents, the nameless offspring of an illegal connection! Oh! no. Far better, if the will of Heaven were so, that Fanny should die now — at once — before her rights as a wife could be disputed — before her conduct should become the subject of public conversation, and insulting investigation; before she herself could become aware from experience of the injustice, the cruelty, the infidelity of him whom she had so loved, so trusted; before her heart were more deeply pierced by a knowledge of his willful desertion, than it could be by the legal process now threatened. Better for herself — better for her child. Her rights would then be secured beyond all question; her mother's death would forever establish her claim upon her other parent, and by no process of law could she be robbed of her birth-right; and perhaps some portion of tenderness might revive in her father's bosom when the motherless girl's claims were thus forced upon him. Repentance he must surely feel for his present conduct: remorse would certainly wring his bosom, and he might accord to the daughter the justice which he denied to the wife.

So far Frank's thoughts were clear, and his musings of no selfish character; but then arose other feelings. She might live! and if this suit were proceeded with, her hand would once more be free. She might be loved without remorse when she was no longer a wife. This was dangerous ground to approach. Again he felt on his hand the pressure of those slender fingers, he heard her voice again pronounce his name, he saw her bewitching eyes again before him; his heart beat, but reason told him it was idle, and conscience murmured it was wrong to indulge in such speculations. No! loving as she did — as he too well knew she loved her husband — how could he flatter himself that her heart could ever be sensible to another attachment? Were she *legally* free, her *heart* never could become so.

Moved by the recollection alike of her bitter sorrow, and her touching resignation, by her misery and her helplessness, he vowed to stifle every feeling but such as should entitle him to be considered as her friend, to make every exertion, spare no effort, leave nothing untried to save her from such suffering; yes, were it in his power thus to secure her peace, he would fortify the barrier which now divided them, and trample on his own feelings, to secure her from torture.

But if her husband should be torn from her, or should voluntarily cast her off; if, regardless of the value of her affections, he should forsake her for another, then it should be his care to show his opinion of her purity, his sense of her worth — his constant, his devoted love.

This vision flitted before his eyes for a moment, but again he remembered the floods of sorrow through which she must pass, before such a point could be reached, and he turned away his thoughts with a prayer that she might be saved this trial.

Thus tossed by conflicting emotions, he reached London, and with the shortest possible delay, he proceeded to seek Cecil Mansfield, at his rooms in the Albany, for he had not taken a house this year. But as he anticipated, Cecil was not to be found; he had not been in town for a week past, and his servant believed him to be at the villa of Mr. Henry Mansfield, in the neighborhood of Twickenham. There Frank determined to follow him, for he still kept to his resolution of delivering his distressing news in person, and though it would be late when he arrived there, he calculated with confidence on finding him still accessible.

Cecil was within, and being asked by the servant to walk in, Frank followed his conductor so closely into the drawing-room, as to become witness to a scene certainly not intended for his eyes. His first impression on entering the room had been that it was empty, until a glance at a mirror in the inner room, showed him what was passing in a corner not otherwise open to his observation. There he distinctly saw the reflection of a beautiful girl, who, with head upturned, and glances which seemed to indicate most passionate love, was listening with glowing cheek to words whose nature was indubitable; words whispered by Cecil Mansfield himself, who, leaning on the back of her chair, with an arm all but encircling her waist, was bending so closely over her, that a very small movement in advance must have brought his lips in contact with her cheek. There was love in her looks, love in his gestures — yes, permitted and encouraged love, in the familiar attitude and air of each.

Short as was Frank's moment for observation, he felt that Fanny was forgotten, was betrayed; and indignation, resentment, and scorn swelled in his heart, and annihilated every softer feeling with which he had been prepared to meet the husband of the suffering Fanny.

Startling, when the servant announced that a gentleman was waiting to see him on business of great importance, Cecil left his cousin's side, and advanced into the room where Mr. Linwood was standing. Surprise and confusion, caused perhaps, by a consciousness of guilt, marked his features, when he discovered who his visitor was, and met the cool scrutiny of his eye. He seemed to anticipate evil tidings, possibly feeling that he deserved them; the scrutiny was excessively painful to each, though the coldness, reserve, and self-possession of the lawyer, formed a striking contrast to the hurried manner and embarrassed attempts at cordiality with which he was received by the man of pleasure, and served at once to convince Laura, as she contemplated them from the inner room, how correct was her instantaneous impression that this intruder was unwelcome.

"I desire to speak with you, on business of urgent importance, Cecil," commenced the visitor; "but I would prefer to make the communication in private. Can you attend to me now?"

"Certainly," replied Cecil, in a voice far less steady than his companion's, and instantly leading the way to a small adjoining room, he had no sooner closed the door between that and the parlor which they had just left, than unable to restrain his impetuosity, he exclaimed:

"What evil tidings do you bring me, Linwood? are you straight from Yorkshire?"

"I am," replied the other, gravely: "and if you know the nature of the communication which was yesterday made through your attorney to your wife, you will perhaps, be less surprised at what I have to tell you."

Cecil turned deadly pale, and his emotion was evident: he trembled, or rather shuddered, at these words; and grasping the back of a chair for support, he ejaculated:

"What, in the name of Heaven, does this prelude mean? how is — ?" He stopped, and seemed unwilling to pronounce her name.

"She was alive when I left my mother's house," replied Frank, with a voice almost stern in its gravity. "I do not wish to trifle with your feelings, Cecil, but excuse me if I seem abrupt. You have lost a son, and the mother is lying at the point of death; there is hardly a hope of her recovery."

Cecil averted his face, and then concealed it in his hands; but it was evident from his trembling limbs, and death-like hue, that he did feel acutely.

"The slight probability which still exists, that you may be in time to see her alive," continued Frank, summoning all his firmness to speak with composure, "has induced me not to lose a moment in warning you of her danger. She was under my mother's care in her house when I left her."

His auditor was silent, but he could not hide the emotion which this news created. His mind was a chaos of wild thoughts, guilty wishes, unavailing remorse, and useless shame.

Too well had Laura exerted her fatal powers — too well had she fulfilled her engagement to her father; her cousin Cecil was completely fascinated by her charms, and was now more wildly, more madly in love with her, than he had ever been with his present wife. Ever led by his passions, he had rushed into her *snares*; and for weeks had thought only of Laura, had lived only to please her, cared only for her smiles, and forgot that there existed another in the world who had a claim on him. He reflected not on the injustice he was committing, deceiving himself with the paltry pretense, that if he allowed his uncle to take the active steps for dissolving his marriage, he was not himself responsible for it.

To attempt to prevent it would be useless; to divert his uncle from his purpose would be a hopeless effort; there was nothing left on his side, but simply acquiescence. For the throb of guilty pleasure with which he listened to a plan so consonant to his wishes, he had not called himself to account; his new passion had seemed no longer criminal, now that a way was opened to gratify it. He had forgotten Fanny, and the sufferings this step must entail upon her; he saw, he thought only, of Laura — the beautiful Laura — listening with glowing cheek and beaming eye, and trembling hand, to his words of love; and he had tried to convince himself that what was the effect of a criminal passion, was simply a return to a right judgment — a virtuous, and even heroic resignation of a connection which ought never to have been formed.

But he could not now deceive himself. The sight of Frank Linwood had awakened other ideas — remorse and regret — fond memories of his pure, loving, gentle Fanny. The thought of her dying — perhaps dead — *murdered* by the very resolution of his uncle, and to which he had so willingly agreed — victim to his own *infidelity* and *treachery*. Some virtuous feelings returned to a mind which, though tyrannized over by passion, and too weak to resist temptation, was too conscious of the course which duty required, to be quite at ease now. The self-delusions, and fallacious arguments with which he had hitherto lulled his conscience, seemed suddenly to escape from his memory, and he sat before his visitor self-condemned — tortured by remorse — dreading to ask a question — dreading to hear another word, and dreading still more to think what he ought to do next.

"I collect from your silence," resumed Frank, at length finding that his companion made no inquiries, and needed no further explanations, "that it is with *your knowledge and consent* that the announcement which has proved so terrible a

blow to Fanny, was made to her. It is not for me to blame your uncle, but to you, who was perfectly acquainted with her delicate state of health, I cannot resist expressing my surprise that you should have allowed it to be made in such a way, and at such a time. Am I to infer that you concur in the plans which are threatened — that you intend to allow the law to take its course unopposed? and will submit without a struggle to the separation from your wife — that is, supposing that death does not interpose in a more speedy and more merciful manner, and baffle the efforts of her enemies?”

Cecil felt far too guilty to resent this language; he writhed under Frank's reproaches, which were only the echoes of his own conscience.

“Never shall I forget,” continued Frank, “the tones of agonized tenderness with which she called on you to comfort and protect her; the dependence which she placed upon your love; the touching trust she showed; the conviction that you would suffer as much as herself — ”

“Linwood, I will go to her,” interrupted Cecil, starting up, “for she is my wife. Angel that she is, she may yet forgive me! I will kneel for pardon; I will give up anything but her — ” he paused a moment, and then continued with more hesitation, “but yet it may all be unavailing! — what can I do?”

“Go to her at once — by all means go instantly!” cried Frank eagerly, misunderstanding his irresolution, which he supposed alluded to his fear for her precarious state; “you may possibly be in time to see her once more; or at least it is not too late to save your reputation and honor as a husband; and it will be some comfort to you hereafter, even to have made the effort; some abatement of the hours of remorse which you are storing up for yourself in future.”

“If my uncle will but consent,” faltered Cecil, evidently in a doubtful frame of mind, “if I can but persuade him to renounce his determination: I fear not — and yet I think he may — and even Laura may see — what can I do? I must go to him instantly. Oh, that I had never left Brookensha! Excuse me, Frank, I must make arrangements — I have a hundred things to do; and I hardly know what I am about!”

“Can I be of the slightest use or assistance to you to expedite your departure?” inquired Frank, who would gladly have seen him out of the house. “Command me in any way — my services are at your disposal.”

The offer was, however, declined; and Frank was obliged to leave, with a strong misgiving as to the permanence of Cecil's resolution, which appeared to him too much the result of excited feeling to be depended on. He felt, however, that he had done all in his power; the result alone could show whether he had produced any good effects; but his conscience was clear, and his intentions had been irreproachable.

The result did show that Cecil's *impulses* were alone his guides, and that whether for good or evil, his conduct was at the mercy of circumstances. His resolution to rejoin his wife, which had originated in Frank's representations, was destined to melt away before the opposition, or the acts of his companions. Seeking his uncle in haste and trepidation, he stated his intention of immediately starting for Yorkshire, in consequence of the very alarming news which he had received within the hour. He was proceeding to describe the circumstances and situation of his wife, but the coolness and composure with which he was listened to, so completely embarrassed him that he stopped abruptly.

His uncle's reply was to the effect, that of course Cecil was his own master, and must judge for himself. If he thought it right to return home under the present aspect of affairs, he was bound to do it. He, his uncle, wished everyone to act from conviction.

Cecil was surprised, for he had expected to meet with opposition, and finding none, he ventured to hint his wish that the affair should be hushed up, and the threatened proceedings in the Church Court suffered to drop.

But now he was not listened to at all. The measures which *Henry Mansfield* contemplated, were the result of deliberate conviction of what was *right* to be done — such was his assurance to his nephew — and however easily Cecil might be led to alter his opinion, or swerve aside from a purpose once so settled, by the influence of the person in question, or the representations of her friends, he must not expect his uncle to be equally wavering. What it was right for him to do yesterday, was equally so today; a principle was a principle, though all the world opposed it; and a moral question could not be altered by a woman's illness. In justice to his daughter, even were he indifferent to his own interests, he could not allow vacillation or supineness on his part to rob her of her future rights in favor of an illegitimate child, whose existence dishonored the family. Happy, indeed would he be, if he could congratulate Cecil on the birth of an heir, through whom the estate might be transmitted in a direct line from father to son, as had for many generations been the case; but while his present connection continued, this desirable event could never take place.

There was one other circumstance for which Cecil must be prepared, if he persisted in going into Yorkshire on such an errand; he might, of course, leave his house for this object, if he chose, but he would find the door closed against him on his return. Regard for Laura, care for her happiness and reputation, made it an imperative duty with her father to take this course; and he was quite decided, on no consideration, would Cecil ever be permitted to return.

How far Laura's happiness was likely to be compromised by his sudden desertion of her for such a purpose, Cecil himself could best judge. Her father had but too much reason to fear, that, having been taught to consider her cousin's connection with his sister-in-law as altogether illegal, she had looked on him as a *single* man, and allowed her affections to become entangled by the very marked attentions which she had received from him; attentions which, it now appeared,

had no worthy aim, and could be regarded in themselves only as insulting, since Cecil suddenly professed to believe himself *married*. There was time to snatch her from further suffering; she should not again be exposed to the insinuating addresses of a man whose conduct betrayed such an entire lack of principle: she should never again associate with one who could thus leave her society, to attend the summons of a mistress. This was a degree of immorality which he, Henry Mansfield, could neither comprehend nor countenance.

“You forget,” exclaimed the nephew, irritated by these reproaches into a more spirited remonstrance than his uncle had anticipated, “that until this question is decided by law, she is in reality my wife: that were you not to interfere, my wife she would continue to be. Decency and propriety alike make it imperative on me, now when she is dying — when she may be dead — that I should not willfully absent myself from her. You know that, should she not survive, your utmost efforts could not alter her claim to have been called my wife, or stigmatize the birth of my daughter, whose rights you are so anxious to invalidate. I will go; and you may do your worst, you shall not change my purpose!”

At this moment Laura herself entered the room, and the resolution of Cecil died away within him, as she laid her hand on his, and asked him, in a playful manner, what wonderful undertaking he was proposing, that its announcement should require so angry a voice, and so disturbed an air?

He was silenced at once; for could he to her talk of his wife? Dared he name her, after the vows he had so recently breathed in Laura’s ears? Her passionate kisses still seemed to glow upon his lips; his bosom still throbbed with the same emotion as when he had clasped her to it. The inextricable entanglement in which his lack of principle had involved him; the conflicting nature of his hopes and fears, wishes and feelings, silenced him before her: he stood subdued and humiliated. Self-condemned, convicted of the basest treachery, he was incapable of answering his cousin Laura.

After a pause, during which Laura turned in surprise from Cecil to her father for some explanation, the latter told her in few, but perfectly explicit words, both what Cecil was proposing, and what he was resolved to do in such an event.

The feelings of the daughter on hearing him alike defied control and scorned concealment; she loved Cecil with the kind of attachment which warm and lively characters so well know how to express in passionate words, which gain for them the credit of feeling more than people of a reserved and timid disposition. At first she clung to him, and recalled to his memory the vows which he had made her: she professed she had loved him, and him only, ever since they first met; that it was not the affection of a month, or two months, or six — it was the growth of years; and if he deserted her now, her happiness was gone forever. Had he then been *vainly trifling* with her all along? What had she done to deserve such treatment? How was she disgraced in her own eyes, in being thus deceived into an unrequited passion! Had he only sought to draw from her the avowal of her passion — that he might tell her he considered himself fettered to another! What an uncalled-for insult was this!

Then she changed her mood: she dried her eyes with indignation, and turning proudly to her father, she said, with glowing cheek and scornful accent: “Yes, let him leave us; why should you or I abase ourselves by supplication? I will never stoop to sue for the consideration we might naturally have anticipated from a favored guest. Let him return your hospitality and my friendship by this grateful, this manly, this honorable proceeding. I will never lament a *heart* which has shown itself so *black* a traitor: it is unworthy of regret — beneath contempt. Cecil, let us part, and let us never meet again!”

More, much more, she said, with a passionate eloquence which was far beyond the control of her father, who tried to check her; but which exercised only too powerful an influence on the mutable, unsteady mind of her cousin Cecil; and finding that his remonstrances could not restrain her, and only irritated Cecil, Henry left the room, and with him seemed to vanish all the remaining firmness of his nephew. He yielded once more to Laura’s influence, and Fanny was once more forgotten, or remembered only as a subject of uneasiness and self-reproach.

It was with far more of contempt than surprise that Frank received the next morning the following note:

“Dear Linwood, If I rightly understood you in the hurry and confusion of my feelings last night, Fanny is now under your mother’s care. I conclude, therefore, that you will have the earliest and most correct news as to her state; will you transmit it to me? You can imagine my uneasiness; but it is as I feared last night — I find I cannot leave London at present; important engagements effectually prevent it. My uncle, too, is resolute in his determination, and no persuasions of mine can avail to alter it. In this case what can I do? Advise me, for I hardly know what course is best. I cannot meet her under such circumstances, and must trust to your friendship to secure her the best professional advice either York or London can furnish. Believe me, ever faithfully yours, Cecil Mansfield.”

With an unutterable mixture of scorn and indignation Frank Linwood perused these lines, and at first he determined not to reply to them. But after some more consideration he decided to write.

“Sir, In answer to your note received this morning, I beg to state that the news conveyed by today’s post from Brookensha is to the effect that Mrs. Mansfield continues in a most precarious state, and her physicians can give no opinion as to the ultimate result. You may rely on her having every requisite attention; and I will also desire that your steward may receive regular accounts of her situation to transmit to you. If, in the request for my advice, you require my professional services, I will at once put you in the way of defending your cause in the Church Court; and shall, for Mrs.

Mansfield's sake, be happy to be of any service to you in my power. If this is not the advice you require, I must beg to decline entirely all interference. It is impossible for me to understand the nature of the obstacles which prevent your return to Yorkshire, or detain you under such circumstances in your uncle's house. I am, therefore, totally unqualified for an adviser. Yours obediently, Frank Linwood."

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 7

Fanny Mansfield did not die; to the surprise of her physicians, and all her anxious friends, she began slowly to amend. After two or three weeks, hopes of her ultimate recovery were entertained, and these hopes grew gradually stronger as every day's improvement was developed. Still her state was considered so precarious, that it was dreaded lest any additional blow should throw her back; and her friends feared that returning recollection might prompt questions, relative either to the past or future, which would lead to knowledge fatal possibly at once to her life. It was not until she had regained a considerable degree of health that she made any allusion to what had happened, or to the immediate cause of her illness. Once, indeed, when her child was taken from her side, she turned to her friend, who was sitting near, and inquired:

“Olivia, where is her father?”

“In London, I believe,” was Olivia's trembling reply, dreading what might come next.

“He has not been to Brookensha?” demanded Fanny, faintly.

“Not since you were ill, dear,” was the answer; and Fanny said no more.

It was at least another week before she again reverted to the subject; her friends saw she was calm, and flattered themselves that she was not uneasy; how little they knew of what was passing within.

She was perfectly aware of her situation; recollected distinctly all that was passed, and the events which had immediately preceded her illness; and the only wonder was, that under such circumstances she should live. She thought of her husband — his former love — and pictured to herself what he must be suffering under the misfortune which threatened them; she believed that the depression and variability of his spirits, which at times formerly had alarmed her, arose from a knowledge of what was impending. Having never changed in her feelings towards him, she could not believe that he would vary in his sentiments to herself; the idea of unfaithfulness in him did not assail her mind, and she only loved him the more from believing he was miserable. She had hoped he would come to see her; every day brought a new expectation of a meeting, and every night she consoled herself for her disappointment by the consideration that she must at least be one day nearer to the desired event. She felt, had she the power, she should have flown to console him; and that he would surely judge best, most kindly in coming to her. Thus she hoped for many weary days, but as each hope was destroyed, she began to think differently; she could not bear to blame him, and therefore tried to *excuse his conduct*.

After all, though led by her own selfish wishes she had desired he should come, perhaps it was wisest and best to keep away; indeed the throbbing pulses, and fainting sensations with which she listened when the sound of the house-door, or an unexpected step in the corridor, made her imagine that he was coming, proved repeatedly to her how unfit she was for such an interview; she longed for the period when it would be safe for him to come, in the meantime she was convinced that he had written, and that her friends retained his letters until she should be strong enough to enjoy them. This idea was her solace; she treasured it in secret, looking forward every day to the period of its realization, but trembling to ask the question, which would have completed her assurance — or annihilated her hopes. She dared not inquire, preferring rather the suspense which attended her now, to the possibility of incurring a negative. Thus days passed, and then came with her returning strength a sickening fear, lest she had deceived herself. Perhaps, after all, Cecil meant to give her up, and it would become her duty to resign herself to this trial. She should be called on to give up all that was dearest to woman, all that could sweeten life. Her name and her fame, her beloved home — her child's station and birthright — that was bitter indeed — her husband — the object of her fondest love — oh! that was worst of all.

The dreadful idea — the word which to herself she dared hardly pronounce — *total separation* — that idea hung like a dark, brooding shadow over the future; she had scarcely courage to depict it to herself — she scarcely ventured to imagine its horrors. To be forbidden to *see* him — to *hear* him — to *love* him. To have no fellowship, no claim, no right to meet! to be parted and yet not by death, but by an impassable gulf far worse than the grave itself; and then perhaps to know him wedded to another — to think of another woman mistress of her once dear home, enjoying his presence, his love, all those exquisite pleasures which had made life so inexpressibly dear — which she would never know again. It was possible that she might live to hear of this — to feel all this; but no, it must be impossible — she could not survive such a shock, she could not imagine that existence would continue under such heartrending sorrow. But should it be so, she must learn to *bear*, she must learn to be *patient*, she must learn to *forgive*. Yes, even the uncle who was so cruelly invading her happiness, and the cousin who now added to her former insult, by this deepest of injuries — they must be *forgiven*.

She was not aware how much she had to forgive, how greatly Laura had sinned against her; but something she guessed of what had passed, and could not but conclude that Laura must be cognizant of her father's plans, and agreeing to them. Ignorant of the difference which the death of the elder children had effected in their relative situations, and their prospect of succeeding to the Brookensha property, she could not comprehend any motive for this sudden interference after two years' silence and apparent indifference. Nor could she imagine how Mr. Henry Mansfield had now become possessed of a power which she had always imagined none but her late father could have exercised. Either Cecil had been all along deceived, or there was a possibility that the court would decide against his right of interference. Her brain was too weak to



form very connected ideas, but it appeared to her that there was still one way open to them by which they might hope to silence him. If he was influenced by a desire of wealth, and if there was a doubt of his success, perhaps a large sum of money would secure their repose. On this subject she ventured to consult Rev. Hughes; many days was she attempting to make up her mind to speak, many days it required to give her the necessary courage to pronounce the painful words, or clothe in language the distressing ideas which occupied her mind; but she knew it must be done, and summoning all her strength, she began by inquiring if he were acquainted with the original cause of her recent illness.

He hesitated to reply, and advised her not to think of the subject at present.

"If you are counseling me with regard to what you think my state of health requires," replied Fanny, sadly but quite firmly, "believe me when I assure you, that yours is a mistaken care. I am strong enough now to think for myself, and it is necessary that I should thoroughly understand my *position* and *prospects*, which I can only hope to do by availing myself of your counsel. With this assurance will you be satisfied, and hear me now?"

He still seemed doubtful, seeing which, she added:

"I am convinced that conversing quietly on this subject with you, will even be more beneficial to me than silence, for I am forever turning over these subjects in my mind, and cannot banish them sleeping or waking."

"Perhaps you are right," replied he; "and as long as you can speak without emotion, I will listen, and do everything in my power both to direct and strengthen you."

"I was convinced of that," replied Fanny, looking gratefully at him. "I look upon you as filling the position of a parent towards me, and shall speak openly. Can you tell me how long it will be before this painful question is decided — I mean with regard to my marriage?" she hesitated as she spoke, and then recovering herself she added more firmly. "It is foolish to shrink from naming what I must prepare myself to hear discussed. How long is this suit likely to continue?"

"I understand from Frank Linwood," replied Rev. Hughes, "that it will be many months, possibly a year, before it is settled. Courts of Law are not usually very prompt in their proceedings. It will be tried in the Prerogative Court of York."

Rev. Hughes was not surprised to hear the deep sigh with which this news was received; he experienced far more astonishment at the firmness and resolution of purpose with which the pale, delicate woman before him, entered on a subject so deeply trying to her heart. There was nothing of hardness or indifference; nothing unfeeling in her manner — it was the composure of a mind nerved to bear its appointed burden with *firmness*, *patience*, and *humility*; resolved to do whatever duty required or conscience prompted as right, and trusting alone to power from God to bear her without fainting, through her fiery trials. And strength was given her when she required it. After a short interval of reflection and mental prayer, she spoke again quite calmly.

"This will be painful, indeed — a year of suspense. May God support me. And York, too — so near home. I had hoped — but no matter. Perhaps it is wrong, Rev. Hughes, but it adds certainly to the pain to think of becoming the object of public discussion in a neighborhood where so many know me. But since I sinned publicly, it is fit I should be punished thus." She paused again, and continued with eyes bent downwards, until, suddenly looking up, she said: "In the meantime, what position do I hold?"

"You are undoubtedly *his wife*," replied Rev. Hughes, firmly, "as such the law would recognize you.

"I thought so," replied Fanny.

"Yes," continued Rev. Hughes, "and were this suit not to be concluded during the lifetime of yourself or Cecil, or if his uncle were to suspend the prosecution of it, neither your own nor your daughter's rights could be interfered with!"

"This assurance of yours settles one point, on which I had some doubts," replied Fanny. "I shall be right in returning to my husband's house, at least until he signifies his wishes to the contrary. Here I am conscious I must not longer remain. I am largely indebted to dear Mrs. Linwood; but I must not repay the obligation by depriving her of her son's society.

"I suppose the long vacation will soon commence," observed Rev. Hughes, "but perhaps Frank may spend it abroad."

"Mrs. Linwood has never hinted at the subject, of course," returned Fanny; "but you know it has been the custom when he goes abroad, that his mother and sister should accompany him; and in either case I shall be equally an impediment to them while I remain here."

"True, and I think you are right to return home," said her old friend; he knew that Cecil and Frank were not on good terms, and quite agreed with her view of the subject likewise for other reasons.

"What do you suppose to be Mr. Henry Mansfield's object, his particular motive?" inquired Fanny, presently. "It must be something very powerful which could actuate a man to disturb the peace and publish the dishonor of those so nearly related to him?"

"It is difficult, and I am not sure that it is right, to assign *motives* for the conduct of any individual," replied Rev. Hughes, gravely. "How often are we warned against *judging* our neighbors; and it so constantly leads us into error when we attempt it."

"It was from no trifling motive, no idle curiosity, or prying ill-will that I suggested the question," said Fanny, very earnestly. "Indeed, sir, it may be of the last importance to me to discover the real motive of his actions. Why, after two years' silence, should he now have started the question?"

“I have no doubt that one of his principal reasons is the fact of his being next in the *deed* of inheritance in case Cecil should leave no children to inherit,” was Rev. Hughes’s answer; for although aware of Frank Linwood’s and Mrs. Compton’s suspicions of Cecil’s *infidelity*, he would rather have had his tongue cut out than speak of such subjects to the wife, unless supported by something more than suspicion. Time alone could prove them right or wrong, and to whisper them before proof, would be only an aggravation of her misery.

“But how does he come to possess this power?” pursued Fanny. “Cecil solemnly assured me that no one, except my father, had the right to interfere!”

“At that time, Cecil was right, my dear,” said he, “while those two children lived, his uncle, having no direct interest, could not interfere. I suppose their death first opened to him those prospects of possible inheritance; and I presume him to be well informed as to his right of interposition; otherwise, I own I would have doubted his being permitted to do so now.”

“Then you consider that really a questionable point?” said Fanny. “It is on this very foundation that I have built all my hopes!”

“Do not be too optimistic if you are intending to dispute this point.”

“I will tell you my plan,” said Fanny. “Considering that this step had probably been taken from the hope of financial gain, it had occurred to me that perhaps for the immediate possession of a large sum, instead of the uncertain and distant succession to this estate — he might be *bought off*; would there be anything wrong in making the attempt?”

“Wrong! no, I would think not; but there might be many difficulties in the way of success in such a project. To raise a sum large enough to purchase his forbearance may be out of your power; or he may feel too *sure* of his future prize to listen to any terms at all.”

“But if it is possible that his right may be questioned, that may make him hesitate,” said Fanny; “and you know there is another contingency which might defeat all their plans.”

Rev. Hughes gazed at her as if unable to comprehend her meaning.

“I allude,” said she, “to the possibility of Cecil’s marrying again.” She tried to speak with composure, but her blanched lips quivered, her pale cheek grew still more white, and she drew her breath hurriedly for a few moments. But after a brief pause she recovered, and continued even with energy:

“Yes, they may rob him of *one* wife, but they cannot prevent his having *another*. I know, I feel it will be so, and I ought to rejoice at it. Were I dying, I would wish him to be consoled; and if we are to be parted now, if I am to be dead to him, I ought not to wish that he should mourn forever! No! As bitter as will be the pang, he will recover in time — he must — he shall — and form some marriage connection of which he need not be ashamed, which will secure his comfort and respectability for life: and they who have planned our misery for their profit shall be disappointed!”

“And you hope to *buy* his uncle off?” said Rev. Hughes, to change the current of her thoughts.

“The attempt can certainly be made,” Fanny answered; “and as to the funds, if we have to give up half our income, nay, everything for which he wishes, if we only retained sufficient to procure ourselves the necessities of life, Cecil and I would willingly exchange it all to be allowed to keep our honor and our love — to live for one another, and claim our daughter without a blush. I am certain such will be his feelings on the subject when we come to discuss it together.”

Rev. Hughes shook his head. “I fear Henry Mansfield feels too sure of his game to allow you to foster such hopes. You talk like a wife and a mother; but, Fanny, such things cannot be. Your child must either have, or lose, all; give up what you could yourselves, you could not alter her rights or alienate her future possessions. But you are exciting yourself, Fanny, and I must not allow of this; you will do your health harm if you converse too long. Shall I leave you?”

“I have no reason to be particularly careful of my health,” replied Fanny, with a very sad smile. “What is my life worth? But now do not look so grave, and shake your head at me, my dear friend; indeed I will not trifle wantonly with my strength, nor rebel against *the hand which smites me*, if I am to live; but I do not think I ought to shrink from a slight exertion in discussing these affairs; it is of the utmost importance to my child that I should do my best while I have the power to aid her. My life — the prolongation of it — may deprive her of so much as to make it my duty to do all which care can do to alleviate the evil. The question which haunts me night and day is — Can nothing be done to *avoid* this dreadful catastrophe? Oh! Rev. Hughes” — clasping her hands, and speaking in a voice of the deepest emotion — “you cannot imagine how agonizing the thought is to me. To foresee this misery, and to know by my own feelings what Cecil will suffer! — to writhe beneath the hopeless, withering, and — worse — the unjustifiable longing for each other’s society which must be our lot in life for the future! — is it not cruel — heart-breaking! Oh! that I might only lie down and die at once!”

“No doubt it is bitter to human feelings, Fanny,” replied Rev. Hughes, much affected at her grief; “but you know from *whose* hand the trial comes, and *why* it is sent to you.”

“Yes,” murmured Fanny, “I know I have *sinned*, and I bear the chastisement. I wronged and grieved an earthly parent — and such a good parent! Oh! I deserve it all, and I will strive — I do pray to bear it with submission; do not judge my murmurs harshly!”

“I did not mean that, dear Fanny; far be it from me to judge you at all,” answered Rev. Hughes. “I never intended to remind you of a fault long ago, and deeply repented of; but my present meaning was, that *afflictions come in mercy*, and that you may one day say, ‘*It is well,*’ though now the *cloud* looks so dark and heavy — it may be fraught with blessings. But to return to your own affairs: you do not, then, contemplate any other result from a sentence adverse to you, than a final and complete separation?”

“And what other idea could I entertain?” exclaimed Fanny, rising upright from her pillows, and calmed by her astonishment at the question. “Could you suppose I would continue to live with him as his *mistress*, for that will be the name the law will give me? Did you think this possible? It is sad enough to have incurred such a disgraceful appellation, though done in *ignorance*, and therefore so far in *innocence*. But to continue on such terms — willfully to incur the shame, the guilt, of such a connection now — you could not so misjudge me!”

Rev. Hughes regretted that he had alluded to the subject. He had feared that a *refuge in another country*, where such marriages were permitted, might have suggested itself to Fanny’s mind as an alternative; but he did not venture to pursue the idea now.

After a little pause, Fanny added: “I am sure Cecil thinks the same; and, though I own I have ardently wished to see him, I am trying to bring my mind to acquiesce in his resolution, that it is better for us not to meet at present. There would be no peace, no comfort now in being together; no doubt he judges rightly — and yet I would like to see him!”

“Have you learned this from himself?” inquired Rev. Hughes. “I was not aware that you had received any communication from him.”

“I have not received any communication from him. I learned it from his *silence*,” replied Fanny, trying to repress a sigh. “If *writing* is too painful — what would *meeting* be?”

Her friend made no reply; what could he say? He saw that Fanny had *no suspicion of infidelity* in her husband, and he could not suggest the truth to her. He knew that in the two letters of thanks which Mrs. Linwood had received, and in the previous eager inquiries after Fanny’s health, there had been so little of real feeling, that the letters had been at once destroyed, lest the accidental sight of them should shock Fanny’s heart. He knew, likewise, that Cecil was actually residing under his uncle’s roof, and that his devoted attention to his lovely cousin had created surprise and given rise to comments among many of his acquaintances. Evil reports are sure to travel quickly, and the story of this evil affair lost nothing of its point by its circulation in Yorkshire.

He was meditating on all these circumstances, when Fanny again broke the silence:

“The more I reflect upon it, the more convinced I am of the importance of seeing and consulting with him myself; and in every respect it would be better that the meeting should take place in London. There we can easily arrange everything necessary, and that without interfering with his parliamentary business, and without his suffering the painful embarrassment which might attend his visiting me here. Every allowance must be made for Cecil’s feelings — his pride — his sensitiveness, which shrinks often from things which we are forced to bear. I can easily comprehend that he dreads returning to a place where he is so well known — dreads the curious eyes and busy tongues of a town which has its full share of gossip, no doubt. I can hide; but were he here — his duties, his situation, his place in society, would forbid seclusion. He must show himself courteous to electors, and kind to tenants. Do you not see it in this light?”

She spoke slowly and thoughtfully, but her companion made no attempt to interrupt her; he had no inclination to speak at all: but on being thus appealed to; some answer was necessary, and he replied:

“Yes, I can believe that it may be inconvenient or disagreeable to Cecil to come to Brookensha now, but I do not see why you are to be the *only* sufferer, or *always* to make all the necessary *sacrifices*. It would be much easier for him to come here, than for you to travel to London, and if a meeting is necessary — then he should come to you!”

“Oh, as to the journey,” said Fanny in a careless tone, assumed to hide another feeling struggling in her heart, “I think that would do me good; change of air certainly would, and I need not make it a fatigue; there would be no occasion to travel fast.”

Rev. Hughes considered and pondered, there was both good and evil in the plan: could she secure an interview with her husband, it might arouse him from the culpable negligence which he had hitherto displayed towards his wife and child; it might *break the influence of Laura*; it might open his eyes to the *scandal* of his own conduct, and serve to remind him of his true position. But on the other hand, there was the risk that the journey might end in disappointment; she might fail to see him — or see him only to increase her suffering. She might learn his *intimacy* with those whom everyone must regard as her enemies; she might be exposed to hear painful reports, and become sooner aware of her husband’s indifference, if not of his actual infidelity and desertion.

Under such circumstances he dreaded to decide, lest he should hereafter have to repent his decision, and he therefore confined himself to one objection which was very prominent: Fanny’s weakness, and the danger of such exertion.

“Do not talk to me of that as an objection,” replied Fanny composedly, “unless it be to prove that you have no other to make. I trust I shall always be equal to any exertion which can hold out the faintest hope of benefiting my child. Of what value can my life be, if I cannot obtain the object of my desires? While I live, I must employ it for her advantage, and seek

by every means to palliate the evils I have brought upon her. It is not for *myself* that I strive, or at least not only for myself: the thought of my helpless unoffending little one, involved in her mother's sorrows, without having shared in my faults, is almost more than I can bear. God forgive me if the wish is wrong, but I cannot help feeling that it would have been better for me to have died at once, if I can do nothing else to save her from disgrace. All through my illness this thought haunted me, and returning health brought no pleasure to my feelings; I longed for death, and it has required hours of self-humiliation and of prayer to reconcile me to life."

Rev. Hughes only sighed and shook his head.

"I know what you would say," continued Fanny, looking at him earnestly, "my *conscience* tells me that I have not acted as a daughter should do, and have, therefore, no right to expect comfort as a parent. I try to submit, but must I wish for life. It is better for her that I should die!"

"True," said Rev. Hughes gravely, "if you consider this world's approbation and wealth, and if you value rank and money above everything; but, Fanny, is her father's *name* the highest distinction you wish for your child? is her father's *property* the only inheritance for which you had hoped to rear her? Would you, while living, confide the moral and religious training of your daughter to any unknown hand, for half Yorkshire — for any possible amount of worldly wealth? I know you would not; and yet you are ready impatiently to shrink from your appointed task, because it appears it will be painful, and wish to *resign your duties as a mother*, although you cannot tell into whose hands the task might fall, or what *training* your child might receive."

"Ah, do not chide me, dear Rev. Hughes," said Fanny mournfully, "I will try and not wish for death; but you cannot tell how near my heart sometimes feels to breaking, I must not think or talk on the subject. I have *deeply sinned*, and deserve deeply to suffer."

"You do think your marriage *wrong* then?" inquired Rev. Hughes. "Forgive me, I have never intruded on this subject before, or dared to ask the question, but I cannot now forbear!"

"I *suppose* it was wrong," replied Fanny, "since it entails these consequences — *legally*, if not morally, wrong; but I never felt it so, and as I solemnly assure you, I was not aware of the state of the case when I contracted it, I do not feel guilty in that respect. It is my *hastiness*, my *disregard* of my father, my *neglect* of him for which I blame myself; nothing can justify my not following the dictates of my conscience, and awaiting his opinion. Then this marriage would never have been contracted, and as much as I might have felt then, it would have been nothing to what I now endure, and must hereafter expect. I am to be pronounced *his mistress*."

And she shuddered visibly, and became again as pale as the pillow on which she leaned, the slight flush produced by the exertion of talking having died away from her cheek.

"And Cecil, do you then blame him?" inquired Rev. Hughes; "he knowingly *led* you astray — are you quite free from resentment against the author of all your misfortunes?"

"Blame Cecil!" exclaimed Fanny in astonishment; "how or why should I blame him? He has ever been the fondest, and truest, and kindest of husbands; and when I know, too, that he will suffer as much as myself — share my misery — oh, no, you must not blame him, or think harshly of him for the past."

Rev. Hughes was astonished that the *absence* and *silence* of Cecil did not seem at all to shake her faith in him, or make her love him less. But he did not understand a true woman's heart — a true woman's love. She would not, did not, could not blame him, nor endure that any other should do so either. Nothing but the proof of his infidelity could open her eyes to his real character, or make her see how different was the *idol of her imagination* from the real Cecil — the being whom others knew and judged.

But although she still wore the air of calmness, which has distinguished her through much of the conversation, Rev. Hughes now resolutely put a stop to it, certain that she must be fatigued, probably all the more so from her attempt to hide it; but at her urgent entreaty, he agreed to come again very soon, and arrange everything relative to her journey to London, which would take place so soon as her strength permitted.

Could he have seen her when the closing door hid him from her view, he might well have doubted her capability for such an undertaking. It seemed as if all strength abandoned her when the necessity for exertion ceased, and she sank back on her cushions completely overcome. She did not faint; insensibility would have been happiness compared to the *mental torture* which she suffered. She did not weep; tears would have *relieved* her, but they would not flow.

One by one, past and present events and circumstances flitted before her mind; and her future situation contrasted painfully, darkly, bitterly, fearfully — with her former position in life. What she *had been*, what she *was*, and what she *would become* — were considerations to which she was acutely alive. She had been a beloved wife — a happy mother — holding an honored position among the matrons of the land, with a host of respectful and attached dependents, who trusted to her influence, support, or protection, sought her *bounty* in distress, her *sympathy* in happiness, her *smile* and *good word* at all times. To the utmost of her power she had used the influence which she had possessed to suppress vice, and encourage virtue: she had held herself responsible for her money, her time, her power, and had endeavored to employ them in an unselfish and philanthropic manner.

As a *wife*, too, her name had been unsullied: no whisper had ever thrown a doubt upon her purity, no levity had clouded her fame, nor cast a shadow of dishonor on her husband.

And while her private character as a wife had been irreproachable — how sweet, how perfect had been hitherto their conjugal happiness, how free from every bitter admixture; no doubt, no distrust between them. His love had been too warm, and her devotion too absolute — to make an argument a possible occurrence; and in all their one mutual sorrow, how perfect had been his sympathy — when the death of the children had grieved her heart — how sweet it was to weep on Cecil's bosom, feel he shared the anguish, and yet comforted her by words of endearment.

And if he had not felt as she did her father's death, if his sorrow had not then equaled hers — was there not comfort too in that? The *remorse* from which she suffered — he did not share, because it did not exist; and rather would she have borne tenfold than have breathed a word to him which might seem reproachful, or which might by implication, have conveyed the idea that she thought him to blame. For though she felt that her own conduct had hastened her father's death, and suffered all the remorse attendant on such an idea, she would not have had him suffer in like manner for the world.

And now all this was over, they were to be parted — not parted by the hand of death; sad as such a separation would have been to the survivor — that which threatened them was, at least in her estimation, more dreadful by far. How Cecil would bear it — in what light he considered it — she could only conjecture; but with her former knowledge of his heart, she fondly flattered herself she could not conjecture very wrong. She was convinced he would suffer nearly as much as herself, but though their feelings might bear a resemblance, their situations would not. His *tenderness* would be wounded, his *heart* would feel desolate and his home miserable and forlorn when his wife and child were *torn* from him, but his position in life would continue unaltered; who would look more coldly on him? who would reproach him for the past? who would shun his society, or consider him disgraced or degraded by the apprehended sentence of the Court? No, this would not be his to bear, and oh, how thankful did she feel when she reflected thus.

To have seen him suffering in character or reputation, would have doubled every sorrow of her own, would have been harder to bear than all the rest.

But this she knew was not the way in which the world visits such faults in *men*; of faults in which a woman shares, they have judged it expedient that the *dishonor* shall fall only on the weaker partner. True sons of Adam, in his proud self-justifying answer to the charge against him!

But Fanny in her tenderness was very far from repining at the law which would relieve him from all taint of dishonor; she viewed it as one great source of consolation, it gave her more courage to bear her own disgrace.

But what a disgrace it was — to be deprived of the title of his wife, to be *stigmatized* — oh! thought of *shame!* — as his *mistress* — his *paramour* — oh! insupportable degradation!

Was it possible? could there exist a man so insensible to grief, so callous to suffering, as willfully to prepare such a fate for an innocent woman, who had never offended him — never in the slightest degree trespassed against him? it was incredible, it was doing Henry Mansfield an injury to suppose it. Henry Mansfield surely could not *know* what he was doing, he could not have reflected on the miserable consequences which his interference would draw after it; to believe that any man in cold blood, after due consideration, could inflict such a degradation on his nephew's wife and child, seemed to her mind a libel on human nature.

For, after all, she was his wife; and had not this uncle raised the question, no law would have interposed to separate them: and was it not most unreasonable, most unjust, that the power to torture them thus should be placed in the hands of any individual? But this was rebelling against the law: she would confine her thoughts to another view of the subject.

Could she see Henry Mansfield — could she represent to him the inevitable misery which would result from his intended conduct, the indelible disgrace which he was inflicting on Cecil's only child — he would most certainly relent. He was a parent — could he be insensitive to a parent's misery? He had a daughter — he must feel compassion for the daughter of another, of one so closely related to himself. The sight of her beautiful and innocent child, must act far more persuasively than the most eloquent words; that child in whose veins his own blood was flowing — that child who had never sinned, who must be guiltless towards him — could he fail to feel pity towards her?

Her imagination, excited by the recent agitation she had gone through, became ungovernable! Strange, wild, unconnected ideas floated through her mind; broken, incoherent images of pleasure and of pain; hopes which only owed their existence to a fevered imagination, and which would not have borne one moment's calm consideration; until at last all became fused in one undistinguishable chaos — a sort of instinct, not amounting to a sensation, an *indefinable crushing consciousness of utter misery*, of which her mind could not fathom the depth, and was barely awake to the origin.

Hours passed away in this state, one painful feeling following another, until Olivia, wondering at the profound stillness of the room, crept to her side, and found her friend extended on the sofa, not insensible indeed, but apparently *exhausted by mental suffering*; her heavy eyelids half closed, her thin hands closely clasped, and pressed upon her bosom, her brows contracted as if in pain, and her whole form betraying no other symptom of life than the deep-drawn sighs and convulsive sobs which occasionally heaved her bosom, and shook her feeble frame.

But from the debility which this violent paroxysm of grief occasioned, she was sufficiently recovered the following day to be able again to renew her project of going to town; and, after a second discussion with Rev. Hughes, it was settled, that, if her health permitted, she would start early the following week, and that her excellent friend, Rev. Hughes, would accompany her. The fact of having a nephew minister come to stay at his rectory, to whom he could unhesitatingly confide his parish and his clerical duties, enabled him to make this arrangement, as agreeable to Fanny's wishes, as it was necessary, in the eyes of her friends, to her comfort and respectability.

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 8

Among all those who had suffered from anxiety, and experienced suspense and uneasiness during Fanny Mansfield's recent alarming illness, none had felt more *deeply interested* in the event, or more ardently desired her recovery, than the very man whose threatened enmity had occasioned her sufferings. But it was neither *compassion* nor *remorse* which assailed him; it was no dreadful presentiment that her death would leave him haunted with an evil conscience as her murderer; it was no sentiment of what he would have denominated weakness which influenced Henry Mansfield, and caused him often to curse in his heart the result of his first move in this affair.

His mind was far removed from such *softness*, such profitless, such uncalled-for waste of feeling as this: he was armored against the ordinary sensations of humanity. He dreaded her death solely because it would *mar his plans*, disappoint his hopes, and, so long as her *daughter* would live, might interfere with his favorite projects for enriching his own child.

It was true that, if Fanny died, Cecil would be at full liberty to marry Laura; but having determined to *disgrace Fanny*, and deprive her daughter of her birthright — he would have felt himself defrauded of a right, and really deserving pity, were he to be prevented exercising the power he claimed, by so untoward an event as Fanny's death. The *resolution to injure* had produced its usual consequence in a proportionate degree of ill-will; and to have had the child's legitimate claim on her father placed out of the reach of his malice, was a disappointment he could ill have brooked.

Besides, even were Cecil and Laura to marry, who could ensure they would have a son? It was possible, certainly; but, for his own part, he believed that couples who most desired sons were usually those to whom they were never born, and he felt a strong presentiment that they, Cecil and Laura, would be an example of this — that the whole affair would go wrong, and all his deep-laid schemes be overthrown.

Cecil was so little in the habit of speaking of his wife, that his uncle was unaware of the necessity of caution in making an announcement calculated to alarm her; nor probably would the idea have suggested itself, had he simply been informed of her expected confinement. He knew little of any woman except his own daughter, and believed nothing of their ordinary delicacy, because she had always been robust. Indeed, though he had often seen her under the influence of a violent fit of passion, he had never known her have a fit of *illness* in her life, except when she had the measles, and that happened at school, so he heard very little of it; the idea that sorrow or mental suffering could endanger a woman's life, would never have occurred to him, and had he been told of such a case at another time, he would have treated it as a fable. He believed that the grief, or suffering which expends itself in violent demonstrations, in passionate tears, or in angry declamation — is not likely to be attended with very serious results to the constitution of the sufferer — that the broken heart is not likely to be fatal to the possessor. His daughter's sorrows had been of this nature, and so he supposed were all women's.

To hear, therefore, that Mrs. Mansfield had been rendered extremely angry at his attack — that she was resentful, enraged, excited to take every measure in her power to defeat his attempts, and win the battle — was what he had been prepared for, what he had considered as a thing of course; but to hear instead of this that she was ill — dangerously ill — lying in so precarious a state that her physician despaired of her life, and gave up all attempts to save her; this took him completely by surprise, gave him new views of the female character, and almost made him regret the measures he had taken.

And yet he had delayed as long as he had dared; there was a strong expectation that some reform in the laws of marriage was intended by Government, which would be certain to touch upon the very point which was the ground of his suit; and whether or not it legalized such marriages for the future, it would in all probability, place those already contracted beyond dispute; and, unless he could speedily succeed in getting Cecil's marriage annulled, this might put it out of his power ever to do so. He could not, therefore, trifle longer in so serious a matter; the affair must be settled *now*, before any additional difficulties were thrown in his way. Laura had been given sufficient time to carry out her plans, and there was nothing more required.

Laura's ideas on the same subject, when she attempted to comprehend them, appeared very unsettled and wavering. In securing her cousin's affections, she had thrown away her own; her heart, such as it was, being entirely his; and she was anxious to become his wife with as little delay as possible. The death of Fanny would compel a year's mourning, but it did not appear that the dissolution of her marriage by law would be likely to occupy less time; it was therefore a question which would be the most desirable for her plans — which would afford her the greater security.

The accounts which her friend Mary Annesley had given her regarding the beauty and grandeur of Brookensha Park, the extent of the Mansfield influence, the position occupied by its mistress among the aristocracy of the county, and all the advantages accruing from her situation — had filled her with the most extravagant wish to occupy Fanny's place, long before she saw any prospect of gratifying her unprincipled desires. Her efforts to win her cousin's heart had been completely successful; she had no doubt of his love at present, and she could not think so lightly of her own charms, as to fear any change in his feelings.

But she was *vain* as well as *selfish*; a devotion which was obliged to be confined to the privacy of her own sitting room, or at least could only be displayed in public when covered with the mask of friendship, did not more than half satisfy her. She therefore desired her rival's *death*, that the veil might at once be cast aside, and her engagement and her triumph made known to her friends.

Then the town might be astonished by the elegance of her trousseau, the beauty of her equipage, and the cost of her diamonds; then her young female friends might die of envy, or expire of chagrin — at her superior felicity.

All this would be very bewitching, and all this might be secured by the death of that “odious Fanny,” who seemed bent on tormenting poor Laura as much as possible, and would neither do one thing nor the other.

There was comfort, however, in the consideration that, should she recover, though much of flattered vanity must be given up, much substantial good would still remain. She would still eventually be *Mrs. Mansfield of Brookensha*, and it might be, since her father appeared bent on expediting matters to the utmost, with less delay than *mourning* would require; and if her wedding paraphernalia were not yet destined to exalt her in the eyes of her female friends, she might still outshine them in the *number* of her lovers. For, since her engagement was only a *conditional* one, what was there to prevent her flirting with at least half a dozen other men? Nothing — for her conscience certainly did not stand in her way; and as to Cecil's uneasiness, he dared not show it publicly, and a few smiles and tender words when they were next together, would always suffice to clear his brow. Her *power* over him was unlimited, and she flattered herself it would be inexhaustible.

It was strange how much her popularity had increased among gentlemen, ever since she had been observed to have Cecil's devotion. She had many more admirers now than she could ever before have boasted; but, though very good to *flirt* with, there was only one who could have been considered at all an eligible husband, or whose offer, had he made one, could at all have competed with Cecil's.

This was a certain *Arthur Temple*, a man of very good family, and very *bad morals*, with a considerable estate, but who was likewise suspected of having considerable debts; so that, on the whole, setting aside all regard to *character*, he was hardly to be looked on as more desirable than Cecil himself. The one had fashion — the other had tolerable morality; and if the one was more noted for the *conquests* he had made — the other, at least had probably more sincerity in his devotions.

Indeed, though Laura liked, of all things to *flirt* with Mr. Temple, to receive his attentions, and be distinguished by his admiration — she felt convinced that they meant nothing all the time; and, however she might amuse herself with him, her acceptance of his flattery was fully as insincere as his intentions in offering it, and that is saying a great deal.

“I wonder,” said Mary Annesley one day to her, “that you do not attempt to secure Mr. Temple. It would be a good match for you, Laura.”

“Do you?” replied Laura, smiling. “I recommend *you* to try to secure him yourself, my dear Mary.”

“Me! Oh, no! If I had half your charms, indeed, I would see what I could do; but to enter the lists at present, would be hopeless.”

“Oh! you need not despair,” said Laura. “I am sure he is not in the least particular about the beauty of those he flirts with; so long as they are *forbidden fruit* — that gives them a zest.”

“But why do you say so? — are you in that predicament, Laura?” inquired Mary, quite curiously.

“Perhaps yes — perhaps no,” laughed Laura. “Ask Mr. Temple that question, Mary!”

“But you do not act wisely at all, Laura,” persisted Mary. “You throw away an excellent opportunity for an fine marriage, because you will not break off a useless flirtation with a married man. I do believe you care more for Cecil Mansfield than for anyone else.”

“And who told you it is a *useless* flirtation?” inquired Laura. “I am not accustomed to spend my time in *useless efforts*, and I do not see why you should charge me with it.”

“But what good can it do, unless you are sure that poor Mrs. Mansfield will break her heart about it? I am really of opinion that she will, for she is excessively attached to him.”

“Let her then,” cried Laura, with an expression of countenance which was shocking. “What right has she to stand in my way? — why should I consider her?”

“Nay, now really I must stand up for poor Mrs. Mansfield,” replied Mary. “She is rather dull, to be sure; but, if one is not born a wit, how can one help it? But really she is very amiable and excellent, and was very kind to me.”

“Well, but with all her excellence,” said Laura, scornfully, “she has done what she ought to be ashamed of — married her brother-in-law; and as the law forbids such marriages, it is, or at least it will be soon, all the same as if it had never taken place.”

Mary Annesley looked a little shocked at this declaration, and, after a moment's pause, she said coldly:

“I understand your plan, I believe, but I cannot say I admire it; there is something in the scheme I do not like.”

“You are *too scrupulous*, I know; but in love, as in war, all is fair; and if we can turn our enemies' mistakes to our own advantage by a little stratagem, I do not see why we should not do it,” said Laura, not at all abashed.



"I would not like to be the cause of quite so much suffering," replied Mary.

"Oh, pooh! Mrs. Mansfield is not more tender than other people; she will console herself with another husband, and all will be right. I think I could name the man who would not be sorry to have her!"

"You must name a very bold man who would dare to insinuate such a wish, I can tell you that, Laura," replied Miss Annesley, quite warmly.

"Why there is that man, Mr. Linwood, who is forever concerning himself about her affairs, and doing all he can to set them right; what motive can he have for his interference?" demanded Laura.

"Hardly the same as yourself, I would apprehend," replied Mary, "or else the results would be the same; and I much mistake if you have been trying to set her affairs right."

"I am quite content with managing my own, my dear child," said Laura, laughing carelessly; "and as I have some interest in the question, I think I am justified in all I have done. I am next after papa in the inheritance, and do not see why the fact of Cecil and Fanny loving one another, admitting that they did, should stand between me and my rightful inheritance. I only want the *estate* which by law should be mine."

"I have nothing to object to your father, or anyone else, trying to recover an estate by legal means; it is your interfering with the affection due to a wife — your robbing her of her husband entirely, which strikes me as unjust and unjustifiable."

"That is because you do not comprehend, Mary, that is all: I cannot have Brookensha, if she keeps her husband; and even if they were to be parted, I might be no nearer to it, unless I marry him myself, because he would be sure to take another wife."

"Then, were I in your case, I would have neither; all the Brookenshas in the world should not tempt me to such *cruelty as to separate a husband and wife so much attached.*"

"Why, you said just now Cecil was so attentive to me, you thought it necessary to warn me against encouraging him. Does that seem like *attachment to his wife*, or very bitter indignation against his antagonists in this dispute? No, no; Cecil and I understand one another, and he, at least, will not break his heart at the separation."

"That is the very thing in which you appear to me so blameworthy; a little flirtation I could have overlooked as easily as anyone: such things are common enough; and though I do not think you would be justified in a court of *honor* — a court of *law* will not blame you for fighting for the estate; but to win his heart while he is yet a husband, and coolly prepare to step into the place of the woman you injure, appears to me quite improper!"

"Vastly, Mary, our sense of moral obligation differs, that is all; but you must agree with me that he will make a better husband than Arthur Temple, who is thoroughly a man devoted to a life of sensual pleasure."

"I would not depend too much on the *faithfulness* of a man who has changed already under such suspicious circumstances, Laura."

"Oh! as to that, I have no fear of change in him; he is the *humblest slave* that ever was! I may *torment* him as I like; but he will only love me the better for it."

"So it seems to you now; but with all due respect to your *charms* and your *abilities* — I do not think you ought to be too sure. He cannot be bound by any promise, of course, while he is in fact married; and he may, when it comes to the point, desert you, and choose someone else."

"I would like to see him! Mary, you do not know him or me either, or you would not give me so little credit for understanding my business. I can wind him round my finger — and he will never escape me!"

"So you assert; give me some proof of that."

"Well! are you to be tomorrow at Mrs. Bishop's garden party?"

"Yes, I rather think of going."

"Well, you see — Cecil and Arthur Temple are both to be there; see us together, and then judge fairly as to the extent of my power over him."

The challenge was accepted, and the two young ladies, who could scarcely be called *friends*, parted soon after this agreement.

That evening, Mary Annesley found herself solicited to waltz by the same Mr. Temple of whom they had been talking. They met at a small evening party, and for the first time she had the honor of being the partner of this popular man.

A part of their conversation must be recorded, because it is intimately connected with our more important characters.

"What strange people we seem to have got among," whispered the gentleman: "our kind, fat hostess is my god-mama, and as they are enormously wealthy, I make a point of being dutiful to them. When all my fortune is gone, I shall come upon my sureties to pay my debts! That's what they are intended for, is it not?"

"It is a new idea to me," replied Mary, "but I have no doubt it will be a convenient one to you."

"You are sly, Miss Annesley; well, good old Mrs. Jackson does get the oddest people around her that ever you saw. You are the only individual in all this circle at all belonging to the class in which I exist. I was so glad to see you enter the room."

"I am quite delighted to have appeared for once in so favorable a point of view," replied Mary Annesley archly. "You seem to be of the opinion of the Irishman, that the *frame* is the heart of the picture, and yet not that exactly either — for you require apparently a *dull frame* to please you."

"I do not understand you."

"I only meant that in the many bright drawing-rooms where we have been accustomed to meet, you were not accustomed to find me the most attractive object."

"So much the worse for my taste!"

"Not at all, it is perfectly natural and correct; tomorrow, when we meet at Mrs. Bishop's, I shall be again invisible."

"Are *you* to be there then?"

"Yes; I am going there for a particular object."

"Indeed! — may I ask what that is — to complete and confirm your conquest over some admirer, or to exhibit one of Madam Carson's triumphant butterflies?"

"Not at all" said she gaily; "I am going to be witness to the triumph of another: my friend, Laura Mansfield, is bent on trying her power over her cousin Cecil, and I am going to stand by, and see fair play."

"Oh! indeed, it will be very amusing, no doubt. Do you consider her so *sure* of her game?"

"No; we have had a dispute on that subject. I think she may lose both her lover and her wager; but we shall see."

"I think so charming a person as Miss Mansfield should not throw away her smiles on a married man, although cousins have great privileges. Well, I wish I were somebody's cousin."

"I dare say you are, Mr. Temple, if you did but know it. Could you not make yourself out to be mine? your ingenuity, I am sure, could soon prove that, if you set about it."

"No doubt; but how is Laura Mansfield to prove her power over her cousin? how is she to try him?"

"Oh, that she must decide for herself; perhaps she may flirt horridly with someone else, or perhaps, like the ladies in romance, she may inflict some dreadful penalty on him; not to speak, for instance, for an hour, or not to drink any champagne, or not to waltz; imagine the torture which such a command would inflict on a lively and rational young man."

"I think I shall make common cause with her, and try to assist her in inventing torments!"

"There is no occasion; she is ingenious enough without your help at that game; but you would not be a true man if you did not look on, and enjoy the sport."

"Upon my word, I am afraid of you, Miss Annesley, you are so very severe."

"I did not mean to frighten you; mine I thought a very common-place observation, one which you will meet with in all moralizing books, and which has been made by philosophers of all ages."

"As if that were any consolation for your bitter remarks. These good people must be very enthusiastic in their search after happiness, if they intend to try for it any longer in this domicile. I have not found it come yet. Good night, Miss Annesley; if God-mama Jackson is angry at my running away from her delightful soiree, I shall tell her I was pelted off by the red-hot shot of your wit. I trust you will be in a more placid mood when we meet tomorrow — *au revoir*."

"Now, I wonder what the effect will be," thought Mary, when she was left alone: "will he really try to vex Cecil, or will he allow himself to be made *Laura's tool* for that purpose. I really think, if I had the opportunity, I would soon be able to make some impression on that man."

On the lawn of Mrs. Bishop's estate, they met again about four o'clock on the following day. Laura looked unusually bewitching; her dress was perfection, and her air a charming mixture of coquetry and sentiment.

Mary was near her when Cecil approached with his usual eagerness; for owing to an engagement that morning, he had not accompanied them to the event, nor seen them since the evening before. Laura was engrossed apparently by a very interesting conversation which she was holding with a young officer on her left; and, as Mary believed, intentionally averted her face from her cousin, and appeared unconscious of his approach. Cecil was obliged to wait a few minutes, and when a momentary pause encouraged him to present himself, his reception rather surprised him.

"Ah, Cecil," said she, carelessly looking over her shoulder, and extending to him the tip of one delicate gloved finger, "good day to you."

But the hand had rather a repellent than an inviting motion, and she turned again instantly to her lively companion, whose conversation drew forth the most gracious smiles.

Cecil stood confounded; he could not imagine what *sudden change had come over the object of his idolatry*, or who this unknown rival was who had so suddenly stepped into his place. Mary marked his astonishment and uneasiness, as he continued to stand by Laura's side, but it gradually subsided, and his air of easy calmness rather surprised her.

It was not very long before Mr. Temple made his appearance, and the marked pleasure with which he was received formed a complete contrast to her manners towards her cousin. Smiles and gracious words were his in abundance; the young officer was no more listened to, and her whole attention was engrossed by Arthur Temple.

He seemed bent on making himself more than commonly agreeable, his flattering devotion was peculiarly marked; his incessant attentions, and the evident pleasure with which they were received, were such as no rival could view

unconcerned. Cecil looked very grave; he left her side, but remained only a short distance from her, and fortunately where Mary could see him well. He did not speak to anyone else, or make any attempt at retaliation for her flirtation; he merely stood gravely watching her, and Miss Annesley was unable to guess his thoughts from his countenance.

So stood affairs when the general move was made to partake of the meal; there was a confusion, a good many people were passing, all crowding one way; some stopped to converse with Miss Mansfield, her chaperon was escorted off by another gentleman, while Laura was detained; how it happened, Mary did not exactly comprehend, she had been too intent on watching to be aware that she was left by her party, when suddenly Mr. Temple presented himself, and requested to be allowed the felicity of conducting her to the table. Her surprise at the request seemed almost to take away her senses, she had concluded he would not leave Laura, and she forgot to look round and see what became of her friend.

The party who had stopped Miss Mansfield now moved on, and she was left under the trees where they had been sitting, by all except her cousin. Laura's chagrin was excessive. To have been thus suddenly deserted by the one admirer on whom she most depended, and thrown entirely upon the kindness of the other in whose eyes she wished to appear so universally charming and admired, was a severe blow; but she took it for granted that at least Cecil would be humble and penitent, would be too happy if she condescended to take his arm, and enchanted to be allowed to wait on her. He approached, but instead of the solicitations which she expected, she was addressed in a very different tone.

"I am glad the crowd is gone, Laura," said he, "as it affords me an opportunity of speaking to you." It was very gravely said — he was evidently angry.

"I quite agree with you, Cecil." replied she, interrupting him; "and I hope it will likewise afford you an opportunity of taking me where I can get some ice; I am dying of heat and exhaustion."

"I trust, however, you will survive long enough to answer me, when I ask what am I to understand by *your conduct* this afternoon?"

"You should first explain what I am to understand by your question," retorted she: "inform me to what part of my conduct you refer?"

"Your outrageous flirtation with Arthur Temple, Laura — what am I to suppose from that?"

"Why that I find him very agreeable; what other deduction can you draw?"

"But do you suppose I can find it agreeable, or think it right, that you should thus encourage, before my eyes, the devotion of another man? Laura, is it kind or just?"

"I can see no reason why I should not amuse myself," replied Laura, boldly; "you are a complete dog-in-the-manger: the attentions you must not pay me yourself — you will not allow me to receive from another!"

"You know, Laura, you have pledged yourself, when my hand is free, to accept it; why, in the meantime should you behave in a spirit so contrary to your promise? Is it only to *vex* me?"

"If it is, I am sure it is no more than you deserve, for your tiresome catechism, as if I came here to be lectured in this fashion, or listen to dry discussions on *moralities*. For Heaven's sake, act like a reasonable being, and let us go and get something to eat."

"No, Laura, I shall not. I will not assume what I do not feel, or *make believe* to be on good terms with you, merely to satisfy your vanity. I thought you *loved* me, but since your conduct has convinced me that you do not, I shall wish you good day, and return to town!"

"Why, what a fuss you make about a *little harmless flirtation*; what is the object of that, please? merely half an hour's listening to Mr. Temple's wit, is not so great a *crime* as to deserve that I should be left here all alone."

"If it were the first or the second time," replied Cecil, without the least appearance of softening, "there might be some truth in what you say, but you know it is not so. If Mr. Temple is preferred to me — then I leave you to him. Adieu!"

And to Laura's very great astonishment, he actually walked away. She could not at first believe it possible; she continued to expect he would look back, or return by some other way to see how she bore the parting, and she remained many minutes after he had disappeared still expecting him. But he came not, and she was left quite alone to make up her mind to this sudden desertion as best she could. She was mortified — excessively mortified — at first, but a little reflection consoled her.

His *anger* was a proof of his *love*, for it had its origin in *jealousy*, and she felt certain that he was too completely in her power for his indignation to give her any real cause for alarm. He *loved* her — she could not doubt it, and now was the time of trial. If she were firm in her own justification, resolute in her scorn of his interference, and her determination to please herself — she would soon see him at her feet again. For after all, she was secure of him; to whom else could he go? Would another woman listen to his *vows* as she had done? or love him as she had loved, in spite of every obstacle?

He was still bound, she was free; she had nothing to fear from jealousy, her situation secured her from that, while his so completely laid him open to its utmost pangs. Yes, she was certainly safe, and could defy his *threats*, and disregard his *anger*, certain that they must equally subside into humility at last. If he was not too long coming to his senses, she would forgive him at last; but it was possible if he kept her a very long period in suspense, that she might marry someone else — Mr. Temple perhaps; he was decidedly very charming, and upon the whole, worthy of a woman's attention, if he were

only *sincere* — but here was the difficulty. And how did it happen that he had deserted her just now? what had become of him? She had not seen him go, but she felt herself decidedly ill-used in his leaving her so abruptly; and here she was now left quite alone, without companion of any kind, she who but an hour before had been surrounded by admirers.

Afraid lest what had occurred should be surmised by her acquaintance, she walked away, and entering a thick shrubbery of evergreens, she strolled leisurely along, intending to rejoin Mrs. Archer, the lady who acted as her chaperon, when she could do so without her *solitary* situation being noticed. While she was thus sauntering about, not much noticing how time passed, while engrossed with her own thoughts, the sound of voices approaching roused her, and a turn in the walk brought her immediately face to face with Mr. Temple and Miss Annesley.

She colored at seeing them together, partly on her own account, partly on theirs, and seemed inclined to turn down another path, but they eagerly prevented it.

“We were looking for you, Laura,” cried Mary Annesley; “your sudden disappearance has created the greatest commotion among your friends and acquaintance; Mrs. Bishop talked of the river, and feared you were drowned; Mrs. Archer apprehended you had eloped; and, in short, it would be endless to tell you all we have felt and suffered. Mr. Temple and I came to search for you.”

“I am infinitely obliged to you all for the interest and concern you manifest towards me; here I am, you see, quite well and comfortable. I have been taking a solitary ramble amidst these pleasant shades.”

“And you really prefer that to taking an ice in the marquee we have just left, Miss Mansfield?” inquired Mr. Temple, as they all three walked along together, “or listening to the band which has been performing some of your favorite waltzes; is your *contemplative mood* over yet? and will you return to society?”

“Where’s your cousin?” whispered Mary.

“Upon my word I do not know, I have seen very little of him this afternoon. He is not in a good temper, and when that is the case I always leave him,” replied Laura carelessly.

“Take care, or I shall be right,” pursued Mary in the same under-tone.

“I am not afraid, I know what I am about too well for that,” said Laura.

They returned to the rest of the company, and Laura tried hard to be easy and mirthful; but there was an undefined sense of uneasiness in her heart, which made it difficult for her to wear the *mask of indifference*.

Cecil did not re-appear, and now that Mr. Temple had driven him from the field, there was a strong inclination on his part to desert it also — he was little with her, and when he was by her side, he was dull and stupid. Her thoughts wandered after Cecil, but with a firmness which would have been heroism in a worthy object, she persisted in showing the *appearance of gaiety and ease*. She would not leave the scene of the festival a moment earlier on account of her internal sufferings, but when the proper hour arrived, and she was enabled to throw herself back in the corner of Mrs. Archer’s britscha, it was with very bitter and angry feelings that her *proud heart* swelled in her bosom.

She was angry with Mr. Temple for his sudden indifference; with Mary for her equally sudden flirtation with him; angry with her cousin, because she had given him cause to complain; and still more angry with *herself* because she had acted foolishly.

She returned home with a fond expectation of finding Cecil with her father; but her father had seen nothing of him, and was only surprised that he did not appear in company with his cousin.

She said he had been at Mrs. Bishop’s, but getting tired he had left early, and she supposed that he found it necessary to attend the House, which had taken him to London again. Thank Heaven, that tiresome Parliament would soon be out, in another day or two he would be at full liberty, and they might then put in practice a charming plan which she and Cecil had discussed yesterday, and which she trusted her father would readily join: this was, to go abroad — to go to the Rhine and Switzerland, for a couple of months; it would be delightful, and papa must agree to it immediately.

But her father demurred; he wanted to stay in England in order to hurry on as much as possible the *suit* in the matter of this marriage, and he feared that if he went abroad the affairs would languish — time would be lost, and there was no knowing what evils might arise from that.

“How provoking! how tiresome!” exclaimed Laura. “I do believe I am the most unfortunate creature in the world; whatever I set my heart on, I am never allowed to have, or not until after a delay almost worse than a direct refusal. I am sure you could do all the business that must be done by letter, and just grant my request.” He shook his head.

“That odious suit, what a nuisance it is we must wait for it,” cried Laura, very petulantly; “upon my word it seems to me more trouble than it is worth.”

“What makes you talk so foolishly, my dear girl?” said her father complacently. “I used to think you rather a *sensible* woman, but upon my word that last speech does little credit to your understanding.”

“Well, I know it is foolish,” replied his daughter; “but really it is very hard that we cannot get what we want without such a world of pains, and even then the chances are against our getting all we wish for.”

“Well, all I can say is, that if we cannot get all we want, we had better, at least, get all we can! I do not grudge the trouble necessary to make you *mistress of Brookensha*, only you must not hinder my plans by your impatience. I must go to town early tomorrow, and if Cecil is not here before, I will call at the Albany and bring him away with me.

“Ay do, that will be right; but I expect he will come to breakfast tomorrow, as he often does, when detained late at the House.”

This was the hope Laura chose to encourage relative to her cousin: it served to support her spirits the next morning, and though it proved fallacious, it only died away to give place to another more certain — that he would return with her father at noon.

“Tell him I desire him to come,” was her parting admonition to her father, secretly trusting that the knowledge of this wish on her part, would act as a certain *charm* to remove his lingering displeasure.

Great was her astonishment when her father returned alone. He had called at the Albany; Cecil had been there since yesterday afternoon, but had left it early that morning, saying he was going into the country for a few days. He had taken his servant with him, and no one knew where he was gone, he having left no address, only asking that letters should be kept until he sent for them.

This was quite beyond Henry Mansfield’s comprehension: *why* and *where* he could be gone, and how long he meant to stay, and what could be his object — was at present a mystery to him. But Laura could divine the meaning; he was angry — very angry. And had she lost him! — it was possible. Oh! why had she done it! Never had she loved him so well as now — never had his affection appeared of so much value. She had not thought he possessed such spirit, such firmness — or she would not have *trifled* with him as she had done; but she admired, she loved him the more for it; it gave him additional value in her eyes, and made him all she could wish.

After meditating some time, she imparted to her father some portion of what had passed, as an explanation of her fears.

“What can we possibly do to recover the truant, and bring him back?” said she anxiously.

“Bring him back! why of course you will soon hear from him, both to say where he is, and what he is doing: he could not live without corresponding with you, Laura,” replied her father.

“Why, to own the truth,” said Laura, a little embarrassed, “we did not part on very good terms. He made himself ridiculous; and I was angry; and we differed. We had a *little quarrel*, and I suppose he is hiding until the *sulky fit* is gone.”

“Oh! he will soon recover then. Lovers’ quarrels are proverbial; though I would not recommend you to push this one too far, or you may *exasperate* him. But you must settle it between yourselves; I shall not interfere. When he is disposed to relent, I imagine he will come back.”

Laura was glad that he viewed the matter so lightly, and she began to have more cheerful views on the subject herself, wondering how she ever could be such a coward, and so false to her own sense of her charms, as to doubt the ultimate return of her lover.

But just as she had come to this comfortable conclusion, a note was handed to her father, which somewhat excited her.

“From Cecil,” said her father, as he broke the seal. “I thought we would soon hear.”

Laura watched his countenance as he read, and was almost frightened at its change of expression. He dashed the note down on the table, and struck his fist upon it so forcibly that even the marble paper-weight jumped.

“See what you have done with your absurd quarrels, Laura, and nonsensical misunderstandings! Fool! not to be able to manage your own matters better than that! You will repent this nonsense as long as you live! When the man was yours — positively at your disposal — that you should be such a fool as to drive him from you! Read that, and explain, if you can!”

Laura took up the note, and, turning deadly pale with suppressed anger, she read a few lines, the purpose of which was to announce that he, Cecil, was on the point of starting for Brookensha, since, after what had so recently passed between him and his cousin Laura, it would be equally unpleasant to both to meet again. He thought it extremely probable that he should go abroad soon; and, with many thanks for his uncle’s hospitality, he wished him farewell for the present.

It was perfectly true that Cecil had suddenly resolved to start for Brookensha — nay, was actually gone. He had left Mrs. Bishop’s, his heart swelling with *angry* and *jealous* feelings at Laura’s *heartless conduct* and *insufferable vanity*. Was this the woman for whom he had given up his once-beloved wife? Was this the woman who should rival Fanny in his affections? This *vain flirt*, who, rather than resign her silly triumph in being attended by men whose admiration was a reproach rather than an honor, could thus willfully wound his feelings, and destroy his peace!

The image of his *tender, constant, gentle Fanny* ran in his mind; her affectionate ways, her calm and holy life, her unvariable sweetness, her unalterable love, her devotion to every domestic duty, and, above all, the duty of pleasing him; her constant self-sacrifice, unrepining and unhesitating; her fixed immovable principles, on which he would have ventured to stake his life. Such she was — and what was her rival? Lovely, certainly — fashionable, clever; but what was her temperament? What were her principles? What her *regard* for him, her *consideration* of his feelings, her *concern* for his comfort?

Never was there a more *complete contrast* between two women than that which he mentally drew between his wife and his cousin; the one all *softness* and *charms* — the other all *vanity* and *self-will*.

And for *this* he had plunged his soul in guilt; for *this* he had endured the reproaches of conscience, the shame which made him shrink from every former acquaintance; to be, after all, scorned and mocked at by a false woman, made a subject for her *ridicule* among her companions, or a *laughing-stock* for a man like Arthur Temple!

He *hated* Arthur Temple; he could hardly account for the bitterness of the feeling towards him — perhaps it arose from jealousy; but, whatever was its origin, it amounted to positive hatred. Again and again had he remonstrated with Laura on the subject of her intimacy with this man, and as often had his representations been set aside by smiles, caresses, or words of affection. She had *laughed* at his jealousy — she had declared that Arthur Temple was nothing to her, but she had still persisted in receiving him at all hours, and encouraging his attentions by every means in her power.

He would no longer be the *sport* of such a girl — her *toy*, her *slave* — he would leave her. There was one far better than she, who would receive him joyfully — one on whose tender reception he could depend. Come what would of the measure, he would seek his wife. His uncle might shut his door upon him; he might exclude him forever from his house — he never wished to enter it again! He would break with him and with Laura entirely; and if they succeeded in their object — if they gained their suit, he would carry Fanny away to some far-distant land, where, in spite of uncles, cousins, courts, and laws, they might live in peace.

With this wild scheme in his head, he hurried back to his rooms at the Albany; and after spending the evening partly in writing letters of business, or notes of apology for broken engagements, partly in stormy gusts of passion, he started the next morning very early for Brookensha, without waiting for the post, and leaving no orders to have his letters forwarded. The angry tumult of his feelings had not subsided when he entered his carriage; but the solitary confinement tended greatly to restore his mind to calmness.

During his two days' journey, he reviewed all the past — the *guilty* past; his growing attachment to Laura, his increasing indifference to Fanny; the plans of his uncle, and the evil pleasure with which he had learned them; the sufferings of his wife in consequence; and the hopes, the actual though hidden hopes, which he felt that he had cherished, that she would not survive it. And now he was seeking her again — returning once more to her, whom he never should have left; and that too without concern as to how she would receive him, only a doubt as to what his own feelings would be.

Was he quite certain that his present sentiments would last? Was he even quite sure what his present sentiments were? He told himself that he was cured of his love for Laura, that her power over him was gone; but he found himself often speculating on what his power over her might be — how she would look, what she would feel, when she heard of *his desertion*. Would her bright eyes be dimmed with tears? Would her rosy cheek grow paler by a shade? Would her heart flutter and her hand tremble, when she saw the note to her father? Or would she be quite cold, quite passive, quite indifferent? Would she *laugh* with Arthur Temple about his routed rival? It was fortunate that this idea occurred to him, as it served to strengthen his mind, and nerve his heart for the perpetual separation on which he was determined.

Agitated thus by conflicting passions, every hour he approached nearer to his home; and, by degrees, visions of Laura, her charms and her offences, died away, to be replaced by others, which assumed more importance as the moment of their realization approached.

He was returning to Brookensha: how would people look at him there? How would he be considered? how regarded? Were his uncle's intentions generally known? If so, in what light would he be considered — as a *sufferer*, or a *sinner*? Should he be pitied, or blamed? Should he become the object of intrusive curiosity, the mark for country scandal and gossip? Would not that be intolerable? How could he bear it? Should he shrink and hide himself? Should he scorn and defy it? Whatever he might feel and see, he should hear *no blame* at least. Cold hands and averted eyes, or ceremonious recognitions, instead of friendly greetings — this was the worst that he could encounter; for who would dare to question his conduct, or pry into his family concerns? It would be worst to encounter intimate friends. He must see the Linwoods: he believed his wife still to be staying with them, and, of course, he must encounter a meeting with them.

The second day was nearly over, and a bright evening sun in August was gilding the old oaks in the Brookensha woods, as he drove up. The lodge-keeper, seeing a carriage, advanced to say that none of the family were at home, and no visitors could be admitted; when, seeing her master's face, she uttered a scream of joy, and hurried off to get the keys.

The evening was calm and cool; the birds were singing in the clear air, and tracing wide circles in the deep-blue sky, as they returned to their roost-trees for the night. The rocky bank round which the road wound, glowed in the golden sunlight, and the blossomed heather seemed more than usually rich-colored. Then the carriage entered a grove of ancient pines, through whose straight trunks the slanting sunbeams glanced, as between the pillars of some vast cathedral; turning each rugged stem apparently into a column of brilliant coral or glowing fire, contrasting richly with the deep-purple hue assumed by their thick clustering, but usually somber foliage.

Who that ever watched a sunset in such a grove, and listened to the perpetual music which the lightest airs of Heaven make in this, one of nature's most magnificent temples, can ever forget the impression? How often had Fanny and Cecil sought this spot in summer evenings, to enjoy the view; and lingered arm-in-arm, watching that same brilliant effect with

inexhaustible pleasure! Now the sight was *painful* beyond measure. He covered his face with his hands, and shuddered, as he murmured: “*Why, oh! why did I ever leave you, Fanny?*”

But the road led down a steep slope, which concealed landscape and sunshine alike from him, through a thick grove of oaks, by the side of a rushing, rocky brook, around a deep pool, overhung by mountain-ash and hazel, with groves of old hollow-trunked yews above it, and then up again on the other side, under a rich plantation of varied foliage and luxuriant growth, skirting the lawn and flower-garden, until he stopped at the ancient porch of his own mansion.

How *desolate* it looked! The windows on the ground-floor, so far as he could see, were mostly closed; but where an open shutter allowed a glimpse within, the rooms presented every token of the housemaid’s care, when the family was absent. The great bell pealed almost mournfully in his ear, and the echo of hurried footsteps, with the slamming of the doors within, had a strange, hollow, unnatural sound, as they rang through the otherwise silent house.

He sprang from the carriage, and pushing open the doors, entered the vestibule, and looked around him. The great hall, where, on his return on one memorable occasion, he had found Fanny sporting with his little ones, was empty now — silent and deserted. The flowers were removed, the furniture placed back against the wall in most correct order; not a seat, not a toy out of place — not the smallest trifle to show that a spirit of elegance and gaiety had once presided there. All breathed the active duties of a housemaid’s taste, under an exact and precise housekeeper. It was painful to him to look at it. He remembered how often he had heard the murmur which the children made such a litter with their carts and balls, and other toys, that the place was never fit to be seen now. Such had been the complaints of the excellent, but formal *Lucy*, who had presided as housekeeper over his establishment for fifteen years. And where were now the fairy feet which had tripped over the pavement? They were gone with their musical voices, their ringing laughter — all their baby glee, and endearing baby wiles.

The three minutes during which he stood waiting there, sufficed for all these thoughts to cross his mind, and he was turning away with a shudder, when *Lucy* herself approached with hurried steps.

Quite fluttered at seeing her master arrive so unexpectedly, she hardly knew what to say. Nothing was the matter, she hoped.

“Nothing. Get me some dinner, *Lucy*, and a room ready for me to stay — I shall be back again in an hour, I dare say.”

And with these words he left the house and disappeared so rapidly, that but for the evidence which the presence of his manservant and the carriage at the door afforded, *Lucy* would have doubted if she had really seen her master.

Restless and uneasy, *Cecil* could not remain quiet, and dared not continue in the dreary home he had just left, at least until it was made in some degree more comfortable. After the weary confinement of his two days’ journey, he was glad to stretch his limbs again; and the cool, soft evening air was refreshing after the dust of the high road, which he had inhaled incessantly for the last ten hours. He took the short path to the rectory, determined to see *Rev. Hughes*, and consult with him as to how he had best announce his presence to *Fanny*.

The scent of the pale woodbine, which twined round the trees, on either side of this path, reminded him of his first wife. She had loved the flower, and planted it there. How long ago that seemed! What an age of passion and emotion he had lived since then! He had lived more in these last three years than many individuals would do in ten or even twenty.

Thus felt *Cecil*, as he hastily trod the little path which greatly shortened the way down to the rectory, and in a quarter of an hour he was at the well-known gate; in another minute he had walked up to the parlor window, and entered the room from the lawn. Instead of *Rev. Hughes*, he found only a stranger there, a young man, who, looking up a little astonished at the *intrusion*, inquired with mild politeness whether he needed anything.

*Cecil* apologized, and explained. He came to seek *Rev. Hughes*; and being accustomed to do so, had taken the shortest mode of entrance.

The young man expressed concern; but his uncle, *Rev. Hughes*, was not at home: he had set off for London, three days ago, with a friend: he had gone on important business, and it was quite uncertain when they would return.

*Cecil* looked exceedingly astonished. He had never heard of such an event as *Rev. Hughes* going to London, since he could remember; and it seemed to him almost as improbable as if the church steeple had gone there.

The stranger, seeing he looked astonished, and fearing he was disappointed, courteously inquired whether he could be of any service, in his uncle’s stead, as he was filling his place as minister during his absence.

This, of course, *Cecil* declined. Then he offered him refreshment; would he take some tea — the servant would bring it in an instant.

But his visitor had no inclination to stop with a stranger; so, declining all his offered hospitality with equal politeness, he bowed and left him; turning his steps towards *Mrs. Linwood’s* house, feeling certain that here at least he should not be disappointed: he would assuredly learn something positively of *Fanny* here.

As he advanced up the little approach to the house, he suddenly encountered *Miss Linwood* herself. She was stooping to gather some flowers; and, concealed by a thick shrub, had neither seen nor been observed, until he was close to her; but, on perceiving him, she startled, and gave a slight scream.

“Good heavens! Cecil, what brings you here?” she exclaimed, even in an accent of terror. “What has happened in London?”

Cecil began to think that his countenance must show dreadful evidence of what he had lately done and suffered in London, on his being thus greeted, for the second time, since his arrival at Brookensha.

“Do not be alarmed,” he replied; “there is nothing the matter. I came to see *Fanny* — that is, if you think I may venture.”

“Fanny!” replied Olivia; “she is not here; she is gone to London with Rev. Hughes.”

“Gone — gone to London, and I not know it? Gone, just when I sought her here? How very unfortunate! — how very distressing!”

Olivia was silent, but she had a great mind to tell the disappointed man that he should not have delayed so long, and then his wife would not have been required to seek him.

“She must be much better, if she is able to do this,” said Cecil, at last.

“She is much better — better than I ever thought to see her again,” said Olivia; “but I think she is still so delicate, and her life so very precarious, that I fear she has undertaken too much for her.”

“And her object?” interrogated Cecil, hastily; “what was her object?”

“To see *you*, I believe,” said Olivia, coolly: “she did not know you were coming here.”

“How very unfortunate! But I do not wonder that you are surprised at seeing me,” continued Cecil.

“I am much surprised that we had not that pleasure sooner; but had you made known your intention, no doubt Mrs. Mansfield would have remained here.”

“How much I am indebted to you and Mrs. Linwood for your hospitality!” observed Cecil: “I fear it must have occasioned you extreme trouble.”

“The pleasure of doing anything for your wife, far outweighs any trouble it can possibly occasion. I wish it had been in our power to alleviate, in any degree, her mental or bodily sufferings.”

“Poor thing!” said Cecil, “she has been a great sufferer!”

“She must have been made of marble. Such agony of mind as she has gone through, it is astonishing that she lives after it all.”

Cecil looked very uncomfortable, but Olivia was far too bitter against him to feel any inclination to spare him a single pang which remorse could inflict.

“But what could we, or anyone here, do to comfort her? And with her angelic patience, what could we do, but look on and admire her? Sweet Fanny!”

At this moment *Mrs. Linwood* approached. She had seen Cecil from the window, and came out to meet him. Her reception was more cordial than her daughter’s: she extended her hand, but she equally expressed considerable surprise at seeing him there, and regretted that he had not sent word of his intentions beforehand, and so saved Fanny a long and useless journey.

These observations embarrassed Cecil, who did not like to own that his return to his home was the result of an angry impulse, not the consequence of a wish to do right; and that it would have been as impossible to give any notice of his suddenly-formed plan as it would be to predict with certainty what his next movement would be.

He hesitated, and then said that it was only the night before he left London, that he had found his engagements could be arranged in such a way as to allow of his paying a short visit to the country; but it was most unfortunate that matters had turned out as they had done. The last accounts that he had received from Yorkshire, had not led him in the least to anticipate Fanny’s arrival in London.

“That must have been owing to your own sudden departure,” observed Olivia; “for I know that Fanny had arranged in such a way, that the announcement of her intentions should be received by you the day before she expected to reach London, that you might be able to join her at the earliest possible period after her arrival.”

“And how long do you suppose she would be likely to remain?” inquired Cecil, anxiously.

That neither of the ladies could tell.

“And what was her address?” was the next question.

They gave him this, as Rev. Hughes had procured comfortable lodgings for the invalid, in a quiet locality, that she might not suffer unnecessary disturbance or annoyance.

Cecil then took his leave, with a mind almost distracted by conflicting feelings, and returned to the Hall to eat his solitary dinner, and settle on his plans for the future.

It was a difficult question to decide what he should do, because he did not seek to know what would be *right*, but what would be most *agreeable*. He wished to gratify his feelings, or perhaps, we might say more correctly, his *passions*, his *pride* — his wounded *vanity* and his divided affections.

Should he return to London, and seek his wife — or Laura? Should he absent himself from both? From Laura, he certainly would. His offended self-love made her offences still appear enormous — too great to be freely forgiven; but to



throw himself at the feet of his wife, entreat her pardon for neglect, and for the future act the part of the faithful, devoted husband — could he submit to this? What would be the consequence as regarded his connection with his cousin? He should then never see Laura more — and could he endure this separation? Though he did not mean to make the first advances, he was secretly hoping to be reconciled again. He was expecting concession and humility from her, and longing for it, as a reason for forgiving her. But if he returned to his wife, overtures from Laura must not be listened to — they would not, in all probability, be made. Her *pride* would never stoop to that; and he would find, even to his own entreaties, that nothing would be granted.

And, after all, it would be no use to return to Fanny. The law would soon separate them; and even if they should continue, after that, to reside together — if they would seek refuge in another country, and defy the English law — he would never see his property descend to a child of his: he could not secure that point, but his uncle and Laura would assuredly triumph there.

The full-moon of August had risen brightly in the dark-blue sky, when Cecil stepped out upon the terrace after his hasty dinner, and sought the cooling night air to stay the feverish throbbing of his pulses. He wandered along, enjoying, yet almost unconscious of the solemn stillness around him.

The trees threw their dark shadows over the lawn, and raised their somber-looking masses of foliage, in deep contrast to the bright sky. The heavy dew shone upon the grass, where the moonbeams fell, as if it had been strewn with pearl. The air was calm; scarcely a leaf was stirred, and there was not a note of bird or distant sound to break the silence, except the deep, jarring voice of a night-hawk, which, from a neighboring branch, uttered his unmusical tones. They fell on Cecil's ears as an ominous voice, which foretold misery and desolation to him, as if some messenger of evil had been sent to haunt him for his evil conduct. He turned away with a hasty exclamation, which perhaps startled the shy bird, for it was silent for awhile.

Cecil fell into a profound reverie. He looked from the terrace where he stood over a landscape, which, whether seen by daylight or moonlight, could not fail to please. The rich woods that clothed the steep slope beneath the house, which now showed their tops in the moonbeams; the fair pastures which rose beyond, on the side of the opposite hill; the extensive park, with its herds of deer, its glorious old oaks and beech-trees, rearing their stately heads, the pride of many generations, which swept away to the right, beyond the nearest forest; the rich fields of grain in the valley beneath, here and there opened to the view between the vistas in the adjacent plantations to the left; the hills, with their heathery sides, their many-thousand acres, and their hundreds of sheep: all, all were his — had been his father's, and his father's father's, for many centuries. And should they never be owned by a son of his? Must they pass away to another branch — another family perchance? — for, if they became the heritage of a *female*, who could tell in what family they might become engulfed?

He gazed at his venerable mansion, fit dwelling for a noble, with its magnificent suites of rooms, its graceful oriel windows, and its ancient and stately halls. They had all been the pride of his heart since quite a boy, and he would not have exchanged them for any other mansion in Great Britain. No, he could not sacrifice that: he must have a child to whom he could leave all this; he must have a son, who, like himself, should transmit name and property intact to his descendants.

Just as these thoughts passed through his mind, the night-hawk again renewed its croaking note, and startled Cecil by its apparent proximity.

The harsh tones seemed to say to him: "*Never, never — no son of yours shall succeed you!*" A superstitious terror seized upon his heart, and he actually trembled as he listened. It was the *terror of a guilty conscience*, which can make the boldest man quail before it, which assailed Cecil. He could not face it now, but hastily re-entering the house, he closed the door, and, fatigued by his long journey, had no sooner retired to his night's rest, than he fell into a profound sleep, undisturbed alike by the croaking of the bird, or the whispers of an uneasy conscience.

But the bright morning sunshine only brought a renewal of his absorbing perplexities. He could not tell what to do with himself; he could not decide whether he should go or stay — seek Fanny or Laura, or, leaving them both, at once go abroad. This idea presented itself to him again and again. He thought it would be so safe a way to *cut the perplexing knot* which he could not unravel.

France or Germany might offer him some distractions, which would serve to chase away the gloomy thoughts that Brookensha inspired. Many of his friends and acquaintance had gone to the German baths; he would follow; and there, at least, he would be safe from all appearance of disgraceful submission to his proud cousin. Then, if she wished to renew their fellowship, she must seek him herself, as he secretly expected that she would; and his would be the triumph — hers the humility and repentance.

He resolved to set out immediately — that is, as soon as he had gone through some necessary business with his steward, from whom he was momentarily expecting a visit.

Mr. Dennis came, and, after discussing some business about leases and tenants, which required his attention, Cecil informed him that he was intending to go abroad for the present; "For," added he, "while this unfortunate affair is pending in the Prerogative Court of York, it will be extremely unpleasant to me to continue in the country."

Mr. Dennis was not at all surprised at the resolution; indeed, he thought it, in every respect, the best thing Cecil could do; but he wished to know, might he take the liberty of asking whether Cecil was intending to let judgment go by default, or to offer any opposition to the suit?

"How can I oppose it?" said Cecil, half impatiently; "the fact is undeniable. I have got myself into a scrape, but I do not see that I can prevent the consequences."

"Allow me to suggest," said Mr. Dennis, respectfully, "that the right of Henry Mansfield to institute this suit is by no means so clear as you seem to suppose; and, on that ground, you would have a fair chance of defeating it."

"I had not thought of that," replied Cecil, and then was silent.

Mr. Dennis, like everyone else who had ever come in contact with Fanny, was much attached to her, and warmly anxious to promote her interests. Through Rev. Hughes, he had been consulted by her as to the possibility of stopping all further proceedings by a compromise of some kind; and knowing how anxiously she was bent on this project, he ventured now to hint it to Cecil, stating that it was with the view of proposing some step of this kind that Fanny had gone to London.

At first, Cecil was inclined to reject the idea as entirely hopeless; but a moment's consideration gave a new turn to his thoughts. He would threaten his uncle in his turn; he would make a show of opposing him; he would propose this compromise, suggested by his wife. It would give such an air of dignity to his indignation thus to assume the attitude of defiance; it would tend so much to prove the reality of his anger, the depth of his resentment, that Laura would not long resist such threats. This would certainly bring her to her senses, and she would be as desirous as himself of making up their quarrel.

Accordingly he instructed his steward to write letters, containing the notice of his intentions, to Mr. Henry Mansfield, and take the necessary measures for defending his cause in court; conscious that, if he saw it requisite, he could at any time give up his defense, while he would gain something in character by prosecuting it, as long as the *show of bravado* was desirable.

He mentioned that he was going abroad, but forbade his steward to divulge his intended route; and that he would not return to England until the meeting of Parliament recalled him.

He intended to go by Hull, and thus avoid passing through London; by which means he should run no risk of encountering any acquaintance during his passage; and he wished to avoid any encounter of the kind until fairly out of England.

After his steward was dismissed, with injunctions not to send these letters until Cecil was on the point of sailing, he sat down with a feeling of wonder as to what he should do, until the time for commencing his journey arrived.

It was Saturday, and as the next steamer would not start before Monday, he had some time still on his hands, to dispose of which seemed a difficult task. He ordered his horse, and rode out until dinner-time; but he felt solitary and unhappy, and was glad when the dusk of the evening allowed the windows to be closed, and lamps to be lighted.

The weather had changed. It had been cold and unpleasant all day, and a stormy rain came driving, with dreary sounds against the windows, while the wind howled furiously round the many angles of the Hall.

Cecil stirred his fire, and hoped he would not have such a night as this on Monday; and then taking up the "Edinburgh Review," which lay unopened upon the table, was soon engrossed in one of the brilliant essays which abound in that publication.

Sunday was a trying day to him. He felt that he ought to attend the church; but it would be very painful to meet all the old familiar faces, and see everything as it used to be in days that were no more.

But his having left London, and determined to oppose his uncle, gave him a sort of feeling which almost amounted to heroism. He would not shrink from showing himself; he feared to appear afraid; no one would say that he was ashamed.

So he went through the torture of attending service. His eyes wandered from the dusty, faded memorials of his family, which adorned the pillars, to the cumbrous marble monuments, something resembling chimney-pieces of some centuries back, which recorded the virtues of his grandfather and his wives.

Then he glanced at the chancel where he had wedded *Mary Ellis*; and thought of the dark vault beneath, where that fair and delicate being now lay; and his eye instinctively turned to the plain tablet of pure white marble which commemorated her name and those of her two children.

He sighed, and withdrew his eyes: they fell on his large, empty pew, and the seat where the two sisters had each sat beside him, the cushion on which they had knelt, and the books which Fanny had used.

It was a relief to him, that at this moment the service required that he should kneel, for it served to conceal the workings of his agitated countenance, which must have plainly revealed all that nervous feeling in his heart.

After the service was concluded, as he was leaving the church, he joined Mrs. Linwood and her daughter.

He told them he wished to bid them farewell, as he intended immediately to go abroad, and would not return for some months. Mrs. Linwood expressed surprise at this sudden resolution — Olivia made no answer.

“During the period of suspense,” said Cecil, “which must ensue, it would be too painful to continue in England. Mr. Dennis has my instructions to do all that is possible, and my presence would be unavailing. Under these circumstances, also, it would be impossible for Fanny and me to reside together; we must part — but she shall be sovereign mistress, if she chooses to live at Brookensha. Should she, however, go abroad — should that be recommended for her health — Europe is wide enough for us both; she need not fear a meeting; she shall be enabled to do whatever may be most agreeable or most beneficial to her.”

“I suppose you have communicated all this to her?” said Olivia.

“I intend to do so by this evening’s post,” replied Cecil, to whom the idea had occurred unprompted; “and I hope, so far as in my power, to allay every uneasiness of hers. Happiness, I too much fear, is gone from us forever. But I will not forebode evil; it is possible that all may yet end well.”

Then taking a friendly farewell of both the ladies, he hurried away.

The letter was written to Fanny, without loss of time. That afternoon, Cecil Mansfield started for Hull, that he might be ready to embark the next morning early; and, before twenty-four hours had passed, the steamer was rapidly bearing him away from the shores of England.

The sudden disappearance of Cecil Mansfield from London excited no little commotion among his intimate friends, and Laura had to answer repeated questions as to what had become of her cousin, which both offended and vexed her.

Mr. Temple especially was particular in his inquiries. He seemed to suppose no other subject would be interesting to her — at least, he made no attempt to pursue any other when they met; but from the day of Mrs. Bishop’s gathering, there had been a marked decline in his attentions. He no longer sought her side in the Parks, her hand at a dance, or her smile anywhere: he gradually but surely altered his manner, and Laura had the additional mortification to find, that just when she had lost one lover by her own *conduct*, another had deserted her from mere *caprice*.

It was in vain she told herself that Cecil would return; in vain she proudly assured her father of this conviction. He was certainly gone; and the cutting scorn and irony with which her father treated all her assurances that he would not long be absent, irritated her almost to madness.

To be accused of lack of skill in the management of her affairs, was more wounding to her self-love than even the desertion of her cousin. It was bad enough to have him gone, but that her father should persist in affirming this to be her own fault, was greatly aggravating the injury, because it was true.

Mary Annesley’s smiles, too, were insulting, and she longed for the time when they would leave London, and all her troublesome friends and odious acquaintances, behind them. Her father had consented to go abroad, and she was looking forward to the time as the commencement of a new era in life.

“Are you not a friend of Mr. Cecil Mansfield, Mr. Linwood?” inquired Miss Annesley, on accidentally meeting him.

“I used to know him very well,” replied Frank, somewhat surprised at the question.

“I thought so,” said Mary. “Do you know where he is now?”

“Not at all. Is he not with Mr. Henry Mansfield?”

“No, indeed; he has disappeared in a mysterious manner, and must, I fear, be advertised as lost, stolen, or strayed. Meanwhile, his affectionate uncle and cousin are suffering agonies of anxiety on his account.”

“Do you really mean that he has left London?” inquired Frank, with some degree of interest. “When did he go, and where?”

“The *when* and the *where* are alike enveloped in mystery, so far as I know,” replied Mary; “and even the *why* can only be faintly guessed at. However, I believe it is supposed that he is gone to his own home. Has he not a *wife* in Yorkshire? There was a *Mrs. Mansfield* when I visited at Brookensha.”

“Yes, there is a Mrs. Mansfield now, but she is not at Brookensha; she is just come to London; she arrived here yesterday afternoon. Are you sure your information is correct, Miss Annesley? Has Cecil Mansfield really left London?”

“I am perfectly certain that he has not been seen since last Wednesday,” said Mary, seriously, seeing how earnest Frank was in his questions; “and I really believe he is gone down to Yorkshire. I learned that much from Laura herself, whom I saw yesterday. She then seemed in great doubt as to her cousin’s plans, said he hinted at going abroad, but she did not believe he would.”

“How strange and inconsistent he is!” observed Frank.

“Why, I believe the truth to be, there has been quarrel between the parties,” said Mary. “It would not be necessary or fair to enter into particulars, but there has been a decided difference, and the two branches of the family have parted on very bad terms.”

“I am extremely glad to know something certain about Cecil,” said Frank, “for it will save Mrs. Mansfield many hours of anxiety. She was quite ignorant that she had arrived too late to see him; but perhaps he will return here again.”

“I do not think Laura seemed to expect that,” replied Miss Annesley; “though she did not actually admit as much to me, I gathered from the style of her conversation that she was not very optimistic about it.”

Frank seemed satisfied with this assurance, but he made no answer; and after another minute, Mary added:

“I am afraid, Mr. Linwood, you are so ill-natured as to be pleased at this rupture. How can you rejoice in domestic dissensions and family disputes?”

“I!” exclaimed Frank. “I assure you that to hear of family quarrels always occasions me pain; though, considering my profession, I ought to be pretty well hardened, they so often come under my cognizance.” Then, after a little more consideration, he added: “But I must wish you good night, as I have business of importance to transact, which will not admit of being deferred.”

He then hurried away, determining to see Rev. Hughes early the next morning, to convey to him the news he had just received.

It was perfectly true. Fanny Mansfield was indeed on her road to London at the very time when her husband was seeking her at Brookensha; and the letter which was intended to announce her arrival, was lying unopened at his rooms in the Albany, when she reached her destination. The temporary disappointment to either party in consequence of thus acting at cross-purposes, was very differently estimated at the time, and still more differently regarded in after-years, when the consequences of their actions became apparent.

Fanny indeed, was acting on no sudden impulse, no wild enthusiasm, or unsettled purpose. Her proceedings were the result of mature deliberation; and however fallacious her hopes might prove, their defeat brought no self-reproach mixed up with the regret inevitable to disappointment.

She had encountered neither inconvenience nor accident on her road to London; railroads had not as yet monopolized the carrying trade, and the luxury of posting with four horses along the best roads in the world, might still be enjoyed to perfection. Her assertions that the journey would revive her and do her good, appeared for the first two days correct; she evidently gained strength, and testified no emotion which could make her companions uneasy. The unintelligible lisps of her little girl, who was just beginning to talk, amused them on the road, and of course every precaution was taken to prevent her suffering fatigue.

But as they approached their destination, her feelings became too much absorbed in one idea, to allow her to evince an interest in any other object. She could still sufficiently control her agitation, to prevent her companions noticing its extent, but she could neither converse nor attend to surrounding objects.

The hope of again meeting her husband, after an absence — so full of events that it seemed lengthened into years, not months — absorbed every other sentiment; as they drove through the labyrinth of streets, with those rows of buildings which seem interminable in their ugly sameness, her heart was alternately thrilling with the fondest hopes, and dying away under the most depressing despondency. Nearer and nearer they came to their destination; at times the carriage was compelled to halt, from the crowds of vehicles in the streets, and Fanny’s nervous excitement and impatience was scarcely to be controlled.

Then again they proceeded at a rapid pace, and she felt inclined to check them lest her worst fears should be too soon realized. At length they stopped, and her blood seemed to stop in her veins; she held her breath in eager expectation, as she bent her eyes on the door to see who would meet them there.

The long loud rap of the footman was speedily answered, the door was thrown open by a maid-servant, and one glance revealed to Fanny that the mistress of the lodgings, and she alone, stood in the vestibule awaiting her arrival. It was enough: she sank back in bitter disappointment, and when assisted from the carriage, she was with difficulty able to articulate an inquiry whether there was any letter or note for her. None at all; no one had been there to inquire, no message had been sent. She sat down in silent despair, no tears were in her eyes, and for some minutes she was speechless. Suddenly it occurred to her that perhaps the letter had been addressed to Rev. Hughes, who had engaged lodgings in a neighboring street, and of whose address she had been careful to inform her husband. She implored him immediately to go and ascertain this point; and to quiet her emotion, though with little hope, he left her for this purpose.

Fearing she was ill, the mistress of the house had been eager in her proffers of assistance, the nurse too was alarmed, and little Mary was clinging around her; this was too much for her nerves, all she wished was solitude and quiet. She begged them to leave her, and they were at length wise enough to allow her to have her own way, and all left the room save her own maid, who, seated out of her sight, anxiously watched her mistress, to whom she was devotedly attached.

This was an inexpressible relief to Fanny. With closed eyes and folded hands, she lay on the sofa where she had been placed, endeavoring to arrange her ideas and plans; and so pallid was her complexion, so perfectly immovable her figure, that but for the occasional heaving of her chest, you would have thought her an effigy rather than a living woman. The drapery in which she had been enveloped falling around her in graceful folds, the dark crimson pillow which supported her head contrasting strongly with the delicate alabaster hue of her face and throat, her long hair, slightly disarranged by the removal of her bonnet, straying down her neck and shoulders, as she lay on the couch, would have made her a charming model for an artist.

After an interval of profound silence, she slowly rose, and with a deep-drawn sigh, as if seeking to remove the oppression from her chest, she called for her desk, and wrote another hurried note to her husband, entreating an interview with him. This she instantly dispatched by one of her servants, with strict instructions to inquire every particular relative to his master which he could ascertain.

Just after this, Rev. Hughes returned, but with no tidings to console her; and at Fanny's urgent request he consented to go out again to seek Frank Linwood, and entreat him to come to her, for she was longing to have some communication with him on the practicability of effecting any compromise with their adversary.

Frank Linwood knew that Fanny was expected in London. He had heard the news with mixed feelings, which he could not very well understand himself. But whatever was the origin of the emotion which he felt, one thing was certain — he would, if possible, avoid meeting her: he did not think he could do so under present circumstances with the composure and calm friendship which her situation as a wife required. He felt that he could not forget that she would, in all probability, be soon released from that tie; that her husband neglected, and wished to cast her off; and that on some future, and probably, not very distant day, her hand, if not her heart would be free.

It was dangerous, with all the dim visions of a possible future crowding round his heart, for him to encounter the object of a passion too intense to have been quite extinguished. He would not willingly risk her good opinion by a look or a word indicative of his sentiments — but could he feel certain of so strong a degree of self-command as entirely to conceal them? And should the time hereafter come when these sentiments might be revealed, would she not esteem him more, could he say with truth, "Fanny, while you were the wife of another man, I may have loved, but I never sought to indulge that love."

But all his philosophical resolutions were overthrown by an assurance from Rev. Hughes that Fanny required his presence, and that he must come there the following day. Fanny, indeed, had wished that he should return with Rev. Hughes, but to this, the latter had decidedly objected, on account of the fatigue and excitement under which she was already laboring, and he had at first refused even to go to Frank, until she became sufficiently reasonable to agree to defer the meeting.

The idea that in the mean time it was most probable Cecil would arrive, helped to satisfy her mind on this point, and soon this absorbing anxiety quite swallowed up every other feeling.

The expectation of meeting her husband after an absence which, though actually of only a few months' duration, embraced events enough for half a lifetime, was so overwhelming, that she forgot every minor sentiment in the consideration of it. She trusted that her messenger, if he did not find him at home, would at least succeed in discovering where he was, and she had given positive orders, that if Cecil were in London, he was to be followed until the note was placed in his hands.

But her expectations were doomed to be disappointed; the message brought back was to the effect that Mr. Mansfield had not been at the Albany since the preceding morning; and as they did not know where he was gone, they could not forward his papers and letters. This was a severe blow to Fanny; she trembled, and her lips turned pale with agitation and sickening fears. What could be the meaning of this? where could he be gone? could Rev. Hughes suggest any explanation of his absence?

Rev. Hughes suggested several reasons, one in particular: he guessed that her husband was spending some time, perhaps, with his uncle Henry at Richmond; and he might return any time, in a day, or even a few hours, receive her note, and come to her.

But Fanny could not admit the probability of this, quite unaware that such visits had been his weekly custom; she thought it impossible that he could be on terms of such intimacy with one whose dispositions were so unfriendly toward them both: and she was astonished to find that her friend by no means seemed to consider this objection so insurmountable as she did. Rev. Hughes only shook his head at her protestations of disbelief, and wished she might find it was some reason more satisfactory to her which detained Cecil out of town.

Hour after hour passed wearily away, and though exhausted by fatigue, she was not to be persuaded to retire to rest, from the fear that she might by this means miss seeing her husband, should he arrive late. At length, however, even she was induced to give up all idea of a meeting that night; and so completely was she exhausted, that her head was scarcely on the pillow before she slept the deep sleep in which all is forgotten, and which is so often the consequence of protracted sorrow, that it may be considered as the merciful counterpoise to mental suffering. Morning, however, found her pale, languid, and yet so excitable, that the smallest thing which startled, almost overpowered her. She persisted in rising to breakfast, as if she thought by hurrying her own preparations she could advance the movements of Cecil; but she was apparently so overpowered by the exertion, as to be obliged to recline on a couch at the meal, and Rev. Hughes saw that she was listening to the sound of the few carriages, which at that hour passed through their quiet street, with a nervous attention that was quite distressing; and the sharp rap of the postman on the door, a sound which, at all times, and under any circumstances, can never be heard with composure, quite overpowered her.

It was no letter for her that the post conveyed; and, as the morning passed away in the same wearing and wearisome suspense, her kind old friend at length proposed that he should himself go to Cecil's chambers at the Albany, and endeavor to learn some further particulars relative to the supposed destination of Cecil when he left London, the time and manner of his traveling, and, in short, anything that he could ascertain respecting him.

He had already been long gone when a knock at the door announced a visitor, and Fanny held her breath in eager expectation: someone was coming upstairs; she half rose, and would have sprung from her couch had her strength permitted; but she could not; her power of motion failed her; and, with one hand resting on the back of the sofa, the other pressed upon her bosom, she sat with eager eyes, and parted lips, watching the door. It opened, and *Frank Linwood* alone entered the room. She tried to speak — she wished to welcome and to thank him, but her power was gone, her lips would not obey her wishes, her voice was not under her control, but, sinking back, she had just power sufficient to extend her hand to him in silence, and point to a chair beside her. He took the thin, white hand which she offered, and held it a moment in his, too much touched by the sight of the marks which suffering and sorrow had left on her countenance to be able to speak a word. Seating himself by her side in profound silence, he fixed his eye on the ground for a moment, and then became, to all appearance, intently occupied by surveying the border of a shawl which hung over the sofa. Fanny was the first to speak:

"It is very kind of you to come at my summons," said she. "I think I am destined to cause nothing but trouble to my friends; I would thank you if I could —"

"Please, don't — thanks are unnecessary — undeserved. I am happy if I can be of the slightest use to you."

He paused for composure, and she, quite calm now, because she had to think of matters of business, and her feelings were not called into play, replied:

"I wish so much to consult you as to the possibility of putting a stop to this affair, this suit, by a compromise; and I have so much to say, I hardly know where to begin — money — would not money do it?"

Frank shook his head, doubtingly.

"You think not? — but consider a moment — are not Henry Mansfield's motives purely mercenary? and would not possession, immediate possession, of a large sum, would not that be a temptation to him?"

"He feels so sure of success, that it would take a large sum, indeed, to make it worth his while to desist," replied Frank.

He looked upon the affair as hopeless, for at this time he was not aware of the quarrel between Cecil and his cousin Laura, and he believed their *mutual passion* to be the ground on which the uncle built his expectations of enriching his daughter — a ground too firm for any efforts on Fanny's side to shake. With such a view of the case, could he flatter the unhappy wife with a hope that Cecil would agree to any measures which would raise a barrier between him and the object of his wishes? It would not be kind to do so, though he must leave to some other hand the *painful task of opening her eyes to the real nature of her husband's sentiments*.

"If Henry Mansfield is playing for a large stake," replied Fanny, almost in a voice of coldness, "what do we risk? I would hardly have expected that you would have considered the possession of this coveted estate worth more than —" her voice faltered a little as she concluded, "than what he wishes to take from us."

"I do not think I deserve your implied reproof," he exclaimed. "I am as well aware of the value of what Cecil will lose as he can be himself" — he stopped abruptly, and blamed himself for the warmth with which he had spoken; but she was quite unconscious of all the *meaning* which he attached to the words which had escaped him. To a woman whose heart is devoted to her husband, the idea would not readily occur that *she* could be the object of another's love; and it is, perhaps, this unconsciousness which leads occasionally to misinterpretation among the vain and the profligate of the other sex, who misunderstand the confiding and innocent openness of manner, and attribute it to undue partiality to themselves.

Frank Linwood, however, did not think thus of Fanny; his object was not to understand or influence her feelings, but to regulate and control his own. He had been convinced that he would have a difficult part to play in seeing her again, and he found his anticipations perfectly correct. He thought her unjust, and it was hard to bear her censure without an attempt at justification; but he determined to say no more, lest *his treacherous heart* should betray itself.

But Fanny felt the next moment that her implied reproach must sound harsh and ungrateful, and hastened to retract it.

"I am sure of that," she replied, eagerly, "you would not value lightly family ties and domestic peace, and an honorable name; I know you could not have intended to balance them against any amount of gold or lands. There is some other objection, I conclude, which I do not see, to make you speak so doubtingly."

"Are you aware what sum such an object would probably cost you? and do you know what means your husband has at his disposal?" inquired Frank.

"I do not see why it should be so immense a sum as you seem to expect," replied she, little suspecting that the difficulty about the money was only put forward to enable Frank to conceal what he imagined the real objection, her husband's lack of inclination for the plan. "Consider the relative ages of my husband and his uncle — the small probability there is that the latter should survive the former to inherit the property; the possibility, even if he succeeds in

the suit, that his wishes may be thwarted by Cecil's leaving children, after all; and then the uncertainty of his success; all these things taken together, surely reduce his interest in the estate to a very reasonable compass."

"Have you had any communication with Cecil on the subject?" demanded Frank.

"No, I have had none at all: can you give me any clue to where he is? I have not been able to ascertain," replied she, in a trembling voice, and with a very sinking heart.

"I have known nothing of him for some days," replied Frank; "but he is often backward and forward between London and Richmond — perhaps he is there now."

Fanny sighed deeply, and remained silent.

"I think you had better ascertain his wishes," pursued Frank, gently, "before you build too much on your hopes of a compromise."

"It is impossible that he should think of it otherwise than I do," said she, decidedly. "But tell me, what power have I over the money which I inherit from my father?"

Frank Linwood was one of the trustees of this money under Mr. Ellis' will. He answered immediately: None at all — you can only receive the interest — it is settled on *your children*."

"Under all circumstances?" inquired Fanny, coloring deeply.

"No," said he, in a hesitating voice, "if Henry Mansfield wins his suit, your daughter will not inherit after you!"

"And shall I then have absolute possession of it?" inquired Fanny again.

"No, it is given over to other parties — distant connections of yours!"

"And yet I cannot have it now, to purchase a name and an inheritance for my poor child!" sighed Fanny. "How could it be disposed of to greater advantage?"

"Your daughter in securing a right to one estate, would do so likewise to the other — she must have or lose all! But we cannot spend it!"

"Poor child!" sighed the mother; "and she can then only inherit her grandfather's fortune, under circumstances which would render it of little importance, for her father could give her enough."

Frank assented by his silence to this remark.

"But the ten thousand pounds which were mine before my marriage, there is nothing to prevent my doing as I like with that!"

"Only your husband's will — unless that too is secured to you by settlement. It was not placed in our hands, but perhaps it forms a separate trust."

"No, I believe it does not; I think Cecil kept it in his own hands, and of course that can be forthcoming at any time."

Frank bit his lip; if Cecil had retained that money, what was there to assure them that it was not already spent? but he ventured now to say:

"You see, Fanny, how little use it is to converse on this topic, without your husband's knowledge, or an acquaintance with his wishes on the subject. It is absolutely necessary, or else we are groping our way completely in the dark."

"But tell me one thing more," said Fanny: "is there no way in which money could be raised on my income; I wish to know what it will be in my power to offer to my husband; you know I alone have a right of receiving the interest."

"Though you could not dispose of the capital, you could sell your life-interest, which might fetch twelve or fourteen thousand pounds. You could do this with Cecil's consent: but surely he ought not to allow you thus to strip yourself!"

"What would it matter whether it is called mine or his?" cried Fanny, "it is all the same in the end, and I would think the money well disposed of, if it went to such a purpose. But there is Rev. Hughes, I already know his knock — " she stopped abruptly, and seemed eagerly listening to the approaching footsteps.

But her wishes could not deceive her, the slow tread of Rev. Hughes, as he gently ascended the stairs, was not for a moment to be mistaken for the youthful and elastic step of Cecil, such as she had in imagination pictured to herself. Her eyes were attentively fixed on him as he entered, and she read in his face little to give her satisfaction. He appeared disappointed, perplexed, and uneasy. She hardly dared ask the question which she longed to hear answered, but with a great exertion she faltered out:

"You bring me no news, I suppose?"

"No *certain* news, my dear child," replied he, but still I have learned a little. Though I do not know where Cecil is, I have ascertained that he is not at his uncle's!"

"I never thought he was," observed Fanny.

Rev. Hughes and Frank Linwood exchanged a glance which, fortunately, she did not see.

"How did you learn that much?" inquired Frank.

"I was told that Henry Mansfield had, a morning or two before, called to inquire after his nephew, and expressed great surprise on hearing that he was absent; I likewise learned that Cecil left town in his traveling-carriage, as if prepared for a long journey, but that he did not say *where* he was going."

“How very strange!” murmured Fanny; “what can have taken him away so suddenly? and what can his uncle have wanted with him?”

Neither of her companions replied, and she, after reflecting a few minutes, exclaimed with sudden animation:

“Perhaps his uncle was seeking him to propose the same thing that I have in view; perhaps he repents of his interference, and would be glad to accede to a *compromise*.”

“Do not allow such hopes to spring up,” said Rev. Hughes, gravely, as he observed Fanny’s excited air and eager look of hope.

“But it must have been something peculiar which could induce him to seek for *Cecil* — such a man — and at such a time!”

“I do not think so,” persisted Rev. Hughes; “I believe your husband has been for some time on terms of *great intimacy* with his uncle!”

“I do not believe it!” exclaimed Fanny. “What! on terms of continued intimacy with a man who could thus wound his honor and disturb his peace? Impossible! I know he was once on good terms, but that must long have ceased.”

“So you *think*, Fanny,” said Rev. Hughes.

She interrupted him.

“I am certain of it; and had anyone else asserted the contrary, I would have said it was a base slander of my husband. Of you, I can only suppose that you have been *entirely misinformed*. Who told you so?”

She looked round at Frank, who was sitting with his eyes fixed on the carpet, and showing by his countenance, in spite of all his efforts.

“Is it you, Mr. Linwood, who have thus prejudiced Rev. Hughes against my husband, and propagated such reports of him? I thought you were my friend!”

“I trust you will never have reason to think otherwise, Fanny,” replied he, somewhat proudly. “Believe me, I have never attempted to say a word detrimental to your husband, either to Rev. Hughes or to anyone else. If you have made all the inquiries you wish of me, please allow me to take my leave.”

He rose, and stood a moment hesitating, doubtful whether she would extend her hand to him.

The only subject which seemed to excite in Fanny a shade of indignation or impatience, was the remotest hint that Cecil could be inclined to submit to a separation at all more willingly than she was. Perhaps, had there really been no shadow of suspicion in her own mind, she would have been less sensitive on this point; but a *lurking fear*, a sort of *foreboding dread* of something worse than what she had yet experienced — an idea that something was kept back, or concealed from her, had recently seized her imagination; and though she would not have owned this to herself, it perpetually haunted her with vague apprehensions, that *Cecil might in some way prove to blame in these unhappy transactions*.

The thought returned again and again, that he had once deceived her, and every time it recurred, she felt less able to combat the painful suspicions, to which such an idea gave birth. Frank Linwood and Rev. Hughes seemed both to conspire in charging her husband with favoring the proceedings of his uncle — a charge which implied a very terrible accusation. But it was her duty, her positive duty, not to repel such insinuations as reflected dishonor on her husband. As much as she *esteemed* Frank Linwood, she was more *angry* with him than he had ever seen her before during their long acquaintance; and he had the inexpressible pain of parting from her, aware that she was angry, and not daring to explain or enforce what he had said, lest he should only remove her indignation — by increasing her unhappiness.

They parted. Fanny’s cold salutation cut him to the heart, though he felt that he deserved no pity, since it ought not to have given rise to any such feelings.

When he was gone, Rev. Hughes took the seat which he had occupied, and quietly observed:

“I think, Fanny, you hardly exhibited toward Frank the degree of *courtesy* he might naturally expect, considering that he came here at your particular request.”

“Was I uncourteous?” said Fanny, blushing; “I did not *intend* it; but I own I was *rather* angry with him. I am sorry; but, dear Rev. Hughes, I cannot think of Frank Linwood just now. I am so much more occupied with one other consideration — what can have become of Cecil?”

To this question of course no answer could be given, and the afternoon and evening passed away in weary conjectures on this subject. It was in vain that Rev. Hughes attempted to engage her mind on any other topic, or that her little girl endeavored to divert her thoughts by her playful antics. Sad smiles and absent answers were the only replies which she could make to either her friend or her daughter, and the efforts of each gradually subsided into a thoughtful and quiet watchfulness; for even the child was sensible that there was something wrong, and looked at her mother with that sort of puzzled yet pitying glance with which children view sorrow that they cannot understand.

It was on the evening of this very day that Frank, as was before related, learned from Miss Annesley what had actually become of Cecil, and dispatched the news early the ensuing morning to Rev. Hughes. The note reached him while at breakfast and alone, for this morning Fanny had not left her own room. The announcement startled and distressed him.



That Cecil should have gone to Brookensha just at the time when his wife was seeking him in London, appeared so very unfortunate and unexpected an occurrence, that he could hardly form a guess as to how Fanny would bear it; and he knew not how to announce the fact to her, fearing, as he did, the effect which such a disappointment must produce on a mind so ardent and a frame so feeble as hers.

Excited and borne up by the hopes of a speedy meeting, it would be a trial indeed to discover that the step she had taken to expedite her grand object, was in fact the cause of a prolonged separation. Besides, in what light should he venture to represent this sudden journey of her husband's? Was his object really to *seek* — or to *avoid* his wife? had he really left the metropolis ignorant of her arrival? or had a guilty conscience forced him to flee on receiving news that Fanny was approaching.

Frank Linwood's note attempted no explanation of the *motives* which might have urged the measure, and Rev. Hughes conjectured that he was as ignorant on this subject as himself; nothing but time could throw any light upon it, as he naturally supposed; for he argued, that if Cecil was seeking Fanny, he would of course return to London immediately; and if otherwise, he would certainly not await her re-appearance at Brookensha. While pondering on these points, forgetful how time passed, he was roused by the sound of the church bells in the neighborhood, for it was Sunday morning; and at once he rose and prepared to attend the public worship, aware that Fanny, probably, would not appear for some hours, and unwilling to communicate through any other person, news which so intimately concerned her.

He had not proceeded many yards from the door when he was overtaken by Frank Linwood, who eagerly accosted him:

"You received my note, my dear sir — have you told Fanny — how did she bear it?"

"I have not seen Fanny this morning," replied the clergyman; "and as yet she knows nothing of your note, or its contents. But tell me, from whom did you obtain this information?"

Frank immediately explained particularly how he had heard this news, and then proceeded to give some further details relative to the reports connected with Cecil and his cousin Laura. He told Rev. Hughes that the intimacy had been matter of general remark, and equally general astonishment, so far as he could learn, among their acquaintances; and that more than one family, scandalized at appearances, had drawn back from associating with Miss Laura Mansfield as formerly. That, according to Miss Annesley's report, the sudden disappearance of Cecil from London was owing to some disagreement with his cousin Laura, which might lead to a total rupture, or prove only a temporary separation; but that at all events it was with no view of avoiding his wife that he had fled; but that perhaps a meeting now might have a very beneficial effect in arousing his regard for her, and restoring her influence to what it ought to be.

There was a painful spasm in Frank's heart as he suggested this, but he concealed what he felt, and his true love for Fanny conquered, as it had often done before, his selfish inclinations.

But Rev. Hughes immediately replied, that unless Cecil returned to London, he saw no chance of a meeting at present; since fatigue, excitement, and distress had been too much for Fanny, and he greatly feared, in her present state, the shock of this news would quite overwhelm her slight remaining strength.

Frank believed sincerely that it was much better that Cecil should not return to London at present. If separation from his cousin could only be secured by separation from his wife — let it be so. It was much better that he and Fanny should remain asunder, than that he and Laura should again meet. Once within the *charmed circle of her attractions*, all hope of his wife's retaining any hold on him was, in Frank's opinion, entirely over; and her situation would become worse than ever.

"As painful as it is to hear her confidence in her husband," said Frank, "I think even this *delusion*, in her present weak state, must be better than that bitterest of all feelings — the consciousness of a rival's triumph. I would not have her endure such misery to know that Cecil loved another instead of herself, and yet to love — love hopelessly and helplessly — not if I could save her from it by laying down my life."

Surprised at the warmth with which Mr. Linwood spoke, his companion turned and looked at him with astonishment; but they were just at the entrance of the church, and he had no time to make any answer, much to the satisfaction of Frank Linwood, who had betrayed more emotion than he had wished to do, and was exceedingly glad to drop the subject.

On his return from church, Rev. Hughes found Fanny in the drawing-room with her little girl by her side; she looked pale and languid, but almost her first words to her friend were an inquiry whether he had received any news since last night.

The explanation which he dreaded was now inevitable; Rev. Hughes owned that he had.

"What is it?" exclaimed the anxious wife, eagerly fixing her eyes on him.

"I learned this morning," replied Rev. Hughes, "that Cecil is no longer in London — that he is — in fact, that last Thursday he left town for Brookensha —"

In speechless amazement Fanny remained some moments gazing on Rev. Hughes; it seemed as if she either did not understand or could not believe his assertion; but at length she slowly repeated:

“Left town for Brookensha. — Ah! I knew he would seek me; dearest Cecil, how *unjust* I have been in my thoughts to you! I have *blamed*, even while you were going so far to meet me, and been tempted to think myself neglected. I am ashamed to remember it! But, Rev. Hughes,” added she, looking up, “how unfortunate that we should have passed on the road — how lonely he will feel — how disappointed he will be on finding no one there. It is very unlucky that I did not send him word earlier, or that I was so impatient to come to London — how I wish I had waited another week!”

Rev. Hughes felt perfectly astonished to witness the turn which her feelings took on hearing of her husband’s proceedings. She did not seem disappointed, as he had feared, but actually pleased, or at least quite relieved, by the news. And so she was. The idea that her husband had voluntarily returned to seek her, as her imagination immediately pictured that he had done; the thought that the present delay, instead of owing its rightful origin in his *indifference and infidelity* — was in reality the result of his *affection*; and that it could not be but that they should now speedily meet — was a compensation for all she had recently suffered so much beyond her hopes, that it seemed an occasion only for joy.

She then began to inquire eagerly how he had learned this, and on finding that it was Frank Linwood to whom she was indebted, she observed that it was very kind — just like himself. She gave nothing but trouble to all the Linwoods.

Her thoughts flew back as she spoke to the events of the past summer, and to her beloved home at Brookensha, and then came a sudden revulsion of feeling, and she wept as she pictured to herself Cecil walking through the lonely halls and deserted gardens, seeking her and his child in vain. But they were silent tears, and as she appeared desirous of concealing them, Rev. Hughes did not make any remark, or appear to notice them. At length looking up, she said,

“I feel so grateful to be thus relieved from suspense, for I had really been indulging in very foolish fears on his account. What do you think I had better do now? Surely, he will return to London; at least, when he learns where I am, he will write!”

“Undoubtedly,” replied Rev. Hughes; “and you will write to him, I suppose?”

“Oh, yes, of course; but I dare not leave London until some plan for our meeting has been *arranged*, lest the same thing occur again.”

“Perfectly reasonable; your best plan is to stay here until you receive a letter to direct your movements, or announce those of Cecil. I think he will probably wish you to return home.”

Fanny’s eyes sparkled.

“After all, there may have been some *agreement* between him and his uncle!” she exclaimed. “The visits which have passed between them may have all been to settle this point — and we may yet be allowed to enjoy our dear home together.” She paused, and appeared wrapped in a reverie of happy thoughts.

Rev. Hughes still contemplated her with astonishment, for his imagination had too little vigor, while his knowledge of past occurrences was too accurate for his hopes to rise with anything like the elasticity of hers. Indeed, he could not at all enter into her feelings on this occasion, and he saw with concern how much she built upon so *uncertain a foundation* as her husband’s hasty journey to Brookensha-hall.

Suspicious as he was of Cecil’s motives, Rev. Hughes feared a still more painful reaction, when Fanny would become fully aware of his conduct during the last few months; and yet he checked himself in the thought, for perhaps Cecil had really repented of the past, and might be returning in heart to the wife he had too long neglected. His doubts, however, kept him grave, though Fanny hardly noticed the circumstance. She remained wrapped in *pleasing anticipations*, and only turning from them to indulge in treasured reminiscences; she lay on the sofa quiet and silent, with a feeling of satisfaction in her heart too deep for words to express, and too sacred to be exposed even to the eyes of a friend.

Relief from painful suspense certainly in her case proved the most efficacious remedy, for she rose next morning with a look more composed and happy than Rev. Hughes had witnessed for weeks. It was not merely the renewed confidence in her husband which gave her strength — it was her more lively faith in the goodness of God. Her conscience reproached her for her former *doubts* and distresses, as if these had been *criminal*; and now that she believed them to be totally unfounded and unjust, she firmly resolved in future to be more *humble* and *patient* under affliction, come when it might, and more readily to admit, or at least *trust in the goodness and the mercy of the Hand from which the affliction came*.

The approach of the post hour could not be encountered without excitement; and the nervous expectation, when the first announcement of the postman’s vicinity met her ear, was quite painful; she watched his progress up the other side of the street, and counted the steps as he returned, with the most intense eagerness. He came at last — although he seemed so unusually slow, and though there appeared to be a never-ending discourse carried on about some letter at the next house between him and the maid-servant. Fanny was at the window; he approached, placed one foot on the steps, and then turned back to give some further explanation to the maid-servant who still stood at the door. Then he returned, sorted a bundle of letters he held in his hand, ran up the steps, and knocked.

There seemed to be many letters for this house, and the lodgers on the ground floor first received theirs; but at last her servant entered with hers — at last it seemed, for in her state of excited feeling, ten seconds appeared almost ten minutes.

There were several, but she distinguished only one — her husband's writing; it was once more before her — that beloved hand — it was long since she had seen it. Throwing herself into a chair, she was soon absorbed in the perusal, and for a few minutes forgot everything else in the world.

In style, the letter was everything which she could desire — breathing *affection* and *confidence* throughout. Its subject was of course not quite so satisfactory, for it was to announce his determination of going abroad for the present. He desired her to return to Brookensha, to live there as if nothing had occurred of a peculiar nature. He wished her to enjoy every comfort, every luxury that she had ever done; he gave her unlimited credit on his bankers, feeling confident that he might safely trust her.

But of his own plans he said little: he did not mention where he was going, nor for how long; he said nothing about a meeting at any future time, but he expressed his perfect acquiescence in her proposal for effecting a compromise, having learned it, as he explained, from Mr. Dennis; and he informed her that he had written to his uncle on this subject, by the same post as this letter to herself.

It was a letter which caused about equal pain and pleasure; she wept over it in silence, shedding tears of joy at his affectionate expressions, and tears of sorrow and disappointment at the long separation which it threatened. It was well for her that she had, by reflection and prayer, that morning been strengthened to bear and to hope even against hope; for otherwise her fortitude would have failed her now, at this most unlooked-for termination of all her wishes. It was very bitter, but she struggled in silence, and the *rebellious murmurs* of her heart were crushed in their first birth. She told herself it was best, wisest, most proper, that they should separate for the present. She felt it must be so; but yet the hopes so recently sprang up, could not be put away without a sigh, and the long, blank future could not be contemplated without a shudder. Yes, it was very bitter.

Rev. Hughes saw that she was deeply affected by what she read, and he was regarding her with intense interest, when she looked up, and caught his anxious expression of countenance. She put the letter into his hands. "Read that," she said, "and teach me to *bear* it."

Lessons of *submission* and *fortitude* flowed from the lips of the good old man, and Fanny's tears were assuaged as she listened, and a peaceful hope again began to steal into her heart.

"Yes," she observed, "it is true — our meeting, when we meet again, will be only the more delightful after this separation. If this *cloud* should pass away, how happily shall we once more sit down together at our dear home; and if not, may God's will be done. Life does not last here forever, and some time or other it will be all over. A few years, and we shall all enjoy peace — I humbly trust, that peace which will fear no interruption, no disturbance."

There was a letter at the same time from Olivia Linwood, which mentioned her interview with Cecil, and the fact of his having attended the morning service at the parish church. Then it went off into a long digression on the sermon which Mr. Williams had delivered on the occasion, the sweetness of his voice, his eloquence and piety. Fanny gave this letter also over to Rev. Hughes, rightly judging that the praise bestowed upon his nephew would be most acceptable to him.

In the course of the afternoon, while Rev. Hughes was gone out, Fanny, after once more reading over her husband's letter, and shedding *tears of tenderness* over the memory of "days that were no more," had just dropped into a peaceful slumber, when a thundering knock at the door aroused her with a startle. Before her nerves recovered from the concussion, or her memory returned sufficiently to recollect herself and her circumstances, the door of the room was thrown open, and *Mr. Mansfield* was announced.

"With an exclamation of astonishment, Fanny started from the sofa, and was rushing forward to throw herself, as she supposed, into her husband's arms, when the first glance at the intruder stopped her at once. It was not *Cecil* who entered. It was a tall stranger with grizzled hair, and rather an unpresentable appearance, who approached her.

Fanny stood aghast; she had heard her husband's name announced, and at that moment she could not comprehend who the visitor was, for her brain was in that state of perplexity which is often the consequence of being suddenly roused from sleep.

She consequently remained standing, with her eyes fixed on him in silence, waiting for some explanation. The gentleman approached.

"Have I the honor of addressing the daughter of the late Mr. Ellis, of Jedburgh?" inquired he in a tone of singular mildness, which contrasted rather disagreeably with his sinister expression of eye.

"You have," replied Fanny, recovering her composure, when the exertion of speaking became necessary; "but *Ellis* is not my present name. I am Fanny Mansfield, of Brookensha hall."

"I am aware that this is the name by which you are *now* known," replied the stranger, with a look and tone both peculiar and offensive to Fanny, who immediately concluded that this was some *lawyer*, who was aware of the impending suit — perhaps an agent of her husband's uncle — come to propose terms of compromise. The idea flashed on her mind, and gave her resolution to answer.

"That is my name — may I in return inquire yours, and also your object in seeking this interview?"

“Do not let me keep you standing, madam,” replied the gentleman advancing; “we may have much to say, and I have no wish to encroach upon your strength.” He handed her a chair as he spoke, and added, “Sit down;” at the same moment seating himself.

Fanny retreated to the sofa. It was further removed from her visitor, whose air she did not like, and, therefore, more agreeable to herself.

“Will you be so kind as to answer my question?” said she, breaking the silence which had followed upon their taking their seats; “to what am I indebted for the honor of this visit?”

A new idea flashed across her mind, as she spoke — if she had heard correctly — if she remembered rightly, the stranger had been announced by the same name as her own. Was it possible — could this be Mr. *Henry* Mansfield himself? It seemed so unlikely that he would thus unnecessarily thrust himself upon her, that she was ready to abandon the notion as a delusion. He proceeded:

“The anxiety which I felt, madam, to save you from the pain of a delusion which must immediately be destroyed; my desire to come at once to a clear and explicit statement of what you may expect from me; and my purpose, I may say my determination — my inflexible determination not to give up — even to the pity which I must feel for you — these conspired to bring me here at this time!”

“Please be explicit,” said Fanny, with an agitation she could not conceal. “Your *name*, sir? I did not rightly catch it when announced.

“I am Mr. Henry Mansfield, of Berkeley-street.”

She turned pale, and the blood seemed all to rush toward her heart.

“My husband’s *uncle*?” said she in a faint voice.

“I am uncle to Mr. Cecil Mansfield, of Brookensha Park, in the county of Yorkshire,” replied her visitor with grave emphasis.

“He is my husband,” said Fanny firmly, for her spirit was roused at the implied insult conveyed by his answer, and also by the look that he assumed, for he pressed his lips very firmly together, as if to prevent the escape of some retort, which he had an immense difficulty in restraining.

“I certainly did not expect to see you here Mr. Mansfield, after what has passed; and permit me to observe that I presume it to be some very powerful reason which has occasioned this interview. Will you favor me with an explanation?”

“Certainly. I received a letter this morning from my nephew, Cecil, stating his intention of immediately leaving England for a considerable time. In consequence of his absence, which has thus unexpectedly prevented my communicating with him, I was desirous of an interview with *you*, having learned your residence from him, and being also referred to you by himself.” He made a moment’s pause, and Fanny had time to imagine several different *motives* for this meeting, before he resumed:

“Cecil is perfectly aware of my plans and my sentiments. You, may perhaps be ignorant of the latter, though the former are, of course, well known to you. But as you are in some degree concerned in the result, I think it is right that you should be made aware of the *motive of my actions*.”

Fanny’s mind was agitated by a variety of feelings at this moment. She saw before her the man who had so deeply wounded her, who had ruined her peace, threatened her honor, and wished to wrest from her all she held dearest on earth. Indignation and dislike were striving in her mind, with other and still more powerful motives. She remembered her plan for a compromise, and her hopes of softening her enemy. She looked at his countenance, his handsome, and yet drab features; his cold, stern eye, and the determination which was marked by the lines of his mouth; and her hopes gave way as she gazed. But her other plan might yet be brought to bear, and she decided she would do nothing which might *irritate* him, or excite his opposition to the *compromise* she still ventured to anticipate. Though she could read no *love of mercy* in his face, she imagined the *love of money* was strongly depicted there; and she turned over in her own mind the arguments which she should use on the occasion, during another short pause which ensued.

“Will you be *explicit*, sir,” said she looking up at length, “that there may be no mistake as to the point to which you allude.”

“Certainly, madam. I would ask then, what you suppose to be the motive for the proceedings which you are aware I have taken in the Prerogative Court at York?”

Fanny faltered — had she answered to her own feelings, she would at once have said, “the love of money,” but she did not venture to reply in this manner; and, after a moment’s consideration, she answered:

“You must be perfectly aware, Mr. Mansfield, how extremely painful the discussion of this subject necessarily is to me; could it not be better transacted through a third person?”

“I am sorry to give you pain — a thing which, I know, women would always shrink from, let the cost of avoiding it be what it may; but, in this instance, I must request to be heard. Will you answer me?”

“You cannot be surprised,” replied Fanny, with assumed composure, “that I would be more anxious to discover a motive which would induce you to discontinue the painful and disgraceful proceedings to which you allude. Allow me to propose a *compromise*. Cecil and I agree in desiring it; and I am empowered to offer you a large sum of money, if you will allow the matter to drop. Is there any price which you will name?” — she stopped, agitated, and out of breath, and awaited his answer in an agony of suspense.

With a well-acted gesture of surprise and indignation, he drew back, and exclaimed:

“Is it possible that you can unblushingly propose such a thing to me? Had you at all appreciated the motives of my actions, you would be aware that no sum would serve to buy me off.”

“I imagined your motives to be a desire of eventually possessing my husband’s property,” replied Fanny, quickly; “and as we can offer you more than your life-interest in it would be worth, I think the proposal a very fair one.”

“You greatly misunderstand me; my interference is for my *nephew’s* sake, to save him from continuing a culpable and dishonorable *liaison*, for I will not condescend to call it a *marriage*.”

“Whatever you may be pleased to call it,” replied Fanny, with crimson cheeks, “you must be aware that the law calls it a marriage — and nothing but your interference would rob it of that title. If you leave us alone, we shall continue husband and wife until death.

“I do not wonder to hear you make these assertions — your previous conduct had prepared me for it — but they have no influence with me. Whatever you may attribute to me, my sole motive is a *strict love of honor and morality*, and, consequently, a desire to save my nephew, for whom I feel a strong affection, from a course of conduct which disgraces himself, and threatens a *stain* upon a family whose genealogy has hitherto been *untainted*. His estate no otherwise occupies my mind, or enters into my plans, than as, of course, I wish to see it transmitted to his *legitimate heirs*, not falling a prey to those who have no right to bear his name.

“Permit me to remind you, sir, that, had I happily died two months ago, as, through the announcement of your purpose, I so nearly did — that no effort on your part, could have invalidated my daughter’s claim to her father’s name and property; and I must add, that it appears to me little consonant with the love of honor or morality which you profess, to come here, and thus wantonly *insult* and *distress* an unprotected woman like myself!”

Henry Mansfield felt astonished at the spirit and firmness with which she spoke, and he did not know exactly what to answer.

Fanny continued: “Even your right to interfere is doubtful: it is more than possible that the court may decide against you on that ground, and there is then no other human being who can cause us annoyance. Reflect, then, a moment before you refuse the advantageous offers which I am empowered by my husband to make you. You say he knows your motives, yet he agrees with me, and I believe has himself written to you on the subject. Is this consistent with your assumption?”

“If you think,” replied Mr. Mansfield, who found it most convenient to take up another line of argument, “to make any impression on me by persisting in calling my nephew your husband, you are very much mistaken; and whatever fallacious hopes you may entertain, the law will very shortly prove which of us is right; and I repeat, again, what I before said, you cannot name a price which would purchase my silence at the expense of *my sense of morality*.”

“May I ask, then,” replied Fanny, indignantly, “why were these feelings perfectly quiescent during the last two years? why you never uttered a remonstrance during all this period, but continued to court my husband’s acquaintance without a single reflection on the point which now appears to shock your sense of morality? I confess I cannot understand such conduct.”

“I do not consider myself bound in any way to afford you explanations of this nature. It is enough for you to know my *present intentions*.”

“But, Mr. Mansfield,” exclaimed Fanny, “are you sure that you have duly considered all the consequences which will result from your proceedings? I do not urge my own feelings or my own wishes, but Cecil, your nephew, whom you say you love — are you aware of the *misery* which you will cause him? He loves me — he loves his child — he values his honor; but your measures will strip of him of all which he holds most dear, and cannot fail to make him miserable — think of the disgrace, the degradation attending such a rupture: surely you would not inflict *that* on your own nearest relative!”

“I do indeed love my nephew, but I love his honor and that of my family beyond everything else,” replied her unrelenting enemy. “Were I certain it would make him wretched for life, it would not turn me from my purpose — but this is not the case. My nephew admits the *justice* of my actions, and the *propriety* of my intentions; he is convinced of his past errors, and ready to renounce them forever. Is it not a proof of this that he flies from you, and to avoid a meeting hastens out of England?”

“No,” replied Fanny, though her cheeks were deadly pale. “This cannot be — I had a letter from him this morning, every line of which breathes a different tale. It is true that he is leaving England, but it is you, not I, who drive him from his country. He considers me as his wife, and as such wishes me to live at Brookensha Hall.”

“Whatever he may have written to you today,” replied Mr. Henry Mansfield, “I have reason to believe — nay, I have positive and incontestable proof — that he does not consider himself bound to you, or look upon you as his wife. We *perfectly agree* in our opinion on that point.”

“Impossible!” cried Fanny, indignantly: “your *slanders* cannot alter my opinion of my husband, whatever they may do as respects yourself.”

“I did not expect you to believe me, and so far as your opinion is concerned, I am perfectly indifferent about it. Of the facts I am sure — my nephew is so thoroughly convinced of his freedom from you — so perfectly aware that he has formed with you no lasting tie, that I know he has engaged his faith to another, and only waits the judgment of the Court to take a lawful wife.”

It was impossible to hear this unmoved, although Fanny did not believe it. Her bosom heaved, and her color varied; but at length, in a voice which was surprisingly steady, considering her emotion, she said, as she fixed her eyes on her persecutor:

“And why does he wait for that, if, as you assert, he is free? why not bestow his hand, as you declare he has already given his affection?” She paused, but receiving no answer, she added: “Because, as you know, he would subject himself to a prosecution for *bigamy*; and does not that prove that I am his wife? Mr. Mansfield, *I command you to leave me!* After the *slanders* you have uttered against my husband’s character, your presence is offensive;” she rose, and rang the bell as she spoke: “I will no longer submit to the *insult* of it. Though a woman, and alone, you shall find I am not unprotected, for I can protect myself. Show this gentleman downstairs!” said she, as a servant opened the door.

But her presence was not in answer to her summons; it was to usher in *Frank Linwood*, that the door had opened; and he entered immediately, but stopped short, with an air of astonishment, when he perceived *who* was before him. There stood Fanny, with looks of indignation and contempt in her sweet countenance, such as Frank had hardly supposed it could have expressed; and there stood before her the wily and hard-hearted man who had ruined her happiness, and seemed now *sneering* at the warmth with which she defied him.

“Madam,” he replied, without seeing that another spectator stood behind him, “I do not wonder at your anger, because you are the *losing party*; and as I know your threats to be perfectly harmless, I forgive them. Time will open your eyes to the truth, and will not only show you how vain is your boast that you are my nephew’s wife, but will convince you that he has both the will and power to choose another. I am sorry for you — sorry for the *pride that must have a fall*; and I wish you farewell with no sentiment of ill-will — no feeling of anger — ”

“If I do not mistake,” interrupted Frank, cutting short his speech, and making Mr. Mansfield startle by his sudden interposition, “you, Sir, have already been requested to leave the room. Was it not so, Mrs. Mansfield?” advancing to Fanny as he spoke.

The determined air of the young lawyer seemed to have some effect on the intruder, and stopped him in his *cruel triumph*. He hastily retreated, and when the door was closed, Fanny sank on the sofa, and concealing her face in the cushion, remained perfectly silent, but *visibly trembling* from head to foot, leaving Frank Linwood in about as awkward a situation as possible. He remained standing, and gazing at her, doubtful whether he should offer her assistance, stay where he was, or leave the room. He did not like to leave her, while she appeared so unfit to be left alone; and after a few moments’ hesitation, he approached nearer, and in a tone of the *sincerest sympathy*, inquired if there was any way in which he could be of service to her.

He was too much occupied by her sorrows to think of himself, or to attempt an explanation of his presence; but the fact was, that Fanny, in consequence of Cecil’s letter, had expressed a wish to see and consult Frank as to the means of opening negotiations with the uncle, and this wish had been repeated to him, in the form of a message, by Rev. Hughes, who had that morning been calling at his chambers. But, though coming, in compliance with her wish, he had not been desirous of a face-to-face meeting, and had calculated on finding the old clergyman there before him; instead of which, he now found himself alone with one whom he had repeatedly resolved to avoid, and who was as repeatedly, by circumstances which he could not control, thrown, as it were, on his protection.

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 9

Notwithstanding the awkwardness of his situation, Frank did not regret his intrusion, for he surmised that it had probably served to cut short an interview which he felt certain had been anything but friendly; yet he wished Fanny would speak, or would take some notice of his presence, and it was because she did not raise her head, that he ventured to address her himself.

She startled when he spoke, and lifted her face from the cushion, looking at Frank with an expression of *misery* so intense, with a cheek so pale, an eye so heavy, and such an air of total despondency — as he could not calmly witness. She did not answer, though her lips moved; but she gazed at him with a kind of wandering and half-unconscious glance, painful beyond expression to behold.

“Dear Fanny,” said he, approaching close to her, and taking her hand, “I fear something very unpleasant has occurred. Has that — that *man* who has just now left you — has he brought you bad news — has he said anything painful to your feelings?”

“The worst possible!” replied Fanny, in a low, agitated whisper. “He could not have given me more distressing tidings. He has assured me that he is implacable, cruel; and he has said — oh! Frank — he has said such things as I must not believe — and cannot disprove.” She shuddered, and paused.

“Wretch!” murmured Frank; “what right had he to intrude? Villain! — to insult the *misery* which he has occasioned!”

“Oh, Frank!” exclaimed Fanny, laying both her hands on his arm, and looking up in his face with those earnest, tender eyes, which had long ago established themselves as the ruling orbs of his heart’s system, “tell me that he was deceiving me — give me the power of convicting him of misrepresentation — or give me only proof which shall satisfy my own heart, and I will bless you forever!”

“I would do anything — you know I would do anything — to give you comfort or peace,” replied he, almost shrinking from the touch of that hand which was only too dear to him; “but I know nothing which passed between you and your persecutor; tell me to what you allude, and I will, if possible, do as you desire.”

“That man had the boldness to assert,” replied Fanny, her indignation at the recollection giving her strength to speak, “that Cecil — that my husband — not only considers himself free from all ties with regard to myself, but that he is actually affianced to another!” She paused, and looked at Frank, whose changeful color and troubled expression were interpreted by her in favor of her own wishes. He was silent, from feeling entirely unable to express what he thought — in what way could he answer, unless to declare his conviction of her husband’s infidelity, and of the correctness of his uncle’s assertion? He could not do that, unless she got the knowledge from him by direct questions; he waited, therefore, until she continued:

“To state my conviction that this is untrue, is, of course, needless. Heaven forgive me for my lack of love and patience — but I told him, I believe, to his face, that it was a *calumny*. I would not judge anyone harshly, for I, of all people, have need of lenient judgment; but if he did really believe it, could he be justified in thus stating it to me — was it not harsh and unfeeling to do so?”

“But harshness and lack of feeling from *him*, you must be prepared for,” replied Frank, glad to take up another branch of the subject. “His whole conduct toward you has been marked by nothing else. It was base and wanton cruelty!”

“I have not injured him, in thought, or wish, or deed — it cannot, therefore, be ill-will to me personally that actuated him,” said Fanny; “he must have some other motive, and if it is not love of gain, what can it be?” She paused a few moments, and then continued, “but you, who know Cecil, who have seen him both with me, and when we were separated — you can perhaps put me in the way of proving that he was mistaken, misinformed, or incorrect, can you not?”

“I do not think I can,” replied he, slowly, and without raising his eyes.

“Why not? do you not know how he spent his time in London — can you give me no particulars?”

“Very few.”

“And those, what are they? Where did he go? Whose house did he frequent?”

“His uncle’s, I believe; and you know I do not visit there.”

“Well,” replied Fanny, warmly, “the fact proves his innocence. And how could his uncle venture to make a statement which his own daily observations might have enabled him to correct? It is inexcusable!”

Frank was silent.

“I am perfectly convinced of the falsehood of the statement,” continued she, “and so must Mr. Henry Mansfield himself be, even while making it. I need concern myself no further about it.”

There are moments when a sudden conviction to which we have hitherto been inaccessible, rushes in with an overwhelming force and takes entire possession of the mind. So it was with Fanny at this moment. Nothing had hitherto sufficed to destroy her *faith* or weaken her *love* toward her husband; his silence, absence, neglect had failed to convince her of his infidelity; and as she pronounced the last words, her opinion seemed as unchanged as ever; yet as she raised her eyes to her companion, and met his grave, or rather sad look, it seemed as though by a mental electric shock, she became



partaker of the same feelings as were passing in his mind. The recollection of the *beautiful Laura*, whom she had once seen so gaily conversing with Cecil, the remembrance of Mrs. Compton's suggestions and cautions, the coldness and uncertainty of Cecil's letters previous to her illness, and a hundred other *minute proofs* rushed into her mind as she caught the eyes of Frank fixed on her with a look of sorrowful and pitying wonder: the blood mounted to her face, and then suddenly receding, she closed her eyes, and fell back on the sofa in a dead faint!

Frank started up, and tried to ring the bell, but like many an article in a lodging-house, the gay bell-pull he seized was for ornament, not use; and while his agitation prevented his discovering the error, he was compelled to hurry back and catch Fanny in his arms, to save her from falling on the floor. He laid her on the sofa in a recumbent posture; but his arm was still under her head, as he could not easily withdraw it. Poor Frank, there he was alone kneeling by the side of the inanimate figure of her, who, every pulse in his frame told him, was dearer to him than any other mortal. His lips were within three inches of her pale cheek, his breath fanned the ringlets on her forehead, and she was totally insensible. Might he not unknown to her once press those idolized lips; she would not blame, for she would not feel the *theft*. The temptation was strong, but honor and principle were stronger; he forbore, and gently withdrew his arm, seized a bottle of lavender-water which was on the table, and with trembling fingers applied the spirit to her temples, gently pushing back the long curls from her cheeks, and feeling as he did so that he would have joyfully given up a week's fees to have purchased one of those silken ringlets.

Wondering that the bell remained unanswered, he again pulled the rope, then perceiving the mistake, he tried the other pull with more success — a footman appeared.

"Send Mrs. Mansfield's maid here immediately; your mistress is ill!"

The attendants soon flocked around; but Mrs. Cookson, a sensible woman, and one who usually noticed without gossip what was passing around her, speedily dismissed them all, except the old nurse, declaring that they and Mr. Linwood were quite able to manage together.

"Open the window, Mr. Linwood, please, and then just let her alone, we will not wear her out by trying to bring her to her senses and her recollection. Poor thing! the recollection of what's awaiting her in this wicked world, will come soon enough. It is a wicked world indeed, Mr. Linwood, though I never thought so until I saw how ill it used my poor dear mistress. It's shocking, isn't it, sir!"

"Yes," answered Frank, hardly knowing what he said.

"I wonder what that old liar has been saying to her?" continued she; "I was so angry with Harry for letting him in — a *nasty old viper* — he should have shut the door in his face! I would have, I know; I would never open it to him — a nasty, fawning, aggravating *snake* in the grass! How pale she looks; I know all about their goings on — rub her feet, Mr. Linwood — look, like this — now the nurse will chafe her hands — because, you see, I correspond with my master's attendant, and he tells me everything. But when he told me my master had forgotten and forsaken my lady, and was going, as soon as he could, to marry *his cousin*, that they might share everything between them. So, when I heard they were going abroad, I made up my mind that it would be waste of time to wait until they come home again, and then find Mr. Kingston all in another mind. Don't you think so, sir?"

Frank had vainly tried to stop Mrs. Cookson's tongue, who was by no means sparing of her sentiments on the rare occasions when she expressed them. He thought, and with justice, that Fanny's consciousness had returned, and that she was not likely to be any better for the audible remarks of her waiting-woman.

In the midst of this scene, Rev. Hughes appeared, and Frank immediately led him to the farther end of the drawing-room, and informed him in a low tone of all the circumstances with which he himself was acquainted. Then seeing that Fanny was reviving, and having obtained a promise from the clergyman that he would send him word speedily how things went on, he hastily escaped from the room.

It is not my intention to follow him through all the agitated consciousness of recollections, regrets, and interpretations with which he solaced his solitary afternoon. I need not note how many hours he sat over one brief legal case, trying to take in its meaning, while in spite of himself, the characters before him seemed to take the form of Fanny's features, or totally disappearing, left his memory's eye and ear busy with the events of those few hours.

I must return to *Fanny*. He had been perfectly right in his conjectures, as to the return of her consciousness, before she had the power of demonstrating it. She heard and understood Mrs. Cookson's *harangue*, she felt as if every word were burnt into her brain, and she would have given worlds to have arrested her tongue, or escaped the *torture* of hearing such remarks. Left alone, her mind was busy in true solitude; for though Rev. Hughes was sitting in the room after her attendants were dismissed, the good old man was apparently profoundly occupied by his book, and each felt instinctively that at the present moment discussion even between them must be avoided. Fanny thought again and again on what had just occurred — the sudden burst of *new light on her husband's character*, and the change in her own views which this knowledge must occasion.

So dreadful was the idea of *Cecil's supposed infidelity*, that she felt at first inclined to shut her eyes on the suggestion, and refuse to admit it for a moment. But reflection and reason taught her otherwise. To consider what must inevitably



befall her, view it in every light, and call to mind all the requisitions of duty under such circumstances, was what she knew to be right, and therefore what must in the end be wisest and best.

Her interview with Henry Mansfield had all but annihilated hope. It was true that there was the possibility of defeating him, if his right of interference could be questioned; but the hope seemed too fragile for her to cling to with comfort; no, he was a foe as *powerful* as he was *relentless*.

But, alas! she had a worse enemy than the uncle. He took from her much, but the *cousin* had robbed her of far more. If her conjectures were right — and everything seemed to confirm them — *Laura* had made assurance doubly sure, by enlisting Cecil's affections on her own side, in opposition to the interests of his unfortunate wife. Perhaps had this not been so, had not the *daughter's* passions urged on the *father's* measures, means might have been found to avoid the dreaded catastrophe. But if Cecil's wishes pointed the same way, what could be hoped — or what remained for his wife, but to cease the struggle, and submit. Accustomed to acquiesce in all his wishes, and implicitly yield her will to his, this was her first impulse, it seemed her first duty. But then came to her heart the remembrance of her child — of her interests, so dear to the mother — and this quickly gave a new direction to every feeling of her soul.

She, the mother, was bound to protect her daughter; but from *whom* was she called on to defend her? from *her own father*? yes, in forsaking and forgetting his wife — he was forsaking and forgetting also his innocent child, and what could excuse such conduct? Feelings of indignation which no ill-usage to herself alone could have occasioned, swelled in Fanny's heart at the recollection; she hardly dared give a name to her sense of Cecil's conduct: could he, her beloved Cecil, he, who had once been so tender, so kind, so devoted, could he have entirely forgotten all former affection? Had the passionate earnestness with which he had wooed her, the tenderness with which he had treated her, the rejoicing over her daughter's birth, and the affectionate caresses lavished on that child, had all these been forgotten? were they obliterated from his memory; passing like the shadow on the mountain side, which looks beautiful awhile, and then silently flits away for ever? Had she deserved this at his hands?

If, as conscience whispered, she had deserved it herself, it was not from his hands that the punishment would come. Oh! cruel, cruel Cecil! he who had involved her in the guilt, who had used every argument and artifice to overcome her scruples, was he to be the first to discover that those scruples were well-founded? Could she have imagined this termination to his passion?

Yet again replied the faithful voice of conscience, why should it surprise her? he had once before deceived her, and she had yielded only too willingly to the deception; now she must not murmur, if she were the victim, not the gainer, by his artifice.

Memory ran over again all that eventful week, which had sealed her fate in connection with him; and she viewed it now in a new light. She saw clearly that to which she had hitherto invariably closed her eyes— she saw that in their marriage, Cecil had made principle yield to passion; and what should hinder a repetition of such conduct? For weary hours she lay revolving in her mind her husband's character. Uncontrollable events had suddenly torn away the veil in which her own affection had hitherto shrouded it; she could no longer conceal from herself, though she did not as yet put the idea, or rather the feeling, into words, that his conduct had been selfish and unjustifiable.

It was agony to her to think thus; it was agony to see, without disguise, all the defects which her tenderness had hitherto so sacredly hidden. She would have given every worldly hope for the privilege of thinking well of him; she would have endured any amount of bodily privation, rather than give up the happiness of loving him; she would have sacrificed every possession with less regret than this!

But it must be endured; it was come upon her, and she must not shrink from the burden; no, she must learn to bear it humbly, meekly, trustfully. Light might arise out of the darkness hereafter; and if peace in this world was never more to be her lot, there was another to which she might look forward, where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest. Again she perused her husband's last letter, and every sentence seemed now to testify to his altered feelings and wishes. The expressions of affection appeared constrained, the hopes of meeting cold, and the whole tone conveyed so different a feeling to her mind, now that her own ideas were so altered, that she could hardly believe it to be the same writing with which she had at first been so well satisfied.

"Ah, Cecil, Cecil!" murmured she, "you too desire to cast off the bonds which once you so fervently courted—be it so: never will I reproach your inconstancy, nor sue for your pity. Whilst your wife, you shall have no cause to complain of my conduct; and if breaking this cherished tie does not quite break my heart, I must love you to the end of my life. You have been my first, my only love, and my affection can never cease — I must forgive and love you still."

Then suddenly recollecting herself, she shuddered, and internally ejaculated: "Heaven forgive me! but even that consolation is denied me. I must not even love him, for he will be the husband of another. How shall I bear it?—would that we had never met. I could resign him—I could leave him, if it were only death that parted us. Oh, how sweet to have died his wife—to have known that he would close my eyes, and mourn my fate. But oh, how different is my lot."

Her ideas grew vague and uncertain, and she gradually fell into a deep sleep—the sleep of mental aberration, which for the time obliterates all care and effaces every recollection.

## [Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 10

Agreeably to her husband's wishes expressed in the letter which she had received in London, Fanny, as soon as her health permitted, prepared to return to Brookensha. She had resolved to obey him if possible in everything to the last, and she was most anxious once more to enjoy the soothing quiet of her much-loved native country, after the noise, heat, and dust of the world of London, and the agitation, sorrow, and anxiety of her mental system. She imagined the cool air of Yorkshire would allay the mind's fever, and the silence and comparative solitude of Brookensha would afford a facility for acquiring mental strength, denied to her in the narrow walls and smoky atmosphere of her London lodgings.

She returned, therefore, with a stronger sensation of pleasure than she had yet experienced; but her heart sank and her eyes were blinded by tears, as she once more entered the dear home from which she was, perhaps, shortly to be expelled as an intruder. She came there without him — sad — sickly — oppressed with care — pale with suffering, and overwhelmed with dark forebodings. What a contrast did her feelings present to that happy time when she had been brought there as a beloved bride; and when the thought of how she might be compelled to leave it again rushed on her mind, her feelings broke loose from restraint, and she wept long and bitterly.

But hers was not a nature to yield to *selfish sorrow*, and the thought that she had still duties to perform, roused her from the indulgence of her melancholy reflections. There was much to be done before she left that home forever, many schemes for the good of her poor people to be carried out, and perfected; plans of benevolence, which still required her fostering hand to establish them. No time was to be lost if she wished to do all she could, and a few days after her re-establishment at Brookensha, she was as actively employed as ever.

She felt as we would all feel if we really acted on the knowledge which we all possess — that she was now, indeed, only a *temporary sojourner* in her husband's house; that the summons to leave it must come *eventually*, and might come *speedily*; and that it was, therefore, her present duty to employ what remained of time, and influence, and wealth, to the best advantage, if she wished to avoid lasting regret when called on to relinquish them forever.

She exerted herself, therefore, with all her power. Every plan which Cecil had sanctioned by his approbation, she now endeavored to perfect, and though she abstained from entering on new ones which could involve him in expense, she spared no labor of her own when it might benefit her dependents. Her dependents — yes, they were still hers, but how soon might they cease to look up to and be guided by her — how soon would her place be vacant among them, and her name forgotten, or remembered only with obloquy and contempt.

Then, too, she might see another mistress in the home where she had, until now been first and most beloved. A stranger would fill her place in the neighborhood, in the parish, in the Hall, in her husband's heart — and she should live to witness it. As these thoughts often rushed on her mind, she could not always entirely subdue the emotion which they occasioned; but even in her deepest sorrow, there was one comfort left — she would still keep her *child* to herself; that this *sweet solace* would not be torn from her — that she need not grieve at the prospect of seeing her infant daughter confided to those who did not understand her disposition, or were incompetent to the task of guiding it.

At such moments she would clasp her child with a passionate energy to her heart, and rejoice with sentiments of the most fervent gratitude that this trial had been spared her.

Most earnestly did she wish that her successor at Brookensha, might be one who would seek the good of the tenants, and endeavor to promote those plans for the benefit of all around her, to which she had devoted so much time and attention. And still more earnestly did she desire that her successor should be one who could fix Cecil's wandering affections, and make him more thoroughly happy than she had been able to do. To love him more than she had done, seemed to her quite impossible; but she trusted that her rival's love would be better rewarded than her own had been.

She told herself that it was right and natural that Cecil, who had made in most respects so excellent a husband, and who was so perfectly qualified to render happy any woman whom he loved, it was right and natural in him to do his utmost to re-establish the domestic ties which would shortly be torn from him. It was natural that when he lost all — his wife and children — when he found himself again a *solitary individual* — that he should struggle against the evil which beset him, and readily seek a solace in some happier and more legal connection.

But, disguise it as she might from herself, the truth would present itself to her eyes, and flash upon her brain, that, until he was free from her, he had no right to seek another love, She could not avoid nor suppress the conviction that he was deeply criminal, if, as seemed probable, he loved his cousin Laura; more, far more criminal in the *indulgence* of this affection, than in that which had caused her so much happiness, and such a weight of misery.

Such conduct might pass uncensored by the law of the land; but, judged by another and a higher standard, she could not but own that he was widely wandering from the way of morality, however such a dereliction might be glossed over or named in softened terms by those who profited by it. And this conviction gave her far more pain, than the sense of *injustice* and *desertion* could ever do.

Meanwhile strange rumors respecting her began to circulate in the county. Proctors had been down examining registers, tracing genealogies, questioning witnesses; and it began to be whispered abroad that the absence of the master, and the seclusion of the mistress of Brookensha, arose from other causes than legal debates or delicate health.

Reports were very various, and conjecture entered largely into all of them. Malice and mischief, envy and ill-will, were busy with the fame of each; for, in spite of the gentleness, humility, and kindness of Fanny, there were some who bore toward her feelings of no kindly nature. There were some who *envied* her elevation, having schemed for Cecil themselves — these were her equals. There were others, from whose coarseness of mind, or unkind dispositions, she had shrunk with an uncontrollable aversion — and these now rejoiced that they could *cast a stone* at her, and *attach a stain to her spotless character*. There were others who, having never enjoyed her society nor partaken of her kindness, being too base for the one and too high for the other, now felt themselves justified in deprecating her to the utmost of their power, and thanked Heaven with eager gratitude that they had never known her.

Of course there were some who understood the circumstances of the marriage, and the cause of the change which was now impending — and they, in general, deeply pitied both husband and wife: for, since the marriage had taken place, and required nothing further to sanction it than to be let alone, why should anyone be so cruel as to step between a couple so well suited to each other, and so much beloved as the Mansfields were? Their extreme attachment was almost proverbial in the country, and no suspicion of Cecil's infidelity had been circulated; it was, therefore, supposed that he had gone abroad in consequence of the unhappy fate impending over him; and the feeling hearts of all the young ladies in the country were exercised in picturing him wandering sad and lonely amid the ruined castles on the Rhine, or the vineyards of Italy, deploring, in melancholy musings, the unkind interference of his uncle, which had forever blasted his hopes, and ruined his domestic happiness.

Among the lower classes — those by whom Fanny was well-near worshiped as an angel, and was certainly considered quite incapable of a culpable action — the whole affair was completely incomprehensible; for they were in general in a state of profound ignorance that any restriction had ever been placed on marriages of relations, and the only solution of the mystery which could be suggested to them was, that, owing to the haste with which it had been celebrated, or the place chosen, or some other informality — the cruel uncle had been enabled to procure its dissolution, and would ultimately succeed in driving from her proper home, and depriving of her just possessions, one for whom no home could be too good, and who certainly was fitter for Heaven than earth.

The cruelty to Fanny, and the injustice to her daughter, excited the liveliest indignation in the minds of her dependents; but as it was known that, during the lifetime of old Mr. Mansfield, his brother had never been on good terms with him, it was supposed that the latter had seized this opportunity of venting his ill-will by persecuting his unfortunate nephew.

"Please, is it true that our lady is going to leave us?" inquired farmer Price of Rev. Hughes.

"I am sorry to say that it is but too probable," replied Rev. Hughes, quietly.

"And driven out by that good-for-nothing, hateful miser of an uncle, who, after quarreling all his life with his own brother, is now going to ruin his nephew's wife!" exclaimed farmer Price, with honest indignation.

"Hush, Mr. Price — you forget yourself: speak no evil," interposed the clergyman.

"You are quite right, no doubt," was the farmer's answer; "and I will mind what you say; but you know, to say the truth is not evil-speaking — and truly I look upon that Mr. Henry Mansfield, who has worked all this mischief, to be little different from a devil in his nature, or he could not have wished to ruin the happiness of a couple who loved each other as well as Adam and Eve. It is a cruel and shameful job, sir."

"No one can regret it more than I do," replied Rev. Hughes; "but I cannot allow you to speak in this way. Mr. Henry Mansfield is only acting up to the law, and probably considers himself perfectly right."

"He may be acting according to law, sir, perhaps," replied the farmer, doubtfully. "It is not for me to contradict you, or set up my opinion against yours; but whatever law he follows, it's not that of doing unto others, as he would be done by — and whatever goes contrary to that, sir, as you have often taught us, is not really right. You have always a kind word to say in excuse of everybody; but there are some *evil deeds* which should not be excused, because they don't deserve it. But I wish you could explain to me how he manages to do this, for I suppose it's not enough his merely wishing for Brookensha to make him able to get it."

"Are you not aware," replied Rev. Hughes, with some reluctance, "that your landlord has married his late wife's sister, and that such unions are *illegal*? Mr. Henry Mansfield is next in the inheritance to his nephew, and he has a right to interfere, that he may not be unduly deprived of his chance of succeeding to the estate."

"I hope with all my heart that I shall never see him master of it," cried Mr. Price with energy, striking into the ground the pitch-fork on which he was leaning. Then drawing it out, he stood for a minute or two, tracing circles in the dust with its prongs, until suddenly looking up at Rev. Hughes, he said: "Please, sir, tell me the truth; don't you think him wrong for meddling in the matter?"

"I will not answer you, Price; what right have I to *judge* my brother?"

Rev. Hughes seemed inclined to give up the point, and to remonstrate no more with Price on the subject of his opinions. The good clergyman had the same series of questions to go through, time after time; the same disapprobation of the uncle; the same unqualified praise of the wife, and the same wondering sympathy in her misfortunes. Not a cottage that he entered, but it was alike the theme of curiosity and sorrow; everywhere her impending departure was mourned with the sincerest grief; and it seemed probable that had the author of the evil at that time shown himself in the village, he would have been mobbed, and seriously ill-treated by the exasperated population.

It was not, however, as I before said, everyone who took a favorable view of Fanny's case, and there was much censure bestowed on her by those who knew nothing of the real circumstances. Cecil was a great favorite in the town of which he was member. His courteous manners, flattering speeches, and liberal spirit, had won the hearts of all the middle classes on his side of politics; and nothing which he could do was by them supposed to be wrong. But, on the contrary, the opposite party were equally bitter against him. They were a minority, it is true, but they were not the less bitter for that; on the contrary, the recollection of their defeat galled their spirits, and increased the pleasure with which they listened to all evil reports against him or his wife. Strange stories circulated among them, were caught up with avidity, and repeated with variable additions, but none of them losing either in malice or mischief by the relators of these tales.

"Pray, have you heard the sad news about *the Mansfields* of Brookensha?" said Mrs. Cole, the doctor's wife, shaking her head, and half whispering, with closed eyes, as if some shocking sight were passing before them.

Her auditors mostly had some version of their own, but politeness required that they should listen to hers, and all entreated her to tell them immediately.

"I am extremely unwilling to repeat stories to the disadvantage of anyone," said Mrs. Cole, stirring her tea with great vigor. "Heaven be praised, nobody was ever less of a scandal-monger than I am; and as to bearing ill-will against Fanny, I am sure I do no such thing. I heartily forgive her for all the injury she and her husband have done us. I never asked her, or any body's patronage; no, nor would I of the greatest lady in the land. I would not condescend to ask Queen Adelaide for hers. But then, I must say, if a man is to be cut because he votes according to his conscience, and his wife is never to be noticed, why — one may have one's thoughts. Never have I been asked within the walls of Brookensha since that fine lady was there; and if she thinks I am going there without an invitation, why she's very much mistaken, that's all."

Mrs. Cole's feelings having here overpowered her, and the stream of her indignant eloquence suddenly coming to a full stop, the surrounding ladies seized the moment to circulate, in whispers, sundry tales about the owner of Brookensha. It was evident that the town ladies were much better informed than the country ones, and those who know nothing personally of Fanny, were decidedly the best acquainted with her private affairs.

"We heard," cried Miss Amelia Brown, "that they quarreled before he went to London, and he has gone abroad, because he cannot get her out of the house, and he has vowed never to live with her. There have been lawyers down about it, but they could not persuade her to give up possession, and the cause is to be tried at the York Courts."

"Worse than that," murmured Mrs. Cole, mysteriously.

"Worse than that!" cried Mrs. Reeves, the banker's wife, "why, my dear Mrs. Cole, what can you have learned of her?"

Mrs. Cole seemed to have considerable difficulty in suppressing the news with which she was evidently brimful. She shrugged her shoulders, and nodded her head again and again, but did not speak.

"We know what it is!" cried the two Miss Battys in a breath; "we heard all about it from mamma's maid;" then simultaneously sinking their voices, they whispered very audibly, "She is to be divorced!"

Mrs. Cole looked spitefully and indignantly at the Miss Battys, who thus relentlessly tore from her what she valued so much — a piece of *new scandal* — scandal, which was food and drink to her: and to have it thus carelessly taken from her mouth!

"I wonder young ladies like you are not ashamed of talking of such improper things," said she, with compressed lips and elevated brow. "You ought to know nothing of such matters."

"How can we help it!" exclaimed Miss Harriet Batty, very pertly; "why you are sure to tell us, Mrs. Cole, if nobody else did."

As these young ladies were daughters of a gentleman, and nieces of a baronet, Mrs. Cole did not dare to quarrel with them, she was therefore forced to content herself with confirming Miss Batty's assertion.

"Yes, it is quite true — very sad. I am sure no one grieves more than I do, but I must say I always thought there was a *mystery* about their marriage which does not sound well. You know she was living in her brother-in-law's house, and the marriage was got up so hastily and secretly while she was there, that it looked very badly — gave rise to dreadful surmises. I never was angry at not having invitations to the wedding — but when people are ashamed to publish their marriage in the usual way, why it will set other people talking!"

"But what has she done now?" inquired Mrs. Reeves, anxiously. "I heard the marriage was irregular, and I thought — why can they not marry over again? it would do no harm, and might set all right."

"It is something much worse than that," whispered Mrs. Cole, with a very meaning look. "There's to be a *divorce* — you know what that means!"

“Good heavens! you don’t say so!” exclaimed several ladies, with looks of *virtuous horror*, while one added, in a compassionate tone, “Poor Fanny! how sorry I am to hear it!”

“Keep your compassion, Miss Prendergast, for those who *deserve* it!” exclaimed Mrs. Cole, sharply; “I think it looks quite unfitting in a single lady to be sympathizing with the *degraded* of her gender.”

“You can hardly apply those epithets to Fanny,” said the calm voice of an elderly woman, who had not yet spoken, but whose countenance announced the mildness and benevolence of her temper.

“Indeed I do, though,” interrupted Mrs. Cole, very tartly; “why, even you, Mrs. Forster, must allow that to be *divorced* is a *disgrace*, and implies that the past conduct is very bad. Women are not divorced in England for *trifles* — incompatibility of temper, for instance, or any such nonsense.”

“If they were,” whispered one young lady to a friend, aside, “I suspect several of our friends would speedily be cut off the list of wives.”

“But what has she done now — has she really been slyly encouraging a lover?” inquired Mrs. Reeves, who seemed bent on getting to the bottom of the affair.

“Why, have you not heard,” inquired Mrs. Cole, “of how she has long been going on with Mr. Linwood? even in the country it was very apparent, but when she went to town it was still worse. You know she took an opportunity to go there when Mr. Mansfield was coming down here; and I am told that there was never a day but they were together the greatest part of it; so much so, that her husband has positively refused to see her, and lawyers have been down at the Hall collecting evidence of her guilt before the trial. What has Mrs. Forster to say to that?”

“Only that you have been misinformed, Mrs. Cole, in some important particulars. The idea of connecting Frank Linwood’s name with the story is preposterous. He has had no more to do with the catastrophe than you or I. And, so far from having left London to avoid her, Mr. Mansfield came down here with the fullest expectation of finding her here, while she expected to meet him in London. I know this on the authority of Mrs. Linwood herself.”

“And of course she put the *best construction* upon it — she would not incriminate her son; but, my dear Mrs. Forster, are you weak enough to believe all you are told, or every story that you hear?”

“By no means — I would be extremely sorry to do so,” replied Mrs. Forster, quietly.

“Then how do you account for the fact of the impending divorce?” inquired Mrs. Cole; “there must be some *cause* for that.”

“You are mistaken, I believe, about the fact of the divorce — at least you call it by a wrong name; the marriage has been called in question, and it is to be tried whether it is legal, but not the least from any conduct of either party since it was celebrated. However mistaken they may have been as to contracting the marriage, there is no blame to be attached to anyone, that I know of, since.”

Mrs. Cole looked much too angry at having her well-ascertained facts disputed, to answer another word at this moment; but one of the other ladies inquired what was the reason, then, of all this fuss, if nobody had done anything wrong.

Mrs. Forster announced the fact, and mentioned the real reason of the disturbance, but she gained little good-will, or even credit, by doing so. Indeed, several ladies were quite angry at thus being deprived of the pith and marrow of their story, which was reduced within such very tame and ordinary bounds by the *truth-telling* Mrs. Forster. It was much more interesting to them to gossip over the supposed frailty of their neighbor, than to simply pity the misfortunes which had almost overwhelmed her.

Mrs. Cole herself declared openly that she was perfectly incredulous as to the cause assigned. She had never heard any objection made to brothers and sisters-in-law marrying, and as she was herself the daughter of a doctor of divinity, she affirmed that she ought to know, if anybody did. Besides, she knew her uncle had done so himself, and more than one of her own friends, so that it could not really be wrong, as Mrs. Forster wanted to prove it. Many other ladies asserted the same opinion, founding it on the same irrefragable arguments — they had known it done, so it could not be wrong; and Mrs. Forster, wearied at length by their idle declamation, left them to decide on the matter of Fanny’s guilt unaided by her. No sooner was she gone, than Mrs. Cole burst out into a bitter invective against such inconsiderate and incomprehensible *charity* as hers — a charity which seemed to take pleasure in proving the absent innocent, and throwing the only blame on those who ventured to repeat a savory story, or an interesting tale. There was no one else of the party, now that Mrs. Forster had retreated, with sufficient charity or energy to defend the much-censured lady; the subject was therefore carried on in a tone of *bitter incrimination* which it is now quite unnecessary to repeat.

## Chapter 11

The season had passed, London was empty, the parks dusty, dull, and deserted; the streets comparatively silent, or enlivened only by the wearisome cries of the dealers in small wares. The crowds were gone — all gone — and of all the mirthful, the fair, the hopeful, or the disappointed who had fled from London during the last month, none had gone with a more anxious heart, or a stronger wish to escape from home and homely duties than *Laura Mansfield*. Disappointed she was — bitterly disappointed, scarcely owning to herself how low her hopes had fallen, and still more anxiously concealing from her father the little expectation she ventured to entertain of ever seeing their mutual wishes realized. To him she always asserted that her cousin would return, and to her friends she made believe that his absence was a thing arranged by their mutual sense of right; but for herself she felt and knew that she had lost him, and her one prevailing wish was now to *follow* him, and *reclaim the heart* which she thought she valued highly.

For this she had insisted on going abroad, for, having ascertained that her cousin Cecil was in Germany, she knew she would be more likely to meet him there, than if they remained in England. Accordingly, to Germany they went, and such was the impatience of her spirit, that her father, for the sake of peace, allowed her to do precisely as she pleased. With much care and trouble, they tracked him during a somewhat circuitous route, but at length he was lost to them completely; he had gone from one town to the other so often, had been altogether so unsettled, that *Laura* was almost in despair, and her father considered the case as hopeless.

They reached Wiesbaden, and *Henry Mansfield* determined to remain there a week to try the *hot springs*, which he imagined might do him good. His daughter this time could not hurry him off, and the compulsory idleness and inactivity to which she was condemned, made her look back with additional regret to the time when she enjoyed so much of excitement arising from adulation and gratified vanity. They had no acquaintance at Wiesbaden who, in her estimation, deserved to be spoken to; a few old and unfashionable couples, who were come to be cured of rheumatism, and some middle-aged single gentlemen to whom she never deigned a look or a word. *Fashion*, that year, had carried all worth naming, the mirthful, the distinguished, and the wealthy to some other of the numerous hot springs. She was provoked then beyond measure that her father would persist in remaining there, where there were none worthy to look at her lovely face or her exquisite Parisian wardrobe.

After some days of weary and hopeless murmuring, she at length succeeded in discovering a companion more agreeable to her taste than her father. This was a mirthful, young French count, whom she had once before met in London, and who impressed with the idea that all young English ladies were as rich as they were fair, and that a girl so handsome as this “*Mease Mansfield*” must be *heiress* to an unknown and inconceivable thousands, was very willing to be recognized as her admirer. *Laura* herself was much too wary to take a Frenchman out of France for more than he was worth as a man, and was not at all likely to be irretrievably captivated by any mustaches whatever, let them be ever so well trimmed and curled; but she was not sorry in her present plight, to admit as an admirer a man whose address could not disgrace her, but who, she was persuaded would form rather an enviable object when she appeared in public.

Accordingly, a lively flirtation was commenced, and the French count was soon in regular attendance on the English belle, having removed from his room at the “*Four Seasons*”, to one which commanded the lodging where the *Mansfields* were stationed, that he might be able to keep constantly on the watch, and attend her whenever she issued forth for a “*promenade*.”

It happened one day, that her father being engrossed by letters and papers just arrived from England, *Laura* availed herself of the French count’s escort to take a stroll in the gardens, more because she was weary and dissatisfied with remaining tranquil, than from any expectation of pleasure in the exercise. Still, from habit, she engaged in a lively conversation with the French count and seated on a bench overlooking the water, they diverted themselves by making somewhat severe remarks on the company who passed them. *Laura* protested that the society at Wiesbaden was the dullest, most vulgar, and wearisome of any place where she had ever been. The gentleman, of course, gallantly differing from her, and protesting he could see no fault, and was never better satisfied in his life.

*Laura* was amusing herself by drawing figures on the gravel with the point of her parasol, as she sat listening to his eloquence; when he suddenly interrupted himself by inquiring if she had observed the person who just then passed in front of them? She had not looked up, but now roused by his question, she raised her eyes to see the individual in question, but just too late — a shrub had concealed him from her view.

“He crossed behind us twice before,” said the Frenchman, “and each time looked so impertinently *curious*, that I longed to knock him down; if he passes again in the same way, allow me the satisfaction of tossing him in the lake.”

“Nay, I must see how he looks, before I can permit such extreme measures,” replied *Laura*; “perhaps he is some acquaintance wishing to catch my attention; one probably whom I may rejoice to see. What was he like?”

“An Englishman — I hope he is no acquaintance: he was very handsome, black, and tall — and your present friend would not rejoice to be thrown in the shade by such a rival. I would not willingly resign your favorable smiles.”



“Surely I have smiles enough for all my friends here,” replied Laura, archly. “I did not use to be so deficient in capacity as to be unable to entertain *two gentlemen at once*. However, in spite of my excited curiosity, your hero seems to have passed from our sight, so, suppose we walk a little. I am tired of looking at the same tree; and even that music becomes boring.”

They walked toward the ruins of the Sonnenburg, and Laura renewed her questions relative to the individual whose observation had disturbed the count’s equanimity. She was not at all offended by the idea, she never supposed anyone could look at her without admiration; and it was by no means impossible that she might either find or make an acquaintance on this occasion. But the French count did not seem well pleased with her interrogatories, either being, or affecting to be, *jealous* of her forming any new friendships. He did not, therefore, tell her that he saw the same individual following them now at a distance, and as Miss Mansfield did not happen to look round, she continued unaware of it. They reached the ruins, and ascended one of the steep paths which led up the mount, and then throwing herself down on a seat at the top, she exclaimed that she was so fatigued, she knew not what to do.

“What can I do? I fear it is my fault. I have failed entertaining you as I ought. But here is your admiring countryman, who has followed our steps; perhaps now you may find a friend.”

Laura looked around at these words, and saw the figure of a man who was approaching them by the same path which they had followed.

“Is it possible?” exclaimed she, starting up with animation, the color rushing in crimson tides into her cheeks. It was *Cecil!* She stood suspended, her hand half-advanced, her lips apparently about to pronounce a welcome, and yet with an air of doubt and hesitation on her countenance, which seemed to speak of some internal struggle.

Their eyes met; he raised his hat from his brows and bowed respectfully, yet coldly; but there was a tinge of *haughtiness* in his look which, while it told her she was not pardoned, showed her also that he was not indifferent; had affection died quite away, *resentment* would not have survived it; he loved her still, though probably he loved against his will, and hoped it would not be discovered.

She had long determined on the line of conduct she should adopt in case of any meeting of this kind; and immediately approaching him as he stood gazing through a broken archway, she held out her hand and said in a softened voice, and eyes which seemed floating in tears:

“Is it thus cousins meet in a foreign land? — Cecil, have you forgotten all the past?”

“No,” replied he, with emphasis, but withholding his hand — “I remember all — and our *parting* best of all.”

“Ungenerous Cecil,” murmured Laura. “Is there another man in the world who would have answered my appeal in so cold a way? But let the past go into *oblivion*, then, if you can only remember what is disagreeable. Are we not cousins still, even though our former friendship were quite obliterated?”

“I do not doubt,” he replied, in a calm, cold tone, “that you can yourself adopt the measures you recommend: you have proved that you can consign to oblivion hopes and affections which should be eternal; but it is not so with everyone. The *pain of the past* is too indelibly impressed for me to efface all remembrance of it so easily. I, at least, have suffered — ”

“And do you suppose *my feelings* have been *unwounded* — my *heart* unpaired — my brow unclouded, since you left me, Cecil?” replied she, with emphasis; “since you so cruelly yourself tore asunder those sweet bonds which had united us. I did not sever them — you know the deed was yours.”

“I see no symptom of clouds or sorrow on your face, Laura; your cheek is as fresh, your eyes are as bright, your brow as fair as ever. *Deep feeling* leaves some trace either on the body or the mind; but your voice is as mirthful, your laugh as light, as when we parted in London. I walked behind, unnoticed by you, and though I did not hear all that you said. I could catch the merry tones of your voice, and there was nothing of suffering there!”

“Cecil, you deceived and ill-used me,” replied Laura, drawing herself up. “You *deserted* me in an unmanly, an ungenerous way; and now, when on meeting again I offer to overlook the past and only remember our relationship — you meet me with scorn and reproaches!”

“And do you wonder that I should distrust your words, or think lightly of your feelings, when you remember *why* we parted, Laura? The undisguised encouragement with which you received attentions from another man, would have moved the most passive to indignation. You could not expect — you knew that I would not stand by and see it — and now, when I meet you again, do I not see you engaged in the same course?” glancing, as he spoke, at the French count, who stood at a little distance, “and will I be duped again in the same way? No!”

“Cecil,” said Laura softly, raising to him her black eyes, swimming in tears, “in spite of your ungenerous reproaches, I will not treat you as you deserve; if I did, I would leave you now to yourself; but I know you love me; disguise, deny it if you will, you love me still, and I own that I love you. Yes, I *love* you so well, that were I not convinced that your happiness depends as much as my own upon our mutual affection, I would not say another word — I would leave you in silence though in sorrow. But your *anger* shows me that you feel; I understand *your heart* — even though you shut your eyes to it, and I will not be offended away, whatever you may say or do. I own I was wrong; I tried you too far — but I



have been *amply punished* — be generous now, and forgive me,” she laid her ungloved hand upon his as it rested upon the rustic balustrade, and looking in his face, she whispered again, “Please forgive me!”

The appeal was irresistible, he clasped the hand in his, and the pressure of his fingers told her all was forgiven.

The French count was allowed to walk by her side, on her return to her lodgings; but her averted face and turned to Cecil, the arm clasped in her cousin’s, the tenderness of her voice, as she whispered in English — told him his power was passed, and that it befitted him to withdraw his attentions as quietly and quickly as good-breeding would allow.

From this time the cousins became inseparable, and as no one knew or cared whether Cecil was married or single, there was not even the feeble reason which *decorum* had prescribed in England to restrain his attentions; but in everything they behaved as an *engaged couple* may do in Germany, where the customs of the country allow so much freer relationships than our own manners permit.

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 12

The complete seclusion in which *Fanny* continued at Brookensha entirely precluded her from hearing the surmises which were afloat; and she knew not that the affair which weighed down her spirit, and bowed her, as it were, to the dust — was the subject of gossip, wonder, and scandal, for half the country.

She saw no one but her friends Mrs. Compton and Rev. Hughes, for the Linwoods had been obliged to leave the village, on account of the ill-health of Mrs. Linwood, and they were now at Scarborough, for the benefit of sea-air.

Mrs. Compton had often tried to induce her friend to leave Brookensha, and spend a few days with them; but their house was known to be so mirthful, that *Fanny* shrank from it, nor could the assurances that she would not be disturbed at all tempt her to run the risk of meeting former acquaintances of her happy days, or strangers who would not understand her situation or her sufferings.

In consequence of this, the fellowship between them resulted only from Mrs. Compton's visits to Brookensha, and she, fearful of soon losing her friend altogether, was in the habit of repeating those visits very frequently. It would have appeared as if her ardent and active mind must have been quite uncongenial to the *humble patience and sweetness of the suffering Fanny*. But, although often led away by the warmth of her feelings to use expressions which might justly be reprehended, Mrs. Compton never uttered a word of friendship, or promise of help, or a wish of kindness, which did not flow directly from the depth of her heart, and which her subsequent actions did not amply justify.

It was on a calm, clear afternoon in October, that the two ladies were walking together on the terrace at Brookensha. *Fanny's* little daughter was trotting happily about, watching the bees which clustered on the ivy blossoms covering the wall, or the peacock butterflies which flitted among the splendid dahlias and fuchsias that ornamented the pastures. It was one of those delicious afternoons which fill the mind with a train of mournful musings, you know not why — a *pleasant pain* which steals upon the heart even of the gayest, and subdues the highest spirits — a day which recalls *sad thoughts of past pleasure and shadowy presentiments of unknown troubles*; it stands a connecting link between the sweets of a departed summer, and the storms of the approaching winter. The yellow leaf was on the ash-tree — the tawny oak, the orange-beech, and the rich crimson of the maples united to give to the woods the tints that painters love to perpetuate.

At one point the terrace looked down on a deep, narrow valley, towards which the ground fell so precipitously that it seemed as though a stone dropped from the balustrade would fall into the torrent below. The hill on the opposite side rose abrupt and richly wooded, though here and there the grey rock jutted out, bare and stern, from the bosom of the forest. Following with your eye the winding stream, you would obtain at the extremity of this valley a lovely view of a distant champaign country bathed in the autumnal sunshine, which appeared as a picture set in a dark frame of rugged rocks. Long filmy threads of gossamer floated and glistened in the air. All was silence, except the hum of insects, the warbling of a whole choir of robins in the glen, or the fluttering of some withered leaf as it fell gently from the bough to alight at their feet.

“And all this you have to leave,” said Mrs. Compton to her friend, after gazing round on the view, glancing at the house, and then fixing her eyes on *Fanny*. “Give up everything that you hold dear, renounce what seems your just right, submit to be banished from a home you have so dearly loved, and then see another woman in your place. Oh, *Fanny*! if you can submit to this without a murmur, you must be an angel indeed.”

“Very far indeed from that,” replied *Fanny*, mournfully. “I find too many thoughts prompting me to murmur and complain; would that I really felt the resignation you ascribe to me!”

“And then to know that you will certainly be succeeded here by one so unworthy, so unprincipled, so wicked — one who so little deserves the elevation to your place — one who does not merit to tie your shoestrings, an artful, unprincipled girl — ”

“Oh, hush! you know so little of her — why judge her so harshly?”

“I know enough of her, *Fanny*, in knowing that she has supplanted you. I have seen enough of her to form an accurate opinion of her character — to feel sure that, judge her as I may, I cannot wrong her — black and treacherous — ”

“Indeed you pain me exceedingly by speaking thus; I would so gladly think well of Cecil's future wife, so much will depend upon her conduct and character. Indeed, Margaret, you must not talk so.”

“I would have no objection to think well of her if I could,” replied Mrs. Compton, coolly, “but that is impossible; a woman who steals a married man's heart, or even merely encourages his attentions, is odious enough; but one who deliberately seduces another woman's husband with the view to cast off the first wife and leave her to misery and reproach — what words can express her character, which would not be too bad for us to name?”

“I dare not judge in that way. I have sinned myself; and what am I that I should presume to speak ill of another. I forgive, as I hope to be forgiven.”

“I can readily admit that you acted *imprudently*,” replied Mrs. Compton, “but not *culpably*; events prove the one, the other I firmly deny. However, even granting that you were wrong in your marriage, what harm did you do? whom did you injure but yourself?”

“All those who by my example may have been led to consider the law as of no consequence not to be regarded; all those who have been pained and scandalized by my improper conduct; all those who have been betrayed into uncharitable actions, or unkind words through my crime — more — many more than I can reckon.”

“Do you mean then to take on your own shoulders all the wicked plots of Miss Mansfield? her evil passions — are you responsible for these?”

“In a certain degree I am: they are the consequence, as well as the punishment, of my dereliction of duty; and your hard words, Margaret, too — they spring from warm affection in you, but they pain me, because I always remember that I am responsible for them, too.”

“Well, if you feel that,” replied Mrs. Compton, in a voice which showed her much touched by her friend’s words, “I will try and be moderate in my expressions at least; but as to thinking differently, either of you or your husband’s cousin Laura, I cannot pretend to do so, for a moment.”

A short silence ensued, broken by Mrs. Compton, who said, “I heard you give orders to have the north gate of the park unlocked, are you expecting visitors?”

“Only my lawyers,” replied Fanny, with a faint smile, “I see no one else except for you. I am expecting Frank Linwood from York, and with him the proctor who has charge of my affairs in the court. We have some business to discuss.”

“Business! — business — how you must hate the sound of that word; what pain and trouble it has brought upon you. Will it take you long?”

“I do not know; but long or short I must go through it, for it relates to her interests,” pointing to her child.

“Indeed; then I hope this time it is not painful, though it may be troublesome, perhaps.”

Fanny answered only by a sigh.

“So, Frank Linwood is coming to you, is he?” continued Mrs. Compton, looking earnestly at her companion. “He has done a great deal for you, I think?”

“He has indeed been most kind and indefatigable in my service. I hope Heaven will reward him, for I never can.”

“I like Mr. Linwood myself,” said Mrs. Compton, “but he is usually accused of coldness and indifference to women. One or two of my friends, charming girls in every respect, have tried vainly to draw him into the most casual flirtation; but they say they could never *melt the ice* in which he enshrouds himself, or so much as extract a compliment from him.”

“He is not cold,” replied Fanny; “they do him injustice if they think so; he has a warm and loving heart, which will make any sacrifice for the sake of affection for his mother or his sister; but I never remember a time when he seemed to care much for female society exclusive of them. He never flirted, or talked and laughed with pretty girls, as I have seen other young men do; and as to flattery — it was impossible — he could speak nothing but the truth, let what might depend upon it.”

“Of course you must know him well, as you have known him long; probably he is the victim of an *unrequited love* — that would make him just what you describe.”

“Would it? I do not know; but I am not in his confidence on that subject. Our talks now take a more serious turn, and we have no time to talk about the affections.”

Then after a pause, Fanny added. “Do you know Mr. Mansfield has dismissed Mr. Dennis from his employment?”

“No, I had not heard it. How long has that been?”

“Quite recently — since their return from Germany: they are all together in London now, you know. I am sorry for Mr. Dennis, for I think he was an upright man, who would have always served Cecil well. I fear he has got into trouble by his partiality for me.”

“I am sure Mr. Compton will be delighted to engage him: he has been long dissatisfied with our old steward, who is quite elderly. I will persuade him to give old Hanson a retiring pension, and take Mr. Dennis instead.”

“Margaret, that is just like you — so enthusiastic in your plans; you never suppose *difficulties* or *impediments* in your way. Mr. Dennis is going to the south of England immediately.”

Just at this moment a servant approached to inform her that the two gentlemen she was expecting had arrived; and Mrs. Compton taking her leave, Fanny returned slowly and thoughtfully to the library.

The subject which engrossed her mind requires some words of explanation.

Fanny and her sister, the two daughters of Mr. Ellis had inherited from their maternal grandfather the sum of ten thousand pounds apiece, of which they became possessed on attaining their majority. This sum had been secured by marriage settlements, in the case of Mary Ellis, to herself and children; but after their death, Cecil became master of the whole of his first wife’s share. Fanny’s share had never been settled in any way; and in consequence of this neglect on the part of Cecil, the original sum had been under his sole control since her marriage, though she had been accustomed to receive more than the interest. Of this sum she would, of course, be sole and undisputed mistress, in the event which now seemed near approaching — the termination of the suit in Mr. Henry Mansfield’s favor.

The property which her father left her, though bequeathed to her and her children, was, in case of the failure of these, given over to a distant branch of the family; so that, though Fanny enjoyed an income from it for her life, it would not

descend to her daughter if her marriage was pronounced invalid. Consequently, it became of the highest importance to secure to the child the ten thousand pounds belonging to her mother, as it was all that the unfortunate girl could depend on with certainty to save her from eventually suffering poverty or dependence.

Fanny, indeed, hoped and believed that the father of her child would not entirely cast off his daughter — that the paternal affection which had once bound him to her could no more be extinguished than the tie could be annulled. Courts of law might decide that Fanny was not his wife, but they could not deny that the infant Mary was his daughter; and it was impossible that Cecil could leave her to incur the chance of poverty or distress. It would be nothing surprising, she thought, if he were to forget that there was any risk of this; all the inevitable consequences of the impending blow, probably had never occurred to him, but he would only need to be reminded to provide liberally for the little girl; and as to her own money, that, of course, would be forthcoming at a moment's notice.

So had *thought* Fanny, and consequently she remained with a feeling of perfect security on the subject until many weeks had passed, and the end of her time of suspense was rapidly approaching. She was roused, however, by a communication which she received unexpectedly from Mr. Dennis. Mr. Dennis was an attorney, and an upright and able man; like everyone else who had come in contact with Fanny, he was strongly attached to her, and warmly interested for her welfare. Of course, he had felt and grieved over the impending change in her circumstances, but his grief was increased to indignation, when he received one day directions from his employer to prepare the necessary instructions for a lawyer in London to draw up the marriage settlement of Miss Laura Mansfield.

Sentence had not been pronounced as yet, declaring the former marriage invalid, and he, of course, felt strongly that all preliminary steps toward another ought, in decency, to be postponed. His first impression was to write a remonstrance to Mr. Mansfield, and refuse to fulfill the injunction; but again reading over carefully what the latter wished to have done, and the arrangements which he proposed to make, Mr. Dennis was so struck by the *gross injustice to Cecil's present wife and daughter*, that all his indignation at the indelicacy was merged in this other sentiment. Cecil intended to settle such a sum upon his cousin Laura, as was greatly beyond what the strictness of the inheritance would allow to be raised from the estate. His expenses had for a long time quite equaled his income, and there was no other source from which this money could possibly come, than the fortune of his first wife, which, as we before stated, on the death of his children, fell into Cecil's hands. Of course his *legal* right to spend this as he chose, could not be questioned, but *law* and *morality* are two different things; and Mr. Dennis could not help feeling that *morality* would have required that this sum should, at least after Cecil's death, revert to *Fanny* for her child, who, being equally the daughter of Cecil, would have appeared the most proper inheritor of it.

But this was not all: not one word was said by Cecil as to the re-payment of Fanny's portion, which ought immediately to be refunded when he ceased to be her husband; and on examining closely into his affairs, it appeared that there was no provision made for it; the very money which he was thus preparing to settle on his cousin Laura was, in fact, due to his present wife, and Mr. Dennis trusted could be claimed by her.

He determined, therefore, to write to Mr. Mansfield, and remind him of the necessity of holding himself prepared to refund the ten thousand pounds in question to Fanny, and the prudence of refraining from incurring further responsibility before this matter was settled.

The result of his advice was what might be anticipated: it produced an angry letter from Cecil, declaring that he did not need the *lectures of his steward* to teach him what was right; but since the latter had so far forgotten what was expected from one in his situation, he could no longer hold it with the hope of giving any satisfaction to his employer — Cecil had, in fact, dismissed him at once. This summary proceeding had, indeed, been entirely the result of *Laura's influence*; she hated everyone who named Fanny, or spoke of her as having any *rights* to be attended to. She hated whoever had lived in her service, or who seemed at all attached to her. She hated Fanny herself, as malevolent minds do always hate those they have injured, and who have forgiven them. She was determined that every individual who had known her predecessor, should leave the place immediately on her becoming mistress of Brookensha, and she was delighted when the opportunity offered itself to dismiss so important a person as the steward at once.

Cecil had returned to England with his uncle Henry and cousin Laura, and was now residing with them. The cousins had apparently become more attached than ever; certainly Cecil's infatuation was greater than before the disagreement which had once threatened to separate them, and Laura's power was unlimited. Her father took care to dictate such settlements as would secure her possession of an ample provision for Laura after the death of Cecil, in case she should have a child to inherit the Brookensha property.

Cecil had power to charge the estate with a sum no larger than ten thousand pounds, yet the directions given to Mr. Dennis had been to the effect that twenty-five thousand should be settled on Laura, of which twenty thousand was to be immediately paid over to the trustees, and another five thousand paid out of the estate, leaving only a similar sum to portion any younger children who might perhaps be born.

No sooner was Mr. Dennis thus peremptorily dismissed, than he determined to take some immediate steps to prevent the *injustice* which he believed was threatened to Fanny. As was natural, he had always managed the affairs connected

with the property left by Mr. Ellis, for, as husband and wife, Fanny and Cecil had but one interest, and he was consequently perfectly well acquainted with her circumstances. When, by the proceedings of Cecil, he was placed in the situation of steward to opposing parties — those whose interests thus suddenly clashed — he at first felt embarrassed. But the dismissal by Cecil, having released him from this dilemma, he had gone at once to Fanny, stating what had occurred, and inquiring whether she should still require his services.

This application was for several reasons distressing to Fanny — she was grieved that another should be involved in trouble, as she suspected, for her sake, though Mr. Dennis was guarded and cautious in expressing the manner in which he had displeased her husband. She regretted that Cecil should lose the services of one of whom she thought most highly, and she was deeply wounded at the conviction thus forced on her, that their *interests*, as well as their *paths* through life, were widely separated now.

As to deciding on continuing to employ Mr. Dennis herself, she referred him at once to Frank Linwood, who, as trustee under her late father's will, was the person who would arrange all such matters.

On first addressing himself to Fanny, he had entertained an intention of telling her the threatened *injustice*, and the necessity of taking some measures to secure her property, but delicacy of feeling prevented him, when it came to the point; he could not bring himself to name the approaching marriage of the man who was still actually her husband; it seemed a sort of insult to talk of such a thing. He decided, therefore, to communicate to Mr. Linwood the facts with which he was acquainted, holding that, in this instance, he was bound to *serve the cause of the weak and oppressed*, and that his fidelity to the mistress who retained him, superseded his duty of secrecy to the employer who had dismissed him.

Frank Linwood at once comprehended all the necessity that there was for exertion to prevent the consummation of this injustice toward Fanny and her child; he saw, too, that the trustees for Fanny, under Mr. Ellis' will, would become responsible for the sums they had paid to Cecil as her husband, and that it became advisable that some measures should be taken with reference to this point also, to prevent the possibility hereafter of vexatious disputes, and to secure to this *injured and deserted* woman whatever might be left to her of worldly wealth. He sent word to Fanny that he wished to see her, and proposed coming over from York with the other lawyer, Mr. Tucker, who likewise desired to have some conversation with her, though on a different topic. He did not enter into particulars, but only stated that his own business intimately concerned the interests of her child, and this was enough to secure Fanny's readiest attention.

She entered the library with a steady step, though an anxious heart. She did not notice the scrutinizing eyes of Mr. Tucker fixed on her as she greeted his companion: and little suspecting what was passing in his mind, she displayed the *warm friendship* that she felt toward Frank, never supposing that it could be misunderstood. But Mr. Tucker, accustomed to read human nature, and penetrate into the hearts of mankind, and, moreover, accustomed to look much on the harsh, the selfish, or the unprincipled side of human nature, was rather inclined to *suspicion*, though at the same time thinking lightly of the evil he suspected. It was true that he had read rightly the nature of Frank Linwood's feelings, but his mind was too coarse to have any success in exploring the delicate folds and recesses of such a heart as Fanny's. He believed the partiality mutual, and he neither wondered nor blamed.

After explaining to her the details with which he wished her acquainted, he offered to take a walk in the park while Mr. Linwood and Fanny were coming to an understanding; but, to his surprise, the conversation with which he deposed to indulge them, was rejected by each. There was no secret from him in the matters under discussion, and, so far as he could judge, Linwood seemed rather the most desirous of the two that he should remain. When this point was settled, Frank still hesitated to explain his errand.

"Well, Frank," said she, in a tone of open friendship, and with a sad smile, "I am afraid that it is no pleasant mission on which you come, since you seem unwilling to commence it; what new *misfortune* do you announce?"

"I fear it is a matter which will cause you anxiety and trouble," replied he fixing his eyes on the carpet, and mechanically playing with a paper-knife near him; "but it must be spoken, so my hesitation is useless. Have you ever thought — do you know what is become of the sum you possessed in your own right — the *ten thousand pounds* which you inherited from your grandfather?"

Fanny looked rather relieved at the question, as if she thought that anything relating to money was in itself trifling, and easily borne with. She had never known financial difficulties; and until they have been felt, the affectionate or generous heart will estimate them lightly.

"I have never had anything to do with it," she replied. "On my marriage it of course came into Cecil's possession, and he has always received the interest for me."

"And what do you now intend to do about it, if you will allow me to ask?" inquired Frank, raising his eyes suddenly to her face.

"I have not thought," was her answer; then after a moment's pause, she added: "but it does not require much thought — settle it on my daughter, and make you trustee and guardian. Will you undertake the charge?"

"Willingly, if you will join Mr. Tucker in the trust — for I will not be sole trustee — I will have a deed prepared immediately. But have you got it now?" he added, after a pause.

“Not now; but it will be mine again, will it not, when I am — when — ”

“Yes, it will be yours by right then,” he hastily rejoined, to save her the pain of expressing herself further; “but has Cecil made any proposals about it — has any communication passed on the subject?”

“None whatever,” replied she, with an expression of surprise; “but if it is *mine*, you cannot doubt that — or suppose that Cecil will hesitate a moment on the subject.”

“But suppose it has not occurred to him?” suggested Frank.

“That I think is not unlikely,” said she; “but of course it will.”

“Would it not be better to *remind* him of your claim? Would you wish this done at once?”

“I think not,” said she; “I could not bear the appearance of *avariciousness*. It will be time enough to remind him when he fails to perform it!

“Excuse me, but I do not agree with you; there may be circumstances which will render an *early attention* to this point necessary. Delay may — nay, I know it will soon be too late for a remonstrance to have any effect — some *immediate* measures must be taken — ”

“Are you certain of what you are saying?” replied Fanny, in a tone of something like cold reproof. “Cecil has wronged me deeply — you know it — but it must be strong evidence indeed which can convince me that he would intend to *defraud* either me or my child.”

“I am perfectly certain,” answered Frank, “of all that I assert. The measures which he proposes to pursue, although not intended for that purpose, will rob you of that money, or at least render the restoration of it a matter of great difficulty. This may possibly be prevented by any act tending to remind him of *your claims* — at least the wrong cannot then be done from forgetfulness. As you are willing to attribute it to that, let it be so; but act now so as to arouse him from this state.”

“I cannot make up my mind to it with such precipitation,” replied Fanny, in a doubtful voice; “of course it is important, or you would not urge it so; but you are quite *sure* of what you say?” fixing her eyes on his face as if to read his soul.

“You hesitate, I know, from motives of delicacy,” said Frank; “but these must not weigh against right. Are you not aware of the importance to *your child* of securing this sum? It will be all you will have in your power to give her, or at least nearly all.”

“Yes, I suppose so.”

“And would you not reproach yourself, if, through *inattention* or *delicacy*, or any motive grounded on *feeling* only — you lost it for her?”

“Yes, certainly.”

“Besides, if Cecil is about to commit an injustice, unknowingly, is it not true kindness to warn him in time?”

“That is very true.”

“Then why do you hesitate?” inquired Frank, with surprise. “If you admit all my assertions, why not act upon them?”

“Because you have not yet proved to me that this injustice is *contemplated* by Cecil — you have merely asserted it.”

“You are hard to convince, Fanny,” replied he, in a tone of vexation, throwing himself back in his chair, and looking down as if displeased. “When did I ever deceive or mislead you, that you should thus doubt my word? My only object has been to spare you pain, but you will not allow me to do so. I have learned from Mr. Dennis, that Cecil is preparing to settle your rightful inheritance on his cousin Laura, as will put it out of his power not only to do anything himself for his child, but will make it almost impossible that he should restore your own portion, without perhaps giving up his establishment in England, and going abroad to economize. Judge whether this course is likely to be readily adopted by a mirthful woman — a young bride — ”

He paused, and raised his eyes to hers, to see how she bore the communication: he saw her cheek grow deadly pale, her lips even were blanched by agitation, and her small hand, which rested on the work-table beside her, shook visibly. For a moment, she did not answer, though, from the motion of her lips, she seemed attempting to speak: then resolutely shaking off her emotion, she raised her eyes, and said, “Are you *sure* of this?”

“As sure as that I am now sitting here. I saw Cecil’s letter. Mr. Dennis showed it to me, for he dared not mention the fact to you; yet, as your steward still, though dismissed by Cecil for having ventured to remind him of *your rights*, he thought it his duty to warn me how much your interests were endangered.”

She was silent, but changed her posture, and sat pressing her hands together, as if to crush some feeling with which she was struggling. Frank could not forbear watching her with the most intense interest, but he was also thinking how indifferent an object he was to her, since the pain she had given him, by her distrust of his word, seemed to make no impression on her. She thought not of him, except as an agent — she cared not for his feelings, compared with those of her worthless husband; perhaps she knew not that he had any.

For a moment he felt irritated at her neglect; but it was but a moment before he remembered that such feelings as he entertained must indeed be unknown to her, since in their nature they were *culpable*, and ought to be suppressed. The time was not come when she might be loved without blame — when the sentiment which had lately been growing almost

beyond control might be avowed as an honorable emotion, not hidden as a guilty passion. A week perhaps, or at most two weeks, and then, if the touch of her soft hand made him thrill, it would be followed by no stern admonishment from conscience. If the sweet voice did make the chords of tenderness vibrate in his heart, there would be no imperative duty to require that he should turn from their tones. If the friendly glance of her eye, and the gentle smile with which she greeted him, were felt by him to be the sweetest of earth's sights — there would then be no need to school his own look and voice into cold indifference or calm politeness. If he might not presume to let his affection be seen, yet he might then nurse and treasure it in secret; and none could blame him — as Fanny would be no longer a wife.

All these thoughts passed through his mind as he sat gazing intently on her, forgetting everything else — almost forgetting that the time was not yet come when these fond imaginations would be realized. He was roused and recalled to facts and truth by Fanny, who at length said, in a low voice,

“What do you recommend me to do?”

“His mind, however, had gone so far astray, that for once his self-possession was lost, and he actually could not recall his thoughts enough to answer. She paused, however, for a reply; and, forcing himself to speak, without well knowing what he said, he answered, in a constrained and unnatural manner,

“Of course, you must do as you please: it does not befit me to urge my sentiments now — ”

He stopped abruptly, and bit his lip, conscious that he was talking nonsense.

She looked extremely surprised; not that she had the remotest idea of his meaning, or the real state of his feelings, but she did not at all understand what was the matter; Frank was not usually touchy or quickly offended, but she thought that something must have hurt his feelings to cause that constrained tone, that cold, unfriendly eye, that stern, almost angry brow. She was quite distressed at the idea, and tried to remember if she had said anything which could have given rise to it. At last she concluded that he had been pained at her *incredulity* when he asserted Cecil's intentions, and hurt at her refusing to act on his advice. She therefore replied,

“No, indeed you are wrong. I will be guided by *you* in this affair; I know you have only my interest at heart — speak to me as a brother would; I have few, very few to advise me now.”

With a natural action, as she spoke, she held her hand to him; but fearful of betraying his feelings, he would not see it, and unable to control his voice as he could wish, he did not answer.

“Frank, I never knew you unkind before: I did not imagine I should ever feel you so. If you are offended, I sincerely beg your pardon. I believe I was wrong in my incredulity, but surely you might forgive a wife, if she is hard to convince on such a subject. Spare me the pain of speaking unnecessarily on it. I am sure you would, if you knew what it costs me; but will you not give me your advice?”

“Your apology, Fanny, makes me ashamed of myself. I do not deserve it, and will in return give you all I can in the way of friendly counsel; follow it or not, as you please. You should lay your claim immediately before Cecil, show him that you are aware of your child's interests, and that you are determined to uphold them. As long as you are his wife you can only ask and remonstrate, but state also your firm and unalterable resolution when you cease to be so, to *prosecute* this claim for your daughter's sake, and to *compel* him to restore what he cannot legally or justly withhold. Is not this your sentiment also, Mr. Tucker?” added he, appealing to that gentleman, who after wandering all round the library to examine its books and its ornaments, had now concluded his perambulations on the spot from which he had commenced them.

“Certainly,” replied he, “Fanny must by all means prosecute that claim.”

“But what steps would be necessary to *enforce payment*?” inquired Fanny.

“You will have to *sue* him in a Court of Equity, madam,” replied Mr. Tucker, with evident glee, “and you will be *certain* of gaining your cause. It will almost be too easy, for there cannot be a doubt of the outcome.”

“I cannot threaten Cecil with such measures, for I am certain I shall never adopt them. I cannot *sue* him for it, cost what it may!”

“Not sue him?” exclaimed Mr. Tucker. “My dear madam, you are surely speaking without consideration. There is nothing dangerous, or difficult, or even uncertain, in the process. Do not be alarmed on the subject.”

“It is not from alarm that I form the resolution I announce,” replied Fanny, calmly.

“Consider the interests of your child, Fanny,” said Frank, persuasively; “and I am sure you will not throw away *her* inheritance.”

“Frank, I consider her best and highest interest in my resolution,” replied she again, with the same tone of quiet determination.

“But do not yield too much to feeling or impulse, and so forget the reality and necessities of life.”

“You need not fear that; but I believe that in bequeathing my child a *clear conscience*, though a small estate — I shall be doing more for her real good, than by leaving her tens of thousands won by enforced law-suits.”

“Well, I cannot agree in your estimation of this,” observed Mr. Tucker. “It seems to me, as if a suit on such a subject was the most *natural* thing in the world. I would desire nothing better than to conduct it myself, if you only put it within my province.”

“Do you understand me?” said Fanny, looking expressively at Frank; “you know why I would rather bear and suffer wrong — than go to law in this case.”

“Yes, I understand you; but, Fanny, consider well — are you sure you are right in *needlessly surrendering the inheritance of your child?*”

“I am sure of it; but we are not called on to decide this question until we know what Cecil will say. He may at once restore it to his child, and save all future struggles. We shall see!”

“And if not?” said Frank, in an interrogative tone.

“Then I must let it be; for happen what may to myself, I shall never forget that Mary is his child; and I will not begin her earliest lessons by setting her in opposition to her father.”

“But how then will you provide for her? — for allow me to remind you that you have only a *life interest* in your own property — she will not succeed to it.”

“Poor child! — it is for no fault of hers that she is cut off from the estates of both father and mother!” sighed Fanny; “but I will insure my life for her benefit. By retrenching and living with the plainness, the retirement, and the economy suitable to my altered station. I am certain of securing her a provision for the future which will preserve her from destitution.”

Frank understood her feelings better than Mr. Tucker, but did not feel at all more disposed than he to see her thus *defrauded* of her rights; he, therefore, secretly resolved to do all in his power to prevent this wrong and injustice, if he could not induce *her* to resort to active measures on her own part to repel injury.

“After all,” said Fanny, again resuming the conversation, “I think even were I disposed to hostile measures, I would not threaten before the time to act. You say I can do nothing at present — then let me be quiet. A very short time, Mr. Tucker tells me, will release Cecil, and then, Frank, you shall in my name, claim this money for my child. Until then, it will be far more agreeable to let this matter rest. And now, gentlemen, I have ordered you a dinner, but you will excuse my presence at it, I am too weary and worn out for anything but my own room. Farewell, Frank — perhaps when we meet again, I may be better able to thank you for your unvaried friendship than I can today.” She held out her hand, he took it silently. “We shall not meet again in this house,” continued she, after a pause.

“You leave it soon,” said he, with a look of pleasure.

“I have settled on nothing,” replied she.

“But allow me to suggest whether you had not better come to a decision? I hear, in London, of extensive purchases of furniture, pictures, etc.; would it not be advisable to move before the mansion becomes a scene of confusion and painful alteration?”

Fanny looked around the room with the air of one awaking from a dream. “How selfish I have been,” she said, “I forgot that I was keeping him from his home — that while indulging my unwillingness to leave this beloved place, I was perhaps encroaching too far. Thank you for reminding me. I will think of it, and try to act in some way; but wherever I go, I shall be glad to see you, Frank: you will still be my friend and my brother by adoption!”

“Your friend, I trust I shall always remain, under any change of place or circumstance,” was his answer, pressing slightly the hand which she extended; “but do not take leave of me as if we were not to meet again, and that soon; for unless you were positively to forbid me your presence, I shall certainly be your visitor.”

A kind “farewell” was Fanny’s only answer; she was, as she said, wearied and worn out, and glad to be once more alone, she retired to her dressing-room to *think* and to *feel*.

With all her strength of mind, there were times when the *agony of her internal struggles* were severe indeed. Times when scenes of the past would crowd upon her memory with a fearful distinctness, when her *disappointed affections* would cry aloud in her heart, when a sense of desertion and ill-usage oppressed her almost beyond her strength — almost I say — for even in her darkest hour, bright hopes would gradually arise with reflection — hopes which had their foundation in things not seen! Faith would whisper of a *future rest after her struggles*, and supply patience to support them.

But though this was always the result of her mental conflicts, they were attended by the acutest suffering; a sense of *shame, remorse, and despondency* which would bow her to the earth, and enveloped every future prospect in the most dismal coloring. She saw before her, in anticipation, a period, perhaps a long one, of disgrace and discomfort: seclusion and solitude must be her fate; and though for herself she would have welcomed this, she was a *mother*, and could not endure to think of her innocent child sharing in her parent’s sufferings, or undergoing privation brought on by errors in those who should have led her better into the path of life.

On the present occasion, no sooner was she alone than her pent-up feelings struggled for relief, and overwhelmed her soul with agony. The bitterness of having her dearest affections torn away by the hand which had once so fondly cherished them; the sorrow at leaving a home so well beloved, and where she had been so happy; the uncertainty as to the course she should pursue; and a hundred other painful reminiscences and thoughts, swelled her heart almost to bursting. It was not until tears had come to her relief and moistened her scorching eyeballs, and softened the burning of her



overcharged brain, that anything like composure revisited her, or that she was able to consider her future movements. When, however, her tears had subsided, and her mind been fortified by *prayer* and reflection, the result of her mental struggle, and more quiet consideration appeared in a note to Mrs. Compton, to this effect:

“After all my resolute and repeated refusals to visit you, dear Margaret, you will be surprised when I offer myself as your visitor tomorrow, and that for an indefinite time. I shall come to you early, and intend to stay until I have settled on my future home. At present I only know this much, that I leave Brookensha tomorrow forever! further explanation I shall defer until we meet, I cannot put feelings on paper. Adieu. Yours, for the present, Fanny Mansfield.”

Having dispatched this note, poor Fanny felt exceedingly inclined to lay her head on a pillow, close her eyes, and try to forget all worldly things until the painful moment when she must tear herself from her beloved home. But it might not be. There was so much to be done in the short interval that remained, and much that in its nature was most bitter. Letters to be examined and destroyed, books to be sorted and arranged — a division to be made between such things as were hers and such as were Cecil’s — such as she might retain, and such as she must resign. It was inexpressibly painful. Often as she searched for some article which she wished to preserve, her hand fell on a trifle, an ornament, perhaps a book or an engraving, which called up the most bitter sensations; silent tokens of past tenderness, memorials of happy days, which with mute but eloquent language revealed to her mind scenes which must not be remembered, but never could be forgotten. The early love of Cecil, that love which had once seemed inexhaustible — how every article recalled it to her mind.

She was firmly resolved to take nothing away which would serve to remind her of her married life. The *presents* which she had received as his wife should all be abandoned; soon, very soon, she would have no right to love him. It befitted her, therefore, to relinquish all that could feed that love; even his picture, that treasure of her happier days, she had now no claim to call her own — but could she abandon that to her successor? It was one which had been painted for her sister, and on the back, surrounding a lock of Cecil’s dark hair, there was a golden wreath with the words engraved, “*Cecil Mansfield, to his beloved wife,*” and should she leave this which had been hallowed by the touch of Mary’s fingers, pressed so often to Mary’s lips, lain by her side through hours of suffering, and been bequeathed to Mary’s child as her mother’s dearest gift — could she leave this for *Laura* Mansfield — oh, no; Cecil had given it to her, when Mary’s daughter died, and she would keep it for his child; there could be no harm in that, she would seal it up, and some day when her daughter wished to hear who her father was, she would learn it thus; some day when her daughter’s age justified the measure, she would learn Fanny’s sad history, and take warning by her fall.

But if it was painful to examine and separate all those tokens of the past, how much more so was it when she was obliged to sit down, and look over old letters which must be destroyed. Sheet after sheet of Cecil’s writing was cast into the fire with averted eyes and close-pressed lips, and heaving heart, which felt the sacrifice it dared not mourn. With all the heroism of a well-principled woman, she resolutely destroyed each token, each acknowledgment of that love with which she knew those pages abounded. She did not indulge in one glance at their contents; she hardly allowed herself one thought on their several subjects. One only she reserved — the first he ever wrote to her as her husband — to be laid by with the picture, and one other little token of her marriage to be given to her daughter to prove that, though erring, her mother had not been unprincipled, but had been more sinned against, than sinning.

She had not finished her labors until long past midnight, and then with throbbing head and heart, bursting with pent-up grief, she for the last time laid her head on the pillow under her husband’s roof.

A few days more and she would no longer dare to call him so; a very, very brief space, and her name, her home, her husband — all would be torn from her, and she would be a disgraced and desolate woman. Such thoughts as these did not tend to soothe her to sleep, or make her pillow easy; and the morning’s sun which shone through her half-drawn curtains, visited her chamber before sleep had closed her eyes.

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 13

“If you please, madam, the carriage is at the door,” had been twice repeated by Mrs. Cookson on that *morning of suffering*, before Fanny could command herself sufficiently to appear to hear. As pale as marble, she sat motionless and speechless, looking fixedly at the window, but unconscious of the prospect before her eyes, her mind wandering in a sort of *chaos* of feeling, no idea devoid of pain, and none peculiarly prominent; she knew she had something sad and oppressive to pass through, but she felt scarcely aware what it was. At length, her unnatural stillness alarmed her attendants, and they hit upon the plan of trying to arouse her by the caresses of her child. This was successful: catching the little girl in her arms, and thus concealing her face, she rushed from the room, passed with a hurried but trembling step through the marble hall, and in another moment was seated in her carriage with closed eyes and quivering lips, and close-drawn veil; nor did she once raise her head, or cast one glance around, until they were far beyond the boundaries of Brookensha, and had passed forever from those dearly-loved scenes.

Her friend met her at the door of the Compton house with a heart full of joyous welcome; but when she caught a glimpse of Fanny’s pale, worn face, and saw the evidences of internal struggle, the words died on her lips, and she silently conducted her to the rooms which were devoted to her.

Carefully and gently she removed Fanny’s bonnet, kissed her marble forehead, bathed her temples with Eau-de-Cologne, and whispered as she did so:

“Cry, dear Fanny, do cry; it will do you much good — only have a good cry, and your heart will not break.”

And suiting the action to the word, she sat down herself, and burst into tears. She could not have done a more beneficial thing; there is something so contagious either in mirth or sorrow; and Fanny, who had been repressing her tears for hours until they had seemed to scorch up her heart, now gave free vent to them, and was relieved.

As soon as she was equal to it, she explained to her friends the reason of her sudden resolution to leave Brookensha, and her entire uncertainty as to where she should go, and what should become of her. The first wish of her heart at the present moment appeared to be to leave Yorkshire, to place as great a distance as possible between herself and former scenes — to forget, or at least to banish, all memorials of the past. She consulted Mr. Compton as to where she should settle. He was a calm, quiet man, very different from his lively and excitable wife; and she had great respect for his judgment. On this occasion, it did not take him long to come to a decision for her. He had been, for some little time, negotiating for a house at Hastings for the winter months: it was larger than they needed, and there would, therefore, be abundant accommodation for Fanny. She should come to them as their guest, and continue so until she saw how far the place suited her health and her feelings: she would then be able to act and judge for herself.

This was a plan which agreed with Fanny’s wishes. The distance from Yorkshire, the little probability of meeting any acquaintance at Hastings, the offers of complete seclusion, when she chose it, and yet the comfort of a friend at hand, to advise and assist her in case of sudden emergency — all presented strong temptations to her mind. The offer was eagerly closed with, and in a very few days more, Fanny was domiciled with her friends at Hastings; retaining of her former large and expensive establishment, only her own attendant, Mrs. Cookson, who was to wait on little Mary and herself.

A week passed with no event of importance, except the receipt of a deed which she signed and returned, constituting her two lawyers, as proposed by Frank, trustees of the money thus settled on her child. She wished she had more to do; it would have done her good. With her utmost efforts to repress all selfish sorrow, subdue rebellious murmurings, and cultivate a spirit of submission and meekness, it was impossible to recover her composure, or conceal her agitation; as the day and hour advanced which was to decide her fate. Not that she had any feelings of doubt as to the result — at least so she told herself — but who, while there is the smallest opening to hope, can quite exclude its flattering whispers, or entirely expel its illusions?

She must remain in some degree of uncertainty until the sentence was given — and then *farewell forever* to all worldly hopes, and sentiments of earthly love and happiness. There would be nothing left for her but one blank, joyless future, with only one sentiment to bind her heart to earth — one feeling, half pain, half pleasure — her maternal affection. She was not sure when the die would be cast, and her fate fixed; and she was sitting one afternoon trying not to think on the subject, but to occupy her mind with a book, when the door opened, and Frank Linwood was announced.

She half rose to receive him, but, agitated and anxious, she sank again on the sofa, only extending her hand, which he eagerly clasped and held in his own, but without uttering a word.

She wished to ask a question, but at first she could not articulate; however, raising her eyes to his face, she read in the look of pity and concern with which he regarded her, the announcement he had come to make.

“It is over then,” said she, in a low voice, “I see; I know it all — you may spare yourself the trouble of words, Frank.”

“Do not hate me, Fanny, though I am the messenger of evil news,” said he, trying to retain the hand which she, however, withdrew. She made no answer, but turning from him, concealed her countenance by leaning on the sofa-cushion, and he could only judge of her feelings and her agitation by the visible trembling of her whole form. She was not

weeping, however, as he supposed; she was *praying for strength* to bear her appointed burden, and when she raised her head again, her face was calm and composed, though very sad and pale.

"It is all over, Frank! tell me, when was the sentence given?"

"The day before yesterday."

"Were you present?"

"I was, and left York immediately for London."

"And was — was Cecil at Brookensha?"

"No, he was in London. I saw him there."

"You saw him?"

"Yes, agreeably to your wishes, relative to that money."

"Oh, never mind that; I will hear of that by-and-by. But you must have traveled quickly, Frank!"

"I traveled all one night, and saw Cecil late yesterday evening."

"Where?"

"At his uncle Henry's."

Fanny startled, and a crimson shade tinged her cheek.

"Do you know where he is now?" was her next question.

"Gone to Brookensha."

"To Brookensha!" she repeated, and was again silent. He sat looking at her with an anxious, uneasy air, as of one who wishes, yet dares not to speak. She glanced at him, and met his dark eyes fixed on her with a sad and commiserating expression.

"What is it, Frank?" she said. "Are you vexing about that money? Do not do so; if it cannot be recovered, let it go!"

"No, Fanny, the money will be all right. It is not that; I have something more to say. Are you prepared for painful news?"

"What more — surely there can be nothing more to learn, unless — " and a sudden thought striking her, first dyed her cheek crimson, then blanched it completely she paused and hesitated: he looked at her.

"You said Cecil was at Brookensha," whispered she. "Is he *alone*?"

"No, Fanny, you must hear it; he this morning married his cousin Laura!"

She looked at him in silence.

"Yes, it is so," he continued, speaking more to relieve his own heart than for her sake who was listening. "He has broken one chain — only to put on another: he has cast away a pearl beyond price — to make a treasure of a gaudy colored pebble."

She continued to sit silent, immovable and tranquil, as if unconscious of the full meaning of his words, or unable to realize their truth. He began to fear he had been too abrupt, and regarded her anxiously, desirous that she should show some emotion, shed a tear, speak a word of feeling, or give some sign of consciousness. He was quite at a loss what to do or say next, and though exceedingly desirous of affording her relief, he had not the least idea how to set about it. Man has not the *delicate tact* of woman, which would enable him to throw himself in imagination into the situation of the sufferer he would console, and *feel the griefs* from which come such bitter sorrow as if they were his own. With all Frank's love to Fanny, he could not now understand her sufferings, for he was a man, and his *reason* and *judgment* were his guides — and not his *feelings* or his *heart*; and these told him that Cecil was so perfectly worthless, that he had shown himself so thoroughly *immoral*, *heartless*, and *cruel*, that he could not imagine any sentiments of *affection* surviving in her bosom. That she must suffer, he doubted not; but that tenderness to Cecil could form the basis of her sufferings, he could not suppose.

He had thought with a swelling heart of Fanny — free, unfettered, a lawful object of competition, a woman who might now be wooed and won — but this was before he witnessed her *overwhelming sorrow*. Now he felt and judged differently: the tide of his affections was driven back on his heart, and must there be carefully concealed, for he knew now it would be many, many months before he could dare to breathe a word on such a subject. He must be her *brother* still, if he would not lose her friendship forever.

But to console her now, what could he do? She sat there like a statue, as fixed, as cold; he took her hand in his — it was chilly to the touch.

"Dear Fanny," whispered he, alarmed, "is there anything that I can do to relieve you? Speak to me. Please speak — "

She pressed her other hand upon her throat, as if to subdue the painful rising of her heart, but spoke not a word.

"Fanny," again he whispered, "where is your child? Remember your little Mary. She is still left to you."

He had touched the right chord now, and the stony trance passed away.

"Oh, my Mary, my fatherless, my deserted child!" she sobbed. "Oh, who will care for you now, my little innocent one? Would that I were laid in my grave, and my Mary beside me. Then I would be at peace."

She burst into tears, and, totally regardless of her companion, she sobbed long and bitterly. In silence he watched her emotion; he knew that tears would do her good, and he watched without further interference, internally praying that she might find strength and consolation in her hour of sorrow and suffering.

At length the agony of her first grief began to subside, and she turned toward him.

“You had better leave me,” she said, hurriedly, for until now she had been scarcely conscious of his presence; then looking at him she saw a *tear* glistening in his eye, and she felt how deep must be the *sympathy* which could bring tears. “Do not stay with me now.” she said, in a very soft and almost affectionate voice. “Neither you nor anyone can do me good; and indeed, I am best alone. Leave me, my kind friend. I shall be better soon.”

He pressed his lips to her hands, taking both of hers in his, and he saw as he did so, that she still wore her wedding-ring, that symbol of her most unfortunate union. It caught her eye at the same moment, and she half drew it from her finger, then paused, hesitated, and replaced it.

“No, I cannot part with it,” she whispered; “surely I may wear that still for my own sake, if not for his: it shall stay there.”

Without trusting his voice with another word, Frank hastened away, but was arrested at the door by Fanny’s voice; she begged him to go and tell the Comptons what he had just told her. He could not refuse, though he had much rather not have seen anyone at that moment, but he obeyed Fanny’s injunctions. The effect was very different upon Mrs. Compton from what it had been upon Fanny.

“Married again, Mr. Linwood!” exclaimed she, “impossible — quite impossible. I know men are very wicked, and Cecil Mansfield is as bad as the worst of them; but it is not possible that he or anyone can be so wicked, so unfeeling, so lost to all sense of *common morality and decency*. It is not true!”

“My dear Margaret,” said her husband, quietly, as if desirous to stop the torrent of her eloquence, “please, if it is possible, recollect what you are saying!”

She did not heed him; but starting from her chair advanced to Frank, exclaiming:

“For the credit of your gender, for the sake of human nature, for decency, for propriety — assure me that you were only jesting.”

“Surely, Mrs. Compton, you cannot suppose I could choose such a time or such a subject for *jesting*,” replied Frank, very gravely.

“And must I believe it? Oh, that I had a thousand tongues to proclaim my *scorn* and *detestation* of that man. Oh! that I could sound in his ears day and night, how I loathe and despise him. I trust he will be miserable — I am sure he deserves it. Wretch! — infamous wretch! to desert such an *angel* — to ruin her peace — to break her heart — to rob her of everything in the world; and then the very instant the law sets him free, to put another in her place — not to wait a year, a month, a week — one little week for *decency’s* sake. It is detestable, abominable, horrible!”

“She was forced to stop for breath, and relieved her feelings by pacing the room.

“Mrs. Compton is not mad on every subject,” said her husband, quietly. “I dare say you might imagine so, however, from what you see.”

“Hold your tongue. Edward, I am not mad at all — only I have feelings, and I dare express them — in which two points I differ from many others, some never expressing what they feel, and some never feeling anything to express. Now, Mr. Linwood, tell me, are you *sure* this incredible news is true?”

“I am certain, for I was present and saw them married.”

“You were present! you *sanctioned* it by your presence — and you dared to come here; had I known it, I would never have touched your hand — I would never have spoken to you a word!”

“Yes, I was present: I understood it was to take place at an early hour this morning, and I went to ascertain the truth for myself. There was a great crowd, and I was an unobserved spectator of the ceremony — that I might not be the bearer of an idle report. Are you offended at that?”

“No! there is no harm in that; but you would not shake hands with him, would you?”

“No; previous to his marriage he behaved in such a way, that I would consider myself *disgraced* by calling him a friend. I had an interview the night preceding, and we parted on such terms that we are not likely to meet again.”

“I am perfectly delighted to hear it!” exclaimed Mrs. Compton.

“I would be sorry to think that you are serious in all the warm expressions that you use, Margaret,” said her husband.

“Indeed I am; I just think what I say; but, Mr. Linwood, you have not been —” she stopped, and looked fixedly at him for a moment — “of what nature was your meeting and your parting?”

“A very *unfriendly* one,” replied Frank. “My meeting with Cecil Mansfield was on matters of business entirely; it took place in his uncle’s drawing-room, and Miss Laura Mansfield was present the whole time. You can imagine that it was extremely hostile, or at least unfriendly.”

“I wonder you would speak to the man at all,” said Mrs. Compton, impatiently. “I am sure I would not.”

“Not even if *Fanny’s* interests required it? — I am sure you would!” replied he, very earnestly; there was a peculiar accent too in the word as he pronounced that name that caught the lady’s ear.

“You certainly have a heart, Mr. Linwood,” said she, looking at him with evident admiration.

“I would hope so,” he replied, in a tone of proud humility. “I cannot imagine that there is anything peculiar in the possession,” said Frank; “I trust there are few men devoid of it.”

“Then you are quite mistaken; most men have no more heart than that statue of Mercury — my husband there is one of them.”

“Quite true, Margaret,” replied Mr. Compton; “I gave mine to you, and have never asked for it back again. You understand now, Mr. Linwood, what she means when she says you have a heart.”

“I would like to see Mrs. Mansfield — *Fanny*, I mean,” said Frank, “as soon as she is a little recovered from this blow: she felt it, of course, very much; but *now all hope is over*, she will the sooner grow composed, and then I must have an interview about *business matters*. Will you ask her — and let me know her wishes Mrs. Compton?”

“Business! — how detestable to have to attend to business! I am sure I never could think under such a trial as hers. I would be either crying or scolding all day long.”

“Your friend has too much sense to spend her energies in that way,” observed Mr. Compton; “she has one of the strongest and best regulated minds that I ever met with.”

“Thank you for the implied compliment. *Fanny*, I know, is an angel, and I am a very ordinary mortal, Frank; is she not perfection?” addressing Mr. Linwood.

“I cannot imagine anything nearer to it in the shape of woman,” was his answer; “but now I must bid you farewell, Mrs. Compton; let me know when I may come again.”

“That man certainly loves *Fanny*,” said Mrs. Compton, as soon as the door closed on him. “Beyond a doubt; how glad he must be that Cecil is married again. But, poor dear *Fanny*, I must go to her,” and she rushed from the room as she spoke.

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 14

The very same evening that Frank had arrived from York, he had sought an interview with Cecil Mansfield, on the subject of *Fanny's fortune*. Fearful that his name might alarm him, and unwilling to allow him time to escape the interview, Frank had merely announced himself as a *gentleman on business*, and had been at once shown into the drawing-room; the servants supposing that he was the lawyer who was just then expected with the marriage settlements for signature.

Cecil and Laura were sitting side by side examining some jewelry, many cases of which were spread on the table before them, while the young jeweler stood obsequiously bowing and turning over the diamonds, rubies, and pearls, holding them up to the lamp to display their splendid water, and talking of the hundreds of pounds which this or that article cost, as carelessly as if he could hardly suppose such trifling sums worth naming.

Shame, embarrassment, and anger were visible in Cecil's countenance, as he perceived who the visitor was; he rose, and bowed silently. Laura also rose and sweeping aside the little morocco cases with their sparkling contents, she asked in an audible voice, the jeweler to wait a few minutes, until Mr. Mansfield was at liberty to renew the inspection. Neither the words, nor the fact of their remaining standing, without asking him to be seated, were unnoticed by Frank; but nothing daunted, he determined to carry through his object, whether he were welcomed or the reverse.

"Can I have a few minutes' private conversation with you?" was his inquiry. "The subject on which I have to speak is not one you would wish to have made public."

Cecil hesitated, but Laura motioning to the man to draw back, led the way herself to the inner drawing-room, and partially closing the doors, said in an authoritative voice:

"You may speak here, sir, if you please."

"You cannot be surprised to see me, Mr. Mansfield," said Frank, turning to Cecil; "perhaps you guess my object. As one of the trustees under the late *Mr. Ellis' will*, I have some claims to make on you, for which of course you are prepared; also to act on behalf of *your daughter*, in claiming the sum which you owe to her."

"I assure you I am quite unprepared for any claim you can have to advance, Mr. Linwood; indeed I am not aware of any which you can possibly assert as trustee or otherwise."

"Allow me to remind you: in the first place, there is the sum of *ten thousand pounds*, which came into your possession about three years ago, the property of *Fanny Ellis*, which she now wishes to reclaim; and, secondly, there is the *annual income* arising from the late Mr. Ellis' estate, which has been paid to you since his death, but which the trustees are now bound to re-demand, as it has been paid and received under a mistake which it is unnecessary now to advert to."

The first of these claims was no surprise to Cecil, who had already been prepared for it by Mr. Dennis' remonstrance; but the second was quite as unexpected as it was unwelcome. After a moment's hesitation, he said:

"Really, Mr. Linwood, I hardly know what to say to this extraordinary demand, beyond that I am quite unprepared to meet it, and equally astonished at its being made. It is true that the money in question all came into my hands, but I received it as — as *Fanny's husband* — and as such, was both entitled to receive and spend it."

There was a look of extreme embarrassment, and even of deprecation as he glanced at Frank, after saying these words.

"Certainly," replied Frank, in a blunt, unshrinking tone, "as *Fanny's husband* you were entitled to receive them; and had you *continued* her husband, no one would have questioned your right. But since the annulment at York has decided that you never held the relationship of her husband — of course the money must be resigned with the other advantages you are called upon to give up."

"And is it *Fanny* who desires you to press this claim?"

"It is by her particular request that I make it."

"But surely, when she knows that it will materially inconvenience and distress me — she will not insist on it."

"Your inconvenience and distress at repaying it, cannot be greater than that which she will experience in the loss of it; and as she has *justice* and *law* on her side, you cannot wish to make her the sufferer."

"But if I *cannot* —"

"That is a word which I apprehend a court of law would not understand."

"You do not mean to insinuate that *Fanny* will *sue* me for this sum? She must be very much changed indeed if she can do that."

"Possibly she is; but changes of this nature must be familiar to you, and need not, therefore, excite surprise."

"But I am convinced she would never proceed to such extremities — she is too generous for that."

"And of course you would be incapable of taking advantage of such generosity, by attempting to *defraud* her of her right?"

"I cannot see that it is her right. It was mine when I took it; you cannot blame me for doing so?"

"That you believed it yours, I can easily imagine; I was under a similar mistake when I paid you the three thousand pounds which Mr. Ellis bequeathed to his daughter's *husband*, and the *interest* of his other money. Whatever steps his



daughter might be disposed to take for the recovery of *her own property*, and whatever degree of forbearance she might have shown, is not now the question. The matter does not rest with her! She has settled the money on your daughter; and the gentleman who is joined with me in the trust, is no more disposed than myself to allow the claim to drop through neglect. We must see *justice* done.”

“I repeat it, it is a most unreasonable claim — you might as well ask for the ten thousand pounds which belonged to my *first* wife.”

“That you should have a life-interest in that sum is natural, but though of course it would be only reasonable to expect that you should settle it on your own daughter — still this is a question where the law cannot dictate. In the other you will find it peremptory, and I am determined to resort to it to enforce claims which you seem so disposed to neglect.”

“Really, I would do it if I could — but I have not the money at command.”

“You *had* the money, what is become of it, you best know; if you have spent it, after the request of Mr. Ellis that it should be settled on his *daughter*, I can only observe that I am glad I am not in your situation.”

“The money is not spent — at least, not *all* of it — but considering it as *mine*, I have entered into engagements which — indeed I have incurred expenses that I cannot — ” he hesitated, and did not very well know what *excuse* to urge. The injustice of his own proceedings struck him forcibly, and he looked at Laura, who had continued listening to the whole conversation, while apparently occupied in examining the jewelry. She now came forward and addressed Frank.

“Was it not of her own free will that Fanny gave Cecil this money? What right has she *now* to reclaim her gifts?”

“Mr. Mansfield knows best.” replied Frank, “whether he can produce any evidence to prove the gift, or whether he did not merely become possessed of it under the idea that he was her *husband*. Would she have given it — had she not supposed herself his wife? Or would he have accepted it, not believing himself her husband.”

“Really, Mr. Linwood, when a woman acts as Miss Ellis has done, and sacrifices everything to her affection for a man, one cannot answer for what she may do. The gift of a few thousand pounds would be of less value than some other gifts she made him, at least so most women would judge,” said Laura.

“No doubt; madam, you judge perfectly right, few people can be better qualified than yourself to form a decision on that point,” said Frank, with perfect calmness. “The value of the *sacrifices* she has been compelled to make, was no doubt well understood by you before you took the steps which enforced their surrender. Leave her, however, the poor consolation of having a decent provision for her child; having torn from her her *name*, her *home*, her *station*, her *husband* — do not *defraud* her of that to which you have no claim — while stepping into possession of all the rest. I would recommend you to relinquish your hopes of appropriating what is placed by the law beyond your grasp.”

She seemed rather astonished, and tried to interrupt him, but he went on. “If it is true what I hear, that you are to be married tomorrow, you should have some concern for your husband’s honor. Consider how it will sound to have an action brought against him on the charge of *fraudulently* retaining money of which he obtained possession by deceiving the owner into the belief that she was his wife; thereby reducing her to great poverty, and leaving his daughter destitute of a provision for her support.”

“It is no use talking in that way, Linwood,” exclaimed Cecil, hastily, “Fanny is amply provided for, she has her father’s fortune, which is five or six hundred a year, on which, with her *moderate habits*, she may live most comfortably.”

“She will have it for *her* life, but it will not descend to your daughter, as you must be aware; and the *three* thousand which by your father-in law’s will was bequeathed to his daughter’s *husband*, and which I now reclaim from you, together with her own *ten* thousand, is all that she will have to bestow upon your child.”

“And a very handsome provision, too,” asserted Laura. “What can an *illegitimate child* expect, if thirteen thousand pounds does not satisfy her? I have no pity for such insatiable, grasping greediness!”

“Only secure her the thirteen thousand, madam, and we will ask for no more; but it is the lack of that of which we complain. In demanding it, I only ask what Mr. Mansfield cannot in justice withhold money to which he has not the shadow of a claim, as he will of course admit, when he comes to consider it.”

At this moment the butler entered, and informed Laura that she was waited for in the library.

“Who wants me?” inquired she, hastily.

“My master, ma’am,” replied the servant, “and the gentleman — Mr. Price — with the papers.”

“Come then, Cecil,” said she, putting her hand on his arm; but he hesitated and looked at their visitor. Frank, however, firmly stood his ground, resolved not to give way while a hope remained for Fanny.

“Am I to await your return Mr. Mansfield, or will you give me a definite answer before you leave the room?”

“Really it is such a matter of difficulty, I do not know what to say,” hesitated Cecil, looking rather ashamed of himself.

“Will you, or will you not, accede to my claim?” demanded Frank: “the *justice* of it you must feel, though you will not acknowledge it. But will you yield to my remonstrances, or *force* me at once to put the matter in the hands of a solicitor?”

While Cecil still stood uncertain, they were interrupted by the entrance of Henry Mansfield himself, who came to know the reason of their delay. The nephew was too embarrassed to make an intelligent reply; his mind was wavering — he was

equally ashamed to proceed or retract, and hesitated in all the agony of a weak mind which has not strength to decide on either good or evil. Laura interposed,

“This gentleman, papa, has come on matters of business to Cecil — claims which had much better wait some other time for investigation. I am sure, when he understands that we are particularly engaged on affairs of importance, he will forbear to press his wishes at this time.”

“I am sure you will, sir,” said Henry Mansfield, turning to Frank, “when you learn that at this moment the solicitor is waiting with papers of great importance which require signature.”

“No,” said Frank, decidedly. “I must first have an answer, and not until then, will I go hence. Before Mr. Mansfield makes the settlement which he proposes on your daughter, let me warn you that he is liable to the amount of upward of fourteen thousand pounds, which I claim from him!”

The uncle expressed his surprise, and demanded the particulars. He listened attentively and calmly to the statement, and when it was concluded, demanded whether Miss Fanny Ellis was determined to *sue* Cecil for the amount.

“She has nothing to do with it,” said Frank, “the trustees under the settlement she has made on her child, are the parties to sue your nephew. I am one of them!”

“Then, Cecil, you should pay the amount at once; for as you would be certain to lose your cause, you had better spare yourself the trouble and the expense of costs.”

“I do, sir, it will be quite impossible for me to make the settlements on your daughter which you require. I cannot pay this exorbitant sum, and give *Laura* what I wish and what she deserves!”

“Ah, indeed! that alters the case, Mr. Linwood. You must give us time to think of this, and perhaps we may hit upon some *plan* — contrive some *means* for securing what you demand. Give us time.”

“I will give you time only on condition that Mr. Mansfield refrains from completing these settlements — until he has refunded the money he has no right to retain.”

“Impossible!” replied the father; “my daughter is to be married tomorrow!”

“I apprehend the marriage might be *delayed* without any gross violation of decorum or delicacy,” replied Frank, coolly.

“Cecil! father!” cried Laura, indignantly. “What right has this stranger — this man — to interfere in our concerns, or dictate respecting my marriage? What has he to do with it?”

“I would be sorry to have anything to do with it, Miss Mansfield,” said Frank, the polite tone of his voice making the bitterness of his words the more striking; then, turning to Cecil, he added: “Pay the money I demand to me, instead of to Miss Mansfield’s trustees. Delay your marriage until this is settled, or I will give directions tomorrow for filing a bill in Chancery for the recovery of it.”

“I would rather have twenty bills filed, than be dictated to in that manner!” exclaimed Laura, passionately.

“Consider,” resumed Frank, “that though the world may forgive the desertion of Fanny for another — may not blame your conduct as unfeeling or dishonorable in misleading, and then casting her off — the attempt to *defraud* her of her property, to *rob* her, and leave your own child destitute — will not pass uncondemned, even by the imperfect standard of this world’s rule of right. It is *disgraceful* to your feelings as a *man* and a *father!*”

Cecil looked at Laura, and hesitated; but his evil genius prevailed: “Do as you please. I will abide the consequences. I wish you goodnight, Mr. Linwood.”

With a glance of immeasurable *scorn*, the lawyer left the room.

“Now, do not keep Mr. Price waiting any longer,” said Mr. Henry Mansfield, impatiently, and he hurried out of the room.

“Come, Laura,” said Cecil, placing his arm fondly round her waist.

“I will not!” said the young lady in a most peremptory tone. “I will not touch pen or paper, Cecil, unless you promise me to have no communication — hold no interaction with Fanny Ellis or her child.”

“My dearest Laura, what makes you think of that?” remonstrated he.

“Promise me, solemnly promise me, that beyond what the law compels you — you will *do* nothing for them — *give* nothing to them — *see* nothing of them — *hear* nothing from them; that you renounce all connection with, interest in, or affection for, the child and its mother; that nothing will ever induce you to acknowledge its existence, or in any way act as if it were connected with you. Unless you do this, even now I will refuse you.”

“Now, Laura, can you suppose for a moment that I could wish to hold communication with one from whom I parted on such terms? She is *nothing* to me now: you need not be jealous of her power, or afraid of its revival.”

“Remember what I say! — let me henceforth never hear of the existence of the *brat* whose birth is a *perpetual reproach* to you.”

“I will give you any promise that you like, you jealous girl,” replied her lover immediately; yet the words were followed by something like a sigh, as he remembered *little Mary*, and some remains of *parental feeling* stirred within his heart.



[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 15

It was a *dark and gloomy day* which witnessed Cecil Mansfield's *third* appearance at the matrimonial altar. London was enveloped in a dense, damp fog; the bride's hair would not curl, the bridesmaids had red noses, and the bridegroom shivered — perhaps with cold, perhaps with feeling. The church was lighted, but the lamps struggled feebly with the murky atmosphere; and encumbered by her lace veil and flounces, the bride stumbled in the dark on leaving the church, and nearly fell down the slippery steps.

"I trust it is not *ominous* of her future marriage," whispered one of the guests to another; "a faux pas so very soon after marriage is a little remarkable."

They left town immediately for Brookensha. The fog out of London melted away into a drizzling misty rain, blotting out all distant objects completely and preventing them seeing the nearer ones by the thick curtain of small specks which it drew across the window. It was a trying journey; and when the second day proved no finer than the first, and brought them no change of prospect, Laura began to be quite *cross* — and having no one else to show her feelings to, was forced to exercise them on her husband. He bore it very well, however, being so much in love as to make every change of her temper interesting.

They reached Brookensha late on a November afternoon. The almost leafless woods looked *dreary* and damp, exhibiting to the eye one uniform tinge of a dull purplish-brown. The park was solitary and forlorn-looking, the cottages dripping and unsightly — there was nothing to charm the eye as they entered the grounds of Brookensha.

They reached the house, and Cecil led his wife into the new home he had given her — the home of their common ancestors. The wood fire on the hearth in the hall burned dull and smoky, emitting neither light nor heat, and there were no candles to compensate for it. The servants seemed taken by surprise, and quite unprepared for the return of their master.

The *new Mrs. Mansfield* gave a glance round the hall, and it was followed by a shudder, "I cannot say much for the lively appearance of your new house," observed she, as she advanced; "there is something so unearthly and *deathlike* in the mansion, one would suppose a *party of ghosts* had been holding a midnight festival here. Is it always as suitable for a *funeral* as this?"

Before Cecil could answer, the housekeeper advanced and made a stiff and formal courtesy, as she requested to know whether there was anything she could do for the young lady's comfort. Her cold and constrained manner formed a striking contrast to the affectionate address with which she had been accustomed to welcome Fanny or her sister.

"Send somebody here with a light to show me the way to my dressing-room, and let my own maid come to me immediately."

The *haughty voice* in which these words were spoken, at once completed the resolution which the housekeeper had been for some time forming — to leave Brookensha. She would not serve under such a mistress, not she! After waiting on an *angel*, she would not condescend to a woman who deigned not to look at her, but she would give her master warning of her termination the next morning. Time was when it would have broken her heart to leave a mansion where she had lived from a girl; but all was changed now, even her young master forgot to speak to her as he had been used to do, and only *found fault* that everything was so ill-prepared.

The next morning did not find the young mistress of the mansion in at all a more amiable mood. She quarreled with everything she saw and heard, from the breakfast-service to the disposition of the rooms; from the waiting of the servants, to the attentions of her husband; from the voice of the housekeeper, to the tones of a new harp. Nothing pleased her: the weather was wet on purpose to provoke her; the prospect was gloomy, the rooms were dark, the country jargon of the footman was abominable.

"I do not wonder that I have heard the *beauties* of Brookensha so much vaunted," said she contemptuously, as she stood at the library window, "the prospect is so charming; the wet and spongy turf, the half-withered flowers, dripping with rain, the leafless boughs of those trees, and the melancholy, but not musical noise of those rooks, form altogether a perfectly captivating ensemble. I begin to understand what poor nuns in French convents must have suffered, banished from the bright face of man, and see nothing but some old priest confessor."

"But things will look much brighter here in fair weather, dear Laura: it is the cloudy atmosphere gives you the vapors," said Cecil, tenderly.

"Very likely, but I don't mind a wet day in London!"

"This is the lady's flower-garden," said he, to change the subject. "I hope, next spring often to see you busy here."

"Good Heavens! Cecil, don't you keep a gardener?" exclaimed she, with an accent something between *terror* and *surprise*.

"Of course, my love, about a dozen," replied he, smiling.

"Then why, in the name of all that is astonishing, am I to *soil my fingers* by digging?" inquired she.

“Not digging, dear, but superintending, and pruning, and all the *light work* suited to a lady. The terrace-garden has always been under the charge of the lady of the mansion,” said he, with a something of tender *retrospection* in his tone.

“Very suitable, no doubt, for your country-bred women, who are accustomed to such occupations,” said she, scornfully; but I received a *London education*, and learned different lessons!”

“There is nothing unlady-like in gardening, dear Laura. Women of the highest rank and most refined education, take pleasure in it.”

“Very likely; but I am sure it must make their hands hard and brown. Imagine me tucking up my gown, and grubbing in the dirt with these fingers — I would be able to touch the harp well, would I?” And she held up her small white hands as she spoke.

“Ah!” said he, kissing them affectionately, “I do not despair of gathering a bouquet of your planting, before the end of next summer.”

“I tell you if you gather no flowers but of my planting, Cecil, you will never prick your fingers with a rose again! I never even tied up my own bouquets in London, or dressed a flower-pot, or cared for a plant, my genius does not lie in the *domestic or rural simplicity* way. I prefer *artificial* flowers to real ones, and the glitter of a ball-room — to all the gardens in the world. There may be ‘*Sermons in stones, books in running brooks*’ — but I hate sermons, and do not like books, except of my own choosing; and as to the ‘voices in trees,’ they are unknown tongues to me, so I am not likely to be amused by them!”

“Well, dear Laura,” said her husband, good-humoredly, “I trust you will find more entertaining tongues in the country soon. Our neighbors will be calling, and I am sure you will be pleased with some of them.”

“Pleased with *country* neighbors? Really, Cecil, you know but little of my mind. Pleased with a set of people whose language, actions, and tastes are all foreign to me? Impossible!”

“Do not judge so harshly, Laura.”

“Oh! I know exactly what *country neighbors* are like,” said she; “they think and talk of nothing but politics and the state of the country, varied by digressions on horses and hounds. There are their wives, who wear satin gowns, and feathers in their bonnets, who talk of their housemaids’ failings and their doctors’ prescriptions. Then come their *daughters*, who converse about the Opera, taking their idea of the first from the papers, and of the second from the magazines. Then come the *doctors*, who look as if they were studying your constitution; and their wives, who never speak to one another, and will not sit at the same table. Then the parsons, boring you with paupers’ miseries and charity sermons; and their wives, with their hearts wrapped up in their noisy nurseries, and flannel-petticoats for the poor. Oh! yes; the country society is *charming* in every way.”

“I assure you, Laura, we have very excellent neighbors, people of good old families, who spend the season in London, and live in first-rate style.”

“They must be the *greatest bores* of all; bringing down second-hand fashions, and exploded tastes from London; and passing them off as first-rate in the *country*.”

“You are very unjust, Laura; but you shall tell a different tale when you have experienced their hospitality. Wait until you have spent a *Christmas* in the country.”

“I, spend a Christmas in the country? Heavens! what will you mention next, Cecil? You cannot expect me to stay here more than two weeks.”

“Indeed I hope you will remain here until the House meets at least; you know I must go to town then, and you, I expect, will accompany me — but until then, I trust you will spend the interval as the wife of a *man of property* should do: in getting acquainted with your neighbors, studying the interests of our poor tenantry, and making yourself and me popular among the electors of the county.”

“I mean to spend the next winter at Paris!” said Laura, composedly.

“Paris, Laura; impossible! I cannot leave the country,” replied her husband, excessively surprised. “You cannot expect it!”

“I am determined to go there, was her resolute answer. “I did not get my *pretty trousseau* to lay it aside until it is all old-fashioned!”

“Wear your pretty clothes *here*, Laura.”

“I dare say — very suitable; lace flounces and satin slippers aren’t exactly calculated for appearing in this forlorn and weeping wilderness!”

“You will be expected to appear well-dressed at church.”

“Well or ill, I can tell you I shall *not* appear there at all. It makes me shudder to think how damp and cold a *country church* would be!”

“But my popularity, Laura — ”

“Had better not depend on *me*, for I feel sure I shall never agree with any of the *country gossips* of whom you are speaking. I shall affront them all!”

“My dear Laura, don’t be *childish*.”

“I am determined that *I will have my own way*, as few children ever have!”

Laura was as good as her word; and added but little to her husband’s popularity while at Brookensha. They had been three days in the country, when visitors made their appearance, and Laura was summoned from the sofa in her dressing-room, to receive one of the oldest and proudest of the neighboring families. She entered the room and advanced to meet them with an air of indifference and self-possession very different from the usual aspect of a bride when first receiving visitors in her husband’s house. Her scrutinizing eyes quailed not, and her swan-like neck continued drawn to its full height, as if she were internally questioning the *equality* of those she approached with her own elevated station. She glided across the room to an easy chair near her embroidery-frame, and seated herself with the air of a *queen* who waits to be entertained by those whom she honors with an interview.

The party consisted of a father, mother, and daughter, who valued themselves more on their unfilled but illustrious descent than many patrician families would venture to do. *Pride thus opposed to pride*, it was not likely that a very friendly interview would take place, though the visitors were too well-bred to adopt the haughty and contemptuous silence with which Mrs. Mansfield treated them. *Civil inquiries* were made as to how she liked the place and the general aspect of the country, but they met with the most frigid and brief replies. She sat twisting a piece of colored lambs-wool round her delicate white fingers, as if indulging a fit of profound reflection, from which she was aroused by the occasional questions of her guests.

The inquiries of the young lady relative to their new neighbor’s tastes and amusements, were not more successful in eliciting information than those of her mother had been. Judging from her replies, Laura appeared to have no accomplishments, no occupations, no preferences. The harp in the room seemed to indicate that she was musical, but Laura only admitted that she liked well enough to *hear* it. The embroidery-frame might have served as a ground-work for a confidential discussion relative to patterns, shades, and colors; but she asserted that she scarcely ever touched it. She knew nothing of *gardening* except that it soiled the hands; or of *sketching* beyond the fact that it must weary the eyes.

Upon the whole, the impression made during the quarter of an hour that the visit lasted, was extremely unfavorable, and the family decided, that whatever faults the unfortunate Fanny Ellis might have had, she certainly possessed better manners, and probably better sense, than her successor at Brookensha.

At the gate of the park the Fermors met with their eldest son, who was proceeding, full of curiosity, to see the woman whose charms had been sufficiently powerful to subdue the affection for Fanny, which had once been so remarkable.

Fanny had never been a popular character with the generality of mirthful young men — no *affectionate wife* can be so. They could not deny her gentleness, beauty, and virtue; but while these claimed their *respect* — their society, conversation, and liveliness, was reserved for those women who valued them more and complimented them better.

When assured by his mother that he would find the new Mrs. Mansfield proud, silent, and unsociable; and by his sister that her mind and manners were equally deficient — he did not feel inclined to credit either, and only the more resolutely set his horse’s head toward the house, in hopes to make some impression by his own worth on *the proud lady of the domain*.

Just as the party had left the house, Cecil entered the drawing-room, and Laura, sinking back in her chair, exclaimed: “Take me away, Cecil, from these *horrors*, if you do not wish to kill me with *disgust* and *chagrin*.”

“My dearest Laura,” exclaimed the alarmed husband. “what is the matter?” seating himself by her side with an air of the tenderest solicitude.

“Only that I cannot *survive* if I have again to do the honors to such another party of *bores* as those Fermors.”

“My love, they are some of my best friends.”

“Then your best friends are very *dull* and *stupid* people, and bad company,” replied she, very unceremoniously; “and I must insist on not being exposed to such *dreadful visitations*.”

“Why, what did they do?”

“The papa Fermor never spoke at all; the mamma was still more disagreeable, because she did talk a little; but the daughter was worst of all, for she seemed to think it necessary to catechize me on my accomplishments, as if she had been inquiring the qualifications of a governess. Could I play, sing, draw, dance, etc. I had a great mind to show her the advertisements in the ‘Times’ of the London schools, and tell her I learned all that they professed to teach at one of those establishments.”

“My love, you really must not be so severe. I have no doubt Miss Fermor meant to be both civil and agreeable.”

“It is a pity then that her efforts so ill responded to her intentions, for her questions proved both rude and unpleasant.”

“I am sorry you found her so,” began Cecil, when he was interrupted by his wife, who continued, without paying any attention to what he was saying,

“The fact is, Cecil, you must take me away immediately!”

“My dearest love, you cannot wish to go before Christmas.”

“Most certainly I do; I mean to spend Christmas at Paris!”

“Paris, Laura! What can you be thinking of? What put *that* into your head?”

“Why, what is there unnatural in the wish? Paris is the most agreeable place in the world, and you cannot expect me to remain all my life moping here in this extremely dull prison of yours.”

“But my interest, my influence, the security of my seat! The owners of Brookensha have always been noted for *hospitality* at Christmas; what will my neighbors say?”

“That they wish themselves in your place; what else could they say? They will find you grown wiser than your ancestors.”

“It will not do,” said Cecil, shaking his head.

“Depend upon it, Cecil,” said she, firmly, “if you reckon on my making myself a popularity-hunter for your sake, you will find yourself grossly mistaken. I never have been accustomed to *bow* and *cringe* to anyone: for instance, I thought the Fermors disagreeable, and I have no doubt that they found me so.”

“I would hope not,” said he, gravely: “it will be very detrimental to my interests if you *offend* them.”

“Well, then, take me to Paris!”

“Now, my dearest wife,” said he, drawing his chair close to her, and kindly taking her hand, “do for my sake listen to reason. Please try and make yourself agreeable to my friends, and I will try and oblige you. We will see if we can go to Paris in the spring, if you will spend the winter here. You know you can be most delightful, fascinating, if you please; do exert your powers for the good of your husband, and try and make friends with those whose friendship is important to me.”

“Only see,” exclaimed Laura, impatiently, shaking the folds of her gown, “you have placed the chair on my flounces! Really you grow so *gothic* — perhaps you are used to behave in this manner at home; but I must say, I wonder what kind of ladies you could have associated with, if they permitted such manners? Do try, and for my sake behave like a gentleman. It is important to me.”

“Laura, do you want to *vex* me?” said Cecil, drawing back with an air that showed he was hurt.

“It is not my particular object; but I would suppose you were trying to annoy me, by the way in which you go on worrying. Can you not be quiet?”

“You did not use to behave thus, Laura; you are changed, I think, this morning. Do be yourself, and be reasonable.”

Laura only turned away, and took a newspaper from the table near her. She was humming an opera air over its columns, when the house-bell was again heard, and Cecil exclaimed,

“Here are more visitors, Laura; let me beseech you to make yourself pleasant.”

Laura only raised her eyebrows and compressed her lips, but uttered not a word; when the opening door disclosed young Fermor, alone. An elegant, well-dressed young man, with a graceful bow, a pleasant address, and a command of fluent flattery was at any time, even in London, an agreeable object to Laura Mansfield; but in the quiet of Brookensha, it was an apparition to *gladden* her eyes, lighten her heart, and call up her most fascinating smiles. She received him with a ready and pleasant grace, which at once showed him he was welcome, and the warmth of her reception, coming as it did after the very opposite representations of his mother and sister, convinced him that she was only *slandered* on account of her superior grace and beauty. From that moment he became her devoted admirer, and decided in his own mind that she was the *epitome of feminine loveliness*.

“I hope you mean to make a long stay at Brookensha, Mrs. Mansfield,” said he; “we cannot afford in our neighborhood to lose a family even of an ordinary stamp, much less a valuable acquaintance.”

“On the contrary, I fully intend to go to *Paris* very soon.”

“Indeed! what only appear among us to dazzle our eyes, and then leave us in deeper darkness.”

“Oh, as to that, you will easily content yourself amidst the many charming families in this neighborhood. Those who have lived in the same circle, and grown up with the same set of ideas, must be much better suited as society for each other than a poor exiled vagrant like me. I, you know, am only London bred, not *genuine Yorkshire* like your friends here.”

“It needs no ghost to tell us that: I can see that you have moved in another circle from our poor boorish country squires and dames. But do not leave us in scorn; stay with us, and teach, enlighten, dissipate our ignorance.”

“No, indeed, were I to remain, I fear my mind would soon take the *genuine Yorkshire stamp and edge*. I am so susceptible of impressions — you would soon take me for your sister.”

“It is cruel indeed to tantalize.”

“If you wish to see more of me, follow me to Paris.”

“Well, if you do go, I shall certainly go too. But is this your work, Mrs. Mansfield?” drawing toward him the embroidery frame. “How lovely!”

“Yes, it is mine; but I am quite ashamed of it. I am so shockingly idle — scarcely ever put a stitch in without some strong inducement.

“Let me supply it now; do go on working, that I may see you.”

“Why?” said she, raising her brilliant dark eyes to his face, with a look of innocent wonder, as if she could not in the least imagine what he meant.

“Because, in the first place, there is nothing more agreeable to contemplate, to my eyes, than a beautiful — pattern; the fair hands of an artist, such as you, passing backward and forward the little polished shaft which works such wonders, and does such execution.”

“Well,” said she, drawing her work close to her, and taking up the needle, “I cannot refuse to give you pleasure at so cheap a rate — do you think it pretty?”

“Lovely!” said he, warmly looking all the while at her face, which she turned toward him; “just the shades and colors I most admire!”

“And if I were to make you a present of it, what would you do with it?” inquired she, with her most fascinating smile.

“Mount it in a carved oak frame, and keep it to adorn my own room, considering it as my greatest treasure; but that is far too great a happiness to be thought of.”

“It certainly would be a considerable favor — one which I would expect to be earned by great devotion and extraordinary services.”

“Of what nature would the services be? Shall I find you a riding-horse, or procure you a lap-dog? Ride to London for a skein of lambswool, or fetch you a new novel from Paris?”

“Come after me to Paris yourself — I mean to fetch my own novels; but defend my character in the country, when I am accused of being proud and disagreeable. Take my part in my absence.”

“Indeed I will, with all my heart,” said he, enthusiastically.

“And you may, with truth; for though I am sometimes accused of it, indeed it is unjustly. Sometimes I am seized with an indescribable feeling — a sort of *spell* comes over me. I am unable to speak or act; it is as if I were under the influence of mesmerism; and I feel a *repellent power* exercised by those with whom I am in contact. If there is no sympathy — if we are uncongenial souls — is it my fault that I cannot make myself agreeable? Am I to blame for a failing over which I have no control?”

“Certainly not,” exclaimed he, with emphasis.

“But when I meet with one who can understand me, then it is a very different thing. You will defend me?”

“To the death,” cried he. “Should anyone dare to attack you, let them not do it in my presence.”

If Cecil had been vexed at his wife’s lack of animation toward his other friends, he was certainly not better pleased by the extraordinary fluency and liveliness, amounting almost to *flirtation*, which characterized her conversation with this young man. His presence was unnoticed by either, and he sat leaning over a newspaper, though unconscious of what the columns contained, wondering to himself if this could be the *same Laura* who, a short month ago, had appeared to be entirely devoted to him. Unpleasant reminiscences of their earlier acquaintance, and of the manner in which she then behaved, crossed his mind. He remembered their *quarrel and parting*, and a half-formed wish arose that they had still continued *separated*.

He was seated at a little ebony work-table, which had been a favorite of Fanny’s, where she had been accustomed to sit and occupy herself. Scarcely conscious of what he did, he pulled open the drawer. Among these remnants, preserved by accident, was an open note, addressed to Mrs. Mansfield, which, from the date, he knew must have been meant for *Fanny*. It was only a simple note, inviting them to dinner at one of their neighbors; but the sight of it recalled the circumstances under which that invitation had been given and received. There had been a little discussion on the subject of accepting it. It was to a family whom she did not much like — one who were rather inclined to be haughty and unpleasant to herself, and she had wished not to go; but he had urged the contrary, and she had yielded, as she ever did where only her own comfort and pleasure were concerned — yielded so *sweetly*, so *gracefully*, that it had served to endear her more to him. The contrast between her unvarying tenderness and self-devotion — and the self-will and carelessness of his new bride, could not fail of producing an effect on his mind: and when the thought arose of how Fanny’s *trustful love* had been requited — a feeling of *most bitter remorse* came over his mind, and he felt at that moment how just a retribution it would be toward himself, should he now suffer as a husband.

“Yes, he had deceived, betrayed, deserted a woman devoted to him; he had cast her off; defrauded her and her daughter; and even bound himself by promise to abandon his only child; and all for the sake of a woman who now made it evident how little she really cared for his comfort and satisfaction. Whether any feelings of regret would have wounded his peace of mind, had Laura behaved in a way perfectly agreeable to him, may well be doubted. His was not the repentance of *conviction* — but of *disappointment*; and arose not from having committed a *fault* — but from having made a *mistake*.

Immersed in a deep reverie over these thoughts and considerations, he remained unconscious of the babbling of his wife and her visitor, until he was roused by the leave-taking of the latter. Laura extended her fair ungloved hand, which young Fermor gallantly kissed, expressing at the same time his determination to come again soon: it was said with an

assurance of welcome and a self-sufficiency which provoked Cecil, and made him feel extremely desirous of kicking the young man from the room.

As soon as the door had closed, Laura threw herself back in her chair, and exclaimed: "Well, Cecil, I hope I have proved to you how *docile* and *responsive* I am, complying so entirely with your requisition to be civil to your guests. I am sure I did my duty to that young man."

"Laura," said he, in a low voice of deep emotion, "I could not have believed it possible — " he stopped abruptly.

"What? that *I* could be so agreeable?" inquired she, in a most provoking tone.

"That you could have behaved in the way you have done!" exclaimed he, in an angry voice. "The selfish carelessness with which you neglect and insult my best friends and supporters, is only equaled by the *impudent disregard of propriety* with which you flirt before my face with the first worthless young man chance throws in your way. What am I to understand by such conduct?"

"You would gratify me extremely if you did not speak so loud, Cecil; because if you choose to quarrel with me, I see no reason why the footmen and housemaids should become cognizant of our disagreements."

"Laura, your indifference and carelessness are enough to irritate a saint!"

"Then it is no wonder it makes you angry; but I am so glad it has had the effect, for it is exceedingly befitting to you to be in a passion, and I assure you I admire you with all my heart."

"Your heart, Laura!" replied he; "do you possess one? Had you a heart, you would not *vex* me by *flirting* with a man like young Fermor."

"Certainly, if it vexes you, I will not do it again, my dear Cecil," replied she, in a lively tone, unwilling to bring on a dangerous quarrel, though regardless of his feelings. "But allow me to observe, that I did not know I was *flirting*, in the first place; and, secondly, until you have pointed out to me the description of young men I may flirt with, I must be liable to make a mistake occasionally, as I seem to have done on the present occasion."

"I object to your *flirting* with *any* young man, Laura," replied he, but in a relaxed tone, and with a sort of struggle to avoid a smile.

"Oh! it is the entire *genus* you would have me avoid; I imagined it was only the *species*, when you talked of a young man *like* Fermor."

He really smiled now, though reluctantly.

"My dearest Cecil!" continued she, rising and coming up to his side, "you cannot possibly be jealous of a giddy-brained young goose like that boy just gone out of the room. You cannot imagine that, because I listened to his nonsense, and amused myself with quizzing him, that you have anything to fear for my affection toward you. Fie upon you! what must I think of your affection, if you judge mine so lightly?"

"My dearest Laura — " began he.

"Nay, nay!" interrupted she; "I forgive you this time freely; but mind how you allow your *jealousy* to appear again! And now come and take a ride with me on this pleasant afternoon, before any other visitors come to stop us."

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 16

It was long before Fanny formed any decided plans for future life, or gathered courage to face the difficulties of her situation, unsupported by the presence of her friends. She had always entertained some vague ideas of settling in a quiet village, perhaps on the sea-coast of Devonshire, where *seclusion* and *economy* might be united to the pure pleasures to be derived from the grandeur and quiet of nature amid rocks and waves, hills and woods. These pleasures were still hers — she could look on a fair landscape without reading reproach there, or imagining that the smile of sunshine was grown cold since her disgrace.

But where the choice is unrestricted, it takes long to settle; and as she was free to select any county in England or Wales as her residence, she felt never-ceasing doubts as to where she should go. One only neighborhood her feelings forbade — she could not again enter the county of Yorkshire; but she had no friends beyond that neighborhood to influence her choice, or induce her to prefer one locality to another.

There were many minor difficulties or inconveniences which necessarily attended her situation: but of which she had as yet formed no distinct idea. Forced to renounce the name which she had borne, she felt puzzled how to designate herself, or what she should reveal or what conceal of her situation. She could not call herself a *widow*, and yet she certainly was not a *wife*, while consideration for her daughter as well as herself forbade her resuming the title which custom assigns to unmarried ladies. All these little inconveniences never even occurred to her during the first overwhelming sorrow of her bereavement; it was only as her mind became calmer, she took them into consideration. At first she thought only of one thing — Cecil, her Cecil, the husband of another — the heart which had once been all her own, now devoted to her rival. She must have been more than mortal, could she have been insensible to all feelings of resentment, when she considered the *cruel* and deliberate way in which she had been robbed of her husband and her home.

That Laura had been instigated by affection to Cecil, she could not doubt: it must have been that which urged her and her relentless father on to their *cruel triumph*. No wonder they would hear of no compromise, take no sum, however large, to buy her peace; there was that at stake dearer than any money, worth more to woman than thousands and tens of thousands.

Still it was a *robbery*, an unprincipled robbery; what right had Laura or her father to step in between Fanny and her husband, and create an evil which but for them would have had no birth?

It was thus she reasoned, and felt in those weak hours, when she was tempted to look at the *instruments* instead of the *Disposer* of events. When she averted her mind from their malice, and fixed her thoughts on His hand who rules all things — then, indeed, she felt at peace. But by degrees, reflection and principle tended materially to soften and alleviate those bitter feelings. Cecil, the husband of another, gradually assumed a new aspect to her eyes. While she was his wife, it was of course equally her duty and her interest to close her eyes to any failings or foibles on his part, and to cultivate assiduously the strongest feelings of affectionate regard. But now her whole line of conduct was altered, the exactions of duty were precisely reversed, and she was bound to use every means which could serve to detach her heart from one it was no longer *lawful to love*. The suggestions of reason, that he had proved himself unfaithful, cruel, unprincipled — were no longer to be repelled as treasonable thoughts: they were useful considerations, deeply painful it was true, but a bitter medicine, a tonic which might brace her mind, and assist it in performing the difficult task which lay before it.

This was not the work of a day, or a week or a month. The love which had grown, and spread, and flourished for years, entwining around every object which she saw, and overshadowing her daily path — this love was not to be eradicated in a short time. But the *death-wound* had been dealt, and lingering as the extermination might prove, it was now certain. She was firmly resolved to do her duty.

But how much had she to resign besides outward grandeur and the luxury of wealth: every cherished hope; every tender confiding thought; the day-dreams which every young woman forms of matrimonial happiness, of sweet communion, of unshaken love and truth. Indifference and forgetfulness were now the virtues which formed her duty; strange reversal of human plans and wishes.

She lingered through the winter at Hastings with her friends, but at the end of that period she firmly resolved to seek a habitation and home for herself. In the mean time, she had, by the help of Frank Linwood, effected an insurance on her life for the benefit of her daughter, which, though it considerably diminished her annual income, would do away with the necessity of saving up in any other manner.

Her thoughts and feelings had often reverted with a tender regret to that village on the southern coast of Devonshire, where her sister's children lay buried. She wished again to see a spot where she had once suffered amidst so much happiness. She imagined that she would find a degree of peace there in reflecting on the past, its troubles, pleasures, and disappointments. There she had experienced bitter grief, but her tears had been dried by the hand of fond affection; now she had no such solace, and the painful contrast would become more vivid; and yet, with the strange contradiction of human nature, she resolved to seek this contrast, and try its effects upon her mind.



She wept when she was there before, because the twin flowers in her *fair garden of happiness withered* amidst all her tender care, and yet the bereavement left her rich in life's choicest blessings. But now she was alone in a sadly altered world, all around her was a waste, barren wilderness; every object of delight had been swept away, except the one blossom which grew beside her path to cheer her. And in this dry and arid desert, she should not weep now, she had done with tears; she should go on her way, as the panting traveler journeys through the scorching and sandy plains of the East, looking for no variation, hoping for no change, until she reached the borders of this weary land, and death removed her to her *final home*.

In vain Mrs. Compton used every effort to retain her in their home, or at least a near neighbor. For her to return to *Yorkshire* was impossible, and the Comptons could not always remain banished from their own house. She parted, therefore, at length from these kind friends, and set out on her journey toward the west. Her determination was to seek the nearest town to the little spot in question, and remaining there until she could settle on a plan for the future, either establish herself in lodgings, or rent a small house, according as she might find accommodations suitable to her. It was one of the novelties of her situation to have *traveling expenses* to consider, and *economy* to study in this respect. She had arranged that one part of her journey should be performed in the stage-coach, a style of traveling which as yet she had never tried; and she felt a little nervous as she took her place inside this conveyance. Her greatest fear at the moment, though it was a thought which had not occurred to her before, was lest she should encounter any individual amidst her fellow-travelers acquainted with her previous history. It was a relief to her on glancing round, to discover two faces with which she was totally unacquainted. One was a respectably dressed middle-aged woman, with a vulgar cast of countenance, denoting strong curiosity; the other was a man about thirty, or perhaps a little more, with a pleasant expression and good-humored smile, who made way for her little Mary with a readiness which of course pleased the mother, and formed a favorable contrast to the expression with which their female companion eyed the little stranger.

Poor Fanny soon found herself considerably annoyed by the scrutinizing eyes which her opposite neighbor fastened upon her. They were dull, black eyes, with a sort of heavy, snake-like look about them, but expressive of a restless, insatiable curiosity; and their owner seemed bent on making herself accurately acquainted with every detail connected with Fanny's countenance and dress. It was in vain that her *victim* turned away her head, looked out of the window, or endeavored to occupy herself with her child — the same cold, unvarying glance still rested on her, and met her again the moment she ventured to look up.

After about half an hour passed in general silence, this steady gazer inquired, in a harsh voice, if she would mind the window being pulled up? Fanny, supposing that her companion felt it cold, did not oppose the change, though she rather dreaded the oppressive closeness likely to ensue, when thus excluded from the fresh air.

"There," said the unknown, "now I shall be able to talk comfortably; but really, when those windows are down, there is no hearing what you say, and one is obliged to bawl one's self hoarse for a little quiet conversation."

Fanny felt extremely doubtful whether the power of hearing her face to face would be any improvement, but she kept her own counsel, and contented herself with a silent admission that she would hear better.

"Are you going far, ma'am?" was the first question which met her ears.

It was evident that the gentleman's attention had been caught by the manners of their companion, and he was listening attentively.

"A considerable distance," replied Fanny, unwilling to make her route an affair of discussion at present.

"And that's your child, ma'am?" pursued the questioner.

"It is," was the brief reply.

"And is her 'pa outside?" was the next question.

"No."

"Where is he, then?"

"She has lost her father," said Fanny, in a low voice.

"Ah! indeed — some time back, I suppose, as you do not wear widows weeds. When did he die?"

"Excuse me," said Fanny, "but this is not a pleasant subject to discuss at present."

"Poor thing! — not got over your grief yet; I know what that is well. I lost a good husband myself, and never married again. So go on, and relieve your mind — have no scruple in expressing yourself to me."

"Thank you, but I will not put your kindness to any such test," replied poor Fanny.

"You must have married very young — you look quite a child still; and your chick there seems four years old at least, and I suppose she was born since you married," laughing as if she thought this supposition a capital joke.

Fanny colored deeply, and replied:

"She looks older than she is."

"Don't you find it dull without any companion?" again demanded the inquisitor. "It must be a sad change, Mrs. — ; I forget what you said your name was."

"It is," replied Fanny, taking no notice of this palpable effort to fish out her name.

“Come, and sit on my lap, my little dear,” said the persevering querist to little Mary, “and I will sing you a song.”

“No, thank you,” said the child, as plainly as she could speak, grasping more tightly her mother’s hand, and pressing closer to her, as if she feared this strange-looking woman would take her away by force.

“What is your name, my darling?” pursued she. “Tell me, and I will give you this,” producing a peppermint candy as she spoke.

Mary attempted to answer, but her articulation was too indistinct to be clearly understood, a circumstance at which Fanny greatly rejoiced, as the child invariably answered as she had formerly been taught to say by her nurse: “Miss Mansfield, of Brookensha.”

Her mother had taken great pains to teach her to call herself *Mary Ellis*, but in vain. With the pertinacity of childhood, she persisted in what she had originally learned; and it was never, until reminded of the change, that she called herself by her new name. In the present instance, the answer was not intelligible to the interrogator, who immediately repeated the question, and desired her to speak more distinctly.

Frightened at the harsh tone in which the question was put, the little girl shrank back, and looked timidly up to her mother; the latter, interposing, told the curious inquirer that her name was *Mary*.

“You should teach the child to speak plain, ma’am; it’s of great consequence,” said she; “there is nothing of more importance for her to learn. I am sure all mine could speak wonderfully. And allow me to mention that every child should know its name, first and surname. It is very negligent not to teach them that. I am sure there was not one of my seven but could answer its name was Tomkins, before it was two years old.”

Fanny made no reply; and seeing that she advanced nothing by this indirect mode of attack, Mrs. Tomkins made a vigorous assault at once; for, again addressing Fanny, she boldly said,

“May I just ask what is your name, ma’am? It’s so awkward talking familiarly with a person, when one does not know what to call them.”

“That is perfectly true,” interposed their fellow-traveler, who had been listening to the whole conversation, and now, by his sudden interposition, preventing Fanny from answering; “I never like to speak to a person until I know their name, Mrs. Tomkins. I am glad you have told us your name.”

“Oh! for the matter of that, you are welcome: I am not ashamed of it at all, and have no reason to keep it a secret.”

Fanny was half inclined to think that the *pertinacity* with which Mrs. Tomkins hunted her name arose from a suspicion who she was; but she was mistaken — it only originated in a desire to receive information for the gratification of her own curiosity.

Their fellow-passenger now entering upon a conversation with Mrs. Tomkins, Fanny obtained a considerable respite, and she enjoyed the *luxury of silence*, until it was disturbed by the gentleman, who, suddenly addressing her, pointed out as worthy of her attention, a beautiful baronial residence, which they were then passing. Fanny, who happened to have been well acquainted in former times with some of the members of the family to whom the estate belonged, looked with much interest on the turrets rising from the ancient wood, and as they were lost in the distance, she reflected that even so had those scenes vanished from the stage on which the rest of her sad career must be performed. The memory of their former intimacy was doubtless blotted from their minds, and to herself it were best it should become as though it had never been.

“Have you never seen the castle before, ma’am?” inquired Mrs. Tomkins.

Fanny owned she had not.

“Well, indeed! — and I have been all over it. It’s a beautiful place, I assure you, ma’am, and well worth a visit.”

It was evident Mrs. Tomkins took great credit to herself for having seen the interior of a ducal castle.

“It looks beautiful!” observed Fanny, calmly.

“Oh! but you cannot judge of the interior from what you see outside. It is a very different sort of thing. Old trees and such like are vastly well, but I never care a straw for looking at them,” replied Mrs. Tomkins.

“Perhaps you like fine paintings,” replied Fanny, by way of suggesting something easy and safe to talk upon.

“Not I, indeed,” said she, in a contemptuous tone; “all waste of time, and space, and paint.”

“Then what did you admire?” inquired the gentleman.

“Oh! the carpets, and curtains, and sofas covered with damask, which I dare say cost thirty shillings a yard. It was beautiful! I declare it does one’s heart good to see such a sight. There was one sofa which was as perfect a piece of goods as was ever sent out from a shop before.”

“You seem to be a *connoisseur* in such articles, Mrs. Tomkins?” observed the gentleman.

“And well I may, sir,” replied she, with evident pride, “when my husband kept one of the principal upholsterer’s shops in Exeter, and I am sure we put out of hand articles which would have done credit to any London house. I only wish you could have seen our easy chairs.” Then turning suddenly to Fanny, she inquired, “Were you never in any castle at all?”

“Yes, two or three,” replied she.

“And which were they?” eagerly pursued Mrs. Tomkins.

Fanny mentioned the name of one in Yorkshire, where she had formerly visited.

“And were they fine and grand? What color was the best drawing-room furniture? In what style was it done up?” were her rapid queries.

“I hardly remember,” replied Fanny. “It was either drab and crimson, or blue and white; but I cannot be sure.”

“Did you ever see Windsor Castle?” was the next question.

Fanny assented.

“What splendid damask there is there!”

“I dare say there is.”

“I wonder anyone can forget such things” said Mrs. Tomkins, rather displeased, as if an insult had been cast on her by Fanny’s forgetfulness.

“I apprehend, where handsomely-furnished rooms are daily before the eyes, a sofa or a carpet makes but slight impression,” said the gentleman, with emphasis.

Fanny admitted the truth of the assertion, but Mrs. Tomkins did not understand its point.

“You are well acquainted with *Yorkshire*, no doubt,” added he, looking at her with considerable interest.

Fanny startled, and her brow flushed with sudden fear and emotion.

“Are you?” said she, instead of answering his question.

“I have been much in the county,” he replied. “I was there last year — at York — during much of the autumn and winter.”

This declaration silenced Fanny, and occasioned her an indescribable confusion of feelings. If he was there at that time, he must have learned her history. Was it possible that he recognized her, or had in any way discovered who she was? She could not raise her eyes again for some time, but appeared engaged in arranging her little girl’s bonnet. When she ventured once more to look up, she met his eyes fixed on her with a peculiar expression of interest and commiseration. There was nothing of impertinence or familiarity in the glance — nothing which could in the least degree offend or distress her, beyond the instantaneous conviction which it conveyed, that he was aware of her history and misfortunes. Yet it was evident that he considered her without blame, for there was *respect* as well as *pity* in his look. Neither did he distress her by any further allusions to Yorkshire, or his residence there. His manner seemed to say: “I know your secret, but it is safe with me; and I will not commit you to this woman.”

About the middle of the day, the coach stopped to allow its passengers to dine. Fanny did not follow Mrs. Tomkins’s example in alighting, but remained with her child on her seat. While thus freed from her presence, the gentleman approached the window, and, after offers to procure her any refreshment she needed, which were gratefully acknowledged, though declined, he observed:

“You look as if you were usually more abstemious than our companion, Mrs. Tomkins; she is making a hearty meal of roast ducks, beef-steaks, onions, and Dublin porter. I hope you do not very much mind the scent of onions.”

“I cannot say I am partial to it, nor do I suppose the odor will make it more agreeable when Mrs. Tomkins opens her lips.”

“Why, to say the truth, our good friend, though no doubt a good upholsteress, and possibly an amiable woman, does not drop rubies and pearls every time she opens her lips. Her *curiosity* is proportioned to her *bulk*, and her questions are of a downright straightforward nature, not at all resembling the satin on which she loves to expatiate.”

Fanny assented.

“I beg your pardon,” continued he with a slight hesitation, “but would it not be wise to satisfy her curiosity in one respect. She is bent on learning your name. Will you not gratify her?”

Fanny looked half-displeased, but after a moment’s hesitation answered: “Why should you advise this? — you surprise me!”

“Believe me, not from any feeling of curiosity on my part. I believe I know it, though from regard to your evident reluctance to hear it, I have not addressed you by it. You are astonished; but I have seen you before — your station in society, and the interest attached to your history — may I add the universal veneration and attachment with which you were regarded, have rendered your face well-known to many whose names you never heard. Your little girl mentioned her former name, and immediately I remembered everything connected with the countenance, which hung in my memory like the faces we see in dreams.”

Fanny was silent.

“Are you offended?” said he, “I am unfortunate, indeed, if I have pained you.”

“No; I understand your motive, and thank you for it.” she replied, forcing herself to speak.

The return of Mrs. Tomkins put an end to all further conversation, the coachman resumed his seat, the guard cried “All right,” and the coach continued its route. It was sometime, however, before Mrs. Tomkins had settled herself comfortably in her corner again. She had bought three oranges and some buns, and was making sundry vain attempts to stow them all in the coach-pocket, which she had already filled so completely with her sundry small parcels, that it would contain

nothing more. How she finally disposed of her oranges, her companions did not know; but they were relieved at last by her calmly subsiding into her corner, and declaring with much complacency, "That she felt quite jolly now."

"And I think, Mrs. What's-your-name, you had much better have followed my example and taken some good wholesome beef-steak, it would have helped to bring a little color to your unhappy, pale face; a glass of wine and a good beef-steak are famous recipes for a good, bouncing, healthy crimson color. But perhaps you are afraid of getting too fat," added she, laughing immoderately at this lively sally.

"Now," continued she, "if you, ma'am, are going to the sea for health, come and lodge with me, my house is excellent; and I assure you I am extra-attentive. I have always given satisfaction when I sought to do so!"

"You keep a lodging-house, then?" said the gentleman.

"Yes, that is the way I get money in the summer to enable me to take a jaunt every year. As to the rest, I have enough and to spare besides of my own. So, ma'am, if you need lodgings, remember me."

"Perhaps I may be needing some," replied Fanny; "it is possible, but I cannot answer at present."

"Well, I am sure you would find yourself perfectly comfortable with me. You would not find a more comfortable and better furnished lodging within two hundred miles of Exeter, I am certain; and I could cook so that you would be perfectly delighted with it. Many ladies have been with me, but none ever left me displeased; and they are mostly anxious to return again. Here, ma'am, is my card."

Fanny took the offered card, and found on a highly enameled surface, a gilded representation of Mrs. Tomkins's new lodging-house; a tall, thin, upright house, with sundry extraordinary angles, windows jutting out, and chimneys strangely contorted, which altogether with its high roof and many corners, seemed intended expressly to catch as much of the winter blasts as possible, that the mournful howling of the wind might entertain its inhabitants, if all other sounds should fail. The building appeared shrugging up its shoulders with cold, while the two small cypress trees in the center of the lawn, and two anomalous but twin shrubs flanking each side, seemed quite unequal to afford the shelter and support it evidently required.

But the situation of the house was precisely what she required; it was the very neighborhood she wished to visit, and she felt it would be such a relief to settle on some definite abode, to have no trouble in searching for a house, that she felt strongly tempted at once to close with Mrs. Tomkins's offers.

"Now, ma'am," said Mrs. Tomkins, "you must tell me your name; you will let me know who I am to expect as a lodger?"

"Oh! certainly," replied Fanny, "my name is Ellis — Mrs. Ellis."

"Ellis — very good — I knew a Colonel Ellis once, my husband supplied him with goods when he was quartered in Plymouth — he was not married then, perhaps he was your husband?"

"No," said Fanny briefly, she did not look up at her companion as she was thus questioned; nor was she sensible of her quick and speaking eyes then fixed on her with pity.

"I am glad of it," was Mrs. Tomkins's reply, "you would have had a sad life of it with him. He was quite a scamp. Nothing of a gentleman. I can answer for it: why he had ten pounds' worth of goods from us which have never been paid for to this day. He was quite good-for-nothing."

Fanny attempted nothing in defense of the late Colonel Ellis, or in excuse for his alleged misdemeanors. She would have preferred avoiding the subject altogether, but Mrs. Tomkins was not to be so easily satisfied. She pressed the inquiry as to whether he was not some relation of her husband, cousin, uncle, or brother; but decided negatives were the only answers she received. At length her friend in the other corner, whose name she learned was *Grant*, skillfully effected a diversion in her favor, by suggesting the observation that her house must be exposed too much to the easterly winds. This had the desired effect, Mrs. Tomkins turned all her energies to defend her own home, and the subject of Fanny's family was again dropped.

To the great relief of her two companions, Mrs. Tomkins took a fancy to seat herself on the outside for a time; "the open air," she observed, "was better for digestion, than the inside."

When she was gone, Mr. Grant, addressing Fanny said, "you will not surely think of lodging with Mrs. Tomkins, at least unless you wish her to make herself thoroughly acquainted with all your past history. I am certain you will find her both *impertinent* and *troublesome*."

"Oh! you must not judge so harshly of her," said Fanny, "inquisitive of course she is, but everyone has some foible, and I do not expect *perfection* in a lodging-house keeper."

"But her prying curiosity?" suggested he.

"I must learn to baffle it," was Fanny's reply.

"You will find that impossible," said he, shaking his head; "a woman like her, will never be baffled; she is insensible to a gentle hint, impervious to a quiet rebuke, such as you can give."

“Oh! you are prejudiced,” said Fanny, “because her appearance is not prepossessing. I grant you she is coarse and plain in person, but I will not admit that therefore she must be coarser or ruder in mind than is usual with women of her station and education.”

“I am a physiognomist,” (That is, one who assesses of a person’s character or personality from their face. — Editor) replied he, “and there is that in her countenance which indicates strong animal passions and intense selfishness. I am persuaded that her temper is violent, and her disposition grasping and overreaching. In your exposed and unprotected situation, you should not be brought in contact with violent passion and baseness, of which you can at present form little idea. Perhaps you think I have no right to interfere, or even to give my advice; but every man has the right to exert himself for the good, or comfort of the oppressed and unprotected, and a woman in circumstances of difficulty or doubt becomes immediately, for the time, the peculiar charge of any gentleman whom chance brings into contact with her.”

“I am much obliged to you for your goodwill, though my judgment may not coincide with yours. The *kindness of your intentions* I can at least appreciate, though it surprises me.”

“It ought not. The surprise is a reproach to our gender, though perhaps a not unmerited one. You would find, could you only know it, that I merely express the public opinion and the good-will of all who know you.”

“You are either attempting to mislead me by flattery, Mr. Grant,” replied Fanny, with a smile, “or you must allow me to deduce this moral from it, that I may safely venture to lodge with Mrs. Tomkins, secure in her future sympathy and good-will.”

“The sympathy and good-will of a lodging-house keeper! Have you ever been in lodgings?”

“Never.”

“Ah, that accounts for your inexperience. No — keepers of lodgings are a peculiar race of beings, not subject to the same feelings, nor governed by the same principles as their fellow-men and women.”

“I cannot allow this. To *malign a whole class*, because you have met with some unfortunate specimens, is neither fair nor kind. Probably they have their *failings*, but why therefore include them all in one sweeping condemnation?”

“I cannot tell why it should be so, but their tricks and impositions are proverbial; and the *stigma* would not be universally attached to them, were it not just. A friend of mine was told by one, that she wished to have a real gentleman and lady as lodgers, because she could make more by them in two months than by those of a lower class in a year.’ Now a real gentleman with them is one who pays his bills without reading them, and never counts the difference between the bottles of wine he drinks and those he pays for; and a real lady is one who does not lock up her tea and sugar, or ask again for the cold fowl which was sent down from dinner.”

“Surely there must be some mistake,” said Fanny: “no one could have dared to make such an impudent confession as that you mention.”

“I assure you it is true, upon my honor. The assertion was made to the *clergyman* of a village not far from London, and made without shame — quite as a matter of course.”

“Still, though there may be very dishonest and unconscionable persons in this occupation, as well as in others, why condemn the whole class?”

“Because it is the occupation which makes them so; the continual temptation, the craving for petty gain, the seeking advantages which can only be obtained at the expense of others. Depend upon it, if you are ensnared by Mrs. Tomkins — you will repent it; and I think I shall make a point of traveling through Torquay, in order to make an excursion to your village, and see how you agree three months hence.”

“Is not the coach going rather alarmingly fast?” said Fanny, whose attention had been diverted from the latter part of his speech, by perceiving the trees and hedges vanishing with a wonderful velocity.

“Yes,” said Mr. Grant, looking out, and discovering the same fact; “I see by the shadow that the horses are galloping hard; I hope they are not quite running away, but it looks something like it.”

Fanny turned pale, and, clasping her child close to her, inquired:

“Do you suppose we are in danger?”

“Not while we keep along a level and straight road, like this,” replied he; “but I see you are alarmed: probably you are not accustomed to stage-coach traveling?”

“I never tried it before,” said Fanny, who watched, with nervous excitement, the increasing speed with which they tore along.

Screams from the exterior, in a female voice, and exclamations from the passengers generally, told them that the alarm was becoming general. Faster and faster they rushed along. She drew her breath quickly, and, unable to speak, only demanded with her eyes what he thought now.

“Yes,” he replied, bending forward, that she might hear his voice above the rattle of the wheels, “I suppose we are in danger now. No one in their senses would drive so fast!”

The calmness of his manner tended to compose her feelings. She closed her eyes for a minute, to offer a mental *prayer*; and then, observing that the window was closed, she attempted to let it down.

“For your life,” cried he, catching her hand, and stopping her, “do not attempt to get out; our only course is to sit perfectly still!”

“I only wished to let the window down, that we might not suffer from the broken glass, when we upset,” she replied, calmly; and then, pressing her child closely to her, she sat still and breathless, to await the event.

It seemed an hour, those few minutes of suspense, during which they remained helpless and passive — he, with his eyes sometimes watching the road, sometimes fixed admiringly on her, as he witnessed her heroic composure — she, with her looks riveted on her child, and every action showing that she thought only of Mary’s safety.

A sudden and abrupt descent in the road, terminating with a sharp corner, put a period to their anxiety, by upsetting the coach, which was thrown to the ground with a fearful impetus. The horses stopped now, and screams, groans, and exclamations, were the only sounds heard.

Mr. Grant was comparatively unhurt; and that the little Mary was not killed, or seriously injured, was evident by her cries of terror:

“Mamma, mamma! what is the matter?”

He succeeded in scrambling up, extricating himself, and with still more difficulty in releasing his two companions.

Fanny was considerably bruised, and evidently suffered much, though her thankfulness in discovering that her daughter was uninjured, at first rendered her insensible to her own sufferings. There were dwellings near the spot, and assistance and hospitable attentions were offered by the inhabitants. A respectable-looking young woman conducted Fanny and her child into her house, a shelter which the former gratefully accepted, as she felt unequal to exert herself further; and, at her request, Mr. Grant, having seen her in safety, returned to inquire for the fate of her nurse.

After a suspense of a quarter of an hour, poor Fanny learned that her servant was considerably injured — to such a degree, indeed, as to render it extremely improbable that she would be able to move under several days. Among the other sufferers, was the communicative Mrs. Tomkins, whose bruises were severe; she, as well as Mrs. Cookson, was conveyed to the residence where Fanny had found shelter. Miss Harris, the owner, declaring she could accommodate them all, as the lodgings which she was in the habit of renting happened at that time to be unoccupied. Discovering that Miss Harris was thus able and willing to receive her, on the understanding that due compensation should be made, Fanny resolved to await here the convalescence of her nurse, the deferring of her journey westward being a matter of slight importance to her.

She found her hostess obliging and civil; her rooms clean and comfortable; and, as the nurse’s bruises appeared, on the physician’s report, to be of a kind which rest and time would certainly heal, she resigned herself to her present situation with tolerable composure. She was rather surprised the next morning, while sitting at breakfast, to be informed that Mr. Grant waited below to know if he might see her. She had supposed that he would have proceeded on his journey the evening before; but, finding that this had not been the case, she conjectured that he was now come to inquire for her health, and wish her farewell. She could not, of course, refuse to see him, and he was ushered in accordingly.

To inquire for her health was certainly his object, but no mention was made of proceeding on his journey; and, after a little conversation, she discovered, with surprise, that he was a resident in this neighborhood, and had come this morning from his own house. His visit was prolonged beyond what Fanny felt that *civility* required; and it was rather a relief to her, when, at length, he rose, and seemed about to say farewell.

“You have no books, Mrs. Ellis,” said he, as he looked round the room — “surely you must need them — my library is at your disposal — permit me to supply you with these necessities of civilized life.”

She repaid him with grateful thanks, but did not accept the offer; this, however, did not seem to abate his determination to supply her, and he was still standing, running over to her the names of such works as he thought might be new and interesting, when the physician, who was attending the patients upstairs, was ushered into the room.

It was evident that he knew Mr. Grant, though the recognition was not a particularly cordial one; and the visitor immediately took his departure, without any further mention of his library. Nothing, however, was said by Mr. Taylor, the physician, with reference to him, his conversation being strictly confined to the object of his visit, unless his earnest exhortations to Fanny to keep perfectly quiet, and not to engage in exciting conversation, might be supposed to refer to the presence of the visitor whom he disturbed.

Affairs went on in this way for some days; the progress of both the injured females was satisfactory, and Fanny began to hope a day or two more would enable her to proceed on her journey. She was the more anxious for this, as the manner of Miss Harris, her hostess, which had at first been civil and obliging, became now reserved, and even unpleasantly stiff. It was no use to attempt conjectures as to how she was offended, unless indeed, she found the invalids required more attention than was pleasant; and yet Fanny felt convinced that Mrs. Tomkins exacted far more care, and gave twice as much trouble as her own woman did. From whatever it might arise, however, it was evident that she was no longer welcome as a lodger; and she was not surprised, therefore, though rather annoyed, when Miss Harris at last intimated to her, that, as soon as Mrs. Cookson was able to move, she would be obliged if Mrs. Ellis would accommodate herself elsewhere, as she needed her rooms for some long-promised friends.

Persuaded that this was an excuse, Fanny was not at all inclined to urge unnecessary delay, and determined to remove, if possible, the next, or at least the following day. It appeared that Mrs. Tomkins was going likewise; and hints were thrown out to the nurse, that, as they were all going the same route, they had better all travel together, as posting would not then cost more than the coach. This, Fanny had not any inclination to accede to: she was intending to travel post, certainly, having had enough of a coach, but she did not wish to enjoy the benefit of Mrs. Tomkins's society and conversation. Mr. Grant, who was, and had been, during her whole stay here, her daily visitor, laughed at the idea, and endeavored to amuse Fanny by whimsical sketches of what subjects her topics of discourse would embrace.

This gentleman had been very anxious to make her residence at his native town agreeable to the fair stranger. The excuse of showing her new books, or bringing flowers, and pictures for her little girl, had been daily in requisition. Little Mary was very fond of him, and more out of indulgence to the child than from pleasure in his society, she frequently permitted rather lengthened visits. Certainly during their progress Mary and he were the chief conversational partners: he played with her at many little games; built her houses of cards; told her stories; and frequently took her out for a country ramble, though he seldom succeeded in inducing her mamma to accompany them. His manners to Fanny were perfectly respectful, and there was always a tone which denoted a feeling of *pity* and *sympathy*. He seldom, however, won her into conversation: she would sit during his visit, with her calm, pale face bent over some article of needlework which occupied her delicate fingers, while her mind appeared far away. If ever she smiled it was at the infantile sallies of her child: and generally, if she spoke, it was to censure, to commend, to correct, or to explain something which interested or concerned her little Mary.

Although Mr. Grant knew her to be free and disengaged; although he felt her to be admirable, and really wished to commend himself to her, he would no more have dared to breathe a sentence of gallantry, or hint at admiration or devotion, than if she had still been Mrs. Mansfield of Brookensha Park, and surrounded with all the barriers which should encompass a wife. His attentions were, therefore, wholly confined to the child; but his devotion to her, as little as either of them suspected it, was becoming the foundation of unpleasant reports.

A *stranger* coming unexpectedly into an English country town, is pretty sure to become immediately the topic of discourse, and the subject for curiosity amidst every circle with which he or she comes in contact. So it was now. Lady's-maids gossiped to their mistresses while they were "doing their hair" — milliners' young ladies began to speculate on a customer or a marriage, and their superiors whispered about an imaginary rival in the fair unknown at Miss Harris's lodgings. The simple fact that she had been upset in the coach, and was now only waiting, in order to proceed to Devonshire, for the convalescence of her nurse, was much too simple a fact for them.

It soon became known that Mr. Grant, the most popular bachelor of the town, was a visitor at Miss Harris's lodgings; it was circulated — how, no one knew — that they had had some previous acquaintance. His extraordinary partiality for the little girl was commented on with surprise. Then it became known that more than once, the wounded nurse, in speaking of her mistress, had called her some other name; and it was discovered that the child never by any chance called herself Mary Ellis. All this formed a savory mystery.

There must be something wrong about her, was the speedy conclusion; and more than one hint was thrown out to Miss Harris about the necessity of knowing who her lodger was, if she meant to retain the good-will of her customers. Poor Miss Harris, whose interest had been won by the sweet tones, gentle manners, and sad looks of the strange lady, resisted a little; but in vain. The public was inexorable — their curiosity must be gratified, or Miss Harris should suffer. Without sufficient courage to stand by one of her own gender whom she believed to be slandered, she attempted, as we related, by unpleasant manners, to drive her away, and finding this did not succeed, she had at length been compelled to give her direct notice to leave. Her own impression was, that Mr. Grant's acquaintance with the stranger had been as casual as her own; that Mary's partiality for him did not necessarily imply any nearer connection; and that if he was an admirer of the lady, it was in all honor and propriety.

As to the difficulty about the *name*, she would never have thought about it, if Mrs. Tomkins had not dwelt so much and so long on the subject: she, indeed, was the originator of the scandal which flew about the town, and she insisted upon the truth and accuracy of her own conjectures with a zeal which betrayed a far better opinion of her own judgment than of her neighbor's character.

She wanted to hurry Fanny from her present lodgings, because she was extremely anxious to secure her as an inmate of her own house, and besides it would have been a great deal more convenient to her to travel home post with Mrs. Ellis, than to go in any other way. She did not, therefore, confine herself merely to hints as to the desirableness of such an arrangement, conveyed through the communication of the maid, but being now well enough to leave her room, she made a descent on Fanny's parlor. In spite, however, of all the eloquence that she could muster, Fanny was firm on this point: she could not, she said, conveniently convey Mrs. Tomkins. Had Mrs. Tomkins been a helpless, unprotected, or indigent person, Fanny might have been more propitious to her entreaties; but the good lady was old enough, and wise enough, and rich enough to take care of herself, and therefore she did not feel called on to incur so much that was unpleasant and inconvenient, to save a trifling expense to one who had no claim on her. Indeed, on this latter head, Fanny offered to

accommodate her, if a loan would be of any service, as repayment could be easily arranged when they met at her lodging-house; but it appeared there was no need of this — indeed the offer was somewhat hastily refused.

But the calm dignity and self-possession of Fanny in her refusal, had the usual effect: Mrs. Tomkins did not venture to re-urge a request which met a denial so positive, so unconditional, and yet so little offensive; however, she said she had something more to say to Mrs. Ellis, and hemmed and fidgeted in such a way as to induce Mr. Grant to conclude that he was the *impediment* to her usually fluent speech. To obviate this he walked away into the inner drawing-room, and occupied himself intently in examining some of Mary's picture-books, while Mrs. Tomkins proceeded to deliver her mind to her patient listener.

It appeared from what she said now, that her object was to raise the terms on which she had offered her lodgings to Mrs. Ellis; she could not, in consequence of all the circumstances, and of what was due to herself and her own character, think of receiving her into her most respectable and well-conducted lodging-house, without a remuneration nearly *double* what she had previously named. "And I am sure, Mrs. Ellis, you must see the reasonableness of this, if I am to accommodate you under the circumstances!" said she.

"Indeed, I do not," replied Fanny, in surprise; "I can see no reason which can account for your demanding such immoderate remuneration: it is quite out of the question for me to agree to it."

"But you must know very well, Mrs. Ellis, that when I named that sum, I thought I was speaking to — I considered everything was quite right — but now I know better; and that alters the face of things, you see."

"It is a matter of indifference to me," replied Fanny, calmly, "whether I use your lodgings or not — but if it is only a doubt of my intention of payment, or my power, which you mean to express, that would be easily settled by my paying weekly. However, if you have any hesitation, I am quite willing to go elsewhere."

"How *hasty* you are!" exclaimed Mrs. Tomkins. "I don't want to drive you away at all; you know you might have a difficulty in finding anything else that will suit you, because everybody may not be as willing to admit you into their house as I am; only, you see, some kind of people pay much more than other kinds of people — you understand."

"Indeed I do not understand, Mrs. Tomkins, nor see any reason why I should pay more than anyone else; surely you do not wish to extort money from me because I am a stranger and unhappy!"

"Extort!" exclaimed Mrs. Tomkins, instantly flying into a furious passion, and bringing down her hand with a tremendous shock upon the desk where Fanny had been writing, "who dares to accuse me of extortion, or anything else that is wrong? Mrs. Ellis, I wonder you are not ashamed to name it. I, a poor widow, gaining my hard-earned bread by honest industry, to be accused by such a one as you of extortion! Look to yourself Mrs. Ellis, and mind how you insult me; for you will find you have got the wrong sow by the ear, I can tell you!"

"I am sure I am sorry," began Fanny, meaning to make some sort of apology; but the vehemence of the injured lady's feelings cut her short.

"To dare me so — I, a lawful wedded wife, and now a widow indeed — I, to be insulted and accused of extortion by such a one as you; times are come to a pretty pass indeed, if this is to be the way we carry on business. What right have you to wag your tongue against me, an honest widow? I tell you I was married in the church, and that's more than you could say, with all your finery!" Fanny looked confounded. "Yes, I know you, and all about you; you a married woman!"

"May I beg you to leave this room, Mrs. Tomkins," said Fanny, drawing herself up with unanswerable dignity. "Leave this room, and consider all negotiations between us at an end!"

"Ay, that I gladly will. I would not take you into my house after what I know. My house has never been *disgraced* by anyone's mistress being kept there, nor shall it, you shall see!"

Mrs. Tomkins stood up full-blown and swelling before the unfortunate Fanny, her face glowing like a peony, her neck swelling like a turkey, her bosom heaving with visible passion, while her arms worked away like the vanes of a windmill, moved by her boiling indignation.

Mr. Grant could stand by no longer, but stepped up, and interfered in Fanny's favor; or rather he attempted to do so — for scarcely had he uttered two words of remonstrance, when Mrs. Tomkins turned on him in an evidently accumulating passion.

"Ay, it's a likely thing indeed that I should listen to you, sir — you whom I have interrupted in the very midst of your *intrigues* — I tell you both to your faces, that I am not to be put upon, and that if you want me to receive you and your child into my house, or countenance your proceedings, you must pay me in proportion to the favor you demand; and I would like to know what honest woman would expect less —" she was compelled to pause for breath, and Mr. Grant taking advantage of the state of exhaustion in which she found herself, quietly took her by the hand, and led her to the door, an action which she could not resist, over-awed as she was by the superiority which perfect calmness and self-possession never fail to give over passion.

"Go downstairs, Mrs. Tomkins," said he, in a low determined voice, "and tell Miss Harris and her gossiping friends for what sum you offered to receive the woman you supposed to be my mistress into your house — and how she in consequence turned you immediately out of her room!"



Mrs. Tomkins flounced down into the shop below, where, to the great amazement and terror of her hostess, she went off, immediately on finding a seat, into a violent fit of screaming hysterics, the vehemence being proportioned alike to her own magnitude, and that of the indignity offered her.

There was a considerable degree of awkwardness in the feelings with which Mr. Grant returned to the room after repelling the offending Mrs. Tomkins. He could not make up his mind in what precise light Fanny would regard the *insult* she had received. He knew those who would have laughed it off as a thing to be seen only in a ridiculous point of view; others again who would have made a prodigious fuss, and would have displayed to the uttermost the shock which their assumed delicacy had received. Instinct taught him that she would display neither levity nor affectation — the depth of her feelings and the purity of her heart would as much preclude the one, as the true modesty and womanly dignity of her nature would forbid the other. But having watched Mrs. Tomkins fairly out of sight, he had no choice but to return to the sitting-room.

Fanny was placed with her back to the door, and did not see him enter, so that he had a moment to contemplate her before she was aware of his presence. He could not obtain a full view of her face, but the cheek which he did see was paler than usual, and there was something in her attitude indicative of suppressed agitation. When she turned her head, at the sound of his footstep, he saw her eyes were tearless; and though her voice slightly trembled as she addressed him, there was neither indignation nor fear in her tone.

“Is she quite gone?” was her question.

“She is.” replied he.

“Then be so good as to come here, and allow me a few minutes’ conversation with you.”

“I am at your service.”

Fanny paused a moment, as if considering, and then said quite calmly:

“You, who know my unfortunate story, Mr. Grant, and the painful position which I must ever hold, cannot wonder that I should not wish to vindicate myself from suspicion by entering on disquisitions of so painful a nature. But you see to what unpleasant surmises I am subjected. I intend to leave this place tomorrow; and I wished to say to you, that when I am gone, you are at perfect liberty to explain the circumstances connected with my affairs, which have of course been the origin of these gossiping reports.”

He felt more than he could express at hearing and seeing her thus speak and look; it was so evident that she permitted this explanation for *his* sake.

“And now, Mr. Grant, I must wish you farewell! Excuse me, but I have much to do, and cannot trifle away my time. My thanks are due for your neighborly kindness, and my good wishes will remain with you. Good-by!”

She held out her hand; it was the first time he had ever touched it ungloved, and he did not feel disposed to let it go again. He felt uncommonly eloquent and persuasive, but his eloquence faded on his lips when he raised his eyes from her slender fingers to her calm, friendly expression: her look, her tone, her gesture seemed to indicate an internal conviction that her situation, when known, secured her from misapprehension, and insured her the honorable protection of all who were possessed of feeling.

Yet it was the last opportunity — she was wishing him farewell, perhaps forever; she did not ask to see him again, perhaps she did not wish it; he ventured gently to detain her hand, and said:

“And must we part forever?”

“I do not know what will become of me,” replied Fanny; “my plans are all unsettled, and whether we shall ever meet again or not, is, of course, as uncertain as the rest. But I assure you it will give me pleasure if circumstances should again bring us together.”

“Must it be left to circumstances or chance?” replied he, quickly. “Give me permission to visit you wherever you may be.”

She looked at him for a moment with surprise at his tone, then replied gravely but firmly:

“I am sorry to appear ungracious, Mr. Grant, but I cannot accede to your request; my peculiar circumstances must plead my excuse for my lack of hospitality, but I cannot receive visitors.”

Mr. Grant would probably have pleaded warmly in his own favor, but a voice below at this moment caught their ears.

“Oh, yes, Mrs. Ellis, as she is called, lodges here, sir; but I would not recommend you to intrude just now, or you may chance to be bundled out neck and heels for your pains, as I was just now.”

“I am not afraid of that, if Mrs. Ellis is within,” replied a voice, which Fanny instantly recognized as that of *Frank Linwood*; “only tell me, is she upstairs?”

“Oh, yes,” continued Mrs. Tomkins, in a like scornful tone, “she is upstairs; and for all you say, you will find her one too many for you. The gentleman who keeps her is with her.”

“Who?” exclaimed Frank, in a voice which immediately brought an exclamation of:

“Gracious, sir! how you do startle one; you have made me burn my fingers. Why, all the town says Mr. Grant brought her here, and that she is his mistress!”

“Then all the town is guilty of a most prodigious lie!” exclaimed he very hastily; “and she shall not stay another day to be *slandered* so foully.”

During these few hasty sentences both Fanny and her visitor had remained silent, and listening; he was still holding her hand, but he saw that her calmness had deserted her: burning blushes suffused her cheeks, her forehead, her neck, and just as Frank, with four bounds, cleared the narrow stairs, and stood in the door-way, she caught away her hand, and sank on the chair behind her, half suffocated with emotion. She could not have defined the confusion of feeling which overpowered her; perhaps it arose from hearing herself thus publicly slandered, perhaps from being thus warmly defended, perhaps from being, as it were, surprised in an interview with the very man of whom such things were said; be this as it may, she lost her self-possession, and to any eyes but those of Frank Linwood, her embarrassment would have worn all the appearance of guilt.

But let appearances be what they might — let her situation be ever so equivocal, or incomprehensible, it was impossible that in his eyes she could seem wrong, or that his heart could harbor a suspicion or a doubt of her.

At this moment he saw nothing but herself, Mr. Grant was totally unnoticed, as he advanced hastily to meet her, and clasping her hand with the warmth of privileged friendship, he exclaimed:

“Dear Fanny, I have startled you; but I heard from Mrs. Compton of your accident, and I could not rest without ascertaining whether you were hurt, or needed help,” he looked at her attentively. “You are looking well; but will you not speak to me, or am I really an intruder?”

“You have taken me by surprise, certainly,” answered she, commanding her voice as well as she could; “but you are very welcome, Frank. Sit down.”

He drew a chair close, and looked very happy as he obeyed her; though by no means vain, still he was a man; and men, even the best of them, will interpret blushes and embarrassment as flattering encouragement.

“How is my little ward?” inquired he; “she was not hurt at all, I understand.”

“No, thank Heaven! Mary had not a scratch,” replied Fanny warmly.

“And you — are you sure you are quite recovered?” said he, again taking in his the hand which was resting on the table beside him.

“Perfectly, thank you,” said she, withdrawing it quietly; the check was felt, he looked graver immediately: he had forgotten his prudence for a moment in the joy of seeing her again, but her calm tone recalled it all.

At this moment Mr. Grant again stepped forward, and in a voice, and with a manner which denoted considerable perturbation of mind, he repeated his farewell, adding:

“And if you really do go tomorrow, I fear I shall never see you again.”

“My gratitude and best wishes remain with you, Mr. Grant,” replied she, very gravely; “ours has been a short acquaintance, and I have been during its existence, much obliged to you; in now terminating it at once, and completely, you will confer the only additional obligation which is in your power.”

He bowed, and without another word left the room. Frank closed the door after him, and then returning to his seat, he asked:

“Who is he on whom you have pronounced so steady a sentence of *banishment*, Fanny?”

She told him in a few words how their acquaintance had originated.

“And he has known you for a week,” said Frank, “only a week; and yet that is long enough, no doubt, to give birth to the sentiments from which he evidently suffers. If he has been so kind to you, Fanny, even I must pity him for a mortification — a disappointment so acute.”

“I do not know why you should assign to him mortification or disappointment,” replied Fanny, rather surprised; “the terms on which we parted imply neither, nor can I flatter myself that a casual acquaintance being broken off need cause much more than a few minutes’ regret. One forms such relationships constantly, and the impression after parting is not stronger than to produce an occasional exclamation of: ‘Yet they were pleasant people, I would like to meet them again.’”

“There was more than that in Mr. Grant’s looks, and more too in his manner, or else the report of his admiration of you would not have been so universal in this town.”

“Do you want to make me angry, Mr. Linwood? I never expected such *nonsense* from you. Mr. Grant knew my circumstances and situation, and if they excited a more than ordinary degree of pity, they should at least preserve me from hearing professions of sentiments which would seriously displease and annoy me!”

Frank looked confounded; to make her angry was certainly the last thing he could have wished; but it could not be more unwelcome to him to suppose he had done so, than to imagine that she meant to lay a *prohibition on all feelings of admiration, sentiments of affection, or expressions of tenderness*.

“Wish to make you angry!” repeated he. “No, indeed, you must know that to be an unjust supposition; but you shall say what you choose. I can forgive you anything. However unjust your accusations, I shall only leave it to yourself, when you take time to reflect, to consider whether I am injured or not.”

“I would not wish to be unjust,” replied Fanny, “nor unkind to you; but I must say,” she added, smiling, “I think you are grown more touchy of late, and are rather fond of assuming yourself injured. You wish to work upon my feelings, I believe.”

There was such a bright flash of joy in his eyes, as he raised them suddenly at these words, that, had she been looking at him, she must certainly have suspected his secret; there was something indefinable in the smile and tone, with which she spoke, and the accent on the pronoun *you*, which sent the blood thrilling through all his veins.

“I cannot admit myself to be guilty of a crime,” persisted he, “in asserting that it is my conviction that rumor has not greatly erred in assigning to Mr. Grant a more than common feeling of friendship; and, Fanny — or, since you are grown ceremonious, I suppose I must say *Mrs. Ellis* — why should this offend or affront you?”

“It certainly will both offend and affront me,” replied she quickly, “if you address me in that way. What I can bear from strangers, sounds most displeasing from one familiar with me from infancy. Please call me *Fanny*.”

He smiled as he replied: “I am very unfortunate today.”

“No,” she answered, “you do it on purpose; it is malice, not misfortune.”

“But you have not answered my other question, Fanny,” said he, still smiling slyly. — “Why should you, being a free and disengaged woman, be angry or offended if a man, knowing this, does what he cannot help doing, likes you — admires you — loves you.” He did not smile as he spoke the last words; he was too earnest, too deeply interested in her answer — he was not trifling now.

“It is useless for anyone to talk to me of love,” replied Fanny, very gravely. “I have loved — and I can never love again. They waste their time and affections who bestow them on me.”

“Granting this to be the case, Fanny,” said he, “I see no reason why you should resent it, or consider it an *insult*. Your indifference is punishment enough for such presumption, without being embittered by your anger.”

“Well, it matters little to discuss the subject now,” replied Fanny. “Mr. Grant said nothing which calls for either anger or any unkind passion. There was nothing more passed between us than what you heard; and as I own the subject is particularly disagreeable to me, I must beg you to let it drop. What brought you down here?”

“I came to see after you: I had no other motive. I heard you had been hurt, and was anxious to know of your well-being. Surely, as your adopted brother, I could not do less than come to see after you under such circumstances. I trust this does not *affront* you.”

“Truly, no, you come in good time; for as it was necessary that I should put an end to the visits of Mr. Grant, I am glad to find a substitute for him in you.”

“A substitute for Mr. Grant!” repeated Frank; “I am truly honored. What can I do, and how shall I supply his place?”

“You must make all the necessary arrangements for my journey tomorrow, Frank, and help me with your advice as to where I should go; and, above all, keep from my presence that *ferocious* woman, Mrs. Tomkins, the very remembrance of whom makes me shudder.”

“I shall be most happy to protect you by my presence so far as I can. If it will be agreeable to you, I can remain here until you leave; but where do you intend to go?”

I cannot make up my mind. I had intended to go to Coombelands, which you know was a house where we once lodged, in the neighborhood of Torquay; but I ascertained from Mrs. Tomkins that the house has been destroyed; and as my lodging with her is quite out of the question now, I have formed no further design than to leave this place at all events.”

“That of course you must do,” observed Frank, “after all the gossiping to which your short sojourn has given rise.” He stopped abruptly, and looked as if he repented the allusion.

“I heard what was said to you in the passage,” observed Fanny. “Offensive as such accusations must be, just at the moment, they are really of little consequence; I shall remove, and it will all be forgotten. I am not afraid of your being influenced by them, Frank,” added she, with a smile of sadness; “but your indignation at them did not surprise me.”

“I influenced by such scandal, Fanny? Could I believe it for one moment — could I give an instant’s credit to what was derogatory to you — I would deserve never to touch this hand, or look upon this face again; and a heavier punishment could not be devised for any offense.” He spoke with a passionate warmth, which half startled her; but the momentary doubt as to the nature of his feelings was dispelled by the sudden entrance of the little girl, who now ran forward to demonstrate her joy at again seeing “dear Mr. Linwood,” and the subject was dropped for the present.

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 17

“And is this where you have passed the last twelve months?” said Mrs. Compton to Fanny Ellis, as she paced the little lawn in front of the drawing-room windows. “This narrow garden, these Lilliputian rooms, this plain, simple furniture, these two servants, and your old gardener? Is this the exchange for the numerous domestics, the elegancies and luxuries, the lofty halls, the extensive park of Brookensha? You have lived here a whole year, and your diversions have been teaching and stitching, and yet you survive it!”

Fanny smiled as she replied that her friend, she supposed, on that point, would believe the evidence of her own eyes.

“Yes, I see it,” continued Mrs. Compton; “but how it has thus happened is the wonder! — nay, you have not only *survived*, you have improved — grown younger — fresher — fairer with the change! I never quite comprehended you, and I think I never shall. Such a house!” eying Fanny’s residence with looks of wonder.

“You must not abuse the house, Margaret,” replied Fanny. “It is very comfortable, though not large.”

“Oh, yes, I admit that. It is not a *cottage* — my peculiar detestation. No, the rooms are well arranged, and high, and light — that large bow-window makes the drawing-room very pleasant, and the vestibule and porch make it airy, and give a feeling of space. I have nothing to say against the house as a *small* house, and really your *garden* is very pretty, and I acknowledge the view from it to be magnificent; but the change — the contrast!”

“I have long ceased to think that an evil,” answered the other. “I hope my heart was never set on the *idle vanities of this world*. I assure you that they could give me no pleasure in the *day of trouble*. But, though my domain is small, my steps are not confined to its limits; I am able to walk over all the beautiful hills which surround us, and the magnificent seashore is as free to me as to anyone.”

“But you are *alone!*” said Margaret, expressively.

“I am a good deal alone, certainly,” said Fanny, “but that is no evil to me. I have plenty of books, sufficient employment, and objects of interest to keep my mind from stagnation, and society also in the person of the excellent old clergyman of the village, Mr. Humphreys, and his sister, who live together, and who present a most charming picture of domestic affection.”

“Well!” replied Mrs. Compton, with a voice of hesitation. Then she proceeded in another tone: “I do believe the secret of it is that you have a very hard heart, and a stoic temperament, which prevents your feeling — ”

“You do not really think so, Margaret, for I am sure if you did you would give me up altogether.” observed Fanny, quietly.

“Yes I do. indeed — that is, I don’t *really*, because I know you to have the tenderest and most feeling heart in the world: in short, I do not understand you — never did, and never shall. You are too *good* for me to understand, but not too good for me to love and admire exceedingly. But, talking of hearts and dispositions, how do you think Cecil relishes the one he took so much pains to secure to himself?”

“It is a subject on which I know nothing,” said Fanny, quite gravely. “It is long since I have heard their names mentioned.”

“Well, I can tell you a good deal, for I saw them in London, and she is quite notorious as a *flirt*.”

“I am sorry to hear it.”

“It is sorrow thrown away, for I am sure she would not thank you for it. She looks happy enough — that is, she is mirthful and lively in society. One cannot see below the surface, but I hope she is really as wretched as she deserves, for all that — ”

“Oh, Margaret, for shame!”

“Not at all — retributive justice, my dear Fanny. Where would be the use of being good or bad, if it did not make us happy or miserable in its results? How often have you told me passions indulged, do not lead to happiness?”

“Then apply my principle to yourself, Margaret, and do not indulge your passion for judging your neighbors,” replied Fanny.

“Well, well, if you will not let me hope she is sorry for her crimes, so be it; but I thought myself very charitable in supposing her capable of repentance.”

“You do not misunderstand me, I know, Margaret, however you may pretend, so I shall not contradict you again.”

“Provoking creature! However, as I am very charitable, I shall tell you that I have every reason to suppose that if she does not repent the past — *he* does! He is so altered, you would be astonished. He has a look of discontent, a peevishness which speak him ill at ease; he seldom goes into society, and when I met him, which was quite by accident, first in the most solitary path in Kensington Gardens, and afterward near Brookensha, he seemed to wish to avoid speaking or recognizing me. He is *certainly miserable*.”

“I am sorry for it,” said Fanny: and she looked so sad, that Margaret exclaimed:

“Surely, Fanny, you do not *love* him still!”

“No, I would hope not. I have been enabled to overcome the feeling you call *love*; and most thankful am I that it is so.”

“Your *love* must have died a natural death, when your *esteem* and *regard* vanished,” observed Mrs. Compton.

Her companion was silent.

“Then why should his dejection and discontent pain you?” pursued the former lady.

“I am grieved to think that anyone should suffer from such causes. I cannot analyze my feelings — but is it unreasonable to regret that one I have known so long, and once loved so dearly, is suffering from the absence of true peace of mind?”

“Brookensha is very different now, Fanny, from what it was a few years ago: it is full of the mirthful, the wealthy, the frivolous for one season of the year — and a lonely desert for the other nine months.”

Fanny sighed deeply, and turned away her head.

“Has Mrs. Mansfield any family?” inquired she at length.

“Not yet, but it was whispered after she left England last winter that some such event was expected.”

“Oh, I hope it may be so,” said Fanny, with animation, “the birth of an *heir* would make her husband so much happier, and might perhaps steady her a little.”

“You are very charitable, Fanny, but I think her conduct too scandalously light to be steadied by any such means. However I wish with all my heart she may have a child, because then she will not herself succeed to the Brookensha estate when she has worried her husband to death.”

“You are *incorrigibly malicious*, Margaret.”

“Well, to show you that I can praise, I shall just tell you now how much I admire your friend, Mr. Linwood. He is a person it does one good to know: it raises one’s estimation of the human species.”

“I have nothing to object to your praises of Frank,” replied Fanny, with a quiet smile. “I do not wonder at your liking him.”

“You do — don’t you?” inquired Mrs. Compton.

“How could I do otherwise?” replied she. “Could I help feeling kindly disposed toward one who has so invariably manifested his friendship for me? My little Mary, too, his kindness to her — you would be surprised at it.”

“Yes, that is the way to a mother’s heart, of course — trust a man for finding out that; when he wants to please you — it is easy to court your child.”

“I do not believe he has any other impulse than simple goodness of heart. I am persuaded that he feels an interest in Mary for her own sake, from her peculiar and unfortunate situation,” said Fanny, quite warmly.

“When did you see him last?” inquired Margaret.

“At Christmas: he generally gives us a visit every vacation, if possible.”

“Oh, he does,” observed Mrs. Compton. “Shall you see him this spring?”

“I expect we shall, but it may be possible that unavoidable business may prevent it.”

Mrs. Compton looked earnestly at her friend as she spoke, but there was no consciousness, no hesitation, no embarrassment to make her imagine that Fanny partook of the sentiments which she was perfectly persuaded influenced Frank Linwood so powerfully. Her manner was simple, calm, and friendly in speaking of him, and her companion came to the conclusion that his feelings were still unknown to Fanny. This was rather a disappointment to her mind; for in her ardent love and admiration of Fanny, she had already formed in her imagination a sketch of her future destiny, in which the long constancy of Frank, and the patient sufferings of Fanny, were alike to meet their reward in a *happy marital union*. Seeing no symptoms of a partiality which she had hoped was fully established, she began to fear that her schemes for her friend’s happiness would never be accomplished; and she was strongly tempted to accuse her of lack of feeling and gratitude, in thus continuing indifferent or blind to a passion so warm as his.

“I would think,” said she, after rather a lengthened silence, “that those who broke in upon a solitude so complete as yours must appear to great advantage. How refreshing to meet with one who can indulge you in that greatest of all luxuries — reminiscences; whose mental vision looks back over the same fields as your own, and whose eyes see past events with the same, or nearly similar hues.”

“Are you asking for a compliment, Margaret?” replied Fanny: “it is a great pleasure to see you. Had I not said so already?”

“As if I was thinking of any such thing! Besides our past lives have been too little connected to make my words at all applicable. I was thinking of the pleasure you must have experienced, in meeting *Mr. Linwood* here.”

“Yes, it had its enjoyments, although so much of our past is too painful or unpleasing to refer too. Our earlier reminiscences are sacred to the memory of the dead, and our later ones cannot be indulged with any gratification, to me at least; so that you must perceive that your observations can only apply in a very limited sense to our fellowship.”

Mrs. Compton’s visit to her friend lasted several days, and although they were quietly spent, she informed her husband when he arrived to escort her home, that she thought she had derived much benefit from them.”

“I was not aware you needed it,” he observed, “though of course I am delighted to learn it. Is it moral or physical good you have derived?”

“Oh, *moral*, certainly — I have been studying *Fanny’s character* with the most intense admiration, and though not entertaining the smallest hope of ever being comparable to her, I have been induced to think about trying to be *patient* and *humble*. Do you think you would like it?”

“Really, I cannot say; you would be so very *different* from what I have always known you, that I cannot venture to pronounce an opinion.”

“Oh, indeed!”

“And I have no expectation of ever being called on to decide, by any very sudden or apparent alteration in your *morals* or *manners*, Margaret.”

Whether her admiration of Fanny produced any permanent effect on Mrs. Compton’s mind, we cannot at this time undertake to say; the principal effect produced by her visit, was that to which it gave birth in Frank Linwood’s feelings. He called on her on her return to town for the pleasure of talking of “Fanny,” in which she was as willing to indulge him as he could desire. They discussed her looks, her child, her house, her friends, her occupations, and, finally, herself — the state of her mind and feelings. Frank listened with a pleasure he could not disguise to her friend’s enthusiastic expressions of admiration.

“Does she seem perfectly happy?” inquired he, with a tone of deep interest.

“As happy as possible,” replied she, with a little feeling of malice. “I do not suppose that now she would willingly change her circumstances, or that anything could draw her from her *beloved solitude*.”

She bent her eyes on him as she said this; his were fixed on the window, but a slight change passed over his countenance — a shadow of something like disappointment, or mortification.

“Not that I think she objects to having the solitude now and then broken in upon,” continued the lady, hastening to afford *balm* to the *wound* she had made. “I know she is looking forward with pleasure to the expectation of a visit from you this Easter. You intend to go, of course?”

“Is she?” said he, with emphasis; “are you sure, Mrs. Compton? I do not like to *intrude*, and was doubting on the subject; but if she is really expecting me — ”

“Oh, do not hesitate!” cried she, “I am sure you will be welcome; she spoke of your visits as doing her good, and most fully expects you.”

“I do not feel quite sure of you, Mrs. Compton,” said Frank, turning his eyes with an arch expression upon her; “I suspect you are quizzing my vanity — I believe — that is — I hope Fanny does not dislike to see me sometimes; but that she is *anticipating* a visit is, perhaps, a sketch of your lively imagination.”

“Your polite insinuations, Mr. Linwood, almost provoke me to leave you in your error; and whether they spring actually from distrust of me, or only from the wish of having your vanity gratified by hearing the assertion of your importance reiterated, I feel equally ill-disposed to please you by repeating my assertions!”

Frank laughed, then looked a little embarrassed, hesitated, and said:

“If you knew how much I really wish to know Fanny’s feelings and desires — ” then he stopped.

“Well, what then?” inquired Mrs. Compton, looking gravely and steadily at him. “What are her feelings and desires to you?”

“Only that I may gratify them,” replied he, with an altered voice.

“Well, that is easy for you in this case: you have only to go into Devonshire.”

“And you are not joking?”

“Do you think I would joke on so important a subject as your paying her a visit of a few days?” replied she, with mock gravity. Then changing her tone to real earnestness, she added: “Your wishes will agree with hers so far as that is concerned, but in your real object — your *first* wish — I must not flatter you.”

He turned and looked at her steadily, but with an air of surprise.

“Mr. Linwood,” she pursued with animation, “my nature is frank and open, and I have studied yours to little purpose if I offend you now — I am sure I shall not, by speaking without disguise. I never could comprehend the use of concealment and evasion when, in reality, each perfectly understood the other’s feelings, or if not, it would have been better for them both if they had done so.”

“Well,” replied he, with a smile, as she paused to take breath, “make me understand you perfectly now, if you please; you are speaking in enigmas, in spite of all your avowed *frankness*.”

“With pleasure. You came here today to talk of *Fanny* — you dwell on my description, and heighten all the praises I give her. Now, I must be blind indeed, if I could not read that *your ruling passion is a deep, devoted love for her*. You want to know my opinion as to your probable success, but you are afraid to ask. Is not this true?”

He did not immediately reply; he was earnestly employed in examining a pen-knife which he had taken from the table, in opening and shutting the blades, or trying to read the maker’s name upon it. But there were lines upon his brow, and a close compression of the lips, which told of other feelings working in his mind besides those of curiosity respecting the

temper of the blade in his hand. When he did speak, it was in a low voice indicative of suppressed emotion; and there was an abruptness in his manner which was very different from his usual self.

“It was my boyhood’s dream, Mrs. Compton; it is still the object of my most ardent wishes. But yet, when fortune and fame were all to make before I dared address her, it seemed hardly more distant or uncertain than now. Fanny, and Fanny alone, I have loved, and whether I win her or not, I can never love another.”

“Another! No; if, after your worship of her, you could turn aside to any meaner object, I would say you deserved no more pity than that worthless Cecil Mansfield. But, Mr. Linwood, I am sorry for you, I do not think you will succeed.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Compton. You stimulate me to the trial; I will go down next month, and venture all on one hazard.”

“And I wish you success, with all my heart — such success as you deserve. How I delight in a spirit which is not to be shaken by forebodings, or conquered by others’ fears.”

“There is one thing,” said Frank, hesitating a little, “your doubts as to the issue do not arise from supposing that I have any *rival*.”

“Rival! On, no; only from the idea that *she has had enough of matrimony and its miseries*.”

This was but *cold encouragement* for a lover to take with him, and it was not without many misgivings that Frank set off the ensuing week to pay a visit on which he intended so much should depend. All the way there his mind was tormented by visions of the past, such as had been conjured up by the last words of Mrs. Compton. Fanny had had enough of matrimony and its miseries. Yet how true this was — how much was included in these few words!

Since the dissolution of her former ties, he had so seldom thought of her as a wife, that he nearly forgot she had ever been called one. She was again the *Fanny Ellis* who was almost all the world to him: the personification of the beautiful, the pure, the tender, the lovable in woman; the serenity of her manners, and the calm tone of *friendship* which she assumed to him, seemed to mark a heart unscathed by the fire of passion, free and at ease with itself. Thus she had long appeared to him as *Mrs. Mansfield of Brookensha*, he had completely ceased to think of her; but Margaret Compton’s words revived unwelcome reminiscences. It was true — only too true — that to her matrimony might be justly coupled with misery: how dearly had her present serenity been bought, how bitter had been the struggle, he once well knew. His passion might lead him to forget this, but it could not be so with her. She had been happy — and she had lost that happiness. She had been miserable — and she had survived her misery; how could he hope that she would once more be induced to set out on the *perilous and uncertain route of matrimony*?

How well he remembered her, the first time he saw her as Mrs. Mansfield; her look, her expressions, her very dress, were engraved on his memory; and what an assurance of happiness was then conveyed by her quiet smile, her gentle voice, her sweet and gracious manner. And then he thought of her again, as he had seen her in his mother’s house, on that dreadful day which had first ushered in her subsequent sufferings; he thought of her with a shudder, for he never could recall that idea without a thrill of anguish. “No,” thought he again and again, “it is vain to ask her to love once more.”

Once more, however, under her roof, and within the fascination of her voice, his wishes and his hopes prevailed over his fears. Even while walking up from the little cottage, where he was accustomed to lodge, to her house, he had been in a desponding frame of mind; but within her garden-gate he was met by the bright-faced Mary, who was watching for him, and who, eagerly clinging to his hand, led him to her mother, assuring him all the while that mamma would be so glad to see him.

Fanny was sitting in the well-known and much-loved little drawing-room, whose simple aspect, in his eyes, was so much more accordant to her appearance than the magnificent room of Brookensha had ever been. She was arranging some sweet violets in glasses, and the whole room was filled with the delicious fragrance of the white and purple heaps which lay before her.

Her air and tone did not belie the assurances that her child had given, that he was welcome; it was true that they conveyed only the idea of *friendship*, but it was a friendship so kind, confiding, and open, that a very small exertion of self-flattery served to persuade him it would be easy to *ripen it into affection*.

They were soon amicably seated together, she continuing her occupation, and he engaged in watching her hands, when obliged by courtesy to withdraw his eyes from her face, and now and then taking a violet from her fingers, which he certainly did not afterward throw away. Their conversation, however, was not very nearly connected with his thoughts; his last visit to Mrs. Compton, the latest news from his mother and sister, the newest books of any interest, and Mary’s progress in her education; these, and such as these, were their *subjects* for the next hour. Then came tea, for Fanny had adopted early hours, and after Mary had retired, came a long and quiet evening. He was not in a talkative mood, and taking from the table a work which had Fanny’s marker in it, he proposed reading to her, which being accepted with pleasure, the time was thus occupied until he retired.

During his short walk home, under a clear starlight sky, and long afterward, as he sat at his little lattice window watching the light which beamed from Fanny’s dwelling, he was engaged in profound calculations as to whether he had really made any progress in her esteem since the day when she allowed him first to call himself the guardian of her child, and her own adopted brother.



It was not to be expected that his visit would afford many incidents to form a prominent part of this record. Saunters in the beautiful Devonshire lanes, or strolls upon the thymy downs, which overhang the sea, were among their daily diversions. Teaching Mary gardening with her mother, and once drinking tea with the old clergyman, filled up the rest of his time, and to any man not deeply in love, the whole might have seemed intolerably dull; but it was not so to him; and although his spirits were by no means high, he did his utmost to amuse and entertain Mary, because her merry ringing laughter was usually accompanied by her mother's sweetest smile, and this smile was very dear to Frank. He observed it come more freely than when he was last in Devonshire; her spirit seemed more even and more cheerful; she seldom sighed, and there was never any symptom of depression as heretofore.

Days glided past, and he had not yet dared to break the smooth surface of their pleasant existence by the question which he had come prepared to ask; and his stay in the country was drawing near a close, when unexpectedly, and as those pre-arranged affairs usually turn out, quite in a different way from what he had intended, the whole was brought to a conclusion. It had been a lovely April day, and he had accompanied Fanny on a longer walk than usual to visit a cottage near the sea-shore; the relaxing nature of a warm spring sunshine made her feel more than usually fatigued, and Frank found for her a charming seat in a little nook upon the rocks almost overhanging the sea; she gladly seated herself, while he remained standing, idly dropping pebbles into the green waters which flowed at the foot of the rock over which he leaned. His amusement, or his thoughts, must have been very engrossing, since he did not hear her gentle voice recommending him to be seated, as he had taken more exercise than usual that morning.

At length he was startled from his deep reverie by a sudden question:

"Frank, are you not well?"

There was something of peculiar interest, almost of tenderness, in the tone of these words, which immediately roused him, which thrilled all over him, and it was with a flushed cheek that he turned to answer:

"Perfectly, thank you, Fanny; what makes you ask?"

"Oh, I did not mean to affront you," replied she, smiling, misunderstanding the excitement of his manner. "You are so unusually silent and preoccupied, I thought perhaps you were ill; but if that is not the case, I conclude you are only thinking of some cause you have to plead, and are anxiously meditating on legal cases and judgments."

"Yes, Fanny," said he, advancing and seating himself by her side, "you are right; I have a cause to plead, and on the decision of the suit hangs everything most dear to me; but the cause is my own; and you, Fanny must be the judge. Fanny, I have dared to *love* you."

"Frank!" exclaimed she, absolutely starting from her seat with surprise amounting nearly to terror, "do not say so; you insult my past sorrows."

The remembrance of all she had suffered since she first heard those words whispered in her ear, of her marriage — of Cecil's love — the fact of his being still living, though severed from her; the remembrance that Frank knew all this too, that he had witnessed both her happiness and her misery; had been aware how deeply her feelings had been tried, and how hard she had won tranquility of mind again: all these recollections made her recoil almost with horror from the first utterance of his affection, and cast on him a look which he little expected to have ever received. She stood, with her slight figure drawn up, and her head half averted, while her cheeks alternately glowed and faded with her various emotions. There was a silence between them, which she broke, by saying, in a softened voice however:

"And is this to be the end of our friendship, Frank? Must I lose you too, who I had imagined would have been as a *brother* to me?"

"Fanny," said he, in a tone both proud and injured, "why should my devotion offend you? is it just or generous to repay my affection with scorn?" Her look softened a little as he spoke, and with more hope he went on, "Because I cannot help seeing that you are the most amiable of women, am I *criminal* in loving you? Because another has injured you, will you revenge yourself on the innocent? Surely you need not be angry, even if you do think it presumption in me to love you."

But the first feelings of indignation had faded away, and others were taking their place. Memory was active with the past, and she saw in a rapid retrospective glance, much that she had never perceived before. With the quickness of a penetrating woman, having once taken in her hand the thread, she unraveled the clue to Frank's past thoughts and feelings. She suddenly discovered and understood his long existing love to her; a thousand circumstances, when they were boy and girl together, confirmed the idea that his love dated far, far back; everything in their fellowship while she bore the name of wife, and still more everything since, convinced her of this. A thousand facts came crowding on her mind, all showing his affection, and testifying to his worth; and her *deep debt of gratitude* to him for the unvarying friendship of his past conduct was heightened by the thought how long he had waited and watched since her hand was free, before he had breathed a syllable of his love. Did he indeed deserve to be repaid with *scorn*? Was it possible that he had really merited such a reproach in her reception of his declaration?

Her eyes filled with tears, as she gazed on the ground, while an expression of *regret* stole over her features, which Frank read and interpreted in his favor.



“Speak to me Fanny,” said he, advancing and taking her hand, “tell me you *forgive* me — that I have not offended you beyond pardon!”

She did not answer, but sinking again upon the bank, she tried in vain to suppress the deep, hysterical sobs which heaved her bosom, for strong emotion had weakened her nerves, and now fatigue, surprise, and many other feelings combined to overthrow her self-possession.

He was shocked at the suffering he had occasioned, and hung over her with tender but useless solicitude. A few minutes restored her usual calmness, and she succeeded at last in articulating,

“Dear Frank, forgive me if I have pained you, and don’t think me scornful or ungrateful; but indeed I *cannot* love you.”

“No, dearest Fanny, I can never think ill of you; but you little know how deep is the interest I have at stake, if you expect I can be satisfied with this answer. Listen, Fanny: I have loved you from my boyhood to this moment, with a constancy which knew no change; and though that very constancy was only once a torment, it is now my glory. But the passionate love I feel for you, I do not expect to be returned. I know you, Fanny, and I feel assured that your friendship — your regard — such as you, I trust, feel for me, would suffice for my happiness.”

She shook her head sadly.

“You do feel some regard for me?”

“Oh, yes, gratitude — esteem — the warmest regard, Frank; but I cannot love you!”

“Have you tried, Fanny?”

“I cannot try; my heart is sick.”

“Then I will be satisfied without it: only give me your hand.”

“No, never! A *hand without a heart* would be a poor return for your love; it would be unjust.”

“If it satisfied me, Fanny?”

“You think now that it would do so — but would those feelings last?”

“Has not my constancy been sufficiently tried?”

“But constancy in *pursuit*, Frank, is different from constancy in *possession*; and it is better to be denied an object — than to be disappointed in it.”

“This would be very true, perhaps, if my love were of recent date — if I had loved only from last week, or last month, or even last year; but I have known you more than twenty years, Fanny, and I cannot be mistaken in your character or your worth.”

She still shook her head, and drew away the hand which he tried to take.

“Have you no pity, Fanny, no compassion for my long, long sufferings?”

She turned toward him, and fixing on him her eyes with a look of deep sadness, she said,

“Frank, I owe you so much in every way, and I esteem and regard you so highly, that the impulse of my feelings would be to yield to your entreaties, and try to make you happy as your wife; but *reason* and *reflection* point out a very different line of duty.”

He looked impatient, as if he were inclined to wish reason and reflection in the depth of the sea, rather than that they should interfere with his plans and wishes.

“Regard for *your* happiness, your own interest and domestic comfort, induce me to refuse you.”

“This is the strangest mode of reasoning, Fanny; you thwart my wishes to increase my happiness, and refuse to be my wife — to promote my domestic comfort. What can you mean?”

This time he spoke as well as looked impatiently; he almost thought she was *trifling* with him.

“Frank, remember who and what I am, and you will understand me,” replied she, her pale cheek flushing scarlet as she spoke.

“Yes, I remember you are not only the most angelic, but the most ill-used of women, sweetest, dearest Fanny. I remember all and everything, and I feel how much of happiness is owing to you to compensate for the past. Oh! that you would only allow me to be the one who should show a proper appreciation of your worth — the one who could *display* to all the world the estimation in which he holds you.”

“Frank, you are rising to eminence in your profession — you are ambitious — you value honors and distinctions: would you then ally yourself with *shame* and *disgrace*? would you wish that your wife should be known as the forsaken mistress of another, or that there should be circles in the world from which her past history would exclude her?”

“This is not possible — no such blame rests on you; or if it were so, such censures would be as despicable as they were unjust!”

“But would you brave them?”

“Yes, for your sake I would defy every censure, or if you shrink from encountering them, I would find ample compensation in my home with my sweet companion!”

“So you think, but it would not be so; your wife must not, Frank, drag you into obscurity, or cover you with shame; she should be a woman honorable and unstained: one who can unblushing share your future renown; not a sad wreck like myself, whose only safety from contempt is in *oblivion!*”

“Fanny, when I affirm and declare that you are only too *good* for me — why will you try to make out that you are too *bad*?”

“Because I know that a man in a fever of passion is no fair judge of his own cause. It is for your own sake I argue thus.”

“This is the hardest part of it,” he exclaimed quite vehemently, “you refuse me in the calmest, cruelest manner — and then assert that it is for my own good!”

“Yet so it is,” replied she very quietly.

“For *my* good!” pursued he, more and more impatiently, “for my good, to deprive life of all pleasure, home of all joy, distinction of all charm — to make fame and fortune indifferent, or to turn them into an absolute curse — to condemn me to a life of useless solitude and hopeless repining — is this for *my* good?”

“This would *not* be for your good, it is true, Frank,” said she very gently, and laying her hand on his arm in her earnestness, “but you are too good and reasonable, too Christian, to throw away, like a spoiled child, all your advantages, because you are denied one single object of your wishes. You will still have duties to perform to mankind, charities to your fellow-creatures, duties to your God, which forbid you to sit down in despair, and brood over one subject of regret.”

“But *domestic* happiness, Fanny; must I resign all hopes of having a wife to cheer me, to soothe, to love, to counsel — the *one treasured wish of my heart*, must I give that up?”

“Why need you — there are *other women* in the world as worthy, and far more happy than myself — choose another for your wife, and still be to me the *brother* I had always hoped to find you.”

“Choose another, Fanny!” he exclaimed bitterly, “it is easy talking so; but what do such words avail? can the love of years be lightly done away? can I turn my heart to another object? No! no! ‘many waters cannot quench love,’ and words are useless. That angel face, that beloved voice — they have been always the *secret treasure* to which memory reverted; and if you, Fanny, will not be my wife — no other woman ever shall!”

She was silent.

“Are you resolved?” said he, taking her hand in his, and looking fixedly on her face. She raised her eyes to meet his, but she could not bear that look. There was such *pleading, passionate love* in his dark eyes; such an intensity of feeling, as no woman could meet unmoved. Her heart quailed, and she looked down lest her eyes, betraying her confused emotions, should lead him to unfounded hope.

“Answer, Fanny, are you quite resolved?”

She needed to recall all her reason and fortitude to the task before she could answer. Gratitude, esteem, pity, were all contending with a stern sense of duty to him, but duty conquered, and she did articulate “*I am.*”

He dropped her hand, and turned away. When she looked timidly at him, there was a deadly paleness on his cheek, and a dark mark under his eye, which, with the compressed lips, told how deeply he was *suffering*. She felt miserable, almost guilty, in having *caused* such misery; yet she dared not attempt to soothe him, lest compassion should be mistaken for a more friendly feeling. She remained silent, therefore, and contented herself with watching him.

At length he said, but without looking at her:

“Had you said that your feelings forbade a second union, that your happiness and peace were best secured by *seclusion* and *solitude*, had it been for your sake — indeed, though a heavy disappointment, I could have borne it better; but to have you acting on *imaginary* principles, making me so perfectly wretched for my own sake, and from a *mistaken kindness* — acting on a scruple, which I cannot even understand, this is the worst of all. Oh, Fanny! you cannot know how wretched you make me.”

After a little consideration, and a good deal of inward struggle, she addressed him in a mournful, but soft, pleading tone, which went straight to his heart.

“Frank, have some pity on me, do not quite crush me with remorse, which your words awaken. I dare not murmur at my sad lot, because it was through my own misconduct I incurred the penalty. But is my path in life a bright one? have I nothing to endure? I have brought shame, regret, sorrow, disgrace on all connected with me — my brother-in-law, my father, my child; and now I must lose my *best friend*, and part from him with these words of reproach in my ears. I thought I had tasted misery in all its bitterness, and did not expect to receive from your hand an addition to that which I had already gone through.”

He had raised himself from the turf by her side, and stood at a little distance when she began to speak. Her voice drew him gradually nearer as she proceeded, but for several minutes after she had ceased, he continued standing beside her, his arms crossed on his bosom, and his eyes bent down as if in profound meditation.

Time had passed unnoticed during this conversation, but now Fanny, observing the position of the sun, became conscious that it was necessary to return home. She arose, and prepared to ascend the steep hill, up which their path lay;

but the agitation of the last half hour was but ill calculated to restore the strength which the fatigue of her walk had impaired. Her step was slow and heavy, and her whole air told a tale of extreme and painful weariness. Frank saw it, and was at her side in a moment.

“Lean on me, dear Fanny,” said he: “you need support, let me assist you up this trying hill.”

He saw she hesitated, but he would not be repelled; he took her hand, and drew it beneath his arm with a sensation of pleasure that she still needed his assistance and support, that she could not yet do without him. He longed to press the hand which leaned upon him, to his heart, but he was afraid of offending her: her countenance had an expression which he did not like; it told of feelings of *reserve* creeping over her heart — reserve towards himself which he could ill brook. Was he then to forfeit her *friendship*, because he could not win her *love*? This must not, should not be. He would plead no more for what she so resolutely refused him; but he would make an effort at least to retain what she had always permitted him to enjoy. They had reached the top of the ascent, and she attempted to withdraw her hand, but he would not allow it.

“No, dear Fanny, do lean on me a little longer, you are sadly tired; and unless I have offended beyond forgiveness, do not punish me so severely. Ah, that is kind of you,” he continued, as she silently acceded to his entreaty; “that is like yourself. Now tell me, do you, can you forgive my petulance — my impatience just now? Can you, who are so near an angel, make allowance for the weakness of a mortal like myself?”

“Frank, leave off this foolish way of talking, and speak to me as one rational being should do to another,” replied Fanny, quietly, “that is, if you expect me to talk to you at all.”

“Well, Fanny, I will try; but forgive a man who is very, very much in love, for not preserving the coolness — but I make you angry again. Well, Fanny, I will own that in the excess of my own pained feelings, I forgot yours, and I fear I talked as if I had supposed that I alone had a claim to be gratified. I have been *selfish* and *unreasonable* — can you forgive it? Yes, I see you can, and forget it too: let all be as nearly as possible as in times passed!”

“As nearly as possible!” she replied.

This time he did venture to press her hand; she took no notice of the movement.

“But, Fanny,” he continued, reverting to her last speech, “why will you persist in ascribing *blame* to yourself for the past? I mean one part of the past: if you acted illegally, it was not *morally wrong*, because, as I well know, you were unaware that it was illegal; shame and disgrace must belong to those who *misled* or *injured* you, not to yourself or your own actions. It is the first time,” he continued, finding she made no reply, “that I have ventured to approach this subject; but since you have alluded to it yourself, allow me to entreat you, not for my sake, but for your own and your child’s also, do not give way to the feeling you seemed to express that you bring a *blight* upon what you love. It is a morbid, unhealthy idea which will grow on you and *poison all your sources of happiness*.”

“Perhaps so,” said Fanny, with a sigh, hardly knowing what she said; but after a few minutes’ silence she added: “Frank, I will tell you all, and then let this subject never be revived between us: I once *believed* myself the wife of Cecil Mansfield — I *was* his wife. If bad passions interposed and separated us — if our marriage was declared an empty ceremony — if I was cast away as a dishonored thing — if he even chose to take another woman in my vacant place — all this does not release my feelings from the *marriage vow* I made. My *hand* I know is free, and my *heart* I hope is no longer occupied by him; but while he lives, although forever separated from me — I am equally separated in feeling from all others. I could not bear to meet him in society, I could not bring his child before the world — if I were the wife of some other man; call it weakness — call it folly — call it what you will, only leave me — leave me in peace and seclusion, to try to make some atonement for the evils I have entailed on my child, by an undivided and devoted attention to her.”

He saw that her resolution was fixed for the present, and that eloquence of his could not move her, he therefore yielded to necessity; and though without understanding her feelings or entering into her scruples, he was obliged to allow them to pass unnoticed.

It was his wisest way — a very little more urging on his part — and she would have passed on him the heavy sentence of perpetual banishment; and this he could ill have borne. Had he indeed given up all hopes, he would not have wished to continue a fellowship which could give birth on his part only to vain and bitter regret. But the ardent hopes of twelve years were not so to be extinguished. He had seen a barrier, to all appearance insurmountable, dissolve and vanish away; the love which had once made his own attachment hopeless, had been first crushed by *violence*, then eradicated by *reason* and *religion* — until it was not now even named as an obstacle to his wishes; to these there now opposed themselves only *scruples* and *doubts* which he believed to be baseless, imaginary, and which he hoped would be transient.

Was it likely that with her avowed regard, gratitude, and good opinion — his ardent love should have no effect on her heart, a heart so tender and susceptible of kind emotions? Could she know him suffering from disappointment which only she could relieve, without some feelings of pity and regret? Only let him still have access to her society, and he was very far from despairing as to his ultimate success. He had not gained much certainly by his present step; indeed, at first sight, it might seem as if he had gained nothing, for he had received a *decided refusal*; but in reality he had made progress, he had given her the idea that he loved, he had opened the subject, and he had won from her professions of regard which in a small degree would console him for his present failure, because they seemed to open a more flattering prospect beyond.

And still she leaned upon his arm — leaned more and more heavily as her fatigue increased; and so she could not do without him, he must still be her friend, companion, guardian, brother — time would do the rest, and to time he would trust.

“Fanny, dearest Fanny,” said he, after a long pause, “let the conversation of the last hour be forgotten; I understand you now, and grieve, deeply grieve, that I have added another *thorn* to your painful path. Let me still be your *friend* — do not withdraw your correspondence nor proscribe my visits; and while I submit to your decision, I shall still flatter myself with the hope of being occasionally useful to you. You will promise me this?”

Perhaps had she seen his heart, she would not have given the promise he requested; but unaware of all that his views comprehended, and really anxious not to lose a friend such as Frank had been, she acquiesced, and another long silence ensued.

At length they reached her home; exhausted with fatigue and emotion, she felt as if she could not have walked another hundred yards. He accompanied her in, and after preparing the sofa for her to repose, waiting on her with something more than a brother’s zeal and kindness, and seeing her enjoying the rest she so much required, he silently clasped her hand, lingered a moment, pressed his lips to it, and then hastily left the room, leaving Fanny and her feelings in an inextricable maze of regret, admiration, dissatisfaction, gratitude, and half a dozen other feelings, each in turn more lively than its predecessor.

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 18

Brookensha House did indeed, under the government of Laura Mansfield, present a very different aspect from what it had assumed under the rule of her predecessors. Instead of the quiet elegance which seemed to unite domestic enjoyment to a rational hospitality — all was now fashion, dissipation, extravagance, and heartless show. Though Laura had brought her husband no dowry, she had all the taste for expense which would have befitted the mistress of thousands.

During the small portion of the year which she spent in the lovely domains of her own and her husband's ancestors, she contrived to make the whole of her conduct such as was most to his disadvantage, and her own benefit. She affronted many of their country neighbors by her haughty exclusiveness, by her neglect to return their stated visits, and omission of the ordinary civilities when she chanced to meet them. Her carriage passed the park of the Fermors half a dozen times before she ever *condescended* to enter their gates, and even then she only bestowed on them a space of five minutes, and a vocabulary of as many sentences. And thus she treated all who had no claim to fashion or fame, beyond the precincts of their country seat. She drove twenty miles to see a dear friend of the last London season, but the constituents on whose votes her husband depended for his next election, she despised and insulted.

The whole county was in a ferment; the errors and failings of her predecessor were obliterated in one single autumn; “the *unfortunate Mrs. Mansfield*,” as *Fanny* was generally designated, however she might have sinned in assuming that name, had never transgressed so unpardonably as the present lady. *Fanny* knew her husband's tenants, talked to their wives, and noticed the children; she lived at Brookensha with only unavoidable absences, and it was well known how glad she always was to return home. She was regularly seen in the parish church, she was *universally kind and benevolent*, she returned all the visits which were paid her.

But the present *fine lady* did none of these things; she filled the hall for three months every autumn with fine people, like herself, from London, who had private theatricals, dances, charades, tableaux vivans, and all sorts of fashionable amusements, from which the whole neighborhood was being excluded. They saw these entertainments to be frivolous or indecorous. And as all the *charities* which had been originated by the twin-sisters were now abolished, there could be no doubt but that complete ruin would speedily fall upon the fair estate which had long held so prominent a place in the admiration of beholders, and given so aristocratic a rank to its possessors.

Little cared Mrs. Mansfield for their ill-will or their predictions; even the sober remonstrances of her husband were of no avail, and she soon assumed to him a *tone* which made him shrink from opposing her when opposition could be avoided.

Her attachment to her husband had soon rapidly subsided; indeed, it may be doubted whether any *real* attachment had ever existed. She had been bent on marrying him, and at one time she had really thought him the most agreeable man of her acquaintance, but that was before she became acquainted with *Arthur Temple*. To say the truth, she was a woman *incapable of any real attachment*; there are and have been many bad women, who are yet susceptible of a strong and unselfish affection; but the faults of Laura Mansfield were not of a nature compatible with any such feeling — *deep selfishness* was the root of all the evil branches which displayed themselves in her actions.

*Vanity* and *ambition*, though conspicuous in all she did, were not the most powerful sentiments of her heart. She was determined to marry her cousin, not because she loved him the best, but because she had heard much of the beauties of that estate which she thus secured to herself or children. She wished to be the head of her house, and had always avowed that she would rather remain a *Mansfield* all her life — than sink the name in one of more plebeian origin or sound.

And so far she was gratified; she was now *mistress of Brookensha*, and had not forfeited the name of which she was so proud. But she met with the usual *consequences* of inordinate desires indulged and gratified — she felt nothing but bitter disappointment.

It was true that she was *Mrs. Mansfield of Brookensha*; but even as such, she did not rise in the estimation of that circle which formed her world, as much as she expected; they thought of her only as of any other young and lovely married woman under patrician rank. Had she stayed in the country indeed, she might, by pursuing a certain policy, have reigned supreme in her own neighborhood; but such a *sacrifice* was not to be expected of her. She hurried to Paris, and was soon immersed in a round of dissipation, from which she tore herself with regret and difficulty, when Cecil's parliamentary duties compelled him to re-cross the Channel. It was in vain that he tried to propitiate her during the voyage, for though his passion had cooled with her increasing indifference — he still *dreamed of domestic peace and happiness*, such as he had once known. She refused to be appeased, and returned all his overtures, with indignant and insulting speeches, which he found it hard to bear.

But in London she again met *Arthur Temple*, and met him frequently. Their former acquaintance was renewed, and his admiration was expressed in a way perfectly intelligible, and very agreeable to her *vanity*. Their relationship was carried on for some time before Cecil discovered they had met; his days and nights were devoted to business in the House of Commons; for *vexed* and *disappointed* with his wife — they had few pleasures or engagements in common. When, however, he accidentally discovered the imprudent levity with which Laura was conducting herself towards his former

rival — he was very angry, and spoke in terms equally decided and indignant on the necessity of putting an end to such an acquaintance immediately.

Laura affected not to hear him; she was apparently engrossed by the columns of the “Morning Post,” and neither raised her eyes, nor made any reply. Cecil was rather glad to avoid the *scornful* and *insolent* answers in which she sometimes indulged, and knowing that she must hear what he said, he did not attempt to extract from her an answer at that time.

Very shortly after this they left London for Yorkshire, and Laura seemed as willing as her husband to retreat there. She took several friends down with her, and more were to follow immediately, so that she was secure from the domestic infelicity of being alone with Cecil. The party was large and mirthful; Laura’s spirits, though unequal, were often high — but Cecil’s were gloomy, and he absented himself much from the uncongenial visitors who thronged his house.

Among this party there was only one with whom he seemed to find any pleasure, and this was *Mary Annesley*. Perhaps it was a perception that her society was useful to allay the irritability of Cecil’s spirits that made Laura extend her invitation to her; for there did not appear to exist any great friendship between the ladies at present.

Miss Annesley had been a visitor in the house in other times, times to which Cecil was now fondly looking back as the happiest of his life. And though they did not converse on the subject, there was a sort of tacit understanding between them, that Cecil’s partiality for her society arose from her connection with the past in his mind. That he did not find much satisfaction in his present mode of life, did not require any extraordinary degree of penetration to discover; and if Miss Annesley, while blaming him in her own mind, was not fully convinced that his punishment was quite adequate to his offence, at least she did not think it necessary to add anything to it of her own devising.

They sometimes walked, and sometimes rode together, falling behind the rest of the party, engaged in occasional conversation, but more often occupied by social silence. They often passed along many miles of country without a syllable being exchanged between them, and Mary was quite as well pleased at it as Cecil.

On one occasion, however, they did speak. They were riding through a beautiful piece of forest scenery, where the golden and rich tawny tints of the trees contrasted admirably with the pale delicate lemon hue of the fern, with which the ground was covered. They were alone, the rest of the party having left them at a rapid canter, when Mary, enchanted with the varied and beautiful scenery she saw on every side, exclaimed:

“It certainly is a lovely spot, Mr. Mansfield; I do not wonder that you love Brookensha.”

“I *did* love it,” was his only reply. “You seem to have been always improving it,” she continued.

“It is long since I have seen any improvement here.”

She was silent, but he added, after a pause:

“You have seen the place otherwise, Miss Annesley; do you not agree with me?”

“If I did, I would certainly not say so,” replied she with spirit.

“You admire my estate, Miss Annesley — you think it beautiful; would you, if you could change with me, take my load of cares and regrets — and give me your light heart and unfettered fate?”

“It is absurd to say what one would do in *impossible cases*, but really I almost think I would,” replied she, archly.

“Would to Heaven that you could then,” exclaimed he. “There are some thoughts which drive one frantic. To look *back*, and see that you have played the *game of life* all wrong; that you have thrown away your best moves, and sacrificed your most important possessions; and to look *forward*, and see nothing but the miserable consequences of these blunders, which must haunt you through life — this is misery with which, were you really acquainted, Brookensha, — Yorkshire itself, would not tempt you to sacrifice yourself.”

“I never was miserable yet,” replied Mary gaily; “and I do not think I ever shall be. Even a wet day does not make me so.”

“And yet you are serious, Miss Annesley; you think and reflect, unlike the *frivolous girls* with whom my house is filled; and can you reflect on the *general misery of existence* without feeling your spirits weighed down by an overpowering load.”

“I do not believe anything about the misery of existence,” said the young lady; “I do not mean to deny that there is a great deal of unhappiness in the world; but I cannot look upon it as a *necessary* part of existence. On the contrary, I consider most cases of *misery*, to arise from the selfish passions of some untamed individual. Someone who will not submit his neck to the yoke of *propriety* and *prudence* — but who has run away with the reins of reason, and left his share of work for the general good unfulfilled.”

“I dare say you are right — it is our own fault when we are miserable; but I do not find that a very consolatory reflection.”

“Very likely not, unless it leads to *amendment*.”

But amendment is not always possible; the good we have thrown away will not, cannot return. And the fearful evil we have incurred is not to be shaken off; what then?”

“I am not qualified for a moral lecturer,” replied Miss Annesley; “but it strikes me that you and I take a different view of *amendment*. I meant a *moral* amendment, which would comprise *repentance* for the past, joined to such a degree of

*humility* and *submission*, as would lead to a quiet determination to bear the burden we have ourselves bound to our shoulders. Yours, I presume, includes only such a disposition as would lead us to *alter the circumstances* which we did not like, but leave temperaments and wishes as uncontrolled as ever."

Another silence ensued, which he suddenly broke by turning abruptly to her, and saying: "Do you think me a *happy* man?"

"No."

"And why not?"

"Because I hear you *complain* so much," replied she, "you are always grumbling. Either the weather, or the cutlets at breakfast, the state of the nation, or your horses' knees — all furnish you with matter for complaint and murmuring."

"And you think this the worst of my lot?" said he, laying his hand on the pommel of her saddle, and gazing earnestly at her.

She was saved from the trouble of a reply, or the danger of sentimental discussions on such a subject, by a sudden interruption; for a turn of the road at a point where several tracks converged in one, brought them directly face to face with another group of the equestrian party; and without appearing to shun Cecil, Mary contrived to keep her horse's pace up to that of their new companions, and thus avoided for the present a further conversation with Cecil.

Two days after this conversation, as Laura was languidly reclining on the sofa in her dressing-room, turning over the leaves of a new review, her husband abruptly entered the room.

"Do you know, Laura," said he, in an accent, and with an air which did not indicate content, "that *Arthur Temple* has just arrived here?"

"No, has he really?" exclaimed Laura, starting up, and her face flushing with pleasure, "then I must trouble you to touch the bell for the servant. I must dress before I can go down to receive him."

"Did you *expect* him, Laura?" said her husband, bending on her a look, which, in spite of her audacity, made her quail inwardly.

"No, not exactly — certainly not; for otherwise I would have been more fit to receive him," replied she, going to a looking-glass and contemplating herself. "I do not think I am looking very well today, do you, Cecil?" turning an arch look at him.

It was no use, however; he was bent on pursuing the unpleasant subject, and her looks had long ceased to have any power over his heart.

"Why does he come then, if you did not *invite* him? I *detest* him, and shall certainly give him to understand that he is not wanted here."

"What a *bear* you are, Cecil," replied she hastily; "you cannot do that, however, for I *did* invite him!"

"You did, Laura! after what I had said to you on that subject in London; you knew my opinion!"

"You never said anything about it, Cecil, I am certain; we never talked about inviting him; and really, I suppose I may ask whom I please to this house, since I am the mistress of it."

"I told you that I thought ill of the *morals*, of the *principles* of Arthur Temple, and that I did not wish you to have any acquaintance with him," said he, very warmly.

"Well, you need not *bawl* out so loud, as if you wanted him to hear what you are saying; and as to my acquaintance with Mr. Temple, it is of as old a date as my acquaintance with you, so you spoke rather too late."

"I asked you to give it up, Laura."

"And I see no reason why I should."

"I would have supposed *my decision* was reason sufficient for my wife in such matters."

"Then you know very little of your wife, for she is not a *baby* in leading-strings, or a *puppet* in your hands."

"I think extremely ill of the conduct of Mr. Temple, he is a man who has shown an entire lack of right principle."

"He has shown himself a great deal more *agreeable* and *complaisant* than you have, I can tell you, Mr. Mansfield; and I suppose this, added to his being handsome and clever, explains what you are pleased to call his lack of right principle. But I have neither leisure nor patience to enter into a *moral discussion* on the subject of his failings or virtues; he is here — he is alone — I must dress and go to him."

"You shall do no such thing until you have heard my opinion, Mrs. Mansfield! It is my firm determination not to submit to your carrying on such a *disgraceful flirtation* as you did in London; I have my honor at stake as well as yours, and I will turn him out of the house if anything of the kind appears."

"Upon my honor, you will be unlikely to mend matters by all this fuss! Why am I not to ride or walk with a friend, as well as yourself? Did I ever object to *Mary Annesley* being a visitor here, or make any uproar because you are so *fond* of her? Have you never been seen riding with your hand upon the pommel of her saddle? Suppose I were to go and complain of your conduct, would it not tell as well as anything you can say against me? I tell you, Cecil, if you oppose Mr. Temple paying me a visit, I will turn Mary Annesley out of the house, for the *shameful flirtation* you have carried on for this month past."



Cecil was startled; it had never occurred to him that any mischievous interpretation would be put on the fellowship he had been in the habit of holding with Miss Annesley; but he was more than startled, he was enraged; he bit his lip for a moment, and then advancing a step towards Laura, he said in a low voice: "Do you know *to whom* you are speaking?"

She looked at him for a moment, then turned away her head, and again began smoothing her long ringlets.

"Laura, you dare not utter so base a slander against an innocent girl," he continued, "you know it to be false; but this *artifice* shall not shield you. Pursue your own way — you selfish, misguided, wicked woman; but remember, that I will not, and cannot be duped. If you fall into the *snare* from which I have tried to save you, remember the consequences! I shall have no pity, for your errors are willful."

"What on earth has all this rude, tiresome tirade to do with the visitor from whom you are detaining me? I will not be *threatened*, and *lectured*, and *frowned* on, like a child! I will take my own way."

"I see you will, and that way will lead, I fear — I foresee, to disgrace and shame. You shall not! I will be master!"

"I dare say all this *stamping* and *thundering* might have a very good effect upon some people — there are perhaps tame, submissive spirits, who would not dare oppose you; but I am not so constituted. I am not your *slave*, thank Heaven, and my spirits are not to be thus bent to your will!"

He only answered by a look, and then hastily left the room.

She was really alarmed lest he should be gone to put his threat in execution, and expel Arthur Temple from the house; she therefore dressed hastily, and descended to preserve the peace.

Cecil's anger evaporated; and besides, his wife became more cautious. Mr. Temple took great pains to make himself universally agreeable, and soon succeeded in forcing even Cecil to find him a pleasant companion. The momentary jealousy of the husband was laid asleep, and things went on smoothly to all appearance for several weeks. Still Cecil was miserable; the suit with Fanny's trustees had not come to a hearing, and he would have given anything to prevent exposure, by repaying the money. But *Laura's extravagance* kept him poor, and made it difficult.

The autumn crept on, the party at Brookensha dispersed, and Laura persuaded her husband to return to Paris for the ensuing winter, or perhaps to go as far as the south of France, and establish themselves in some pleasant neighborhood there. The hope of *economizing* induced him to consent, and on leaving England he gave orders for the cutting down of much of his magnificent timber, to raise the sum, which he now resolved to repay immediately.

The winter that Fanny had spent so quietly in Devonshire, had been passed by the Mansfields amidst the gayest society at Paris; and it was not until Laura's health made it quite absolutely necessary, that they returned to London, where she wished to pass her *confinement*, an event which was anticipated in the course of the spring. Ever since Cecil had begun to expect an heir to his estate, he had in some degree recovered his spirits. Laura, too, seemed improved; though still dissipated, she was no longer a flirt; she was on better terms with her husband; and though exceedingly admired in the French capital, she was not accused of having a single lover. She laughed at the gallantry and compliments showered on her, repeated them to her husband as a good joke, and treated all her *train of admirers* with the most impartial indifference.

Arthur Temple was traveling in America, and the flirtation with him appeared to be forgotten.

It was in the early summer of the ensuing year that a general election occurred, and Laura was hardly recovered from her *confinement*, when Cecil was forced to leave her, to attend to his canvass in Yorkshire. It was a severe contest; he had lost much of his former popularity; but this was not a question of man against man, it was *party* against *party*, *principle* against *principle* — which convulsed the nation, divided neighborhoods, broke up acquaintance of such lengthened standing that it had assumed the name of friendship, and split families into bitter factions.

All the energy of Cecil's mind was strained to the utmost; his time, his thoughts, his whole heart was carried away in the election. It was not that he really cared for his seat, but he was swept into the *vortex of party spirit*; and those who looked on his success as the ultimatum of their own triumph, and what was still dearer, their enemies' defeat — urged him on with a zeal not naturally his own.

He was elected; and when the whole affair was over — the shouting, the charring, the speech-making, the dining, the toasting, the headache, the fever, the disbursements, and the fatigue — when he had reckoned, as well as he could, what it had *cost* him, decided that it was not worth the purchase — he spent a week at Brookensha to examine how it was all to be paid, and even walked into his woods to ascertain what additional timber must be cut to provide the necessary funds, he returned to London to rejoin his wife, from whom he had now been parted about two months.

[Table Of Contents](#)



## Chapter 19

Frank Linwood did not have another interview with Fanny after that memorable conversation which has been recorded. He felt that he could not encounter her again. He left Devonshire the next morning early, leaving a few lines of farewell for her, with an entreaty that she would not withdraw her friendship, nor shut her door upon him for the future — and that he, in return, would be silent on the subject of the past.

A few days after his departure she received a letter from Mrs. Compton to this effect:

“Fanny, I am convinced that you have a hard and stony heart. I always thought you odd, but I never could have imagined you so eccentric as your conduct proves you to be. Oh yes, you know what I mean well enough. Tell me, *why* have you refused Frank Linwood? Give me, if you can, one rational reason for so insane a proceeding. Unfeeling woman! will nothing tempt you from your *cold propriety*? Here is love, worth, and obligation — all in favor of your suitor! Why, common gratitude would have made most women accept him! — not that I blame you for not yielding to gratitude — Heaven forbid! Men, precious creatures! confer on us some trifling favor, or perhaps, sometimes — on rare occasions — some really essential ones — and then, forsooth, a pretty recompense they expect! Trust them for knowing the value of their services!

“But really, there was so much in favor of Mr. Linwood, and it seems such a good thing both for you and Mary to have a *protector*, that I seriously think you ought to have accepted him. Why is it that our views of *duty* usually differ so very widely? How does it happen that we never see things in the same lights or of the same hues? Can it be because your eyes are blue, and mine approach to green? I really think this must have something to do with it, otherwise it never could happen that two clever, sensible, amiable women like you and I, should be so often at odds on the points of right and wrong.

“Do not, however, suppose that Frank Linwood has been complaining to me, or, like an ancient hero, lamenting your cruelty and your charms. We have never mentioned the subject together. I read his disappointment in his countenance when we met, and I respected his feelings too much to irritate them by pity. If my feelings of sympathy were not expressed by my fingers when we shook hands, I am sure they will never be expressed at all. However, since the thing is done, and there is no help for it, my best wishes must be now confined to a very earnest desire that he should speedily meet with someone who can appreciate his character, and will make him happy; for it seems to me a pity that *when good men are so rare*, one who really deserves an encomium should pass through life uncared for and unappreciated. There! I tossed my letter to my husband that he might learn my sentiments, and he returned it with only the comment: ‘I do not think your ink seems very good.’”

It showed some appreciation of the human heart that Mrs. Compton put in that last wish for Frank Linwood’s benefit. Fanny had no intention of marrying him, but the idea thus conjured up of his becoming the husband of *another* made some impression on her. She could not think of him as loving her, as having long, ardently, secretly, and perhaps at times hopelessly loved her, without a degree of sensibility towards him which it would be difficult to define. Let any woman ask herself what sentiment such an affection would naturally create. It must be one of gratification at being the object of such a love. We all value affection, and those value it most, who most need its support.

Fanny had refused his hand, not from selfish motions alone, but because she thought it best for *him* as well as herself; but she could not relinquish his *friendship* without a pang, and yet this would probably in a great measure be withdrawn, if he were really to carry into effect the wishes and plans expressed by Mrs. Compton. She blamed herself for selfish feelings, and tried hard to wish the same; but it was a *difficult lesson* which she set herself to learn.

Her answer to her friend, however, did not express these sentiments.

“I am glad, my dear Margaret,” she wrote, “that, however you may condemn me for hardness of heart or lack of judgment — you do not blame me for willfully giving rise to an attachment which I cannot return. I was very much surprised, quite as much as I was grieved, by the discovery of it; and it really was no easy thing to resist the pleading of one who pleads so well and who had so many arguments and precedents in his favor. I am rather sorry you learned anything about it. I would never have told you; but I am sure you will not again advert to the subject in any way, unless it be to tell me he has married. Please do that as soon as you can. He has been as kind as a *brother* to me, and it was very painful to give him pain. But I know it was best. He must not unite his fate to one whose path has been so rough and dangerous — he must not take a *withered, blighted bough* instead of ‘the fruitful vine’ to ornament his house. I would only disgrace and dishonor him; nor could I marry again while Cecil lives. Now you know my reasons, I am sure you will not advert again to the subject.”

Mrs. Compton submitted, and the matter was not again canvassed between the two friends; and as the Comptons soon afterwards went to Ireland, Frank Linwood occupied no part of Margaret’s letters.

The next two months passed quietly away with Fanny. July was commencing, and she sometimes found herself wondering mentally whether the following autumn would bring a visit from Frank Linwood or not. She supposed *not* —

but she felt that it would be a blank if this were so, and she found with surprise how much these occasional visits had contributed to her pleasure, both in anticipation and reality.

One day, as engrossed by these thoughts, she was slowly climbing, hand in hand with little Mary, the steep and almost precipitous bank which lay behind her residence, she saw on the path before her, descending with care and difficulty, an *elderly* man; he was supported by crutches, and bent with infirmity or old age. They approached each other, and she glanced at him with the feeling of *respect* and *pity* which age and weakness ought to inspire.

It seemed that his attention was attracted by the child who was earnestly speaking — he looked at her, and as he looked, his withered and faded face betrayed painful emotion; he turned his eyes on Fanny for a moment, and then averting his head, moved hurriedly on with an air of excitement and distress amounting almost to agony. But in his haste he did not see where he was going, and he set his crutch upon a loose stone, which gave way, and rolled down the bank. The poor old gentleman lost his balance, staggered, slipped, and before Fanny could assist him, fell with violence over on the side of the path, and was apparently stunned by the blow.

Assistance was easily procured, but being perfectly insensible, Fanny alone was forced to decide what would be done for him. She had him carried to her house, summoned a physician, and while waiting for his appearance and advice, she applied such means as were nearest at hand to restore suspended animation.

The physician came at length, and relieved Fanny from the load of responsibility in acting by herself on such a critical occasion. He found there had been a severe contusion of the brain, and taking into consideration the patient's age, ill health, and evident debility — he held out but slender hopes of his ever recovering his senses. One thing was certain, he could not be moved, and Mrs. Ellis must, he observed, undergo the inconvenience attendant on having on her hands the sick stranger, whom she had already so charitably assisted and succored.

Fanny bore this sentence cheerfully; she was glad to be able to be of use, and she was quite willing to submit to any inconvenience attendant on retaining him in her house, rather than run any risk by moving him.

One comfort was, the physician could tell her who he was, where he lodged, and where his attendants might be found. That he was indeed a *stranger* in the place, Fanny had guessed, or she must have seen him before. He was alone likewise, except for the attendance of one attendant, whom *Dr. Gray*, the physician, sent to her.

This man, a grave, respectable-looking person, with civil but reserved manners, and a very quiet demeanor, informed her only just what she had previously learned from *Dr. Gray*, namely, that his master was a gentleman from London, of the name of *Browne*; that he was old and infirm, had no family with him, and none to care of him, but himself.

That *Mr. Jenkins*, for so the attendant was named, understood the management of a sick room, was speedily evident. He promptly made all necessary arrangements, transferred all necessary articles, inquired for a nurse, and showed by his manner and plans that, whatever other distresses his master might have, lack of funds was not one of which he was afraid. At the same time, he was so careful not to intrude unnecessarily on the comfort or arrangements of the household, and so exquisitely polite to the mistress of the establishment, that she began to consider him as a perfect model for a gentleman's attendant.

Except what was absolutely unavoidable, there was nothing to remind her she had an *invalid inmate* in her house. *Dr. Gray's* predictions, however, were not realized — slowly and imperfectly, but still making actual progress, *consciousness* returned. Day by day the answers to her inquiries were more encouraging. He had recognized *Jenkins*; he had discovered he was in a strange place; he had tried to discover where he was.

Of course, every attention which could be devised was paid him, and Fanny already took a strong interest in his welfare, a most natural interest, considering the circumstances in which they were relatively placed. Her personal attendance on him was quite superfluous; all she could do for his benefit, was to keep her child quiet, and provide for such of his wants as her kitchen could supply.

No questions of either of her maids, nor any interrogatories of the nurse — a *gossip* by profession — could extract from the grave and self-possessed *Mr. Jenkins* one syllable more of information than had been already given. Fanny, of course, never inquired, though she did venture so far as to offer to the attendant to write, if necessary, and inform any of his master's relatives of his present precarious situation.

"Thank you, Madam, but it is not necessary," was the only reply, leaving Fanny in total ignorance as to whether there was no one in whom the information would excite interest, or whether it had already been conveyed to them by himself. She could not help remarking that no letters arrived for the stranger; and except a daily newspaper, which must be more useful to *Mr. Jenkins* than his master, they seemed to have no fellowship with the world.

For some time, everything proceeded in a most satisfactory manner, and *Dr. Gray's* face was each day more cheerful after his visit. Light was admitted partially into the hitherto darkened chamber, voices could be sometimes heard in murmuring conversation, and the physician even got so far as to hint at the possibility of a speedy removal to his own lodgings, if all went on as well as hitherto.

But after another week, *Dr. Gray's* countenance became more clouded. Fanny saw that he was less hopeful, and questioned him with some alarm. Was there a relapse? What was the matter?

She could get no satisfactory answer for some days; he denied there was any positive change, and would not acknowledge that he felt more anxious than before. But days went on, and he no longer spoke of amendment and removal; Mr. Browne's head was clearer, his intellect stronger, his faculties fully returned: this he asserted every day, but still that there was something going wrong was evident to Fanny's quick perception; and since she could get no satisfaction from the physician, she questioned the nurse.

The good woman owned she thought ill of the case. Not only had the confinement aggravated some internal malady which had previously existed, but it was now evident that the paralysis of his lower limbs, from which he had been previously suffering, was creeping upwards, and that if its progress was not stayed, it must before long end in death.

"He is a strange man, Ma'am," pursued the nurse, "a strange and awful man. I cannot make him out; but it seems there is something on his mind like — something wrong, which he cannot get the better of. I only happened to say to Mr. Jenkins what a pity it was to see him lying here so lonesome and sad, and had he no daughter or anyone to love him? — and I thought Mr. Jenkins would have strangled me, he looked so; and when I turned to the poor sick man, his face was just the color of the sheet, only more fearful-looking, and his hands and long fingers worked as if they were pushing something away very horrible like. I asked Jenkins afterwards what was the matter? but he only said his master had once lost a daughter, and told me to hold my tongue about it. I think he might have told me more — I am sure I would never think of repeating it; not I, indeed!"

Fanny thought this specimen of volubility a sufficient proof of her discretion, and an ample justification of the attendant's caution.

She was much distressed by the information she had received, so far as it related to the dangerous state of her present inmate; knowing so much, she had little difficulty afterwards in extracting a confirmation of it from Dr. Gray, who admitted that he foresaw the patient's death would be *certain*, and probably *speedy*.

Her first idea was to propose the visits of the clergyman, and she asked Dr. Gray to mention to the sick man his name and character, and offer to send for him.

The offer was accepted, but with only the proviso that Rev. Anderson must not expect the invalid to converse at all, his visits were admitted.

"What do you think of my guest, Sir?" inquired Fanny, as she walked with Rev. Anderson the evening after the first interview.

"I can hardly tell what to think," replied the old clergyman gravely. "That he is a man of education, and accustomed to good society, the few sentences I heard, and his general manner, convinced me; but there is something *strange* about him and his cautious, quiet servant which I cannot understand.

"There was so little said, and all expression of feeling was so carefully avoided, that I made no progress in acquaintance; and though I am ashamed of what must seem groundless suspicions, I own that I felt they each wore a *mask* — and a *mask* would not be worn if there were nothing to conceal!"

"The same impression seems produced on all who have any fellowship with them," replied Fanny, "and there must surely be some foundation for an idea which arises naturally in minds of such different molds. I wonder *who* and *what* he is. Did you see him?"

"Yes, I saw his face distinctly as he was propped up by pillows, but there was no emotion on the wan, haggard features. Traces of former sufferings — but all was tranquil now. However, as he bade me come again, I shall do so tomorrow, and hope that I shall see some good result by-and-bye."

After Rev. Anderson's third or fourth visit, he one day came to Fanny with a request from the patient, which astonished her a little. Mr. Browne had heard *Mary's* voice on the lawn, and he wanted to see *her*; would Fanny permit her to accompany the clergyman on the morrow?

It was impossible to refuse so simple a request, though Fanny could not avoid recalling what Jenkins had said about the lost daughter, and feeling half afraid as to the effect of an interview.

She said nothing to her child until the moment when she put her hand in that of Rev. Anderson, and simply bidding her then speak softly, and be very attentive to what Rev. Anderson said, she sent her into the sick room.

Little Mary's compassion had been awakened for the poor lame gentleman on crutches, who had hurt himself so; and a feeling of *mysterious awe* crept over her, as she contemplated the closely curtained window from the garden, or walked slowly past the door when it was accidentally opened, to catch a glimpse of the dusky room within. She wondered why she was to go now into that chamber without her mamma, and she vaguely expected the interview would lead to something mysterious.

The curtains were undrawn, the windows were open, the pleasant sunshine fell with slanting beams upon the floor; the carpet with its roses, the white bed-curtains, the sofa, and the tables, all stood exactly as she had been used to see them when she had happened to enter that room before. Only there was the dark figure of the attendant sitting by the window; and on the bed, propped up, was a long lean face, with sunken eyes, and wrinkled cheeks, and a few white locks surrounding the head which lay so uneasily there.

She had been taught to *pity pain and sickness*, and to *reverence the aged*; and here was a double claim on her good-will and infantile feelings of benevolence.

Patently she stood, while Rev. Anderson exchanged a few questions and remarks with the sick man, but she had not to wait very long in silence, for Mr. Browne soon turned on her a look which was a strange mixture of *admiration* and *repugnance*. Yet it seemed strange that anyone could look at this charming child with other feelings than those of pleasure. It was not only her *beauty* which was so captivating; but the *sweetness* of her expression — that *charm* which she inherited from her mother — and the look of compassion beyond her years, perhaps acquired from constant fellowship with that mother — rendered her a general favorite; and accustomed only to kindness and encouragement, she had no fear mixed with her winning but modest ways; all was confidence and readiness to love.

“So, little girl,” said the sick man, stretching out a lean but still white hand, “you have come to visit the old lame man. What is your name, child?”

“Mary Ellis,” she replied, in her little silvery voice, which contrasted as forcibly with the harsh, hollow tone of her interrogator, as her smooth cheek and little dimpled hands did with his withered figure and gaunt features.

“Have you any brothers, Mary?”

“No, Sir.”

“Or sisters?”

“None, Sir.”

“Where is your *father*, Mary?”

A look of *mystery* passed over the young child’s face, and stepping close to the bed, she whispered solemnly:

“I have none.”

“Indeed,” said the gentleman, after a short pause.

“And do you know,” continued Mary, “I think I never had one. It is so odd, no one ever spoke of one to me. Little Lucy Thomas showed me where *her* father lay in the churchyard; and then I asked nurse if mine was there too. She said only ‘No, no,’ and afterwards talked of something else.”

“But there are many churchyards, Mary, in England,” said Rev. Anderson, interposing, for he was ignorant of Fanny’s history, and believed her to be really a widow; “and it is nothing strange that you should not hear him mentioned, for some people never talk of their dead friends.”

Mr. Browne gave the clergyman a sharp look from under his eyebrows, and after a moment’s pause of consideration, said, with much politeness:

“My dear Sir, I am detaining you perhaps from important duties. There is no occasion that you should stop to hear the prattle of a child like this, though it interests an invalid like me.”

Rev. Anderson took the hint, and with a hope that he would not over-exert himself, withdrew. When he was gone, the old man recommenced the conversation with his young visitor.

“Do you *like* this place, Mary?”

“Oh yes, I am very happy; I have a garden, and doves, and a little goat; and the bright sky and the beautiful sea to look at; and *dear mamma* to be with. I love the place very much.”

“You are *happy* here?”

“Quite, quite happy.”

“Would you not like a large house, and fine gardens; a park, with deer and trees, and a houseful of beautiful things — toys and pictures?”

“I dare say I could be happy there, if I had *mamma* too, but not happier than here; only I would like,” she added, correcting herself, “one thing. I would like a little pony-carriage, for *mamma* to drive in when she is tired of walking.”

“Why does not your *mamma* keep one?”

“Because she says it would take up too much money, and you know she is not rich.”

“Is your *mamma* happy, Mary?” inquired he very earnestly, looking at the child with an intensity of expression which frightened her.

“Yes, I think so generally,” replied she, sending down her face towards the bed, and tracing with the tips of her fingers the flowers on the quilt before her.

“Not always then; is she often sad?” demanded he.

“Oh no, but sometimes she sighs and looks grave for a long time together, lately particularly. I think she has talked less to me than she used to do, and then I think she is unhappy.”

“Did you *always* live here, Mary?”

“I do not remember any other place; but nurse once told me that we lived in a grand old house when I was a baby, where dear *mamma* had many servants, and more visitors than here.”

“And where was that, do you know?”

“I cannot remember,” replied Mary; then after pausing, and apparently reflecting, “I do not think nurse told me where it was; perhaps it was in London. Do *you* know?”

“Perhaps it was; but I have never seen your nurse, or heard her speak of it.”

“Did you ever see mamma, Sir?” inquired Mary, turning to him.

Had Mary been a judge of expression, she would have seen some strong emotion was passing through the old man’s mind as she spoke, and it was some minutes before he answered; he began searching for his handkerchief, and was turning the other way, as he replied:

“Yes.”

“Oh, I forgot; to be sure,” said she suddenly, “the day you were hurt, you must have seen us both on the path before you.”

“So I did. Was your mamma much frightened when she saw me fall?”

“I do not know; I was frightened. Mamma was very sorry for you, and did everything she could to make you better. How little I thought, as I saw you coming down the hill, that I would be standing talking to you today.”

“Had you, or your mamma, ever seen me before?”

“Oh no; mamma said she did not know who you were; and she wondered where you lived, and if you had any friends. Have you any?”

“None,” replied he shortly.

“And no little girl to come and talk to you, or amuse you, and wait on you, now that you are ill; would you like one?”

“No,” said he abruptly, but with a countenance that would have betrayed to the most careless observer how much he felt. She thought he was angry, and drew back a little; and at the same time Jenkins, advancing, proposed that Miss Ellis should leave the room, as he thought his master was tired.

Mary submitted without reluctance, for she felt little pleasure in conversing with Mr. Browne; his sharp, abrupt manner; the harsh, husky tone of his voice, and the restless glance of his fiery eyes — all subdued and almost alarmed her.

But when he asked her to come again tomorrow, she could not refuse; for, as young as she was, she had yet learned to *sacrifice her own pleasure to the good of others*; and if it would give the poor sick man any satisfaction — she would readily come every day to him. She repeated a great deal of this conversation to her mamma, who was much surprised and struck by it; nor could she make out the object of the invalid in inquiring so minutely into things which apparently did not concern him at all.

But her attention at this moment was distracted from such considerations by a paragraph that she saw in a newspaper about six weeks old, which happened to fall under her eye. The name of *Mansfield* attracted her; and she read the whole. It was to record the disgraceful *termination* of that marital attachment with Laura, which had once cost Fanny so dear; it was a chronicle of a *stain* on Cecil Mansfield’s honor, a wound on his peace, the destruction of all domestic happiness and family ties for him. It stated that his wife, the woman for whose sake he had sinned so deeply, had voluntarily deserted him for another; had forsaken her infant of two months old; had thrown away fame and station, and fortune, to elope with a man, who was already too notorious for his illicit love affairs, and for intrigues of a similar description.

In short, she had gone off with Arthur Temple; and when her husband returned from Yorkshire, he found only a deserted house, and a frightened disorganized household, who feared to tell him of the *catastrophe* which had occurred. Arthur Temple had returned from the western world shortly after Cecil went down into Yorkshire, and the first visit he paid in England was to Mrs. Mansfield. The absence of her husband left her unrestrained to the influence of her evil passions, which ended in a flight with her lover to the continent — that universal refuge for the destitute of all kinds, alike the resource for those lacking fortune and those lacking character.

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 20

Thus much Fanny had learned from the public papers. But as to Cecil's *feelings* and *sufferings*, she could only guess their nature; but she knew him well, and could guess them with tolerable accuracy. It would not be easy to describe the shock which the news gave her. Had she ever indulged *vindictive* feelings or *malevolent* wishes — here would have been ample gratification for them. Her *rival* — she for whose promotion Fanny had been sacrificed — had plunged deep in the gulf of infamy, and won for herself those opprobrious epithets which she had formerly caused to be flung on her.

Was it possible — could she really be such a *wretch*, so lost to the dearest and strongest feelings of woman's heart, as to forget her sacred duty as mother, forsake her helpless infant, and that without hope of ever seeing it again? Fanny shuddered as she thought with shame and self-abasement, that Laura Mansfield was one of her own gender. She blushed to think that a being so lost, so degraded, should bear the name of woman; but deeply did she *pity* her, and fervently did she *pray* for her.

And what were now the sensations of Cecil — of her brother-in-law, of her former lover? What were his sufferings and his sorrows? Would he not now be brought by similarity of situation to feel some *sympathy* for herself — to experience some *remorse* for his past injuries to her, now that their consequences had turned out so fatally for himself? She would probably never know the effect the blow would produce — interaction with him was out of the question — all communication between them was cut off; and not more from a sense of propriety, than from actual inclination — would she have shunned a meeting with him. She could not think of him without *pity*, but she had not the smallest sentiment of her former affection mingled with that pity. Then she thought of that stern old man, Laura's father, he who had listened unmoved to her pleadings and her prayers; who had so proudly asserted that *regard for the family honor* was the motive for his cruel decision. Where was that family honor now? What was the result of his own earnest endeavors? His daughter's disgrace was in some degree the work of his own hands — how would he bear it?

Suddenly an idea occurred to her which at the first moment seemed so wild and improbable that she repelled it, but still it returned; as she recalled the hard features of Mr. Henry Mansfield at that memorable interview in London, something brought before her mind the worn and wasted face of the invalid upstairs. She felt there was a likeness between them; and the thought having once been suggested, she asked herself whether it were possible that the mysterious inmate of her house was really Laura's father, her own persecutor and cruel enemy, and the uncle of her little girl?

Could this be the origin of his strange questioning of Mary? Could it be remorse for his former cruelty which now made him ask if she were happy? Could it be *shame* for his past conduct which induced him to conceal his name? or was this not rather the effect of the stain his honor had received by his daughter's voluntary disgrace? Was it not this which had driven him from the world, and obliged him to hide his confusion in a remote village? And now, where were the results of his former schemes? Where was his daughter? Gone! and he was left a helpless and sorrow-stricken old man, with a *blighted heart*, to wither by himself — to die under the roof of her whom he had once driven from a dearly-loved home and cast out a forlorn wanderer in the world!

Surely there was *retributive justice* in the misfortunes which had overtaken him! but if her conjecture were true, and he was really indebted for shelter to a woman whom he had so cruelly injured, with what feelings did he now regard her? Were they malevolent and hostile — or was his heart softened by misfortune, and desirous of forgiveness and peace?

But perhaps after all, this was only a wild conjecture of her own: the likeness, she imagined, might take its rise in her own imagination, and the mystery which was supposed to envelop the name and family of her inmate might be merely a cloud created by the too ardent curiosity of those who desired to remove it, acting on the cool and judicious reserve of the attendant. She would have liked much had it been possible to ascertain the fact, but it was out of the question. She could not condescend to question the attendant, or to endeavor to extract from him, either by question, hint, or insinuation, those *secrets* which his employer desired to conceal.

Time, perhaps, might explain, if there was really anything to explain; but in the meantime she must wait, for there was nothing else to be done.

Her thoughts again reverted to *Cecil* — what had become of him? It was six weeks since the elopement of his wife, and during that time, much might have occurred. She had received no information from either of her few correspondents. Mrs. Compton, indeed, was out of the way; but *Frank*, who had recently written, had not alluded to the subject.

But her anxiety would not allow her to remain quite inactive; she wrote to Frank, describing the strange inmate of her house, and her uncertainty as to whether or not she had really seen him before, but without mentioning *whom* she imagined him to resemble; then she alluded briefly to the catastrophe in the Mansfield family, and inquired if Frank could tell her where the unfortunate Cecil now was, and what had been the result of this development to him.

It was perfectly natural that she should still retain some interest in him; he was the father of her child; and if all other sentiments of tenderness were quite annihilated, it was not probable that she would be indifferent to one who was thus connected with her. *Parental tenderness* had been once with him so powerful a sentiment, that she could not believe it to be quite extinguished. Other passions for a time had obscured, or eclipsed it, but those passions were of a nature to fade



away, while in a disposition like his, affection for his daughter, she felt persuaded, would survive them all: and this persuasion connected him still with herself in her own thoughts. She knew that Laura Mansfield had exerted all her influence to repress his interest in little Mary; but that counteracting force was gone now, and she had a sort of vague expectation that he would seek some means of communicating with his child, would show some interest in her, or in some way give evidence of the existence in his heart of some memory of her.

Fanny knew Cecil well, and she judged him truly. When he had returned to London from his successful canvass and triumphant election, nothing had been farther from his thoughts and expectations, than the discovery which there awaited him. He and Laura had been on unusually good terms for some time previous, and his heart had been softened and touched by her suffering during her recent illness, which had been more than usually severe. They had parted quite affectionately, and he had heard from her as often as he could reasonably expect, during his absence. Of course the letters never alluded to her daily visits from Arthur Temple, and he had not the smallest suspicion that this intimacy had been renewed.

On entering his own house, he had proceeded at once to seek Laura, and it was not until he had looked in vain in her boudoir, her drawing-room, and her nursery, that he inquired of the nurse where Laura was.

The nurse, who was a good kind of woman, burst into tears; she thereupon felt herself justified in indulging in a strong fit of hysterics; and when to this was added the scream of the child in her arms, it was so much more than Cecil could bear, that alarmed and angry at once, he rushed out of the room, and peremptorily demanded of the *butler*, whom he encountered on the stairs, where Mrs. Mansfield was?

The man replied he did not know.

“Is she out?” demanded the husband.

“She is not come in, Sir!” was the answer.

“When did she go out?”

“Yesterday evening.”

“Yesterday evening! in the name of all that is sacred, what do you mean — where is Mrs. Mansfield?”

“I believe, Sir, that she has gone to France!”

“And what makes you think so?” inquired Mr. Mansfield, speaking calmly from the very extremity of his excitement.

“Mrs. Manon went with her to the station, Sir; but when she saw what was going to happen, she left her and came back.”

“Send Mrs. Manon to me in my dressing room,” ejaculated Cecil, his voice half choked, and his face pallid with emotion.

Mrs. Manon made her appearance; even she looked moved and excited, and although a Frenchwoman, she appeared ashamed of the confession she had to make.

“Who visited your lady while I was away, Mrs. Manon?”

“Only her old friend and yours, Mr. Temple; and I could not help it, Sir, I think it was very wrong, but Mrs. Mansfield would never hear me say so, so I never dare say nothing at all; but I assure you I do never approve of these clandestine meetings.”

He did not hear her, he was impatiently pacing up and down, and muttering: “Arthur Temple — the villain, the consummate villain — Arthur Temple!” He stopped, and stamped his foot vehemently, then remembering that the Frenchwoman was present, he checked himself, and turning again to her, he demanded hurriedly, abruptly, almost fiercely:

“Did he meet her at the station?”

“Oh, yes sir. And then I just left and came back here. I still have the key to her jewelry box.”

Cecil unconsciously took the key, and replied with a single “Go now!” and mademoiselle tripped from the room, thinking that she had discharged in perfection her duties in so faithfully guarding the jewel box of her missing mistress.

Cecil held the little silver key for a moment, and then indignantly casting it from him, he threw himself on a sofa, and covering his face with his hands, he exclaimed: “Fanny and Mary, you are avenged! I am dishonored — disgraced in my turn!”

It was not, however, *sorrow* which overwhelmed him *as much as rage!* His *indignation* was more powerful than his *grief*; his *wounded pride* was far worse to bear than his *wounded affection*.

“Retribution!” was the word which rang in his ears, and was perpetually suggested by his memory. It was only *retributive justice!* All day he remained alone in the same room, sometimes pacing it with ungovernable impetuosity, sometimes stretched on the sofa in a state of mental prostration brought on by the fury of his passions. Again and again his past life rose before him, again and again he bewailed the mad infatuation which had led him to act as he had done — to spurn from him *true happiness* when in his possession, and after almost breaking the heart so fondly devoted to him, to bestow his own affections on a *fiend* in the shape of a woman, who had caused him evils innumerable while with him, and bequeathed him shame and dishonor at parting.

Had he never known Mary and Fanny, he might have avenged himself as many men do, by abusing the *whole* race of women, because *one* had deceived him; but he could not do this now, and indeed his own earnest conviction was, that though there are bad women in the world — it is men who make them so. Yes, it was but the consistent fruits of her education, which appeared in Laura's fall. The lessons of a cold-hearted, calculating father had fallen on a temperament congenial to them; and if in their development, her passions wore a different hue from his, they still sprung from the same root: the quality of the soil will change the color of a blossom, but it will not affect the nature of the plant, or remove its deleterious properties.

And *conscience* told him that he too had helped — his hand had assisted in *mingling the draught* which he now found so bitter to his taste. His unlawful passion had strengthened hers, his criminal projects had only been seconded by her. Together they had forgotten everything, but *selfish* and ungovernable affections; and what he now endured, was but the just consequence of his previous guilt.

*Retribution!*

Then amidst the stormy gusts of passion which shook his soul, there would return glimpses of times long past — memories — bitter and agonizing memories of happier days — days of tranquility and peace and domestic enjoyment — days which, viewed through the clouds of his excited feelings, seemed like impossible things, so completely had he traveled into another sphere, and so changed appeared even to himself, his whole soul and mind since then.

"Fool, that I have been!" said he, as he dashed his hand upon the table, "fool, madman, thus to sacrifice peace and perfect happiness for a shadow — a dream. O, Fanny, Fanny! could I but have you as my wife once more, worlds should not tempt me to resign, or leave you."

It was growing dark, the long, hot, dusty London summer day was closing in, and already the gas-lights in the streets threw across the room, between the curtains, their chequered streams of flickering light, and partially illumined the otherwise dark room. Hating himself and all around him, Cecil closed his eyes even on this faint ray, and rejoiced in the increasing darkness which prevailed, as it hid from his view a hundred objects which seemed to remind him of his follies and misfortunes.

Lying in this way, listless and almost unconscious on a couch, he did not hear the door open, nor was he aware of the presence of another, until a voice beside him exclaimed:

"Cecil, where is my daughter?"

He startled; his father-in-law was beside him — the very man whose *evil machinations* had wrought the ruin he deplored — the man whose advice had influenced him — whose hand had assisted to untie the bond which now he would have given his whole fortune again to knit.

Passion choked his utterance, his voice was gone; and the words which rushed from his heart died in an inaudible murmur on his lips.

"Where is your wife, Cecil?" again uttered the harsh and hollow tones of the stern parent.

"My wife! gone — gone the way which *your lessons* pointed out," burst from him. "She has trodden the path marked for her by her father; she has gone to destruction — disgrace — damnation!"

"It is true, then," exclaimed Henry; "the daughter has trodden in her mother's steps, has disgraced the name she bore! Curses on her — curses on the memory of her mother — vile, worthless, despicable woman; and it is for such a one as this, I have toiled — and it is for such a one as this, I have blackened my soul by lies — and it is for such an end as this, that I have lent her my name — a name to which she had no right — that she might cover it with infamy!"

The old man sank upon a chair, trembling with passion, almost convulsed by his feelings. Cecil, calmed by the sight of emotion to which his own was but a jest, arose and stood before him in amazement.

"What can you mean, Sir?" he exclaimed impatiently. "Was Laura not *your* daughter?"

"Yes — she was my daughter," said he slowly, and almost like one speaking in a dream, "she was my daughter; but her mother was not my wife — we were never married!"

To describe the variety of feelings which the confession of his father-in-law excited in Cecil's mind, would be impossible. Amazement, indignation, scorn, contempt, and pleasure, a vengeful satisfaction, arose one after the other, and one above the other; but they all merged in a doubt of his uncle's sanity — sorrow and anger had perhaps turned his brain, and he was merely venting the fantasies of a disordered imagination.

He protested his disbelief in the assertion.

His uncle arose, and standing before him, he repeated:

"It is true, and I rejoice that it is true. I rejoice, I tell you, that the girl who has so basely dishonored my name, and your name, cannot, and shall not, inherit an acre of the property of which she has thought herself so secure. Nor shall the *puppy* into whose arms she has thrown herself, profit by the income on which, perhaps, he has speculated. Without an hour's delay, I will take measures which shall ensure their mutual disappointment."



And with *plans of vengeance* in his heart, the father left the room leaving the husband to meditate in solitude over this new discovery, and to reflect in no very favorable mood on the *fraud* which his uncle had already practiced on him, and had purposed practicing on others also.

That Fanny learned none of these events until at least six weeks after they occurred, was not surprising, considering the *seclusion* in which she lived, and the natural repugnance which Frank Linwood felt to mention the name of one who had caused them both so much distress and painful feeling. Frank Linwood may, perhaps, be forgiven for entertaining towards Cecil Mansfield sentiments which so nearly bordered on the hostile, as to require constant suppression and watchfulness to prevent their growing into positive ill-will. It was true that there had been no intentional injury, but there had been unconsciously wounds inflicted which time did not seem to heal.

Cecil had slipped between him and the dearest object of his heart; had unlawfully won those affections which might otherwise, perhaps, have been his own. But this might have been borne, nay, it would probably have been recovered from, had there been nothing more to awaken feelings which were laid asleep, and re-open wounds already well near closed. Not only had Cecil robbed him of the *prize* which in secret Frank had proposed to himself, but this successful rival had not known its *value* when in his possession; he had cast it aside in scorn. But even this, in spite of Fanny's sufferings, would have been forgiven — but that Cecil's shadow still darkened his path, and formed an insurmountable barrier, the more obnoxious because it was without a foundation in reason.

Fanny's letter, therefore, inquiring about Cecil, occasioned him more than pain; it was with positive anger that he threw it down, and thought what right had she to put these questions to *him* — did she do it purposely to distress and annoy him? At least it showed carelessness of his feelings; and his repugnance to reply to her occasioned a delay which would, perhaps, have been very painful to Fanny, had she not received information through another channel, which made Frank's tardy answer unnecessary. *Mrs. Compton* wrote thus:

"My dear Fanny, "I need not tell you that I am returned to London, nor need I dwell on the discomforts of a steamer, or the miseries of a storm. I am here, that is enough for the journey; and I need my pen, paper, and power, for another topic. Who do you think I have seen — nay, who do you think has called on me today, this very morning — taken me quite by surprise? Fanny, if I have ever murmured at the ways of Providence — if I have ever wondered why the vain, the cruel, and the wicked were so happy — I own my fault. I have seen *misery embodied* in the person of Cecil Mansfield. Yes, I have read in his face the signs of an uneasy conscience, a disappointed heart, a mind displeased with itself and everything around it. *Fanny, you are avenged!* This gives you no pleasure, I know; but it does give me intense satisfaction. I take a *savage delight* in the knowledge that for every bitter tear they wrung from you — they will now have cause to shed double for themselves. Do you know the history — do you know how she whom I cannot name, has consummated former treachery by a shameless elopement? How Cecil has undergone dishonor and disgrace, which makes him shrink from the public eye! He called on me. He wanted, he said, to know something of *his child* — his own daughter. He thought, perhaps, I could tell him; he did not know *where* you were. He seemed to feel and to suffer too. I *almost* pitied him.

"He has given up his seat in the House. He says he has arranged all his affairs in Yorkshire, and he is going abroad immediately for the rest of his life. Norway and Russia — Siberia, I believe, are his objects; that is to say, any place where he will not meet his *worthless wife*. I asked after his daughter. A curious expression passed over his face, and he said she was in the country; but he added: 'I shall never see her again.'

"Then he talked of *your Mary*, whom he persisted in designating as his own child; and he gave me the little packet enclosed to transmit to her. He showed me its contents. I think the likeness excellently preserved. I remember when you sat for the original, years ago; so does he. That original — shall I tell you, Fanny — he wears around his neck. Yes, he showed it to me; and I said at once he ought to be *ashamed* of himself, for he was still the husband of another woman, and he had no right to think of *you* in this way.

"Mrs. Compton, your reproaches are useless;" he said, "all that you say, my conscience has said before, and in vain. My eyes are open now, and I see and feel that Fanny has been the one object of my inmost heart's love, even at the time that I imagined I was devoted to another."

"More shame for you!" I said; "and I am happy to assure you she does not sympathize with you!" Here I own my feelings got the better of my facts; for I grieve to say that I have but faint hopes of ever seeing you take so *sensible* and *rational* a view of the matter. He did not relish my speech at all, changed color, and then, with a very hesitating voice, hoped you would be happy at all events. But I do not think he would like you to be happy in any way, but that of regretting him. Now, Fanny, I have great doubts as to the propriety of telling you all this. Say, do you think it wrong? However, I cannot help it now, at all events. I have not time to rewrite my letter, and if I had, I would probably say the same things again, so it would be useless. Cecil says he is *dying of a broken heart*; and if men ever did die of that malady (women do, I believe), I would think he was in a dangerous state. He looks more wretched and altered than I could have imagined possible. After all, when I think of your quiet home, your smiling child, your peaceful countenance — I am convinced that you, the victim, the sufferer, are happier far than your betrayer, deserter, persecutor! And I see that justice, even in this world, is more even-handed than I was disposed at one time to imagine. In short, *conscience is the worst*

*tormentor in the world*; and my conscience is telling me at this moment that I have other things to do than moralizing to you. So adieu, my most amiable friend.”

It was with strangely mingled feelings that Fanny read this letter; the picture of *Cecil's sufferings* touched her. In spite of his unworthiness, she could not think of him now without a degree of emotion. It was transient — certainly at least the portion of it which partook of tenderness was short-lived, although *pity* for him must continue to be felt.

Self-exiled, desolate, forlorn, parted from, or deserted by, those bound to him by the closest ties — what could be more melancholy than his present circumstances. True, it was *his own doing* — it was the *bitter fruit of his own works*; but this reflection would not make him less miserable, and could not diminish her pity.

On returning Mrs. Compton's letter to the envelope, she discovered a small additional sheet, which she had not at first perceived, it contained these words:

“I understand the *father* of the culprit was so overwhelmed when he heard of his daughter's flight, that he was seized that night with a fit from which he only partially recovered. Cecil said Henry Mansfield had left London privately, and was supposed to be concealing himself in the country; but no one knows precisely where.”

This paragraph diverted Fanny's thoughts from Cecil himself, and at once brought them home to the inmate of her own house. It appeared a confirmation of her suspicions; no doubt this was the very individual, and her memory had not deceived her. At the very time she was reading this letter — he was conversing with his little niece, for Mary was gone to pay him the promised visit, and had not yet returned.

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 21

It had not been without some strong feelings of repugnance that little Mary had entered the room of the sick man, so unpleasant had been the sensations which his tones and looks awoke in her youthful mind. His appearance today was more *repulsive* than before; he was lying in the full light of day, for the bed-curtains were withdrawn, and the windows thrown wide open; and yet the invalid gasped for air, and turned his head restlessly from one side to the other, as if vainly seeking to forget internal pain in bodily motion. His sinewy and withered hands were clenched forcibly, and occasionally he struck the bed beside him with an impatience which told the same tale of *nervous agitation*. Every feature of his countenance betrayed suffering, and as his attendant stood beside him, she repeatedly wiped from his wrinkled brow the large drops of perspiration which gathered and rolled over them.

Mary trembled, and drew back at the sight; but he saw her, and motioned that she should enter. Perhaps he saw her repugnance by her innocent face, for he said abruptly in a low, husky voice:

“Hide behind the curtain if you do not like to *see* me, but I must *speak* to you.”

The little girl, with the gentle heroism which she inherited from her mother, advanced timidly but resolutely, and though bending down her eyes, she stood firmly by the bedside, without attempting otherwise to conceal that terrible countenance from her view.

“How are you today, Sir?” said she, softly and tenderly.

“Better, child — I know that I am better, I am getting better fast — I shall soon leave this bed, and this room, and this house, too. Mary — shall you not be glad?”

“I shall indeed, if you get quite well.”

“Mary, do you know what they mean by *dying*?” inquired he, abruptly.

She paused a moment, and then said: “Yes, it is to leave this world, and go to another to be quite happy.”

“Ay, indeed, then I am going to be quite happy, for they tell me I am dying, but I do not believe them — ” he stopped.

Poor little Mary knew not what to say to this strange man, she could not talk to him as she might have done to many; there was an *instinctive repulsion* for which an older person might have been puzzled to account, but which none could have felt more strongly than she did.

“Does your mother teach you to *pray*, Mary?” demanded he suddenly.

“Oh yes, of course,” replied the startled child.

“And for *whom* do you pray?”

“For mamma and myself, and all my friends, and everybody.”

“For your *enemies* too?” ejaculated he.

“My enemies!” repeated the little girl, “I have none — who would be the *enemy* of a little girl like me?”

“And if you had an enemy, if someone had done you harm — much harm — robbed you, pained your mamma, injured her deeply, what would you do to them?” said the sick man, bending on her a glance from under his grizzled and shaggy eyebrows, which seemed to wish to read her thoughts in her face.

“I would try to forgive them,” said Mary, looking up, and putting back from her clear, transparent forehead the curls which had fallen forward as she bent down her head.

“And does your mother teach you this, child? Have you learned this lesson from her?” demanded he, with an intense earnestness of manner that showed him most deeply interested.

“Oh yes, I have no one else to teach me but dear mamma.”

“And does she forgive *her* enemies, Mary? or does she tell you to do what she cannot practice herself?”

“Mamma does everything right, and she is always kind and ready to forgive. If I say I am sorry, she forgives me directly.”

“But she *loves* you?”

“Yes, I know she loves me well, but she loves everybody too, though not so much as she does me; and I know she would always try to forgive everyone who *hurt* her. But nobody does, she loves everybody — and everybody loves her.”

The old man was silent for some minutes, and remained more quiet than he had been before. Then he resumed the conversation on a new topic: in a low, hoarse, husky voice he said:

“Tell me, Mary, does not your mamma teach you that the *wicked* will be punished, that there is a fearful vengeance waiting for them?”

The child trembled equally at the idea, and the manner in which it was suggested, and replied only with a low, faint, half-reluctant “Yes.”

“And do you believe her, Mary?” said he, in the same tone as before.

“Yes, I believe *whatever* mamma says; but I do not like to think about such a thing, it is dreadful.”

“Yes, it may be dreadful to *think* of, but how much worse to *feel*; you are a child, but perhaps you have evil passions; do not yield to them; do not let them govern you — or you may live to repent it as bitterly, and as hopelessly, as I do.”

The little girl scarcely understood his words, but she saw his feelings in his face, she ventured to raise her eyes, and the glance she had of that terrible countenance haunted her innocent mind for days and nights afterwards. There was in his features all the settled horror of remorse and despair; a look which conveyed feelings she could not have clothed in words, but which were not the less strongly and awfully impressed on her memory. He saw the expression of her face, and exclaimed:

“Yes, I see it even there; in your young eyes, I read my doom; you, whom unknown to you, I have so deeply injured; you even turn from me in *uncontrollable instinctive disgust*; you are frightened at me now; what would you say or feel if you knew I had been your deadliest enemy?”

The poor child looked imploringly at the nurse to interfere; she wished to go, but lacked courage to move, and as if spellbound continued to stand by the bedside of the sufferer, whose words and looks alike filled her with *uncontrollable horror*. But the nurse, hoping some elucidation of the many mysterious tokens she had noticed in her patient’s manner was about to be afforded, would not have stopped him for the world, nor have consented to the departure of Mary, when her presence promised so much entertainment to her own insatiable curiosity. A longer silence than before ensued, until at length the sick man opening his eyes, and struggling with some powerful internal emotion, exclaimed:

“I must see her! I cannot die in peace until some *reparation* is made. It may not calm my feelings, but it cannot aggravate my sufferings. Mary, tell your *mother* that — ” he paused, seemed considering, and then hurriedly added, “that I want to see her.”

Mary, glad to be released, quickly made her escape, and hastening to her mother explained to her as clearly as she could, all that had just past; then hiding her face in her mother’s lap, as if to conceal her emotions, she added:

“And, oh, mamma, if you would be so good as not to let me go there again; indeed I cannot bear it.”

And the poor little thing, quite overcome by her excited feelings, burst into a vehement passion of tears. It was some time before the mother could soothe her child, who she saw plainly had been unknowingly exposed to a trial above her years, and one from which many an elder individual would shrink — that of witnessing *hopeless remorse*. The description which Mary gave of the convulsed features, and restless movements of the sick man made her shudder; and it required no small exertion to bring her own mind into a state of sufficient firmness to be ready to undergo such an ordeal herself. But it must be done. Solicited in such a way, in such terms — she could not refuse; and when she had soothed her daughter’s tears, and given her occupation which would divert her mind by employing her fingers, and thus prevent her if possible from brooding on recent events, she prepared to obey the summons.

But even then she paused for a minute at the staircase window, and looked at the plants which stood there, while trying to fortify her mind for the interview. Had she not known, or at least strongly suspected who he really was, her feelings of repugnance would have been much softened; but as it was, in addition to her natural dislike to witness suffering which she could not alleviate, and mental anguish which she could not dissipate or diminish — she had to encounter the additional trial of meeting once more face to face the individual whose *machinations* had blighted her happiness, and blasted her child’s worldly prospects and hopes.

She thought of him, however, in another light, as a *dying man*, as one whose own hopes had withered beneath the invasions of remorse; as one whose deserted sick bed, and helplessly perishing body were but too true types of the *inward misery* which afflicted his mind; and with an earnest aspiration that she might show him the way of peace and hope, she hurriedly mounted the stairs, and entered the room of her guest.

She saw at a glance that little Mary’s description had not been overdrawn; the restlessness and all the other painful symptoms which she had enumerated were there, and her heart sickened as she advanced to the bedside. He fixed his eyes on Fanny’s face for a moment, then turning to his nurse, imperatively commanded her to leave him now, as he wished to be alone with the lady. The good woman was compelled to withdraw, much to her own disappointment.

Then he closed his eyes, and remained for a brief space enrapt in thought, during which time Fanny carefully surveyed his face, and in his withered features she could now distinctly trace the individual who had once before met her in such different circumstances. Yes, in that emaciated and weakened form, so helplessly stretched upon that bed from which he was never more to rise — she saw the man who had once so coldly rejected her pleadings for *mercy*, so cruelly persisted in crushing her down to the very dust! But she saw, too, the sufferer whose bodily pangs were his least evils; she saw the father deserted by his daughter, hiding his head, and concealing his name from the shame and disgrace which his only child had heaped upon it. And then as her thoughts reverted to her own father, to her own desertion of him, and all that had since occurred — feelings of pity conquered everything else, and she felt ready to do or say anything in her power to *alleviate the sufferings* of him whose last hours were so certainly approaching.

“Fanny Ellis,” said he, unclosing his eyes, and fixing a piercing look on her face, “do you remember me?”

“Yes, I think I once saw you before — but not under the name you now bear,” said she very gently.

“You are right; then you have recognized me after all. I knew you again instantly, but you are less changed than I am. *Misery* does not leave such traces as *remorse* and *despair*, of which you can know nothing. You know then, that your greatest enemy, he who wrought your ruin and grief; he who closed his eyes to your tears, and steeled his heart to your

pleadings, who disgraced yourself, and dishonored your child — he is under your roof; you know this, and you do not flee from me as accursed. Do you not hate me?”

“Heaven forbid,” exclaimed Fanny earnestly.

“Tell me; did I cause you suffering and sorrow?” cried he; “did I not wring your heart, and nearly *murder* you outright; and do you know for what I did it?”

“I believe I do,” she gently answered.

“Do you know why I robbed your child of her birthright; her father’s name, her father’s property; why I drove you from your husband’s house, and steeled even his heart against you. Do you know what urged me on?”

She was silent.

“And can you *forgive* me, Fanny? can you pardon the wretch who worked all this woe upon you? Speak! Have I sinned beyond your pity and forgiveness?”

“No,” replied she firmly, but very tenderly; “that is, or ought to be, impossible. I *forgive* you, Mr. Mansfield, fully, freely, as I hope to be forgiven. I have long done so.”

She laid her hand, as she spoke, on his. The long cold fingers closed on hers with the grasp of a vice, and, as he looked in her face, he said:

“It is impossible; you may *forgive* me, but *my sins* are too deep to be forgiven by God.”

“Oh, no, no!” cried she, earnestly; “do not think so” — and she would have proceeded to speak words of comfort to him, but he stopped her almost harshly.

“It is no use speaking thus to me. I am sorry, bitterly sorry, for the past — but of what use can such sorrow be. I know that were my life to act over again, I would yield again to the same temptations.”

She did not know what to say, and he resumed, after pausing for strength.

“There was a *fiend* — a *beautiful* fiend — who helped me — who prompted me even to my cruel deeds. Can you forgive *her* — the woman who supplanted you — who, more even than myself, was your deadly foe? Fanny, you *cannot* forgive her!”

“I can both *forgive* and *pity* her. I am sure I pray both for her and yourself.”

“But I cannot!” exclaimed he, with a fierce energy which was startling to see, and rising from his pillows with the vehemence of his feelings.

“I cannot forgive the ungrateful girl, for whose sake alone I thus *blackened my soul*, and brought trouble and curses on my house. I cannot and I will not forgive the *wretch* whose *unbridled passions* have made me blush that she called me *father* — have obliged me to hide my name from the disgrace she has heaped on it, and brought me down to the grave in shame and sorrow. Nay, do not shudder, or look imploring — I need nothing to remind me of what your religion requires; but I tell you I cannot practice it. *Curses* — *the bitterest curses on her head!* May the shame, reproach, and agony, she has brought on me, be heaped ten-fold on her!” He stopped, exhausted by his passion, and Fanny, pale and shuddering with horror, exclaimed:

“Oh, do not — do not say so; retract those dreadful words, and let me send her, as your parting message, something which may touch her heart, and call her back to *virtue*. *Forgiveness* and *gentleness* go farther to reclaim, than harsh denunciation.”

“Yes, if I could say so with truth, I would tell her I forgive her, but only because I know by bitter experience that forgiveness, such as you bestow on me, is in reality heaping coals of fire on the head. But I cannot say so now. I have thrown away my *peace*, my *hopes* for hereafter, and my life here — for that wicked and abandoned girl; and well has she repaid me. It was for her that I did it — it was to secure her wealth, and station, and happiness. Take back your forgiveness, Fanny; it is an additional *load* on my heart. I will not have it; and yet it is as well; you cannot alter my *fate* or my *feelings*. I am dying, and all here will soon be over!”

He closed his eyes, and looked so exhausted that she was on the point of ringing for his attendants, but he still held her hand so firmly that she could not extricate her fingers from his painful grasp, nor succeed in reaching the bell. He appeared unconscious of her efforts to release herself, and there was nothing to be done but remain quiet until his hold relaxed, which she thought it must do presently.

A space of time, which appeared to her very long, elapsed, and then he unclosed his eyes and his hand at the same time.

“Fanny, you do not know how much, how deeply, I have *sinned* for that wicked girl; but she deserves no more from me now. She has cut herself off — she has cast herself away; and am I to blame if I will not stoop now to soil my name with the infamy she has contracted? I *loathe* and *detest* her, and her image haunts me yet; her voice forever rings in my ear — would that I could forget her!

But you have a child; my blood runs in her veins. She is young and fair. I will compensate to her for the injury I have done her. The inheritance which should have been Laura’s — shall now be transferred to her, and if I cannot give her back

her birthright, I will give her what shall make her beloved and honored, in spite of that misfortune. She shall inherit every farthing of the money I can command. Will not this make her some amends?"

"No," said Fanny, firmly. "No, keep your wealth for those who have a juster claim on it. It is true my daughter is your niece, but she shall not dispossess your child, or step into an inheritance which of right belongs to another. I do not want *gold* for her. I know only too well that *money cannot give happiness*; and as she will, I trust, be *preserved from poverty* — I am equally desirous she should be *secured from riches*. She shall not have your fortune; give it to your grand-daughter. It is hers by right."

"No, it is not," exclaimed he. "The birth of my grand-daughter is a shame and a disgrace to me — a blot on my honor — the seal of my daughter's infamy. Yes, the *stain* runs from one to another, and that child, if she survives to be a woman, will surely follow in the steps of her mother and her mother's mother. Why should I add to her temptations, or heap on her *wealth* which you reject and despise for your own child?"

"Because it is her *right*," replied Fanny; "and if you do not choose to leave your money to *your erring daughter*, you ought not to disinherit *her innocent child*."

"And is it possible that you are armored to the temptation? Fanny, with gold within your reach, can you forbear to stretch your hand to clutch the tempting prize, and that not for yourself, but your child? But, as to giving my money to my daughter — rather would I cast it all to the four winds. Nor has she any claim; think what you please of me, recoil before the additional villainy which I expose, but I tell you *that infamous girl* is the daughter of an unwedded mother! I was never married, and she has only trod in the steps her mother took before her."

Fanny could not avoid startling with surprise at this declaration; she looked doubtfully at Mr. Mansfield, for she thought his senses were wandering, so incredible did the assertion appear to her; but in spite of what she deemed the wildness of his words, there was nothing in his appearance to corroborate the idea. He saw her expression and replied to her looks, for she did not speak.

"Yes, it is perfectly true — you look doubtful and wondering — but on the word of a dying man, I assert it, I never married! — the mother of Laura was such a one as you have seen — the daughter, but she was of low birth, and she tempted me and I tempted her — our passions were strong and unchecked — but none knew we were not married. She did not live long; and when I saw her daughter — our only child — growing up with all the graces which could make a parent proud, I grieved that I had never done her mother justice; and I thought I could, by silence on that point, compensate for past and irremediable wrongs. I gave her all I could — education, indulgence, station, and name. I toiled and labored for her, and it seemed to me but justice to secure to her the property which would have been hers, but for my folly. And now what is the end of all this?" continued he, his voice rising, and his eye kindling as he spoke; "where is my daughter, for whom I have *sinned away my soul*? What pleasure have I in the labor of my hands, in all my toil and trouble? what profit in it? She is gone, and my life-long labors, to build myself a name — a family — are wasted! And all this would be nothing, too," he added, still more vehemently; "I could bear it all, but a busy voice *within* — an incessant *torturing voice* — whispers: '*It was I who did it; it is my work. I corrupted the fountain — must I wonder if the stream is troubled? I seduced the mother — am I not answerable for the daughter's fall?*' But I am not, I will not be, answerable for it. It was her own vile passion which led her astray; what have I to do with that?"

"Do not exhaust yourself by these useless struggles," cried Fanny earnestly; "the voice of *conscience*, of which you speak, is sent not to drive you to despair — but to lead you to repentance. The deeper your offences have been, the more need is there that you should listen to it. You were surely right in giving your daughter all you could; why reproach yourself uselessly for that?"

"Because I gave her not only what was mine in justice to give, and her right to expect — I forced or persuaded others to give her that on which she had no claim. Yes, we stole from *you* — your husband's love, before we robbed you of himself. It was a plot — a deep-laid and too successful plot — to which Cecil fell a victim. You can little imagine the time, the trouble, the artifice it required to bring this to pass. It was no easy matter to detach his heart from you, and induce him to contemplate a separation without abhorrence. Tell me, is there, can there be, pardon for such a *demon's work* as this? What excuse can even your charity devise for so *black and hellish a design*? No, the guilt is on my head; from beginning to end, I have been the perpetrator of the whole, and there is not in my heart the shadow of hope that the crime will be forgiven by God."

Fanny attempted to assure him of her full and entire forgiveness, but he would not listen.

"No," cried he almost fiercely, "I do not want *you* to forgive me — I do not ask to have *your* pardon. It is torture, it is maddening; I longed for it, I panted for it; I thought it would cool my burning heart, but it is only an *addition to my misery*. Your soft voice, your angelic face, seem but to mock me with their kind expression. Leave me, leave me to the *demons of remorse and rage* — they are my fit companions. Go."

He seemed beside himself with the vehemence of his feelings, and she gladly withdrew, her mind filled with powerful emotions, in which astonishment and *horror* had a principal part.

On the stairs she encountered Mr. Mansfield's attendant, accompanied by two strangers, who seemed to be ascending with him to the chamber of his master. She stopped him a moment, to tell him she had just left it, and that she feared the sick gentleman was much exhausted, as he had been talking a great deal.

Mr. Jenkins made a brief but civil answer, and hurried on with an anxious countenance. It was late in the afternoon before she saw the two strangers, whom she conjectured to be lawyers, leave the house. She then sent to inquire for her guest, and the answer was that he was worse, and supposed to be rapidly sinking; she ascertained that his intellect was clear, but his mind seemed much agitated, from which she gathered that he was still suffering from the *remorse* which had oppressed him during the interview in the forenoon.

To pray for him was all she could do. It was very awful to her to feel that within a few yards of her lay one dying in the agonies of despair and remorse, for crimes committed against herself. To witness the hand of Heaven thus extended to fight for her, and to see him who had once so heartlessly crushed her happiness and ruined her peace, now writhing in his turn under the weight of a blow which no human power could avert, and like herself formerly, struggling hopelessly with a pressure too mighty for him to contend with.

She could not sleep that night, so intently was her mind fixed on what had just passed, or occupied in conjecturing what might then be passing. She lay awake listening to the sound of footsteps, and subdued voices in the next room, with occasional hasty and passionate interjections from the dying man. These, however, grew fainter, and towards morning all was hushed in profound silence, when, overcome by weariness, she fell herself into a deep slumber.

[Table Of Contents](#)



## Chapter 22

The first thing Fanny learned from her attendant in the morning was that her inmate was dead, he had expired in the night. She was not surprised, although moved and shocked to think of his wretched state of mind, and his sad and lonely death-bed; it was dreadful to think of such an end to such a career, and though she could not question the justice of this awful dispensation, she *shuddered* as she reflected on it. She blamed herself for not having spoken more openly, more forcibly, of the way of peace; for having shrunk from him and neglected this charitable duty to a *guilty* and *remorseful* man. She thought she had been cowardly and selfish, and shed tears over her own imaginary remissness, yet she was not really to blame; his violence and his sufferings had alike made it impossible to do more than she had done, and in her situation few would perhaps have even attempted so much.

Her mind reverted to the declaration he had made with regard to Laura, and she wondered if Cecil was aware of the stain on his wife's descent. She considered deeply whether she was bound to say anything herself on the subject. She rather thought not, she had no proof to substantiate Mr. Mansfield's assertion, and she felt even inclined herself to doubt whether it was in truth founded on any fact, or did not result from his vindictive feelings at the moment. If it was really true, how terribly just it was that the child who owed her existence to his immoral passions, and for whom he had planned and contrived so much *wickedness* should thus be the very instrument to punish these sins, and by her own misconduct should bring disgrace and shame on him.

She checked the thought, however, as being too near akin to harsh judgment and censoriousness. What right had she to censure others, might not she find to her cost that she too had incurred the sentence she was so ready to pass upon another; was her past conduct so immaculate that she was warranted in deciding on the degree of retribution contained in the misfortunes experienced by others, or would she like the same standard to be applied to her.

Oh no, rather let her sorrow in silence for their misconduct, and pray for those who were still in a situation to benefit by her prayers.

Hours passed on, and she began to feel desirous of knowing what was to be done relative to the *corpse* which was now lying under her roof; there seemed no one to take any interest in the matter, except the attendant of the deceased, and she left him to give what orders he thought necessary, only thinking that he might as well go through the form of telling her what was to be done, even if the matter was perfectly decided on.

In the course of the morning of the following day, she was interrupted in the midst of Mary's lessons by a demand for admission, and on her giving the required invitation she was astonished to perceive a stranger in company with the clergyman and Mr. Jenkins.

The latter acted as master of the ceremonies, introducing the stranger as *Mr. Hook*, the attorney, who had recently drawn up the will of his late lamented master, and as that will contained some directions relative to his funeral, it was deemed expedient to open and read it at once, and, moreover, the gentleman had expressed a wish that both the clergyman and Mrs. Ellis should be present at this reading.

Fanny, who had risen of course on their entry, sent Mary from the room, and now sat down, requesting her visitors to find seats likewise; she invited the good old Rev. Anderson to take a place by her on the sofa, which he did, while Mr. Jenkins retreated respectfully near the door, and was not to be persuaded to sit down at all.

Mr. Hook, taking the smallest chair he could find, a peculiarity of all stout heavy gentlemen, and crossing his legs in three several positions before finally settling which he preferred, proceeded first to blow his nose loudly, then after sundry *ahems*, unfolded the document, and commenced reading. The will was drawn up in the testator's own name, as *Henry Mansfield*, of Berkeley Street, London, a discovery which seemed rather to astonish the clergyman, who whatever he thought of him, did not seem prepared for this. It proceeded as such documents usually do, having been written with all the legal accuracy of which Mr. Hook was master; but his manner of disposing of his property was more extraordinary.

To his daughter Laura, he announced that he left only the knowledge that she was an illegitimate child — a knowledge which, but for her recent conduct, she would never have acquired; this information, together with the assurance that *she* had caused his death, was all the legacy he bequeathed to her. To Laura's child he left his good wishes, but nothing more; if she lived, she would be amply provided for, and if not, she would need nothing from him. To his nephew and son-in-law, *Cecil Mansfield*, he left all the pictures and books, in his house in Berkeley Street, but the house itself, with its furniture, was immediately to be sold for the benefit of his attached and faithful servant, Thomas Jenkins. One hundred pounds he gave in trust to the clergyman of the parish, to be expended by him in relieving the destitute of his flock, twenty pounds every year, after which period he wished his name to be forgotten on the face of the earth.

The rest of his property, amounting to rather more than ten thousand pounds, and arising partly from insurances effected on his life, partly from a legacy recently left him by a distant relative — he bequeathed entirely to his hostess, Fanny Ellis, in trust to be disposed of in charity, according to her will and discretion, for such purposes as he pointed out, namely, building churches, founding schools, or endowing hospitals; but it too was to be all disposed of within the same limited period of five years; any surplus which might be allowed to remain after the expiration of five years, was to be



given to little Mary Ellis to purchase books. He added that he had wished to give her the whole sum for the child's own benefit, but that the mother had so resolutely refused it, that he could not persist in the plan, but adopted another, which he was sure would give her pleasure. As to his own body, he desired his funeral might be as plain as possible, that no monument should be erected to him, but that his body should be laid in the churchyard of the parish where he died, with a flat stone over the grave, bearing as its only inscription the single word "*Miserrimus*."

Fanny felt greatly relieved when the high pitched and monotonous voice of the lawyer was suddenly dropped, and she found the will was concluded without any reference to the reason why he had wished to bequeath his property to his great niece, or the relationship existing between them. She experienced at the same time a great accession of anxiety in considering the new and responsible situation in which she was placed, as the *sole disposer* of such a sum for purposes so important. She distrusted herself and her own heart, and could not suppress a fear lest she should be led in some way to do what was unjust, injudicious, or in any degree reprehensible, by the great power now put into her hands.

She could not say much on this occasion, and two of her visitors withdrew as speedily as possible after the conclusion of the business in hand, Rev. Anderson only remaining to express to her the satisfaction which he felt at a disposal of property in a way which he was convinced would prove beneficial to hundreds.

She thanked him for his good opinion, but owned that she would have been far happier had she escaped the trust altogether; she could not, however, converse on the subject at present, some time must be allowed for her to consider it and compose her mind, meanwhile she would ask her old friend's prayers that she might be guided and directed in the right way, and supported under the heavy burden thus unexpectedly thrown upon her. He left her, and she sat down to reflect on the past.

"*Miserrimus!*" *Most miserable!* the word rang in her ears, and haunted her unceasingly. It spoke of hopes fixed only on this world — and therefore doomed to be disappointed; of ambitious views crushed, of covetous projects baffled, of affection blighted and trust betrayed. It spoke of all that was dark and gloomy in this life, uncheered by the powerful light which can tinge even the deepest shadows with a ray of its own brightness.

Miserable man, indeed! With all her sufferings, she had been able to look with hope upwards, but he — his day had set in gloomy despair, or at least in dark despondency.

Her thoughts turned to his daughter Laura. Was it not possible that the knowledge of her father's miserable end, of his message to herself, and of all that message implied, might now touch her heart, and produce, before it was too late, penitence and reformation in her?

Fanny could not conceive it possible that such a message could be received with indifference; it was of a nature which must tell powerfully on her feelings, and Laura at least, she trusted, might be saved from a further downward progress — might be snatched from destruction — might have less reason to choose as her epitaph, the same melancholy record which her father had selected.

When Frank Linwood received Fanny's letter, requesting information with regard to Cecil, it had excited him in a very extraordinary degree. For the first time in his life, he felt quite angry with her. It appeared to him so extremely unjust, unreasonable, unkind — to require from *him* news of her former lover — from *him*, who had been for some time past regarding her as exclusively his own. She had no right to care for Cecil, nor to concern herself in his misfortunes; the fact of Laura's misconduct did not remove the bar which had separated them, nor if she were now to be divorced, as beyond a doubt she deserved, would Fanny be justified in any return to Cecil.

He wondered how Fanny could be so very indifferent to *his* feelings, as thus carelessly to wound them; and at first he sternly resolved not to give her any answer at all. He was conscious, however, that such a proceeding would be, to say the least of it, ungentlemanlike; and, after a considerable struggle, he did at last so far relent towards her, as to determine to reply to her application; but he could not bring himself to do so immediately.

I have nothing to say in his defense, or any other apology to make for him, than that he was a *man* — and as such subject to some of the errors and weaknesses of mortals. He was likewise very much in love, without being perfectly certain that his attachment would prove a happy one; a little *jealousy* was therefore by no means very unreasonable, considering the peculiar circumstances of the past, and the situation in which Fanny was placed. If these considerations do not account for his unreasonable suspicions as to her motives, I have no other excuse to offer. She had refused Frank, on the plea that Cecil lived — and now she wanted Frank to tell her what was become of his living rival.

After several days' delay and consideration, he slowly and reluctantly assumed his pen, and replied to her letter; but his feelings were not to be repressed. Every line which he wrote betrayed them: irritation and jealousy, and offended affection, lurked in every sentence. Moreover, he had no information to give, he had taken no pains to procure any; and, in short, never was a more *disobliging* epistle despatched by a lover to his mistress. His indignation lasted until he had dropped the letter into the letter-box, and even accompanied him part of the way home; but then it began rapidly to subside, and before he had reached his lodgings, it was only by a violent effort that he could still imagine himself angry.

He took up her letter again, perhaps with the intention of renewing his irritation by its re-perusal; but, somehow or other, it produced now exactly the opposite effect. Either some *magic spell* was cast on him, or the writing was changed

— even line and sentence breathed such a totally different sentiment from what he had imagined. The fact of her referring to Frank at all, marked alike her *confidence* and her *dependence*. She seemed to have no other *friend* whom she could trust, and no hesitation in trusting *him*. Then, though there was evidently no reluctance to mention the name of Cecil, there was care distinctly marked to show that her feelings towards him were perfectly justifiable in their nature, and he imagined also an anxiety to avoid any pain to himself in her manner of introducing the subject. There was propriety and delicacy in every line she had penned, and a very decided friendship for himself marked her application.

And to this letter he had replied in a manner which, if he remembered rightly, could not fail to *shock* her: he had allowed sentiments of *anger*, not only to dwell in his heart, but to dictate to his pen expressions which would certainly astonish, perhaps *affront* her. Was this possible? Under what strange delusion had he been acting? He tried to recall the words he had written, but he could not; he only remembered the *feelings* which had prompted them. He would have given a great deal to have recalled the letter itself, but this was equally beyond his power. He could not now prevent her seeing and reading it, and he must wait and see what consequences it would produce. Would she be angry? Would she write again? Perhaps she would *not* discover the temper in which it had been written; it might be only his *guilty conscience* which made him sensible of the meaning; and she, suspecting nothing, might discover nothing peculiar in its tone or expression. With this hope he consoled himself, and waited with what patience he could, to hear the result.

Fanny deliberated long and thoughtfully on the new care which had devolved upon her; and the determination which she came to was, to acquaint Frank Linwood with the circumstance, and, with his help, consider what she should do. But as she was expecting daily to hear from him, she deferred addressing him again until the arrival of his letter, for she imagined the delay must arise from his being out of town.

At length it came; and when she had read it through, she found, brief as it was, it was yet too long. She dropped it from her hands, and sat for some minutes lost in amazement. What had she said or done to deserve such a repulse? it was such a very *cross* letter — she really could think of no other term to apply to it — it was very cross. She pondered over it, but it puzzled her beyond expression; Frank was *angry* about something, and that something was connected with her. Of this she felt persuaded; but beyond this, she could not penetrate. One thing was certain, she should not apply to him again; the advice and assistance she had been proposing to request, would not now be sought for; unless he addressed her in a very different tone, she should make no further application to him.

Fortunately she had another friend in the person of Mr. Compton, who, as steady, composed, and calm — as his wife was enthusiastic, prejudiced, and vehement, she felt certain would be equally competent and willing to give her advice on this or any other subject. To him, therefore, she applied, and by his judicious counsel, and active friendship, she began to see her way more clearly, and comprehend both what she could, and what she ought to do on this occasion.

Her path thus cleared from some of the doubts which had obscured it, she was able to form regular plans for the most advantageous disposal of the wealth she held in trust, perfectly determined that no fraction of it should remain unappropriated at the expiration of the five years, prescribed by the will.

Meanwhile, Frank was performing a very penitential part in London; and though exceedingly regretting the past, unable exactly to determine what was best to be done at present. She had given no response to his last letter, so that he could not tell in what light she had considered it: perhaps she was affronted, and had he been quite sure of that, he would have taken some step towards a reconciliation; but if this were not the case, any humility on his part would have been unnecessary, and out of place; the puzzle was to ascertain what her feelings really were.

In this dilemma, he resorted to Mrs. Compton, who appeared the usual *referee* in all cases concerning Fanny. He had no one else to apply to, for his sister was abroad: she had married, and her husband's health soon after requiring change of climate, they had been for some time with her mother in the south of France. The distance from England, and her own occupation as nurse to an invalid, rendered her a bad correspondent, so that Frank did not often hear from her, and it was months since Fanny had heard at all.

To Mrs. Compton, therefore, he went; and after some unimportant remarks as preface, he inquired when she had last heard from *Devonshire*.

That very morning, was the reply. What was the date of his last letter? It was six weeks since he had heard a syllable relating to her.

Mrs. Compton looked surprised, and then expressed her feelings: what was the matter? had Fanny quarreled with him?

Of course he denied this, but Mrs. Compton did not believe him, and asserted that as she had resolved to take Fanny as her model in all things, in hopes by that means of reaching nearly to perfection — she should begin on the present occasion, and refuse positively to give him any information relative to her proceedings past, present, or future, since Fanny had avoided doing so likewise. Had Frank believed her, he might have been discouraged; but as it appeared that he did not place perfect confidence in her asserted intentions, he only affected an entire submission to her will and pleasure.

Of course, if she thought it right to be silent, he could not press her to speak; but she would perhaps permit him to ask was there much respecting Fanny's recent conduct which required to be concealed?

“There is a great deal that might be told,” replied the lady, energetically; “but if you dare to assert that any of her conduct requires concealment, I shall ring the bell, and desire the footman to show you to the door.”

Frank smiled. “I cannot think what makes Mrs. Compton so very unamiable today,” said he, “I am sure I have said nothing to offend her. But do tell me, if you know,” continued he, more seriously, “who the *old man* was who was laid up at her house, and what has become of him?”

“What, have you got no further in the history than that?” exclaimed she; “really you ought to be ashamed of such barbarous ignorance. The old gentleman has been dead and buried these five weeks, and has left his whole fortune to his hostess.”

“To Fanny — is it possible!” ejaculated Frank, with a look of vexation.

“Perfectly possible; but why you should be angry at it? I am sure I cannot guess.”

“Was he rich?” inquired Frank, evading her comment.

“He bequeathed somewhere about ten thousand pounds to her.”

“Indeed! I wish her joy in it.” A silence, during which he looked down with a very troubled expression, followed. Mrs. Compton eyed him with curiosity, and at length exclaimed:

“I cannot understand you at all today, Mr. Linwood; but if the idea of Fanny’s being so much richer distresses you, I will try and relieve your mind on that point: only confess — is it so?”

“No, indeed, why should I mind her being provided for? it will make no difference at all to me,” he answered, with a sigh.

“I shall not contradict that assertion,” replied Mrs. Compton; “on the contrary, I suspect it will be borne out by facts. But this much I will tell you, that she herself gains nothing but trouble, and perhaps pleasure, she is only *trustee* to this large sum, which is all to be expended in *charity*.”

Frank did not look at all relieved by the news; he continued thoughtful, then said:

“It must have given her a great deal of trouble no doubt. Has she to manage it all herself?”

“Oh, Mr. Compton has been helping her, and with his assistance she will get on famously. I defy anything to puzzle him; she could not be in better hands. But, Mr. Linwood, who do you think this charitable individual was?”

“How can I imagine? She said his name was *Browne*.”

“I give you twenty guesses to find out.”

“I have no data to go on, except the ten thousand pounds. He was probably some penitent sinner.”

“Well guessed as to *his character*. Now think again: who was the *wickedest man* of your acquaintance?”

“My dear Mrs. Compton, how could I answer such a question?”

“You have less appreciation of character and sense of justice than I gave you credit for, if you cannot guess. Who but the wicked old *uncle of Cecil Mansfield*, who was the perpetrator of so much evil, and the source of so much misery!”

“Mr. *Henry Mansfield*, how strange! Was it possible that he should be thus brought to die under the roof of the woman he had injured! Are you in serious earnest?”

“It is perfectly true: the old man died in her house, and I understand in great *misery* and *remorse* of mind. Poor Fanny must have been much distressed, but she says little of her own feelings. Is it not a striking instance of *retributive justice* even in this world?”

“It is indeed,” replied he, thoughtfully.

“It now only needs that Cecil himself should break his heart, as he promised,” continued she, “and the whole *tragedy* would be complete. But though they are all very much to blame one way or another, it strikes me, Mr. Linwood, that the law is still more so.”

“The law is altered now,” replied he.

“But is it improved?”

“I think so. At all events, there can be now no doubt of the fact that no marriage between persons so connected can be contracted. One law is not now in opposition to another, and there ought not to exist any hesitation as to the right or wrong path to pursue.”

“Certainly, nothing could be more scandalously unjust than the way in which it stood when poor Fanny married: but for that old wretch of an uncle, she would have been a wife to this day, instead of hiding herself in a corner of Devonshire as if she were a culprit.”

Frank was silent on this topic.

“Do you know, I think they ought to repeal that law,” continued she.

“I do not; but I dare say they will some day. It is the age for extension of franchise and reformation — no, I mean *reform*. Depend upon it, when some man of political importance wants to marry his sister-in-law — we shall have another change.”

“You think so, but you do not wish it, apparently.”

“No, I see no advantage in it. It has always answered very well in Scotland, and if it is more difficult to persuade people to restrain their inclinations in England, it must arise from the former uncertainty as to the result to arise from transgression. People whose passions were stronger than their conscience, or whose ignorance on the subject prevented conscience being appealed to at all, were willing to chance it; and might perhaps, by some little maneuvering, effectually prevent any risk of interference. They lived and died husband and wife, though, of course, until one or other was dead, it was not quite certain that they had ever been married. But now the case is different, for whatever reasoning they may employ, such couples are not married at all, and cannot be so in any part of the united kingdoms.”

“Then they must go abroad to be married,” suggested the lady.

“In that case, they must remain abroad,” replied he, “otherwise it would be of no avail.”

“True; for if a man went to Turkey and married four wives — he would not be allowed to keep them in England,” said she. “But do you suppose it is ever done?”

“I fear it is too often either through ignorance, or inadvertence, or willful contempt of the law; but since such parties are not legally married, there is nothing to prevent the man at any time abandoning his partner in guilt, and leaving her, as so many other women have been left, to repent her own credulity.”

“But were this really and thoroughly understood, surely no woman of principle, or even common sense, would risk such a termination.”

“My dear Mrs. Compton, it is an event of every-day occurrence that *women are too trustful — and men are treacherous.*”

“Oh yes, I know, under promise of marriage; but in the case we are discussing, the temptation is removed, for the marriage is impossible. It must be ignorance alone which can occasion this.”

“It may be so, but the case has I fear occurred frequently; and I cannot but anticipate very great evils, family discords, and other unhappiness, when the unfortunate children of such unions grow up to fight their own way in the world.”

“And is no warning voice upraised to save women from the delusions of men, to rescue them from such connections? Has no one exerted themselves to throw a clearer light on the matter? I wish I could make myself heard from Berwick to Land’s End, while I poured forth my feelings on the subject.”

“You startle me by your energy, Mrs. Compton,” observed Frank, viewing with surprise the lady’s flashing eye and flushing cheek.

“Do I?” said she; “and is there no reason to be energetic? have I not seen enough of *misery* springing from this very cause, to rouse a cooler heart, a calmer temper, than mine? And may not this tragedy now be acted and re-acted with perhaps blacker and more deliberate villainy, while not a word is uttered to warn the *victims* of man’s delusions? I tell you, Mr. Linwood, that so bad is my opinion of man in general, that I am convinced that this will not be the last tale of the sort which will meet my ears.”

Frank was silent, not feeling particularly inclined to pursue the turn which the discourse had taken; but just as he was about to revert to the original topic, *Mr. Compton* entered the room.

“What are you and Mr. Linwood discussing so earnestly?” inquired he of his wife. “I heard your voice, Margaret, as I ascended the stairs. Were you delivering a lecture on political economy, or holding a discussion on Chancery practice?”

“Neither one nor the other, Edward,” replied the lady; “we were merely reviewing the present state of the laws concerning marriage.”

Mr. Compton gave another turn to the conversation, by suddenly inquiring of Frank if he had heard of the death of Mr. *Henry Mansfield*, and the *circumstances* attending it; and entered into full *details* as to the *duties* and *difficulties* Fanny had to contend with, and the assistance he had been called on to render her.

Frank listened with interest, but with dissatisfaction; he felt as if he had been deprived of a right in not being first applied to by her. It was strange she should have resorted to another friend, especially in *legal* difficulties, such as some of those she had encountered. He felt he had *offended* her, and his meditations again beclouded his face, as they had previously done when Mrs. Compton remarked his chagrin. He considered some time, and then turning to Mrs. Compton, inquired if she would soon be writing to her friend?

“Yes, have *you* any message to send by her?”

He wished her to say from him that he earnestly hoped that the accession to her duties and her power would contribute as much to her happiness as it must do to her responsibility. In many cases the acquisition of wealth was attended by the deprivation of some kind friend; he trusted this was not the case with her.

Mrs. Compton protested she should never remember such a message, but that he must write it himself; there were pens, ink, and paper on the table: he might use them. But this he declined; he did not *owe* her a letter, and could not therefore presume to write.

She looked at him with a scrutinizing glance, and then taking up a pen declared she must write from his dictation, lest she should make mischief. She wrote a few words, and then without looking up, said:

“Let me see, what was I to say? You fear she will be unequal to the responsibility of her new situation, and are apprehensive that she has lost a friend who might have been useful to her. Was not that the purpose of your message?”

“I thought you had possessed a better memory, Mrs. Compton,” replied he gravely.

“Oh yes, by the way, I am wrong. Your fears are that the power she has acquired of doing good will lead her to cast off her former friends, and prove ungrateful to those who stood by her in adversity.”

“You had better not trust my wife today, Linwood,” said Mr. Compton, good-humoredly; “she is in one of her *provoking humours*, and not amenable to reason. I will take care your message is given right. Where do you spend the long vacation?”

“I am intending to join my mother and sister abroad, and shall start for France the first moment I can get away.”

Mrs. Compton, who was sketching with her pen instead of writing, again suspended her hand, and looked fixedly at Frank, uttering an interrogatory “Oh!” which said a great deal by its accent.

After some minutes’ consideration of his face, she added:

“Well, on the whole, I think you are right, you need change. Change of air and scene will be of advantage to you. You will be missed during your absence by your friends, but they will be the more glad to welcome you back again. I hope when you return we shall not see you with a heavier brow, or more appearance of hopeless despair, than you now display.”

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 23

In a small inn on the banks of a rapid torrent amidst the mountains of *Norway*, two young Englishmen were spending a few weeks together. Their apparent occupations were fishing or shooting, varied by occasional fits of sketching or idling; and they both seemed rather to be seeking for distraction in their pursuits from uneasiness of mind, than following them for any actual pleasure which the occupations afforded. They were companions from accident, rather than friends from choice, yet there was a similarity and a difference alike favorable to intimacy. One of them was our former acquaintance *Mr. Grant*, who was trying to sport away a troublesome remembrance of Fanny Ellis which still haunted him. Had he been a little younger, he might have pleased himself with enthusiastically cherishing her memory; but he had reached an age when men do not wish to encumber themselves with unnecessary burdens, in addition to the inevitable ills of life. He was therefore resolved to forget her; and having found stoicism, philosophy, and business ineffectual — he was now trying what strenuous activity, alternating with total idleness, could effect for him.

His spirits, though unequal, were often high, his enthusiasm for overcoming difficulties at times excessive, and his admiration for the grand and beautiful, warm and lively. He loved to get up little harmless flirtations with blue-eyed peasant girls, and coquettish chamber-maids; quickly learned enough of their language to pay them compliments, and adopted many Norwegian tastes and habits. When he found his companion dull, he would take refuge with the hostess of the inn, amuse himself in romping with her children, both little and big, or take lessons in Norwegian from her eldest daughter, a fair-haired lass, whose merry laugh was often heard when he mistook her instruction, or mis-pronounced her language.

His *companion* was very different: sad, silent, and reserved, shunning strangers, and especially all fellowship with women; seldom moved to speech, except by his passionate admiration of the beauties of nature; and always following every burst of enthusiasm by deeper sighs and heavier dejection; he lived in society as in a dream, seldom conscious of what was going on around him, and only when alone with rocks, mountains, cascades, and pine forests, appeared to breathe freely, or remember where he was. In his emaciated figure, his downcast look, his pale cheek, his wrinkled brow, and prematurely grey hair — you would hardly recognize the once mirthful, handsome, open-hearted *Cecil Mansfield*, who was now trying to hide a broken spirit, a chafed temper, and a dishonored name, from all who had ever known him in his prosperous days.

It is, indeed, a grievous and a bitter thing to have quarreled with this world, and yet feel no hope, no wish for another. Bitter are the fruits of our *misguided passions*, when they produce *remorse* and not repentance. Sorrow for the past was breaking his heart; but the sorrow arose from having *thrown away his happiness* — not from having transgressed his duty.

The image of *Fanny* haunted him everywhere. It walked by his side along the rushing torrent; it scaled with him the mountain brow; it rested with him under the murmuring pine-trees. He seemed to view the landscape with her eyes, and only thought of what she would say, were she present.

The meeting with *Mr. Grant* was quite accidental; they had sailed in the same boat for *Norway*, and chance, which thus brought them together at first, continued to unite them. For at the port where they landed they were obliged from circumstances to proceed in the same vehicle, and they suited each other uncommonly well. *Mr. Grant* was quite as ready to take all the trouble, do all the talking, and pay all the bills — as *Cecil* was to furnish the means for the latter end; and they soon agreed on continuing in company as long as they found they could get on so comfortably. As *Cecil* wished to be *incognito*, he had, on leaving England, dropped the last syllable of his name, and called himself simply *Mann*; and as *Mr. Grant* had never seen him before, he never for a moment suspected that his silent, absent, melancholy companion, was the individual whose conduct had so greatly excited his indignation when learning *Fanny's* fate and misfortunes.

They had been in *Norway* several weeks, and *Mr. Grant* had made satisfactory progress both in committing the native language to memory, and effacing the recollection of his hopeless love, when one afternoon they left the house together for a ramble up the mountain. They bent their steps towards a high hill immediately behind the house, and ascended it with considerable difficulty; but they were desirous of reaching a particular cascade high up among the rocks to which they had not as yet succeeded in penetrating. They leapt from one rock to another, or climbed slowly by means of the twisted roots of the pine and beech-trees, which crept out between the stones. But it was a far more toilsome route than they had anticipated, and *Cecil* was breathless and exhausted when they reached the desired point.

Here they rested themselves on a rock overhanging the stream to enjoy the view: the torrent leaping from the upper channel in one wide sheet of a deep green tint, flung itself with the energy of a living and an angry thing into a deep black pool below, from whence it issued, as white as snow, only to repeat such another leap, and another before it was lost to sight. Dark and ancient forests of fir and pine stretched away right and left from where they lay, and the opposite bank was festooned in wild richness with a multitude of creeping shrubs, which swung their long branches over the cascade, and caught, on each leaf and tendril, drops of the foam which it threw up.

The western sun glanced down on them, turning each drop into a diamond prism, raising a rainbow bridge over the chasm in front of the spectators, tinging the snowy foam with crimson, and seeming to convert the massive trunks of the

huge trees to columns of coral. The air was still, and the dark boughs over their heads hung immovable, like the arches of some ancient cathedral. The roar of the torrent filled the air, and made attempts at communication useless; but the two travelers rested and gazed long and steadfastly on the scene; following with their eyes the downward course of the river, until their sight penetrating between hills and over points, rested on the distant coast with its fishing villages, its boats, its rocky promontories, and its glassy sea, on which lay the long track of light, the reflection of the setting sun.

It was a *glorious prospect*, and, to any healthy mind, an *exhilarating* one; but it was not so to Cecil Mansfield. Thoughts of country and home — of those whom he had loved and lost — of his dead wife, and of her from whom he was parted by a barrier worse than death — of his children — the child of his beloved Fanny, whom he might not see, and the daughter of the *detested* Laura whom he would not see again; these recollections rushed on his mind, overpowered his firmness, and wrung from his eyes those hot and bitter tears of man's passionate grief, which scorch the heart instead of refreshing it.

Mr. Grant appeared not to notice his feelings, and contented himself with idly throwing into the stream small boughs, or the fir cones lying around him, watching them tossing around as helpless playthings to the whirlpools, until they were dashed over the next cascade, and disappeared. He was mentally considering, no doubt, that to bestow words of advice, counsel, or commiseration, on a mind which appeared a *vortex of passion and grief* would be as unproductive of result as throwing these fragments into the basin beneath him.

Composure, however, returned at last; and as the sun warned them it was time to return home, they rose and proceeded down the mountain side. They hit upon a path which was rather smoother, and less precipitous than the route by which they had ascended, and for some time, pursued it in silence. The meeting with a pretty peasant girl, and the lively salutation which his companion bestowed on her, at length however wrung from Cecil a remark to this effect:

"Grant, you have never been *disappointed in love*."

"How do you know that?" inquired he hastily.

"Because if you had, you would not be so ready to *flirt* with every woman whom you encounter," was the reply.

"And reversing your proposition then," said his companion, laughing, "I must suppose you have suffered much in that way, since you never speak to any of them."

Then finding that he received no answer, he continued:

"But the suspicion wrongs my sensibility, I assure you; when I was twenty I was very desperately in love with a young lady about four years my senior, and I was a long time — I would think full four months — recovering from it."

"But that was a *boy's* passion," said Cecil rather contemptuously.

"Well, Mann, to own the truth, this very trip to Norway originated in nothing else than a desire to forget a very charming woman, who had fascinated me more than I can tell you."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, on my honor, I really loved her. I proposed, and was rejected — and so I am here."

"Who was she?"

"We met under very peculiar circumstances," continued he; "she was thrown by accident into my arms at our first encounter, yet I could not afterwards persuade her to accept my hand!"

"Indeed!" again ejaculated his friend. "How do you account for that?"

"I will tell you how it was. We were upset together in a stage-coach; she was a good deal hurt; I pitied her, and you know that *pity melts the heart to love*. Besides, she had one of those angel faces, which infallibly indicate sweetness of disposition; and her singularly unfortunate and desolate situation made me flatter myself she would have gladly accepted an honorable protection for herself and child; but I was wrong."

"Her child! was she then a widow?" inquired Cecil, with an interest thoroughly aroused by the recital.

"No; she was a mother, but neither wife nor widow," answered Mr. Grant.

"You must allow great latitude to women, if you could seriously think of marrying under *such* circumstances."

"No such thing; I am perfectly moral and correct in my notions; and in this case there was misfortune, very great misfortune, but *no guilt*."

"How could that be?" replied Cecil, in a tone which it required no small effort to make tolerably steady.

"I would not say there was no guilt, rather that there was none on *her* side. Do you know anything of Yorkshire, Mann?"

"A little; I have been there occasionally," replied he hastily. "What has that to do with your story?"

"Because I was about to ask you if you ever heard of the cause, *Mansfield versus Mansfield* tried at York, in the Prerogative Court, for marriage with a deceased wife's sister. She was the *heroine* of the trial, and I do firmly believe was as *innocent* in the whole affair as an angel. Her husband appears to have been a very wicked man; and certainly quite undeserving of her. Had it not caused her so much suffering — I am sure every friend of hers must have rejoiced that they were separated."

“How do you know all this?” inquired Cecil, after a considerable pause; “does she still keep the name of Mansfield? had you known her before, or how did you ascertain it all?”

“I had seen her once in Yorkshire, and hers is a face once seen to be remembered for life; and such a voice! For my own part, I think her husband must have been a *great fool* to have thrown away such a woman.”

There was another silence, and then Cecil inquired:

“So you proposed, and were refused — did she assign any motive?”

“I did not propose in person; I would have done so, but was interrupted by the entrance of another; but in spite of a positive sentence of banishment, passed on me by her own mouth, I ventured to address her in *writing*. I had therefore no opportunity of learning more than she chose to commit to paper; and her answer simply stated that her feelings concerning past events would not permit her to enter on new engagements. It was perhaps all I had a right to know, but I doubt whether it was the exact truth.”

“How do you mean?” was eagerly inquired.

“The intruder who stopped my intended eloquence, and compelled me to a silent retreat, appeared to me to receive a welcome of a nature which would bear but one interpretation — the *ground was preoccupied*, I felt convinced; and though determined to chance it, I anticipated very surely my fate.”

Had there been light enough in the increasing gloom to read the expression of Cecil’s face, his companion could not have failed to have been struck by it; he was excessively agitated, but a vigorous exertion conquered sufficiently to enable him to articulate:

“Did you hear his name?”

“She called him *Frank*, and he addressed her as Fanny, *dear Fanny*. I cannot forget the accent he laid on those two words; I saw my castle in the air blown up in a moment. I must tell you, however, that Fanny’s mysterious origin (for this happened at a small market-town in Devonshire, where she was quite unknown), and my visits to her, together with the malevolent and wicked tongues of certain creatures in petticoats, who could not really have been of the same species as herself, raised a violent *scandal* in the town of Bradley. The good people set her down as my mistress, and were properly shocked at such wickedness. Of course she must suffer from continual misinterpretations of the sort; for people will pry into family matters, and wherever there is anything concealed, they always suppose it to be necessarily wicked. This is part of the suffering which her enemies have heaped on her.”

“Yours is an interesting episode, Grant,” said Cecil, forcing himself to speak. “Have you ascertained what has become of her?”

“I know that she is still living in Devonshire, but that was only discovered by accident; for as I wished to forget her, I was not so foolish as to follow her about. It was from a newspaper I learned her present residence; for there was an accident occurred in her neighborhood, close to her house, and I saw an account of it in a provincial paper; this is all I have learned of her lately: it was a year ago and more that we met; and that she is still called *Fanny Ellis* is nearly all I know of her.”

They had reached the inn before either spoke again, and mournful and silent as Cecil Mansfield usually was, he appeared on this evening still *more miserable* than before. From this time, however, he frequently turned the conversation on Mr. Grant’s interviews with Fanny, listening with eagerness to his descriptions, and drawing from him, by repeated cross-questioning, the minutest particulars relative to their fellowship.

This extreme interest not a little surprised his companion; yet, although sometimes taking the trouble to devise a cause for it in his imagination, he was always a long way from guessing the truth; which never suggested itself to his imagination.

Thus another week went on, and the two travelers began to talk of changing their quarters, when an accident occurred that again detained them. In descending the steep hillside one day, by a very rugged and precipitous path, a stone on which Cecil had placed his feet gave way, and he was thrown on the ground with such force as to injure him seriously. He was not unconscious, but very hurt by the fall; and Mr. Grant had considerable difficulty in raising and supporting him home.

On reaching the inn he fainted, and was obliged to be put to bed, where they hoped a night’s rest would restore him. But the next morning the hostess came with tears in her eyes to arouse Mr. Grant with the news that the other Englishman was very ill, and needed a doctor. In fact, Cecil was *delirious*, with a high fever; the natural consequence of the protracted mental excitement and recent bodily pain from which he had suffered acutely.

As his incoherent expressions and uneasy exclamations were uttered in English, what he said was known only to his companion; but every word he uttered confirmed Mr. Grant’s previous impression that he was *haunted by an uneasy conscience which knew no rest*. He knew well enough that much faith need not be put in any discoveries or disclosures produced by disease, but his attention was caught more than once by the way in which he uttered the names of his former friends — *Mary, Fanny, Laura*, were at different times passionately invoked, or he would call in heart-rending tones for his child, his own dear child, not the offspring of Arthur Temple.



Mr. Grant, of course, had dispatched a messenger for the nearest doctor; but being himself not altogether unacquainted with common remedies for common diseases, he set himself to work in the most methodical manner that he could devise for his assistance. It was while engaged in superintending and assisting the hostess in applying snow procured from the mountains to his burning head, that one of the hasty movements of the patient discovered a small *picture* suspended round his neck. The good woman hastily removed it, as it came in her way, and deposited it, without much notice, on a table by the bedside.

Hours passed away, and no doctor appeared; the messenger did not return, and still Cecil's fever seemed to increase; but towards evening he fell into a heavy, slumbering state, which allowed his anxious attendants some respite.

Dismissing everyone to take rest, Mr. Grant drew the table towards him, and was preparing to write a letter to England, when his eye fell on the picture, which, unnoticed by himself, had laid there in the morning. The face was downwards, but his attention was caught by the words, "*Fanny to Cecil*," encircled by a long tress of fair brown hair, which appeared on the back. Curiosity suddenly aroused, made him eagerly grasp the picture, to obtain a view of the painting; when his eyes fell on a face which, as he himself had said, once seen, was never to be forgotten. Yes, there was *Fanny Ellis* — the same fair, open brow, the same expression of *sweetness*, the same delicate complexion; the cheek wore rather a deeper tint, the eyes a happier expression; the forehead was unclouded by care; the whole face indicated a mind at ease, and a heart contented with its lot — the identity was indisputable. Pleasure and astonishment, for a few minutes, prevented his reflecting as to why the picture was there; but when, after the first transient emotion had subsided, he asked himself the question, a sudden light flashed upon his mind, and he turned hastily to the sufferer beside him.

Cecil still slumbered, restless and uneasy, but still unconscious; and his companion reverted to the picture he held in his hand. Long he sat there, gazing on those lovely eyes, and trying to recall every word of the many conversations he had held concerning the original of that portrait. He understood it all now. He saw the foundation of Cecil's interest, the motive for his inquiries, the cause of his sorrows. He still loved her then; and while he had calmly listened to abuse of his supposed inconstancy — his love, undying love, had induced him, again and again, to revert to the theme.

But another remembrance suddenly arose, which puzzled Mr. Grant, and completely upset his theory: he recollected that Cecil Mansfield had married again, had deserted his wife for another (such was the story he learned in Yorkshire), and had himself concurred in the measures which had dissolved the connection between him and Fanny. If this was Cecil, then where was his wife? and how could the voluntary desertion of her predecessor accord with his still wearing her picture round his neck? It was to him a most puzzling enigma, and he with difficulty roused himself sufficiently to write the letters which the present delay rendered necessary.

Three days of suspense were followed by a decided amendment. The tardy doctor had arrived at last, and in some degree reassured Mr. Grant; and his cheering prophecies were gradually verified by the subsidence of the fever, and the return of reason to the patient.

As he could not leave the house, however, for many days, Mr. Grant was still forced to continue at the place, it being impossible to leave his countryman in such dire circumstances.

Two or three days of convalescence passed, and Cecil was supported from his bedroom to their little parlor, and accommodated with such substitutes for a sofa as the home afforded, before he summoned resolution to ask the question, trembling on his lips from the first return of recollection, what was become of the *picture* which had been removed from his neck?

He knew that if it had been seen by his companion, it must have betrayed all to him, and he felt ashamed of having his identity discovered by accident, instead of being voluntarily revealed. More than once he had been on the point of acknowledging his name, when Mr. Grant was expatiating on his own past history — but he had never actually made the avowal, which he concluded would come too late now to carry any appearance of confidence with it.

Urged, however, by the desire to *recover his treasure*, he took an opportunity, after expressing his gratitude to Mr. Grant for his kindness, to inquire if he had taken care of his property as well as himself. There had been a valuable *portrait* and *chain* around his neck, and he trusted they were safe. With perfect gravity his companion rose to fetch the articles, and producing them carefully enveloped in paper, presented them without a word of comment.

The blood mounted to Cecil's sickly skin, and colored his brow and cheeks as he unfolded the little packet, and gazed on the well-known portrait; then, half looking up, he said:

"Did you *see* this painting?"

"I did," was Mr. Grant's short, grave answer.

"And did you *recognize* it?" continued Cecil, fixing his eyes steadfastly on the picture.

"I could not help recognizing it," answered the other, significantly.

An explanation on Cecil's part followed, and Mr. Grant learned all the reasons which had exiled Mr. Mansfield from England, and some of the *misery* which had driven him from all society; the regret, remorse, shame, disgrace, which had combined to make life irksome, and home detestable; the angry feelings which induced him to refuse to sue for a divorce, lest his worthless wife should marry another, and be enabled to transmit Brookensha, which he feared would become hers,

to children of her own. This was an idea that almost drove him frantic. Of course, while her first child lived, Laura would not succeed to the property; but the child was so young, and appeared so delicate, that she seemed but a feeble barrier between the estate and his detested wife. It was true that her father in his passion had declared Laura herself to be *illegitimate*, but besides that the declaration might be the unfounded effect of rage, it was quite unsupported by any evidence; and Cecil was by no means sure whether, in case it were really true, he would desire the *public admission* of it to be made, unless in a last extremity, as a defense against her becoming mistress of the seat of his ancestors.

“Now I would have thought,” observed Mr. Grant, “that the satisfaction of proving her actually without a title to that estate would have been far greater to you than any other pursuit. I could not imagine any salmon we have caught, or black grouse we have shot, would be worth the time expended on them — when compared with a course of investigation for such a purpose.”

“What good would it do me?” inquired Cecil, languidly. “While I live, she cannot inherit Brookensha, and in case I survive the child, I will take care to have the question started. But meantime I need not add to my other mortifications, by acknowledging how deeply I have been *duped*.”

“That is a mere matter of taste, of course,” replied the other; “and as it is always difficult to prove a negative, if you start the objection in such a way that the next heir may get hold of it, you will of course throw the trouble of proclaiming it on his shoulders, and the burden of proof upon hers.”

Though Mr. Grant saw very clearly that Cecil at this time was exceedingly attached to Fanny’s memory, he could not help suspecting that the separation from her was in a great measure, the foundation for this ineffectual constancy. Had they still been united, he believed that Cecil would have still been indifferent, or at least wavering in his affection; but because the wishes of his heart could never be gratified — he now indulged them without considering for a moment whether they were right or wrong. It would however be useless to remonstrate, he believed; and anything he might venture to say would seem to come with a bad grace from one who had already avowed himself a *suitor* to the object of *Cecil’s hopeless but passionate attachment*.

How he could resolve thus to cherish an affection which made him so excessively wretched, and which his moral sense must tell him was wrong — Mr. Grant was not of a temperament to understand. His own disposition was buoyant and cheerful, disposed to shake off the evils of life as rapidly as possible, and if one good failed him — to devise some plan for another. He might have sympathized in his feelings, perhaps, had Cecil been actively engaged in tormenting Laura; but that he should thus cultivate *self-torture*, and like an *imprisoned scorpion*, in his passion sting himself to death — was quite beyond his comprehension.

Yet he had become exceedingly interested in his companion, as incomprehensible as he held him; since *confidence* had been established between them, they had now one perpetual subject of common interest, and Cecil was hardly more willing to expatiate on Fanny’s early years, than his auditor was to listen. One good effect his narratives had, for while listening to the descriptions of her excellence as a wife and mother, his own love gradually died out; and was converted into a sentiment of *warm admiration* and fraternal regard, such as Fanny herself might have listened to without a frown, and accepted without a blush.

Cecil’s amendment was very slow, and their necessary detention on the spot where the accident happened, gave time for letters to be forwarded to them in their present retreat which would otherwise not have met them until their arrival at Bergen.

“What an awful *lawyer-like* looking dispatch for you, Mann,” observed Mr. Grant, handing him a thick packet. Cecil still persisted in abbreviating his name, lest they should encounter any other of their countrymen.

His packet was opened, examined hastily, with a measure of astonishment, which the contents excited even to agitation. His friend was not long kept in suspense, however, as to the subject; for, throwing down a parchment he had been examining, he exclaimed:

“Grant, the thing is done without my intervention, and my father-in-law, in dying, has bequeathed to his daughter, as her only legacy, the knowledge that her mother was never married. Brookensha is safe! And though I know nothing of the next person in the inheritance, I am certain I cannot hate him with the deep and bitter hatred which I bear towards my wife Laura. There at least is some pleasure in this.”

After some consideration, he suddenly began again:

“Grant, will you go back with me to England?”

“What for?” demanded he.

“What for! why for everything in the world. I do not want to be buried amidst these Norwegian mountains; and although you talk of my recovery, I feel that it will never be. I will return to England and die there. But before I die, I have much to do. I will, if possible, procure a divorce from Laura. I care not now what becomes of her. Let Arthur Temple marry her if he chooses. Ah! I well know that, unportioned and disinherited, he will never choose that course; and, besides this, I must see my child. I must try if I cannot make some *greater provision* for her. My heart is longing, yearning, to embrace her once more; and whether her mother will permit me in her company or not, I have surely a right to look upon

my daughter again. If you will not come with me, I must go alone; but I feel scarcely equal to the fatigue of such a journey.”

“I promise you readily, Cecil,” replied Mr. Grant, with animation, “that I will go with you to England, Scotland, or Ireland. I am ready to accompany you any and everywhere you please, if I can be of any use to you. As to your gloomy anticipations, I do not see any reason for indulging such ideas: you are *depressed*, and therefore *imagine* yourself dying. I used to do the same when I was ill. There now; don’t shake your head, and look so very determined; I am positive you are only annoyed by the solitude, the mountains, and the roar of the torrent; and once away from our *hermitage*, you will wonder at your present melancholy fears.”

“I have not the least wish that your prophecies should prove correct, Grant,” replied Cecil, with a sickly smile; “but dying at present, and in this place, is not my object; so to England we will go, if I have any strength remaining. And remember, Grant, if I die by the way, you are to bear my farewell love to Fanny, and the picture I have round my neck shall be yours for your pains.”

“Thanks, my dear fellow,” replied he, squeezing Cecil’s hand very hard, and turning away his face to hide an emotion he could not suppress, caused by the melancholy earnestness of the invalid’s manner of speaking. “But,” continued he in a more cheerful tone, “if you intend to be able to travel tomorrow, I recommend you to hold your tongue today; I will make the needful arrangements, provided you will find the strength requisite for the occasion.”

“Never fear for my strength,” replied Cecil; “once away from here, and in motion for England, I shall have strength sufficient for the voyage, and energy for what I wish to perform. I will concentrate all my power for this one object, and that once accomplished, I care not how soon I come to an end. What is there worth living for — when *Fanny Ellis* can no longer be mine?”

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 24

Frank Linwood could not have taken a wiser step, or done a more judicious thing, than to go abroad when he did, if he wished to make Fanny Ellis sensible of his great importance to her. For the whole long vacation to pass without seeing him was a very unusual prospect, and one which caused her something more than surprise. She began to fear that she had been more eloquent than *sincere* in her wishes that he would consider her only as a friend, and choose another woman for his wife. She saw, if he did this, she could not expect their mutual friendship to continue at all. He would be certain, in some moment of confidence, to reveal the past to his wife, and she would be equally certain to take a very different view of Fanny's past history from himself. No, if Frank did marry, she would lose him altogether — for it would be undesirable and imprudent to carry on any acquaintance, since it might endanger his domestic peace, unless his wife should be a most unusually candid and liberal-minded woman. But she could not imagine Frank Linwood with a wife at all, or if she did, it was a very unpleasant picture. One thing was certain, he had left England for the only time in the next six weeks he could have come to Devonshire, and that too, at a period when she had felt particularly desirous of seeing him, and he had, she believed, left very much out of humor with herself.

Consideration and reflection had enabled her to hit pretty much upon the right reason of his discontent; but whether she guessed right or wrong, she resolved boldly to let him take his own course now, and refrain from addressing him at all. If he really succeeded in fulfilling her injunctions of conquering his love for her, it was well that they should meet no more, lest the esteem and gratitude which she had always avowed should really change their original character, and assume a warmth and tenacity which would render his preference of another woman a painful experience to herself.

But she did *miss* him very much all through that lonely September, and was very greatly surprised, and not a little annoyed, when she caught herself perpetually referring to him in her mind as the object for which some pursuit was to be engaged in, or the individual to whom some event should be detailed.

Even the multiplication of business which was entailed on her by Mr. Mansfield's will, was not sufficient to drive him from her mind; and her utmost efforts could not entirely subdue the regret she experienced at his absence, though she felt assured that thus it would probably be for the future.

October was enlivened by a visit from Mrs. Compton, who came to spend a couple of weeks with her, and was gladly welcomed by Fanny in her solitude. A little change of society was extremely gratified to her; for though good old Rev. Anderson and his sister were very excellent and amiable people, they had so long lived undisturbed in this remote corner of the country, that their ideas and feelings were in many respects nearly as *antiquated* as the furniture of their parlor; and as she had shrunk from communicating to them the particulars of the past, there was little real communion with them; they could not sympathize in sorrows of whose existence they were unaware, or counsel in troubles, the origin of which was concealed from them.

But with Margaret Compton, though there was often more pain, there was also much more pleasure in conversing. Her *hastiness*, it was true, sometimes grieved, or even wounded her friend's feelings; but her *generosity* and *warm affection* secured love in return, and caused even the faults of her character to create an interest, as the fleeting shadows on a landscape give variety and beauty to the tints. If in private she sometimes dwelt indiscreetly on the past, in society she was always scrupulously regardful of Fanny's situation and circumstances, and desirous of procuring for her that respect and consideration from others which she felt to be so justly her due.

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 25

The two ladies were sitting together one morning, when they were surprised by an interruption, which was hardly more unexpected to Mrs. Compton herself, than to her hostess. They had heard the door bell, and concluded that it was old Rev. Anderson come to bestow on them a spare half hour, when the opening door disclosed no other than the very *Mr. Grant*, whose fellowship with Cecil in Norway, and intended return with him to England have been detailed.

Of all these events, Fanny of course knew nothing, and she was as far removed as possible from apprehending the motive of this most unexpected visit. However, there was nothing to be done, but to receive him with civility, and look as if the past events which connected them together, had completely vanished from her mind.

This was the less difficult, not only because Mrs. Compton by her presence secured them from all risk of a recurrence to them, but because her total ignorance of anything peculiar in their former interview prevented her regarding Mr. Grant himself in any other light than as an ordinary visitor, to be received and treated in an ordinary way.

The gentleman himself looked calm and grave, far graver than when she had last seen him, with nothing of the impressment of a lover in his address, much more indeed the air of a man who having come to speak on some subject of important business, is rather at a loss how to introduce the matter.

They sat down, and he continued silent for a moment, looking down; then exerting himself to speak, the result of his efforts produced only an inquiry for her daughter.

Fanny assured him briefly and calmly of her health.

Another silence ensued, which Mrs. Compton broke by inquiring whether there was any political news. She thought the gentleman looked as if he needed some more help to conversation than her friend appeared to bestow.

He replied he did not know. He had been abroad for some time, and since his return had been so much engrossed with attending on a *sick friend*, and assisting him in arranging some complicated affairs, that though his time had been spent in London he had heard nothing of news.

Fanny inquired *where* he had been traveling. He told her in Norway, and looked as if he wanted to say more, but could not quite settle how to introduce it. Suddenly, however, taking courage, he said:

“I have a message to deliver to you from a former acquaintance of yours. Perhaps, as I was commissioned to give it in private, you could favor me with five minutes’ interview.”

With some surprise Fanny arose, and leading the way through the open door upon the little lawn, she stopped when out of hearing of those in the house, and waited in silence for his explanation.

“You have probably been surprised at my intrusion,” began he, gravely and earnestly; “but under the circumstances in which I am placed, I could not help it; the *friend* whose message I carry would not be denied.”

“I would be obliged, Mr. Grant, if you would be explicit; at present you are speaking *enigmas*,” said she, as he paused.

“I will do my best,” replied he. “I bring you a *note*. Remember, I am not more responsible for its contents, than the paper on which those lines are written.”

She took the note which he offered to her, with increasing astonishment, and without looking at the address, hastily broke the seal, and read as follows:

“Fanny, I am dying, and I cannot die in peace without your forgiveness, you whom of all earthly beings I have most deeply injured. I know that you are incapable of harboring malice, and feel sure that your forgiveness has long been granted, but I thirst to have that assurance from yourself. If to have it from your own lips is too great a blessing for a sinner like myself, then I beg one word in writing. One other blessing you have in your power to bestow: let me see my daughter. I promise you by all that is sacred, I will not reveal our relationship, or say or do anything which could hurt your feelings, or injure your peace; but my heart is pining for the sight of the only thing left to me on earth, which it is not now a crime to love. I am *very miserable*. You would not know me were we to meet; but my heart is broken, and I trust the grave will soon hide my dishonored head. I send this by a mutual friend. Adieu, Cecil Mansfield.”

As Mr. Grant appeared to be intensely occupied in watching the movements of the bees in a neighboring rose-bush, Fanny had time to read this note over three times before making any reply. She really needed to pause to recover the use of her voice; astonishment and many other emotions almost choked her. At length the consciousness that she was keeping her companion standing a most unreasonable time, slowly dawned on her mind; and turning to him, she said:

“Your errand surprises me so very much that I cannot, until I better comprehend its nature, give a reply. We need not stand here, however, to discuss it; come back with me to the drawing-room; the friend who is there is acquainted with all my affairs, and her presence need be no impediment to our coming to some understanding.”

They returned accordingly. Mrs. Compton looked up on their entrance, and saw directly that Fanny was paler than usual; she regarded her anxiously.

“Anything unpleasant?” inquired she, in a low voice.

“Mr. Grant has brought me this note,” replied Fanny, putting it into her hands; “and I am rather *perplexed* by its contents.”

Margaret glanced over it hastily, then paused, and seemed weighing the matter; and after a moment looking up at Mr. Grant, who was apparently engrossed in contemplating the view from the window, she exclaimed:

“Where is the *writer* of this note?”

He turned, and replied that he had left him not long ago at a lodging-house in the neighboring village.

“And do you know *who* he is?”

“Perfectly.”

“And *what* he is also?” continued the lady, with great animation.

“Yes, he is one of the most unhappy men in the world,” replied Mr. Grant earnestly.

“And so he ought to be, beyond a doubt!” exclaimed she.

“I do not exactly understand how you come to be employed as his messenger,” said Fanny gently; “I was not aware that you were acquainted.”

Mr. Grant advanced from the window, and taking possession of a chair without seeming to know what he was doing, he told Fanny, if she would listen to him patiently, he would explain their present connection. She gave her permission, and he proceeded to tell her what we already know relative to their excursion in Norway, Cecil’s accident and illness, and his own concern for him.

He took good care to omit everything which could convey the smallest allusion to the past in connecting Fanny and himself together; but explained how Mr. Mansfield had concealed his name, and how it was only accident that revealed it, and how surprised he had been when he discovered that his companion was the Mr. Mansfield of whom he had heard so often and so much.

As soon as Cecil had been well enough, indeed rather before, they had started for England; but they had been very unfortunate in their passage. The weather proved stormy; their vessel was uneasy and wet; and their voyage, after an unpleasant progress, had nearly come to a fatal termination, for another vessel had run on board of them in a fog, and injured their vessel to such a degree that they were compelled to leave her in the middle of a dark, wet, cold night — and be received on board the vessel which had caused the disaster. All these events, however, combined to produce most disastrous consequences upon poor Cecil Mansfield. Weak in body, and nervous from his late illness, the alarm, excitement, exposure to cold and wet, and lack of the comforts needful to an invalid, in the crowded boat which had received them in addition to her own passengers — brought on a relapse, and he had been landed at London in a state rather worse than that from which he had recovered in Norway. Serious fears had been for some time entertained that he would *sink* under the fever; and now though that was subdued, there was another enemy invading his constitution, slower, but more certain in his work. The hectic flush, the hollow cough, the uneasy respiration confirmed the alarming prognostications of his physicians: he was in a slow but sure demise.

Some time had been spent in London to try and arrange certain affairs relative to Mrs. Laura Mansfield; but he was restless himself, and would allow no rest to his friend until they had started for Devonshire, where they arrived late last night; and although averse to intruding on Mrs. Ellis, Cecil would take no denial, nor listen to any argument, but compelled him to carry the note with which Mr. Grant had been charged.

One part of his commission he did not think it necessary or expedient to repeat: Cecil had desired him to watch Fanny’s countenance, and learn from it whether she still felt any regard for him, or whether his sufferings and misfortunes met only the same compassion which she would have bestowed on a total stranger.

He concluded his narrative by saying that he must hasten back to his friend, but that he trusted he might carry an answer of some sort, to the note which he had brought.

Fanny pondered a moment, and then replied:

“Mr. Mansfield’s request to see his daughter is too natural to surprise me — so far I am ready to comply with his wishes; but — ” she paused, and then said: “I will *write* him an answer.”

She sat down to a writing-table, and hastily penned the following lines:

“I will not reproach you for once more disturbing the peace which you have already so deeply injured. For this, and for every other pain you have inflicted — you have my full and entire forgiveness. I always felt you would wish to see your child again — she shall visit you this afternoon; but allow me to remind you that you will seriously injure her if you make known at her present age, the facts of her mother’s past history. Fanny Ellis”

Possessed of this little document, the visitor hastened away; and when he was gone a long silence ensued between the two friends, Fanny being plunged in profound meditation, which Mrs. Compton did not disturb; busying herself with re-arranging the flowers in a vase on the table, until her friend recovered the consciousness of where she was. At last Fanny said:

“Will you lend me your carriage, Margaret, to send Mary to the village?”

“Of course? but you will not go with her?”

“Indisputably not!”

“Then let me.” said Margaret. “I will take her myself. There is nothing to prevent my accompanying her. I do not mind seeing Mr. Mansfield; and if I take her in, there will be both less of peculiarity to attract the gossip of onlookers, and of risk that he will say or do anything to betray himself. Besides, Mary’s curiosity will not be excited for a reason why, as it would probably be were she sent alone; she will go for a drive with me, and I shall call on a *sick gentleman* and tell her to be quiet and behave well.”

“If you are so kind as to take the trouble, I am sure I shall be much obliged,” said the anxious mother. “Do not let her stay long. How strangely events occur, and how oddly people are connected together whom we never expected to meet again. This Mr. Grant, I was more surprised than pleased at his visit; but he really does not appear to blame — he could hardly help yielding to Mr. Mansfield’s entreaties.”

“Was not he the man upset with you in the coach last year, Fanny?”

“The same. And that he should after all have been nursing and attending Cecil, seems to me so extraordinary!”

“Just the sort of thing that constantly happens; events which surprise us most often, come about in the simplest and most natural manner — and the things which we expect with certainty, are just those which never actually occur. I am growing very *philosophical* in my old age, Fanny, and have left off ever being astonished at anything.”

“I believe you are right; but at what time will it suit you to take Mary?”

“After luncheon will be best.”

Mrs. Compton was really very desirous of obliging Fanny in every way in her power, yet there was also a small degree of *feminine curiosity* on this occasion mingled with her friendship; nay more, there was the wish for variety and excitement, which in this quiet retirement could not but prove acceptable to a lady accustomed to so much more *gaiety* and *life* than she could find in Fanny’s drawing-room.

She and her little companion drove at once to the house where Cecil was lodging, and leaving Mary in the carriage, she alighted and walked up the narrow pathway to the door, resolved to inquire herself for the lodger, rather than trust to the intervention of the servant who had driven her. The servant of the house, without delay showed her at once into the room where Cecil was reclining on a sofa, engaged in dictating a letter to his friend.

“Do not be alarmed, Mr. Mansfield,” said she, advancing, for Cecil had startled up at her approach, his pallid face flushing with eager excitement; “I am the herald of your daughter, but I wished to ascertain first that you perfectly understand the only condition on which you are to see her.”

Cecil advanced, and, without attending to her words in the least, grasped her hand, and said, in a deep husky voice:

“My child, my daughter, where is she? In mercy tell me — is she here?”

He was stopped by a violent fit of coughing; and Mr. Grant, who had thrown aside his pen on the interruption, led him back to the sofa, and after administering to him the lozenges to allay the cough, remonstrated earnestly on his madness in thus exerting himself. Mrs. Compton meantime was standing before them, contemplating with mournful and compassionate feelings the melancholy change in him. Indignation, contempt, every unkind feeling, must subside before such indisputable tokens of internal misery. She could not suppress the evidence of emotion which glistened in her eyes, and turned away to recover her composure and command her countenance.

“Mr. Mansfield,” said she again, when Cecil appeared in a state to be addressed, “it seems to me that you are very little in a state to undergo additional excitement; let me advise that the interview with the little girl be delayed for the present. Shall I return tomorrow?”

“I shall be no better tomorrow,” replied he sadly, “and I have no time to spare; it was only a temporary attack, and the greatest kindness you can show me, is to bring my daughter to me at once. I am quite equal to it.”

“But are you prepared to restrain your feelings — your parental feelings? the word *daughter* must not pass your lips in her hearing; you are to claim no peculiar right in her. I stand here as guardian of Fanny’s character and honor in her child’s eyes; and no degree of pity for you shall make me forget what is her due.”

“It is hard, Mrs. Compton, very hard, that I may not testify my love to the only thing left on earth to which I have a claim. You cannot be so unreasonable as to expect me to show no sign of the affection with which my heart overflows towards her — the *link* which still binds me to Fanny herself. Mary is my child!”

“But tell me, Mr. Mansfield, whose fault is this? To what is it owing that you may not claim your child? Was it not your own doing? You cast her off, and now you only experience the consequences!”

“You are harsh, Mrs. Compton; you do not know how I have suffered from that act. You see me now bowed down by the remorse which arises from this very cause — why reproach me again for it?”

“I beg your pardon. I only wished to convince you that it is neither fair nor just that Fanny should in every case be the *sufferer* from your selfish affections. From the beginning of your unfortunate connection, it has been so. When she was mourning for her father — you were indulging in political schemes. When she was prostrate on a sick-bed — you were courting your cousin Laura. When she was hiding in seclusion, after the disgraceful notoriety of the trial — you were indulging in wedding festivities. Now that sorrow and suffering have come around to you — why are you to soothe *your*

affliction, by wounding her once more to the quick? No, I assure you, unless you give me your word of honor that you will conceal this secret completely, I will drive off with the little girl, and you shall not see her for a moment!"

Mrs. Compton spoke with a rapidity and energy which nothing could check. She seemed determined to be heard; and though both Mr. Grant and Cecil tried more than once to arrest her indignant eloquence, it was quite in vain. When, however, she paused for breath, Mr. Grant interposed, and observed that he had not the smallest doubt, but that his friend was as much impressed with the necessity of self-control as Mrs. Compton could desire. He would, therefore, if she permitted, go and fetch the little girl, being assured that the sooner this interview was over the better.

Mrs. Compton did not oppose him, and silence followed his leaving the room; the lady was intently examining the carved mother-of-pearl handle of her parasol; Cecil was turning his eyes anxiously towards the door, and straining his ears for the sound of little Mary's footstep.

In a few moments she appeared, and running up to Mrs. Compton, placed herself by her side. Cecil had started forwards on his sofa, and sat a moment motionless, with his eyes fixed intently on the child, then in silence he held out his hand.

"Go to that gentleman, and speak to him, my dear," said Mrs. Compton to Mary, observing his motion, and perceiving that he was too agitated to speak.

Mary advanced timidly, for there was something in his looks which almost *alarmed* her. She gave him her little hand; he drew her towards him, and stooping, pressed his lips to her forehead; then took her on his knee, and pushing back her bonnet from her face, he gazed on her, as if he would impress every feature on his mind. His total silence, and his strange looks alarmed her; she sat still, for she was too frightened to speak or struggle; for though probably not actually expecting that Cecil would *eat* her, she experienced some uncomfortable suspicions as to his intentions. Profound silence followed for at least five minutes. Mr. Grant had walked away to the window, out of regard to Cecil's feelings; but Mrs. Compton, faithful to her charge, remained attentive to his proceedings, and resolved to prevent any infringement of their agreement. Cecil was smoothing down with his trembling hand the sunny brown hair of his little daughter, and contemplating with the deepest emotion the face, every feature of which reminded him so strongly of her mother. He felt annoyed and irritated with Mrs. Compton for her perseverance in watching him. In spite of her warnings and his promises, he had all along entertained a secret unacknowledged hope that he would have some opportunity of revealing himself to Mary, of claiming her filial love, and making known his overflowing affection. In short, like himself, *he wished to relieve his own feelings at any expense to those of others*, and he thought it very hard that his child should meet him be caressed by him, and finally part from him with the same indifference she would have testified to any other individual.

After a time he recovered the use of his voice sufficiently to say, "She is very like her mother."

Mrs. Compton shook her head upbraidingly.

"Did you know mamma?" said Mary, looking up, and relieved by the sound of his voice from the sort of spell his silent contemplation had created.

"Yes," replied Cecil, "some years ago," resolutely avoiding the sight of Mrs. Compton's warning looks.

"Would you not like to see her again?" asked the child.

"Very much indeed, Mary."

"Did you not love her?" continued she, for she always grew enthusiastic when speaking of her mother. "*Everybody* loves mamma, she is so good and kind."

"Yes," said Cecil, "I loved her very much."

"I love her much better than anything in this world," said Mary, clasping her hands. "There is nobody like her. I love many people, but none like her!"

"Who do you love next best?" asked her father.

The little girl looked at Mrs. Compton, and did not answer.

"That lady?" asked he.

"No, I think not. I think I like *Mr. Linwood* better than anyone, but mamma; though I love Mrs. Compton very, very much. You do not mind my saying so," added she, again fixing her eyes on her friend.

"I, my dear child," ejaculated Mrs. Compton; "oh, no! I think you are quite right to love Mr. Linwood, for next to your mamma he is the best friend you have in this world. I like to see you are grateful for affection and kindness, Mary."

Cecil's brow lowered at these words; he bit his lip, and was thoughtful for some moments, when he began again: "What does Mr. Linwood do to make you love him so much?"

"A great many, many things; I could not tell you half — he is always kind and good, and teaches me, and brings me beautiful books; he works in my garden, and reads to me, and tells me such charming stories; and he calls me his own dear, little girl. I am sure he loves me, and so I love him, and am always glad when he comes, for it makes mamma glad too. There is no one who makes her smile more often, or look so happy as Mr. Linwood. Did you ever see him?"

"Time is passing away, and we must be returning home," interposed Mrs. Compton. "Mamma will be expecting us, Mary!"



“Oh! not yet,” cried Cecil anxiously. “Spare me a little longer time — do not cut short the only gleam of pleasure I have had for months!”

“Well, five minutes more, perhaps.”

“Mary,” said her father softly, “will you take a message from me to your mamma? tell her that I am very ill; that I have come here from the mountains of Norway, to ask for a few words from her — just to see her for once, be it only for five minutes, and then I shall be contented. Will you tell her this?”

“I will try and remember it.”

“And will you *beg* for me, Mary, will you *entreat* her to be kind to one who asks for this great favor, as the only blessing life has left him?”

“Mamma is always kind,” replied the child gravely, “and I have never to *beg* of her; if she thinks it right, she does a thing directly when I ask, but she never lets me ask twice when she has said, *No*. I will tell her as well as I can, what you say; and ask her to let me come again with the answer.”

“Mary, run down and get into the carriage,” said Mrs. Compton hastily.

The child slipped off her father’s knee, and was hastening away, when he caught her, and bestowed on her a shower of passionate kisses. The moment, however, he released his hold, she was off like a shot, to obey Mrs. Compton.

“It is no use, Mr. Mansfield — depend upon it, it is no use to send such messages,” said Mrs. Compton; “the only effect will be to prevent Mary coming to see you again. As to Fanny granting you an interview, it is vain and hopeless to expect it. She is as far removed from desiring as from approving such a meeting.”

“How *hard-hearted* you are, Mrs. Compton. I do not believe this. She never was unkind; and I am convinced, that were she to know how ardently I desire an interview, she would not refuse me. I have a petition to make to her also, for a favor, without which I cannot die happy.”

“Make it then in writing — what should prevent you?”

“No, I cannot commit it to paper, nor can I trust other lips to present it. I must *see* her for the purpose.”

“Then your petition must go unrepresented, for I am certain she will not grant your request.”

“And will you not speak for me — you, who see what I am suffering — to what *remorse* and *regret* have brought me? Have you no pity for me, no consideration, no compassion? I have sinned grievously, but not against you; and yet you are more bitter than she whom I have injured.”

“I am sorry for your sufferings, and would do what I could to relieve them, without doing what is wrong; but whatever compassion and consideration are due to you, still more, I conceive, is due to another; and *no pity for you* shall induce me again to pain her, by introducing this topic. It has given her agony enough already.”

“At least, I may see my *child* again. Mary will return tomorrow?”

“I do not know; I can make no promises of the sort — at present, I must bid you farewell.”

Mrs. Compton withdrew, and when the sound of her carriage wheels had died away in the distance, Cecil, who had been listening to them, raised his head, and exclaimed to his friend:

“Grant, she tells me that I shall not see Fanny again, and I tell you that I will. One interview with her I will have. Let Mrs. Compton say what she pleases, she will find she cannot debar me.”

“Then I think you are wrong, Cecil — quite wrong. You ought to show some regard for her wishes, and not force yourself on her presence in opposition to them. You have cost her enough already.”

“Grant, I expected more *sympathy* from you. Mrs. Compton’s bitterness does not surprise me; but from you, who promised to be my friend, I looked for something different.”

“Mrs. Compton is *harsh*, no doubt, and *severe* in what she says, but she is *just* — there is truth in every word of it; and indeed I think I am most your friend, by representing the same truths to you. You ought not to do as you threaten, and I think you will not.”

“Then you are mistaken, for I will. I do not wish to compromise you with Fanny; nay, I will do all I can for you; I will tell her of your generous devotion, your friendship for me. I will tell her of your present remonstrances; I will influence her feelings in your favor. Will not that please you?”

“I am obliged, but I do not desire your intervention. I have no longer the same hopes, or even wishes, as I confess once existed. I admire and respect her extremely, but these feelings are founded on such a conviction of her perfect sincerity, as forbids me for a moment to encourage my former attachment. Had you seen her this morning, you would have felt the same. Her calmness and self-possession, her self-respect! I shall never forget the impression, but am quite satisfied to acquiesce in her determination not to see me again as a suitor.”

“I am sorry for it, Grant. I would rather have thought otherwise. Are you sure of your own feelings?”

“Perfectly so; and, putting together all that I have seen and heard, I can give a tolerable guess at hers. I would have no chance of success, because, as I told you before, I firmly believe the ground is preoccupied. The daughter’s heart I consider to be a pretty sure index to the mother’s. You heard what the child said?”

“*I hate Frank Linwood!*” cried Cecil, with surprising energy.

“You *hate* him?” exclaimed his friend. “Why, what sort of person he is, I do not of course know; but I cannot imagine that he merits this condemnation.”

“I have hated him long with bitter hatred. He has been the spy and the mischief-maker on all occasions; he has constantly been meddling where he has no business — interfering with Fanny’s concerns and mine; and I firmly believe that he has been from the first attached to her, and planning all along to marry her!”

“You are unreasonable in the highest degree, but I hope it is more the result of bodily ailment than of mental disease. If what you say is true, Mr. Linwood has the merit of *constancy*, which is respectable; and on that very account, I at least would feel inclined to approve her choice.”

“I cannot bear to think of his having the happiness which I have lost! Oh! Grant, if you knew one-half so well as I do, the sweetness and felicity of enjoying Fanny’s love — you would not wonder if it frets me to think of one, who has never been my friend, winning her hand at last.”

“You are exhausted, Cecil, and had better keep quiet. I will resume our reading, and that will compose your nerves. We can finish this letter some other time.”

Cecil was worn out with excitement, and flinging himself on the sofa, he allowed his companion to do as he proposed, while his own mind, wandering far into the regions of the past, the syllables fell on his ear as unheeded as if they had been uttered in an unknown tongue.

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 26

Mrs. Compton, of course, gave a minute account of her interview with Cecil to Fanny on her return. It was a highly-colored one also, for it was impossible for the lady to relate anything which interested her without *tingeing* it with the vivid hues of her own imagination.

Cecil's looks, tones, and feelings, were dwelt on — not with any idea of creating an interest in Fanny's mind, but rather that she might thereby draw a more powerful contrast between his reckless selfishness — and the calm self-control and generous affection of Frank Linwood, who, Margaret maintained, without scruple, loved Fanny as warmly as Cecil did himself, and valued her peace a great deal more.

Fanny listened, sighed, and was almost wholly silent.

What had become of the Cecil, whom she had once loved? His character appeared so altered and so deteriorated, she could scarcely believe him to be the same individual; yet, after all, it was only the *natural effect of those seeds of self-indulgence* which had been sown in early youth, which had grown unchecked in manhood, which now produced so abundant and so baneful a harvest of evil passions, disastrous to his happiness and well-being.

Two days passed away, and Mrs. Compton's visit was drawing to a close, she was daily expecting the news of her husband's movements, which alone was necessary to decide her own; and in the expectation of soon leaving Devonshire, she had gone down this afternoon to say farewell to the clergyman, for whom she entertained a strong partiality.

Fanny was sitting alone in her drawing-room writing, when a shadow fell across the open window, and looking up she saw *Cecil Mansfield* standing on the threshold of her room. She knew him instantly, in spite of the changes wrought by sickness and sorrow, but she felt so much on again seeing him, that words would not come at her bidding to express those feelings. She only sat with her pen suspended, earnestly gazing on the figure before her, as if she doubted its reality, or could not believe the evidence of her eyes!

His appearance and countenance betrayed strong internal emotion; he *trembled* visibly, and seemed holding by the window-frame for support, as if unable to proceed another step alone.

"Mr. Mansfield," at length she said, in a reproachful tone, "why this intrusion? I cannot bid you enter, and be welcome."

"Yes, Fanny, it is I," replied he, heedless of her words, and making an effort as he spoke, he reached and sank into a chair by her side, breathless and exhausted.

She arose, and retreating a step, she said gravely and calmly: "Mr. Mansfield, I have refused to see you, and you could have no doubt as to my wishes and views. It is neither generous nor gentlemanlike to *force yourself on my seclusion*, and compel me to a painful interview."

"Fanny," said he, "forgive, and listen to me."

"I will not — you may rest here until you have recovered your strength, but I will not remain in the room with you."

"Fanny, I entreat, I implore you to hear me! I have a *request* to make to you of the greatest importance to myself — to my child — to you — a request which I will not trust to other lips."

She hesitated, but though apparently inclined to leave him, she yet remained.

"It is for your daughter's sake, for my Mary, that I ask it, in her name that I implore you to listen to me, for her sake that I have made the exertion to come here; and if you refuse to hear me, you will not only add bitterness to my already bitter cup, but you yourself will be a subject of repentance. Hear me!"

"Well, then be brief; it is painful to *hear* you — painful to *see* you; what you have to say, say quickly. We ought never to have met — do not prolong the meeting now."

"Then sit down, Fanny — do you suppose I can talk to you while you stand, as if about to run away?"

She sat down in silence on the opposite side of the table, looking impenetrably grave, and most discouragingly reserved. Silence followed the movement, for he, with his eyes fixed on her, sat, lost in painful reverie, until she roused him by saying: "Well, Mr. Mansfield, I am waiting to hear your request."

He startled at the sound of her voice, and answered hurriedly: "Pardon me, I was thinking of the past, of the time when we were — but no matter now, that time is gone forever! Oh! Fanny, Fanny, have you no feeling, no memory left? Can you look so coldly unconcerned, while my heart is breaking with incessant regret? Do you feel none for the fatal events of the last three years?"

"None! My regrets extend farther back than yours — for the error of my youth, our temporary union, I feel deep repentance; but for our present separation, none at all. I believe it is both right and for the best."

"I had not thought you so unfeeling. I cannot forget the affection which was so dear to me; and the *decree of an arbitrary law* can make no difference to my heart."

"Mr. Mansfield," said Fanny indignantly, "you *insult* me by such language; you, the husband of another woman, to dare in my own house to address me thus, to speak as if in the past you too had been an involuntary sufferer; do you

suppose me ignorant of the events which have occurred since our separation, or that I can forget that you have a living wife? I will not stay and listen to you!"

"Pity me! You talk of my wife — do you not know she has deserted me — fled with another man? She has broken the matrimonial tie, and if I live long enough to complete it, she will no longer have the shadow of a claim on me. Oh! Fanny, what that woman has made me suffer. It was *her fatal allurements* which beguiled me from my better feelings, my more worthy purposes; which induced me, under the strange fascination she exerted over me, to rend asunder the only ties in which I found happiness; and when she had succeeded in her insidious purposes, when she had divided me forever from you and my child, then she showed at once by her own *unprincipled conduct* that selfish interest and not love, had been her ruling motive; that she had never cared for me, or considered me in any way but as the instrument in her hands by which to secure her possession of my property. But she will be deeply and bitterly disappointed. Her father's legacy — you know what that is — will at once annihilate her hopes of possession; my property is secure, and even if her child lives not, she at least will never inherit one acre of the land she so much coveted."

He paused for breath, and Fanny observed calmly: "All this seems to me nothing at all to the purpose. If you really have a request to make — then let me hear it; if not, I must decline any further conference."

"But I have one indeed, and what I say is only the preface to this very request. You know Laura left behind her a daughter, which is called my child; her conduct has been so scandalous, that I cannot but suspect its claim on me; but though this makes the presence of the infant to me quite intolerable, I do not wish to injure the poor child, and it is only to you that I will mention the subject.

"This girl will be my heir, and if she lives will be the owner of my mansion — the *Brookensha* where we were once so happy. To save her from her mother's control, and make her worthy, if possible, of the name she is to bear, is the only wish I have formed respecting her — and it is for *her* I ask. Will you be the *guardian* of that child? — will you fill towards her a mother's place when I am gone?"

He paused for an answer, and Fanny, taken by surprise, hesitated what to reply. She did not like to engage without some consideration, in so heavy a responsibility, the extent of which at that moment she could not clearly see. He watched her attentively for some short space, then exclaimed impatiently:

"Why do you not answer? Surely you will not refuse this request? I have no other *friend* to whom I can entrust such a charge, and if you refuse it, the poor child will be left to the mercy of strangers, and will tread in the steps of her mother and grandmother."

"I cannot answer without reflection; I must consider what such a tie involves — to what I bind myself; and whether it is consistent with other duties — with the good of my own daughter."

"Can you doubt it? they are nearly related, and should learn to love one another; they will be of mutual advantage, Mary will be as a model for the other; and the allowance which will be paid for the board and education of the orphan heiress of Brookensha, will allow you to live in a manner more consonant with your former custom. Say you will accede to my request?"

"I will *consider* it."

"Oh, Fanny, I implore you to grant me this one request before I die — by the love you bear to your daughter — by every motive of charity and mercy — by the memory of all the former ties between us — become a mother to the child; take her, treat her as you do your own, save her from the evil indulgence which has been my ruin; and when she reaches womanhood, let her be as little like her real mother, and as nearly resembling her adopted parent, as it is possible to make her. Were you to be taken from your Mary," continued he with increased energy, seeing she still doubted, "would you feel no anxiety for her future home, no wish to secure her a competent guardian? And will you not do so for this deserted one?"

"I will," replied she solemnly.

"Thank you — oh! a thousand blessings on you, ever kindest, dearest Fanny!" exclaimed he starting up, and catching her hand with enthusiastic tenderness, "I knew you would *pity* me."

"You had better sit down again," said she, coldly withdrawing her hand. "I must ask a few more questions, and settle a few more particulars relative to the promise I have just made; but you engaged that our interview should be brief, and excitement of feeling is hurtful to you."

Cecil seated himself again, but it was in a chair beside her, and leaning on the table, he sat with his dark eager eyes, burning with a fever light, earnestly fixed on her, as she pursued the conversation. She wished to know what he required for his child, what control she was to have over her fortune, in what way she was to be educated, and where? for she could not undertake to live at Brookensha, that was a thing perfectly out of the question.

He desired nothing that was unpleasant to her, asked for nothing which would not be of equal advantage to both the children. The care of her fortune, the control of her estates, all the financial anxieties and troubles — were to be left in other hands, she was to have only the personal guardianship of the orphan, and the provision for her maintenance was

sufficiently ample to allow her to live in a style far more suited to her former habits than Fanny's limited income at present permitted.

It was his earnest wish that the sisters might be treated in every respect alike, so far as the advantages of education were concerned. "Am I not equally interested in providing for Mary's good as yourself Fanny? Is not her improvement far dearer to me, than that of this infant, whose sight produces nothing but odious impressions? It is because I know no other way of benefiting her so effectually, that I am so eager to carry out this plan. It may be done without revealing their connection, or producing any unpleasant discoveries: call their relationship by any name you please, *cousins* if you will, I care not; but let me have the satisfaction of thinking that I have thus ensured to my *undoubted daughter* the same situation in society, the same comforts of independence, and the same benefits from superior tuition, as the child who bears my name. Let the *daughter's* portion go to replace the rights of which the *mother* robbed you; and let your own income be allowed to accumulate for the next twenty years, that at last they may be placed on a more equal footing in the world. Do you consent?"

"I consent, Mr. Mansfield, to take charge of your daughter, to educate her in the way I think most conducive to her happiness, without entrenching on the duty owing to my own child. As to financial arrangements, leave me an unrestrained mistress, and I will strive to do equal justice to them both. Will you *trust* me?"

"Trust you, Fanny! you know I think higher of you than of any other human being, and that there is not a situation or circumstance in which I do not feel convinced you will do your duty with a steadiness and firmness such as no other woman ever displayed."

He then detailed arrangements he had made to repair his long continued injustice in retaining her own portion, to repay which, he had ordered a sale of the valuable furniture, pictures, etc. at Brookensha, including his late uncle's legacy. Fanny listened, and replied:

"Then this is settled; any *particular directions* you can give me in writing. You will of course take care that all the arrangements are made in a correct and formal manner; and now, this being concluded, have you anything more to say?"

"Fanny, you have ever acted towards me as an angel, and I have been to you a wretch, an ungrateful madman. Can you really *forgive* me?"

"I have already told you that I do; I will not gainsay the words that I have written."

"Ah! but let me hear them from your own mouth; let me once, if only once, hear you repeat, 'Cecil, I forgive you.'"

"I do freely, fully, and entirely forgive you, as I hope myself for forgiveness. Now cease this subject, I entreat you."

"Nay, if you forgive me, give me your hand; let me again for a moment clasp that hand which once was all my own."

"I will not," said she decidedly, drawing back her chair as she spoke, and looking reproachfully at him. "My *forgiveness* you have, but the remembrance of the past to which you allude, places between us an insuperable barrier, which makes meeting improper, and familiarity a crime! Let me again entreat you to leave me."

"Stay, Fanny, I have a little more to say. My friend Grant, you knew him formerly," said Cecil, hesitating, yet anxious, if possible, to probe her feelings, and using his name as a cover to introduce the subject; he felt an unconquerable jealousy of Frank Linwood. He continued: "He told me what had passed between you, why did you not listen to his suit, he is a very excellent fellow?"

"Possibly, but I had *no heart* to bestow on him when he asked for it, *my affections had been withered up in the misery* I had so recently endured, and I could not then listen to matrimonial proposals."

"Then," repeated Cecil, watching her attentively, "but now, were he to address you now, would you listen perhaps with more favor?"

"No, do not tempt him with such an idea; if he has engaged you to plead his cause, tell him that his hopes are as vain now as on the day when he first made them known to me."

"Would you not be happier under the shelter of a husband's care?" inquired he.

"I do not know."

"Have you never considered the subject?"

"Why do you ask these questions, Mr. Mansfield?" said she, with a crimsoning cheek; "you have no interest, no right, to inquire into my own feelings or thoughts on the subject."

"You are wrong, Fanny; the law itself has given me a *brother's* right to ask. I may claim some interest in you, surely, by virtue of a title that has cost me, at least, so dear. If you are my sister, as they say, speak to me as a sister, and tell me — have you firmly resolved against all matrimonial engagements?"

He looked earnestly at her as he spoke, and his whole air and tone at once evinced the importance which he attached to the question.

"Whatever right you may claim to make these inquiries, Mr. Mansfield," replied she quietly, "I have at least an equal right to decide whether or not I will answer them, and I do not choose to do so!"

“Then I shall conclude from your silence, Fanny, that you have formed some *engagement* which you do not wish to own,” said Cecil, with a darkening brow. “Perhaps, after all, the report which has reached me, that *Frank Linwood* is a more successful candidate for your favor than Mr. Grant, may have more foundation in truth than I supposed.”

Her color deepened; but she raised her head, and said with a steady voice:

“And were this the case, what right have *you* to question or impugn my proceedings?”

“It certainly accounts for the extraordinary interest which he took in the matter while the case was being tried, and also for the energy with which he supported your claims to money which he intended eventually to share with you,” continued Cecil, without attending to her last words.

She rose indignantly from her chair, and replied:

“I will not listen to *insinuations* which are a far greater disgrace to him who dares to utter them — than to the generous and excellent man against whom they are leveled. I will not disgrace myself either by any attempts at justification. Farewell, Cecil, we shall never, perhaps, meet again upon this earth; but I would gladly hope that we might meet there, where there is no more marrying nor mourning, where neither slander nor sorrow will ever be heard. Farewell!”

Cecil arose also, and placing himself before her, caught and clasped her hand in his own, exclaiming:

“Do not leave me in anger, Fanny,” when the door was thrown open by the housemaid, who ushered in Mr. Compton and Mr. Linwood.

Very deep feeling will produce some result; and even the utmost polish of manner will occasionally fail, the under surface of passion becoming conspicuous through the usually smooth exterior. At least it was so at this moment, for surprise, indignation, shame, jealousy, alarm, even hatred, were at work in the different bosoms, and showing themselves more or less in their several features.

Mr. Compton was, perhaps, the most composed; he only felt that he was an *intruder*, and was yet unwilling to show this feeling, lest he should thereby give offence to Fanny. Astonishment was his prevailing emotion, as Cecil was about the last person in the world he would have expected to encounter there, an astonishment which would have instantly betrayed itself had he spoken; he therefore did not venture to open his lips.

Cecil’s feelings, as his eyes fell on the man of whom he had just been speaking, were a bitter compound of hatred and jealousy, accompanied by an emotion of something very like pleasure, as the thought darted through his mind, that to have been found by him in such a situation, no witness by, and Fanny’s hand in his, might, perhaps, give to Frank Linwood some portion of the sensation of *jealousy* which tormented himself.

As to the other two, their emotions were of far too complicated a nature to be at all within my powers of description. Whether Frank’s unshaken and immovable faith in the correctness of Fanny’s conduct, and the high tone of her principles would not receive a severe blow by meeting her in such a situation — or whether it was still sufficient to triumph over all doubtful appearances, was not exactly evident; he was too good a lawyer to betray his feelings by his face, and as he, like the others, stood perfectly silent, there was little to draw deductions from, without a very close observation, except the fact of his standing as still as a statue, instead of advancing to greet Fanny. She herself stood with a crimsoning cheek, and did look very much embarrassed and perplexed.

[Table Of Contents](#)

## Chapter 27

The profound silence which was so excessively unpleasant, was not, however, of long duration, though it appeared so to the individuals concerned. Before the two intruders had advanced another step into the room, hasty feet were heard approaching the window, and together *Mrs. Compton* and *Mr. Grant* made their appearance. The gentleman looked hurried and annoyed, the lady appeared a little curious and excited; both were surprised at the group they discovered in the drawing-room, though *Mr. Grant* did not give the circumstance more than a moment's consideration. With a brief and hasty salutation he passed *Fanny*, and turning to *Cecil*, he said in a tone of serious remonstrance:

"How can you be so mad, my dear friend? I hurried after you as soon as I discovered your absence, for in your state of health I am sure this exertion is most dangerous; let me persuade you to return, the carriage is still at the gate. Do come."

*Cecil* who during the whole of this interview had been interrupted by violent fits of coughing, now, on attempting to answer, was again seized with a painful attack, and so completely exhausted that when quiet enough again to move, he allowed his friend to lead him away, without resistance or remonstrance.

When he was gone, *Mrs. Compton*, who during the last two or three minutes had been conversing aside with her husband, turned to *Fanny*, and exclaimed:

"So he came after all!"

*Fanny* startled from a profound reverie at these words, and answered without exactly understanding who she meant:

"Yes, with your husband."

*Mrs. Compton* glanced at her, at *Frank Linwood*, who was attentively examining a picture over the chimney-piece; and then at her own husband, with a sort of suppressed smile; however, she added, gravely enough a moment after:

"If I had known you would have so many visitors, I would have stayed to assist and support you, *Fanny*."

"I am sure I wish you had, *Margaret*; you would have saved me from a very painful surprise," replied *Fanny*, beginning to recover her faculties and recollection.

"I hope those words are applicable to my husband *Edward's* intrusion," said *Mrs. Compton*: "he had no business to come down without notice in this way. I will not countenance him in it."

"Not without notice, *Margaret*, surely," replied her husband. "I am ready to make all proper apologies to *Mrs. Ellis* for thus intruding; but I deny that it was my fault if it is without notice, unless indeed you did not get a letter from me yesterday."

"I did, but you said nothing about coming in your letter, I am sure," said the wife.

It appeared, however, on a reference being made to the said letter, that there was a *postscript* which she had not noticed, to the effect that he would be with them on that day, and hoped to bring a *friend* with him. *Margaret* was obliged to own the fault was in her own heedlessness, and to acquit her husband of all blame in the transaction, except putting such news in a *P.S.* As, however, she said she had her own plans to discuss with him, she drew him out upon the lawn, where she extracted from him a minute account of the brief period which had intervened between his own arrival, and her entrance in company with *Mr. Grant*.

*Fanny* and *Frank* were left together in the drawing-room; as yet they had not exchanged a sentence, but she had recovered her self-possession now, and turned courteously and kindly towards him.

"I have been so *ungracious* as not to bid you welcome here," said she, trying to smile; "but, I assure you, I am *very glad* to see you," she stopped and blushed with a sort of conscious look, which *Frank* could not have misunderstood, had he raised his eyes from the ground. He did not, however, look up in time to catch the expression, when he slowly answered: "I am much obliged to you," and then relapsed into his former silent consideration of the carpet. She inquired for his family — where and when had he left them, and how they fared.

His answers were given in the same cold, reluctant tone, very unlike his usual self — at least unlike anything she had ever seen in him. Remembering the last letter she had received from him, which had surprised her so very much, she began to think that his present style of conversation was a continuation of the same feelings and tone, and again the idea occurred to her, that he had ceased to entertain any peculiar friendship for her, or had transferred his regard to some other person. She was, however, determined, look as he might, and speak as he would — that she would at least justify herself from blame in having allowed or encouraged *Cecil's* visit, for she could not help attributing some degree of his present reserve and stiffness, to dissatisfaction at the interview which he had interrupted.

She therefore, after a moment's consideration, said: "I wish you and *Mr. Compton* had arrived half an hour earlier, you would have saved me from a great many painful sensations."

"Indeed," was his rather discouraging reply.

"Yes, I would have escaped this most unwelcome interview with *Mr. Mansfield*; I have seldom, at least lately, been more distressed."



“I would not have supposed that you would require Mr. Compton to come all the way from London to protect you from unwelcome visitors here. In your own home, you surely have the option of receiving or rejecting whom you please,” answered he, with an incredulous look.

“In this instance, I certainly had not; Mr. Mansfield entered without ceremony, and took me by surprise,” replied Fanny, annoyed by his manner.

“Leaving you without the option of remaining in the room with him or not?” said Frank significantly.

She colored again deeply at this suggestion, and was silent for several minutes; then she said, “I concluded you would be surprised at seeing him here with me.”

“No,” said Frank, “the last letter with which you favored me testified so much concern on his account, that I naturally concluded you had some business to transact together;” finishing his sentence hastily, as if he had changed his mind while speaking, and not ended as he had at first proposed.

“The business was all on his side,” said Fanny, determined on not noticing Frank’s capricious manner: “he certainly had a request to make — a request which may perhaps surprise you, as much as it did me; but you have been so much interested in my affairs, that I shall not apologize for mentioning it.”

He looked at her, and met her dark blue eyes turned on him with their peculiar look of *purity* and *trust* — that look which he never could withstand; his own countenance softened immediately.

“Ah! you will listen to me like yourself now,” said she gently, observing the change, and rather thinking out loud than addressing him. “He wants me to take charge of, and educate his child — the heiress of Brookensha — along with mine, in case I survive him; and he is so dreadfully ill, that he does not look as if he could live long.”

“And have you promised, Fanny?” said Frank eagerly.

“Yes — I was unwilling at first, but I could not refuse a dying father — do you think me wrong?”

“Wrong! — I think you, as I have always done, the best and sweetest among women,” exclaimed he enthusiastically, and taking her hand as he spoke. “How few are there who would undertake so much for the daughter of — a rival,” continued he, lowering his voice, pronouncing the last word in a whisper, and relinquishing her hand, as suddenly as he had taken it.

“I never think of her as a *rival*,” said Fanny; “that feeling has gone entirely; the love which could have prompted it is extinct: it vanished when *esteem* died away. Yes, Frank, I will say so to you, though it is a subject on which I do not love to speak; but I acknowledge it to you. Duty claimed from me that the passion should be subdued; and *reflection*, showing me Cecil’s character and conduct in its true colors — made it less difficult than it would otherwise have been. I deserve no merit on the ground you mention, in consenting to adopt his child. Mrs. Laura Mansfield was not considered by me in making such a promise.”

Frank again took her hand, and silently, but with a look which could not be misunderstood, he pressed his lips upon it. In silence, too, she drew it away — in silence, but not in anger — though she colored deeply as she turned and moved towards the window. Not a word was spoken by either for some minutes, and yet each was so busy thinking, that neither was aware of the period which had elapsed before they spoke again.

Frank’s subjects of consideration were far more agreeable than they had been during the first pause, when the Comptons had left the room. He was pondering whether at that moment he should press his suit again, or whether he should wait until the release from all scruples of feeling or imagination on her part, which the failing state of Cecil’s health seemed to predict. He adopted the latter course, and joining her again at the window, he entered into the subject of the *new charge* she had undertaken with the warmth of a friend, unmixed with any symptoms of a stronger sentiment. He had much to ask concerning it, and some suggestions to make, which proved the attention that he bestowed on the subject, and the consideration with which he regarded both the comfort of Fanny and the interest of her little daughter.

They were conversing in a very amicable and friendly tone, when the others returned to the room; and Mrs. Compton’s penetrating glance quickly ascertained that peace, if not an entire and permanent understanding, was *established* between them. She speedily took care to inform Frank of the whole history of Cecil’s visit to Devonshire, in company with his friend, Mr. Grant, whom Mr. Linwood had so little noticed on this occasion, that he did not recognize in him the individual whom he had formerly seen in conversation with Fanny at Bradley.

Mr. Compton had come down to fetch away his wife, intending to remove her the next day; but the lady was willful, and supported by her hostess’s evident wishes, she was not to be moved away. She would not, and ought not to forsake Fanny, so long as she was in danger of invasion from the same quarter as that from which she had been harassed today. Her husband was obliged to submit, and being seriously assured by Fanny, that she would consider the prolonged presence of her friend as a very great favor, and his own as an additional pleasure, it was finally arranged in the way that Mrs. Compton proposed.

It did not require a very great degree of pressing to persuade Frank Linwood to give them another day or two, but he was not the master of his own time sufficiently to enable him to extend his visit to the length for which Mrs. Compton petitioned.



Business could not be put off. Mrs. Compton's observation, that he who *sacrificed duty to pleasure* — deserved to lose the one and fail in the other, made him firm to his purpose, notwithstanding his inclination, and he heroically resolved to return to London in two days, even though he left Cecil Mansfield within a mile of Fanny's house.

His fortitude, however, was not so greatly tried. The next day, an answer to an inquiry, on the part of the Comptons, relative to Mr. Mansfield's health, brought a short note from Mr. Grant, stating that, though very much worse, he was resolved to return to Brookensha; and they were on the eve of starting when he wrote. Margaret was very sorry for this discovery, for she had now no further excuse for remaining in Devonshire; and as her husband really wished to get home, they at last resolved to set off for the north the following day.

My tale is hastening to a conclusion; nor need I dwell long on the few events which remain to be related. Within six weeks after Cecil's return to Brookensha, a long and *somber funeral* procession might be seen descending from his house, and winding through the magnificent park towards the little village church. Some of the neighboring gentry, and all his principal tenantry were united to follow to the grave, the mortal remains of the once popular, admired, and envied owner of Brookensha. There were many there who wore the garb of mourners, but in all the crowd who assembled to hear the solemn service read over the corpse, and to watch the coffin lowered into the dark family vault, where reposed his ancestors for many generations — there was not one who could claim kindred ties with him — not one in whose veins flowed the *proud blood of the Mansfields*.

The sole representative of that ancient house was an *infant*, unconscious of her loss; and even she, the heiress of Brookensha, was not there. The place of chief mourner was filled by one who, a year before, had never seen the deceased — but he was one who, by his indefatigable attentions and unselfish kindness, had fairly earned the title to be called his dearest friend. This was *Mr. Grant*, of Bradley.

The venerable Rev. Hughes was also a true mourner. In spite of his feeble health, he exerted himself this day to perform the last service to the memory of one whom, in that very building, he had held at the baptismal font, united to his first wife, and whom he now consigned to the last earthly abode alike of human greatness and littleness, of worldly hopes and fears, of temporal happiness and misery.

The autumnal sun shone through the stained windows — memorials of different members of his family — and fell in varied and chequered beams upon the pavement, but even the sunbeams looked cold and wan and sickly that day, and appeared as if wasting their strength and brightness, in trying to light up to cheerfulness what would take nothing but gloomy tints. It was a *dreary termination to a sadly wasted life*, and deeply did Rev. Hughes mentally moralize over fortune, station, talents, affections, influence unemployed, or employed only to a bad and miserable purpose.

And if my pen lingers over this scene, it is not that I delight to dwell on images of gloom, but that were I to veil this dreary prospect, and hasten on to the bright passages of life, I would be false to the truth, false to the very object which I have proposed to myself.

That *life wears one unmingled and unchanging hue of happiness* cannot, I imagine, be maintained by many who have walked thirty years in this world; but it is seldom that it is all tinged with gloom, unless where there is *evil and remorse* to blacken it.

But the tomb has closed upon him, and his memory fades away from the place which once knew him, but now knows him no more. Let us hope it has done some good, taught some important lesson, warned some rash follower of his youthful passions — that at last these passions will, like a serpent, sting their victim even to death!

Cecil's wretched wife Laura never returned to England, a sudden fever terminated her guilty course, and her name was speedily forgotten.

How soon it was after these catastrophes that Fanny became the *wife of Frank Linwood* need not be exactly recorded. It was not during the year which saw Cecil laid in the tomb.

The little orphan heiress was immediately received under her protection, and in consequence of some changes in her immediate neighborhood, Fanny was not sorry to give up her Devonshire cottage, and take a pleasant house and beautiful garden not many miles from London. The liberal arrangements which Cecil had made for the support of his daughter, rendered this change a proper one, and she believed herself only following out the father's wishes in placing both his children under circumstances, where they would enjoy every advantage which their station would require.

That Frank Linwood was very urgent on the propriety of removing to the vicinity of London, can hardly be doubted; perhaps he would have been so had he been perfectly unselfish and unprejudiced — had he not felt it an inestimable advantage to have Fanny within an easy distance of the spot where he was constrained to spend so much of his time. Be this as it may, he was zealous in discovering and securing for her such an abode as was suited to her wishes, and here he often visited her, until such time as she was pleased at last to reward his *constancy* by installing him as master of her elegant mansion.

That love ever again wore to her the enchanting colors which it had once assumed, I dare not say. A *strong moral shock*, such as she had experienced, acts on the mind as an *earthquake* is said to do. The feeling of *security* and *thoughtless enjoyment* with which we once walked about, is gone; we have seen every object, even the most solid, tremble

around us, the very earth which was to our minds an emblem of stability — has heaved and rocked beneath our feet; to what then can we cling for support and shelter?

Happy they who can raise their minds above the ruin around them, and anticipate those regions where weakness and instability exist no more; who can feel that while this world passes away with all the things which belong to it, the eternal world on which their hopes are centered is every day becoming nearer and clearer to their mental vision; and that the perishing of each earthly charm — is but the withdrawal of another fold of that thick curtain which hides it from their view.

Fanny's views of life were sobered, but neither her heart nor her countenance were gloomy. Her friends, when they visited *Mrs. Frank Linwood*, could scarcely see any trace of the misery she had once suffered, except it was testified by *her uncommon sympathy for misery of every kind, and her skill in administering consolation*. Her family grew up around her flourishing and fair. Frank Linwood's three boys harmonizing wonderfully well with the two elder girls. Mary continues the especial pet and favorite of Mr. Grant, whose *admiration* for the mother has subsided into *friendship*, but who still entertains a peculiar partiality for her charming daughter.

Under the tuition of such a preceptress and guardian, and surrounded by all that watchful love can suggest — it is to be hoped that the heiress will grow up with the virtues of her companions, and that the memory of the mother whom she has never seen, may not be recalled by the disposition or the fate of the daughter.

In short, there is no happier family than Fanny's home presents; nor do I believe Fanny finds any reason to regret the tenderness with which she now rewards Frank Linwood's unchanging esteem and unvarying attachment, nor the generosity with which she granted Cecil's request in taking charge of the real heiress of Brookensha.

THE END.

[Table Of Contents](#)