


Chapter X

 quarter of an hour, twenty minutes, passed away, and Fanny was still thinking of Edmund, Miss Crawford, and herself, without interruption from any one. She began to be surprised at being left so long, and to listen with an anxious desire of hearing their steps and their voices again. She listened, and at length she heard; she heard voices and feet approaching; but she had just satisfied herself that it was not those she wanted, when Miss Bertram, Mr Rushworth, and Mr Crawford issued from the same path which she had trod herself, and were before her.

'Miss Price all alone' and 'My dear Fanny, how comes this?' were the first salutations. She told her story. 'Poor dear Fanny,' cried her cousin, 'how ill you have been used by them! You had better have straid with us.'

Then seating herself with a gentleman on each side, she resumed the conversation which had engaged them before, and discussed the possibility of improvements with much animation. Nothing was fixed on; but Henry Crawford was full of ideas and projects, and, generally speaking, whatever he proposed was immediately approved, first by her, and then by Mr Rushworth, whose principal business seemed to be to hear the others, and who scarcely risked an original thought of his own beyond a wish that they had seen his friend Smith's place.

After some minutes spent in this way, Miss Bertram, observing the iron gate, expressed a wish of passing through it into the park, that their views and their plans might be more comprehensive. It was the very thing of all others to be wished, it was the best, it was the only way of proceeding with any advantage, in Henry Crawford's opinion; and he directly saw a knoll not half a mile off, which would give them exactly the requisite command of the house. Go therefore they must to that knoll, and through that gate; but the gate was locked. Mr Rushworth wished he had brought the

key; he had been very near thinking whether he should not bring the key; he was determined he would never come without the key again; but still this did not remove the present evil. They could not get through; and as Miss Bertram's inclination for so doing did by no means lessen, it ended in Mr Rushworth's declaring outright that he would go and fetch the key. He set off accordingly.

'It is undoubtedly the best thing we can do now, as we are so far from the house already,' said Mr Crawford, when he was gone.

'Yes, there is nothing else to be done. But now, sincerely, do not you find the place altogether worse than you expected?'

'No, indeed, far otherwise. I find it better, grander, more complete in its style, though that style may not be the best. And to tell you the truth,' speaking rather lower, 'I do not think that I shall ever see Sotherton again with so much pleasure as I do now. Another summer will hardly improve it to me.'

After a moment's embarrassment the lady replied, 'You are too much a man of the world not to see with the eyes of the world. If other people think Sotherton improved, I have no doubt that you will.'

'I am afraid I am not quite so much the man of the world as might be good for me in some points. My feelings are not quite so evanescent, nor my memory of the past under such easy dominion as one finds to be the case with men of the world.'

This was followed by a short silence. Miss Bertram began again. 'You seemed to enjoy your drive here very much this morning. I was glad to see you so well entertained. You and Julia were laughing the whole way.'

'Were we? Yes, I believe we were; but I have not the least recollection at what. Oh! I believe I was relating to her some ridiculous stories of an old Irish groom of my uncle's. Your sister loves to laugh.'

'You think her more light-hearted than I am?'

'More easily amused,' he replied; 'consequently, you know,' smiling, 'better company. I could not have hoped to entertain you with Irish anecdotes during a ten miles' drive.'

'Naturally, I believe, I am as lively as Julia, but I have more to think of now.'

another, straining one's eyes and one's attention, hearing what one does not understand, admiring what one does not care for. It is generally allowed to be the greatest bore in the world, and Miss Price has found it so, though she did not know it.'

'I shall soon be rested,' said Fanny; 'to sit in the shade on a fine day, and look upon verdure, is the most perfect refreshment.'

After sitting a little while Miss Crawford was up again. 'I must move,' said she; 'resting fatigues me. I have looked across the ha-ha till I am weary. I must go and look through that iron grate at the same view, without being able to see it so well.'

Edmund left the seat likewise. 'Now, Miss Crawford, if you will look up the walk, you will convince yourself that it cannot be half a mile long, or half half a mile.'

'It is an immense distance,' said she; 'I see *that* with a glance.'

He still reasoned with her, but in vain. She would not calculate, she would not compare. She would only smile and assert. The greatest degree of rational consistency could not have been more engaging, and they talked with mutual satisfaction. At last it was agreed that they should endeavour to determine the dimensions of the wood by walking a little more about it. They would go to one end of it, in the line they were then in—for there was a straight green walk along the bottom by the side of the ha-ha—and perhaps turn a little way in some other direction, if it seemed likely to assist them, and be back in a few minutes. Fanny said she was rested, and would have moved too, but this was not suffered. Edmund urged her remaining where she was with an earnestness which she could not resist, and she was left on the bench to think with pleasure of her cousin's care, but with great regret that she was not stronger. She watched them till they had turned the corner, and listened till all sound of them had ceased.

'I am really not tired, which I almost wonder at; for we must have walked at least a mile in this wood. Do not you think we have?'

'Not half a mile,' was his sturdy answer; for he was not yet so much in love as to measure distance, or reckon time, with feminine lawlessness.

'Oh! you do not consider how much we have wound about. We have taken such a very serpentine course, and the wood itself must be half a mile long in a straight line, for we have never seen the end of it yet since we left the first great path.'

'But if you remember, before we left that first great path, we saw directly to the end of it. We looked down the whole vista, and saw it closed by iron gates, and it could not have been more than a furlong in length.'

'Oh! I know nothing of your furlongs, but I am sure it is a very long wood, and that we have been winding in and out ever since we came into it; and therefore, when I say that we have walked a mile in it, I must speak within compass.'

'We have been exactly a quarter of an hour here,' said Edmund, taking out his watch. 'Do you think we are walking four miles an hour?'

'Oh! do not attack me with your watch. A watch is always too fast or too slow. I cannot be dictated to by a watch.'

A few steps farther brought them out at the bottom of the very walk they had been talking of, and standing back, well shaded and sheltered, and looking over a ha-ha into the park, was a comfortable-sized bench, on which they all sat down.

'I am afraid you are very tired, Fanny,' said Edmund, observing her; 'why would not you speak sooner? This will be a bad day's amusement for you if you are to be knocked up. Every sort of exercise fatigues her so soon, Miss Crawford, except riding.'

'How abominable in you, then, to let me engross her horse as I did all last week! I am ashamed of you and of myself, but it shall never happen again.'

'Your attentiveness and consideration makes me more sensible of my own neglect. Fanny's interest seems in safer hands with you than with me.'

'That she should be tired now, however, gives me no surprise; for there is nothing in the course of one's duties so fatiguing as what we have been doing this morning: seeing a great house, dawdling from one room to

'You have, undoubtedly; and there are situations in which very high spirits would denote insensibility. Your prospects, however, are too fair to justify want of spirits. You have a very smiling scene before you.'

'Do you mean literally or figuratively? Literally, I conclude. Yes, certainly, the sun shines, and the park looks very cheerful. But unluckily that iron gate, that ha-ha, give me a feeling of restraint and hardship. "I cannot get out," as the starling said.' As she spoke, and it was with expression, she walked to the gate: he followed her. 'Mr Rushworth is so long fetching this key!'

'And for the world you would not get out without the key and without Mr Rushworth's authority and protection, or I think you might with little difficulty pass round the edge of the gate, here, with my assistance; I think it might be done, if you really wished to be more at large, and could allow yourself to think it not prohibited.'

'Prohibited! nonsense! I certainly can get out that way, and I will. Mr Rushworth will be here in a moment, you know; we shall not be out of sight.'

'Or if we are, Miss Price will be so good as to tell him that he will find us near that knoll: the grove of oak on the knoll.'

Fanny, feeling all this to be wrong, could not help making an effort to prevent it. 'You will hurt yourself, Miss Bertram,' she cried; 'you will certainly hurt yourself against those spikes; you will tear your gown; you will be in danger of slipping into the ha-ha. You had better not go.'

Her cousin was safe on the other side while these words were spoken, and, smiling with all the good-humour of success, she said, 'Thank you, my dear Fanny, but I and my gown are alive and well, and so good-bye.'

Fanny was again left to her solitude, and with no increase of pleasant feelings, for she was sorry for almost all that she had seen and heard, astonished at Miss Bertram, and angry with Mr Crawford. By taking a circuitous, and, as it appeared to her, very unreasonable direction to the knoll, they were soon beyond her eye; and for some minutes longer she remained without sight or sound of any companion. She seemed to have the little wood all to herself. She could almost have thought that Edmund and Miss Crawford had left it, but that it was impossible for Edmund to forget her so entirely.

She was again roused from disagreeable musings by sudden footsteps: somebody was coming at a quick pace down the principal walk. She expected Mr Rushworth, but it was Julia, who, hot and out of breath, and with a look of disappointment, cried out on seeing her, 'Heyday! Where are the others? I thought Maria and Mr Crawford were with you.'

Fanny explained.

'A pretty trick, upon my word! I cannot see them anywhere,' looking eagerly into the park. 'But they cannot be very far off, and I think I am equal to as much as Maria, even without help.'

'But, Julia, Mr Rushworth will be here in a moment with the key. Do wait for Mr Rushworth.'

'Not I, indeed. I have had enough of the family for one morning. Why, child, I have but this moment escaped from his horrible mother. Such a penance as I have been enduring; while you were sitting here so composed and so happy! It might have been as well, perhaps, if you had been in my place, but you always contrive to keep out of these scrapes.'

This was a most unjust reflection, but Fanny could allow for it, and let it pass: Julia was vexed, and her temper was hasty; but she felt that it would not last, and therefore, taking no notice, only asked her if she had not seen Mr Rushworth.

'Yes, yes, we saw him. He was posting away as if upon life and death, and could but just spare time to tell us his errand, and where you all were.'

'It is a pity he should have so much trouble for nothing.'

'That is Miss Maria's concern. I am not obliged to punish myself for *her* sins. The mother I could not avoid, as long as my tiresome aunt was dancing about with the housekeeper, but the son I *can* get away from.'

And she immediately scrambled across the fence, and walked away, not attending to Fanny's last question of whether she had seen anything of Miss Crawford and Edmund. The sort of dread in which Fanny now sat of seeing Mr Rushworth prevented her thinking so much of their continued absence, however, as she might have done. She felt that he had been very ill-used, and was quite unhappy in having to communicate what had passed. He joined her within five minutes after Julia's exit; and though she made the best of the story, he was evidently mortified and displeased in no common degree. At first he scarcely said anything; his

conduct, perhaps, the result of good principles; the effect, in short, of those doctrines which it is their duty to teach and recommend; and it will, I believe, be everywhere found, that as the clergy are, or are not what they ought to be, so are the rest of the nation.'

'Certainly,' said Fanny, with gentle earnestness.

'There,' cried Miss Crawford, 'you have quite convinced Miss Price already.'

'I wish I could convince Miss Crawford too.'

'I do not think you ever will,' said she, with an arch smile; 'I am just as much surprised now as I was at first that you should intend to take orders. You really are fit for something better. Come, do change your mind. It is not too late. Go into the law.'

'Go into the law! With as much ease as I was told to go into this wilderness.'

'Now you are going to say something about law being the worst wilderness of the two, but I forestall you; remember, I have forestalled you.'

'You need not hurry when the object is only to prevent my saying a *bon mot*, for there is not the least wit in my nature. I am a very matter-of-fact, plain-spoken being, and may blunder on the borders of a repartee for half an hour together without striking it out.'

A general silence succeeded. Each was thoughtful. Fanny made the first interruption by saying, 'I wonder that I should be tired with only walking in this sweet wood; but the next time we come to a seat, if it is not disagreeable to you, I should be glad to sit down for a little while.'

'My dear Fanny,' cried Edmund, immediately drawing her arm within his, 'how thoughtless I have been! I hope you are not very tired. Perhaps,' turning to Miss Crawford, 'my other companion may do me the honour of taking an arm.'

'Thank you, but I am not at all tired.' She took it, however, as she spoke, and the gratification of having her do so, of feeling such a connexion for the first time, made him a little forgetful of Fanny. 'You scarcely touch me,' said he. 'You do not make me of any use. What a difference in the weight of a woman's arm from that of a man! At Oxford I have been a good deal used to have a man lean on me for the length of a street, and you are only a fly in the comparison.'

Men love to distinguish themselves, and in either of the other lines distinction may be gained, but not in the church. A clergyman is nothing.'

'The *nothing* of conversation has its gradations, I hope, as well as the *never*. A clergyman cannot be high in state or fashion. He must not head mobs, or set the ton in dress. But I cannot call that situation nothing which has the charge of all that is of the first importance to mankind, individually or collectively considered, temporally and eternally, which has the guardianship of religion and morals, and consequently of the manners which result from their influence. No one here can call the *office* nothing. If the man who holds it is so, it is by the neglect of his duty, by foregoing its just importance, and stepping out of his place to appear what he ought not to appear.'

'*You* assign greater consequence to the clergyman than one has been used to hear given, or than I can quite comprehend. One does not see much of this influence and importance in society, and how can it be acquired where they are so seldom seen themselves? How can two sermons a week, even supposing them worth hearing, supposing the preacher to have the sense to prefer Blair's to his own, do all that you speak of? govern the conduct and fashion the manners of a large congregation for the rest of the week? One scarcely sees a clergyman out of his pulpit.'

'*You* are speaking of London, *I* am speaking of the nation at large.'

'The metropolis, I imagine, is a pretty fair sample of the rest.'

'Not, I should hope, of the proportion of virtue to vice throughout the kingdom. We do not look in great cities for our best morality. It is not there that respectable people of any denomination can do most good; and it certainly is not there that the influence of the clergy can be most felt. A fine preacher is followed and admired; but it is not in fine preaching only that a good clergyman will be useful in his parish and his neighbourhood, where the parish and neighbourhood are of a size capable of knowing his private character, and observing his general conduct, which in London can rarely be the case. The clergy are lost there in the crowds of their parishioners. They are known to the largest part only as preachers. And with regard to their influencing public manners, Miss Crawford must not misunderstand me, or suppose I mean to call them the arbiters of good-breeding, the regulators of refinement and courtesy, the masters of the ceremonies of life. The *manners* I speak of might rather be called

looks only expressed his extreme surprise and vexation, and he walked to the gate and stood there, without seeming to know what to do.

'They desired me to stay—my cousin Maria charged me to say that you would find them at that knoll, or thereabouts.'

'I do not believe I shall go any farther,' said he sullenly; 'I see nothing of them. By the time I get to the knoll they may be gone somewhere else. I have had walking enough.'

And he sat down with a most gloomy countenance by Fanny.

'I am very sorry,' said she; 'it is very unlucky.' And she longed to be able to say something more to the purpose.

After an interval of silence, 'I think they might as well have straid for me,' said he.

'Miss Bertram thought you would follow her.'

'I should not have had to follow her if she had straid.'

This could not be denied, and Fanny was silenced. After another pause, he went on—'Pray, Miss Price, are you such a great admirer of this Mr Crawford as some people are? For my part, I can see nothing in him.'

'I do not think him at all handsome.'

'Handsome! Nobody can call such an undersized man handsome. He is not five foot nine. I should not wonder if he is not more than five foot eight. I think he is an ill-looking fellow. In my opinion, these Crawfords are no addition at all. We did very well without them.'

A small sigh escaped Fanny here, and she did not know how to contradict him.

'If I had made any difficulty about fetching the key, there might have been some excuse, but I went the very moment she said she wanted it.'

'Nothing could be more obliging than your manner, I am sure, and I dare say you walked as fast as you could; but still it is some distance, you know, from this spot to the house, quite into the house; and when people are waiting, they are bad judges of time, and every half minute seems like five.'

He got up and walked to the gate again, and 'wished he had had the key about him at the time.' Fanny thought she discerned in his standing there an indication of relenting, which encouraged her to another attempt, and she said, therefore, 'It is a pity you should not join them. They expected to have a better view of the house from that part of the park, and will be

thinking how it may be improved; and nothing of that sort, you know, can be settled without you.'

She found herself more successful in sending away than in retaining a companion. Mr Rushworth was worked on. 'Well,' said he, 'if you really think I had better go: it would be foolish to bring the key for nothing.' And letting himself out, he walked off without farther ceremony.

Fanny's thoughts were now all engrossed by the two who had left her so long ago, and getting quite impatient, she resolved to go in search of them. She followed their steps along the bottom walk, and had just turned up into another, when the voice and the laugh of Miss Crawford once more caught her ear; the sound approached, and a few more windings brought them before her. They were just returned into the wilderness from the park, to which a sidegate, not fastened, had tempted them very soon after their leaving her, and they had been across a portion of the park into the very avenue which Fanny had been hoping the whole morning to reach at last, and had been sitting down under one of the trees. This was their history. It was evident that they had been spending their time pleasantly, and were not aware of the length of their absence. Fanny's best consolation was in being assured that Edmund had wished for her very much, and that he should certainly have come back for her, had she not been tired already; but this was not quite sufficient to do away with the pain of having been left a whole hour, when he had talked of only a few minutes, nor to banish the sort of curiosity she felt to know what they had been conversing about all that time; and the result of the whole was to her disappointment and depression, as they prepared by general agreement to return to the house.

On reaching the bottom of the steps to the terrace, Mrs Rushworth and Mrs Norris presented themselves at the top, just ready for the wilderness, at the end of an hour and a half from their leaving the house. Mrs Norris had been too well employed to move faster. Whatever cross-accidents had occurred to intercept the pleasures of her nieces, she had found a morning of complete enjoyment; for the housekeeper, after a great many courtesies on the subject of pheasants, had taken her to the dairy, told her all about their cows, and given her the receipt for a famous cream cheese; and since Julia's leaving them they had been met by the gardener, with whom she had made a most satisfactory acquaintance, for she had set

had been brought up to practise as a duty made it impossible for her to escape; while the want of that higher species of self-command, that just consideration of others, that knowledge of her own heart, that principle of right, which had not formed any essential part of her education, made her miserable under it.

'This is insufferably hot,' said Miss Crawford, when they had taken one turn on the terrace, and were drawing a second time to the door in the middle which opened to the wilderness. 'Shall any of us object to being comfortable? Here is a nice little wood, if one can but get into it. What happiness if the door should not be locked! but of course it is; for in these great places the gardeners are the only people who can go where they like.'

The door, however, proved not to be locked, and they were all agreed in turning joyfully through it, and leaving the unmitigated glare of day behind. A considerable flight of steps landed them in the wilderness, which was a planted wood of about two acres, and though chiefly of larch and laurel, and beech cut down, and though laid out with too much regularity, was darkness and shade, and natural beauty, compared with the bowling-green and the terrace. They all felt the refreshment of it, and for some time could only walk and admire. At length, after a short pause, Miss Crawford began with, 'So you are to be a clergyman, Mr Bertram. This is rather a surprise to me.'

'Why should it surprise you? You must suppose me designed for some profession, and might perceive that I am neither a lawyer, nor a soldier, nor a sailor.'

'Very true; but, in short, it had not occurred to me. And you know there is generally an uncle or a grandfather to leave a fortune to the second son.'

'A very praiseworthy practice,' said Edmund, 'but not quite universal. I am one of the exceptions, and *being* one, must do something for myself.'

'But why are you to be a clergyman? I thought *that* was always the lot of the youngest, where there were many to chuse before him.'

'Do you think the church itself never chosen, then?'

'*Never* is a black word. But yes, in the *never* of conversation, which means *not very often*, I do think it. For what is to be done in the church?

Mrs Norris was beginning to arrange by what junction of carriages and horses most could be done, when the young people, meeting with an outward door, temptingly open on a flight of steps which led immediately to turf and shrubs, and all the sweets of pleasure-grounds, as by one impulse, one wish for air and liberty, all walked out.

'Suppose we turn down here for the present,' said Mrs Rushworth, civilly taking the hint and following them. 'Here are the greatest number of our plants, and here are the curious pheasants.'

'Query,' said Mr Crawford, looking round him, 'whether we may not find something to employ us here before we go farther? I see walls of great promise. Mr Rushworth, shall we summon a council on this lawn?'

'James,' said Mrs Rushworth to her son, 'I believe the wilderness will be new to all the party. The Miss Berrams have never seen the wilderness yet.'

No objection was made, but for some time there seemed no inclination to move in any plan, or to any distance. All were attracted at first by the plants or the pheasants, and all dispersed about in happy independence. Mr Crawford was the first to move forward to examine the capabilities of that end of the house. The lawn, bounded on each side by a high wall, contained beyond the first planted area a bowling-green, and beyond the bowling-green a long terrace walk, backed by iron palisades, and commanding a view over them into the tops of the trees of the wilderness immediately adjoining. It was a good spot for fault-finding. Mr Crawford was soon followed by Miss Bertram and Mr Rushworth; and when, after a little time, the others began to form into parties, these three were found in busy consultation on the terrace by Edmund, Miss Crawford, and Fanny, who seemed as naturally to unite, and who, after a short participation of their regrets and difficulties, left them and walked on. The remaining three, Mrs Rushworth, Mrs Norris, and Julia, were still far behind; for Julia, whose happy star no longer prevailed, was obliged to keep by the side of Mrs Rushworth, and restrain her impatient feet to that lady's slow pace, while her aunt, having fallen in with the housekeeper, who was come out to feed the pheasants, was lingering behind in gossip with her. Poor Julia, the only one out of the nine not tolerably satisfied with their lot, was now in a state of complete penance, and as different from the Julia of the barouche-box as could well be imagined. The politeness which she

him right as to his grandson's illness, convinced him that it was an ague, and promised him a charm for it; and he, in return, had shewn her all his choicest nursery of plants, and actually presented her with a very curious specimen of health.

On this *rencontre* they all returned to the house together, there to lounge away the time as they could with sofas, and chit-chat, and Quarterly Reviews, till the return of the others, and the arrival of dinner. It was late before the Miss Berrams and the two gentlemen came in, and their ramble did not appear to have been more than partially agreeable, or at all productive of anything useful with regard to the object of the day. By their own accounts they had been all walking after each other, and the junction which had taken place at last seemed, to Fanny's observation, to have been as much too late for re-establishing harmony, as it confessedly had been for determining on any alteration. She felt, as she looked at Julia and Mr Rushworth, that hers was not the only dissatisfied bosom amongst them: there was gloom on the face of each. Mr Crawford and Miss Bertram were much more gay, and she thought that he was taking particular pains, during dinner, to do away any little resentment of the other two, and restore general good-humour.

Dinner was soon followed by tea and coffee, a ten miles' drive home allowed no waste of hours; and from the time of their sitting down to table, it was a quick succession of busy nothings till the carriage came to the door, and Mrs Norris, having fidgeted about, and obtained a few pheasants' eggs and a cream cheese from the housekeeper, and made abundance of civil speeches to Mrs Rushworth, was ready to lead the way. At the same moment Mr Crawford, approaching Julia, said, 'I hope I am not to lose my companion, unless she is afraid of the evening air in so exposed a seat.' The request had not been foreseen, but was very graciously received, and Julia's day was likely to end almost as well as it began. Miss Bertram had made up her mind to something different, and was a little disappointed; but her conviction of being really the one preferred comforted her under it, and enabled her to receive Mr Rushworth's parting attentions as she ought. He was certainly better pleased to hand her into the barouche than to assist her in ascending the box, and his complacency seemed confirmed by the arrangement.

‘Well, Fanny, this has been a fine day for you, upon my word,’ said Mrs Norris, as they drove through the park. ‘Nothing but pleasure from beginning to end! I am sure you ought to be very much obliged to your aunt Bertram and me for contriving to let you go. A pretty good day’s amusement you have had!’

Maria was just discontented enough to say directly, ‘I think *you* have done pretty well yourself, ma’am. Your lap seems full of good things, and here is a basket of something between us which has been knocking my elbow unmercifully.’

‘My dear, it is only a beautiful little heath, which that nice old gardener would make me take; but if it is in your way, I will have it in my lap directly. There, Fanny, you shall carry that parcel for me; take great care of it: do not let it fall; it is a cream cheese, just like the excellent one we had at dinner. Nothing would satisfy that good old Mrs Whitaker, but my taking one of the cheeses. I stood out as long as I could, till the tears almost came into her eyes, and I knew it was just the sort that my sister would be delighted with. That Mrs Whitaker is a treasure! She was quite shocked when I asked her whether wine was allowed at the second table, and she has turned away two housemaids for wearing white gowns. Take care of the cheese, Fanny. Now I can manage the other parcel and the basket very well.’

‘What else have you been spunging?’ said Maria, half-pleased that Sotherton should be so complimented.

‘Spunging, my dear! It is nothing but four of those beautiful pheasants’ eggs, which Mrs Whitaker would quite force upon me: she would not take a denial. She said it must be such an amusement to me, as she understood I lived quite alone, to have a few living creatures of that sort; and so to be sure it will. I shall get the dairymaid to set them under the first spare hen, and if they come to good I can have them moved to my own house and borrow a coop; and it will be a great delight to me in my lonely hours to attend to them. And if I have good luck, your mother shall have some.’

It was a beautiful evening, mild and still, and the drive was as pleasant as the serenity of Nature could make it; but when Mrs Norris ceased speaking, it was altogether a silent drive to those within. Their spirits were in general exhausted; and to determine whether the day had afforded most pleasure or pain, might occupy the meditations of almost all.

Julia, joining them at the moment, carried on the joke.

‘Upon my word, it is really a pity that it should not take place directly, if we had but a proper licence, for here we are altogether, and nothing in the world could be more snug and pleasant.’ And she talked and laughed about it with so little caution as to catch the comprehension of Mr Rushworth and his mother, and expose her sister to the whispered gallantries of her lover, while Mrs Rushworth spoke with proper smiles and dignity of its being a most happy event to her whenever it took place.

‘If Edmund were but in orders!’ cried Julia, and running to where he stood with Miss Crawford and Fanny: ‘My dear Edmund, if you were but in orders now, you might perform the ceremony directly. How unlucky that you are not ordained; Mr Rushworth and Maria are quite ready.’

Miss Crawford’s countenance, as Julia spoke, might have amused a disinterested observer. She looked almost aghast under the new idea she was receiving. Fanny pitied her. ‘How distressed she will be at what she said just now,’ passed across her mind.

‘Ordained!’ said Miss Crawford; ‘what, are you to be a clergyman?’

‘Yes; I shall take orders soon after my father’s return—probably at Christmas.’

Miss Crawford, rallying her spirits, and recovering her complexion, replied only, ‘If I had known this before, I would have spoken of the cloth with more respect,’ and turned the subject.

The chapel was soon afterwards left to the silence and stillness which reigned in it, with few interruptions, throughout the year. Miss Bertram, displeased with her sister, led the way, and all seemed to feel that they had been there long enough.

The lower part of the house had been now entirely shewn, and Mrs Rushworth, never weary in the cause, would have proceeded towards the principal staircase, and taken them through all the rooms above, if her son had not interposed with a doubt of there being time enough. ‘For if,’ said he, with the sort of self-evident proposition which many a clearer head does not always avoid, ‘we are *too* long going over the house, we shall not have time for what is to be done out of doors. It is past two, and we are to dine at five.’

Mrs Rushworth submitted; and the question of surveying the grounds, with the who and the how, was likely to be more fully agitated, and

different—especially if the poor chaplain were not worth looking at—and, in those days, I fancy parsons were very inferior even to what they are now.’

For a few moments she was unanswered. Fanny coloured and looked at Edmund, but felt too angry for speech; and he needed a little recollection before he could say, ‘Your lively mind can hardly be serious even on serious subjects. You have given us an amusing sketch, and human nature cannot say it was not so. We must all feel *at times* the difficulty of fixing our thoughts as we could wish; but if you are supposing it a frequent thing, that is to say, a weakness grown into a habit from neglect, what could be expected from the *private* devotions of such persons? Do you think the minds which are suffered, which are indulged in wanderings in a chapel, would be more collected in a closet?’

‘Yes, very likely. They would have two chances at least in their favour. There would be less to distract the attention from without, and it would not be tried so long.’

‘The mind which does not struggle against itself under *one* circumstance, would find objects to distract it in the *other*, I believe; and the influence of the place and of example may often rouse better feelings than are begun with. The greater length of the service, however, I admit to be sometimes too hard a stretch upon the mind. One wishes it were not so; but I have not yet left Oxford long enough to forget what chapel prayers are.’


While this was passing, the rest of the party being scattered about the chapel, Julia called Mr Crawford’s attention to her sister, by saying, ‘Do look at Mr Rushworth and Maria, standing side by side, exactly as if the ceremony were going to be performed. Have not they completely the air of it?’

Mr Crawford smiled his acquiescence, and stepping forward to Maria, said, in a voice which she only could hear, ‘I do not like to see Miss Bertram so near the altar.’

Starting, the lady instinctively moved a step or two, but recovering herself in a moment, affected to laugh, and asked him, in a tone not much louder, ‘If he would give her away?’

‘I am afraid I should do it very awkwardly,’ was his reply, with a look of meaning.

Chapter XI

HE day at Sotherton, with all its imperfections, afforded the Miss Bertrams much more agreeable feelings than were derived from the letters from Antigua, which soon afterwards reached Mansfield. It was much pleasanter to think of Henry Crawford than of their father; and to think of their father in England again within a certain period, which these letters obliged them to do, was a most unwelcome exercise.

November was the black month fixed for his return. Sir Thomas wrote of it with as much decision as experience and anxiety could authorise. His business was so nearly concluded as to justify him in proposing to take his passage in the September packet, and he consequently looked forward with the hope of being with his beloved family again early in November.

Maria was more to be pitied than Julia; for to her the father brought a husband, and the return of the friend most solicitous for her happiness would unite her to the lover, on whom she had chosen that happiness should depend. It was a gloomy prospect, and all she could do was to throw a mist over it, and hope when the mist cleared away she should see something else. It would hardly be *early* in November, there were generally delays, a bad passage or *something*; that favouring *something* which everybody who shuts their eyes while they look, or their understandings while they reason, feels the comfort of. It would probably be the middle of November at least; the middle of November was three months off. Three months comprised thirteen weeks. Much might happen in thirteen weeks.

Sir Thomas would have been deeply mortified by a suspicion of half that his daughters felt on the subject of his return, and would hardly have found consolation in a knowledge of the interest it excited in the breast of another young lady. Miss Crawford, on walking up with her brother to

spend the evening at Mansfield Park, heard the good news; and though seeming to have no concern in the affair beyond politeness, and to have vented all her feelings in a quiet congratulation, heard it with an attention not so easily satisfied. Mrs Norris gave the particulars of the letters, and the subject was dropt; but after tea, as Miss Crawford was standing at an open window with Edmund and Fanny looking out on a twilight scene, while the Miss Bertrams, Mr Rushworth, and Henry Crawford were all busy with candles at the pianoforte, she suddenly revived it by turning round towards the group, and saying, 'How happy Mr Rushworth looks! He is thinking of November.'

Edmund looked round at Mr Rushworth too, but had nothing to say. 'Your father's return will be a very interesting event.'

'It will, indeed, after such an absence; an absence not only long, but including so many dangers.'

'It will be the forerunner also of other interesting events: your sister's marriage, and your taking orders.'

'Yes.'

'Don't be affronted,' said she, laughing, 'but it does put me in mind of some of the old heathen heroes, who, after performing great exploits in a foreign land, offered sacrifices to the gods on their safe return.'

'There is no sacrifice in the case,' replied Edmund, with a serious smile, and glancing at the pianoforte again; 'it is entirely her own doing.'

'Oh yes I know it is. I was merely joking. She has done no more than what every young woman would do; and I have no doubt of her being extremely happy. My other sacrifice, of course, you do not understand.'

'My taking orders, I assure you, is quite as voluntary as Maria's marrying.'

'It is fortunate that your inclination and your father's convenience should accord so well. There is a very good living kept for you, I understand, hercabouts.'

'Which you suppose has biased me?'

'But *that* I am sure it has not,' cried Fanny.

'Thank you for your good word, Fanny, but it is more than I would affirm myself. On the contrary, the knowing that there was such a provision for me probably did bias me. Nor can I think it wrong that it should. There was no natural disinclination to be overcome, and I see no reason

Mrs Rushworth began her relation. 'This chapel was fitted up as you see it, in James the Second's time. Before that period, as I understand, the pews were only wainscot; and there is some reason to think that the linings and cushions of the pulpit and family seat were only purple cloth; but this is not quite certain. It is a handsome chapel, and was formerly in constant use both morning and evening. Prayers were always read in it by the domestic chaplain, within the memory of many; but the late Mr Rushworth left it off.'

'Every generation has its improvements,' said Miss Crawford, with a smile, to Edmund.

Mrs Rushworth was gone to repeat her lesson to Mr Crawford; and Edmund, Fanny, and Miss Crawford remained in a cluster together.

'It is a pity,' cried Fanny, 'that the custom should have been discontinued. It was a valuable part of former times. There is something in a chapel and chaplain so much in character with a great house, with one's ideas of what such a household should be! A whole family assembling regularly for the purpose of prayer is fine!'

'Very fine indeed,' said Miss Crawford, laughing. 'It must do the heads of the family a great deal of good to force all the poor housemaids and footmen to leave business and pleasure, and say their prayers here twice a day, while they are inventing excuses themselves for staying away.'

'*That* is hardly Fanny's idea of a family assembling,' said Edmund. 'If the master and mistress do *not* attend themselves, there must be more harm than good in the custom.'

'At any rate, it is safer to leave people to their own devices on such subjects. Everybody likes to go their own way—to chuse their own time and manner of devotion. The obligation of attendance, the formality, the restraint, the length of time—together it is a formidable thing, and what nobody likes; and if the good people who used to kneel and gaze in that gallery could have foreseen that the time would ever come when men and women might lie another ten minutes in bed, when they woke with a headache, without danger of reprobation, because chapel was missed, they would have jumped with joy and envy. Cannot you imagine with what unwilling feelings the former belles of the house of Rushworth did many a time repair to this chapel? The young Mrs Eleanors and Mrs Bridgets—starched up into seeming piety, but with heads full of something very