MANSFIELD PARK

BY JANE AUSTEN

BIBLIOPHILE’S POINT

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***From the Pages of* Mansfield Park**

‘Give a girl an education, and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to

one but she has the means of settling well, without further expense to anybody.’

(page 6)

‘An engaged woman is always more agreeable than a disengaged. She is

satisfied with herself. Her cares are over, and she feels that she may exert all her powers of pleasing without suspicion. All is safe with a lady engaged; no harm can be done.’

(page 40)

The politeness which she 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. (page 80)

‘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.’ (page 84)

‘A clergyman has nothing to do but to be slovenly and selfish—read the

newspaper, watch the weather, and quarrel with his wife. His curate does all the work, and the business of his own life is to dine.’ (page 97)

‘Where an opinion is general, it is usually correct.’ (page 97)

‘There seems something more speakingly incomprehensible in the powers, the

failures, the inequalities of memory, than in any other of our intelligences. The

memory is sometimes so retentive, so serviceable, so obedient; at others, so

bewildered and so weak; and at others again, so tyrannic, so beyond control!’

(pages 180-181)

‘A large income is the best recipe for happiness I ever heard of. It certainly may

secure all the myrtle and turkey part of it.’ (page 184)

‘Human nature needs more lessons than a weekly sermon can convey.’ (page

215)

To her, the cares were sometimes almost beyond the happiness; for, young and inexperienced, with small means of choice, and no confidence in her own taste—the “how she should be dressed” was a point of painful solicitude.

(page 220)

‘A sermon, well delivered, is more uncommon even than prayers well read.’

(page 295)

She saw nobody in whose favour she could wish to overcome her own shyness

and reserve. The men appeared to her all coarse, the women all pert, everybody under bred. (page 343)

The indignities of stupidity, and the disappointments of selfish passion, can

excite little pity. (page 403)

***Jane Austen***

The English novelist Jane Austen was born December 16, 1775, the seventh of

eight children, in the Parsonage House of Steventon, Hampshire, where she

spent her first twenty-five years. During her brief lifetime Austen witnessed

political unrest, revolution, war, and industrialization, yet these momentous

events are not the central subjects of her finely focused novels. Rather, Austen

wrote of her immediate experience: the microcosm of the country gentry and its class-conscious insularity. Jane’s father, the Reverend George Austen, was the erudite country rector of Steventon, and her mother, Cassandra (née Leigh), was descended from an aristocratic line of learned clergymen. By no means wealthy, the Austens nonetheless enjoyed a comfortable, socially respectable life, and greatly prized their children’s education.

Jane and her beloved elder (and only) sister, Cassandra, were schooled in

Southampton and Reading for a short period, but most of their education took

place at home. Private theatrical performances in the barn at Steventon

complemented Jane’s studies of French, Italian, history, music, and eighteenth-century fiction. An avid reader from earliest childhood, Jane began writing at

age twelve, no doubt encouraged by her cultured and affectionate family. Indeed,

family and writing were her great loves; despite a fleeting engagement in 1802,

Austen never married. Her first two novels, “Elinor and Marianne” and “First

Impressions,” were written while at Steventon but never published in their

original form.

Following her father’s retirement, Jane moved in 1801 with her parents and

sister to Bath. That popular watering hole, removed from the country life Jane

preferred, presented the sociable young novelist with a wealth of observations

and experience that would later emerge in her novels. Austen moved to

Southampton with her mother and sister after the death of her father in 1805.

Several years later the three women settled in Chawton Cottage in Hampshire,

where Austen resided until the end of her life. She relished her return to the

countryside and, with it, a renewed artistic vigor that led to the revision of her

early novels. *Sense and Sensibility,* a reworking of “Elinor and Marianne,” was

published in 1811, followed by *Pride and Prejudice,* a reworking of “First

Impressions,” two years later.

Austen completed four more novels *(Mansfield Park, Emma, Northanger*

*Abbey,* and *Persuasion)* in the Chawton sitting room. Productive and discreet,

she insisted that her work be kept secret from anyone outside the family. All of

her novels were published anonymously, including the posthumous release,

thanks to her brother Henry, of *Northanger Abbey* and *Persuasion.*

The last years of Austen’s life were relatively quiet and comfortable. Her

final, unfinished work, *Sanditon,* was put aside in the spring of 1817, when her

health sharply declined and she was taken to Winchester for medical treatment of

what appears to have been Addison’s disease or a form of lymphoma. Jane

Austen died there on July 18, 1817, and is buried in Winchester Cathedral.

***The World of Jane Austen and Mansfield Park***

**1775 -** The American Revolution begins in April. Jane Austen is born on

December 16 in the Parsonage House in Steventon, Hampshire, England,

the seventh of eight children (two girls and six boys)

**1778 -** Frances (Fanny) Burney publishes *Evelina* , a seminal work in the

development of the novel manners.

**1781 -** German philosopher Immanuel Kant publishes his *Critique of pure*

*reason.*

**1782 -** The American Revolution ends. Fanny Burney’s novel Cecilia is

published.

**1783 -** Cassandra and Jane Austen begin their formal education in

Southampton, followed by study in Reading.

**1788 -** King George III of England suffers his first bout of mental illness,

leaving the country in a state of uncertainty and anxiety. George Gordon,

Lord Byron, is born.

**1789 -** George III recuperates. The French Revolution begins. William Blake’s

*Songs of innocence* is published.

**1791 -** American political philosopher Thomas Paine publishes the first part of

*the Rights of Woman* .

**1792 -** Percy Bysshe Shelley is born. Mary Wollstonecraft publishes *A*

*Vindication of the Rights of Woman.*

**1793 -** A shock wave passes through Europe with the execution of King Louis

XVI of France and, some months later, his wife, Marie-Antoinette; the

Reign of Terror begins. England declares war on France. Two of

Austen’s brothers, Francis (1774-1865) and Charles (1779-1852), serve

In the Royal Navy, but life in the countryside of Steventon remains

relatively tranquil.

**1795 -** Austen begins her first novel, "Elinor and Marianne,"written as letters

(the fragments of his early work are now lost); she will later revise the

material to become the novel *Sense and Sensibility* . John Keats is born.

**1796 -** Austen authors a second novel, "First Impression,"

**1797 -** which was never published; it will later become *Pride and Prejudice.*

**1798 -** Poets Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth publish the

*Lyrrical Ballads.*

**1801 -** Jane’s father, the Reverend George Austen, retires, and with the

Napoleonic Wars looming in the background of British conciousness, he

and his wife and two daughters leave the quiet country life of Steventon

for the bustling fashionable town Bath. Many of the characters and

depictions of society in Jane Austen subsequent novels are shaped by

her experiences in Bath.

**1803 -** Austen receives her first publication offer for her novel "Susan," but the

manuscript is subsequently returned ny the publisher; it will later be

revised and released as *Northanger Abbey* . The United States buys

Louisana from France. Ralph Waldo Emmerson is born.

**1804 -** Napoleon crowns himself emperor of France. Spain declares war on

britain.

**1805 -** Jane’s father dies. Jane and her mother and sister subsequently move to

southampton. Sir Walter Scott publishes his *Lay of the Last Minstrel* .

**1809 -** After Several years of travelling and short-term stays in various towns,

the Austen women settle in Chawton Cottage in Hampshire; in the parlor

of this house Austen quietly composes her most famous works. Chales

Darwin and Alfred, Lord Tennyson, are born.

**1811 -** Austen begins *Mansfield Park* in February. In November *Sense and*

*Sensibility,* the romantic misadventures of two sisters, is published with

the notation "By a Lady"; all of Austen’s subsquent novels are also

brought out anonymously. George III is declared insane, and the morally

corrupt Prince Wales (the future King George IV) becomes regent.

**1812 -** *Fairy tales* by the Brothers Grimm and the first parts of Lord Byron’s

*Child Harold* are published. The United States declared war on Great Britain.

**1813 -** *Pride and Prejudice* is published; it describes the conflict between the

high-spirited daughter of a country gentleman and a wealthy landowner.

Napoleon is exiled to Elba, and the Bourbons restored are restored to

power.

**1814 -** *Mansfield Park* is published; it is the story of the difficult though

ultimately rewarded life of a poor relation who lives in the house of her

wealthy uncle.

**1815 -** Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo.

**1816 -** Austen’s comic novel *Emma* is published; it centers on the heroine’s

misguided attempts at matchmaking. Charlotte Brontë is born.

**1817 -** Austen begins the satiric novel *Sandition,* but abandons it because of

declining health. She dies on July 18 in Winchester and is buried in

Winchester Cathedral.

**1818 -** *Northanger Abbey*, a social satire with overtones of (parodied) terror, and *Persuasion,* about a reawakened love, are published under Austen’s

brother Henry’s supervision.

**Introduction**

Mary Crawford is, or so it seems, the very model of a Jane Austen heroine.

Spirited, warm-hearted, and, above all else, witty, she displays all the familiar

Austen virtues, and she stands in need of the familiar Austen lessons as well.

Like Elizabeth Bennet, the heroine *of Pride and Prejudice* (1813), she banters

archly with the man she is falling in love with, and, like Elizabeth, she must

learn to set aside her preconceptions in order to recognize that love. Like Emma Woodhouse, the heroine of *Emma* (1816), she speaks more brilliantly and speculates more dazzlingly than anyone around her, and, like Emma, she must learn to rein in the wit that tempts her at times to impropriety. But Mary

Crawford is not the heroine of *Mansfield Park* (1814)—Fanny Price is, and

therein lies the novel’s great surprise. For Fanny differs not merely from Mary,

but also from our most basic expectations of what a novel’s protagonist should

do and be. In Fanny, we have a heroine who seldom moves and seldom speaks,

and never errs or alters.

“‘I must move,”’ Mary announces, “‘resting fatigues me’” (p. 85). Before her

arrival at Mansfield, she had made a glamorous circuit of winters in London and summers at the country houses of friends, with stops at fashionable watering places in between, and at Mansfield she is no less mobile. A vigorous walker, she soon takes up riding, cantering as soon as she mounts. Fanny, by contrast, has hardly left the grounds of Mansfield since her arrival eight years before, and she is further immobilized by her weakness and timidity. A half-mile walk is beyond her, a ball, she fears, will exhaust her, and she is prostrated by headache after picking roses. She must be lifted onto the horse she was long too terrified to approach, and her exercise consists of being led by a groom.

“‘Now, do not be suspecting me of a pun, I entreat,’” says Mary to her

listeners, who have not, in fact, caught the joke at all (p. 54). So dazzling a talker

is Mary that she must serve as her own best audience, amusing herself with

witticisms the others cannot hear. With a keener eye and a sharper tongue than

those around her, Mary sets her words dancing alongside the inanities,

vulgarities, and hypocrisies that make up the other characters’ speech. Fanny, by

contrast, barely speaks at all, and when she does, it is in the silencing language

of moral certainty. “‘Very indecorous,’” Edmund says of Mary’s far more

captivating discourse, and Fanny is quick to agree and contribute a judgment of

her own: “‘and very ungrateful’” (p. 56). There is little that can be said after that.

‘“I will stake my last like a woman of spirit,’” Mary proclaims in the midst of

a card game that Fanny had been reluctant to play at all (p. 210). Mary wins the

hand, only to find that it has cost her more than it was worth, and, in doing so,

she reminds us that to act is necessarily to risk being wrong. Fanny, by contrast,

is always right. “‘Fanny is the only one who has judged rightly throughout’” (pp.

162)—this is Edmund Bertram speaking to Sir Thomas in the aftermath of the

theatricals, but it could just as properly be the narrator at the novel’s end. The

language of Fanny’s right judgment suggests, however, that her moral certainty

is a function of her passivity: “‘No, indeed, I cannot act,’” she had insisted (p.

128), and the double meaning of “acting” suggests that Fanny knows not to “act”

in a theatrical sense because she never really “acts” at all.

It is in the contrast between Fanny and Mary that we can most clearly see that

*Mansfield Park* is, in the words of the critic Tony Tanner, “a novel about rest and

restlessness, stability and change—the moving and the immovable” *(Jane*

*Austen,* p. 145; see “For Further Reading”). *Mansfield Park* is hardly the only

Austen novel to take as its subject matter a pair of opposed terms, but typically

these terms stand in a dynamic relation to one another, each altering the other

until a proper synthesis or balance is achieved. In *Sense and Sensibility* (1811),

for instance, the rational Elinor Dashwood and her romantic sister Marianne

must each learn from the other to moderate her mode of feeling; similarly, Mr.

Darcy must modify his pride and Elizabeth, her prejudice before marriage can

unite them. Other of Austen’s novels draw careful distinctions within a single

term, as when *Persuasion* (1818) establishes a continuum from the most

laudable to the most lamentable instances of conforming to the wishes of others.

*Mansfield Park* stands alone in this regard, for it unequivocally endorses one set

of terms and unequivocally condemns the other. Rest has, in this novel, nothing

to learn from restlessness, and restlessness can in no way be redeemed.

The values that *Mansfield Park* endorses, and the certainty with which it

endorses them, can best be understood when we restore the novel to its historical

context. *Mansfield Park* was written at the end of one tumultuous era, the French

Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars, and at the beginning of another: the

industrialization and urbanization of England. Events like these might seem too

large for the carefully circumscribed world of Austen’s novels, and Austen’s

insistent modesty has done much to encourage such a view. In one letter, she

identified her ideal subject matter as “3 or 4 families in a country village,” and,

in another, she described her novels as “those little pieces (2 inches square) of

ivory.” Her nephew repeated both of these statements in A *Memoir of Jane*

*Austen,* published after her death, and they have long shaped our reading of the

novels. But these are surely the most ironic statements ever made by this most

ironic of novelists. For what Austen’s novels in fact demonstrate is not only that

world-historical events manifest themselves on the scale of the “country

village,” but also that such events can be represented and analyzed even within

the compass of a novel only “2 inches square.” Recent criticism has come to

recognize the full range of Austen’s subject matter, and there are now vehement

debates over whether Austen was feminist or anti-feminist; capitalist or anticapitalist;

imperialist or anti-imperialist; radical, conservative, or moderate. That

these debates persist unresolved is a sign of Austen’s characteristic obliquity: It

is now clear that she was, among other things, a political novelist, but it remains

far from clear what her actual politics might have been.

In the rest of this introduction, I will approach the question of Austen’s

politics, her endorsement of stability and immobility, by following two tropes as

they appear and reappear in *Mansfield Park:* the country house and

improvement. The country house was a longstanding trope for authority in

English literature, one that took on new significance in the years following the

French Revolution. Improvement was, by contrast, a more recent term, referring

to the eighteenth-century vogue for changes in all imaginable domains—

agriculture, art, science, education, manufacturing, and, above all else, landscape

gardening. The conservative theorist Edmund Burke, who used the improvement

of the country house as a way of figuring the maintenance of authority in a world

convulsed by change, first brought together these two tropes. In what follows, I

will first trace the development of the country house trope from seventeenthcentury

poetry to such novels as *Emma* and *Pride and Prejudice.* I will then turn

to *Mansfield Park,* which I take to be Austen’s most complex depiction of the

country house. Astringent and despairing at the same time, the novel insists that

improvements are urgently needed, even as it registers the enormous costs that

these improvements will exact. In this way, *Mansfield Park* stands as Austen’s

most profound treatment of politics, her richest response to the revolutions and

wars of her time.

*Mansfield Park* is unique among Austen’s novels for beginning when its heroine

is still a young girl. In this way, it heralds what will become one of the

nineteenth-century novel’s most enduring concerns, namely the relation between

our childhoods and the adults we become, and it thus serves as the precursor to

novels as various as *Jane Eyre* (1847), *David Copperfield* (1850), and *Jude the*

*Obscure* (1895). These latter novels belong to the genre of the bildungsroman, or

novel of education. The critic Franco Moretti has most powerfully described the

bildungsroman; he argues that the genre emerged in the nineteenth century

because it was only then that youth became what it still remains for us, a time of

possibility. Not until the advent of industrial capitalism, not until the demise of

apprenticeship and feudal farming, could the young imagine that their lives

might be different from those of their elders. The imagining of new possibilities

offered a kind of compensation, Moretti suggests, for the shattering dislocations

that came with such profound economic change, and the bildungsroman sought

to make sense of what would otherwise be an overwhelming experience by

positing an autonomous self, free to move through this new world at will—

indeed, free to remake this new world in his or her own image, as the

eponymous titles of many bildungsromane suggest *(The Way of the World).* That

Mansfield Park is named after a place rather than a person is the first sign, then,

that this novel does not fully belong to the genre.

In *Mansfield Park,* there is something that comes before even the childhood of

the heroine, something that proves to be more fundamental and more

determining, and that is Mansfield itself. The institution is prior to the

individual, in all senses of the word. Fanny is invited to Mansfield only after her

aunts and uncle have decided that whatever “disposition” she may have formed

in the home of her drunken father and slatternly mother will be subdued by her

new “associations” of Bertram family and Bertram estate (p. 10). And subdued

she is. Once at Mansfield, Fanny is quite literally dwarfed by the house in which

she now lives. “The grandeur of the house astonished but could not console her,”

the narrator tells us. “The rooms were too large for her to move in with ease;

whatever she touched she expected to injure, and she crept about in constant

terror of something or other; often retreating towards her chamber to cry” (p.

13). Rather than making her way through the world, as the protagonist of a

bildungsroman would do, Fanny must learn to feel at home at Mansfield.

Mansfield comes before Fanny, then, but in order to understand all that

Mansfield means, we must pause to consider the tradition of country-house

writing, a literary tradition that *Mansfield Park* both enters into and alters. This

tradition begins with the genre of the “country house poem,” poems written, in

the seventeenth century, to pay tribute to a patron or other aristocrat by paying

tribute to his ancestral house. Ben Jonson’s “To Penshurst” (1616) and Andrew

Marvell’s “On Apple-ton House” (c.1650) are the most prominent instances of

this genre, along with Thomas Carew’s “To Saxham” (1624). In these poems, all

that is good and pleasing radiates outward: from the house and its inhabitants to

the lands and people surrounding it. The house itself is invariably described as

ancient, well-proportioned, unpretending, as taking its forms, quite properly,

from nature. “But all things are composed here,” Marvell writes, “Like Nature,

orderly and near.” And as a reward for this imitation of the natural, the house is

surrounded by an unnatural abundance. Fertile fields, blooming orchards,

breeding livestock—all this we might expect, but not perhaps, as in Jonson, fish

that throw themselves into the lord’s nets or, as in Carew, oxen that lead

themselves to slaughter. Only through such impossibilities, it seems, can the full

bounty of the country house be described.

The country house is a source not only of plenty, but also of good. Jonson

concludes “To Penshurst” by describing the training of the lord’s children, for it

is this training that projects the values of the country house both outward in

space and forward in time. The children, he tells us, are taught to pray “with the

whole household,” and their religious education thus serves as the focal point for

concentric rings of piety: the lord’s family, the lord’s household, all the lord’s

dependents. At the same time, the children are learning from their parents’ noble

example the “manners, arms, and arts” that will enable them to perpetuate the

house and its values into the future. So perfect is the goodness of the lord’s

family that it obscures the economic relations organized around the country

house. The tenant farmer who pays a portion of his harvest to his lord, the farm

laborer who receives a cottage and a small wage for his work, both are figured,

in Jonson, as carrying fruits and nuts and cheeses to the country house for no

other reason than to “express their love” for their lord. And upon their arrival

they find that a place has already been set for them at the lord’s own table—and

set for them with the lord’s own beer and meat and wine. Economic exchange is

thus transformed into a fantasy of hospitality. In Carew, even more fantastically,

there is no exchange at all. The lord’s dependents receive his bountiful

generosity, which they reciprocate only with their prayers of gratitude, prayers

that ensure that the lord’s table be “blest / With plenty, far above the rest.” Here,

the very act of giving ensures the receipt of even more.

In Austen, the country house poem is transformed into prose, most clearly in

*Pride and Prejudice* and *Emma.* While the descriptions are less extravagant in

Austen, they nonetheless follow the pattern established by Jonson, Marvell, and

Carew. When Elizabeth Bennet visits Pemberley, for instance, she finds that the

house is “lofty and handsome” and its landscaping a judicious combination of

nature and art, “neither formal nor falsely adorned.” And when Emma visits

Donwell Abbey, she finds that it is “just what it ought to be ... [and] looked what

it was.” The grounds at Pemberley are as fertile as they are expansive, with rich

stands of timber and well-stocked streams, while Donwell is impossibly fecund.

Fish may not leap into nets when Emma visits, but the orchards are blossoming

and the strawberry fields bursting as if it were spring and summer at the same

time. The country house and its grounds are of less interest to Austen, however,

than the network of social relations that they figure. After visiting Pemberley,

Elizabeth can at last comprehend its owner, Mr. Darcy, in all his social roles. “As

a brother, a landlord, a master, she considered how many people’s happiness

were in his guardianship! —How much of pleasure or pain it was in his power to

bestow!—How much of good or evil must be done by him!” (Austen, *Pride and*

*Prejudice,* p. 272). Elizabeth’s description is rather abstract, but *Emma* will

specify the many and various duties comprised by such “guardianship.” As

master of Donwell, Mr. Knightley is magistrate of the local courts and head of

the parish council, and landlord to his tenant farmers and manager of his family’s

home farm as well. He dispenses justice and plans new drains, governs parish

affairs and cuts new footpaths, and the very heterogeneity of these duties

demonstrates his centrality to the community, while his patient attention to all of

them confirms, for Emma as well as for Austen, his fitness for the role.

Indeed, it is no surprise that Emma falls in love with Knightley, as Elizabeth

falls in love with Darcy, when she sees him in his country house; for the very

purpose of the country house trope is to compel our respect, indeed our love, for

those who are our guardians. The trope has endured because the country house is such a potent figure for authority: an authority that is justified, the figure

implies, by the excellence of the family living within the house and ratified by

the gratitude of the people and the fertility of the lands by which the house is

surrounded. This is an implicitly conservative conception of authority, not

simply because it enlists our support for a landed elite, but also because it

inhibits us from imagining any radical change. For by law and by custom, the

country house was unchanging. Primogeniture ensured that the estate was passed down in its entirety to the family’s oldest son, and the estate was legally entailed so that the heir was prohibited from selling or materially diminishing what he was expected to pass down in his turn. Far from being understood as a constraint on freedom, the fact of inheritance both past and future is the very source of the country house’s excellence. Darcy implies as much when he replies to praise of Pemberley by saying calmly, “‘It ought to be good... it has been the work of many generations’” *(Pride and Prejudice,* p. 83). No new work, no work of a mere individual, could possibly compare.

The country house had always implied a conservative conception of authority,

but it was only in the years following the French Revolution, the years

immediately before Austen began writing, that this conservatism would be self-consciously theorized and explicitly named. Modern conservatism begins with

Edmund Burke’s *Reflections on the Revolution* in France (1790), a text that uses

the trope of the country house to represent a specifically English and specifically

anti-revolutionary set of values. Against the radical Jacobins who grounded their

revolutionary claims to liberty in natural law, Burke argued that whatever

liberties we have come to us as an inheritance:

You will observe, that from Magna Charta to the Declaration of Right, it

has been the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert our

liberties, as an *entailed inheritance* derived to us from our forefathers, and

to be transmitted to our posterity; as an estate specially belonging to the

people of this kingdom without any reference whatever to any other more

general or prior right (p. 119; emphasis in original).

By comparing our liberties to an entailed estate, Burke is arguing that we must

bequeath them to future generations largely unchanged. Largely unchanged, but

not entirely so, for Burke recognizes that we must sometimes alter to preserve.

“A state without the means of some change,” he famously cautions, “is without

the means of its conservation” (p.106) . Conservation requires us to distinguish

wise changes from unwise ones. The former, what Burke calls “improvements,”

are those changes that repair what is damaged in order to preserve all that is still

sound. The latter, what he calls “innovations” or “alterations,” are those changes

that sweep aside everything in order to build anew. Against the revolution that

has razed all the edifices in France, then, Burke sets the example of England’s

Glorious Revolution, which had preserved the principle of monarchical

succession through improvements that prevented Catholics from inheriting the

throne.

Whether Austen herself was a Burkean conservative is a question that has

been vehemently debated in recent Austen criticism. The question was first

raised by Marilyn Butler, who, in *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas,* restored

Austen’s novels to their historical context by reading them alongside two

forgotten genres of the 1790s and early 1800s: Jacobin novels, such as those by

Mary Wollstonecraft and William Godwin; and anti-Jacobin novels, such as

those by Maria Edgeworth and Hannah More. In Butler’s account, Austen is the

culmination of the anti-Jacobin tradition, the most artful of the reactionary

novelists writing in opposition to the French Revolution. This account was

challenged, however, by Claudia L. Johnson, who, in *Jane Austen: Women,*

*Politics, and the Novel,* argued that Austen was not, in fact, an anti-Jacobin

novelist and, moreover, that the very category of the anti-Jacobin novel was

more complex and internally riven than it might at first seem. In Johnson’s

account, even the most seemingly reactionary novelists of the period were

suspicious of at least some aspects of Burkean conservatism—and Austen was

the most suspicious of all. While Butler and Johnson come to very different

conclusions about Austen’s politics, they join in emphasizing that her novels in

some way engage with Burke, and thus with the central political questions of her

time.

Nowhere is Burke’s significance to Austen clearer than in *Mansfield Park.* For

if Pemberley and Donwell are the country house ideal, Mansfield is the country

house in desperate need of renovation. The natural and the architectural; the

social, the moral, and the religious; the political and the economic—these

disparate domains no longer combine to reflect and reinforce one another.

Instead, outward appearances have become dangerously unmoored from inward

realities. Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram are well-mannered, but not kind; Maria

and Julia Bertram are accomplished, but not principled; and Mansfield itself, for

all its beauty and expansiveness, is imperiled by precarious investments abroad

and a recklessly improvident heir. The country house ideal has been hollowed

out from within. Mansfield’s shortcomings are symbolized by, and largely

attributable to, Sir Thomas’s two-year absence from home. Mrs. Norris has taken

his place; high-handed meddling and intrusive attention to trivialities make her

the grotesque caricature of a Darcy or a Knightley. Not only does Mrs. Norris

transgress the proper limits of her authority, as when she busies herself advising

the servants at a neighboring country house, but she also betrays the very values

her authority is intended to preserve. She monitors the Bertram servants closely,

but only to ensure that they are not wasting fabric or stealing scraps of wood,

and she pays no attention at all to the far greater lapses of her nieces. Indeed, she

goes so far as to encourage their mercenary marriages and illicit flirtations.

It is hardly surprising, then, that threats to Sir Thomas’s authority multiply

under Mrs. Norris’s incompetent rule. Mary and Henry Crawford pose the first

threat. Dashing and glamorous Londoners, the Crawfords seduce us as easily as

they seduce the provincial Bertrams. It is only in the context of country-house

writing that we can recognize the danger they represent. For Mary is not only

contemptuous of religion, but also indifferent to nature, and she refuses to honor

the seasonal rhythms of rural life. When told that no cart is available to transport

her harp in the midst of harvest season, she is shocked to discover that the

“‘sturdy independence of your country customs’” will not yield to London cash

(p. 52). Henry should be closer to the land than his sister, for he has inherited

Everingham, the Crawford family estate. He has not settled there, however,

because he is, as Fanny describes him, “‘so very fond of change and moving

about’” (p. 102). As a result, his lands have been put in the hands of an agent,

who later proves to have been the cause of much suffering among the tenant

farmers and hired laborers whom Henry has not troubled himself to know.

Neither Mary nor Henry is prepared, then, to be the inheritor and preserver of the

country house.

The theater poses the second threat. The amateur theatricals are the novel’s

most famous set piece because they so seamlessly join the figurative and the

literal: The play itself predicts much of what will happen in the novel, while the

characters’ struggles over the staging of the play present each of them in a

revealing light. The play, *Das Kind der Liebe,* was written in 1791 by the

German August von Kotzebue; it was translated into English, as *Lovers’ Vows,*

by Elizabeth Inchbald in 1798 and was frequently performed throughout

England for several years after that. Austen could therefore presume that her

readers would know the basic outlines of the plot. The play begins twenty years

after a seduction, when a peasant girl, Agatha, encounters Frederick, the

illegitimate son she had long ago abandoned; the Baron Wildenhaim, now a

great landowner with a daughter by a now-dead wife, had seduced Agatha. In a

subplot, the Baron arranges a marriage between his daughter and a dissolute rich

man, even though his daughter is already in love with a humble, but virtuous,

clergyman. Frederick, driven to beg in order to support himself and his mother,

at last threatens the Baron and is imprisoned. His true identity is finally revealed,

however, and the Baron responds to the news by marrying Agatha and restoring

Frederick to his patrimony. Having thus learned to renounce the concerns of

rank, the Baron also permits his daughter to marry the man she loves. As even

this brief summary suggests, the staging of *Lovers’ Vows* gives rise to many

ironic parallels, with the thick-headed and self-satisfied Mr. Rushworth all too

pleased to be playing a man valued only for his money and the fawning Mr.

Yates all too eager to play at being an aristocrat of more exalted rank. More

troubling is Tom Bertram’s readiness to “‘descend a little”’ and play a comic

butler (p. 116), and most troubling of all, of course, is the readiness of Maria and

Julia to descend even further and play the part of the fallen Agatha.

Character is revealed through these parallels, and it is further revealed through

the many debates over whether the play should be staged at all. Tom, Maria, and

Julia defend the theatricals as a fashionable diversion, while Fanny, and later Sir

Thomas, condemn them as a grievous wrong. Austen clearly sides with Fanny

and Sir Thomas. Such anti-theatricalism is remarkable enough to the present-day

reader, for whom nothing could be more innocent than a group of young people

amusing themselves by putting on a play. What makes it even more remarkable,

however, is the fact that Austen herself had avidly participated in theatricals

during her youth, writing the prologues to plays that her neighbors and siblings

would perform. To be sure, social mores had changed somewhat in the years

between Austen’s youth and the writing of *Mansfield Park,* as a growing

evangelical movement began to condemn activities that had formerly been seen

as innocent, and there is reason to believe that Austen had come to view

evangelicals with some sympathy. But the evangelicals condemned novels along

with the theater, and this fact alone is enough to remind us that *Mansfield Park* is

no evangelical tract. All this is to say that the judgments Austen will pass on the

theater are quite particular: They are not the unthinking expression of custom or

belief, but rather the self-conscious exploration of political ideology.

It is worth emphasizing that both the author of *Lovers’ Vows* and the translator

were notorious in England for being political radicals. Moreover, the play itself

was taken to be a Jacobin text. Its explicit theme, after all, was the irrelevance of

rank, and its implicit theme was the priority of individual desire over custom and

law. The play ends, in defiance of Burke, with the inheritance going to an

illegitimate son. Austen suggests, however, that it is not merely this particular

play, but acting in general, that poses a radical threat. For the conservative

conception of authority is organized around stable identities or repertories of

identities: the lords, laborers, and tenant farmers of “To Penshurst,” or the

“brother, landlord, master” of *Pride and Prejudice.* The theater, by contrast,

imagines protean selves, whose various identities are assumed and cast off at

will. Henry Crawford, who proves to be by far the best actor in the novel,

captures the theater’s dangerous possibilities when he announces himself ready

to play “any character that ever was written, from Shylock or Richard III, down

to the singing hero of a farce” (p. 109)—any character, that is to say, other than

the one he has been given by birth, the owner of the Everingham estate. The

theater thus functions in this novel as the art form of unbridled ambitions and

abrogated duties, as the art form of revolution.

To put this another way, the theatricals are a threat because they transform the

country house into a theater. Returning from his travels unexpectedly, Sir

Thomas discovers that his study has been made into a dressing room; worse, he

finds himself standing face-to-face with a feckless young man who plays baron

to his own baronet. This is “‘taking liberties with [the] father’s house’” (p. 112),

indeed. In response to such liberties, Sir Thomas orders that the stage be

disassembled and the scene painter dispatched, and he himself burns all copies

of the play. The “infection” of the theater cannot, however, be so easily

contained (p. 159). The stage curtains find their way into Mrs. Norris’s house,

and Henry Crawford is permitted to stay. With this, we come to the second, more

insidious danger posed by the theatricals: They reveal that the country house has

been a theater all along. The critic Joseph Litvak, in *Caught in the Act,* has

argued that with the return of Sir Thomas the novel shifts its attention from

theatricals to theatricality, from a discrete instance of acting to those forms of

acting that pervade, indeed constitute, social and political life. We will later see

Sir Thomas staging little theaters of power, as when he commands Fanny to

leave a ball early in order to display to potential suitors her remarkable

tractability. Nor does the novel, in Litvak’s view, imagine any alternative to

theatricality. The word “appearance,” first associated with the Crawfords, soon

takes over the narrator’s own discourse, until it is difficult for us to distinguish

the seeming from the real. Not even Fanny can escape. Her famous resistance to

the theater is articulated in the theater’s own language. “‘No, indeed, I cannot

act... I really cannot act’” (pp. 128), she says again and again, like a latter-day

Cordelia in a novelistic *King Lear.*

The first volume of *Mansfield Park* thus demonstrates that Mansfield is a

country house in need of improvement, seduced as it is by the glamour of

mercantile London and hollowed-out by the blurring of appearance and reality.

The second and third volumes of the novel will explore what improvement

should entail. Austen draws our attention to this question by using the word

“improvement” again and again, until it pervades the discourse of the narrator, as

well as the characters. Edmund works toward the “improvement” of Fanny’s

mind (p. 20), while Sir Thomas commends her “improvement” in beauty and in

health (p. 154). Sir Thomas hopes that his son-in-law Rushworth will “improve”

in knowledge and wit (p. 174), and Edmund hopes for Mary Crawford’s

“improvement” in piety and morality (p. 318). At Portsmouth, Fanny seeks the

“improvement” of her sister Susan’s conduct (p. 346), and Henry Crawford

effects some “improvement” in the way their father treats Susan and Fanny both

(p.351). Henry and Edmund approve of the “spirit of improvement” that has

taken over the clergy (p. 294), while Mary, upon hearing that the custom of

family chapel has been abandoned by the Rushworths, slyly remarks, “‘Every

generation has its improvements’” (p. 76).

The problem of improvement is thus raised by the novel’s discourse, but it is

more fully explored in the novel’s other great set piece, the day at Sotherton, the

Rushworth family estate. Having visited a friend whose estate has just been

“improved” by a landscape gardener (p. 46), Mr. Rushworth is suddenly filled

with a desire to have his own estate be similarly improved; he invites the

Bertrams and Crawfords to come to Sotherton and give him advice. Landscape

gardening provides Austen with the perfect opportunity to explore what

improvement requires; for not only is it the most concrete instance of making

changes to the country house, but it was also an activity that was understood at

the time in explicitly political terms. A generation before Austen’s birth,

Capability Brown had developed a gardening style whose natural forms were

said to exemplify a specifically English liberty, as opposed to the rigid

patternings said to exemplify the absolute monarchy in France. In Austen’s

lifetime, Humphry Repton (1752-1818) had taken Brown’s place as the most

influential landscape gardener of the day, but the politics of his gardening style

are more difficult to characterize. On the one hand, Repton warned, in *An*

*Enquiry into the Changes of Taste in Landscape Gardening* (1806), against

“moderniz [ing] old places... and [then] alter[ing] them again on the morrow” (p.

27), a recognizably Burkean caution against excessive change; on the other

hand, his actual designs tended toward rather radical “innovations.” As the critic

Alistair Duckworth has demonstrated in *The Improvement of the Estate,* Austen

knew both sides of Repton, for she not only read widely in theories of landscape

and the picturesque, but she also saw, at first hand, the changes Repton had made to Stoneleigh Abbey, the estate of her mother’s cousin. Repton had, as was his wont, opened new vistas by tearing down trees and walls, even going so far as to redirect the nearby river Avon, and there is reason to believe that Austen felt that these changes had gone too far.

In the episode at Sotherton, however, Austen is less interested in judging

either Repton’s theories or his practices than she is in condemning those

landowners who choose to hire an improver, any improver, to do work that

would better be done by themselves. Sotherton, that is to say, dramatizes both

the need for the country house to be renovated if it is to remain vital and the

imperative that the responsibilities of authority be borne by those who exercise

its powers. In Sotherton, we see a country house that has fossilized from lack of

change: The furniture is fifty years out of date, and its portraits no longer mean

anything to anyone; the family chapel has fallen into disuse and the laborers’

cottages into total disrepair. And in Rushworth, we see a landowner totally

unequipped to make the necessary changes. His plans for Sotherton begin and

end with the idea of calling in Repton, and his wish to consult with others rather

than making plans himself is merely the first sign of a thoroughgoing abrogation

of authority. For the failures at Sotherton can all be attributed to absent or

inadequate guardians: The death of the elder Mr. Rushworth has forced his

widow to turn to the family housekeeper for knowledge of the family traditions;

the younger Mr. Rushworth is ready to chop down that familiar Austen trope for

continuity, a flourishing stand of trees; and his future wife, Maria Bertram,

rejoices that the church is far enough away from the manor house that she will

not be troubled by its bells. The inheritance of the past, the requirements of the

future, and the moral and religious duties of the present—all are betrayed at

Sotherton. And the betrayals at Sotherton throw into relief that far subtler

betrayal the Crawfords threaten at Mansfield. The day at Sotherton gives rise to

much talk about improvements, and it quickly becomes clear that improving is,

for Mary, something that one hires others to do, while it is for Henry a kind of

hobby worth indulging until the pleasure begins to pall: The sister would have

improvements undertaken only when she is away from home, and the brother

would undertake them for the sheer love of “‘doing’” (pp. 50-51). Edmund, on

the other hand, would “‘rather have an inferior degree of beauty, of [his] own

choice, and acquired progressively’” (p. 50), but he alone speaks for the Burkean

values of familial responsibility and incremental change.

These, then, are the values that will come under attack as the Crawfords begin

seducing first one than another of the residents of Mansfield. And this is the

struggle that the rest of the novel will unfold: the struggle to preserve the local,

the reciprocal, and the continuous in an increasingly cosmopolitan, cash-mad,

fashion-driven world; the struggle to find a stable place in a world of

restlessness. This is a struggle over the fate of the country house, but Mansfield

Park suggests that the country house might have already been lost. For only once

is Mansfield celebrated as Donwell and Pemberley are celebrated—and then

only with significant qualifications. Toward the end of the novel, Fanny returns

to Portsmouth to visit her family, and the contrast between their home and the

Bertrams’ prompts Fanny to recognize Mansfield’s virtues at last:

The elegance, propriety, regularity, harmony, and perhaps above all the

peace and tranquillity, of Mansfield, were brought to her remembrance

every hour of the day, by the prevalence of everything opposite to them

*here....* At Mansfield no sounds of contention, no raised voice, no abrupt

bursts, no tread of violence, was ever heard; all proceeded in a regular

course of cheerful orderliness; everybody had their due importance;

everybody’s feelings were consulted. If tenderness could be ever supposed

wanting, good sense and good breeding supplied its place (pp. 340-341).

Tenderness had indeed often been wanting, and Fanny’s tacit acknowledgment

of this fact is the loose thread that unravels the passage as a whole. It reminds us

that while other country houses in Austen compel love at first sight, Mansfield

can be loved only from a distance, only through a veil of faulty memory. And the

more closely we look at this passage, the more clear it becomes that Mansfield

remains what it had long been: a place of “propriety” from without and invidious

distinctions from within, of apparent “harmony” and actual dissent, of “good

sense and good breeding,” but bad morality.

The failures of Mansfield seem to be beyond improvement, and it is in this

context that we can best understand the novel’s shift in focus from country house

to parsonage. Austen famously described *Mansfield Park* as “a complete change

of subject—Ordination,” but the novel proves to be less of a change in subject

than we might at first expect. For what interests Austen about the duties of a

clergyman is their close resemblance to the duties of a landowner; what interests

her about “ordination,” that is to say, is its possible implications for other forms

of order. As a younger son, Edmund cannot hope to inherit Mansfield, but his

understanding of what it means to be a clergyman is held up as a model for what

the heir to Mansfield should and must be. And what it means to be a clergyman,

for Edmund, is to settle in one’s parish. Edmund must explain to the Crawfords

that he will not, as they expect him to do, visit his parish church on Sundays and

spend the rest of the week at Mansfield. For he understands that “‘a parish has

wants and claims which can be known only by a clergyman constantly

resident.... that if he does not live among his parishioners, and prove himself by

constant attention their well-wisher and friend, he does very little either for their

good or his own’” (pp. 214-215). With this passage, Austen joins the

contemporary chorus attacking the rampant abuses in the Church of England,

such as the relatively common practice of clergymen hiring curates to perform

the duties of a parish while themselves continuing to receive its tithes. But the

passage also implies that residence is a virtue for landowners as well as

clergymen, and it reminds us of the “very little good” that was done during Sir

Thomas’s two-year absence from home. The fact that it is Sir Thomas himself

who has spoken this passage, with his customary sententiousness, further

emphasizes the total separation between the appearance and reality at Mansfield.

By retreating from country house to parsonage, *Mansfield Park* acknowledges

that the landed elite is often incapable, or unworthy, of upholding the countryhouse ideal.

But the novel also suggests that this ideal is more problematic than

Burkean conservatives are willing to admit.

More specifically, *Mansfield Park* critiques the landed estate in much the

same terms as Austen herself is now critiqued by critics in our own day. The

critic Raymond Williams, for instance, in *The Country and the City,* has

famously indicted Austen for failing to represent, or perhaps even failing to see,

the agricultural labor on which the country house depends. She can be quite

vague, he notes, about the number of acres in a particular estate, but far more

precise about the number of pounds it is worth every year; in much the same

way, she has a keen eye for timber, which can be cut down and sold, but a

curious blindness when it comes to the woodsmen. What this means, Williams

argues, is that Austen understands the estate as both a source of wealth and a

repository of legible social signs, but not as a site of labor. Indeed, the function

of the country house, he suggests, is to transform working-class labor into

gentry-class gentility. Williams makes this argument most elegantly through a

play on the double meaning of cultivation: The cultivation of land is converted

into money, which must then be converted once more into the cultivation of

manners and accomplishments. What the country house does, Austen’s countryhouse novels do as well—namely, blind us to the working classes and to the crucial labor that they do.

The critic Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism,* has more recently

commented on an odd blindness of Williams’s own, a failure to see the slave

labor on the Bertram’s plantations in Antigua. The fact that the novel refers to

Antigua so obliquely is, in Said’s account, both a sign of Austen’s reluctance to

acknowledge the brutal facts of imperialism and proof that the imperial project

has already been achieved. For what the novel’s scattered references to Antigua

demonstrate most powerfully is that the colonies, and their relation to the

metropolitan centers of England can be taken entirely for granted. Said goes on

to argue that this presumed relation of center to periphery not only organized

economic and political realities in the nineteenth century, but also underwrote

the very form of the nineteenth-century novel. In *Mansfield Park,* we see the

beginning of a novelistic tradition that locates value in fixity, immobility, and,

above all else, centrality and that sees the periphery as “resources to be visited,

talked about, described, or appreciated for domestic reason, for local

metropolitan benefit.”

Williams and Said are persuasive in arguing that *Mansfield Park* does not

merely reflect the contemporary realities of labor and empire, but indeed helps to

create structures that erase working-class and marginalize imperial subjects.

What I want to emphasize, however, are the moments when Austen points to the

gaps where those subjects should be. One such moment comes when Henry

Crawford and Edmund debate the improvements that might be made to

Edmund’s parsonage. Henry’s proposals are typically extravagant, involving the

turning around of the house, the exchanging of meadow and garden, and the

purchasing of nearby stands of timber. Edmund, by contrast, presents his own

plans as properly modest. “‘I must be satisfied with rather less ornament and

beauty, ”’ he says, and further hopes only to give the parsonage “‘the air of a

gentleman’s residence’” (p. 210). In the conversation that follows, however, it

soon becomes clear that what the “air of a gentleman’s residence” requires is the

total removal of the farmyard and all its works, including the blacksmith’s shop.

Austen, here, makes precisely the point that Williams will make more than a

hundred and fifty years later, by cataloguing the various forms of necessary labor

that her own country-house vision requires her to erase. Elsewhere, too, Austen

draws our attention to otherwise forgotten forms of labor. The moment of

Fanny’s great ascendancy at Mansfield, the proposal of marriage she receives, is

marked by Baddeley, the butler, calling her into Sir Thomas’s study, the only

time in the entire novel that any servant speaks. The most famous gap in

*Mansfield Park,* however, is the “‘dead silence’” that follows Fanny’s questions

about the slave trade (p. 171). Critics debate whether this silence would be filled

by a condemnation or a defense of slavery, but surely the significance of the

silence is that it could never be filled in a novel like this—and that it thus

registers all that the novel cannot accommodate.

The critic D. A. Miller helps us to see that Austen understood the costs of

conservatism to be finally as much formal as political. And here we return to

where we began, to the opposition between Fanny and Mary. Miller begins with

the claim that marriage, in an Austen novel, enacts what he calls the “ideology of

settlement” *(Narrative and Its Discontents,* p. 50), an ideology that resembles

Burkean conservatism in crucial ways. Not only does marriage settle characters

socially, by fixing them in their proper sphere, but it can be brought about only,

he argues, by a prior settling of other domains: the cognitive, the moral, and the

linguistic. A man and a woman can marry only after each has come properly to

know the other, has come properly to judge the other, and, what is nearly the

same thing in Austen, has found the proper language in which to speak of and to

the other. It is this search for knowledge, judgment, and conversation that

Austen’s courtship plots narrate. But because the search must be a search, it

requires that her heroines be taken in by lying suitors, be tempted by glamorous

wrongs, even speak intemperately or injudiciously—all on their way to finding a

proper mate. In making this argument, Miller articulates a crucial distinction

between narrative and closure, between the forces that drive a story forward and

the forces that bring it to an end; moreover, he draws attention to the paradoxical relationship between the two. The requirements of narrative are at odds with the requirements of closure, and Austen’s novels, as a result, must contain many elements, many errors and confusions that their endings cannot endorse.

In *Mansfield Park,* Austen subjects this paradox to intense and painful

scrutiny. She does so, Miller argues, by creating two possible heroines—one,

Fanny, who is the embodiment of closure, and the other, Mary, who is the

embodiment of narrative itself. Miller is helpful not only in making sense of our

otherwise perplexing dislike of Fanny, but also in suggesting that this dislike

might have been felt most strongly by Austen herself. For just as readers find

themselves loving Mary despite her faults and disliking Fanny because of her

virtues, so Austen must have recognized that while Fanny would have made an

excellent model for a conduct book, she could never have been the author of

*Mansfield Park.* It is Mary, with her energy and vivacity, her sharp eye and keen

wit, who most resembles Austen, and Mary who signals Austen’s lingering

attraction to the mobile and the changing, perhaps, even, to the revolutionary.

*Mansfield Park* may be the most obviously ideological of Austen’s novels, but it

is by no means unaware of the consequences, indeed the costs, of its own

ideology.

**Amanda Claybaugh** is Assistant Professor of English and comparative

literature at Columbia University. She is currently at work on a project that

considers the relation between social reform and the literary marketplace in the

nineteenth-century British and American novel.

**Mansfield Park**

**CHAPTER I**

**A**bout thirty years ago, Miss Maria Ward, of Huntingdon, with only seven

thousand pounds, had the good luck to captivate Sir Thomas Bertram, of

Mansfield Park, in the county of Northampton, and to be thereby raised to the

rank of a baronet’s lady, with all the comforts and consequences of a handsome

house and large income. All Huntingdon exclaimed on the greatness of the

match; and her uncle, the lawyer, himself, allowed her to be at least three

thousand pounds short of any equitable claim to it. She had two sisters to be

benefited by her elevation; and such of their acquaintance as thought Miss Ward

and Miss Frances quite as handsome as Miss Maria, did not scruple to predict

their marrying with almost equal advantage. But there certainly are not so many

men of large fortune in the world as there are pretty women to deserve them.

Miss Ward, at the end of half a dozen years, found herself obliged to be attached

to the Rev. Mr. Norris, a friend of her brother-in-law, with scarcely any private

fortune, and Miss Frances fared yet worse. Miss Ward’s match, indeed, when it

came to the point, was not contemptible, Sir Thomas being happily able to give

his friend an income in the living of Mansfield; and Mr. and Mrs. Norris began

their career of conjugal felicity with very little less than a thousand a year. But

Miss Frances married, in the common phrase, to disoblige her family, and by

fixing on a Lieutenant of Marines, without education, fortune, or connections,

did it very thoroughly. She could hardly have made a more untoward choice. Sir

Thomas Bertram had interest, which, from principle as well as pride, from a

general wish of doing right, and a desire of seeing all that were connected with

him in situations of respectability, he would have been glad to exert for the

advantage of Lady Bertram’s sister: but her husband’s profession was such as no

interest could reach; and before he had time to devise any other method of

assisting them, an absolute breach between the sisters had taken place. It was the

natural result of the conduct of each party, and such as a very imprudent

marriage almost always produces. To save herself from useless remonstrance,

Mrs. Price never wrote to her family on the subject till actually married. Lady

Bertram, who was a woman of very tranquil feelings, and a temper remarkably

easy and indolent, would have contented herself with merely giving up her sister, and thinking no more of the matter: but Mrs. Norris had a spirit of activity, which could not be satisfied till she had written a long and angry letter to Fanny,

to point out the folly of her conduct, and threaten her with all its possible ill

consequences. Mrs. Price, in her turn, was injured and angry; and an answer,

which comprehended each sister in its bitterness, and bestowed such very

disrespectful reflections on the pride of Sir Thomas as Mrs. Norris could not

possibly keep to herself, put an end to all intercourse between them for a

considerable period.

Their homes were so distant, and the circles in which they moved so distinct,

as almost to preclude the means of ever hearing of each other’s existence during

the eleven following years, or at least to make it very wonderful to Sir Thomas

that Mrs. Norris should ever have it in her power to tell them, as she now and

then did in an angry voice, that Fanny had got another child. By the end of

eleven years, however, Mrs. Price could no longer afford to cherish pride or

resentment, or to lose one connection that might possibly assist her. A large and

still increasing family, a husband disabled for active service, but not the less

equal to company and good liquor, and a very small income to supply their

wants, made her eager to regain the friends she had so carelessly sacrificed; and

she addressed Lady Bertram in a letter which spoke so much contrition and

despondence, such a superfluity of children, and such a want of almost

everything else, as could not but dispose them all to a reconciliation. She was

preparing for her ninth lying-in; and after bewailing the circumstance, and

imploring their countenance as sponsors to the expected child, she could not

conceal how important she felt they might be to the future maintenance of the

eight already in being. Her eldest was a boy of ten years old, a fine spirited

fellow, who longed to be out in the world; but what could she do? Was there any

chance of his being hereafter useful to Sir Thomas in the concerns of his West

Indian property? No situation would be beneath him—or what did Sir Thomas

think of Woolwich? or how could a boy be sent out to the East?

The letter was not unproductive. It re-established peace and kindness. Sir

Thomas sent friendly advice and professions, Lady Bertram despatched money

and baby-linen, and Mrs. Norris wrote the letters.

Such were its immediate effects, and within a twelvemonth a more important

advantage to Mrs. Price resulted from it. Mrs. Norris was often observing to the

others that she could not get her poor sister and her family out of her head, and

that, much as they had all done for her, she seemed to be wanting to do more;

and at length she could not but own it to be her wish that poor Mrs. Price should

be relieved from the charge and expense of one child entirely out of her great

number.

‘What if they were among them to undertake the care of her eldest daughter, a

girl now nine years old, of an age to require more attention than her poor mother

could possibly give? The trouble and expense of it to them would be nothing,

compared with the benevolence of the action.’ Lady Bertram agreed with her

instantly. ‘I think we cannot do better,’ said she; ‘let us send for the child.’

Sir Thomas could not give so instantaneous and unqualified a consent. He

debated and hesitated:—it was a serious charge;—a girl so brought up must be

adequately provided for, or there would be cruelty instead of kindness in taking

her from her family. He thought of his own four children—of his two sons—of

cousins in love, etc.;—but no sooner had he deliberately begun to state his

objections, than Mrs. Norris interrupted him with a reply to them all, whether

stated or not.

‘My dear Sir Thomas, I perfectly comprehend you, and do justice to the

generosity and delicacy of your notions, which indeed are quite of a piece with

your general conduct; and I entirely agree with you in the main as to the

propriety of doing everything one could by way of providing for a child one had

in a manner taken into one’s own hands; and I am sure I should be the last

person in the world to withhold my mite upon such an occasion. Having no

children of my own, who should I look to in any little matter I may ever have to

bestow, but the children of my sisters? and I am sure Mr. Norris is too just—but

you know I am a woman of few words and professions. Do not let us be

frightened from a good deed by a trifle. Give a girl an education, and introduce

her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well,

without further expense to anybody. A niece of ours, Sir Thomas, I may say, or,

at least, of *yours,* would not grow up in this neighbourhood without many

advantages. I don’t say she would be so handsome as her cousins. I daresay she

would not; but she would be introduced into the society of this country under

such very favourable circumstances as, in all human probability, would get her a

creditable establishment. You are thinking of your sons—but do not you know

that of all things upon earth *that* is the least likely to happen; brought up, as they

would be, always together like brothers and sisters? It is morally impossible. I

never knew an instance of it. It is, in fact, the only sure way of providing against

the connection. Suppose her a pretty girl, and seen by Tom or Edmund for the

first time seven years hence, and I daresay there would be mischief. The very

idea of her having been suffered to grow up at a distance from us all in poverty

and neglect would be enough to make either of the dear, sweet-tempered boys in

love with her. But breed her up with them from this time, and suppose her even

to have the beauty of an angel, and she will never be more to either than a sister.’

‘There is a great deal of truth in what you say,’ replied Sir Thomas, ‘and far be

it from me to throw any fanciful impediment in the way of a plan which would

be so consistent with the relative situations of each. I only meant to observe that

it ought not to be lightly engaged in, and that to make it really serviceable to

Mrs. Price, and creditable to ourselves, we must secure to the child, or consider

ourselves engaged to secure to her hereafter, as circumstances may arise, the

provision of a gentlewoman, if no such establishment should offer as you are so

sanguine in expecting.’

‘I thoroughly understand you,’ cried Mrs. Norris; ‘you are everything that is

generous and considerate, and I am sure we shall never disagree on this point.

Whatever I can do, as you well know, I am always ready enough to do for the

good of those I love; and, though I could never feel for this little girl the

hundredth part of the regard I bear your own dear children, nor consider her, in

any respect, so much my own, I should hate myself if I were capable of

neglecting her. Is not she a sister’s child? and could I bear to see her want, while

I had a bit of bread to give her? My dear Sir Thomas, with all my faults I have a

warm heart; and, poor as I am, would rather deny myself the necessaries of life,

than do an ungenerous thing. So, if you are not against it, I will write to my poor

sister to-morrow, and make the proposal; and, as soon as matters are settled, I

will engage to get the child to Mansfield; you shall have no trouble about it. My

own trouble, you know, I never regard. I will send Nanny to London on purpose,

and she may have a bed at her cousin the saddler’s, and the child be appointed to

meet her there. They may easily get her from Portsmouth to town by the coach,

under the care of any creditable person that may chance to be going. I daresay

there is always some reputable tradesman’s wife or other going up.’

Except to the attack on Nanny’s cousin, Sir Thomas no longer made any

objection, and a more respectable though less economical rendezvous being

accordingly substituted, everything was considered as settled, and the pleasures

of so benevolent a scheme were already enjoyed. The division of gratifying

sensations ought not, in strict justice, to have been equal; for Sir Thomas was

fully resolved to be the real and consistent patron of the selected child, and Mrs.

Norris had not the least intention of being at any expense whatever in her

maintenance. As far as walking, talking, and contriving reached, she was

thoroughly benevolent, and nobody knew better how to dictate liberality to

others; but her love of money was equal to her love of directing, and she knew

quite as well how to save her own as to spend that of her friends. Having married

on a narrower income than she had been used to look forward to, she had, from

the first, fancied a very strict line of economy necessary; and what was begun as

a matter of prudence soon grew into a matter of choice, as an object of that

needful solicitude, which there were no children to supply. Had there been a

family to provide for, Mrs. Norris might never have saved her money; but having

no care of that kind, there was nothing to impede her frugality, or lessen the

comfort of making a yearly addition to an income which they had never lived up

to. Under this infatuating principle, counteracted by no real affection for her

sister, it was impossible for her to aim at more than the credit of projecting and

arranging so expensive a charity; though perhaps she might so little know

herself, as to walk home to the Parsonage, after this conversation, in the happy

belief of being the most liberal-minded sister and aunt in the world.

When the subject was brought forward again, her views were more fully

explained; and, in reply to Lady Bertram’s calm inquiry of ‘Where shall the child

come to first, sister, to you or to us?’ Sir Thomas heard, with some surprise, that

it would be totally out of Mrs. Norris’s power to take any share in the personal

charge of her. He had been considering her as a particularly welcome addition at

the Parsonage, as a desirable companion to an aunt who had no children of her

own: but he found himself wholly mistaken. Mrs. Norris was sorry to say that

the little girl’s staying with them, at least as things then were, was quite out of

the question. Poor Mr. Norris’s indifferent state of health made it an

impossibility: he could no more bear the noise of a child than he could fly; if,

indeed, he should ever get well of his gouty complaints, it would be a different

matter: she should then be glad to take her turn, and think nothing of the

inconvenience; but just now, poor Mr. Norris took up every moment of her time,

and the very mention of such a thing she was sure would distract him.

‘Then she had better come to us?’ said Lady Bertram, with the utmost

composure. After a short pause, Sir Thomas added with dignity, ‘Yes, let her

home be in this house. We will endeavour to do our duty by her, and she will at

least have the advantage of companions of her own age, and of a regular

instructress.’

‘Very true,’ cried Mrs. Norris, ‘which are both very important considerations;

and it will be just the same to Miss Lee, whether she has three girls to teach, or

only two—there can be no difference. I only wish I could be more useful; but

you see I do all in my power. I am not one of those that spare their own trouble;

and Nanny shall fetch her, however it may put me to inconvenience to have my

chief counsellor away for three days. I suppose, sister, you will put the child in

the little white attic, near the old nurseries. It will be much the best place for her,

so near Miss Lee, and not far from the girls, and close by the housemaids, who

could either of them help to dress her, you know, and take care of her clothes, for

I suppose you would not think it fair to expect Ellis to wait on her as well as the

others. Indeed, I do not see that you could possibly place her anywhere else.’

Lady Bertram made no opposition.

‘I hope she will prove a well-disposed girl,’ continued Mrs. Norris, ‘and be

sensible of her uncommon good fortune in having such friends.’

‘Should her disposition be really bad,’ said Sir Thomas, ‘we must not, for our

own children’s sake, continue her in the family; but there is no reason to expect

so great an evil. We shall probably see much to wish altered in her, and must

prepare ourselves for gross ignorance, some meanness of opinions, and very

distressing vulgarity of manner; but these are not incurable faults; nor, I trust,

can they be dangerous for her associates. Had my daughters been *younger* than

herself, I should have considered the introduction of such a companion as a

matter of very serious moment; but as it is, I hope there can be nothing to fear

for them, and everything to hope for *her,* from the association.’

‘That is exactly what I think,’ cried Mrs. Norris, ‘and what I was saying to my

husband this morning. It will be an education for the child, said I, only being

with her cousins; if Miss Lee taught her nothing, she would learn to be good and

clever from *them.’*

‘I hope she will not tease my poor pug,’ said Lady Bertram; ‘I have but just

got Julia to leave it alone.’

‘There will be some difficulty in our way, Mrs. Norris,’ observed Sir Thomas,

‘as to the distinction proper to be made between the girls as they grow up: how

to preserve in the minds of my daughters the consciousness of what they are,

without making them think too lowly of their cousin; and how, without

depressing her spirits too far, to make her remember that she is not a *Miss*

*Bertram.* I should wish to see them very good friends, and would, on no account,

authorise in my girls the smallest degree of arrogance towards their relation; but

still they cannot be equals. Their rank, fortune, rights, and expectations, will

always be different. It is a point of great delicacy, and you must assist us in our

endeavours to choose exactly the right line of conduct.’

Mrs. Norris was quite at his service; and though she perfectly agreed with him

as to its being a most difficult thing, encouraged him to hope that between them

it would be easily managed.

It will be readily believed that Mrs. Norris did not write to her sister in vain.

Mrs. Price seemed rather surprised that a girl should be fixed on, when she had

so many fine boys, but accepted the offer most thankfully, assuring them of her

daughter’s being a very well-disposed, good-humoured girl, and trusting they

would never have cause to throw her off. She spoke of her further as somewhat

delicate and puny, but was sanguine in the hope of her being materially better for

change of air. Poor woman! she probably thought change of air might agree with

many of her children.

**CHAPTER II**

**T**he little girl performed her long journey in safety; and at Northampton was met

by Mrs. Norris, who thus regaled in the credit of being foremost to welcome her,

and in the importance of leading her in to the others, and recommending her to

their kindness.

Fanny Price was at this time just ten years old, and though there might not be

much in her first appearance to captivate, there was, at least, nothing to disgust

her relations. She was small of her age, with no glow of complexion, nor any

other striking beauty; exceedingly timid and shy, and shrinking from notice; but

her air, though awkward, was not vulgar, her voice was sweet, and when she

spoke her countenance was pretty. Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram received her

very kindly; and Sir Thomas, seeing how much she needed encouragement, tried

to be all that was conciliating: but he had to work against a most untoward

gravity of deportment; and Lady Bertram, without taking half so much trouble,

or speaking one word where he spoke ten, by the mere aid of a good-humoured

smile became immediately the less awful character of the two.

The young people were all at home, and sustained their share in the

introduction very well, with much good-humour, and no embarrassment, at least

on the part of the sons, who, at seventeen and sixteen, and tall of their age, had

all the grandeur of men in the eyes of their little cousin. The two girls were more

at a loss from being younger and in greater awe of their father, who addressed

them on the occasion with rather an injudicious particularity. But they were too

much used to company and praise, to have anything like natural shyness; and

their confidence increasing from their cousin’s total want of it, they were soon

able to take a full survey of her face and her frock in easy indifference.

They were a remarkably fine family; the sons very well looking, the daughters

decidedly handsome, and all of them well grown and forward of their age, which

produced as striking a difference between the cousins in person, as education had

given to their address; and no one would have supposed the girls so nearly of an

age as they really were.

There were in fact but two years between the youngest and Fanny. Julia

Bertram was only twelve, and Maria but a year older. The little visitor

meanwhile was as unhappy as possible. Afraid of everybody, ashamed of herself,

and longing for the home she had left, she knew not how to look up, and could

scarcely speak to be heard, or without crying. Mrs. Norris had been talking to

her the whole way from Northampton of her wonderful good fortune, and the

extraordinary degree of gratitude and good behaviour which it ought to produce,

and her consciousness of misery was therefore increased by the idea of its being

a wicked thing for her not to be happy. The fatigue, too, of so long a journey

became soon no trifling evil. In vain were the well-meant condescensions of Sir

Thomas, and all the officious prognostications of Mrs. Norris that she would be a

good girl; in vain did Lady Bertram smile and make her sit on the sofa with

herself and Pug, and vain was even the sight of a gooseberry tart towards giving

her comfort; she could scarcely swallow two mouthfuls before tears interrupted

her, and sleep seeming to be her likeliest friend, she was taken to finish her

sorrows in bed.

‘This is not a very promising beginning,’ said Mrs. Norris, when Fanny had

left the room. ‘After all that I said to her as we came along, I thought she would

have behaved better; I told her how much might depend upon her acquitting

herself well at first. I wish there may not be a little sulkiness of temper—her

poor mother had a good deal; but we must make allowances for such a child; and

I do not know that her being sorry to leave her home is really against her, for,

with all its faults, it *was* her home, and she cannot as yet understand how much

she has changed for the better; but then there is moderation in all things.’

It required a longer time, however, than Mrs. Norris was inclined to allow, to

reconcile Fanny to the novelty of Mansfield Park, and the separation from

everybody she had been used to. Her feelings were very acute, and too little

understood to be properly attended to. Nobody meant to be unkind, but nobody

put themselves out of their way to secure her comfort.

The holiday allowed to the Miss Bertrams the next day, on purpose to afford

leisure for getting acquainted with and entertaining their young cousin, produced

little union. They could not but hold her cheap on finding that she had but two

sashes, and had never learnt French; and when they perceived her to be little

struck with the duet they were so good as to play, they could do no more than

make her a generous present of some of their least valued toys, and leave her to

herself, while they adjourned to whatever might be the favourite holiday sport of

the moment, making artificial flowers or wasting gold paper.

Fanny, whether near or from her cousins, whether in the schoolroom, the

drawing-room, or the shrubbery, was equally forlorn, finding something to fear

in every person and place. She was disheartened by Lady Bertram’s silence,

awed by Sir Thomas’s grave looks, and quite overcome by Mrs. Norris’s

admonitions. Her elder cousins mortified her by reflections on her size, and

abashed her by noticing her shyness; Miss Lee wondered at her ignorance, and

the maid-servants sneered at her clothes; and when to these sorrows was added

the idea of the brothers and sisters among whom she had always been important

as playfellow, instructress, and nurse, the despondence that sank her little heart

was severe.

The grandeur of the house astonished, but could not console her. The rooms

were too large for her to move in with ease; whatever she touched she expected

to injure, and she crept about in constant terror of something or other; often

retreating towards her own chamber to cry; and the little girl who was spoken of

in the drawing-room when she left it at night, as seeming so desirably sensible of

her peculiar good fortune, ended every day’s sorrows by sobbing herself to sleep.

A week had passed in this way, and no suspicion of it conveyed by her quiet,

passive manner, when she was found one morning by her cousin Edmund, the

youngest of the sons, sitting crying on the attic stairs.

‘My dear little cousin,’ said he, with all the gentleness of an excellent nature,

‘what can be the matter?’ And sitting down by her, he was at great pains to

overcome her shame in being so surprised, and persuade her to speak openly.

‘Was she ill? or was anybody angry with her? or had she quarrelled with Maria

and Julia? or was she puzzled about anything in her lesson that he could explain?

Did she, in short, want anything he could possibly get her, or do for her?’ For a

long while no answer could be obtained beyond a ‘No, no—not at all—no, thank

you’; but he still persevered; and no sooner had he begun to revert to her own

home, than her increased sobs explained to him where the grievance lay. He tried

to console her.

‘You are sorry to leave mamma, my dear little Fanny,’ said he, ‘which shows

you to be a very good girl; but you must remember that you are with relations

and friends, who all love you, and wish to make you happy. Let us walk out in

the park, and you shall tell me all about your brothers and sisters.’

On pursuing the subject, he found that, dear as all these brothers and sisters

generally were, there was one among them who ran more in her thoughts than

the rest. It was William whom she talked of most, and wanted most to see.

William, the eldest, a year older than herself, her constant companion and friend;

her advocate with her mother (of whom he was the darling) in every distress.

‘William did not like she should come away; he had told her he should miss her

very much indeed.’—‘But William will write to you, I daresay.’—‘Yes, he had

promised he would, but he had told *her* to write first.’—‘And when shall you do

it?’ She hung her head and answered, hesitatingly, ‘she did not know; she had

not any paper.’

‘If that be all your difficulty, I will furnish you with paper and every other

material, and you may write your letter whenever you choose. Would it make

you happy to write to William?’

‘Yes, very.’

‘Then let it be done now. Come with me into the breakfast-room, we shall find

everything there, and be sure of having the room to ourselves.’

‘But, cousin—will it go to the post?’

‘Yes, depend upon me it shall: it shall go with the other letters; and as your

uncle will frank it, it will cost William nothing.’

‘My uncle?’ repeated Fanny, with a frightened look.

‘Yes, when you have written the letter, I will take it to my father to frank.’

Fanny thought it a bold measure, but offered no further resistance; and they

went together into the breakfast-room, where Edmund prepared her paper, and

ruled her lines with all the good-will that her brother could himself have felt, and

probably with somewhat more exactness. He continued with her the whole time

of her writing, to assist her with his penknife or his orthography, as either were

wanted; and added to these attentions, which she felt very much, a kindness to

her brother, which delighted her beyond all the rest. He wrote with his own hand

his love to his cousin William, and sent him half a guinea under the seal. Fanny’s

feelings on the occasion were such as she believed herself incapable of

expressing; but her countenance and a few artless words fully conveyed all their

gratitude and delight, and her cousin began to find her an interesting object. He

talked to her more, and, from all that she said, was convinced of her having an

affectionate heart, and a strong desire of doing right; and he could perceive her

to be farther entitled to attention, by great sensibility of her situation, and great

timidity. He had never knowingly given her pain, but he now felt that she

required more positive kindness, and with that view endeavoured, in the first

place, to lessen her fears of them all, and gave her especially a great deal of good

advice as to playing with Maria and Julia, and being as merry as possible.

From this day Fanny grew more comfortable. She felt that she had a friend,

and the kindness of her cousin Edmund gave her better spirits with everybody

else. The place became less strange, and the people less formidable; and if there

were some amongst them whom she could not cease to fear, she began at least to know their ways, and to catch the best manner of conforming to them. The little rusticities and awkwardnesses which had at first made grievous inroads on the tranquillity of all, and not least of herself, necessarily wore away, and she was no longer materially afraid to appear before her uncle, nor did her aunt Norris’s

voice make her start very much. To her cousins she became occasionally an

acceptable companion. Though unworthy, from inferiority of age and strength, to

be their constant associate, their pleasures and schemes were sometimes of a

nature to make a third very useful, especially when that third was of an obliging,

yielding temper; and they could not but own, when their aunt inquired into her

faults, or their brother Edmund urged her claims to their kindness, that ‘Fanny

was good-natured enough.’

Edmund was uniformly kind himself; and she had nothing worse to endure on

the part of Tom than that sort of mernment which a young man of seventeen will

always think fair with a child of ten. He was just entering into life, full of spirits,

and with all the liberal dispositions of an eldest son, who feels born only for

expense and enjoyment. His kindness to his little cousin was consistent with his

situation and rights: he made her some very pretty presents, and laughed at her.

As her appearance and spirits improved, Sir Thomas and Mrs. Norris thought

with greater satisfaction of their benevolent plan; and it was pretty soon decided

between them that, though far from clever, she showed a tractable disposition,

and seemed likely to give them little trouble. A mean opinion of her abilities was

not confined to *them.* Fanny could read, work, and write, but she had been taught

nothing more; and as her cousins found her ignorant of many things with which

they had been long familiar, they thought her prodigiously stupid, and for the

first two or three weeks were continually bringing some fresh report of it into the

drawing-room. ‘Dear mamma, only think, my cousin cannot put the map of

Europe together—or my cousin cannot tell the principal rivers in Russia—or she

never heard of Asia Minor—or she does not know the difference between watercolours

and crayons! How strange! Did you ever hear anything so stupid?’

‘My dear,’ their considerate aunt would reply, ‘it is very bad, but you must not

expect everybody to be as forward and quick at learning as yourself.’

‘But, aunt, she is really so very ignorant! Do you know, we asked her last

night, which way she would go to get to Ireland; and she said, she should cross

to the Isle of Wight. She thinks of nothing but the Isle of Wight, and she calls it

*the Island,* as if there were no other island in the world. I am sure I should have

been ashamed of myself, if I had not known better long before I was so old as

she is. I cannot remember the time when I did not know a great deal that she has

not the least notion of yet. How long ago it is, aunt, since we used to repeat the

chronological order of the kings of England, with the dates of their accession,

and most of the principal events of their reigns!’

‘Yes,’ added the other; ‘and of the Roman emperors as low as Severus; besides

a great deal of the heathen mythology, and all the metals, semi-metals, planets,

and distinguished philosophers.’

‘Very true, indeed, my dears, but you are blessed with wonderful memories,

and your poor cousin has probably none at all. There is a vast deal of difference

in memories, as well as in everything else, and therefore you must make

allowance for your cousin, and pity her deficiency. And remember that, if you

are ever so forward and clever yourselves, you should always be modest; for,

much as you know already, there is a great deal more for you to learn.’

‘Yes, I know there is, till I am seventeen. But I must tell you another thing of

Fanny, so odd and so stupid. Do you know, she says she does not want to learn

either music or drawing.’

‘To be sure, my dear, that is very stupid indeed, and shows a great want of

genius and emulation. But, all things considered, I do not know whether it is not

as well that it should be so, for, though you know (owing to me) your papa and

mamma are so good as to bring her up with you, it is not at all necessary that she

should be as accomplished as you are; on the contrary, it is much more desirable

that there should be a difference.’

Such were the counsels by which Mrs. Norris assisted to form her nieces’

mind; and it is not very wonderful that, with all their promising talents and early

information, they should be entirely deficient in the less common acquirements

of self-knowledge, generosity, and humility. In everything but disposition, they

were admirably taught. Sir Thomas did not know what was wanting, because,

though a truly anxious father, he was not outwardly affectionate, and the reserve

of his manner repressed all the flow of their spirits before him.

To the education of her daughters Lady Bertram paid not the smallest

attention. She had not time for such cares. She was a woman who spent her days

in sitting nicely dressed on a sofa, doing some long piece of needlework, of little

use and no beauty, thinking more of her pug than her children, but very indulgent

to the latter, when it did not put herself to inconvenience, guided in everything

important by Sir Thomas, and in smaller concerns by her sister. Had she

possessed greater leisure for the service of her girls, she would probably have

supposed it unnecessary, for they were under the care of a governess, with proper

masters, and could want nothing more. As for Fanny’s being stupid at learning,

‘she could only say it was very unlucky, but some people *were* stupid, and Fanny

must take more pains: she did not know what else was to be done; and, except

her being so dull, she must add, she saw no harm in the poor little thing—and

always found her very handy and quick in carrying messages, and fetching what

she wanted.’

Fanny, with all her faults of ignorance and timidity, was fixed at Mansfield

Park, and, learning to transfer in its favour much of her attachment to her former

home, grew up there not unhappily among her cousins. There was no positive ill-nature in Maria or Julia; and though Fanny was often mortified by their

treatment of her, she thought too lowly of her own claims to feel injured by it.

From about the time of her entering the family, Lady Bertram, in consequence

of a little ill-health, and a great deal of indolence, gave up the house in town,

which she had been used to occupy every spring, and remained wholly in the

country, leaving Sir Thomas to attend his duty in Parliament, with whatever

increase or diminution of comfort might arise from her absence. In the country,

therefore, the Miss Bertrams continued to exercise their memories, practise their

duets, and grow tall and womanly; and their father saw them becoming in

person, manner, and accomplishments, everything that could satisfy his anxiety.

His eldest son was careless and extravagant, and had already given him much

uneasiness; but his other children promised him nothing but good. His daughters,

he felt, while they retained the name of Bertram, must be giving it new grace,

and in quitting it he trusted would extend its respectable alliances; and the

character of Edmund, his strong good sense and uprightness of mind, bid most

fairly for utility, honour, and happiness to himself and all his connections. He

was to be a clergyman.

Amid the cares and the complacency which his own children suggested, Sir

Thomas did not forget to do what he could for the children of Mrs. Price: he

assisted her liberally in the education and disposal of her sons as they became

old enough for a determinate pursuit; and Fanny, though almost totally separated

from her family, was sensible of the truest satisfaction in hearing of any kindness

towards them, or of anything at all promising in their situation or conduct. Once,

and once only in the course of many years, had she the happiness of being with

William. Of the rest she saw nothing: nobody seemed to think of her ever going

amongst them again, even for a visit, nobody at home seemed to want her; but

William determining, soon after her removal, to be a sailor, was invited to spend

a week with his sister in Northamptonshire, before he went to sea. Their eager

affection in meeting, their exquisite delight in being together, their hours of

happy mirth, and moments of serious conference, may be imagined; as well as

the sanguine views and spirits of the boy even to the last, and the misery of the

girl when he left her. Luckily the visit happened in the Christmas holidays, when

she could directly look for comfort to her cousin Edmund; and he told her such

charming things of what William was to do and be hereafter, in consequence of

his profession, as made her gradually admit that the separation might have some

use. Edmund’s friendship never failed her: his leaving Eton for Oxford made no

change in his kind dispositions, and only afforded more frequent opportunities of

proving them. Without any display of doing more than the rest, or any fear of

doing too much, he was always true to her interests, and considerate of her

feelings, trying to make her good qualities understood, and to conquer the

diffidence which prevented their being more apparent; giving her advice,

consolation, and encouragement.

Kept back as she was by everybody else, his single support could not bring

her forward; but his attentions were otherwise of the highest importance in

assisting the improvement of her mind, and extending its pleasures. He knew her

to be clever, to have a quick apprehension as well as good sense, and a fondness

for reading, which, properly directed, must be an education in itself. Miss Lee

taught her French, and heard her read the daily portion of history; but he

recommended the books which charmed her leisure hours, he encouraged her

taste, and corrected her judgment: he made reading useful by talking to her of

what she read, and heightened its attraction by judicious praise. In return for

such services she loved him better than anybody in the world except William:

her heart was divided between the two.

**CHAPTER III**

**T**he first event of any importance in the family was the death of Mr. Norris,

which happened when Fanny was about fifteen, and necessarily introduced

alterations and novelties. Mrs. Norris, on quitting the Parsonage, removed first to

the Park, and afterwards to a small house of Sir Thomas’s in the village, and

consoled herself for the loss of her husband by considering that she could do

very well without him; and for her reduction of income by the evident necessity

of stricter economy.

The living was hereafter for Edmund1; and had his uncle died a few years

sooner, it would have been duly given to some friend to hold till he were old

enough for orders. But Tom’s extravagance had, previous to that event, been so

great as to render a different disposal of the next presentation necessary, and the

younger brother must help to pay for the pleasures of the elder. There was

another family living actually held for Edmund; but though this circumstance

had made the arrangement somewhat easier to Sir Thomas’s conscience, he

could not but feel it to be an act of injustice, and he earnestly tried to impress his

eldest son with the same conviction, in the hope of its producing a better effect

than anything he had yet been able to say or do.

‘I blush for you, Tom,’ said he, in his most dignified manner; ‘I blush for the

expedient which I am driven on, and I trust I may pity your feelings as a brother

on the occasion. You have robbed Edmund for ten, twenty, thirty years, perhaps

for life, of more than half the income which ought to be his. It may hereafter be

in my power, or in yours (I hope it will), to procure him better preferment; but it

must not be forgotten that no benefit of that sort would have been beyond his

natural claims on us, and that nothing can, in fact, be an equivalent for the

certain advantage which he is now obliged to forego through the urgency of your

debts.’

Tom listened with some shame and some sorrow; but, escaping as quickly as

possible, could soon with cheerful selfishness reflect, first, that he had not been

half so much in debt as some of his friends; secondly, that his father had made a

most tiresome piece of work of it; and, thirdly, that the future incumbent,

whoever he might be, would, in all probability, die very soon.

On Mr. Norris’s death, the presentation became the right of a Dr. Grant, who

came consequently to reside at Mansfield; and on proving to be a hearty man of

forty-five, seemed likely to disappoint Mr. Bertram’s calculations. But ‘no, he

was a short-necked, apoplectic sort of fellow, and, plied well with good things,

would soon pop off.’

He had a wife about fifteen years his junior, but no children; and they entered

the neighbourhood with the usual fair report of being very respectable, agreeable

people.

The time was now come when Sir Thomas expected his sister-in-law to claim

her share in their niece, the change in Mrs. Norris’s situation, and the

improvement in Fanny’s age, seeming not merely to do away any former

objection to their living together, but even to give it the most decided eligibility;

and as his own circumstances were rendered less fair than heretofore, by some

recent losses on his West India estate, in addition to his eldest son’s

extravagance, it became not undesirable to himself to be relieved from the

expense of her support, and the obligation of her future provision. In the fulness

of his belief that such a thing must be, he mentioned its probability to his wife;

and the first time of the subject’s occurring to her again happening to be when

Fanny was present, she calmly observed to her, ‘So, Fanny, you are going to

leave us, and live with my sister. How shall you like it?’

Fanny was too much surprised to do more than repeat her aunt’s words,

‘Going to leave you?’

‘Yes, my dear, why should you be astonished? You have been five years with

us, and my sister always meant to take you when Mr. Norris died. But you must

come up and tack on my patterns all the same.’

The news was as disagreeable to Fanny as it had been unexpected. She had

never received kindness from her aunt Norris, and could not love her.

‘I shall be very sorry to go away,’ said she, with a faltering voice.

‘Yes, I daresay you will; *that’s* natural enough. I suppose you have had as little

to vex you since you came into this house as any creature in the world.’

‘I hope I am not ungrateful, aunt,’ said Fanny, modestly.

‘No, my dear; I hope not. I have always found you a very good girl.’

‘And am I never to live here again?’

‘Never, my dear; but you are sure of a comfortable home. It can make very

little difference to you, whether you are in one house or the other.’

Fanny left the room with a very sorrowful heart: she could not feel the

difference to be so small, she could not think of living with her aunt with

anything like satisfaction. As soon as she met with Edmund, she told him her

distress.

‘Cousin,’ said she, ‘something is going to happen which I do not like at all;

and though you have often persuaded me into being reconciled to things that I

disliked at first, you will not be able to do it now. I am going to live entirely with

my aunt Norris.’

‘Indeed!’

‘Yes, my aunt Bertram has just told me so. It is quite settled. I am to leave

Mansfield Park, and go to the White House, I suppose, as soon as she is removed

there.’

‘Well, Fanny, and if the plan were not unpleasant to you, I should call it an

excellent one.’

‘Oh, cousin!’

‘It has everything else in its favour. My aunt is acting like a sensible woman in

wishing for you. She is choosing a friend and companion exactly where she

ought, and I am glad her love of money does not interfere. You will be what you

ought to be to her. I hope it does not distress you very much, Fanny.’

‘Indeed it does: I cannot like it. I love this house and everything in it: I shall

love nothing there. You know how uncomfortable I feel with her.’

‘I can say nothing for her manner to you as a child; but it was the same with

us all, or nearly so. She never knew how to be pleasant to children. But you are

now of an age to be treated better; I think she is behaving better already; and

when you are her only companion, you *must* be important to her.’

‘I can never be important to any one.’

‘What is to prevent you?’

‘Everything. My situation—my foolishness and awkwardness.’

‘As to your foolishness and awkwardness, my dear Fanny, believe me, you

never have a shadow of either, but in using the words so improperly. There is no

reason in the world why you should not be important where you are known. You

have good sense and a sweet temper, and I am sure you have a grateful heart,

that could never receive kindness without wishing to return it. I do not know any

better qualifications for a friend and companion.’

‘You are too kind,’ said Fanny, colouring at such praise; ‘how shall I ever

thank you as I ought, for thinking so well of me? Oh, cousin, if I am to go away,

I shall remember your goodness to the last moment of my life.’

‘Why, indeed, Fanny, I should hope to be remembered at such a distance as

the White House. You speak as if you were going two hundred miles off, instead

of only across the park; but you will belong to us almost as much as ever. The

two families will be meeting every day in the year. The only difference will be,

that, living with your aunt, you will necessarily be brought forward as you ought

to be. *Here,* there are too many whom you can hide behind; but with *her* you will

be forced to speak for yourself.’

‘Oh, do not say so.’

‘I must say it, and say it with pleasure. Mrs. Norris is much better fitted than

my mother for having the charge of you now. She is of a temper to do a great

deal for anybody she really interests herself about, and she will force you to do

justice to your natural powers.’

Fanny sighed, and said, ‘I cannot see things as you do; but I ought to believe

you to be right rather than myself, and I am very much obliged to you for trying

to reconcile me to what must be. If I could suppose my aunt really to care for

me, it would be delightful to feel myself of consequence to anybody! —*Here*, I

know I am of none, and yet I love the place so well.’

‘The place, Fanny, is what you will not quit, though you quit the house. You

will have as free a command of the park and gardens as ever. Even *your* constant

little heart need not take fright at such a nominal change. You will have the same

walks to frequent, the same library to choose from, the same people to look at,

the same horse to ride.’

‘Very true. Yes, dear old grey pony. Ah, cousin, when I remember how much I

used to dread riding, what terrors it gave me to hear it talked of as likely to do

me good—(oh, how I have trembled at my uncle’s opening his lips if horses

were talked of);—and then think of the kind pains you took to reason and

persuade me out of my fears, and convince me that I should like it after a little

while, and feel how right you proved to be,—I am inclined to hope you may

always prophesy as well.’

‘And I am quite convinced that your being with Mrs. Norris will be as good

for your mind as riding has been for your health—and as much for your ultimate

happiness too.’

So ended their discourse, which, for any very appropriate service it could

render Fanny, might as well have been spared, for Mrs. Norris had not the

smallest intention of taking her. It had never occurred to her, on the present

occasion, but as a thing to be carefully avoided. To prevent its being expected,

she had fixed on the smallest habitation which could rank as genteel among the

buildings of Mansfield parish; the White House being only just large enough to

receive herself and her servants, and allow a spare room for a friend, of which

she made a very particular point. The spare rooms at the Parsonage had never

been wanted, but the absolute necessity of a spare room for a friend was now

never forgotten. Not all her precautions, however, could save her from being

suspected of something better; or, perhaps, her very display of the importance of

a spare room might have misled Sir Thomas to suppose it really intended for

Fanny. Lady Bertram soon brought the matter to a certainty, by carelessly

observing to Mrs. Norris—

‘I think, sister, we need not keep Miss Lee any longer, when Fanny goes to

live with you.’

Mrs. Norris almost started. ‘Live with me, dear Lady Bertram! what do you

mean?’

‘Is not she to live with you?—I thought you had settled it with Sir Thomas?’

‘Me! never. I never spoke a syllable about it to Sir Thomas, nor he to me.

Fanny live with me! the last thing in the world for me to think of, or for anybody

to wish that really knows us both. Good heaven! what could I do with Fanny?—

Me! a poor, helpless, forlorn widow, unfit for anything, my spirits quite broken

down, what could I do with a girl at her time of life, a girl of fifteen! the very

age of all others to need most attention and care, and put the cheerfullest spirits

to the test. Sure Sir Thomas could not seriously expect such a thing! Sir Thomas

is too much my friend. Nobody that wishes me well, I am sure, would propose it.

How came Sir Thomas to speak to you about it?’

‘Indeed, I do not know. I suppose he thought it best.’

‘But what did he say? He could not say he *wished* me to take Fanny. I am sure

in his heart he could not wish me to do it.’

‘No, he only said he thought it very likely—and I thought so too. We both

thought it would be a comfort to you. But if you do not like it, there is no more

to be said. She is no incumbrance here.’

‘Dear sister! If you consider my unhappy state, how can she be any comfort to

me? Here am I, a poor desolate widow, deprived of the best of husbands, my

health gone in attending and nursing him, my spirits still worse, all my peace in

this world destroyed, with barely enough to support me in the rank of a

gentlewoman, and enable me to live so as not to disgrace the memory of the dear

departed—what possible comfort could I have in taking such a charge upon me

as Fanny? If I could wish it for my own sake, I would not do so unjust a thing by

the poor girl. She is in good hands, and sure of doing well. I must struggle

through my sorrows and difficulties as I can.’

‘Then you will not mind living by yourself quite alone?’

‘Dear Lady Bertram! what am I fit for but solitude? Now and then I shall hope

to have a friend in my little cottage (I shall always have a bed for a friend); but

the most part of my future days will be spent in utter seclusion. If I can but make

both ends meet, that’s all I ask for.’

‘I hope, sister, things are not so very bad with you neither—considering Sir

Thomas says you will have six hundred a year.’

‘Lady Bertram, I do not complain. I know I cannot live as I have done, but I

must retrench where I can, and learn to be a better manager. I *have been* a liberal

housekeeper enough, but I shall not be ashamed to practise economy now. My

situation is as much altered as my income. A great many things were due from

poor Mr. Norris as clergyman of the parish that cannot be expected from me. It is

unknown how much was consumed in our kitchen by odd comers and goers. At

the White House, matters must be better looked after. I *must* live within my

income, or I shall be miserable; and I own it would give me great satisfaction to

be able to do rather more—to lay by a little at the end of the year.’

‘I daresay you will. You always do, don’t you?’

‘My object, Lady Bertram, is to be of use to those that come after me. It is for

your children’s good that I wish to be richer. I have nobody else to care for; but I

should be very glad to think I could leave a little trifle among them worth their

having.’

‘You are very good, but do not trouble yourself about them. They are sure of

being well provided for. Sir Thomas will take care of that.’

‘Why, you know Sir Thomas’s means will be rather straitened, if the Antigua

estate is to make such poor returns.’

‘Oh, that will soon be settled. Sir Thomas has been writing about it, I know.’

‘Well, Lady Bertram,’ said Mrs. Norris, moving to go, ‘I can only say that my

sole desire is to be of use to your family; and so if Sir Thomas should ever speak

again about my taking Fanny, you will be able to say that my health and spirits

put it quite out of the question—besides that, I really should not have a bed to

give her, for I must keep a spare room for a friend.’

Lady Bertram repeated enough of this conversation to her husband to

convince him how much he had mistaken his sister-in-law’s views; and she was

from that moment perfectly safe from all expectation, or the slightest allusion to

it from him. He could not but wonder at her refusing to do anything for a niece

whom she had been so forward to adopt; but as she took early care to make him,

as well as Lady Bertram, understand that whatever she possessed was designed

for their family, he soon grew reconciled to a distinction which, at the same time

that it was advantageous and complimentary to them, would enable him better to

provide for Fanny himself.

Fanny soon learnt how unnecessary had been her fears of a removal; and her

spontaneous, untaught felicity on the discovery, conveyed some consolation to

Edmund for his disappointment in what he had expected to be so essentially

serviceable to her. Mrs. Norris took possession of the White House, the Grants

arrived at the Parsonage, and these events over, everything at Mansfield went on

for some time as usual.

The Grants showing a disposition to be friendly and sociable, gave great

satisfaction in the main among their new acquaintance. They had their faults, and

Mrs. Norris soon found them out.

The Doctor was very fond of eating, and would have a good dinner every day; and Mrs. Grant, instead of contriving to gratify him at little expense, gave her cook as high wages as they did at +Mansfield Park, and was scarcely ever seen in her offices. Mrs. Norris could not

speak with any temper of such grievances, nor of the quantity of butter and eggs

that were regularly consumed in the house. ‘Nobody loved plenty and hospitality

more than herself—nobody more hated pitiful doings—the Parsonage she

believed had never been wanting in comforts of any sort, had never borne a bad

character in *her time,* but this was a way of going on that she could not

understand. A fine lady in a country parsonage was quite out of place. *Her* storeroom she thought might have been good enough for Mrs. Grant to go into.

Inquire where she would, she could not find out that Mrs. Grant had ever had

more than five thousand pounds.’

Lady Bertram listened without much interest to this sort of invective. She

could not enter into the wrongs of an economist, but she felt all the injuries of

beauty in Mrs. Grant’s being so well settled in life without being handsome, and

expressed her astonishment on that point almost as often, though not so

diffusely, as Mrs. Norris discussed the other.

These opinions had been hardly canvassed a year before another event arose

of such importance in the family as might fairly claim some place in the thoughts

and conversation of the ladies. Sir Thomas found it expedient to go to Antigua

himself, for the better arrangement of his affairs, and he took his eldest son with

him, in the hope of detaching him from some bad connections at home. They left

England with the probability of being nearly a twelvemonth absent.

The necessity of the measure in a pecuniary light, and the hope of its utility to

his son, reconciled Sir Thomas to the effort of quitting the rest of his family, and

of leaving his daughters to the direction of others at their present most

interesting time of life. He could not think Lady Bertram quite equal to supply

his place with them, or rather to perform what should have been her own; but in

Mrs. Norris’s watchful attention, and in Edmund’s judgment, he had sufficient

confidence to make him go without fears for their conduct.

Lady Bertram did not at all like to have her husband leave her; but she was not

disturbed by any alarm for his safety or solicitude for his comfort, being one of

those persons who think nothing can be dangerous, or difficult, or fatiguing to

anybody but themselves.

The Miss Bertrams were much to be pitied on the occasion; not for their

sorrow, but for their want of it. Their father was no object of love to them; he

had never seemed the friend of their pleasures, and his absence was unhappily

most welcome. They were relieved by it from all restraint; and without aiming at

one gratification that would probably have been forbidden by Sir Thomas, they

felt themselves immediately at their own disposal, and to have every indulgence

within their reach. Fanny’s relief, and her consciousness of it, were quite equal to

her cousins’; but a more tender nature suggested that her feelings were

ungrateful, and she really grieved because she could not grieve. ‘Sir Thomas,

who had done so much for her and her brothers, and who was gone perhaps

never to return! that she should see him go without a tear! it was a shameful

insensibility’ He had said to her, moreover, on the very last morning, that he

hoped she might see William again in the course of the ensuing winter, and had

charged her to write and invite him to Mansfield as soon as the squadron to

which he belonged should be known to be in England. ‘This was so thoughtful

and kind!’ and would he only have smiled upon her and called her ‘my dear

Fanny,’ while he said it, every former frown or cold address might have been

forgotten.

But he had ended his speech in a way to sink her in sad mortification,

by adding, ‘If William does come to Mansfield, I hope you may be able to

convince him that the many years which have passed since you parted have not

been spent on your side entirely without improvement—though I fear he must

find his sister at sixteen in some respects too much like his sister at ten.’ She

cried bitterly over this reflection when her uncle was gone; and her cousins, on

seeing her with red eyes, set her down as a hypocrite.

**CHAPTER IV**

**T**om Bertram had of late spent so little of his time at home, that he could be only

nominally missed; and Lady Bertram was soon astonished to find how very well

they did even without his father, how well Edmund could supply his place in

carving, talking to the steward, writing to the attorney, settling with the servants,

and equally saving her from all possible fatigue or exertion in every particular

but that of directing her letters.

The earliest intelligence of the travellers’ safe arrival in Antigua, after a

favourable voyage, was received; though not before Mrs. Norris had been

indulging in very dreadful fears, and trying to make Edmund participate them

whenever she could get him alone; and as she depended on being the first person

made acquainted with any fatal catastrophe, she had already arranged the manner of breaking it to all the others, when Sir Thomas’s assurances of their both being alive and well made it necessary to lay by her agitation and affectionate preparatory speeches for a while.

The winter came and passed without their being called for; the accounts

continued perfectly good; and Mrs. Norris, in promoting gaieties for her nieces,

assisting their toilettes, displaying their accomplishments, and looking about for

their future husbands, had so much to do as, in addition to all her own household

cares, some interference in those of her sister, and Mrs. Grant’s wasteful doings

to overlook, left her very little occasion to be occupied even in fears for the

absent.

The Miss Bertrams were now fully established among the belles of the

neighbourhood; and as they joined to beauty and brilliant acquirements a manner

naturally easy, and carefully formed to general civility and obligingness, they

possessed its favour as well as its admiration. Their vanity was in such good

order that they seemed to be quite free from it, and gave themselves no airs;

while the praises attending such behaviour, secured and brought round by their

aunt, served to strengthen them in believing they had no faults.

Lady Bertram did not go into public with her daughters. She was too indolent

even to accept a mother’s gratification in witnessing their success and enjoyment

at the expense of any personal trouble, and the charge was made over to her

sister, who desired nothing better than a post of such honourable representation,

and very thoroughly relished the means it afforded her of mixing in society

without having horses to hire.

Fanny had no share in the festivities of the season; but she enjoyed being

avowedly useful as her aunt’s companion, when they called away the rest of the

family; and as Miss Lee had left Mansfield, she naturally became everything to

Lady Bertram during the night of a ball or a party. She talked to her, listened to

her, read to her; and the tranquillity of such evenings, her perfect security in such

a *tête-à-tête* from any sound of unkindness, was unspeakably welcome to a mind

which had seldom known a pause in its alarms or embarrassments. As to her

cousins’ gaieties, she loved to hear an account of them, especially of the balls,

and whom Edmund had danced with; but thought too lowly of her own situation

to imagine she should ever be admitted to the same, and listened therefore

without an idea of any nearer concern in them. Upon the whole, it was a

comfortable winter to her; for though it brought no William to England, the

never-failing hope of his arrival was worth much.

The ensuing spring deprived her of her valued friend the old grey pony; and

for some time she was in danger of feeling the loss in her health as well as in her

affections; for in spite of the acknowledged importance of her riding on

horseback, no measures were taken for mounting her again, ‘because,’ as it was

observed by her aunts, ‘she might ride one of her cousins’ horses at any time

when they did not want them’; and as the Miss Bertrams regularly wanted their

horses every fine day, and had no idea of carrying their obliging manners to the

sacrifice of any real pleasure, that time, of course, never came. They took their

cheerful rides in the fine mornings of April and May; and Fanny either sat at

home the whole day with one aunt, or walked beyond her strength at the

instigation of the other; Lady Bertram holding exercise to be as unnecessary for

everybody as it was unpleasant to herself; and Mrs. Norris, who was walking all

day, thinking everybody ought to walk as much. Edmund was absent at this time,

or the evil would have been earlier remedied. When he returned, to understand

how Fanny was situated, and perceived its ill effects, there seemed with him but

one thing to be done; and that ‘Fanny must have a horse’ was the resolute

declaration with which he opposed whatever could be urged by the supineness of

his mother, or the economy of his aunt, to make it appear unimportant. Mrs.

Norris could not help thinking that some steady old thing might be found among

the numbers belonging to the Park, that would do vastly well; or that one might

be borrowed of the steward; or that perhaps Dr. Grant might now and then lend

them the pony he sent to the post. She could not but consider it as absolutely

unnecessary, and even improper, that Fanny should have a regular lady’s horse of

her own in the style of her cousins. She was sure Sir Thomas had never intended

it; and she must say, that to be making such a purchase in his absence, and

adding to the great expenses of his stable at a time when a large part of his

income was unsettled, seemed to her very unjustifiable. ‘Fanny must have a

horse’ was Edmund’s only reply. Mrs. Norris could not see it in the same light.

Lady Bertram did: she entirely agreed with her son as to the necessity of it, and

as to its being considered necessary by his father;—she only pleaded against

there being any hurry; she only wanted him to wait till Sir Thomas’s return, and

then Sir Thomas might settle it all himself. He would be at home in September,

—and where would be the harm of only waiting till September?

Though Edmund was much more displeased with his aunt than with his

mother, as evincing least regard for her niece, he could not help paying more

attention to what she said, and at length determined on a method of proceeding

which would obviate the risk of his father’s thinking he had done too much, and

at the same time procure for Fanny the immediate means of exercise, which he

could not bear she should be without. He had three horses of his own, but not

one that would carry a woman. Two of them were hunters; the third, a useful

road-horse: this third he resolved to exchange for one that his cousin might ride;

he knew where such a one was to be met with; and having once made up his

mind, the whole business was soon completed. The new mare proved a treasure;

with a very little trouble, she became exactly calculated for the purpose, and

Fanny was then put in almost full possession of her. She had not supposed before

that anything could ever suit her like the old grey pony; but her delight in

Edmund’s mare was far beyond any former pleasure of the sort; and the addition

it was ever receiving in the consideration of that kindness from which her

pleasure sprang was beyond all her words to express. She regarded her cousin as

an example of everything good and great, as possessing worth which no one but

herself could ever appreciate, and as entitled to such gratitude from her as no

feelings could be strong enough to pay. Her sentiments towards him were

compounded of all that was respectful, grateful, confiding, and tender.

As the horse continued in name, as well as fact, the property of Edmund, Mrs.

Norris could tolerate its being for Fanny’s use; and had Lady Bertram ever

thought about her own objection again, he might have been excused in her eyes

for not waiting till Sir Thomas’s return in September, for when September came

Sir Thomas was still abroad, and without any near prospect of finishing his

business. Unfavourable circumstances had suddenly arisen at a moment when he

was beginning to turn all his thoughts towards England; and the very great

uncertainty in which everything was then involved determined him on sending

home his son, and waiting the final arrangement by himself. Tom arrived safely,

bringing an excellent account of his father’s health; but to very little purpose, as

far as Mrs. Norris was concerned. Sir Thomas’s sending away his son seemed to

her so like a parent’s care, under the influence of a foreboding of evil to himself,

that she could not help feeling dreadful presentiments; and as the long evenings

of autumn came on, was so terribly haunted by these ideas, in the sad solitariness

of her cottage, as to be obliged to take daily refuge in the dining-room of the

Park. The return of winter engagements, however, was not without its effect; and

in the course of their progress, her mind became so pleasantly occupied in

superintending the fortunes of her eldest niece, as tolerably to quiet her nerves.

‘If poor Sir Thomas were fated never to return, it would be peculiarly consoling

to see their dear Maria well married,’ she very often thought; always when they

were in the company of men of fortune, and particularly on the introduction of a

young man who had recently succeeded to one of the largest estates and finest

places in the country.

Mr. Rushworth was from the first struck with the beauty of Miss Bertram, and,

being inclined to marry, soon fancied himself in love. He was a heavy young

man, with not more than common sense; but as there was nothing disagreeable in his figure or address, the young lady was well pleased with her conquest. Being

now in her twenty-first year, Maria Bertram was beginning to think matrimony a

duty; and as a marriage with Mr. Rushworth would give her the enjoyment of a

larger income than her father’s, as well as ensure her the house in town, which

was now a prime object, it became, by the same rule of moral obligation, her

evident duty to marry Mr. Rushworth if she could. Mrs. Norris was most zealous

in promoting the match, by every suggestion and contrivance likely to enhance

its desirableness to either party; and, among other means, by seeking an intimacy

with the gentleman’s mother, who at present lived with him, and to whom she

even forced Lady Bertram to go through ten miles of indifferent road to pay a

morning visit. It was not long before a good understanding took place between

this lady and herself.

Mrs. Rushworth acknowledged herself very desirous that her son should marry, and declared that of all the young ladies she had ever seen, Miss Bertram seemed, by her amiable qualities and accomplishments, the best adapted to make him happy. Mrs. Norris accepted the compliment, and admired the nice discernment of character which could so well distinguish merit. Maria was indeed the pride and delight of them all—perfectly faultless—an angel; and, of course, so surrounded by admirers, must be difficult in her choice: but yet, as far as Mrs. Norris could allow herself to decide on so short an acquaintance, Mr.

Rushworth appeared precisely the young man to deserve and attach her.

After dancing with each other at a proper number of balls, the young people

justified these opinions, and an engagement, with a due reference to the absent

Sir Thomas, was entered into, much to the satisfaction of their respective

families, and of the general lookers-on of the neighbourhood, who had, for many

weeks past, felt the expediency of Mr. Rushworth’s marrying Miss Bertram.

It was some months before Sir Thomas’s consent could be received; but, in the

meanwhile, as no one felt a doubt of his most cordial pleasure in the connection,

the intercourse of the two families was carried on without restraint, and no other

attempt made at secrecy, than Mrs. Norris’s talking of it everywhere as a matter

not to be talked of at present.

Edmund was the only one of the family who could see a fault in the business;

but no representation of his aunt’s could induce him to find Mr. Rushworth a

desirable companion. He could allow his sister to be the best judge of her own

happiness, but he was not pleased that her happiness should centre in a large

income; nor could he refrain from often saying to himself, in Mr. Rushworth’s

company,—‘If this man had not twelve thousand a year, he would be a very

stupid fellow.’

Sir Thomas, however, was truly happy in the prospect of an alliance so

unquestionably advantageous, and of which he heard nothing but the perfectly

good and agreeable. It was a connection exactly of the right sort,—in the same

county, and the same interest,—and his most hearty concurrence was conveyed

as soon as possible. He only conditioned that the marriage should not take place

before his return, which he was again looking eagerly forward to. He wrote in

April, and had strong hopes of settling everything to his entire satisfaction, and

leaving Antigua before the end of the summer.

Such was the state of affairs in the month of July; and Fanny had just reached

her eighteenth year, when the society of the village received an addition in the

brother and sister of Mrs. Grant, a Mr. and Miss Crawford, the children of her

mother by a second marriage. They were young people of fortune. The son had a

good estate in Norfolk, the daughter twenty thousand pounds. As children, their

sister had always been very fond of them; but, as her own marriage had been

soon followed by the death of their common parent, which left them to the care

of a brother of their father, of whom Mrs. Grant knew nothing, she had scarcely

seen them since. In their uncle’s house they had found a kind home. Admiral and

Mrs. Crawford, though agreeing in nothing else, were united in affection for

these children, or, at least, were no farther adverse in their feelings than that each had their favourite, to whom they showed the greatest fondness of the two.

The Admiral delighted in the boy, Mrs. Crawford doted on the girl; and it was the

lady’s death which now obliged her *protégée,* after some months’ further trial at

her uncle’s house, to find another home. Admiral Crawford was a man of vicious

conduct, who chose, instead of retaining his niece, to bring his mistress under his

own roof; and to this Mrs. Grant was indebted for her sister’s proposal of coming

to her, a measure quite as welcome on one side as it could be expedient on the

other; for Mrs. Grant having by this time run through the usual resources of

ladies residing in the country without a family of children,—having more than

filled her favourite sitting-room with pretty furniture, and made a choice

collection of plants and poultry, —was very much in want of some variety at

home. The arrival, therefore, of a sister whom she had always loved, and now

hoped to retain with her as long as she remained single, was highly agreeable;

and her chief anxiety was, lest Mansfield should not satisfy the habits of a young

woman who had been mostly used to London.

Miss Crawford was not entirely free from similar apprehensions, though they

arose principally from doubts of her sister’s style of living and tone of society;

and it was not till after she had tried in vain to persuade her brother to settle with

her at his own country house, that she could resolve to hazard herself among her

other relations. To anything like a permanence of abode, or limitation of society,

Henry Crawford had, unluckily, a great dislike: he could not accommodate his

sister in an article of such importance; but he escorted her, with the utmost

kindness, into Northamptonshire, and as readily engaged to fetch her away

again, at half an hour’s notice, whenever she were weary of the place.

The meeting was very satisfactory on each side. Miss Crawford found a sister

without preciseness or rusticity—a sister’s husband who looked the gentleman,

and a house commodious and well fitted up; and Mrs. Grant received in those

whom she hoped to love better than ever, a young man and woman of very

prepossessing appearance. Mary Crawford was remarkably pretty; Henry, though

not handsome, had air and countenance; the manners of both were lively and

pleasant, and Mrs. Grant immediately gave them credit for everything else. She

was delighted with each, but Mary was her dearest object; and having never been

able to glory in beauty of her own, she thoroughly enjoyed the power of being

proud of her sister’s. She had not waited her arrival to look out for a suitable

match for her; she had fixed on Tom Bertram; the eldest son of a Baronet was

not too good for a girl of twenty thousand pounds, with all the elegance and

accomplishments which Mrs. Grant foresaw in her; and being a warm-hearted,

unreserved woman, Mary had not been three hours in the house before she told

her what she had planned.

Miss Crawford was glad to find a family of such consequence so very near

them, and not at all displeased either at her sister’s early care, or the choice it

had fallen on. Matrimony was her object, provided she could marry well; and

having seen Mr. Bertram in town, she knew that objection could no more be

made to his person than to his situation in life. While she treated it as a joke,

therefore, she did not forget to think of it seriously. The scheme was soon

repeated to Henry.

‘And now,’ added Mrs. Grant, ‘I have thought of something to make it quite

complete. I should dearly love to settle you both in this country; and therefore,

Henry, you shall marry the youngest Miss Bertram, a nice, handsome, goodhumoured,

accomplished girl, who will make you very happy’

Henry bowed and thanked, her.

‘My dear sister,’ said Mary, ‘if you can persuade him into anything of the sort,

it will be a fresh matter of delight to me to find myself allied to anybody so

clever, and I shall only regret that you have not half a dozen daughters to dispose

of. If you can persuade Henry to marry, you must have the address of a

Frenchwoman. All that English abilities can do has been tried already. I have

three very particular friends who have been all dying for him in their turn; and

the pains which they, their mothers (very clever women), as well as my dear aunt

and myself, have taken to reason, coax, or trick him into marrying, is

inconceivable! He is the most horrible flirt that can be imagined. If your Miss

Bertrams do not like to have their hearts broke, let them avoid Henry.’

‘My dear brother, I will not believe this of you.’

‘No, I am sure you are too good. You will be kinder than Mary. You will allow

for the doubts of youth and inexperience. I am of a cautious temper, and

unwilling to risk my happiness in a hurry. Nobody can think more highly of the

matrimonial state than myself. I consider the blessing of a wife as most justly

described in those discreet lines of the poet, “Heaven’s *last best* gift.”’

‘There, Mrs. Grant, you see how he dwells on one word, and only look at his

smile. I assure you he is very detestable—the Admiral’s lessons have quite

spoiled him.’

‘I pay very little regard,’ said Mrs. Grant, ‘to what any young person says on

the subject of marriage. If they profess a disinclination for it, I only set it down

that they have not yet seen the right person.’

Dr. Grant laughingly congratulated Miss Crawford on feeling no disinclination

to the state herself.

‘Oh yes, I am not at all ashamed of it. I would have everybody marry if they

can do it properly: I do not like to have people throw themselves away; but

everybody should marry as soon as they can do it to advantage.’

**CHAPTER V**

**T**he young people were pleased with each other from the first. On each side

there was much to attract, and their acquaintance soon promised as early an

intimacy as good manners would warrant. Miss Crawford’s beauty did her no

disservice with the Miss Bertrams. They were too handsome themselves to

dislike any woman for being so too, and were almost as much charmed as their

brothers with her lively dark eye, clear brown complexion, and general

prettiness. Had she been tall, full formed, and fair, it might have been more of a

trial: but as it was, there could be no comparison; and she was most allowably a

sweet pretty girl, while they were the finest young women in the country.

Her brother was not handsome: no, when they first saw him, he was

absolutely plain, black and plain; but still he was the gentleman, with a pleasing

address. The second meeting proved him not so very plain: he was plain, to be

sure, but then he had so much countenance, and his teeth were so good, and he

was so well made, that one soon forgot he was plain; and after a third interview,

after dining in company with him at the Parsonage, he was no longer allowed to

be called so by anybody. He was, in fact, the most agreeable young man the

sisters had ever known, and they were equally delighted with him. Miss

Bertram’s engagement made him in equity the property of Julia, of which Julia

was fully aware; and before he had been at Mansfield a week she was quite

ready to be fallen in love with.

Maria’s notions on the subject were more confused and indistinct. She did not

want to see or understand. ‘There could be no harm in her liking an agreeable

man—everybody knew her situation—Mr. Crawford must take care of himself.’

Mr. Crawford did not mean to be in any danger: the Miss Bertrams were worth

pleasing, and were ready to be pleased; and he began with no object but of

making them like him. He did not want them to die of love; but with sense and

temper which ought to have made him judge and feel better, he allowed himself

great latitude on such points.

‘I like your Miss Bertrams exceedingly, sister,’ said he, as he returned from

attending them to their carriage after the said dinner visit; ‘they are very elegant,

agreeable girls.’

‘So they are, indeed, and I am delighted to hear you say it. But you like Julia

best.’

‘Oh yes, I like Julia best.’

‘But do you really? for Miss Bertram is in general thought the handsomest.’

‘So I should suppose. She has the advantage in every feature, and I prefer her

countenance—but I like Julia best. Miss Bertram is certainly the handsomest,

and I have found her the most agreeable, but I shall always like Julia best,

because you order me.’

‘I shall not talk to you, Henry, but I know you *will* like her best at last.’

‘Do not I tell you that I like her best *at first?’*

‘And besides, Miss Bertram is engaged. Remember that, my dear brother. Her

choice is made.’

‘Yes, and I like her the better for it. An engaged woman is always more

agreeable than a disengaged. She is satisfied with herself. Her cares are over, and

she feels that she may exert all her powers of pleasing without suspicion. All is

safe with a lady engaged; no harm can be done.’

‘Why, as to that, Mr. Rushworth is a very good sort of young man, and it is a

great match for her.’

‘But Miss Bertram does not care three straws for him; *that* is your opinion of

your intimate friend. *I* do not subscribe to it. I am sure Miss Bertram is very

much attached to Mr. Rushworth. I could see it in her eyes, when he was

mentioned. I think too well of Miss Bertram to suppose she would ever give her

hand without her heart.’

‘Mary, how shall we manage him?’

‘We must leave him to himself, I believe. Talking does no good. He will be

taken in at last.’

‘But I would not have him *taken in,* I would not have him duped; I would

have it all fair and honourable.’

‘Oh dear—let him stand his chance and be taken in. It will do just as well.

Everybody is taken in at some period or other.’

‘Not always in marriage, dear Mary.’

‘In marriage especially. With all due respect to such of the present company as

chance to be married, my dear Mrs. Grant, there is not one in a hundred of either

sex who is not taken in when they marry. Look where I will, I see that it is so;

and I feel that it *must* be so, when I consider that it is, of all transactions, the one

in which people expect most from others, and are least honest themselves.’

‘Ah! You have been in a bad school for matrimony, in Hill Street.’

‘My poor aunt had certainly little cause to love the state; but, however,

speaking from my own observation, it is a manoeuvering business. I know so

many who have married in the full expectation and confidence of some one

particular advantage in the connection, or accomplishment or good quality in the

person, who have found themselves entirely deceived, and been obliged to put

up with exactly the reverse! What is this but a take in?’

‘My dear child, there must be a little imagination here. I beg your pardon, but

I cannot quite believe you. Depend upon it, you see but half. You see the evil,

but you do not see the consolation. There will be little rubs and disappointments

everywhere, and we are all apt to expect too much; but then, if one scheme of

happiness fails, human nature turns to another: if the first calculation is wrong,

we make a second better; we find comfort somewhere—and those evil-minded

observers, dearest Mary, who make much of a little, are more taken in and

deceived than the parties themselves.’

‘Well done, sister! I honour your *esprit du corps.* When I am a wife, I mean to

be just as staunch myself; and I wish my friends in general would be so too. It

would save me many a heartache.’

‘You are as bad as your brother, Mary; but we will cure you both. Mansfield

shall cure you both, and without any taking in. Stay with us, and we will cure

you.’

The Crawfords, without wanting to be cured, were very willing to stay. Mary

was satisfied with the Parsonage as a present home, and Henry equally ready to

lengthen his visit. He had come, intending to spend only a few days with them;

but Mansfield promised well, and there was nothing to call him elsewhere. It

delighted Mrs. Grant to keep them both with her, and Dr. Grant was exceedingly

well contented to have it so: a talking pretty young woman like Miss Crawford is

always pleasant society to an indolent, stay-at-home man; and Mr. Crawford’s

being his guest was an excuse for drinking claret every day.

The Miss Bertrams’ admiration of Mr. Crawford was more rapturous than

anything which Miss Crawford’s habits made her likely to feel. She

acknowledged, however, that the Mr. Bertrams were very fine young men, that

two such young men were not often seen together even in London, and that their

manners, particularly those of the eldest, were very good. He had been much in

London, and had more liveliness and gallantry than Edmund, and must,

therefore, be preferred; and, indeed, his being the eldest was another strong

claim. She had felt an early presentiment that she *should* like the eldest best. She

knew it was her way.

Tom Bertram must have been thought pleasant, indeed, at any rate; he was the

sort of young man to be generally liked, his agreeableness was of the kind to be

oftener found agreeable than some endowments of a higher stamp, for he had

easy manners, excellent spirits, a large acquaintance, and a great deal to say; and

the reversion of Mansfield Park, and a baronetcy, did no harm to all this. Miss

Crawford soon felt that he and his situation might do. She looked about her with

due consideration, and found almost everything in his favour, a park, a real park

five miles round, a spacious modern-built house, so well placed and well

screened as to deserve to be in any collection of engravings of gentlemen’s seats

in the kingdom, and wanting only to be completely new furnished—pleasant

sisters, a quiet mother, and an agreeable man himself—with the advantage of

being tied up from much gaming at present, by a promise to his father, and of

being Sir Thomas hereafter. It might do very well: she believed she should

accept him; and she began accordingly to interest herself a little about the horse

which he had to run at the B—races.

These races were to call him away not long after their acquaintance began;

and as it appeared that the family did not from his usual goings on, expect him

back again for many weeks, it would bring his passion to an early proof. Much

was said on his side to induce her to attend the races, and schemes were made

for a large party to them, with all the eagerness of inclination, but it would only

do to be talked of.

And Fanny, what was *she* doing and thinking all this while? and what was *her*

opinion of the new-comers? Few young ladies of eighteen could be less called

on to speak their opinion than Fanny. In a quiet way, very little attended to, she

paid her tribute of admiration to Miss Crawford’s beauty; but as she still

continued to think Mr. Crawford very plain, in spite of her two cousins having

repeatedly proved the contrary, she never mentioned *him.* The notice which she

excited herself was to this effect. ‘I begin now to understand you all, except Miss

Price,’ said Miss Crawford, as she was walking with the Mr. Bertrams. ‘Pray, is

she out, or is she not? I am puzzled. She dined at the Parsonage, with the rest of

you, which seemed like being *out;* and yet she says so little, that I can hardly

suppose she *is.’*

Edmund, to whom this was chiefly addressed, replied, ‘I believe I know what

you mean—but I will not undertake to answer the question. My cousin is grown

up. She has the age and sense of a woman, but the outs and not outs are beyond

me.’

‘And yet, in general, nothing can be more easily ascertained. The distinction is

so broad. Manners as well as appearance are, generally speaking, so totally

different. Till now, I could not have supposed it possible to be mistaken as to a

girl’s being out or not. A girl not out has always the same sort of dress—a close

bonnet, for instance—looks very demure, and never says a word. You may smile,

but it is so, I assure you; and except that it is sometimes carried a little too far, it

is all very proper. Girls should be quiet and modest. The most objectionable part

is, that the alteration of manners on being introduced into company is frequently

too sudden. They sometimes pass in such very little time from reserve to quite

the opposite—to confidence! *That* is the faulty part of the present system. One

does not like to see a girl of eighteen or nineteen so immediately up to

everything—and perhaps when one has seen her hardly able to speak the year

before. Mr. Bertram, I daresay *you* have sometimes met with such changes.’

‘I believe I have: but this is hardly fair; I see what you are at. You are quizzing

me and Miss Anderson.’

‘No, indeed. Miss Anderson! I do not know who or what you mean. I am quite

in the dark. But I *will* quiz you with a great deal of pleasure, if you will tell me

what about.’

‘Ah! you carry it off very well, but I cannot be quite so far imposed on. You

must have had Miss Anderson in your eye in describing an altered young lady.

You paint too accurately for mistake. It was exactly so. The Andersons of Baker

Street. We were speaking of them the other day, you know. Edmund, you have

heard me mention Charles Anderson. The circumstance was precisely as this

lady has represented it. When Anderson first introduced me to his family, about

two years ago, his sister was not *out,* and I could not get her to speak to me. I sat

there an hour one morning waiting for Anderson, with only her and a little girl or

two in the room, the governess being sick or run away, and the mother in and out

every moment with letters of business; and I could hardly get a word or a look

from the young lady,—nothing like a civil answer,—she screwed up her mouth,

and turned from me with such an air! I did not see her again for a twelvemonth.

She was then *out.* I met her at Mrs. Holford’s, and did not recollect her. She

came up to me, claimed me as an acquaintance, stared me out of countenance,

and talked and laughed till I did not know which way to look. I felt that I must

be the jest of the room at the time, and Miss Crawford, it is plain, has heard the

story.’

‘And a very pretty story it is, and with more truth in it, I daresay, than does

credit to Miss Anderson. It is too common a fault. Mothers certainly have not yet

got quite the right way of managing their daughters. I do not know where the

error lies. I do not pretend to set people right, but I do see that they are often

wrong.’

‘Those who are showing the world what female manners *should be,’* said Mr.

Bertram, gallantly, ‘are doing a great deal to set them right.’

‘The error is plain enough,’ said the less courteous Edmund; ‘such girls are ill

brought up. They are given wrong notions from the beginning. They are always

acting upon motives of vanity, and there is no more real modesty in their

behaviour *before* they appear in public than afterwards.’

‘I do not know,’ replied Miss Crawford, hesitatingly. ‘Yes, I cannot agree with

you there. It is certainly the modestest part of the business. It is much worse to

have girls *not out* give themselves the same airs and take the same liberties as if

they were, which I *have* seen done. *That* is worse than anything—quite

disgusting!’

‘Yes, *that* is very inconvenient, indeed,’ said Mr. Bertram. ‘It leads one astray;

one does not know what to do. The close bonnet and demure air you describe so

well (and nothing was ever juster) tell one what is expected; but I got into a

dreadful scrape last year from the want of them. I went down to Rams-gate for a

week with a friend last September, just after my return from the West Indies. My

friend Sneyd,—you have heard me speak of Sneyd, Edmund,—his father and

mother and sisters were there, all new to me. When we reached Albion Place

they were out: we went after them, and found them on the pier,—Mrs. and the

two Miss Sneyds, with others of their acquaintance. I made my bow in form; and

as Mrs. Sneyd was surrounded by men, attached myself to one of her daughters,

walked by her side all the way home, and made myself as agreeable as I could,

—the young lady perfectly easy in her manners, and as ready to talk as to listen.

I had not a suspicion that I could be doing anything wrong. They looked just the

same: both well dressed, with veils and parasols like other girls; but I afterwards

found that I had been giving all my attention to the youngest, who was not *out,*

and had most excessively offended the eldest. Miss Augusta ought not to have

been noticed for the next six months; and Miss Sneyd, I believe, has never

forgiven me.’

‘That was bad indeed. Poor Miss Sneyd! Though I have no younger sister, I

feel for her. To be neglected before one’s time must be very vexatious; but it was

entirely the mother’s fault. Miss Augusta should have been with her governess.

Such half-and-half doings never prosper. But now I must be satisfied about Miss

Price. Does she go to balls? Does she dine out everywhere, as well as at my

sister’s?’

‘No,’ replied Edmund, ‘I do not think she has ever been to a ball. My mother

seldom goes into company herself, and dines nowhere but with Mrs. Grant, and

Fanny stays at home with her.’

‘Oh, then the point is clear. Miss Price is *not* out.’

**CHAPTER VI**

**M**r. Bertram set off for—, and Miss Crawford was prepared to find a great

chasm in their society, and to miss him decidedly in the meetings which were

now becoming almost daily between the families; and on their all dining together

at the Park soon after his going, she retook her chosen place near the bottom of

the table, fully expecting to feel a most melancholy difference in the change of

masters. It would be a very flat business, she was sure. In comparison with his

brother, Edmund would have nothing to say. The soup would be sent round in a

most spiritless manner, wine drunk without any smiles or agreeable trifling, and

the venison cut up without supplying one pleasant anecdote of any former

haunch, or a single entertaining story about ‘my friend such a one.’ She must try

to find amusement in what was passing at the upper end of the table, and in

observing Mr. Rushworth, who was now making his appearance at Mansfield for

the first time since the Crawfords’ arrival. He had been visiting a friend in a

neighbouring county, and that friend having recently had his grounds laid out by

an improver,2 Mr. Rushworth was returned with his head full of the subject, and

very eager to be improving his own place in the same way; and though not

saying much to the purpose, could talk of nothing else. The subject had been

already handled in the drawing-room; it was revived in the dining-parlour. Miss

Bertram’s attention and opinion were evidently his chief aim; and though her

deportment showed rather conscious superiority than any solicitude to oblige

him, the mention of Sotherton Court, and the ideas attached to it, gave her a

feeling of complacency which prevented her from being very ungracious.

‘I wish you could see Compton,’ said he, ‘it is the most complete thing! I

never saw a place so altered in my life. I told Smith I did not know where I was.

The approach *now* is one of the finest things in the country; you see the house in

the most surprising manner. I declare when I got back to Sotherton yesterday, it

looked like a prison—quite a dismal old prison.’

‘Oh, for shame!’ cried Mrs. Norris. ‘A prison, indeed! Sotherton Court is the

noblest old place in the world.’

‘It wants improvement, ma’am, beyond anything. I never saw a place that

wanted so much improvement in my life; and it is so forlorn, that I do not know

what can be done with it.’

‘No wonder that Mr. Rushworth should think so at present,’ said Mrs. Grant to

Mrs. Norris, with a smile; ‘but depend upon it, Sotherton will have *every*

improvement in time which his heart can desire.’

‘I must try to do something with it,’ said Mr. Rushworth, ‘but I do not know

what. I hope I shall have some good friend to help me.’

‘Your best friend upon such an occasion,’ said Miss Bertram calmly, ‘would

be Mr. Repton, I imagine.’

‘That is what I was thinking of. As he has done so well by Smith, I think I had

better have him at once. His terms are five guineas a day.’

‘Well, and if they were *ten,’* cried Mrs. Norris, ‘I am sure *you* need not regard

it. The expense need not be any impediment. If I were you, I should not think of

the expense, I would have everything done in the best style, and made as nice as

possible. Such a place as Sotherton Court deserves everything that taste and

money can do. You have space to work upon there, and grounds that will well

reward you. For my own part, if I had anything within the fiftieth part of the size

of Sotherton, I should be always planting and improving, for naturally I am

excessively fond of it. It would be too ridiculous for me to attempt anything

where I am now, with my little half-acre. It would be quite a burlesque. But if I

had more room, I should take a prodigious delight in improving and planting. We

did a vast deal in that way at the Parsonage: we made it quite a different place

from what it was when we first had it. You young ones do not remember much

about it, perhaps: but if dear Sir Thomas were here, he could tell you what

improvements we made; and a great deal more would have been done, but for

poor Mr. Norris’s sad state of health. He could hardly ever get out, poor man, to

enjoy anything, and *that* disheartened me from doing several things that Sir

Thomas and I used to talk of. If it had not been for *that,* we should have carried

on the garden wall, and made the plantation to shut out the churchyard, just as

Dr. Grant has done. We were always doing something as it was. It was only the

spring twelvemonth before Mr. Norris’s death, that we put in the apricot against

the stable wall, which is now grown such a noble tree, and getting to such

perfection, sir,’ addressing herself then to Dr. Grant.

‘The tree thrives well beyond a doubt, madam,’ replied Dr. Grant. ‘The soil is

good; and I never pass it without regretting that the fruit should be so little worth

the trouble of gathering.’

‘Sir, it is a Moor Park, we bought it as a Moor Park, and it cost us—that is, it

was a present from Sir Thomas, but I saw the bill, and I know it cost seven

shillings, and was charged as a Moor Park.’

‘You were imposed on, ma’am,’ replied Dr. Grant: ’these potatoes have as

much the flavour of a Moor Park apricot as the fruit from that tree. It is an

insipid fruit at the best; but a good apricot is eatable, which none from my

garden are.’

‘The truth is, ma’am,’ said Mrs. Grant, pretending to whisper across the table

to Mrs. Norris, ’that Dr. Grant hardly knows what the natural taste of our apricot

is; he is scarcely ever indulged with one, for it is so valuable a fruit with a little

assistance, and ours is such a remarkably large, fair sort, that what with early

tarts and preserves my cook contrives to get them all.’

Mrs. Norris, who had begun to redden, was appeased; and, for a little while,

other subjects took place of the improvements of Sotherton. Dr. Grant and Mrs.

Norris were seldom good friends; their acquaintance had begun in dilapidations,3

and their habits were totally dissimilar.

After a short interruption, Mr. Rushworth began again. ‘Smith’s place is the

admiration of all the country; and it was a mere nothing before Repton took it in

hand. I think I shall have Repton.’

‘Mr. Rushworth,’ said Lady Bertram, ‘if I were you, I would have a very

pretty shrubbery. One likes to get out into a shrubbery in fine weather.’

Mr. Rushworth was eager to assure her Ladyship of his acquiescence, and

tried to make out something complimentary; but between his submission to *her*

taste, and his having always intended the same himself, with the superadded

objects of professing attention to the comfort of ladies in general, and of

insinuating that there was one only whom he was anxious to please, he grew

puzzled; and Edmund was glad to put an end to his speech by a proposal of

wine. Mr. Rushworth, however, though not usually a great talker, had still more

to say on the subject next his heart. ‘Smith has not much above a hundred acres

altogether in his grounds, which is little enough, and makes it more surprising

that the place can have been so improved. Now, at Sotherton, we have a good

seven hundred, without reckoning the water meadows; so that I think, if so much

could be done at Compton, we need not despair. There have been two or three

fine old trees cut down that grew too near the house, and it opens the prospect

amazingly, which makes me think that Repton, or anybody of that sort, would

certainly have the avenue at Sotherton down; the avenue that leads from the west

front to the top of the hill, you know,’ turning to Miss Bertram particularly as he

spoke. But Miss Bertram thought it most becoming to reply—

‘The avenue! Oh, I do not recollect it. I really know very little of Sotherton.’

Fanny, who was sitting on the other side of Edmund, exactly opposite Miss

Crawford, and who had been attentively listening, now looked at him, and said,

in a low voice—

‘Cut down an avenue! What a pity! Does not it make you think of Cowper?

“Ye fallen avenues, once more I mourn your fate unmerited.”’

He smiled as he answered, ‘I am afraid the avenue stands a bad chance,

Fanny.’

‘I should like to see Sotherton before it is cut down, to see the place as it is

now, in its old state; but I do not suppose I shall.’

‘Have you never been there? No, you never can; and unluckily it is out of

distance for a ride. I wish we could contrive it.’

‘Oh, it does not signify. Whenever I do see it, you will tell me how it has been

altered.’

‘I collect,’ said Miss Crawford, ‘that Sotherton is an old place, and a place of

some grandeur. In any particular style of building?’

‘The house was built in Elizabeth’s time, and is a large, regular brick building

—heavy, but respectable-looking, and has many good rooms. It is ill placed. It

stands in one of the lowest spots of the park; in that respect, unfavourable for

improvement. But the woods are fine, and there is a stream, which, I daresay,

might be made a good deal of. Mr. Rushworth is quite right, I think, in meaning

to give it a modern dress, and I have no doubt that it will be all done extremely

well.’

Miss Crawford listened with submission, and said to herself, ‘He is a wellbred

man; he makes the best of it.’

‘I do not wish to influence Mr. Rushworth,’ he continued; ‘but had I a place to

new-fashion, I should not put myself into the hands of an improver. I would

rather have an inferior degree of beauty, of my own choice, and acquired

progressively. I would rather abide by my own blunders than by his.’

‘*You* would know what you were about, of course—but that would not suit *me.*

I have no eye or ingenuity for such matters, but as they are before me; and had I

a place of my own in the country, I should be most thankful to any Mr. Repton

who would undertake it, and give me as much beauty as he could for my money;

and I should never look at it till it was complete.’

‘It would be delightful to *me* to see the progress of it all,’ said Fanny.

‘Ay, you have been brought up to it. It was no part of my education; and the

only dose I ever had, being administered by not the first favourite in the world,

has made me consider improvements *in hand* as the greatest of nuisances. Three

years ago, the Admiral, my honoured uncle, bought a cottage at Twickenham for

us all to spend our summers in; and my aunt and I went down to it quite in

raptures: but it being excessively pretty, it was soon found necessary to be

improved; and for three months we were all dirt and confusion, without a gravel

walk to step on, or a bench fit for use. I would have everything as complete as

possible in the country, shrubberies and flower-gardens, and rustic seats

innumerable: but it must be all done without my care. Henry is different, he

loves to be doing.’

Edmund was sorry to hear Miss Crawford, whom he was much disposed to

admire, speak so freely of her uncle. It did not suit his sense of propriety, and he

was silenced, till induced, by further smiles and liveliness, to put the matter by

for the present.

‘Mr. Bertram,’ said she, ‘I have tidings of my harp at last. I am assured that it

is safe at Northampton; and there it has probably been these ten days, in spite of

the solemn assurances we have so often received to the contrary.’ Edmund

expressed his pleasure and surprise. ‘The truth is, that our inquiries were too

direct; we sent a servant, we went ourselves; this will not do seventy miles from

London—but this morning we heard of it in the right way. It was seen by some

farmer, and he told the miller, and the miller told the butcher, and the butcher’s

son-in-law left word at the shop.’

‘I am very glad that you have heard of it, by whatever means; and hope there

will be no further delay.’

‘I am to have it to-morrow; but how do you think it is to be conveyed? Not by

a waggon or cart:—oh no, nothing of that kind could be hired in the village. I

might as well have asked for porters and a hand-barrow.’

‘You would find it difficult, I daresay, just now, in the middle of a very late

hay harvest, to hire a horse and cart?’

‘I was astonished to find what a piece of work was made of it! To want a horse

and cart in the country seemed impossible, so I told my maid to speak for one

directly; and as I cannot look out of my dressing-closet without seeing one farmyard,

nor walk in the shrubbery without passing another, I thought it would be

only ask and have, and was rather grieved that I could not give the advantage to

all. Guess my surprise, when I found that I had been asking the most

unreasonable, most impossible thing in the world; had offended all the farmers,

all the labourers, all the hay in the parish. As for Dr. Grant’s bailiff, I believe I

had better keep out of *his* way; and my brother-in-law himself, who is all

kindness in general, looked rather black upon me, when he found what I had

been at.’

‘You could not be expected to have thought on the subject before; but when

you *do* think of it, you must see the importance of getting in the grass. The hire

of a cart at any time might not be so easy as you suppose; our farmers are not in

the habit of letting them out; but in harvest, it must be quite out of their power to

spare a horse.’

‘I shall understand all your ways in time; but coming down with the true

London maxim, that everything is to be got with money, I was a little

embarrassed at first by the sturdy independence of your country customs.

However, I am to have my harp fetched to-morrow. Henry, who is good-nature

itself, has offered to fetch it in his barouche. Will it not be honourably

conveyed?’

Edmund spoke of the harp as his favourite instrument, and hoped to be soon

allowed to hear her. Fanny had never heard the harp at all, and wished for it very

much.

‘I shall be most happy to play to you both,’ said Miss Crawford; ‘at least, as

long as you can like to listen; probably much longer, for I dearly love music

myself, and where the natural taste is equal, the player must always be best off,

for she is gratified in more ways than one. Now, Mr. Bertram, if you write to

your brother, I entreat you to tell him that my harp is come, he heard so much of

my misery without it. And you may say, if you please, that I shall prepare my

most plaintive airs against his return, in compassion to his feelings, as I know his

horse will lose.’

‘If I write, I will say whatever you wish me; but I do not at present foresee any

occasion for writing.’

‘No, I daresay; nor if he were to be gone a twelvemonth, would you ever write

to him, nor he to you, if it could be helped. The occasion would never be

foreseen. What strange creatures brothers are! You would not write to each other

but upon the most urgent necessity in the world; and when obliged to take up the

pen to say that such a horse is ill, or such a relation dead, it is done in the fewest

possible words. You have but one style among you. I know it perfectly. Henry,

who is in every other respect exactly what a brother should be, who loves me,

consults me, confides in me, and will talk to me by the hour together, has never

yet turned the page in a letter; and very often it is nothing more than—“Dear

Mary, I am just arrived. Bath seems full, and everything as usual. Yours

sincerely.” That is the true manly style,—that is a complete brother’s letter.’

‘When they are at a distance from all their family,’ said Fanny, colouring for

William’s sake, ‘they can write long letters.’

‘Miss Price has a brother at sea,’ said Edmund, ‘whose excellence as a

correspondent makes her think you too severe upon us.’

‘At sea, has she?—In the king’s service, of course.’

Fanny would rather have had Edmund tell the story, but his determined silence

obliged her to relate her brother’s situation; her voice was animated in speaking

of his profession, and the foreign stations he had been on, but she could not

mention the number of years that he had been absent without tears in her eyes.

Miss Crawford civilly wished him an early promotion.

‘Do you know anything of my cousin’s captain?’ said Edmund; ‘Captain

Marshall? You have a large acquaintance in the navy, I conclude?’

‘Among admirals, large enough; but,’ with an air of grandeur, ‘we know very

little of the inferior ranks. Post-captains may be very good sort of men, but they

do not belong to us. Of various admirals I could tell you a great deal; of them

and their flags, and the gradation of their pay, and their bickerings and

jealousies. But, in general, I can assure you that they are all passed over, and all

very ill-used. Certainly, my home at my uncle’s brought me acquainted with a

circle of admirals. Of *Rears,* and *Vices,* I saw enough.4 Now, do not be

suspecting me of a pun, I entreat.’

Edmund again felt grave, and only replied, ‘It is a noble profession.’

‘Yes, the profession is well enough, under two circumstances: if it make the

fortune, and there be discretion in spending it; but, in short, it is not a favourite

profession of mine. It has never worn an amiable form to *me.’*

Edmund reverted to the harp, and was again very happy in the prospect of

hearing her play.

The subject of improving grounds, meanwhile, was still under consideration

among the others; and Mrs. Grant could not help addressing her brother, though

it was calling his attention from Miss Julia Bertram.

‘My dear Henry, have *you* nothing to say? You have been an improver

yourself, and from what I hear of Everingham, it may vie with any place in

England. Its natural beauties, I am sure, are great. Everingham, as it used to be,

was perfect in my estimation; such a happy fall of ground, and such timber!

What would not I give to see it again!’

‘Nothing could be so gratifying to me as to hear your opinion of it,’ was his

answer; ‘but I fear there would be some disappointment; —you would not find it

equal to your present ideas. In extent it is a mere nothing;—you would be

surprised at its insignificance; and as for improvement, there was very little for

me to do—too little—I should like to have been busy much longer.’

‘You are fond of the sort of thing?’ said Julia.

‘Excessively; but what with the natural advantages of the ground, which

pointed out, even to a very young eye, what little remained to be done, and my

own consequent resolutions, I had not been of age three months before

Everingham was all that it is now. My plan was laid at Westminster, a little

altered, perhaps, at Cambridge, and at one-and-twenty executed. I am inclined to

envy Mr. Rushworth for having so much happiness yet before him. I have been a

devourer of my own.’

‘Those who see quickly will resolve quickly and act quickly,’ said Julia. *‘You*

can never want employment. Instead of envying Mr. Rushworth, you should

assist him with your opinion.’

Mrs. Grant, hearing the latter part of this speech, enforced it warmly,

persuaded that no judgment could be equal to her brother’s; and as Miss Bertram

caught at the idea likewise, and gave it her full support, declaring that, in her

opinion, it was infinitely better to consult with friends and disinterested advisers,

than immediately to throw the business into the hands of a professional man, Mr.

Rushworth was very ready to request the favour of Mr. Crawford’s assistance;

and Mr. Crawford, after properly depreciating his own abilities, was quite at his

service in any way that could be useful. Mr. Rushworth then began to propose

Mr. Crawford’s doing him the honour of coming over to Sotherton, and taking a

bed there; when Mrs. Norris, as if reading in her two nieces’ minds their little

approbation of a plan which was to take Mr. Crawford away, interposed with an

amendment.

‘There can be no doubt of Mr. Crawford’s willingness; but why should not

more of us go? Why should not we make a little party? Here are many that

would be interested in your improvements, my dear Mr. Rushworth, and that

would like to hear Mr. Crawford’s opinion on the spot, and that might be of

some small use to you with *their* opinions; and for my own part I have been long

wishing to wait upon your good mother again; nothing but having no horses of

my own could have made me so remiss; but now I could go and sit a few hours

with Mrs. Rushworth while the rest of you walked about and settled things, and

then we could all return to a late dinner here, or dine at Sotherton, just as might

be most agreeable to your mother, and have a pleasant drive home by moonlight.

I daresay Mr. Crawford would take my two nieces and me in his barouche, and

Edmund can go on horseback, you know, sister, and Fanny will stay at home

with you.’Lady Bertram made no objection; and every one concerned in the going was forward in expressing their ready concurrence, excepting Edmund, who heard it all and said nothing.

**CHAPTER VII**

**W**ell, Fanny, and how do you like Miss Crawford *now?‘* said Edmund the next

day, after thinking some time on the subject himself. ‘How did you like her

yesterday?’

‘Very well—very much. I like to hear her talk. She entertains me; and she is

so extremely pretty, that I have great pleasure in looking at her.’

‘It is her countenance that is so attractive. She has a wonderful play of feature!

But was there nothing in her conversation that struck you, Fanny, as not quite

right?’

‘Oh yes, she ought not to have spoken of her uncle as she did. I was quite

astonished. An uncle with whom she has been living so many years, and who,

whatever his faults may be, is so very fond of her brother, treating him, they say,

quite like a son. I could not have believed it!’

‘I thought you would be struck. It was very wrong—very indecorous.’

‘And very ungrateful, I think.’

‘Ungrateful is a strong word. I do not know that her uncle has any claim to her

*gratitude;* his wife certainly had; and it is the warmth of her respect for her

aunt’s memory which misleads her here. She is awkwardly circumstanced. With

such warm feelings and lively spirits it must be difficult to do justice to her

affection for Mrs. Crawford, without throwing a shade on the Admiral. I do not

pretend to know which was most to blame in their disagreements, though the

Admiral’s present conduct might incline one to the side of his wife; but it is

natural and amiable that Miss Crawford should acquit her aunt entirely. I do not

censure her *opinions;* but there certainly is impropriety in making them public.’

‘Do not you think,’ said Fanny, after a little consideration, ‘that this

impropriety is a reflection itself upon Mrs. Crawford, as her niece has been

entirely brought up by her? She cannot have given her right notions of what was

due to the Admiral.’

‘That is a fair remark. Yes, we must suppose the faults of the niece to have

been those of the aunt; and it makes one more sensible of the disadvantages she

has been under. But I think her present home must do her good. Mrs. Grant’s

manners are just what they ought to be. She speaks of her brother with a very

pleasing affection.’

‘Yes, except as to his writing her such short letters. She made me almost

laugh; but I cannot rate so very highly the love or good nature of a brother who

will not give himself the trouble of writing anything worth reading to his sisters,

when they are separated. I am sure William would never have used *me* so, under

any circumstances. And what right had she to suppose that *you* would not write

long letters when you were absent?’

‘The right of a lively mind, Fanny, seizing whatever may contribute to its own

amusement or that of others; perfectly allowable, when untinctured by illhumour

or roughness; and there is not a shadow of either in the countenance or

manner of Miss Crawford, nothing sharp, or loud, or coarse. She is perfectly

feminine, except in the instances we have been speaking of. *There* she cannot be

justified. I am glad you saw it all as I did.’

Having formed her mind and gained her affections, he had a good chance of

her thinking like him; though at this period, and on this subject, there began now

to be some danger of dissimilarity, for he was in a line of admiration of Miss

Crawford, which might lead him where Fanny could not follow. Miss

Crawford’s attractions did not lessen. The harp arrived, and rather added to her

beauty, wit, and good-humour; for she played with the greatest obligingness,

with an expression and taste which were peculiarly becoming, and there was

something clever to be said at the close of every air. Edmund was at the

Parsonage every day, to be indulged with his favourite instrument: one morning

secured an invitation for the next; for the lady could not be unwilling to have a

listener, and everything was soon in a fair train.

A young woman, pretty, lively, with a harp as elegant as herself; and both

placed near a window cut down to the ground, and opening on a little lawn,

surrounded by shrubs in the rich foliage of summer, was enough to catch any

man’s heart. The season, the scene, the air, were all favourable to tenderness and

sentiment. Mrs. Grant and her tambour frame were not without their use: it was

all in harmony; and as everything will turn to account when love is once set

going, even the sandwich tray, and Dr. Grant doing the honours of it, were worth

looking at. Without studying the business, however, or knowing what he was

about, Edmund was beginning, at the end of a week of such intercourse, to be a

good deal in love; and to the credit of the lady it may be added, that without his

being a man of the world or an elder brother, without any of the arts of flattery or

the gaieties of small talk, he began to be agreeable to her. She felt it to be so,

though she had not foreseen, and could hardly understand it; for he was not

pleasant by any common rule, he talked no nonsense, he paid no compliments,

his opinions were unbending, his attentions tranquil and simple. There was a

charm, perhaps, in his sincerity, his steadiness, his integrity, which Miss

Crawford might be equal to feel, though not equal to discuss with herself. She

did not think very much about it, however: he pleased her for the present; she

liked to have him near her; it was enough.

Fanny could not wonder that Edmund was at the Parsonage every morning;

she would gladly have been there too, might she have gone in uninvited and

unnoticed to hear the harp; neither could she wonder that when the evening stroll was over, and the two families parted again, he should think it right to attend Mrs. Grant and her sister to their home, while Mr. Crawford was devoted to the ladies of the Park; but she thought it a very bad exchange; and if Edmund were not there to mix the wine and water for her, would rather go without it than not.

She was a little surprised that he could spend so many hours with Miss

Crawford, and not see more of the sort of fault which he had already observed,

and of which *she* was almost always reminded by a something of the same

nature whenever she was in her company; but so it was. Edmund was fond of

speaking to her of Miss Crawford, but he seemed to think it enough that the

Admiral had since been spared; and she scrupled to point out her own remarks to

him, lest it should appear like ill-nature. The first actual pain which Miss

Crawford occasioned her was the consequence of an inclination to learn to ride,

which the former caught soon after her being settled at Mansfield, from the

example of the young ladies at the Park, and which, when Edmund’s

acquaintance with her increased, led to his encouraging the wish, and the offer of

his own quiet mare for the purpose of her first attempts, as the best fitted for a

beginner that either stable could furnish. No pain, no injury, however, was

designed by him to his cousin in this offer; *she* was not to lose a day’s exercise

by it. The mare was only to be taken down to the Parsonage half an hour before

her rides were to begin; and Fanny, on its being first proposed, so far from

feeling slighted, was almost overpowered with gratitude that he should be asking

her leave for it.

Miss Crawford made her first essay with great credit to herself, and no

inconvenience to Fanny. Edmund, who had taken down the mare and presided at

the whole, returned with it in excellent time, before either Fanny or the steady

old coachman, who always attended her when she rode without her cousins, was

ready to set forward. The second day’s trial was not so guiltless. Miss

Crawford’s enjoyment of riding was such, that she did not know how to leave

off. Active and fearless, and, though rather small, strongly made, she seemed

formed for a horsewoman; and to the pure genuine pleasure of the exercise,

something was probably added in Edmund’s attendance and instructions, and

something more in the conviction of very much surpassing her sex in general by

her early progress, to make her unwilling to dismount. Fanny was ready and

waiting, and Mrs. Norris was beginning to scold her for not being gone, and still

no horse was announced, no Edmund appeared. To avoid her aunt, and look for

him, she went out.

The houses, though scarcely half a mile apart, were not within sight of each

other; but by walking fifty yards from the hall door she could look down the

park, and command a view of the Parsonage and all its demesnes, gently rising

beyond the village road; and in Dr. Grant’s meadow she immediately saw the

group—Edmund and Miss Crawford both on horseback, riding side by side, Dr.

and Mrs. Grant, and Mr. Crawford, with two or three grooms, standing about and

looking on. A happy party it appeared to her—all interested in one object—

cheerful beyond a doubt, for the sound of merriment ascended even to her. It was a sound which did not make *her* cheerful; she wondered that Edmund should

forget her, and felt a pang. She could not turn her eyes from the meadow, she

could not help watching all that passed. At first Miss Crawford and her

companion made the circuit of the field, which was not small, at a foot’s pace;

then, at *her* apparent suggestion, they rose into a canter; and to Fanny’s timid

nature it was most astonishing to see how well she sat. After a few minutes, they

stopped entirely, Edmund was close to her, he was speaking to her, he was

evidently directing her management of the bridle, he had hold of her hand; she

saw it, or the imagination supplied what the eye could not reach. She must not

wonder at all this; what could be more natural than that Edmund should be

making himself useful, and proving his good-nature by any one? She could not

but think, indeed, that Mr. Crawford might as well have saved him the trouble;

that it would have been particularly proper and becoming in a brother to have

done it himself; but Mr. Crawford, with all his boasted good-nature, and all his

coachmanship, probably knew nothing of the matter, and had no active kindness

in comparison of Edmund. She began to think it rather hard upon the mare to

have such double duty; if she were forgotten, the poor mare should be

remembered.

Her feelings for one and the other were soon a little tranquillised, by seeing

the party in the meadow disperse, and Miss Crawford still on horseback, but

attended by Edmund on foot, pass through a gate into the lane, and so into the

park, and make towards the spot where she stood. She began then to be afraid of

appearing rude and impatient; and walked to meet them with a great anxiety to

avoid the suspicion.

‘My dear Miss Price,’ said Miss Crawford, as soon as she was at all within

hearing, ‘I am come to make my own apologies for keeping you waiting—but I

have nothing in the world to say for myself—I knew it was very late, and that I

was behaving extremely ill! and, therefore, if you please, you must forgive me.

Selfishness must always be forgiven, you know, because there is no hope of a

cure.’

Fanny’s answer was extremely civil, and Edmund added his conviction that

she could be in no hurry. ‘For there is more than time enough for my cousin to

ride twice as far as she ever goes,’ said he, ‘and you have been promoting her

comfort by preventing her from setting off half an hour sooner: clouds are now

coming up, and she will not suffer from the heat as she would have done then. I

wish *you* may not be fatigued by so much exercise. I wish you had saved

yourself this walk home.’

‘No part of it fatigues me but getting off this horse, I assure you,’ said she, as

she sprang down with his help; ‘I am very strong. Nothing ever fatigues me but

doing what I do not like. Miss Price, I give way to you with a very bad grace; but

I sincerely hope you will have a pleasant ride, and that I may have nothing but

good to hear of this dear, delightful, beautiful animal.’

The old coachman, who had been waiting about with his own horse, now

joining them, Fanny was lifted on hers, and they set off across another part of the

park; her feelings of discomfort not lightened by seeing, as she looked back, that

the others were walking down the hill together to the village; nor did her

attendant do her much good by his comments on Miss Crawford’s great

cleverness as a horsewoman, which he had been watching with an interest

almost equal to her own.

‘It is a pleasure to see a lady with such a good heart for riding!’ said he. ‘I

never see one sit a horse better. She did not seem to have a thought of fear. Very

different from you, miss, when you first began, six years ago come next Easter.

Lord bless me! how you did tremble when Sir Thomas first had you put on!’

In the drawing-room Miss Crawford was also celebrated. Her merit in being

gifted by nature with strength and courage was fully appreciated by the Miss

Bertrams; her delight in riding was like their own; her early excellence in it was

like their own, and they had great pleasure in praising it.

‘I was sure she would ride well,’ said Julia; ‘she has the make for it. Her

figure is as neat as her brother’s.’

‘Yes,’ added Maria, ‘and her spirits are as good, and she has the same energy

of character. I cannot but think that good horsemanship has a great deal to do

with the mind.’

When they parted at night, Edmund asked Fanny whether she meant to ride

the next day.

‘No, I do not know, not if you want the mare,’ was her answer. ‘I do not want

her at all for myself,’ said he; ‘but whenever you are next inclined to stay at

home, I think Miss Crawford would be glad to have her for a longer time—for a

whole morning, in short. She has a great desire to get as far as Mansfield

Common: Mrs. Grant has been telling her of its fine views, and I have no doubt

of her being perfectly equal to it. But any morning will do for this. She would be

extremely sorry to interfere with you. It would be very wrong if she did. *She*

rides only for pleasure, *you* for health.’

‘I shall not ride to-morrow, certainly,’ said Fanny; ‘I have been out very often

lately, and would rather stay at home. You know I am strong enough now to

walk very well.’

Edmund looked pleased, which must be Fanny’s comfort, and the ride to

Mansfield Common took place the next morning: —the party included all the

young people but herself, and was much enjoyed at the time, and doubly enjoyed

again in the evening discussion. A successful scheme of this sort generally

brings on another; and the having been to Mansfield Common disposed them all

for going somewhere else the day after. There were many other views to be

shown; and though the weather was hot, there were shady lanes wherever they

wanted to go. A young party is always provided with a shady lane. Four fine

mornings successively were spent in this manner in showing the Crawfords the

country, and doing the honours of its finest spots. Everything answered: it was

all gaiety and good-humour, the heat only supplying inconvenience enough to be

talked of with pleasure—till the fourth day, when the happiness of one of the

party was exceedingly clouded. Miss Bertram was the one. Edmund and Julia

were invited to dine at the Parsonage, and *she* was excluded. It was meant and

done by Mrs. Grant, with perfect good-humour, on Mr. Rushworth’s account,

who was partly expected at the Park that day; but it was felt as a very grievous

injury, and her good manners were severely taxed to conceal her vexation and

anger till she reached home. As Mr. Rushworth did *not* come, the injury was

increased, and she had not even the relief of showing her power over him; she

could only be sullen to her mother, aunt and cousin, and throw as great a gloom

as possible over their dinner and dessert.

Between ten and eleven, Edmund and Julia walked into the drawing-room,

fresh with the evening air, glowing and cheerful, the very reverse of what they

found in the three ladies sitting there, for Maria would scarcely raise her eyes

from her book, and Lady Bertram was half-asleep; and even Mrs. Norris,

discomposed by her niece’s ill-humour, and having asked one or two questions

about the dinner, which were not immediately attended to, seemed almost

determined to say no more. For a few minutes, the brother and sister were too

eager in their praise of the night and their remarks on the stars, to think beyond

themselves; but when the first pause came, Edmund, looking around, said, ‘But

where is Fanny? Is she gone to bed?’

‘No, not that I know of,’ replied Mrs. Norris; ‘she was here a moment ago.’

Her own gentle voice speaking from the other end of the room, which was a

very long one, told them that she was on the sofa. Mrs. Norris began scolding.

‘That is a very foolish trick, Fanny, to be idling away all the evening upon a

sofa. Why cannot you come and sit here, and employ yourself as *we* do? If you

have no work of your own, I can supply you from the poor basket. There is all

the new calico that was bought last week not touched yet. I am sure I almost

broke my back by cutting it out. You should learn to think of other people; and,

take my word for it, it is a shocking trick for a young person to be always lolling

upon a sofa.’

Before half this was said, Fanny was returned to her seat at the table, and had

taken up her work again; and Julia, who was in high good-humour, from the

pleasures of the day, did her the justice of exclaiming, ‘I must say, ma’am, that

Fanny is as little upon the sofa as anybody in the house.’

‘Fanny,’ said Edmund, after looking at her attentively, ‘I am sure you have the

headache!’

She could not deny it, but said it was not very bad.

‘I can hardly believe you,’ he replied; ‘I know your looks too well. How long

have you had it?’

‘Since a little before dinner. It is nothing but the heat.’

‘Did you go out in the heat?’

‘Go out! to be sure she did,’ said Mrs. Norris; ‘would you have her stay within

such a fine day as this? Were not we *all* out? Even your mother was out to-day

for above an hour.’

‘Yes, indeed, Edmund,’ added her Ladyship, who had been thoroughly

awakened by Mrs. Norris’s sharp reprimand to Fanny; ‘I was out above an hour.

I sat three-quarters of an hour in the flower-garden, while Fanny cut the roses,

and very pleasant it was, I assure you, but very hot. It was shady enough in the

alcove, but I declare I quite dreaded the coming home again.’

‘Fanny has been cutting roses, has she?’

‘Yes, and I am afraid they will be the last this year. Poor thing! *She* found it

hot enough; but they were so full blown that one could not wait.’

‘There was no help for it, certainly,’ rejoined Mrs. Norris, in a rather softened

voice; ‘but I question whether her headache might not be caught *then,* sister.

There is nothing so likely to give it as standing and stooping in a hot sun; but I

daresay it will be well to-morrow. Suppose you let her have your aromatic

vinegar; I always forget to have mine filled.’

‘She has got it,’ said Lady Bertram: ‘she has had it ever since she came back

from your house the second time.’

‘What!’ cried Edmund; ‘has she been walking as well as cutting roses;

walking across the hot park to your house, and doing it twice, ma’am? No

wonder her head aches.’

Mrs. Norris was talking to Julia, and did not hear.

‘I was afraid it would be too much for her,’ said Lady Bertram; ‘but when the

roses were gathered, your aunt wished to have them, and then you know they

must be taken home.’

‘But were there roses enough to oblige her to go twice?’

‘No; but they were to be put into the spare room to dry; and, unluckily, Fanny

forgot to lock the door of the room and bring away the key, so she was obliged to

go again.’

Edmund got up and walked about the room, saying, ‘And could nobody be

employed on such an errand but Fanny? Upon my word, ma’am, it has been a

very ill-managed business.’

‘I am sure I do not know how it was to have been done better,’ cried Mrs.

Norris, unable to be longer deaf; ‘unless I had gone myself, indeed; but I cannot

be in two places at once; and I was talking to Mr. Green at that very time about

your mother’s dairymaid, by her desire, and had promised John Groom to write

to Mrs. Jefferies about his son, and the poor fellow was waiting for me half an

hour. I think nobody can justly accuse me of sparing myself upon any occasion,

but really I cannot do everything at once. And as for Fanny’s just stepping down

to my house for me,—it is not much above a quarter of a mile,—I cannot think I

was unreasonable to ask it. How often do I pace it three times a day, early and

late, ay, and in all weathers too, and say nothing about it?’

‘I wish Fanny had half your strength, ma’am.’

‘If Fanny would be more regular in her exercise, she would not be knocked up

so soon. She has not been out on horseback now this long while, and I am

persuaded that when she does not ride she ought to walk. If she had been riding

before, I should not have asked it of her. But I thought it would rather do her

good after being stooping among the roses; for there is nothing so refreshing as a

walk after a fatigue of that kind; and though the sun was strong it was not so

very hot. Between ourselves, Edmund,’ nodding significantly at his mother, ‘it

was cutting the roses, and dawdling about in the flower-garden, that did the

mischief.’

‘I am afraid it was, indeed,’ said the more candid Lady Bertram, who had

overheard her; ‘I am very much afraid she caught the headache there, for the

heat was enough to kill anybody. It was as much as I could bear myself. Sitting

and calling to Pug, and trying to keep him from the flower-beds, was almost too

much for me.’

Edmund said no more to either lady; but going quietly to another table, on

which the supper tray yet remained, brought a glass of Madeira to Fanny and

obliged her to drink the greater part. She wished to be able to decline it; but the

tears, which a variety of feelings created, made it easier to swallow than to

speak.

Vexed as Edmund was with his mother and aunt, he was still more angry with

himself. His own forgetfulness of her was worse than anything which they had

done. Nothing of this would have happened had she been properly considered;

but she had been left four days together without any choice of companions or

exercise, and without any excuse for avoiding whatever her unreasonable aunts

might require. He was ashamed to think that for four days together she had not

had the power of riding, and very seriously resolved, however unwilling he must

be to check a pleasure of Miss Crawford’s, that it should never happen again.

Fanny went to bed with her heart as full as on the first evening of her arrival at

the Park. The state of her spirits had probably had its share in her indisposition;

for she had been feeling neglected, and been struggling against discontent and

envy, for some days past. As she leant on the sofa, to which she had retreated

that she might not be seen, the pain of her mind had been much beyond that in

her head; and the sudden change which Edmund’s kindness had then occasioned

made her hardly know how to support herself.

**CHAPTER VIII**

**F**anny’s rides recommenced the very next day; and as it was a pleasant freshfeeling

morning, less hot than the weather had lately been, Edmund trusted that

her losses both of health and pleasure would be soon made good. While she was

gone, Mr. Rushworth arrived, escorting his mother, who came to be civil, and to

show her civility especially, in urging the execution of the plan for visiting

Sotherton, which had been started a fortnight before, and which, in consequence

of her subsequent absence from home, had since lain dormant. Mrs. Norris and

her nieces were all well pleased with its revival, and an early day was named,

and agreed to, provided Mr. Crawford should be disengaged: the young ladies

did not forget that stipulation, and though Mrs. Norris would willingly have

answered for his being so, they would neither authorise the liberty, nor run the

risk; and at last, on a hint from Miss Bertram, Mr. Rushworth discovered that the

properest thing to be done was for him to walk down to the Parsonage directly,

and call on Mr. Crawford, and inquire whether Wednesday would suit him or

not.

Before his return Mrs. Grant and Miss Crawford came in. Having been out

some time, and taken a different route to the house, they had not met him.

Comfortable hopes, however, were given that he would find Mr. Crawford at

home. The Sotherton scheme was mentioned of course. It was hardly possible,

indeed, that anything else should be talked of, for Mrs. Norris was in high spirits

about it; and Mrs. Rushworth, a well-meaning, civil, prosing, pompous woman,

who thought nothing of consequence, but as it related to her own and her son’s

concerns, had not yet given over pressing Lady Bertram to be of the party. Lady

Bertram constantly declined it; but her placid manner of refusal made Mrs.

Rushworth still think she wished to come, till Mrs. Norris’s more numerous

words and louder tone convinced her of the truth.

‘The fatigue would be too much for my sister, a great deal too much, I assure

you, my dear Mrs. Rushworth. Ten miles there, and ten back, you know. You

must excuse my sister on this occasion, and accept of our two dear girls and

myself without her. Sotherton is the only place that could give her a wish to go

so far, but it cannot be indeed. She will have a companion in Fanny Price, you

know, so it will all do very well; and as for Edmund, as he is not here to speak

for himself, I will answer for his being most happy to join the party. He can go

on horseback, you know.’

Mrs. Rushworth being obliged to yield to Lady Bertram’s staying at home,

could only be sorry. ‘The loss of her Ladyship’s company would be a great

drawback, and she should have been extremely happy to have seen the young

lady too, Miss Price, who had never been at Sotherton yet, and it was a pity she

should not see the place.’

‘You are very kind, you are all kindness, my dear madam,’ cried Mrs. Norris;

‘but as to Fanny, she will have opportunities in plenty of seeing Sotherton. She

has time enough before her; and her going now is quite out of the question. Lady

Bertram could not possibly spare her.’

‘Oh no—I cannot do without Fanny.’

Mrs. Rushworth proceeded next, under the conviction that everybody must be

wanting to see Sotherton, to include Miss Crawford in the invitation; and though

Mrs. Grant, who had not been at the trouble of visiting Mrs. Rushworth on her

coming into the neighbourhood, civilly declined it on her own account, she was

glad to secure any pleasure for her sister; and Mary, properly pressed and

persuaded, was not long in accepting her share of the civility. Mr. Rushworth

came back from the Parsonage successful; and Edmund made his appearance

just in time to learn what had been settled for Wednesday, to attend Mrs.

Rushworth to her carriage, and walk half-way down the park with the two other

ladies.

On his return to the breakfast-room, he found Mrs. Norris trying to make up

her mind as to whether Miss Crawford’s being of the party were desirable or not,

or whether her brother’s barouche would not be full without her. The Miss

Bertrams laughed at the idea, assuring her that the barouche would hold four

perfectly well, independent of the box, on which one might go with him.

‘But why is it necessary,’ said Edmund, ‘that Crawford’s carriage, or his *only,*

should be employed? Why is no use to be made of my mother’s chaise? I could

not, when the scheme was first mentioned the other day, understand why a visit

from the family were not to be made in the carriage of the family.’

‘What!’ cried Julia: ‘go boxed up three in a postchaise in this weather, when

we may have seats in a barouche! No, my dear Edmund, that will not quite do.’

‘Besides,’ said Maria, ‘I know that Mr. Crawford depends upon taking us.

After what passed at first, he would claim it as a promise.’

‘And, my dear Edmund,’ added Mrs. Norris, ‘taking out *two* carriages when

*one* will do, would be trouble for nothing; and, between ourselves, coachman is

not very fond of the roads between this and Sotherton: he always complains

bitterly of the narrow lanes scratching his carriage, and you know one should not

like to have dear Sir Thomas, when he comes home, find all the varnish

scratched off.’

‘That would not be a very handsome reason for using Mr. Crawford’s,’ said

Maria; ‘but the truth is, that Wilcox is a stupid old fellow, and does not know

how to drive. I will answer for it that we shall find no inconvenience from

narrow roads on Wednesday.’

‘There is no hardship, I suppose, nothing unpleasant,’ said Edmund, ‘in going

on the barouche box.’

‘Unpleasant!’ cried Maria: ‘oh dear, I believe it would be generally thought

the favourite seat. There can be no comparison as to one’s view of the country.

Probably, Miss Crawford will choose the barouche box herself.’

‘There can be no objection then to Fanny’s going with you; there can be no

doubt of your having room for her.’

‘Fanny!’ repeated Mrs. Norris; ‘my dear Edmund, there is no idea of her going

with us. She stays with her aunt. I told Mrs. Rushworth so. She is not expected.’

‘You can have no reason, I imagine, madam,’ said he, addressing his mother,

‘for wishing Fanny *not* to be of the party, but as it relates to yourself, to your

own comfort. If you could do without her, you would not wish to keep her at

home?’

‘To be sure not, but I *cannot* do without her.’

‘You can, if I stay at home with you, as I mean to do.’

There was a general cry out at this. ‘Yes,’ he continued, ‘there is no necessity

for my going, and I mean to stay at home. Fanny has a great desire to see

Sotherton. I know she wishes it very much. She has not often a gratification of

the kind, and I am sure, ma’am, you would be glad to give her the pleasure

now?’

‘Oh yes, very glad, if your aunt sees no objection.’

Mrs. Norris was very ready with the only objection which could remain, their

having positively assured Mrs. Rushworth that Fanny could not go, and the very

strange appearance there would consequently be in taking her, which seemed to

her a difficulty quite impossible to be got over. It must have the strangest

appearance! It would be something so very unceremonious, so bordering on

disrespect for Mrs. Rushworth, whose own manners were such a pattern of goodbreeding

and attention, that she really did not feel equal to it. Mrs. Norris had no

affection for Fanny, and no wish of procuring her pleasure at any time; but her

opposition to Edmund now arose more from partiality for her own scheme,

because it was her own, than from anything else. She felt that she had arranged

everything extremely well, and that any alteration must be for the worse. When

Edmund, therefore, told her in reply, as he did when she would give him the

hearing, that she need not distress herself on Mrs. Rushworth’s account, because

he had taken the opportunity as he walked with her through the hall of

mentioning Miss Price as one who would probably be of the party, and had

directly received a very sufficient invitation for his cousin, Mrs. Norris was too

much vexed to submit with a very good grace, and would only say, ‘Very well,

very well, just as you choose, settle it your own way, I am sure I do not care

about it.’

‘It seems very odd,’ said Maria, ‘that you should be staying at home instead of

Fanny.’

‘I am sure she ought to be very much obliged to you,’ added Julia, hastily

leaving the room as she spoke, from a consciousness that she ought to offer to

stay at home herself.

‘Fanny will feel quite as grateful as the occasion requires,’ was Edmund’s only

reply, and the subject dropt.

Fanny’s gratitude, when she heard the plan, was in fact much greater than her

pleasure. She felt Edmund’s kindness with all, and more than all, the sensibility

which he, unsuspicious of her fond attachment, could be aware of; but that he

should forego any enjoyment on her account gave her pain, and her own

satisfaction in seeing Sotherton would be nothing without him.

The next meeting of the two Mansfield families produced another alteration in

the plan, and one that was admitted with general approbation. Mrs. Grant offered

herself as companion for the day to Lady Bertram in lieu of her son, and Dr.

Grant was to join them at dinner. Lady Bertram was very well pleased to have it

so, and the young ladies were in spirits again. Even Edmund was very thankful

for an arrangement which restored him to his share of the party; and Mrs. Norris

thought it an excellent plan, and had it at her tongue’s end, and was on the point

of proposing it, when Mrs. Grant spoke.

Wednesday was fine, and soon after breakfast the barouche arrived, Mr.

Crawford driving his sisters; and as everybody was ready, there was nothing to

be done but for Mrs. Grant to alight and the others to take their places. The place

of all places, the envied seat, the post of honour, was unappropriated. To whose

happy lot was it to fall? While each of the Miss Bertrams was meditating how

best, and with most appearance of obliging the others, to secure it, the matter

was settled by Mrs. Grant’s saying, as she stepped from the carriage, ‘As there

are five of you, it will be better that one should sit with Henry; and as you were

saying lately that you wished you could drive, Julia, I think this will be a good

opportunity for you to take a lesson.’

Happy Julia! Unhappy Maria! The former was on the barouche box in a

moment, the latter took her seat within, in gloom and mortification; and the

carriage drove off amid the good wishes of the two remaining ladies, and the

barking of Pug in his mistress’s arms.

Their road was through a pleasant country; and Fanny, whose rides had never

been extensive, was soon beyond her knowledge, and was very happy in

observing all that was new, and admiring all that was pretty. She was not often

invited to join in the conversation of the others, nor did she desire it. Her own

thoughts and reflections were habitually her best companions; and in observing

the appearance of the country, the bearings of the roads, the difference of soil,

the state of the harvest, the cottages, the cattle, the children, she found

entertainment that could only have been heightened by having Edmund to speak

to of what she felt. That was the only point of resemblance between her and the

lady who sat by her; in everything but a value for Edmund, Miss Crawford was

very unlike her. She had none of Fanny’s delicacy of taste, of mind, of feeling;

she saw nature, inanimate nature, with little observation; her attention was all for

men and women, her talents for the light and lively. In looking back after

Edmund, however, when there was any stretch of road behind them, or when he

gained on them in ascending a considerable hill, they were united, and a ‘there

he is’ broke at the same moment from them both, more than once.

For the first seven miles Miss Bertram had very little real comfort: her

prospect always ended in Mr. Crawford and her sister sitting side by side full of

conversation and merriment; and to see only his expressive profile as he turned

with a smile to Julia, or to catch the laugh of the other, was a perpetual source of

irritation, which her own sense of propriety could but just smooth over. When

Julia looked back, it was with a countenance of delight, and whenever she spoke

to them, it was in the highest spirits: ‘her view of the country was charming, she

wished they could all see it,’ etc., but her only offer of exchange was addressed

to Miss Crawford, as they gained the summit of a long hill, and was not more

inviting than this, ‘Here is a fine burst of country. I wish you had my seat, but I

daresay you will not take it, let me press you ever so much’; and Miss Crawford

could hardly answer, before they were moving again at a good pace.

When they came within the influence of Sotherton associations, it was better

for Miss Bertram, who might be said to have two strings to her bow. She had

Rushworth-feelings and Crawford-feelings, and in the vicinity of Sotherton the

former had considerable effect. Mr. Rushworth’s consequence was hers. She

could not tell Miss Crawford that ‘those woods belonged to Sotherton,’ she could

not carelessly observe that ‘she believed it was now all Mr. Rushworth’s

property on each side of the road,’ without elation of heart; and it was a pleasure

to increase with their approach to the capital freehold mansion, and ancient

manorial residence of the family, with all its rights of court-leet and court-baron.

‘Now we shall have no more rough road, Miss Crawford, our difficulties are

over. The rest of the way is such as it ought to be. Mr. Rushworth has made it

since he succeeded to the estate. Here begins the village. Those cottages are

really a disgrace. The church spire is reckoned remarkably handsome. I am glad

the church is not so close to the Great House as often happens in old places. The

annoyance of the bells must be terrible. There is the parsonage; a tidy-looking

house, and I understand the clergyman and his wife are very decent people.

Those are almshouses, built by some of the family. To the right is the steward’s

house; he is a very respectable man. Now we are coming to the lodge gates; but

we have nearly a mile through the park still. It is not ugly, you see, at this end;

there is some fine timber, but the situation of the house is dreadful. We go down

hill to it for half a mile, and it is a pity, for it would not be an ill-looking place if

it had a better approach.’

Miss Crawford was not slow to admire; she pretty well guessed Miss

Bertram’s feelings, and made it a point of honour to promote her enjoyment to

the utmost. Mrs. Norris was all delight and volubility; and even Fanny had

something to say in admiration, and might be heard with complacency. Her eye

was eagerly taking in everything within her reach; and after being at some pains

to get a view of the house, and observing that ‘it was a sort of building which she

could not look at but with respect,’ she added, ‘Now, where is the avenue? The

house fronts the east, I perceive. The avenue, therefore, must be at the back of it.

Mr. Rushworth talked of the west front.’

‘Yes, it is exactly behind the house; begins at a little distance, and ascends for

half a mile to the extremity of the grounds. You may see something of it here—

something of the more distant trees. It is oak entirely.’

Miss Bertram could now speak with decided information of what she had

known nothing about when Mr. Rushworth had asked her opinion; and her spirits

were in as happy a flutter as vanity and pride could furnish, when they drove up

to the spacious stone steps before the principal entrance.

**CHAPTER IX**

**M**r. Rushworth was at the door to receive his fair lady; and the whole party were

welcomed by him with due attention. In the drawing-room they were met with

equal cordiality by the mother, and Miss Bertram had all the distinction with

each that she could wish. After the business of arriving was over, it was first

necessary to eat, and the doors were thrown open to admit them through one or

two intermediate rooms into the appointed dining-parlour, where a collation was

prepared with abundance and elegance. Much was said, and much was ate, and

all went well. The particular object of the day was then considered. How would

Mr. Crawford like, in what manner would he choose, to take a survey of the

grounds? Mr. Rushworth mentioned his curricle. Mr. Crawford suggested the

greater desirableness of some carriage which might convey more than two. ‘To

be depriving themselves of the advantage of other eyes and other judgments,

might be an evil even beyond the loss of present pleasure.’

Mrs. Rushworth proposed that the chaise should be taken also; but this was

scarcely received as an amendment: the young ladies neither smiled nor spoke.

Her next proposition, of showing the house to such of them as had not been there

before, was more acceptable, for Miss Bertram was pleased to have its size

displayed, and all were glad to be doing something.

The whole party rose accordingly, and under Mrs. Rushworth’s guidance were

shown through a number of rooms, all lofty, and many large, and amply

furnished in the taste of fifty years back, with shining floors, solid mahogany,

rich damask, marble, gilding and carving, each handsome in its way. Of pictures

there were abundance, and some few good, but the larger part were family

portraits, no longer anything to anybody but Mrs. Rushworth, who had been at

great pains to learn all that the housekeeper could teach, and was now almost

equally well qualified to show the house. On the present occasion, she addressed

herself chiefly to Miss Crawford and Fanny, but there was no comparison in the

willingness of their attention; for Miss Crawford, who had seen scores of great

houses, and cared for none of them, had only the appearance of civilly listening,

while Fanny, to whom everything was almost as interesting as it was new,

attended with unaffected earnestness to all that Mrs. Rushworth could relate of

the family in former times, its rise and grandeur, regal visits and loyal efforts,

delighted to connect anything with history already known, or warm her

imagination with scenes of the past.

The situation of the house excluded the possibility of much prospect from any

of the rooms; and while Fanny and some of the others were attending Mrs.

Rushworth, Henry Crawford was looking grave and shaking his head at the

windows. Every room on the west front looked across a lawn to the beginning of

the avenue immediately beyond tall iron palisades and gates.

Having visited many more rooms than could be supposed to be of any other

use than to contribute to the window tax, and find employment for housemaids,

‘Now,’ said Mrs. Rushworth, ‘we are coming to the chapel, which probably we

ought to enter from above, and look down upon; but as we are quite among

friends, I will take you in this way, if you will excuse me.’

They entered. Fanny’s imagination had prepared her for something grander

than a mere spacious, oblong room, fitted up for the purpose of devotion—with

nothing more striking or more solemn than the profusion of mahogany, and the

crimson velvet cushions appearing over the ledge of the family gallery above. ‘I

am disappointed,’ said she, in a low voice to Edmund. ‘This is not my idea of a

chapel. There is nothing awful here, nothing melancholy, nothing grand. Here

are no aisles, no arches, no inscriptions, no banners. No banners, cousin, to be

“blown by the night wind of heaven.” No signs that a “Scottish monarch sleeps

below.”’

‘You forget, Fanny, how lately all this has been built, and for how confined a

purpose, compared with the old chapels of castles and monasteries. It was only

for the private use of the family. They have been buried, I suppose, in the parish

church. *There* you must look for the banners and the achievements.’

‘It was foolish of me not to think of all that, but I am disappointed.’

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 choose their own time and manner of

devotion. The obligation of attendance, the formality, the restraint, the length of

time— altogether it is a formidable thing, and what nobody likes; and if the good

people who used to kneel and gape 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 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.

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 license, for here we are all together, 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 shown, 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 for surveying the grounds, with

the who and the how, was likely to be more fully agitated, and 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 further? 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. Bertrams have never seen the wilderness yet.’a

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 faultfinding.

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 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 choose 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? 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 *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, plainspoken

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 connection 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.’

‘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-hab 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 make 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 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 gate 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.

**CHAPTER X**

**A** 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 stayed 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 think-86 ing 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.’

‘You have undoubtedly—and there are situations in which very high spirits

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 haha,

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 that 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 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 say—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 further,’ 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 stayed for me,’

said he.

‘Miss Bertram thought you would follow her.’

‘I should not have had to follow her if she had stayed.’

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 under-sized man handsome. He is not

five foot nine. I should not wonder if he was 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 daresay

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 further 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 side gate, 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 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 him right as to his grandson’s illness, convinced him it was an ague, and

promised him a charm for it; and he, in return, had shown her all his choicest

nursery of plants, and actually presented her with a very curious specimen of

heath.

On this rencontre they all returned to the house together, there to lounge away

the time as they could with sofas, and chitchat, and *Quarterly Reviews,* till the

return of the others, and the arrival of dinner. It was late before the Miss

Bertrams 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.

**CHAPTER XI**

**T**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 that 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 all who shut their eyes while they

look, or their understandings while they reason, feel 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,

hereabouts.’

‘Which you suppose has biassed 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 why a man should

make a worse clergyman for knowing that he will have a competence early in

life. I was in safe hands. I hope I should not have been influenced myself in a

wrong way, and I am sure my father was too conscientious to have allowed it. I

have no doubt that I was biassed, but I think it was blamelessly.’

‘It is the same sort of thing,’ said Fanny, after a short pause,

‘as for the son of an admiral to go into the navy, or the son of a general to be

in the army, and nobody sees anything wrong in that. Nobody wonders that they

should prefer the line where their friends can serve them best, or suspects them

to be less in earnest in it than they appear.’

‘No, my dear Miss Price, and for reasons good. The profession, either navy or

army, is its own justification. It has everything in its favour; heroism, danger,

bustle, fashion. Soldiers and sailors are always acceptable in society. Nobody

can wonder that men are soldiers and sailors.’

‘But the motives of a man who takes orders with the certainty of preferment

may be fairly suspected, you think?’ said Edmund. ‘To be justified in your eyes,

he must do it in the most complete uncertainty of any provision.’

‘What! take orders without a living! No, that is madness indeed, absolute

madness.’

‘Shall I ask you how the church is to be filled, if a man is neither to take

orders with a living, nor without? No, for you certainly would not know what to

say. But I must beg some advantage to the clergyman from your own argument.

As he cannot be influenced by those feelings which you rank highly as

temptation and reward to the soldier and sailor in their choice of a profession, as

heroism, and noise, and fashion are all against him, he ought to be less liable to

the suspicion of wanting sincerity or good intentions in the choice of his.’

‘Oh, no doubt he is very sincere in preferring an income ready made, to the

trouble of working for one; and has the best intentions of doing nothing all the

rest of his days but eat, drink, and grow fat. It is indolence, Mr. Bertram, indeed

—indolence and love of ease—a want of all laudable ambition, of taste for good

company, or of inclination to take the trouble of being agreeable, which make

men clergymen. A clergyman has nothing to do but to be slovenly and selfish—

read the newspaper, watch the weather, and quarrel with his wife. His curate

does all the work, and the business of his own life is to dine.’

‘There are such clergymen, no doubt, but I think they are not so common as to

justify Miss Crawford in esteeming it their general character. I suspect that in

this comprehensive and (may I say) commonplace censure, you are not judging

from yourself, but from prejudiced persons, whose opinions you have been in the

habit of hearing. It is impossible that your own observation can have given you

much knowledge of the clergy. You can have been personally acquainted with

very few of a set of men you condemn so conclusively. You are speaking what

you have been told at your uncle’s table.’

‘I speak what appears to me the general opinion; and where an opinion is

general, it is usually correct. Though I have not seen much of the domestic lives

of clergymen, it is seen by too many to leave any deficiency of information.’

‘Where any one body of educated men, of whatever denomination, are

condemned indiscriminately, there must be a deficiency of information, or

(smiling) of something else. Your uncle, and his brother admirals, perhaps, knew

little of clergymen beyond the chaplains whom, good or bad, they were always

wishing away.’

‘Poor William! He has met with great kindness from the chaplain of the

*Antwerp,’* was a tender apostrophe of Fanny’s, very much to the purpose of her

own feelings, if not of the conversation.

‘I have been so little addicted to take my opinions from my uncle,’ said Miss

Crawford, ‘that I can hardly suppose;—and since you push me so hard, I must

observe, that I am not entirely without the means of seeing what clergymen are,

being at this present time the guest of my own brother, Dr. Grant. And though

Dr. Grant is most kind and obliging to me, and though he is really a gentleman,

and I daresay a good scholar and clever, and often preaches good sermons, and is

very respectable, *I* see him to be an indolent, selfish *bon vivant,* who must have

his palate consulted in everything; who will not stir a finger for the convenience

of any one; and who, moreover, if the cook makes a blunder, is out of humour

with his excellent wife. To own the truth, Henry and I were partly driven out this

very evening by a disappointment about a green goose, which he could not get

the better of. My poor sister was forced to stay and bear it.’

‘I do not wonder at your disapprobation, upon my word. It is a great defect of

temper, made worse by a very faulty habit of self-indulgence; and to see your

sister suffering from it must be exceedingly painful to such feelings as yours.

Fanny, it goes against us. We cannot attempt to defend Dr. Grant.’

‘No,’ replied Fanny, ‘but we need not give up his profession for all that;

because, whatever profession Dr. Grant had chosen, he would have taken a——

not a good temper into it; and as he must either in the navy or army have had a

great many more people under his command than he has now, I think more

would have been made unhappy by him as a sailor or soldier than as a

clergyman. Besides, I cannot but suppose that whatever there may be to wish

otherwise in Dr. Grant, would have been in a greater danger of becoming worse

in a more active and worldly profession, where he would have had less time and

obligation—where he might have escaped that knowledge of himself, the

*frequency,* at least, of that knowledge which it is impossible he should escape as

he is now. A man—a sensible man like Dr. Grant, cannot be in the habit of

teaching others their duty every week, cannot go to church twice every Sunday,

and preach such very good sermons in so good a manner as he does, without

being the better for it himself. It must make him think; and I have no doubt that

he oftener endeavours to restrain himself than he would if he had been anything

but a clergyman.’

‘We cannot prove the contrary, to be sure—but I wish you a better fate, Miss

Price, than to be the wife of a man whose amiableness depends upon his own

sermons; for though he may preach himself into a good-humour every Sunday, it

will be bad enough to have him quarrelling about green geese from Monday

morning till Saturday night.’

‘I think the man who could often quarrel with Fanny,’ said Edmund,

affectionately, ‘must be beyond the reach of any sermons.’

Fanny turned further into the window; and Miss Crawford had only time to

say, in a pleasant manner, ‘I fancy Miss Price has been more used to deserve

praise than to hear it’; when being earnestly invited by the Miss Bertrams to join

in a glee, she tripped off to the instrument, leaving Edmund looking after her in

an ecstasy of admiration of all her many virtues, from her obliging manners

down to her light and graceful tread.

‘There goes good-humour, I am sure,’ said he presently.

‘There goes a temper which would never give pain! How well she walks! and

how readily she falls in with the inclination of others! joining them the moment

she is asked. What a pity,’ he added, after an instant’s reflection, ‘that she should

have been in such hands!’

Fanny agreed to it, and had the pleasure of seeing him continue at the window

with her, in spite of the expected glee, and of having his eyes soon turned, like

hers, towards the scene without, where all that was solemn, and soothing, and

lovely, appeared in the brilliancy of an unclouded night, and the contrast of the

deep shade of the woods. Fanny spoke her feelings. ‘Here’s harmony!’ said she;

‘here’s repose! Here’s what may leave all painting and all music behind, and

what poetry only can attempt to describe! Here’s what may tranquillise every

care, and lift the heart to rapture! When I look out on such a night as this, I feel

as if there could be neither wickedness nor sorrow in the world; and there

certainly would be less of both if the sublimity of nature were more attended to,

and people were carried more out of themselves by contemplating such a scene.’

‘I like to hear your enthusiasm, Fanny. It is a lovely night, and they are much

to be pitied who have not been taught to feel in some degree as you do—who

have not at least been given a taste for nature in early life. They lose a great

deal.’

*‘You* taught me to think and feel on the subject, cousin.’

‘I had a very apt scholar. There’s Arcturus looking very bright.’

‘Yes, and the Bear. I wish I could see Cassiopeia.’

‘We must go out on the lawn for that. Should you be afraid?’

‘Not in the least. It is a great while since we have had any star-gazing.’

‘Yes, I do not know how it has happened.’ The glee began.

‘We will stay till this is finished, Fanny,’ said he, turning his back on the

window; and as it advanced, she had the mortification of seeing him advance

too, moving forward by gentle degrees towards the instrument, and when it

ceased, he was close by the singers, among the most urgent in requesting to hear

the glee again.

Fanny sighed alone at the window till scolded away by Mrs. Norris’s threats

of catching cold.

**CHAPTER XII**

**S**ir Thomas was to return in November, and his eldest son had duties to call him

earlier home. The approach of September brought tidings of Mr. Bertram, first in

a letter to the gamekeeper, and then in a letter to Edmund; and by the end of

August he arrived himself, to be gay, agreeable, and gallant again as occasion

served, or Miss Crawford demanded; to tell of races and Weymouth, and parties

and friends, to which she might have listened six weeks before with some

interest, and altogether to give her the fullest conviction, by the power of actual

comparison, of her preferring his younger brother.

It was very vexatious, and she was heartily sorry for it; but so it was; and so

far from now meaning to marry the elder, she did not even want to attract him

beyond what the simplest claims of conscious beauty required: his lengthened

absence from Mansfield, without anything but pleasure in view and his own will

to consult, made it perfectly clear that he did not care about her; and his

indifference was so much more than equalled by her own, that were he now to

step forth the owner of Mansfield Park, the Sir Thomas complete, which he was

to be in time, she did not believe she could accept him.

The season and duties which brought Mr. Bertram back to Mansfield took Mr.

Crawford into Norfolk. Everingham could not do without him in the beginning

of September. He went for a fortnight;—a fortnight of such dulness to the Miss

Bertrams as ought to have put them both on their guard, and made even Julia

admit, in her jealousy of her sister, the absolute necessity of distrusting his

attentions, and wishing him not to return; and a fortnight of sufficient leisure, in

the intervals of shooting and sleeping, to have convinced the gentleman that he

ought to keep longer away, had he been more in the habit of examining his own

motives, and of reflecting to what the indulgence of his idle vanity was tending;

but, thoughtless and selfish from prosperity and bad example, he would not look

beyond the present moment. The sisters, handsome, clever, and encouraging,

were an amusement to his sated mind; and finding nothing in Norfolk to equal

the social pleasures of Mansfield, he gladly returned to it at the time appointed,

and was welcomed thither quite as gladly by those whom he came to trifle with

further.

Maria, with only Mr. Rushworth to attend to her, and doomed to the repeated

details of his day’s sport, good or bad, his boast of his dogs, his jealousy of his

neighbours, his doubts of their qualification, and his zeal after poachers,—

subjects which will not find their way to female feelings without some talent on

one side or some attachment on the other,—had missed Mr. Crawford

grievously; and Julia, unengaged and unemployed, felt all the right of missing

him much more. Each sister believed herself the favourite. Julia might be

justified in so doing by the hints of Mrs. Grant, inclined to credit what she

wished, and Maria by the hints of Mr. Crawford himself. Everything returned

into the same channel as before his absence; his manners being to each so

animated and agreeable as to lose no ground with either, and just stopping short

of the consistence, the steadiness, the solicitude, and the warmth which might

excite general notice.

Fanny was the only one of the party who found anything to dislike; but since

the day at Sotherton, she could never see Mr. Crawford with either sister without

observation, and seldom without wonder or censure; and had her confidence in

her own judgment been equal to her exercise of it in every other respect, had she

been sure that she was seeing clearly, and judging candidly, she would probably

have made some important communications to her usual confidant. As it was,

however, she only hazarded a hint, and the hint was lost. ‘I am rather surprised,’

said she, ‘that Mr. Crawford should come back again so soon, after being here so

long before, full seven weeks; for I had understood he was so very fond of

change and moving about, that I thought something would certainly occur when

he was once gone, to take him elsewhere. He is used to much gayer places than

Mansfield.’

‘It is to his credit,’ was Edmund’s answer, ‘and I daresay it gives his sister

pleasure. She does not like his unsettled habits.’

‘What a favourite he is with my cousins!’

‘Yes, his manners to women are such as must please. Mrs. Grant, I believe,

suspects him of a preference for Julia; I have never seen much symptom of it,

but I wish it may be so. He has no faults but what a serious attachment would

remove.’

‘If Miss Bertram were not engaged,’ said Fanny, cautiously, ‘I could

sometimes almost think that he admired her more than Julia.’

‘Which is, perhaps, more in favour of his liking Julia best, than you, Fanny,

may be aware; for I believe it often happens that a man, before he has quite

made up his own mind, will distinguish the sister or intimate friend of the

woman he is really thinking of, more than the woman herself. Crawford has too

much sense to stay here if he found himself in any danger from Maria; and I am

not at all afraid for her, after such a proof as she has given that her feelings are

not strong.’

Fanny supposed she must have been mistaken, and meant to think differently

in future; but with all that submission to Edmund could do, and all the help of

the coinciding looks and hints which she occasionally noticed in some of the

others, and which seemed to say that Julia was Mr. Crawford’s choice, she knew

not always what to think. She was privy one evening to the hopes of her aunt

Norris on this subject, as well as to her feelings, and the feelings of Mrs.

Rushworth, on a point of some similarity, and could not help wondering as she

listened; and glad would she have been not to be obliged to listen, for it was

while all the other young people were dancing, and she sitting, most unwillingly,

among the chaperons at the fire, longing for the re-entrance of her elder cousin,

on whom all her own hopes of a partner then depended. It was Fanny’s first ball,

though without the preparation or splendour of many a young lady’s first ball,

being the thought only of the afternoon, built on the late acquisition of a violinplayer in the servants’ hall, and the possibility of raising five couples with the

help of Mrs. Grant and a new intimate friend of Mr. Bertram’s just arrived on a

visit. It had, however, been a very happy one to Fanny through four dances, and

she was quite grieved to be losing even a quarter of an hour. While waiting and

wishing, looking now at the dancers and now at the door, this dialogue between

the two above-mentioned ladies was forced on her:—

‘I think, ma’am,’ said Mrs. Norris—her eyes directed towards Mr. Rushworth

and Maria, who were partners for the second time—‘we shall see some happy

faces again now.’

‘Yes, ma’am, indeed,’ replied the other, with a stately simper, ‘there will be

some satisfaction in looking on *now,* and I think it was rather a pity they should

have been obliged to part. Young folks in their situation should be excused

complying with the common forms. I wonder my son did not propose it.’

‘I daresay he did, ma’am. Mr. Rushworth is never remiss. But dear Maria has

such a strict sense of propriety, so much of that true delicacy which one seldom

meets with nowadays, Mrs. Rushworth, that wish of avoiding particularity. Dear

ma‘am, only look at her face at this moment, how different from what it was the

two last dances!’

Miss Bertram did indeed look happy, her eyes were sparkling with pleasure,

and she was speaking with great animation, for Julia and her partner, Mr.

Crawford, were close to her; they were all in a cluster together. How she had

looked before, Fanny could not recollect, for she had been dancing with Edmund

herself, and had not thought about her.

Mrs. Norris continued, ‘It is quite delightful, ma’am, to see young people so

properly happy, so well suited, and so much the thing! I cannot but think of dear

Sir Thomas’s delight. And what do you say, ma‘am, to the chance of another

match? Mr. Rushworth has set a good example, and such things are very

catching.’

Mrs. Rushworth, who saw nothing but her son, was quite at a loss. ‘The

couple above, ma’am. Do you see no symptoms there?’

‘Oh dear—Miss Julia and Mr. Crawford. Yes, indeed, a very pretty match.

What is his property?’

‘Four thousand a year.’

‘Very well. Those who have not more must be satisfied with what they have.

Four thousand a year is a pretty estate, and he seems a very genteel, steady

young man, so I hope Miss Julia will be very happy.’

‘It is not a settled thing, ma’am, yet. We only speak of it among friends. But I

have very little doubt it *will be.* He is growing extremely particular in his

attentions.’

Fanny could listen no further. Listening and wondering were all suspended for

a time, for Mr. Bertram was in the room again; and though feeling it would be a

great honour to be asked by him, she thought it must happen. He came towards

their little circle; but instead of asking her to dance, drew a chair near her, and

gave her an account of the present state of a sick horse, and the opinion of the

groom, from whom he had just parted. Fanny found that it was not to be, and in

the modesty of her nature immediately felt that she had been unreasonable in

expecting it. When he had told of his horse, he took a newspaper from the table,

and looking over it said in a languid way, ‘If you want to dance, Fanny, I will

stand up with you.’ With more than equal civility the offer was declined; she did

not wish to dance. ‘I am glad of it,’ said he, in a much brisker tone, and throwing

down the newspaper again—‘for I am tired to death. I only wonder how the

good people can keep it up so long. They had need be *all* in love, to find any

amusement in such folly—and so they are, I fancy. If you look at them you may

see they are so many couple of lovers—all but Yates and Mrs. Grant—and,

between ourselves, she, poor woman, must want a lover as much as any one of

them. A desperate dull life hers must be with the doctor,’ making a sly face as he

spoke towards the chair of the latter, who proving, however, to be close at his

elbow, made so instantaneous a change of expression and subject necessary, as

Fanny, in spite of everything, could hardly help laughing at. ‘A strange business

this in America, Dr. Grant! What is your opinion? I always come to you to know

what I am to think of public matters.’

‘My dear Tom,’ cried his aunt soon afterwards, ‘as you are not dancing, I

daresay you will have no objection to join us in a rubber; shall you?’—then,

leaving her seat, and coming to him to enforce the proposal, added in a whisper,

‘We want to make a table for Mrs. Rushworth, you know. Your mother is quite

anxious about it, but cannot very well spare time to sit down herself, because of

her fringe. Now, you and I and Dr. Grant will just do; and though *we* play but

half-crowns, you know you may bet half-guineas with *him.’*

‘I should be most happy,’ replied he aloud, and jumping up with alacrity, ‘it

would give me the greatest pleasure—but that I am this moment going to dance.

Come, Fanny,’ taking her hand, ‘do not be dawdling any longer, or the dance will

be over.’

Fanny was led off very willingly, though it was impossible for her to feel

much gratitude towards her cousin, or distinguish, as he certainly did, between

the selfishness of another person and his own.

‘A pretty modest request upon my word!’ he indignantly exclaimed as they

walked away. ‘To want to nail me to a card table for the next two hours with

herself and Dr. Grant, who are always quarrelling, and that poking old woman,

who knows no more of whist than of algebra. I wish my good aunt would be a

little less busy! And to ask me in such a way too! without ceremony, before them

all, so as to leave me no possibility of refusing! That is what I dislike most

particularly. It raises my spleen more than anything, to have the pretence of

being asked, of being given a choice, and at the same time addressed in such a

way as to oblige one to do the very thing—whatever it be! If I had not luckily

thought of standing up with you I could not have got out of it. It is a great deal

too bad. But when my aunt has got a fancy in her head, nothing can stop her.’

**CHAPTER XIII**

**T**he Honourable John Yates, this new friend, had not much to recommend him

beyond habits of fashion and expense, and being the younger son of a lord with a

tolerable independence; and Sir Thomas would probably have thought his

introduction at Mansfield by no means desirable. Mr. Bertram’s acquaintance

with him had begun at Weymouth, where they had spent ten days together in the

same society, and the friendship, if friendship it might be called, had been

proved and perfected by Mr. Yates’s being invited to take Mansfield in his way,

whenever he could, and by his promising to come; and he did come rather earlier

than had been expected, in consequence of the sudden breaking-up of a large

party assembled for gaiety at the house of another friend, which he had left

Weymouth to join. He came on the wings of disappointment, and with his head

full of acting, for it had been a theatrical party; and the play, in which he had

borne a part, was within two days of representation, when the sudden death of

one of the nearest connections of the family had destroyed the scheme and

dispersed the performers. To be so near happiness, so near fame, so near the long

paragraph in praise of the private theatricals at Ecclesford, the seat of the Right

Hon. Lord Ravenshaw, in Cornwall, which would of course have immortalised

the whole party for at least a twelvemonth! and being so near, to lose it all, was

an injury to be keenly felt, and Mr. Yates could talk of nothing else. Ecclesford

and its theatre, with its arrangements and dresses, rehearsals and jokes, was his

never-failing subject, and to boast of the past his only consolation.

Happily for him, a love of the theatre is so general, an itch for acting so strong

among young people, that he could hardly out-talk the interest of his hearers.

From the first casting of the parts, to the epilogue, it was all bewitching, and

there were few who did not wish to have been a party concerned, or would have

hesitated to try their skill. The play had been Lovers’ Vows,c and Mr. Yates was

to have been Count Cassel. ‘A trifling part,’ said he, ‘and not at all to my taste,

and such a one as I certainly would not accept again; but I was determined to

make no difficulties. Lord Ravenshaw and the duke had appropriated the only

two characters worth playing before I reached Ecclesford; and though Lord Ravenshaw offered to resign his to me, it was impossible to take it, you know. I was sorry for *him* that he should have so mistaken his powers, for he was no more equal to the Baron—a little man, with a weak voice, always hoarse after the first ten minutes. It must have injured the piece materially; but *I* was resolved to make no difficulties. Sir Henry thought the duke not equal to Frederick, but that was because Sir Henry wanted the part himself; whereas it was certainly in the best hands of the two. I was surprised to see Sir Henry such a stick. Luckily the strength of the piece did not depend upon him.

Our Agatha was inimitable, and the duke was thought very great by many.

And upon the whole it would certainly have gone off wonderfully.’

‘It was a hard case, upon my word’; and, ‘I do think you were very much to be

pitied,’—were the kind responses of listening sympathy.

‘It is not worth complaining about, but to be sure the poor old dowager could

not have died at a worse time; and it is impossible to help wishing that the news

could have been suppressed for just the three days we wanted. It was but three

days; and being only a grandmother, and all happening two hundred miles off, I

think there would have been no great harm, and it *was* suggested, I know; but

Lord Ravenshaw, who I suppose is one of the most correct men in England,

would not hear of it.’

‘An after-piece instead of a comedy,’ said Mr. Bertram. ‘Lovers’ Vows were at

an end, and Lord and Lady Ravenshaw left to act My Grandmother by

themselves. Well, the jointure may comfort *him;* and, perhaps, between friends,

he began to tremble for his credit and his lungs in the Baron, and was not sorry

to withdraw; and to make *you* amends, Yates, I think we must raise a little

theatre at Mansfield, and ask you to be our manager.’

This, though the thought of the moment, did not end with the moment; for the

inclination to act was awakened, and in no one more strongly than in him who

was now master of the house; and who having so much leisure as to make almost

any novelty a certain good, had likewise such a degree of lively talents and

comic taste as were exactly adapted to the novelty of acting. The thought

returned again and again. ‘Oh for the Ecclesford theatre and scenery to try

something with!’ Each sister could echo the wish; and Henry Crawford, to whom

in all the riot of his gratifications it was yet an untasted pleasure, was quite alive

at the idea. ‘I really believe,’ said he, ‘I could be fool enough at this moment to

undertake any character that ever was written, from Shylock or Richard III.

down to the singing hero of a farce in his scarlet coat and cocked hat. I feel as if

I could be anything or everything, as if I could rant and storm, or sigh or cut

capers, in any tragedy or comedy in the English language. Let us be doing

something. Be it only half a play—an act—a scene; what should prevent us? Not

these countenances, I am sure,’ looking towards the Miss Bertrams; ‘and for a

theatre, what signifies a theatre? We shall be only amusing ourselves. Any room

in this house might suffice.’

‘We must have a curtain,’ said Tom Bertram, ‘a few yards of green baize for a

curtain, and perhaps that may be enough.’

‘Oh, quite enough,’ cried Mr. Yates, ‘with only just a side wing or two run up,

doors in flat, and three or four scenes to be let down; nothing more would be

necessary on such a plan as this. For mere amusement among ourselves we

should want nothing more.’

‘I believe we must be satisfied with *less,’* said Maria. ‘There would not be

time, and other difficulties would arise. We must rather adopt Mr. Crawford’s

views, and make the *performance,* not the *theatre,* our object. Many parts of our

best plays are independent of scenery.’

‘Nay,’ said Edmund, who began to listen with alarm. ‘Let us do nothing by

halves. If we are to act, let it be in a theatre completely fitted up with pit, box,

and gallery, and let us have a play entire from beginning to end; so as it be a

German play, no matter what, with a good tricking, shifting after-piece and a

figure-dance, and a hornpipe, and a song between the acts. If we do not outdo

Ecclesford, we do nothing.’

‘Now, Edmund, do not be disagreeable,’ said Julia. ‘Nobody loves a play

better than you do, or can have gone much further to see one.’

‘True, to see real acting, good hardened real acting; but I would hardly walk

from this room to the next to look at the raw efforts of those who have not been

bred to the trade,—a set of gentlemen and ladies, who have all the disadvantages

of education and decorum to struggle through.’

After a short pause, however, the subject still continued, and was discussed

with unabated eagerness, every one’s inclination increasing by the discussion,

and a knowledge of the inclination of the rest; and though nothing was settled

but that Tom Bertram would prefer a comedy, and his sisters and Henry

Crawford a tragedy, and that nothing in the world could be easier than to find a

piece which would please them all, the resolution to act something or other

seemed so decided as to make Edmund quite uncomfortable. He was determined

to prevent it, if possible, though his mother, who equally heard the conversation

which passed at table, did not evince the least disapprobation.

The same evening afforded him an opportunity of trying his strength. Maria,

Julia, Henry Crawford, and Mr. Yates, were in the billiardroom. Tom, returning

from them into the drawing-room, where Edmund was standing thoughtfully by

the fire, while Lady Bertram was on the sofa at a little distance, and Fanny close

beside her arranging her work, thus began as he entered—

‘Such a horribly vile billiard-table as ours is not to be met with, I believe,

above ground! I can stand it no longer, and I think I may say that nothing shall

ever tempt me to it again;—but one good thing I have just ascertained, it is the

very room for a theatre, precisely the shape and length for it; and the doors at the

further end, communicating with each other, as they may be made to do in five

minutes, by merely moving the bookcase in my father’s room, is the very thing

we could have desired, if we had sat down to wish for it. And my father’s room

will be an excellent green-room. It seems to join the billiardroom on purpose.

‘You are not serious, Tom, in meaning to act?’ said Edmund in a low voice, as

his brother approached the fire.

‘Not serious! never more so, I assure you. What is there to surprise you in it?’

‘I think it would be very wrong. In a *general* light, private theatricals are open

to some objections, but as *we* are circumstanced, I must think it would be highly

injudicious, and more than injudicious, to attempt anything of the kind. It would

show great want of feeling on my father’s account, absent as he is, and in some

degree of constant danger; and it would be imprudent, I think, with regard to

Maria, whose situation is a very delicate one, considering everything, extremely

delicate.’

‘You take up a thing so seriously! as if we were going to act three times a

week till my father’s return, and invite all the country. But it is not to be a

display of that sort. We mean nothing but a little amusement among ourselves,

just to vary the scene, and exercise our powers in something new. We want no

audience, no publicity. We may be trusted, I think, in choosing some play most

perfectly unexceptionable; and I can conceive no greater harm or danger to any

of us in conversing in the elegant language of some respectable author than in

chattering in words of our own. I have no fears, and no scruples. And as to my

father’s being absent, it is so far from an objection, that I consider it rather as a

motive; for the expectation of his return must be a very anxious period to my

mother; and if we can be the means of amusing that anxiety, and keeping up her

spirits for the next few weeks, I shall think our time very well spent, and so I am

sure will he. It is a very anxious period for her.’

As he said this, each looked towards their mother. Lady Bertram, sunk back in

one corner of the sofa, the picture of health, wealth, ease and tranquillity, was

just falling into a gentle doze, while Fanny was getting through the few

difficulties of her work for her.

Edmund smiled and shook his head.

‘By Jove! this won’t do,’ cried Tom, throwing himself into a chair with a

hearty laugh. ‘To be sure, my dear mother, your anxiety,—I was unlucky there.’

‘What is the matter?’ asked her Ladyship, in the heavy tone of one halfroused:—‘

I was not asleep.’

‘Oh dear, no, ma’am—nobody suspected you.—Well, Edmund,’ he continued,

returning to the former subject, posture, and voice, as soon as Lady Bertram

began to nod again, ‘but *this* I *will* maintain,—that we shall be doing no harm.’

‘I cannot agree with you—I am convinced that my father would totally

disapprove it.’

‘And I am convinced to the contrary. Nobody is fonder of the exercise of

talent in young people, or promotes it more, than my father; and for anything of

the acting, spouting, reciting kind, I think he has always a decided taste. I am

sure he encouraged it in us as boys. How many a time have we mourned over the

dead body of Julius Cæsar, and *to be’d* and *not to be’d* in this very room for his

amusement! And I am sure *my name was Norval* every evening of my life

through one Christmas holidays.’

‘It was a very different thing. You must see the difference yourself. My father

wished us, as schoolboys, to speak well, but he would never wish his grown-up

daughters to be acting plays. His sense of decorum is strict.’

‘I know all that,’ said Tom, displeased. ‘I know my father as well as you do;

and I’ll take care that his daughters do nothing to distress him. Manage your own

concerns, Edmund, and I’ll take care of the rest of the family.’

‘If you are resolved on acting,’ replied the persevering Edmund, ‘I must hope

it will be in a very small and quiet way; and I think a theatre ought not to be

attempted. It would be taking liberties with my father’s house in his absence

which could not be justified.’

‘For everything of that nature I will be answerable, said Tom, in a decided

tone. ‘His house shall not be hurt. I have quite as great an interest in being

careful of his house as you can have; and as to such alterations as I was

suggesting just now, such as moving a bookcase, or unlocking a door, or even as

using the billiardroom for the space of a week without playing at billiards in it,

you might just as well suppose he would object to our sitting more in this room,

and less in the breakfast-room, than we did before he went away, or to my

sisters‘ pianoforte being moved from one side of the room to the other. Absolute

nonsense!’

‘The innovation, if not wrong as an innovation, will be wrong as an expense.’

‘Yes, the expense of such an undertaking would be prodigious! Perhaps it

might cost a whole twenty pounds. Something of a theatre we must have

undoubtedly, but it will be on the simplest plan; a green curtain and a little

carpenter’s work—and that’s all; and as the carpenter’s work may be all done at

home by Christopher Jackson himself, it will be too absurd to talk of expense;

and as long as Jackson is employed, everything will be right with Sir Thomas.

Don’t imagine that nobody in this house can see or judge but yourself. Don’t act

yourself, if you do not like it, but don’t expect to govern everybody else.’

‘No, as to acting myself,’ said Edmund, *‘that* I absolutely protest against.’

Tom walked out of the room as he said it, and Edmund was left to sit down

and stir the fire in thoughtful vexation.

Fanny, who had heard it all, and borne Edmund company in every feeling

throughout the whole, now ventured to say, in her anxiety to suggest some

comfort, ‘Perhaps they may not be able to find any play to suit them. Your

brother’s taste and your sisters’ seem very different.’

‘I have no hope there, Fanny. If they persist in the scheme, they will find

something. I shall speak to my sisters, and try to dissuade *them,* and that is all I

can do.’

‘I should think my aunt Norris would be on your side.’

‘I daresay she would, but she has no influence with either Tom or my sisters

that could be of any use; and if I cannot convince them myself, I shall let things

take their course, without attempting it through her. Family squabbling is the

greatest evil of all, and we had better do anything than be altogether by the ears.’

His sisters, to whom he had an opportunity of speaking the next morning,

were quite as impatient of his advice, quite as unyielding to his representation,

quite as determined in the cause of pleasure, as Tom. Their mother had no

objection to the plan, and they were not in the least afraid of their father’s

disapprobation. There could be no harm in what had been done in so many

respectable families, and by so many women of the first consideration; and it

must be scrupulousness run mad that could see anything to censure in a plan like

theirs, comprehending only brothers and sisters, and intimate friends, and which

would never be heard of beyond themselves. Julia *did* seem inclined to admit

that Maria’s situation might require particular caution and delicacy—but that

could not extend to *her*—*she* was at liberty; and Maria evidently considered her

engagement as only raising her so much more above restraint, and leaving her

less occasion than Julia to consult either father or mother. Edmund had little to

hope, but he was still urging the subject, when Henry Crawford entered the

room, fresh from the Parsonage, calling out, ‘No want of hands in our theatre,

Miss Bertram. No want of under-strappers; my sister desires her love, and hopes

to be admitted into the company, and will be happy to take the part of any old

duenna, or tame confidante, that you may not like to do yourselves.’

Maria gave Edmund a glance, which meant, ‘What say you now? Can we be

wrong if Mary Crawford feels the same?’ And Edmund, silenced, was obliged to

acknowledge that the charm of acting might well carry fascination to the mind of

genius; and with the ingenuity of love, to dwell more on the obliging,

accommodating purport of the message than on anything else.

The scheme advanced. Opposition was vain; and as to Mrs. Norris, he was

mistaken in supposing she would wish to make any. She started no difficulties

that were not talked down in five minutes by her eldest nephew and niece, who

were all-powerful with her; and, as the whole arrangement was to bring very

little expense to anybody, and none at all to herself, as she foresaw in it all the

comforts of hurry, bustle, and importance, and derived the immediate advantage

of fancying herself obliged to leave her own house, where she had been living a

month at her own cost, and take up her abode in theirs, that every hour might be

spent in their service, she was, in fact, exceedingly delighted with the project.

**CHAPTER XIV**

**F**anny seemed nearer being right than Edmund had supposed. The business of

finding a play that would suit everybody proved to be no trifle; and the carpenter

had received his orders and taken his measurements, had suggested and removed

at least two sets of difficulties, and having made the necessity of an enlargement

of plan and expense fully evident, was already at work, while a play was still to

seek. Other preparations were also in hand. An enormous roll of green baize had

arrived from Northampton, and been cut out by Mrs. Norris (with a saving, by

her good management, of full three-quarters of a yard), and was actually forming

into a curtain by the housemaids, and still the play was wanting; and as two or

three days passed away in this manner, Edmund began almost to hope that none

might ever be found.

There were, in fact, so many things to be attended to, so many people to be

pleased, so many best characters required, and above all, such a need that the

play should be at once both tragedy and comedy, that there did seem as little

chance of a decision as anything pursued by youth and zeal could hold out.

On the tragic side were the Miss Bertrams, Henry Crawford, and Mr. Yates; on

the comic, Tom Bertram, not *quite* alone, because it was evident that Mary

Crawford’s wishes, though politely kept back, inclined the same way: but his

determinateness and his power seemed to make allies unnecessary; and,

independent of this great irreconcilable difference, they wanted a piece

containing very few characters in the whole, but every character first-rate, and

three principal women. All the best plays were run over in vain. Neither Hamlet,

nor Macbeth, nor Othello, nor Douglas, nor the Gamester, presented anything

that could satisfy even the tragedians; and the Rivals, the School for Scandal,

Wheel of Fortune, Heir at Law, and a long *et cætera,* were successively

dismissed with yet warmer objections. No piece could be proposed that did not

supply somebody with a difficulty, and on one side or the other it was a

continual repetition of, ‘Oh no, *that* will never do. Let us have no ranting

tragedies. Too many characters. Not a tolerable woman’s part in the play.

Anything but *that,* my dear Tom. It would be impossible to fill it up. One could

not expect anybody to take such a part. Nothing but buffoonery from beginning

to end. *That* might do, perhaps, but for the low parts. If I *must* give my opinion, I

have always thought it the most insipid play in the English language. *I* do not

wish to make objections, I shall be happy to be of any use, but I think we could

not choose worse.’

Fanny looked on and listened, not unamused to observe the selfishness which,

more or less disguised, seemed to govern them all, and wondering how it would

end. For her own gratification she could have wished that something might be

acted, for she had never seen even half a play, but everything of higher

consequence was against it.

‘This will never do,’ said Tom Bertram at last. ‘We are wasting time most

abominably. Something must be fixed on. No matter what, so that something is

chosen. We must not be so nice. A few characters too many must not frighten us.

We must *double* them. We must descend a little. If a part is insignificant, the

greater our credit in making anything of it. From this moment *I* make no

difficulties. I take any part you choose to give me, so as it be comic. Let it but be

comic, I condition for nothing more.’

For about the fifth time he then proposed the Heir at Law, doubting only

whether to prefer Lord Duberley or Dr. Pan-gloss for himself; and very earnestly,

but very unsuccessfully, trying to persuade the others that there were some fine

tragic parts in the rest of the *dramatis personæ.*

The pause which followed this fruitless effort was ended by the same speaker,

who, taking up one of the many volumes of plays that lay on the table, and

turning it over, suddenly exclaimed—‘ Lovers’ Vows! And why should not

Lovers’ Vows do for us as well as for the Ravenshaws? How came it never to be

thought of before? It strikes me as if it would do exactly. What say you all? Here

are two capital tragic parts for Yates and Crawford, and here is the rhyming

Butler for me—if nobody else wants it—a trifling part, but the sort of thing I

should not dislike, and, as I said before, I am determined to take anything and do

my best. And as for the rest, they may be filled up by anybody. It is only Count

Cassel and Anhalt.’

The suggestion was generally welcome. Everybody was growing weary of

indecision, and the first idea with everybody was, that nothing had been

proposed before so likely to suit them all. Mr. Yates was particularly pleased: he

had been sighing and longing to do the Baron at Ecclesford, had grudged every

rant of Lord Ravenshaw’s and been forced to re-rant it all in his own room. The

storm through Baron Wildenhaim was the height of his theatrical ambition; and

with the advantage of knowing half the scenes by heart already, he did now, with

the greatest alacrity, offer his services for the part. To do him justice, however,

he did not resolve to appropriate it—for remembering that there was some very

good ranting ground in Frederick, he professed an equal willingness for that.

Henry Crawford was ready to take either. Whichever Mr. Yates did not choose

would perfectly satisfy him, and a short parley of compliment ensued. Miss

Bertram, feeling all the interest of an Agatha in the question, took on her to

decide it, by observing to Mr. Yates that this was a point in which height and

figure ought to be considered, and that *his* being the tallest, seemed to fit him

peculiarly for the Baron. She was acknowledged to be quite right, and the two

parts being accepted accordingly, she was certain of the proper Frederick. Three

of the characters were now cast, besides Mr. Rushworth, who was always

answered for by Maria as willing to do anything; when Julia, meaning, like her

sister, to be Agatha, began to be scrupulous on Miss Crawford’s account.

‘This is not behaving well by the absent,’ said she. ‘Here are not women

enough. Amelia and Agatha may do for Maria and me, but there is nothing for

your sister, Mr. Crawford.’

Mr. Crawford desired *that* might not be thought of: he was very sure his sister

had no wish of acting, but as she might be useful, and that she would not allow

herself to be considered in the present case. But this was immediately opposed

by Tom Bertram, who asserted the part of Amelia to be in every respect the

property of Miss Crawford, if she would accept it. ‘It falls as naturally as

necessarily to her,’ said he, ‘as Agatha does to one or other of my sisters. It can

be no sacrifice on their side, for it is highly comic.’

A short silence followed. Each sister looked anxious; for each felt the best

claim to Agatha, and was hoping to have it pressed on her by the rest. Henry

Crawford, who meanwhile had taken up the play, and with seeming carelessness

was turning over the first act, soon settled the business.

‘I must entreat Miss *Julia* Bertram,’ said he, ‘not to engage in the part of

Agatha, or it will be the ruin of all my solemnity. You must not, indeed you must

not (turning to her). I could not stand your countenance dressed up in woe and

paleness. The many laughs we have had together would infallibly come across

me, and Frederick and his knapsack would be obliged to run away.

Pleasantly, courteously it was spoken; but the manner was lost in the matter to

Julia’s feelings. She saw a glance at Maria which confirmed the injury to herself;

it was a scheme—a trick; she was slighted, Maria was preferred; the smile of

triumph which Maria was trying to suppress showed how well it was understood;

and before Julia could command herself enough to speak, her brother gave his

weight against her too, by saying, ‘Oh yes, Maria must be Agatha. Maria will be

the best Agatha. Though Julia fancies she prefers tragedy, I would not trust her

in it. There is nothing of tragedy about her. She has not the look of it. Her

features are not tragic features, and she walks too quick, and speaks too quick,

and would not keep her countenance. She had better do the old countrywoman—

the Cottager’s wife; you had, indeed, Julia. Cottager’s wife is a very pretty part, I

assure you. The old lady relieves the high-flown benevolence of her husband

with a good deal of spirit. You shall be Cottager’s wife.’

‘Cottager’s wife!’ cried Mr. Yates. ‘What are you talking of? The most trivial,

paltry, insignificant part; the merest commonplace—not a tolerable speech in the

whole. Your sister do that! It is an insult to propose it. At Ecclesford the

governess was to have done it. We all agreed that it could not be offered to

anybody else. A little more justice, Mr. Manager, if you please. You do not

deserve the office, if you cannot appreciate the talents of your company a little

better.’

‘Why as to *that,* my good friend, till I and my company have really acted there

must be some guess-work; but I mean no disparagement to Julia. We cannot

have two Agathas, and we must have one Cottager’s wife; and I am sure I set her

the example of moderation myself in being satisfied with the old Butler. If the

part is trifling she will have more credit in making something of it; and if she is

so desperately bent against everything humorous, let her take Cottager’s

speeches instead of Cottager’s wife’s, and so change the parts all through; he is

solemn and pathetic enough, I am sure. It could make no difference in the play;

and as for Cottager himself, when he has got his wife’s speeches, *I* would

undertake him with all my heart.’

‘With all your partiality for Cottager’s wife,’ said Henry Crawford, ‘it will be

impossible to make anything of it fit for your sister, and we must not suffer her

good-nature to be imposed on. We must not *allow* her to accept the part. She

must not be left to her own complaisance. Her talents will be wanted in Amelia.

Amelia is a character more difficult to be well represented than even Agatha. I

consider Amelia as the most difficult character in the whole piece. It requires

great powers, great nicety, to give her playfulness and simplicity without

extravagance. I have seen good actresses fail in the part. Simplicity, indeed, is

beyond the reach of almost every actress by profession. It requires a delicacy of

feeling which they have not. It requires a gentlewoman—a Julia Bertram. You

*will* undertake it, I hope?’ turning to her with a look of anxious entreaty, which

softened her a little; but while she hesitated what to say, her brother again

interposed with Miss Crawford’s better claim.

‘No, no, Julia must not be Amelia. It is not at all the part for her. She would

not like it. She would not do well. She is too tall and robust. Amelia should be a

small, light, girlish, skipping figure. It is fit for Miss Crawford, and Miss

Crawford only. She looks the part, and I am persuaded will do it admirably.’

Without attending to this, Henry Crawford continued his supplication. ‘You

must oblige us,’ said he, ‘indeed you must. When you have studied the character,

I am sure you will feel it suit you. Tragedy may be your choice, but it will

certainly appear that comedy chooses you. You will be to visit me in prison with

a basket of provisions; you will not refuse to visit me in prison? I think I see you

coming in with your basket.’

The influence of his voice was felt. Julia wavered; but was he only trying to

soothe and pacify her, and make her overlook the previous affront? She

distrusted him. The slight had been most determined. He was, perhaps, but at

treacherous play with her. She looked suspiciously at her sister; Maria’s

countenance was to decide it; if she were vexed and alarmed—but Maria looked

all serenity and satisfaction, and Julia well knew that on this ground Maria could

not be happy but at her expense. With hasty indignation, therefore, and a

tremulous voice, she said to him, ‘You do not seem afraid of not keeping your

countenance when I come in with a basket of provisions—though one might

have supposed—but it is only as Agatha that I was to be so overpowering!’ She

stopped—Henry Crawford looked rather foolish, and as if he did not know what

to say. Tom Bertram began again—

‘Miss Crawford must be Amelia. She will be an excellent Amelia.’

‘Do not be afraid of *my* wanting the character,’ cried Julia, with angry

quickness: ‘I am *not* to be Agatha, and I am sure I will do nothing else; and as to

Amelia, it is of all parts in the world the most disgusting to me. I quite detest her.

An odious, little, pert, unnatural, impudent girl. I have always protested against

comedy, and this is comedy in its worst form.’ And so saying she walked hastily

out of the room, leaving awkward feelings to more than one, but exciting small

compassion in any except Fanny, who had been a quiet auditor of the whole, and

who could not think of her as under the agitations of *jealousy* without great pity.

A short silence succeeded her leaving them; but her brother soon returned to

business and Lovers’ Vows, and was eagerly looking over the play, with Mr.

Yates’s help, to ascertain what scenery would be necessary—while Maria and

Henry Crawford conversed together in an under voice, and the declaration with

which she began of ‘I am sure I would give up the part to Julia most willingly,

but that though I shall probably do it very ill, I feel persuaded *she* would do it

worse,’ was doubtless receiving all the compliments it called for.

When this had lasted some time, the division of the party was completed by

Tom Bertram and Mr. Yates walking off together to consult further in the room

now beginning to be called *the Theatre,* and Miss Bertram’s resolving to go

down to the Parsonage herself with the offer of Amelia to Miss Crawford; and

Fanny remained alone.

The first use she made of her solitude was to take up the volume which had

been left on the table, and begin to acquaint herself with the play of which she

had heard so much. Her curiosity was all awake, and she ran through it with an

eagerness which was suspended only by intervals of astonishment, that it could

be chosen in the present instance—that it could be proposed and accepted in a

private theatre! Agatha and Amelia appeared to her in their different ways so

totally improper for home representation—the situation of one, and the language

of the other, so unfit to be expressed by any woman of modesty, that she could

hardly suppose her cousins could be aware of what they were engaging in; and

longed to have them roused as soon as possible by the remonstrance which

Edmund would certainly make.

**CHAPTER XV**

**M**iss Crawford accepted the part very readily; and soon after Miss Bertram’s

return from the Parsonage, Mr. Rushworth arrived, and another character was

consequently cast. He had the offer of Count Cassel and Anhalt, and at first did

not know which to choose, and wanted Miss Bertram to direct him; but upon

being made to understand the different style of the characters, and which was

which, and recollecting that he had once seen the play in London, and had

thought Anhalt a very stupid fellow, he soon decided for the Count. Miss

Bertram approved the decision, for the less he had to learn the better; and though

she could not sympathise in his wish that the Count and Agatha might be to act

together, nor wait very patiently while he was slowly turning over the leaves

with the hope of still discovering such a scene, she very kindly took his part in

hand, and curtailed every speech that admitted being shortened; besides pointing

out the necessity of his being very much dressed, and choosing his colours. Mr.

Rushworth liked the idea of his finery very well, though affecting to despise it;

and was too much engaged with what his own appearance would be to think of

the others, or draw any of those conclusions or feel any of that displeasure which

Maria had been half prepared for.

Thus much was settled before Edmund, who had been out all the morning,

knew anything of the matter; but when he entered the drawing-room before

dinner, the buzz of discussion was high between Tom, Maria, and Mr. Yates; and

Mr. Rushworth stepped forward with great alacrity to tell him the agreeable

news.

‘We have got a play,’ said he. ‘It is to be Lovers’ Vows; and I am to be Count

Cassel, and am to come in first with a blue dress, and a pink satin cloak, and

afterwards am to have another fine fancy suit by way of a shooting dress. I do

not know how I shall like it.’

Fanny’s eyes followed Edmund, and her heart beat for him as she heard this

speech, and saw his look, and felt what his sensations must be.

‘Lovers’ Vows!’ in a tone of the greatest amazement, was his only reply to Mr.

Rushworth; and he turned towards his brother and sisters as if hardly doubting a

contradiction.

‘Yes,’ cried Mr. Yates. ‘After all our debatings and difficulties, we find there is

nothing that will suit us altogether so well, nothing so unexceptionable, as

Lovers’ Vows. The wonder is that it should not have been thought of before. My

stupidity was abominable, for here we have all the advantage of what I saw at

Ecclesford; and it is so useful to have anything of a model! We have cast almost

every part.’

‘But what do you do for women?’ said Edmund gravely, and looking at Maria.

Maria blushed in spite of herself as she answered, ‘I take the part which Lady

Ravenshaw was to have done, and (with a bolder eye) Miss Crawford is to be

Amelia.’

‘I should not have thought it the sort of play to be so easily filled up with *us,’*

replied Edmund, turning away to the fire where sat his mother, aunt, and Fanny,

and seating himself with a look of great vexation.

Mr. Rushworth followed him to say, ‘I come in three times, and have two-andforty

speeches. That’s something, is not it? But I do not much like the idea of

being so fine. I shall hardly know myself in a blue dress and a pink satin cloak.’

Edmund could not answer him. In a few minutes Mr. Bertram was called out

of the room to satisfy some doubts of the carpenter; and being accompanied by

Mr. Yates, and followed soon afterwards by Mr. Rushworth, Edmund almost

immediately took the opportunity of saying, ‘I cannot before Mr. Yates speak

what I feel as to this play, without reflecting on his friends at Ecclesford; but I

must now, my dear Maria, tell *you,* that I think it exceedingly unfit for private

representation, and that I hope you will give it up. I cannot but suppose you *will*

when you have read it carefully over. Read only the first act aloud to either your

mother or aunt, and see how you can approve it. It will not be necessary to send

you to your *father’s* judgment, I am convinced.’

‘We see things very differently,’ cried Maria. ‘I am perfectly acquainted with

the play, I assure you; and with a very few omissions, and so forth, which will be

made, of course, I can see nothing objectionable in it; and *I* am not the *only*

young woman you find who thinks it very fit for private representation.’

‘I am sorry for it,’ was his answer; ‘but in this matter it is *you* who are to lead.

*You* must set the example. If others have blundered, it is your place to put them

right, and show them what true delicacy is. In all points of decorum, *your*

conduct must be law to the rest of the party.’

This picture of her consequence had some effect, for no one loved better to

lead than Maria; and with far more good-humour she answered, ‘I am much

obliged to you, Edmund; you mean very well, I am sure; but I still think you see

things too strongly; and I really cannot undertake to harangue all the rest upon a

subject of this kind. *There would* be the greatest indecorum, I think.’

‘Do you imagine that I could have such an idea in my head? No: let your

conduct be the only harangue. Say that, on examining the part, you feel yourself

unequal to it; that you find it requiring more exertion and confidence than you

can be supposed to have. Say this with firmness, and it will be quite enough. All

who can distinguish will understand your motive. The play will be given up, and

your delicacy honoured as it ought.’

‘Do not act anything improper, my dear,’ said Lady Bertram: ‘Sir Thomas

would not like it.—Fanny, ring the bell; I must have my dinner.—To be sure

Julia is dressed by this time.’

‘I am convinced, madam,’ said Edmund, preventing Fanny, ‘that Sir Thomas

would not like it.’

‘There, my dear, do you hear what Edmund says?’

‘If I were to decline the part,’ said Maria, with renewed zeal, ‘Julia would

certainly take it.’

‘What!’ cried Edmund, ‘if she knew your reasons?’

‘Oh, she might think the difference between us,—the difference in our

situations,—that *she* need not be so scrupulous as *I* might feel necessary. I am

sure she would argue so. No; you must excuse me; I cannot retract my consent; it

is too far settled, everybody would be so disappointed, Tom would be quite

angry; and if we are so very nice we shall never act anything.’

‘I was just going to say the very same thing,’ said Mrs. Norris. ‘If every play

is to be objected to, you will act nothing, and the preparations will be all so

much money thrown away, and I am sure *that* would be a discredit to us all. I do

not know the play; but, as Maria says, if there is anything a little too warm (and

it is so with most of them) it can be easily left out. We must not be over-precise,

Edmund. As Mr. Rushworth is to act too, there can be no harm. I only wish Tom

had known his own mind when the carpenters began, for there was the loss of

half a day’s work about those side-doors. The curtain will be a good job,

however. The maids do their work very well, and I think we shall be able to send

back some dozens of the rings. There is no occasion to put them so very close

together. I *am* of some use, I hope, in preventing waste and making the most of

things. There should always be one steady head to superintend so many young

ones. I forgot to tell Tom of something that happened to me this very day. I had

been looking about me in the poultry yard, and was just coming out, when who

should I see but Dick Jackson making up to the servants’ hall door with two bits

of deal board in his hand, bringing them to father, you may be sure; mother had

chanced to send him of a message to father, and then father had bid him bring up

them two bits of board, for he could not no how do without them. I knew what

all this meant, for the servants’ dinner bell was ringing at the very moment over

our heads; and as I hate such encroaching people (the Jacksons are very

encroaching, I have always said so,—just the sort of people to get all they can), I

said to the boy directly (a great lubberly fellow of ten years old, you know, who

ought to be ashamed of himself), *“I’ll* take the boards to your father, Dick; so get

you home again as fast as you can.” The boy looked very silly, and turned away

without offering a word, for I believe I might speak pretty sharp; and I daresay it

will cure him of coming marauding about the house for one while. I hate such

greediness—so good as your father is to the family, employing the man all the

year round!’

Nobody was at the trouble of an answer; the others soon returned; and

Edmund found that to have endeavoured to set them right must be his only

satisfaction.

Dinner passed heavily. Mrs. Norris related again her triumph over Dick

Jackson, but neither play nor preparation was otherwise much talked of, for

Edmund’s disapprobation was felt even by his brother, though he would not have

owned it. Maria, wanting Henry Crawford’s animating support, thought the

subject better avoided. Mr. Yates, who was trying to make himself agreeable to

Julia, found her gloom less impenetrable on any topic than that of his regret at

her secession from their company; and Mr. Rushworth, having only his own part

and his own dress in his head, had soon talked away all that could be said of

either.

But the concerns of the theatre were suspended only for an hour or two: there

was still a great deal to be settled; and the spirits of evening giving fresh

courage, Tom, Maria, and Mr. Yates, soon after their being reassembled in the

drawing-room, seated themselves in committee at a separate table, with the play

open before them, and were just getting deep in the subject when a most

welcome interruption was given by the entrance of Mr. and Miss Crawford, who,

late and dark and dirty as it was, could not help coming, and were received with

the most grateful joy.

‘Well, how do you go on?’ and ‘What have you settled?’ and ‘Oh, we can do

nothing without you,’ followed the first salutations; and Henry Crawford was

soon seated with the other three at the table, while his sister made her way to

Lady Bertram, and with pleasant attention was complimenting *her.* ‘I must really

congratulate your ladyship,’ said she, ‘on the play being chosen; for though you

have borne it with exemplary patience, I am sure you must be sick of all our

noise and difficulties. The actors may be glad, but the bystanders must be

infinitely more thankful for a decision; and I do sincerely give you joy, madam,

as well as Mrs. Norris, and everybody else who is in the same predicament,’

glancing half fearfully, half slyly, beyond Fanny to Edmund.

She was very civilly answered by Lady Bertram, but Edmund said nothing.

His being only a bystander was not disclaimed. After continuing in chat with the

party round the fire a few minutes, Miss Crawford returned to the party round

the table; and standing by them, seemed to interest herself in their arrangements

till, as if struck by a sudden recollection, she exclaimed, ‘My good friends, you

are most composedly at work upon these cottages and alehouses, inside and out

—but pray let me know my fate in the meanwhile. Who is to be Anhalt? What

gentleman among you am I to have the pleasure of making love to?’

For a moment no one spoke; and then many spoke together to tell the same

melancholy truth—that they had not yet got any Anhalt. ‘Mr. Rushworth was to

be Count Cassel, but no one had yet undertaken Anhalt.’

‘I had my choice of the parts,’ said Mr. Rushworth; ‘but I thought I should like

the Count best—though I do not much relish the finery I am to have.’

‘You chose very wisely, I am sure,’ replied Miss Crawford, with a brightened

look, ‘Anhalt is a heavy part.’

*‘The Count* has two-and-forty speeches,’ returned Mr. Rushworth, ‘which is

no trifle.’

‘I am not at all surprised,’ said Miss Crawford, after a short pause, ‘at this

want of an Anhalt. Amelia deserves no better. Such a forward young lady may

well frighten the men.’

‘I should be but too happy in taking the part, if it were possible,’ cried Tom,

‘but unluckily the Butler and Anhalt are in together. I will not entirely give it up,

however—I will try what can be done—I will look it over again.’

‘Your *brother* should take the part,’ said Mr. Yates, in a low voice. ‘Do not

you think he would?’

*‘I* shall not ask him,’ replied Tom, in a cold, determined manner.

Miss Crawford talked of something else, and soon afterwards rejoined the

party at the fire.

‘They do not want me at all,’ said she, seating herself. ‘I only puzzle them,

and oblige them to make civil speeches. Mr. Edmund Bertram, as you do not act

yourself, you will be a disinterested adviser; and, therefore, I apply to you. What

shall we do for an Anhalt? Is it practicable for any of the others to double it?

What is your advice?’

‘My advice,’ said he, calmly, ‘is that you change the play.’

‘*I* should have no objection,’ she replied; ‘for though I should not particularly

dislike the part of Amelia if well supported—that is, if everything went well—I

shall be sorry to be an inconvenience—but as they do not choose to hear your

advice at *that table—*(looking round)—it certainly will not be taken.’

Edmund said no more.

‘If *any* part could tempt *you* to act, I suppose it would be Anhalt,’ observed the

lady, archly, after a short pause; ‘for he is a clergyman, you know.’

*‘That* circumstance would by no means tempt me,’ he replied, ‘for I should be

sorry to make the character ridiculous by bad acting. It must be very difficult to

keep Anhalt from appearing a formal, solemn lecturer; and the man who chooses

the profession itself is, perhaps, one of the last who would wish to represent it on

the stage.’

Miss Crawford was silenced; and with some feelings of resentment and

mortification, moved her chair considerably nearer the tea-table, and gave all her

attention to Mrs. Norris, who was presiding there.

‘Fanny,’ cried Tom Bertram, from the other table, where the conference was

eagerly carrying on, and the conversation incessant, ‘we want your services.’

Fanny was up in a moment, expecting some errand; for the habit of employing

her in that way was not yet overcome, in spite of all that Edmund could do.

‘Oh, we do not want to disturb you from your seat. We do not want your

*present* services. We shall only want you in our play. You must be Cottager’s

wife.’

‘Me!’ cried Fanny, sitting down again with a most frightened look. ‘Indeed

you must excuse me. I could not act anything if you were to give me the world.

No, indeed, I cannot act.’

‘Indeed, but you must, for we cannot excuse you. It need not frighten you; it is

a nothing of a part, a mere nothing, not above half a dozen speeches altogether,

and it will not much signify if nobody hears a word you say, so you may be as

creep-mouse as you like, but we must have you to look at.’

‘If you are afraid of half a dozen speeches,’ cried Mr. Rushworth, ‘what would

you do with such a part as mine? I have forty-two to learn.’

‘It is not that I am afraid of learning by heart,’ said Fanny, shocked to find

herself at that moment the only speaker in the room, and to feel that almost every

eye was upon her; ‘but I really cannot act.’

‘Yes, yes, you can act well enough for *us.* Learn your part, and we will teach

you all the rest. You have only two scenes, and as I shall be Cottager, I’ll put you

in and push you about; and you will do it very well, I’ll answer for it.’

‘No, indeed, Mr. Bertram, you must excuse me. You cannot have an idea. It

would be absolutely impossible for me. If I were to undertake it, I should only

disappoint you.’

‘Phoo! phoo! Do not be so shamefaced. You’ll do it very well. Every

allowance will be made for you. We do not expect perfection. You must get a

brown gown, and a white apron, and a mob cap, and we must make you a few

wrinkles, and a little of the crowsfoot at the corner of your eyes, and you will be

a very proper, little old woman.’

‘You must excuse me, indeed you must excuse me,’ cried Fanny, growing

more and more red from excessive agitation, and looking distressfully at

Edmund, who was kindly observing her; but, unwilling to exasperate his brother

by interference, gave her only an encouraging smile. Her entreaty had no effect

on Tom: he only said again what he had said before; and it was not merely Tom,

for the requisition was now backed by Maria, and Mr. Crawford, and Mr. Yates,

with an urgency which differed from his but in being more gentle or more

ceremonious, and which altogether was quite overpowering to Fanny; and before

she could breathe after it, Mrs. Norris completed the whole, by thus addressing

her in a whisper at once angry and audible: ‘What a piece of work here is about

nothing,—I am quite ashamed of you, Fanny, to make such a difficulty of

obliging your cousins in a trifle of this sort,—so kind as they are to you! Take

the part with a good grace, and let us hear no more of the matter, I entreat.’

‘Do not urge her, madam,’ said Edmund. ‘It is not fair to urge her in this

manner. You see she does not like to act. Let her choose for herself as well as the

rest of us. Her judgment may be quite as safely trusted. Do not urge her any

more.’

‘I am not going to urge her,’ replied Mrs. Norris, sharply; ‘but I shall think her

a very obstinate, ungrateful girl, if she does not do what her aunt and cousins

wish her—very ungrateful, indeed, considering who and what she is.’

Edmund was too angry to speak; but Miss Crawford, looking for a moment

with astonished eyes at Mrs. Norris, and then at Fanny, whose tears were

beginning to show themselves, immediately said, with some keenness, ‘I do not

like my situation; this *place* is too hot for me,’—and moved away her chair to

the opposite side of the table close to Fanny, saying to her, in a kind low whisper,

as she placed herself, ‘Never mind, my dear Miss Price—this is a cross evening,

—everybody is cross and teasing—but do not let us mind them’; and with

pointed attention continued to talk to her and endeavour to raise her spirits, in

spite of being out of spirits herself. By a look at her brother she prevented any

further entreaty from the theatrical board, and the really good feelings by which

she was almost purely governed were rapidly restoring her to all the little she

had lost in Edmund’s favour.

Fanny did not love Miss Crawford: but she felt very much obliged to her for

her present kindness; and when, from taking notice of her work, and wishing *she*

could work as well, and begging for the pattern, and supposing Fanny was now

preparing for her *appearance,* as of course she would come out when her cousin

was married, Miss Crawford proceeded to inquire if she had heard lately from

her brother at sea, and said that she had quite a curiosity to see him, and

imagined him a very fine young man, and advised Fanny to get his picture drawn

before he went to sea again,—she could not help admitting it to be very

agreeable flattery, or help listening, and answering with more animation than she

had intended.

The consultation upon the play still went on; and Miss Crawford’s attention

was first called from Fanny by Tom Bertram’s telling her, with infinite regret,

that he found it absolutely impossible for him to undertake the part of Anhalt in

addition to the Butler: he had been most anxiously trying to make it out to be

feasible,—but it would not do,—he must give it up. ‘But there will not be the

smallest difficulty in filling it,’ he added. ‘We have but to speak the word; we

may pick and choose. I could name at this moment at least six young men within

six miles of us, who are wild to be admitted into our company, and there are one

or two that would not disgrace us,—I should not be afraid to trust either of the

Olivers or Charles Maddox. Tom Oliver is a very clever fellow, and Charles

Maddox is as gentlemanlike a man as you will see anywhere, so I will take my

horse early tomorrow morning, and ride over to Stoke, and settle with one of

them.’

While he spoke, Maria was looking apprehensively round at Edmund in full

expectation that he must oppose such an enlargement of the plan as this—so

contrary to all their first protestations; but Edmund said nothing. After a

moment’s thought, Miss Crawford calmly replied, ‘As far as I am concerned, I

can have no objection to anything that you all think eligible. Have I ever seen

either of the gentlemen? Yes, Mr. Charles Maddox dined at my sister’s one day,

did not he, Henry? A quiet-looking young man. I remember him. Let him be

applied to, if you please, for it will be less unpleasant to me than to have a

perfect stranger.’

Charles Maddox was to be the man. Tom repeated his resolution of going to

him early on the morrow; and though Julia, who had scarcely opened her lips

before, observed, in a sarcastic manner, and with a glance first at Maria, and then

at Edmund, that ‘the Mansfield theatricals would enliven the whole

neighbourhood exceedingly,’ Edmund still held his peace, and showed his

feelings only by a determined gravity.

‘I am not very sanguine as to our play,’ said Miss Crawford in an under voice

to Fanny, after some consideration; ‘and I can tell Mr. Maddox that I shall

shorten some of *his* speeches, and a great many of *my own,* before we rehearse

together. It will be very disagreeable, and by no means what I expected.’

**CHAPTER XVI**

**I**t was not in Miss Crawford’s power to talk Fanny into any real forgetfulness of

what had passed. When the evening was over, she went to bed full of it, her

nerves still agitated by the shock of such an attack from her cousin Tom, so

public and so persevered in, and her spirits sinking under her aunt’s unkind

reflection and reproach. To be called into notice in such a manner, to hear that it

was but the prelude to something so infinitely worse, to be told that she must do

what was so impossible as to act; and then to have the charge of obstinacy and

ingratitude follow it, enforced with such a hint at the dependence of her

situation, had been too distressing at the time to make the remembrance when

she was alone much less so,—especially with the superadded dread of what the

morrow might produce in continuation of the subject. Miss Crawford had

protected her only for the time; and if she were applied to again among

themselves with all the authoritative urgency that Tom and Maria were capable

of, and Edmund perhaps away, what should she do? She fell asleep before she

could answer the question, and found it quite as puzzling when she awoke the

next morning. The little white attic, which had continued her sleeping room ever

since her first entering the family, proving incompetent to suggest any reply, she

had recourse, as soon as she was dressed, to another apartment more spacious

and more meet for walking about in, and thinking, and of which she had now for

some time been almost equally mistress. It had been their school-room; so called

till the Miss Bertrams would not allow it to be called so any longer, and

inhabited as such to a later period. There Miss Lee had lived, and there they had

read and written, and talked and laughed, till within the last three years, when

she had quitted them. The room had then become useless, and for some time was

quite deserted, except by Fanny, when she visited her plants, or wanted one of

the books, which she was still glad to keep there, from the deficiency of space

and accommodation in her little chamber above: but gradually, as her value for

the comforts of it increased, she had added to her possessions, and spent more of

her time there; and having nothing to oppose her, had so naturally and so

artlessly worked herself into it, that it was now generally admitted to be hers.

The east room, as it had been called ever since Maria Bertram was sixteen, was

now considered Fanny’s almost as decidedly as the white attic: the smallness of

the one making the use of the other so evidently reasonable, that the Miss

Bertrams, with every superiority in their own apartments, which their own sense

of superiority could demand, were entirely approving it; and Mrs. Norris, having

stipulated for there never being a fire in it on Fanny’s account, was tolerably

resigned to her having the use of what nobody else wanted, though the terms in

which she sometimes spoke of the indulgence seemed to imply that it was the

best room in the house.

The aspect was so favourable, that even without a fire it was habitable in

many an early spring and late autumn morning, to such a willing mind as

Fanny’s; and while there was a gleam of sunshine, she hoped not to be driven

from it entirely, even when winter came. The comfort of it in her hours of leisure

was extreme. She could go there after anything unpleasant below, and find

immediate consolation in some pursuit, or some train of thought at hand. Her

plants, her books—of which she had been a collector, from the first hour of her

commanding a shilling—her writing desk, and her works of charity and

ingenuity, were all within her reach; or if indisposed for employment, if nothing

but musing would do, she could scarcely see an object in that room which had

not an interesting remembrance connected with it. Everything was a friend, or

bore her thoughts to a friend; and though there had been sometimes much of

suffering to her,—though her motives had been often misunderstood, her

feelings disregarded, and her comprehension undervalued,—though she had

known the pains of tyranny, of ridicule, and neglect,—yet almost every

recurrence of either had led to something consolatory; her aunt Bertram had

spoken for her, or Miss Lee had been encouraging, or what was yet more

frequent or more dear—Edmund had been her champion and her friend;—he had

supported her cause, or explained her meaning, he had told her not to cry, or had

given her some proof of affection which made her tears delightful, —and the

whole was now so blended together, so harmonised by distance, that every

former affliction had its charm. The room was most dear to her, and she would

not have changed its furniture for the handsomest in the house, though what had

been originally plain had suffered all the ill-usage of children; and its greatest

elegancies and ornaments were a faded footstool of Julia’s work, too ill done for

the drawing-room, three transparencies, made in a rage for transparencies, for

the three lower panes of one window, where Tin-tern Abbey held its station

between a cave in Italy and a moonlight lake in Cumberland, a collection of

family profiles, thought unworthy of being anywhere else, over the mantel-piece,

and by their side, and pinned against the wall, a small sketch of a ship sent four

years ago from the Mediterranean by William, with H.M.S. Antwerp at the

bottom, in letters as tall as the mainmast.

To this nest of comforts Fanny now walked down to try its influence on an

agitated, doubting spirit—to see if by looking at Edmund’s profile she could

catch any of his counsel, or by giving air to her geraniums she might inhale a

breeze of mental strength herself. But she had more than fears of her own

perseverance to remove: she had begun to feel undecided as to what she *ought to*

*do;* and as she walked round the room her doubts were increasing. Was she *right*

in refusing what was so warmly asked, so strongly wished for? What might be so

essential to a scheme on which some of those to whom she owed the greatest

complaisance had set their hearts? Was it not ill-nature—selfishness—and a fear

of exposing herself? And would Edmund’s judgment, would his persuasion of

Sir Thomas’s disapprobation of the whole, be enough to justify her in a

determined denial in spite of all the rest? It would be so horrible to her to act,

that she was inclined to suspect the truth and purity of her own scruples; and as

she looked around her, the claims of her cousins to being obliged were

strengthened by the sight of present upon present that she had received from

them. The table between the windows was covered with work-boxes and nettingboxes

which had been given her at different times, principally by Tom; and she

grew bewildered as to the amount of the debt which all these kind remembrances

produced. A tap at the door roused her in the midst of this attempt to find her

way to her duty, and her gentle ‘come in’ was answered by the appearance of one

before whom all her doubts were wont to be laid. Her eyes brightened at the

sight of Edmund.

‘Can I speak with you, Fanny, for a few minutes?’ said he.

‘Yes, certainly.’

‘I want to consult—I want your opinion.’

‘My opinion!’ she cried, shrinking from such a compliment, highly as it

gratified her.

‘Yes, your advice and opinion. I do not know what to do. This acting scheme

gets worse and worse, you see. They have chosen almost as bad a play as they

could; and now, to complete the business, are going to ask the help of a young

man very slightly known to any of us. This is the end of all the privacy and

propriety which was talked about at first. I know no harm of Charles Maddox;

but the excessive intimacy which must spring from his being admitted among us

in this manner is highly objectionable, the *more than* intimacy—the familiarity. I

cannot think of it with any patience; and it does appear to me an evil of such

magnitude as must, *if possible,* be prevented. Do not you see it in the same

light?’

‘Yes; but what can be done? Your brother is so determined?’

‘There is but *one* thing to be done, Fanny. I must take Anhalt myself. I am

well aware that nothing else will quiet Tom.’

Fanny could not answer him.

‘It is not at all what I like,’ he continued. ‘No man can like being driven into

the *appearance* of such inconsistency. After being known to oppose the scheme

from the beginning, there is absurdity in the face of my joining them *now,* when

they are exceeding their first plan in every respect; but I can think of no other

alternative. Can you, Fanny?’

‘No,’ said Fanny, slowly, ‘not immediately—but—’

‘But what? I see your judgment is not with me. Think it a little over. Perhaps

you are not so much aware as I am of the mischief that *may,* of the

unpleasantness that *must,* arise from a young man’s being received in this

manner—domesticated among us—authorised to come at all hours—and placed

suddenly on a footing which must do away all restraints. To think only of the

license which every rehearsal must tend to create. It is all very bad! Put yourself

in Miss Crawford’s place, Fanny. Consider what it would be to act Amelia with a

stranger. She has a right to be felt for, because she evidently feels for herself. I

heard enough of what she said to you last night, to understand her unwillingness

to be acting with a stranger; and as she probably engaged in the part with

different expectations—perhaps without considering the subject enough to know

what was likely to be—it would be ungenerous, it would be really wrong to

expose her to it. Her feelings ought to be respected. Does it not strike you so,

Fanny? You hesitate.’

‘I am sorry for Miss Crawford; but I am more sorry to see you drawn in to do

what you have resolved against, and what you are known to think will be

disagreeable to my uncle. It will be such a triumph to the others!’

‘They will not have much cause of triumph when they see how infamously I

act. But, however, triumph there certainly will be, and I must brave it. But if I

can be the means of restraining the publicity of the business, of limiting the

exhibition, of concentrating our folly, I shall be well repaid. As I am now, I have

no influence, I can do nothing: I have offended them, and they will not hear me;

but when I have put them in good-humour by this concession, I am not without

hopes of persuading them to confine the representation within a much smaller

circle than they are now in the high road for. This will be a material gain. My

object is to confine it to Mrs. Rushworth and the Grants. Will not this be worth

gaining?’

‘Yes, it will be a great point.’

‘But still it has not your approbation. Can you mention any other measure by

which I have a chance of doing equal good?’

‘No, I cannot think of anything else.’

‘Give me your approbation, then, Fanny. I am not comfortable without it.’

‘Oh, cousin.’

‘If you are against me, I ought to distrust myself—and yet—But it is

absolutely impossible to let Tom go on in this way, riding about the country in

quest of anybody who can be persuaded to act—no matter whom: the look of a

gentleman is to be enough. I thought *you* would have entered more into Miss

Crawford’s feelings.’

‘No doubt she will be very glad. It must be a great relief to her,’ said Fanny,

trying for greater warmth of manner.

‘She never appeared more amiable than in her behaviour to you last night. It

gave her a very strong claim on my goodwill.’

‘She *was* very kind, indeed, and I am glad to have her spared—’

She could not finish the generous effusion. Her conscience stopped her in the

middle, but Edmund was satisfied.

‘I shall walk down immediately after breakfast,’ said he, ‘and am sure of

giving pleasure there. And now, dear Fanny, I will not interrupt you any longer.

You want to be reading. But I could not be easy till I had spoken to you, and

come to a decision. Sleeping or waking, my head has been full of this matter all

night. It is an evil—but I am certainly making it less than it might be. If Tom is

up, I shall go to him directly and get it over; and when we meet at breakfast we

shall be all in high good-humour at the prospect of acting the fool together with

such unanimity. *You* in the meanwhile will be taking a trip into China, I suppose.

How does Lord Macartney go on?—(opening a volume on the table and then

taking up some others). And here are Crabbe’s *Tales,* and the *Idler,* at hand to

relieve you, if you tire of your great book. I admire your little establishment

exceedingly; and as soon as I am gone, you will empty your head of all this

nonsense of acting, and sit comfortably down to your table. But do not stay here

to be cold.’

He went; but there was no reading, no China, no composure for Fanny. He had

told her the most extraordinary, the most inconceivable, the most unwelcome

news; and she could think of nothing else. To be acting! After all his objections

—objections so just and so public! After all that she had heard him say, and seen

him look, and known him to be feeling. Could it be possible? Edmund so

inconsistent. Was he not deceiving himself? Was he not wrong? Alas! it was all

Miss Crawford’s doing. She had seen her influence in every speech, and was

miserable. The doubts and alarms as to her own conduct, which had previously

distressed her, and which had all slept while she listened to him, were become of

little consequence now. This deeper anxiety swallowed them up. Things should

take their course; she cared not how it ended. Her cousins might attack, but

could hardly tease her. She was beyond their reach; and if at last obliged to yield

—no matter—it was all misery *now.*

**CHAPTER XVII**

**I**t was, indeed, a triumphant day to Mr. Bertram and Maria. Such a victory over

Edmund’s discretion had been beyond their hopes, and was most delightful.

There was no longer anything to disturb them in their darling project, and they

congratulated each other in private on the jealous weakness to which they

attributed the change, with all the glee of feelings gratified in every way.

Edmund might still look grave, and say he did not like the scheme in general,

and must disapprove the play in particular; their point was gained; he was to act,

and he was driven to it by the force of selfish inclinations only. Edmund had

descended from that moral elevation which he had maintained before, and they

were both as much the better as the happier for the descent.

They behaved very well, however, *to him* on the occasion, betraying no

exultation beyond the lines about the corners of the mouth, and seemed to think

it as great an escape to be quit of the intrusion of Charles Maddox, as if they had

been forced into admitting him against their inclination. ‘To have it quite in their

own family circle was what they had particularly wished. A stranger among

them would have been the destruction of all their comfort’; and when Edmund,

pursuing that idea, gave a hint of his hope as to the limitation of the audience,

they were ready, in the complaisance of the moment, to promise anything. It was

all good-humour and encouragement. Mrs. Norris offered to contrive his dress,

Mr. Yates assured him that Anhalt’s last scene with the Baron admitted a good

deal of action and emphasis, and Mr. Rushworth undertook to count his

speeches.

‘Perhaps,’ said Tom, *‘Fanny* may be more disposed to oblige us now. Perhaps

you may persuade *her.’*

‘No, she is quite determined. She certainly will not act.’

‘Oh, very well.’ And not another word was said; but Fanny felt herself again

in danger, and her indifference to the danger was beginning to fail her already.

There were not fewer smiles at the Parsonage than at the Park on this change

in Edmund; Miss Crawford looked very lovely in hers, and entered with such an

instantaneous renewal of cheerfulness into the whole affair, as could have but

one effect on him. ‘He was certainly right in respecting such feelings; he was

glad he had determined on it.’ And the morning wore away in satisfactions very

sweet, if not very sound. One advantage resulted from it to Fanny; at the earnest

request of Miss Crawford, Mrs. Grant had, with her usual good-humour, agreed

to undertake the part for which Fanny had been wanted; and this was all that

occurred to gladden *her* heart during the day; and even this, when imparted by

Edmund, brought a pang with it, for it was Miss Crawford to whom she was

obliged, it was Miss Crawford whose kind exertions were to excite her gratitude,

and whose merit in making them was spoken of with a glow of admiration. She

was safe; but peace and safety were unconnected here. Her mind had been never

further from peace. She could not feel that she had done wrong herself, but she

was disquieted in every other way. Her heart and her judgment were equally

against Edmund’s decision: she could not acquit his unsteadiness; and his

happiness under it made her wretched. She was full of jealousy and agitation.

Miss Crawford came with looks of gaiety which seemed an insult, with friendly

expressions towards herself which she could hardly answer calmly. Everybody

around her was gay and busy, prosperous and important; each had their object of

interest, their part, their dress, their favourite scene, their friends and

confederates—all were finding employment in consultations and comparisons,

or diversion in the playful conceits they suggested. She alone was sad and

insignificant; she had no share in anything; she might go or stay, she might be in

the midst of their noise, or retreat from it to the solitude of the east room,

without being seen or missed. She could almost think anything would have been

preferable to this. Mrs. Grant was of consequence ; *her* good-nature had

honourable mention—her taste and her time were considered—her presence was

wanted—she was sought for, and attended, and praised; and Fanny was at first in

some danger of envying her the character she had accepted. But reflection

brought better feelings, and showed her that Mrs. Grant was entitled to respect,

which could never have belonged to *her;* and that had she received even the

greatest, she could never have been easy in joining a scheme which, considering

only her uncle, she must condemn altogether.

Fanny’s heart was not absolutely the only saddened one amongst them, as she

soon began to acknowledge herself Julia was a sufferer, too, though not quite so

blamelessly.

Henry Crawford had trifled with her feelings: but she had very long allowed

and even sought his attentions, with a jealousy of her sister so reasonable as

ought to have been their cure; and now that the conviction of his preference for

Maria had been forced on her, she submitted to it without any alarm for Maria’s

situation, or any endeavour at rational tranquillity for herself. She either sat in

gloomy silence, wrapt in such gravity as nothing could subdue, no curiosity

touch, no wit amuse; or, allowing the attentions of Mr. Yates, was talking with

forced gaiety to him alone, and ridiculing the acting of the others.

For a day or two after the affront was given, Henry Crawford had

endeavoured to do it away by the usual attack of gallantry and compliment, but

he had not cared enough about it to persevere against a few repulses; and

becoming soon too busy with his play to have time for more than one flirtation,

he grew indifferent to the quarrel, or rather thought it a lucky occurrence, as

quietly putting an end to what might ere long have raised expectations in more

than Mrs. Grant. She was not pleased to see Julia excluded from the play, and

sitting by disregarded; but as it was not a matter which really involved her

happiness, as Henry must be the best judge of his own, and as he did assure her,

with a most persuasive smile, that neither he nor Julia had ever had a serious

thought of each other, she could only renew her former caution as to the elder

sister, entreat him not to risk his tranquillity by too much admiration there, and

then gladly take her share in anything that brought cheerfulness to the young

people in general, and that did so particularly promote the pleasure of the two so

dear to her.

‘I rather wonder Julia is not in love with Henry,’ was her observation to Mary.

‘I daresay she is,’ replied Mary, coldly. ‘I imagine both sisters are.

‘Both! no, no, that must not be. Do not give him a hint of it. Think of Mr.

Rushworth.’

‘You had better tell Miss Bertram to think of Mr. Rushworth. It may do *her*

some good. I often think of Mr. Rushworth’s property and independence, and

wish them in other hands; but I never think of *him.* A man might represent the

county with such an estate; a man might escape a profession and represent the

county.’

‘I daresay he *will* be in Parliament soon. When Sir Thomas comes, I daresay

he will be in for some borough, but there has been nobody to put him in the way

of doing anything yet.’

‘Sir Thomas is to achieve mighty things when he comes home,’ said Mary,

after a pause. ‘Do you remember Hawkins Browne’s “Address to Tobacco,” in

imitation of Pope?—

*‘Blest leaf! whose aromatic gales dispense*

*To Templars modesty, to Parsons sense.*

I will parody them:

*‘Blest Knight! whose dictatorial looks dispense*

*To Children affluence, to Rushworth sense.*

Will not that do, Mrs. Grant? Everything seems to depend upon Sir Thomas’s

return.’

‘You will find his consequence very just and reasonable when you see him in

his family, I assure you. I do not think we do so well without him. He has a fine

dignified manner, which suits the head of such a house, and keeps everybody in

their place. Lady Bertram seems more of a cipher now than when he is at home;

and nobody else can keep Mrs. Norris in order. But, Mary, do not fancy that

Maria Bertram cares for Henry. I am sure *Julia* does not, or she would not have

flirted as she did last night with Mr. Yates; and though he and Maria are very

good friends, I think she likes Sotherton too well to be inconstant.’

‘I would not give much for Mr. Rushworth’s chance, if Henry stept in before

the articles were signed.’

‘If you have such a suspicion, something must be done; and as soon as the

play is all over, we will talk to him seriously, and make him know his own mind;

and if he means nothing, we will send him off, though he is Henry, for a time.’

Julia *did* suffer, however, though Mrs. Grant discerned it not, and though it

escaped the notice of many of her own family likewise. She had loved, she did

love still, and she had all the suffering which a warm temper and a high spirit

were likely to endure under the disappointment of a dear, though irrational hope,

with a strong sense of ill-usage. Her heart was sore and angry, and she was

capable only of angry consolations. The sister with whom she was used to be on

easy terms was now become her greatest enemy: they were alienated from each

other; and Julia was not superior to the hope of some distressing end to the

attentions which were still carrying on there, some punishment to Maria for

conduct so shameful towards herself as well as towards Mr. Rushworth. With no

material fault of temper, or difference of opinion, to prevent their being very

good friends while their interests were the same, the sisters, under such a trial as

this, had not affection or principle enough to make them merciful or just, to give

them honour or compassion. Maria felt her triumph, and pursued her purpose

careless of Julia; and Julia could never see Maria distinguished by Henry

Crawford without trusting that it would create jealousy, and bring a public

disturbance at last.

Fanny saw and pitied much of this in Julia; but there was no outward

fellowship between them. Julia made no communication, and Fanny took no

liberties. They were two solitary sufferers, or connected only by Fanny’s

consciousness.

The inattention of the two brothers and the aunt to Julia’s discomposure, and

their blindness to its true cause, must be imputed to the fulness of their own

minds. They were totally preoccupied. Tom was engrossed by the concerns of

his theatre, and saw nothing that did not immediately relate to it. Edmund,

between his theatrical and his real part, between Miss Crawford’s claims and his

own conduct, between love and consistency, was equally unobservant; and Mrs.

Norris was too busy in contriving and directing the general little matters of the

company, superintending their various dresses with economical expedient, for

which nobody thanked her, and saving, with delighted integrity, half a crown

here and there to the absent Sir Thomas, to have leisure for watching the

behaviour, or guarding the happiness, of his daughters.

**CHAPTER XVIII**

**E**verything was now in a regular train; theatre, actors, actresses, and dresses,

were all getting forward: but though no other great impediments arose, Fanny

found, before many days were past, that it was not all uninterrupted enjoyment

to the party themselves, and that she had not to witness the continuance of such

unanimity and delight as had been almost too much for her at first. Everybody

began to have their vexation. Edmund had many. Entirely against *his* judgment, a

scene-painter arrived from town, and was at work, much to the increase of the

expenses, and, what was worse, of the éclat, of their proceedings; and his

brother, instead of being really guided by him as to the privacy of the

representation, was giving an invitation to every family who came in his way.

Tom himself began to fret over the scene-painter’s slow progress, and to feel the

miseries of waiting. He had learned his part—all his parts—for he took every

trifling one that could be united with the Butler, and began to be impatient to be

acting; and every day thus unemployed was tending to increase his sense of the

insignificance of all his parts together, and make him more ready to regret that

some other play had not been chosen.

Fanny, being always a very courteous listener, and often the only listener at

hand, came in for the complaints and distresses of most of them. *She* knew that

Mr. Yates was in general thought to rant dreadfully; that Mr. Yates was

disappointed in Henry Crawford; that Tom Bertram spoke so quick he would be

unintelligible; that Mrs. Grant spoilt everything by laughing; that Edmund was

behindhand with his part, and that it was misery to have anything to do with Mr.

Rushworth, who was wanting a prompter through every speech. She knew, also,

that poor Mr. Rushworth could seldom get anybody to rehearse with him: *his*

complaint came before her as well as the rest; and so decided to her eye was her

cousin Maria’s avoidance of him, and so needlessly often the rehearsal of the

first scene between her and Mr. Crawford, that she had soon all the terror of

other complaints from *him.* So far from being all satisfied and all enjoying, she

found everybody requiring something they had not, and giving occasion of

discontent to the others. Everybody had a part either too long or too short;—

nobody would attend as they ought,—nobody would remember on which side

they were to come in,—nobody but the complainer would observe any

directions.

Fanny believed herself to derive as much innocent enjoyment from the play as

any of them; Henry Crawford acted well, and it was a pleasure to *her to* creep

into the theatre, and attend the rehearsal of the first act—in spite of the feelings it

excited in some speeches for Maria. Maria she also thought acted well—too

well;—and after the first rehearsal or two, Fanny began to be their only

audience,—and sometimes as prompter, sometimes as spectator, was often very

useful. As far as she could judge, Mr. Crawford was considerably the best actor

of all; he had more confidence than Edmund, more judgment than Tom, more

talent and taste than Mr. Yates. She did not like him as a man, but she must admit

him to be the best actor, and on this point there were not many who differed

from her. Mr. Yates, indeed, exclaimed against his tameness and insipidity; and

the day came at last, when Mr. Rushworth turned to her with a black look, and

said, ‘Do you think there is anything so very fine in all this? For the life and soul

of me, I cannot admire him;—and, between ourselves, to see such an undersized,

little, mean-looking man, set up for a fine actor, is very ridiculous in my

opinion.’

From this moment there was a return of his former jealousy, which Maria,

from increasing hopes of Crawford, was at little pains to remove; and the

chances of Mr. Rushworth’s ever attaining to the knowledge of his two-and-forty

speeches became much less. As to his ever making anything tolerable of them,

nobody had the smallest idea of that except his mother;—*she*, indeed, regretted

that his part was not more considerable, and deferred coming over to Mansfield

till they were forward enough in their rehearsal to comprehend all his scenes; but

the others aspired at nothing beyond his remembering the catchword, and the

first line of his speech, and being able to follow the prompter through the rest.

Fanny, in her pity and kind-heartedness, was at great pains to teach him how to

learn, giving him all the helps and directions in her power, trying to make an

artificial memory for him, and learning every word of his part herself, but

without his being much the forwarder.

Many uncomfortable, anxious, apprehensive feelings she certainly had; but

with all these, and other claims on her time and attention, she was as far from

finding herself without employment or utility amongst them, as without a

companion in uneasiness; quite as far from having no demand on her leisure as

on her compassion. The gloom of her first anticipations was proved to have been

unfounded. She was occasionally useful to all; she was perhaps as much at peace

as any.

There was a great deal of needlework to be done, moreover, in which her help

was wanted; and that Mrs. Norris thought her quite as well off as the rest, was

evident by the manner in which she claimed it:—‘Come, Fanny,’ she cried,

‘these are fine times for you, but you must not be always walking from one room

to the other and doing the lookings on, at your ease, in this way,—I want you

here. I have been slaving myself till I can hardly stand, to contrive Mr.

Rushworth’s cloak without sending for any more satin; and now I think you may

give me your help in putting it together. There are but three seams, you may do

them in a trice. It would be lucky for me if I had nothing but the executive part

to do. *You* are best off, I can tell you; but if nobody did more than *you,* we should

not get on very fast.’

Fanny took the work very quietly, without attempting any defence; but her

kinder aunt Bertram observed on her behalf—

‘One cannot wonder, sister, that Fanny *should* be delighted: it is all new to her,

you know:—you and I used to be very fond of a play ourselves—and so am I

still—and as soon as I am a little more at leisure, *I* mean to look in at their

rehearsals too. What is the play about, Fanny? you have never told me.’

‘Oh, sister, pray do not ask her now; for Fanny is not one of those who can

talk and work at the same time. It is about Lovers’ Vows.’

‘I believe,’ said Fanny to her aunt Bertram, ‘there will be three acts rehearsed

to-morrow evening, and that will give you an opportunity of seeing all the actors

at once.’

‘You had better stay till the curtain is hung,’ interposed Mrs. Norris; ‘the

curtain will be hung in a day or two,—there is very little sense in a play without

a curtain,—and I am much mistaken if you do not find it draw up into very

handsome festoons.’

Lady Bertram seemed quite resigned to waiting. Fanny did not share her

aunt’s composure; she thought of the morrow a great deal,—for if the three acts

were rehearsed, Edmund and Miss Crawford would then be acting together for

the first time;—the third act would bring a scene between them which interested

her most particularly, and which she was longing and dreading to see how they

would perform. The whole subject of it was love—a marriage of love was to be

described by the gentleman, and very little short of a declaration of love be made

by the lady.

She had read and read the scene again with many painful, many wondering

emotions, and looked forward to their representation of it as a circumstance

almost too interesting. She did not believe they had yet rehearsed it, even in

private.

The morrow came, the plan for the evening continued, and Fanny’s

consideration of it did not become less agitated. She worked very diligently

under her aunt’s directions, but her diligence and her silence concealed a very

absent, anxious mind; and about noon she made her escape with her work to the

east room, that she might have no concern in another, and, as she deemed it,

most unnecessary rehearsal of the first act, which Henry Crawford was just

proposing, desirous at once of having her time to herself, and of avoiding the

sight of Mr. Rushworth. A glimpse, as she passed through the hall, of the two

ladies walking up from the Parsonage made no change in her wish of retreat, and

she worked and meditated in the east room, undisturbed, for a quarter of an hour,

when a gentle tap at the door was followed by the entrance of Miss Crawford.

‘Am I right? Yes; this is the east room. My dear Miss Price, I beg your pardon,

but I have made my way to you on purpose to entreat your help.’

Fanny, quite surprised, endeavoured to show herself mistress of the room by

her civilities, and looked at the bright bars of her empty grate with concern.

‘Thank you—I am quite warm, very warm. Allow me to stay here a little

while, and do have the goodness to hear me my third act. I have brought my

book, and if you would but rehearse it with me, I should be so obliged! I came

here to-day intending to rehearse it with Edmund—by ourselves—against the

evening, but he is not in the way; and if he *were,* I do not think I could go

through it with *him,* till I have hardened myself a little, for really there *is* a

speech or two—You will be so good, won’t you?’

Fanny was most civil in her assurances, though she could not give them in a

very steady voice.

‘Have you ever happened to look at the part I mean?’ continued Miss

Crawford, opening her book. ‘Here it is. I did not think much of it at first—but,

upon my word—There, look at *that* speech, and *that,* and *that.* How am I ever to

look him in the face and say such things? Could you do it? But then he is your

cousin, which makes all the difference. You must rehearse it with me, that I may

fancy *you* him, and get on by degrees. You *have* a look of *his* sometimes.’

‘Have I?—I will do my best with the greatest readiness—but I must *read* the

part, for I can *say* very little of it.’

*‘None* of it, I suppose. You are to have the book, of course. Now for it. We

must have two chairs at hand for you to bring forward to the front of the stage.

There—very good schoolroom chairs, not made for a theatre, I dare say; much

more fitted for little girls to sit and kick their feet against when they are learning

a lesson. What would your governess and your uncle say to see them used for

such a purpose? Could Sir Thomas look in upon us just now, he would bless

himself, for we are rehearsing all over the house. Yates is storming away in the

dining-room. I heard him as I came upstairs, and the theatre is engaged of course

by those indefatigable rehearsers, Agatha and Frederick. If *they* are not perfect, I

*shall* be surprised. By the bye, I looked in upon them five minutes ago, and it

happened to be exactly at one of the times when they were trying not to embrace,

and Mr. Rushworth was with me. I thought he began to look a little queer, so I

turned it off as well as I could, by whispering to him, “We shall have an

excellent Agatha, there is something so *maternal* in her manner, so completely

*maternal* in her voice and countenance.” Was not that well done of me? He

brightened up directly. Now for my soliloquy.’

She began, and Fanny joined in with all the modest feeling which the idea of

representing Edmund was so strongly calculated to inspire; but with looks and

voice so truly feminine as to be no very good picture of a man. With such an

Anhalt, however, Miss Crawford had courage enough; and they had got through

half the scene, when a tap at the door brought a pause, and the entrance of

Edmund, the next moment, suspended it all.

Surprise, consciousness, and pleasure appeared in each of the three on this

unexpected meeting; and as Edmund was come on the very same business that

had brought Miss Crawford, consciousness and pleasure were likely to be more

than momentary in *them.* He, too, had his book, and was seeking Fanny, to ask

her to rehearse with him, and help him to prepare for the evening, without

knowing Miss Crawford to be in the house; and great was the joy and animation

of being thus thrown together—of comparing schemes—and sympathising in

praise of Fanny’s kind offices.

*She* could not equal them in their warmth. *Her* spirits sank under the glow of

theirs, and she felt herself becoming too nearly nothing to both, to have any

comfort in having been sought by either. They must now rehearse together.

Edmund proposed, urged, entreated it—till the lady, not very unwilling at first,

could refuse no longer—and Fanny was wanted only to prompt and observe

them. She was invested, indeed, with the office of judge and critic, and earnestly

desired to exercise it and tell them all their faults but from doing so every feeling

within her shrank; she could not, would not, dared not attempt it: had she been

otherwise qualified for criticism, her conscience must have restrained her from

venturing at disapprobation. She believed herself to feel too much of it in the

aggregate for honesty or safety in particulars. To prompt them must be enough

for her; and it was sometimes *more* than enough; for she could not always pay

attention to the book. In watching them she forgot herself; and, agitated by the

increasing spirit of Edmund’s manner, had once closed the page and turned away

exactly as he wanted help. It was imputed to very reasonable weariness, and she

was thanked and pitied; but she deserved their pity more than she hoped they

would ever surmise. At last the scene was over, and Fanny forced herself to add

her praise to the compliments each was giving the other; and when again alone,

and able to recall the whole, she was inclined to believe their performance

would, indeed, have such nature and feeling in it as must ensure their credit, and

make it a very suffering exhibition to herself. Whatever might be its effect,

however, she must stand the brunt of it again that very day.

The first regular rehearsal of the three first acts was certainly to take place in

the evening: Mrs. Grant and the Crawfords were engaged to return for that

purpose as soon as they could after dinner; and every one concerned was looking

forward with eagerness. There seemed a general diffusion of cheerfulness on the

occasion: Tom was enjoying such an advance towards the end, Edmund was in

spirits from the morning’s rehearsal, and little vexations seemed everywhere

smoothed away. All were alert and impatient; the ladies moved soon, the

gentlemen soon followed them, and, with the exception of Lady Bertram, Mrs.

Norris, and Julia, everybody was in the theatre at an early hour, and, having

lighted it up as well as its unfinished state admitted, were waiting only the

arrival of Mrs. Grant and the Crawfords to begin.

They did not wait long for the Crawfords, but there was no Mrs. Grant. She

could not come. Dr. Grant, professing an indisposition, for which he had little

credit with his fair sister-in-law, could not spare his wife.

‘Dr. Grant is ill,’ said she, with mock solemnity. ‘He has been ill ever since he

did not eat any of the pheasant to-day. He fancied it tough—sent away his plate

—and has been suffering ever since.’

Here was disappointment! Mrs. Grant’s non-attendance was sad indeed. Her

pleasant manners and cheerful conformity made her always valuable amongst

them—but *now* she was absolutely necessary. They could not act, they could not

rehearse with any satisfaction without her. The comfort of the whole evening

was destroyed. What was to be done? Tom, as Cottager, was in despair. After a

pause of perplexity, some eyes began to be turned towards Fanny, and a voice or

two to say, ‘If Miss Price would be so good as to *read* the part.’ She was

immediately surrounded by supplications,—everybody asked it,—even Edmund

said, ‘Do, Fanny, if it is not *very* disagreeable to you.’

But Fanny still hung back. She could not endure the idea of it. Why was not

Miss Crawford to be applied to as well? Or why had not she rather gone to her

own room, as she had felt to be safest, instead of attending the rehearsal at all?

She had known it would irritate and distress her—she had known it her duty to

keep away. She was properly punished.

‘You have only to *read* the part,’ said Henry Crawford, with renewed entreaty.

‘And I do believe she can say every word of it,’ added Maria, ‘for she could

put Mrs. Grant right the other day in twenty places. Fanny, I am sure you know

the part.’

Fanny could not say she did *not,*—and as they all persevered, —as Edmund

repeated his wish, and with a look of even fond dependence on her good-nature,

—she must yield. She would do her best. Everybody was satisfied; and she was

left to the tremors of a most palpitating heart, while the others prepared to begin.

They *did* begin; and, being too much engaged in their own noise to be struck

by an unusual noise in the other part of the house, had proceeded some way,

when the door of the room was thrown open, and Julia, appearing at it, with a

face all aghast, exclaimed, ‘My father is come! He is in the hall at this moment.’

**CHAPTER XIX**

**H**ow is the consternation of the party to be described? To the greater number it

was a moment of absolute horror. Sir Thomas in the house! All felt the

instantaneous conviction. Not a hope of imposition or mistake was harboured

anywhere. Julia’s looks were an evidence of the fact that made it indisputable;

and after the first starts and exclamations, not a word was spoken for half a

minute; each with an altered countenance was looking at some other, and almost

each was feeling it a stroke the most unwelcome, most ill-timed, most appalling!

Mr. Yates might consider it only as a vexatious interruption for the evening, and

Mr. Rushworth might imagine it a blessing; but every other heart was sinking

under some degree of self-condemnation or undefined alarm, every other heart

was suggesting, ‘What will become of us? What is to be done now?’ It was a

terrible pause; and terrible to every ear were the corroborating sounds of opening doors and passing footsteps.

Julia was the first to move and speak again. Jealousy and bitterness had been

suspended: selfishness was lost in the common cause; but at the moment of her

appearance, Frederick was listening with looks of devotion to Agatha’s narrative,

and pressing her hand to his heart; and as soon as she could notice this, and see

that, in spite of the shock of her words, he still kept his station and retained her

sister’s hand, her wounded heart swelled again with injury, and, looking as red as

she had been white before, she turned out of the room, saying, *‘I* need not be

afraid of appearing before him.’

Her going roused the rest; and at the same moment the two brothers stepped

forward, feeling the necessity of doing something. A very few words between

them were sufficient. The case admitted no difference of opinion; they must go

to the drawing-room directly. Maria joined them with the same intent, just then

the stoutest of the three; for the very circumstance which had driven Julia away

was to her the sweetest support. Henry Crawford’s retaining her hand at such a

moment, a moment of such peculiar proof and importance, was worth ages of

doubt and anxiety. She hailed it as an earnest of the most serious determination,

and was equal even to encounter her father. They walked off, utterly heedless of

Mr. Rushworth’s repeated question of ‘Shall I go too? Had not I better go too?

Will not it be right for me to go too?’ but they were no sooner through the door

than Henry Crawford undertook to answer the anxious inquiry, and, encouraging

him by all means to pay his respects to Sir Thomas without delay, sent him after

the others with delighted haste.

Fanny was left with only the Crawfords and Mr. Yates. She had been quite

overlooked by her cousins; and as her own opinion of her claims on Sir

Thomas’s affection was much too humble to give her any idea of classing herself

with his children, she was glad to remain behind and gain a little breathing time.

Her agitation and alarm exceeded all that was endured by the rest, by the right of

a disposition which not even innocence could keep from suffering. She was

nearly fainting: all her former habitual dread of her uncle was returning, and

with it compassion for him and for almost every one of the party on the

development before him—with solicitude on Edmund’s account indescribable.

She had found a seat, where in excessive trembling she was enduring all these

fearful thoughts, while the other three, no longer under any restraint, were giving

vent to their feelings of vexation, lamenting over such an unlooked-for,

premature arrival as a most untoward event, and without mercy wishing poor Sir

Thomas had been twice as long on his passage, or were still in Antigua.

The Crawfords were more warm on the subject than Mr. Yates, from better

understanding the family, and judging more clearly of the mischief that must

ensue. The ruin of the play was to them a certainty: they felt the total destruction

of the scheme to be inevitably at hand; while Mr. Yates considered it only as a

temporary interruption, a disaster for the evening, and could even suggest the

possibility of the rehearsal being renewed after tea, when the bustle of receiving

Sir Thomas was over, and he might be at leisure to be amused by it. The

Crawfords laughed at the idea; and having soon agreed on the propriety of their

walking quietly home and leaving the family to themselves, proposed Mr.

Yates’s accompanying them and spending the evening at the Parsonage. But Mr.

Yates, having never been with those who thought much of parental claims or

family confidence, could not perceive that anything of the kind was necessary;

and therefore, thanking them, said ‘he preferred remaining where he was, that he

might pay his respects to the old gentleman handsomely since he was come; and

besides, he did not think it would be fair by the others to have everybody run

away.’

Fanny was just beginning to collect herself, and to feel that if she stayed

longer behind it might seem disrespectful, when this point was settled, and being

commissioned with the brother and sister’s apology, saw them preparing to go as

she quitted the room herself to perform the dreadful duty of appearing before her uncle.

Too soon did she find herself at the drawing-room door; and after pausing a

moment for what she knew would not come, for a courage which the outside of

no door had ever supplied to her, she turned the lock in desperation, and the

lights of the drawing-room and all the collected family were before her. As she

entered, her own name caught her ear.

Sir Thomas was at that moment looking round him, and saying, ‘But where is

Fanny?—Why do not I see my little Fanny?’—and, on perceiving her, came

forward with a kindness which astonished and penetrated her, calling her his

dear Fanny, kissing her affectionately, and observing with decided pleasure how

much she was grown! Fanny knew not how to feel nor where to look. She was

quite oppressed. He had never been so kind, so *very* kind, to her in his life. His

manner seemed changed; his voice was quick from the agitation of joy; and all

that had been awful in his dignity seemed lost in tenderness. He led her nearer

the light and looked at her again—inquired particularly after her health, and

then, correcting himself, observed that he need *not* inquire, for her appearance

spoke sufficiently on that point. A fine blush having succeeded the previous

paleness of her face, he was justified in his belief of her equal improvement in

health and beauty. He inquired next after her family, especially William; and his

kindness altogether was such as made her reproach herself for loving him so

little, and thinking his return a misfortune; and when, on having courage to lift

her eyes to his face, she saw that he was growing thinner, and had the burnt,

fagged, worn look of fatigue and a hot climate, every tender feeling was

increased, and she was miserable in considering how much unsuspected vexation

was probably ready to burst on him.

Sir Thomas was indeed the life of the party, who at his suggestion now seated

themselves round the fire. He had the best right to be the talker; and the delight

of his sensations in being again in his own house, in the centre of his family,

after such a separation, made him communicative and chatty in a very unusual

degree; and he was ready to give every information as to his voyage, and answer

every question of his two sons almost before it was put. His business in Antigua

had latterly been prosperously rapid, and he came directly from Liverpool,

having had an opportunity of making his passage thither in a private vessel,

instead of waiting for the packet; and all the little particulars of his proceedings

and events, his arrivals and departures, were most promptly delivered, as he sat

by Lady Bertram and looked with heartfelt satisfaction on the faces around him

—interrupting himself more than once, however, to remark on his good fortune

in finding them all at home—coming unexpectedly as he did—all collected

together exactly as he could have wished, but dared not depend on. Mr.

Rushworth was not forgotten: a most friendly reception and warmth of handshaking

had already met him, and with pointed attention he was now included in

the objects most intimately connected with Mansfield. There was nothing

disagreeable in Mr. Rushworth’s appearance, and Sir Thomas was liking him

already.

By not one of the circle was he listened to with such unbroken, unalloyed

enjoyment as by his wife, who was really extremely happy to see him, and

whose feelings were so warmed by his sudden arrival as to place her nearer

agitation than she had been for the last twenty years. She had been *almost*

fluttered for a few minutes; and still remained so sensibly animated as to put

away her work, move Pug from her side, and give all her attention and all the

rest of her sofa to her husband. She had no anxieties for anybody to cloud *her*

pleasure: her own time had been irreproachably spent during his absence: she

had done a great deal of carpet work, and made many yards of fringe; and she

would have answered as freely for the good conduct and useful pursuits of all the

young people as for her own. It was so agreeable to her to see him again, and

hear him talk, to have her ear amused and her whole comprehension filled by his

narratives, that she began particularly to feel how dreadfully she must have

missed him, and how impossible it would have been for her to bear a lengthened

absence.

Mrs. Norris was by no means to be compared in happiness to her sister. Not

that *she* was incommoded by many fears of Sir Thomas’s disapprobation when

the present state of his house should be known, for her judgment had been so

blinded that, except by the instinctive caution with which she had whisked away

Mr. Rushworth’s pink satin cloak as her brother-in-law entered, she could hardly

be said to show any sign of alarm; but she was vexed by the *manner* of his

return. It had left her nothing to do. Instead of being sent for out of the room, and

seeing him first, and having to spread the happy news through the house, Sir

Thomas, with a very reasonable dependence, perhaps, on the nerves of his wife

and children, had sought no confidant but the butler, and had been following him

almost instantaneously into the drawing-room. Mrs. Norris felt herself defrauded

of an office on which she had always depended, whether his arrival or his death

were to be the thing unfolded; and was now trying to be in a bustle without

having anything to bustle about, and labouring to be important where nothing

was wanted but tranquillity and silence. Would Sir Thomas have consented to

eat, she might have gone to the housekeeper with troublesome directions, and

insulted the footmen with injunctions of despatch; but Sir Thomas resolutely

declined all dinner: he would take nothing, nothing till tea came—he would

rather wait for tea. Still Mrs. Norris was at intervals urging something different;

and in the most interesting moment of his passage to England, when the alarm of

a French privateer was at the height,5 she burst through his recital with a

proposal of soup. ‘Sure, my dear Sir Thomas, a basin of soup would be a much

better thing for you than tea. Do have a basin of soup.’

Sir Thomas could not be provoked. ‘Still the same anxiety for everybody’s

comfort, my dear Mrs. Norris,’ was his answer. ‘But indeed I would rather have

nothing but tea.’

‘Well, then, Lady Bertram, suppose you speak for tea directly ; suppose you

hurry Baddeley a little; he seems behindhand to-night.’ She carried this point,

and Sir Thomas’s narrative proceeded.

At length there was a pause. His immediate communications were exhausted,

and it seemed enough to be looking joyfully around him, now at one, now at

another of the beloved circle; but the pause was not long: in the elation of her

spirits, Lady Bertram became talkative, and what were the sensations of her

children upon hearing her say, ‘How do you think the young people have been

amusing themselves lately, Sir Thomas? They have been acting. We have been

all alive with acting.’

‘Indeed! and what have you been acting?’

‘Oh, they’ll tell you all about it.’

‘The *all* will be soon told,’ cried Tom hastily, and with affected unconcern;

‘but it is not worth while to bore my father with it now. You will hear enough of

it to-morrow, sir. We have just been trying, by way of doing something, and

amusing my mother, just within the last week, to get up a few scenes—a mere

trifle. We have had such incessant rains almost since October began, that we

have been nearly confined to the house for days together. I have hardly taken out

a gun since the 3rd. Tolerable sport the first three days, but there has been no

attempting anything since. The first day I went over Mansfield Wood, and

Edmund took the copses beyond Easton, and we brought home six brace

between us, and might each have killed six times as many; but we respect your

pheasants, sir, I assure you, as much as you could desire. I do not think you will

find your woods by any means worse stocked than they were. *I* never saw

Mansfield Wood so full of pheasants in my life as this year. I hope you will take

a day’s sport there yourself, sir, soon.’

For the present the danger was over, and Fanny’s sick feelings subsided; but

when tea was soon afterwards brought in, and Sir Thomas, getting up, said that

he found he could not be any longer in the house without just looking into his

own dear room, every agitation was returning. He was gone before anything had

been said to prepare him for the change he must find there; and a pause of alarm

followed his disappearance. Edmund was the first to speak:—

‘Something must be done,’ said he.

‘It is time to think of our visitors,’ said Maria, still feeling her hand pressed to

Henry Crawford’s heart, and caring little for anything else. ‘Where did you leave

Miss Crawford, Fanny?’

Fanny told of their departure, and delivered their message.

‘Then poor Yates is all alone,’ cried Tom. ‘I will go and fetch him. He will be

no bad assistant when it all comes out.’

To the theatre he went, and reached it just in time to witness the first meeting

of his father and his friend. Sir Thomas had been a good deal surprised to find

candles burning in his room; and, on casting his eye round it, to see other

symptoms of recent habitation and a general air of confusion in the furniture.

The removal of the bookcase from before the billiard-room door struck him

especially, but he had scarcely more than time to feel astonished at all this,

before there were sounds from the billiard-room to astonish him still further.

Some one was talking there in a very loud accent—he did not know the voice

—*more* than talking—almost hallooing. He stepped to the door, rejoicing at that

moment in having the means of immediate communication, and, opening it,

found himself on the stage of a theatre, and opposed to a ranting young man,

who appeared likely to knock him down backwards. At the very moment of

Yates perceiving Sir Thomas, and giving perhaps the very best start he had ever

given in the whole course of his rehearsals, Tom Bertram entered at the other end

of the room; and never had he found greater difficulty in keeping his

countenance. His father’s looks of solemnity and amazement on this his first

appearance on any stage, and the gradual metamorphosis of the impassioned

Baron Wildenheim into the well-bred and easy Mr. Yates, making his bow and

apology to Sir Thomas Bertram, was such an exhibition, such a piece of true

acting, as he would not have lost upon any account. It would be the last—in all

probability the last scene on that stage; but he was sure there could not be a finer.

The house would close with the greatest *éclat.*

There was little time, however, for the indulgence of any images of

merriment. It was necessary for him to step forward, too, and assist the

introduction, and, with many awkward sensations, he did his best. Sir Thomas

received Mr. Yates with all the appearance of cordiality which was due to his

own character, but was really as far from pleased with the necessity of the

acquaintance as with the manner of its commencement. Mr. Yates’s family and

connections were sufficiently known to him to render his introduction as the

‘particular friend’—another of the hundred particular friends—of his son,

exceedingly unwelcome ; and it needed all the felicity of being again at home,

and all the forbearance it could supply, to save Sir Thomas from anger on finding

himself thus bewildered in his own house, making part of a ridiculous exhibition

in the midst of theatrical nonsense, and forced in so untoward a moment to admit

the acquaintance of a young man whom he felt sure of disapproving, and whose

easy indifference and volubility in the course of the first five minutes seemed to

mark him the most at home of the two.

Tom understood his father’s thoughts, and, heartily wishing he might be

always as well disposed to give them but partial expression, began to see more

clearly than he had ever done before, that there might be some ground of offence

—that there might be some reason for the glance his father gave towards the

ceiling and stucco of the room; and that, when he inquired with mild gravity

after the fate of the billiard-table, he was not proceeding beyond a very

allowable curiosity. A few minutes were enough for such unsatisfactory

sensations on each side; and Sir Thomas, having exerted himself so far as to

speak a few words of calm approbation in reply to an eager appeal of Mr. Yates,

as to the happiness of the arrangement, the three gentlemen returned to the

drawing-room together, Sir Thomas with an increase of gravity which was not

lost on all.

‘I come from your theatre,’ said he composedly, as he sat down; ‘I found

myself in it rather unexpectedly. Its vicinity to my own room—but in every

respect, indeed, it took me by surprise, as I had not the smallest suspicion of

your acting having assumed so serious a character. It appears a neat job,

however, as far as I could judge by candle-light, and does my friend Christopher

Jackson credit.’ And then he would have changed the subject, and sipped his

coffee in peace over domestic matters of a calmer hue; but Mr. Yates, without

discernment to catch Sir Thomas’s meaning, or diffidence, or delicacy, or

discretion enough to allow him to lead the discourse while he mingled among

the others with the least obtrusiveness himself, would keep him on the topic of

the theatre, would torment him with questions and remarks relative to it, and

finally would make him hear the whole history of his disappointment at

Ecclesford. Sir Thomas listened most politely, but found much to offend his

ideas of decorum, and confirm his ill opinion of Mr. Yates’s habits of thinking,

from the beginning to the end of the story; and when it was over, could give him

no other assurance of sympathy than what a slight bow conveyed.

‘This was, in fact, the origin of *our* acting,’ said Tom, after a moment’s

thought. ‘My friend Yates brought the infection from Ecclesford, and it spread—

as those things always spread, you know, sir—the faster, probably, from *your*

having so often encouraged the sort of thing in us formerly. It was like treading

old ground again.’

Mr. Yates took the subject from his friend as soon as possible, and

immediately gave Sir Thomas an account of what they had done and were doing;

told him of the gradual increase of their views, the happy conclusion of their first

difficulties, and present promising state of affairs; relating everything with so

blind an interest as made him not only totally unconscious of the uneasy

movements of many of his friends as they sat, the change of countenance, the

fidget, the hem! of unquietness, but prevented him even from seeing the

expression of the face on which his own eyes were fixed—from seeing Sir

Thomas’s dark brow contract as he looked with inquiring earnestness at his

daughters and Edmund, dwelling particularly on the latter, and speaking a

language, a remonstrance, a reproof, which he felt at his heart. Not less acutely

was it felt by Fanny, who had edged back her chair behind her aunt’s end of the

sofa, and, screened from notice herself, saw all that was passing before her. Such

a look of reproach at Edmund from his father she could never have expected to

witness; and to feel that it was in any degree deserved was an aggravation

indeed. Sir Thomas’s look implied, ‘On your judgment, Edmund, I depended;

what have you been about?’ She knelt in spirit to her uncle, and her bosom

swelled to utter, ‘Oh, not to him! Look so to all the others, but not to *him!’*

Mr. Yates was still talking. ‘To own the truth, Sir Thomas, we were in the

middle of a rehearsal when you arrived this evening. We were going through the

three first acts, and not unsuccessfully upon the whole. Our company is now so

dispersed, from the Crawfords being gone home, that nothing more can be done

to-night; but if you will give us the honour of your company to-morrow evening,

I should not be afraid of the result. We bespeak your indulgence, you understand,

as young performers; we bespeak your indulgence.’

‘My indulgence shall be given, sir,’ replied Sir Thomas gravely, ‘but without

any other rehearsal.’ And with a relenting smile he added, ‘I come home to be

happy and indulgent.’ Then turning away towards any or all of the rest, he

tranquilly said, ‘Mr. and Miss Crawford were mentioned in my last letters from

Mansfield. Do you find them agreeable acquaintance?’

Tom was the only one at all ready with an answer, but he being entirely

without particular regard for either, without jealousy either in love or acting,

could speak very handsomely of both. ‘Mr. Crawford was a most pleasant,

gentlemanlike man; his sister a sweet, pretty, elegant, lively girl.’

Mr. Rushworth could be silent no longer. ‘I do not say he is not gentlemanlike,

considering; but you should tell your father he is not above five feet eight, or he

will be expecting a well-looking man.’

Sir Thomas did not quite understand this, and looked with some surprise at the

speaker.

‘If I must say what I think,’ continued Mr. Rushworth, ‘in my opinion it is

very disagreeable to be always rehearsing. It is having too much of a good thing.

I am not so fond of acting as I was at first. I think we are a great deal better

employed, sitting comfortably here among ourselves, and doing nothing.’

Sir Thomas looked again, and then replied with an approving smile, ‘I am

happy to find our sentiments on this subject so much the same. It gives me

sincere satisfaction. That I should be cautious and quick-sighted, and feel many

scruples which my children do not feel, is perfectly natural; and equally so that

*my* value for domestic tranquillity, for a home which shuts out noisy pleasures,

should much exceed theirs. But at your time of life to feel all this, is a most

favourable circumstance for yourself and for everybody connected with you; and

I am sensible of the importance of having an ally of such weight.’

Sir Thomas meant to be giving Mr. Rushworth’s opinion in better words than

he could find himself. He was aware that he must not expect a genius in Mr.

Rushworth; but, as a well-judging, steady young man, with better notions than

his elocution would do justice to, he intended to value him very highly. It was

impossible for many of the others not to smile. Mr. Rushworth hardly knew what

to do with so much meaning; but by looking, as he really felt, most exceedingly

pleased with Sir Thomas’s good opinion, and saying scarcely anything, he did

his best towards preserving that good opinion a little longer.

**CHAPTER XX**

**E**dmund’s first object the next morning was to see his father alone, and give him

a fair statement of the whole acting scheme, defending his own share in it as far

only as he could then, in a soberer moment, feel his motives to deserve, and

acknowledging, with perfect ingenuousness, that his concession had been

attended with such partial good as to make his judgment in it very doubtful. He

was anxious, while vindicating himself, to say nothing unkind of the others; but

there was only one amongst them whose conduct he could mention without some necessity of defence or palliation. ‘We have all been more or less to blame,’ said he, ‘every one of us, excepting Fanny. Fanny is the only one who has judged

rightly throughout; who has been consistent. Her feelings have been steadily

against it from first to last. She never ceased to think of what was due to you.

You will find Fanny everything you could wish.’

Sir Thomas saw all the impropriety of such a scheme among such a party, and

at such a time, as strongly as his son had ever supposed he must; he felt it too

much, indeed, for many words; and, having shaken hands with Edmund, meant

to try to lose the disagreeable impression, and forget how much he had been

forgotten himself as soon as he could, after the house had been cleared of every

object enforcing the remembrance, and restored to its proper state. He did not

enter into any remonstrance with his other children: he was more willing to

believe they felt their error, than to run the risk of investigation. The reproof of

an immediate conclusion of everything, the sweep of every preparation, would

be sufficient.

There was one person, however, in the house whom he could not leave to

learn his sentiments merely through his conduct. He could not help giving Mrs.

Norris a hint of his having hoped that her advice might have been interposed to

prevent what her judgment must certainly have disapproved. The young people

had been very inconsiderate in forming the plan; they ought to have been

capable of a better decision themselves; but they were young, and, excepting

Edmund, he believed, of unsteady characters; and with greater surprise,

therefore, he must regard her acquiescence in their wrong measures, her

countenance of their unsafe amusements, than that such measures and such

amusements should have been suggested. Mrs. Norris was a little confounded,

and as nearly being silenced as ever she had been in her life; for she was

ashamed to confess having never seen any of the impropriety which was so

glaring to Sir Thomas, and would not have admitted that her influence was

insufficient—that she might have talked in vain. Her only resource was to get

out of the subject as fast as possible, and turn the current of Sir Thomas’s ideas

into a happier channel. She had a great deal to insinuate in her own praise as to

*general* attention to the interest and comfort of his family, much exertion and

many sacrifices to glance at in the form of hurried walks and sudden removals

from her own fireside, and many excellent hints of distrust and economy to Lady

Bertram and Edmund to detail, whereby a most considerable saving had always

arisen, and more than one bad servant been detected. But her chief strength lay

in Sotherton. Her greatest support and glory was in having formed the

connection with the Rushworths. *There* she was impregnable. She took to herself

all the credit of bringing Mr. Rushworth’s admiration of Maria to any effect. ‘If I

had not been active,’ said she, ‘and made a point of being introduced to his

mother, and then prevailed on my sister to pay the first visit, I am as certain as I

sit here that nothing would have come of it—for Mr. Rushworth is the sort of

amiable, modest young man who wants a great deal of encouragement, and there

were girls enough on the catch for him if we had been idle. But I left no stone

unturned. I was ready to move heaven and earth to persuade my sister, and at last I did persuade her. You know the distance to Sotherton; it was in the middle of winter, and the roads almost impassable, but I did persuade her.’

‘I know how great, how justly great, your influence is with Lady Bertram and

her children, and am the more concerned that it should not have been——’

‘My dear Sir Thomas, if you had seen the state of the roads that day! I thought

we should never have got through them, though we had the four horses of

course; and poor old coachman would attend us, out of his great love and

kindness, though he was hardly able to sit the box on account of the rheumatism

which I had been doctoring him for ever since Michaelmas. I cured him at last;

but he was very bad all the winter—and this was such a day, I could not help

going to him up in his room before we set off to advise him not to venture: he

was putting on his wig—so I said, “Coachman, you had much better not go, your

Lady and I shall be very safe; you know how steady Stephen is, and Charles has

been upon the leaders so often now, that I am sure there is no fear.” But,

however, I soon found it would not do; he was bent upon going, and as I hate to

be worrying and officious, I said no more; but my heart quite ached for him at

every jolt, and when we got into the rough lanes about Stoke, where, what with

frost and snow upon beds of stones, it was worse than anything you can imagine,

I was quite in an agony about him. And then the poor horses too! To see them

straining away! You know how I always feel for the horses. And when we got to

the bottom of Sand-croft Hill, what do you think I did? You will laugh at me—

but I got out and walked up. I did indeed. It might not be saving them much, but

it was something, and I could not bear to sit at my ease, and be dragged up at the

expense of those noble animals. I caught a dreadful cold, but *that* I did not

regard. My object was accomplished in the visit.’

‘I hope we shall always think the acquaintance worth any trouble that might

be taken to establish it. There is nothing very striking in Mr. Rushworth’s

manners, but I was pleased last night with what appeared to be his opinion on

*one* subject—his decided preference of a quiet family party to the bustle and

confusion of acting. He seemed to feel exactly as one could wish.’

‘Yes, indeed, and the more you know of him the better you will like him. He is

not a shining character, but he has a thousand good qualities; and is so disposed

to look up to you, that I am quite laughed at about it, for everybody considers it

as my doing. “Upon my word, Mrs. Norris,” said Mrs. Grant, the other day, “if

Mr. Rushworth were a son of your own he could not hold Sir Thomas in greater

respect.’”

Sir Thomas gave up the point, foiled by her evasions, disarmed by her flattery;

and was obliged to rest satisfied with the conviction that where the present

pleasure of those she loved was at stake, her kindness did sometimes overpower

her judgment.

It was a busy morning with him. Conversation with any of them occupied but

a small part of it. He had to reinstate himself in all the wonted concerns of his

Mansfield life, to see his steward and his bailiff—to examine and compute—and,

in the intervals of business, to walk into his stables and his gardens, and nearest

plantations; but, active and methodical, he had not only done all this before he

resumed his seat as master of the house at dinner, he had also set the carpenter to work in pulling down what had been so lately put up in the billiard-room, and

given the scene-painter his dismissal, long enough to justify the pleasing belief

of his being then at least as far off as Northampton. The scene-painter was gone,

having spoiled only the floor of one room, ruined all the coachman’s sponges,

and made five of the under servants idle and dissatisfied; and Sir Thomas was in

hopes that another day or two would suffice to wipe away every outward

memento of what had been, even to the destruction of every unbound copy of

‘Lovers’ Vows’ in the house, for he was burning all that met his eye.

Mr. Yates was beginning now to understand Sir Thomas’s intentions, though

as far as ever from understanding their source. He and his friend had been out

with their guns the chief of the morning, and Tom had taken the opportunity of

explaining, with proper apologies for his father’s particularity, what was to be

expected. Mr. Yates felt it as acutely as might be supposed. To be a second time

disappointed in the same way was an instance of very severe ill-luck; and his

indignation was such, that had it not been for delicacy towards his friend, and his

friend’s youngest sister, he believed he should certainly attack the Baronet on the

absurdity of his proceedings, and argue him into a little more rationality. He

believed this very stoutly while he was in Mansfield Wood, and all the way

home; but there was a something in Sir Thomas, when they sat round the same

table, which made Mr. Yates think it wiser to let him pursue his own way, and

feel the folly of it without opposition. He had known many disagreeable fathers

before, and often been struck with the inconveniences they occasioned, but

never, in the whole course of his life, had he seen one of that class so

unintelligibly moral, so infamously tyrannical, as Sir Thomas. He was not a man

to be endured but for his children’s sake, and he might be thankful to his fair

daughter Julia that Mr. Yates did yet mean to stay a few days longer under his

roof.

The evening passed with external smoothness, though almost every mind was

ruffled; and the music which Sir Thomas called for from his daughters helped to

conceal the want of real harmony. Maria was in a good deal of agitation. It was

of the utmost consequence to her that Crawford should now lose no time in

declaring himself, and she was disturbed that even a day should be gone by

without seeming to advance that point. She had been expecting to see him the

whole morning—and all the evening, too, was still expecting him. Mr.

Rushworth had set off early with the great news for Sotherton; and she had

fondly hoped for such an immediate éclaircissement as might save him the

trouble of ever coming back again. But they had seen no one from the Parsonage

—not a creature, and had heard no tidings beyond a friendly note of

congratulation and inquiry from Mrs. Grant to Lady Bertram. It was the first day

for many many weeks in which the families had been wholly divided. Four-andtwenty

hours had never passed before, since August began, without bringing

them together in some way or other. It was a sad, anxious day; and the morrow,

though differing in the sort of evil, did by no means bring less. A few moments

of feverish enjoyment were followed by hours of acute suffering. Henry

Crawford was again in the house: he walked up with Dr. Grant, who was anxious

to pay his respects to Sir Thomas, and at rather an early hour they were ushered

into the breakfast-room, where were most of the family. Sir Thomas soon

appeared, and Maria saw with delight and agitation the introduction of the man

she loved to her father. Her sensations were indefinable, and so were they a few

minutes afterwards upon hearing Henry Crawford, who had a chair between

herself and Tom, ask the latter in an under voice whether there were any plan for

resuming the play after the present happy interruption (with a courteous glance

at Sir Thomas), because, in that case, he should make a point of returning to

Mansfield at any time required by the party: he was going away immediately,

being to meet his uncle at Bath without delay; but if there were any prospect of a

renewal of ‘Lovers’ Vows,’ he should hold himself positively engaged, he should

break through every other claim, he should absolutely condition with his uncle

for attending them whenever he might be wanted. The play should not be lost by

*his* absence.

‘From Bath, Norfolk, London, York,—wherever I may be,’ said he,—‘I will

attend you from any place in England, at an hour’s notice.’

It was well at that moment that Tom had to speak and not his sister. He could

immediately say with easy fluency, ‘I am sorry you are going—but as to our

play, *that* is all over—entirely at an end (looking significantly at his father). The

painter was sent off yesterday, and very little will remain of the theatre

tomorrow. I knew how *that* would be from the first. It is early for Bath. You will

find nobody there.’

‘It is about my uncle’s usual time.’

‘When do you think of going?’

‘I may perhaps get as far as Banbury to-day.’

‘Whose stables do you use at Bath?’ was the next question; and while this

branch of the subject was under discussion, Maria, who wanted neither pride nor

resolution, was preparing to encounter her share of it with tolerable calmness.

To her he soon turned, repeating much of what he had already said, with only

a softened air and stronger expressions of regret. But what availed his

expressions or his air? He was going—and if not voluntarily going, voluntarily

intending to stay away; for, excepting what might be due to his uncle, his

engagements were all self-imposed. He might talk of necessity, but she knew his

independence. The hand which had so pressed hers to his heart! The hand and

the heart were alike motionless and passive now! Her spirit supported her, but

the agony of her mind was severe. She had not long to endure what arose from

listening to language which his actions contradicted, or to bury the tumult of her

feelings under the restraint of society; for general civilities soon called his notice

from her, and the farewell visit, as it then became openly acknowledged, was a

very short one. He was gone—he had touched her hand for the last time, he had

made his parting bow, and she might seek directly all that solitude could do for

her. Henry Crawford was gone,—gone from the house, and within two hours

afterwards from the parish,—and so ended all the hopes his selfish vanity had

raised in Maria and Julia Bertram.

Julia could rejoice that he was gone. His presence was beginning to be odious

to her; and if Maria gained him not, she was now cool enough to dispense with

any other revenge. She did not want exposure to be added to desertion. Henry

Crawford gone, she could even pity her sister.

With a purer spirit did Fanny rejoice in the intelligence. She heard it at dinner,

and felt it a blessing. By all the others it was mentioned with regret; and his

merits honoured with due gradation of feeling—from the sincerity of Edmund’s

too partial regard, to the unconcern of his mother speaking entirely by rote. Mrs.

Norris began to look about her and wonder that his falling in love with Julia had

come to nothing; and could almost fear that she had been remiss herself in

forwarding it; but with so many to care for, how was it possible for even her

activity to keep pace with her wishes?

Another day or two, and Mr. Yates was gone likewise. In his departure Sir

Thomas felt the chief interest: wanting to be alone with his family, the presence

of a stranger superior to Mr. Yates must have been irksome; but of him, trifling

and confident, idle and expensive, it was every way vexatious. In himself he was

wearisome, but as the friend of Tom and the admirer of Julia he became

offensive. Sir Thomas had been quite indifferent to Mr. Crawford’s going or

staying—but his good wishes for Mr. Yates’s having a pleasant journey, as he

walked with him to the hall door, were given with genuine satisfaction. Mr.

Yates had stayed to see the destruction of every theatrical preparation at

Mansfield, the removal of everything appertaining to the play: he left the house

in all the soberness of its general character, and Sir Thomas hoped, in seeing him

out of it, to be rid of the worst object connected with the scheme, and the last

that must be inevitably reminding him of its existence.

Mrs. Norris contrived to remove one article from his sight that might have

distressed him. The curtain over which she had presided with such talent and

such success went off with her to her cottage, where she happened to be

particularly in want of green baize.

**CHAPTER XXI**

**S**ir Thomas’s return made a striking change in the ways of the family,

independent of ‘Lovers’ Vows.’ Under his government, Mansfield was an altered

place. Some members of their society sent away, and the spirits of many others

saddened, it was all sameness and gloom, compared with the past—a sombre

family party rarely enlivened. There was little intercourse with the Parsonage.

Sir Thomas, drawing back from intimacies in general, was particularly

disinclined at this time for any engagements but in one quarter. The Rushworths

were the only addition to his own domestic circle which he could solicit.

Edmund did not wonder that such should be his father’s feelings, nor could he

regret anything but the exclusion of the Grants. ‘But they,’ he observed to Fanny,

‘have a claim. They seem to belong to us—they seem to be part of ourselves. I

could wish my father were more sensible of their very great attention to my

mother and sisters while he was away. I am afraid they may feel themselves

neglected, but the truth is, that my father hardly knows them. They had not been

here a twelvemonth when he left England. If he knew them better, he would

value their society as it deserves, for they are, in fact, exactly the sort of people

he would like. We are sometimes a little in want of animation among ourselves:

my sisters seem out of spirits, and Tom is certainly not at his ease. Dr. and Mrs.

Grant would enliven us, and make our evenings pass away with more enjoyment

even to my father.’

‘Do you think so?’ said Fanny: ‘in my opinion, my uncle would not like *any*

addition. I think he values the very quietness you speak of, and that the repose of

his own family circle is all he wants. And it does not appear to me that we are

more serious than we used to be—I mean before my uncle went abroad. As well

as I can recollect, it was always much the same. There was never much laughing

in his presence; or, if there is any difference, it is not more I think than such an

absence has a tendency to produce at first. There must be a sort of shyness; but I

cannot recollect that our evenings formerly were ever merry, except when my

uncle was in town. No young people’s are, I suppose, when those they look up to

are at home.’

‘I believe you are right, Fanny,’ was his reply, after a short consideration. ‘I

believe our evenings are rather returned to what they were, than assuming a new

character. The novelty was in their being lively. Yet, how strong the impression

that only a few weeks will give! I have been feeling as if we had never lived so

before.’

‘I suppose I am graver than other people,’ said Fanny. “The evenings do not

appear long to me. I love to hear my uncle talk of the West Indies. I could listen

to him for an hour together. It entertains *me* more than many other things have

done—but then I am unlike other people, I dare say.’

‘Why should you dare say *that?* (smiling)—Do you want to be told that you

are only unlike other people in being more wise and discreet? But when did you,

or anybody, ever get a compliment from me, Fanny? Go to my father if you want

to be complimented. He will satisfy you. Ask your uncle what he thinks, and you

will hear compliments enough; and though they may be chiefly on your person,

you must put up with it, and trust to his seeing as much beauty of mind in time.’

Such language was so new to Fanny that it quite embarrassed her.

‘Your uncle thinks you very pretty, dear Fanny—and that is the long and the

short of the matter. Anybody but myself would have made something more of it,

and anybody but you would resent that you had not been thought very pretty

before; but the truth is, that your uncle never did admire you till now—and now

he does. Your complexion is so improved!—and you have gained so much

countenance!—and your figure—nay, Fanny, do not turn away about it—it is but

an uncle. If you cannot bear an uncle’s admiration, what is to become of you?

You must really begin to harden yourself to the idea of being worth looking at.

You must try not to mind growing up into a pretty woman.

‘Oh, don’t talk so, don’t talk so,’ cried Fanny, distressed by more feelings than

he was aware of; but seeing that she was distressed, he had done with the

subject, and only added more seriously—

‘Your uncle is disposed to be pleased with you in every respect; and I only

wish you would talk to him more. You are one of those who are too silent in the

evening circle.’

‘But I do talk to him more than I used. I am sure I do. Did not you hear me ask

him about the slave-trade last night?’

‘I did—and was in hopes the question would be followed up by others. It

would have pleased your uncle to be inquired of further.’

‘And I longed to do it—but there was such a dead silence! And while my

cousins were sitting by without speaking a word, or seeming at all interested in

the subject, I did not like—I thought it would appear as if I wanted to set myself

off at their expense, by showing a curiosity and pleasure in his information

which he must wish his own daughters to feel.’

‘Miss Crawford was very right in what she said of you the other day—that

you seemed almost as fearful of notice and praise as other women were of

neglect. We were talking of you at the Parsonage, and those were her words. She

has great discernment. I know nobody who distinguishes characters better. For

so young a woman, it is remarkable! She certainly understands you better than

you are understood by the greater part of those who have known you so long;

and with regard to some others, I can perceive, from occasional lively hints, the

unguarded expressions of the moment, that she could define many as accurately,

did not delicacy forbid it. I wonder what she thinks of my father. She must

admire him as a fine-looking man, with most gentlemanlike, dignified,

consistent manners; but, perhaps, having seen him so seldom, his reserve may be

a little repulsive. Could they be much together, I feel sure of their liking each

other. He would enjoy her liveliness—and she has talents to value his powers. I

wish they met more frequently ! I hope she does not suppose there is any dislike

on his side.’

‘She must know herself too secure of the regard of all the rest of you,’ said

Fanny, with half a sigh, ‘to have any such apprehension. And Sir Thomas’s

wishing just at first to be only with his family is so very natural, that she can

argue nothing from that. After a little while I dare say we shall be meeting again

in the same sort of way, allowing for the difference of the time of year.’

‘This is the first October that she has passed in the country since her infancy. I

do not call Tunbridge or Cheltenham the country; and November is a still more

serious month, and I can see that Mrs. Grant is very anxious for her not finding

Mansfield dull as winter comes on.’

Fanny could have said a great deal, but it was safer to say nothing, and leave

untouched all Miss Crawford’s resources, her accomplishments, her spirits, her

importance, her friends, lest it should betray her into any observations seemingly

unhandsome. Miss Crawford’s kind opinion of herself deserved at least a

grateful forbearance, and she began to talk of something else.

‘Tomorrow, I think, my uncle dines at Sotherton, and you and Mr. Bertram

too. We shall be quite a small party at home. I hope my uncle may continue to

like Mr. Rushworth.’

‘That is impossible, Fanny. He must like him less after tomorrow’s visit, for

we shall be five hours in his company. I should dread the stupidity of the day, if

there were not a much greater evil to follow—the impression it must leave on Sir

Thomas. He cannot much longer deceive himself. I am sorry for them all, and

would give something that Rushworth and Maria had never met.’

In this quarter, indeed, disappointment was impending over Sir Thomas. Not

all his good-will for Mr. Rushworth, not all Mr. Rushworth’s deference for him,

could prevent him from soon discerning some part of the truth—that Mr.

Rushworth was an inferior young man, as ignorant in business as in books, with

opinions in general unfixed, and without seeming much aware of it himself.

He had expected a very different son-in-law; and beginning to feel grave on

Maria’s account, tried to understand her feelings. Little observation there was

necessary to tell him that indifference was the most favourable state they could

be in. Her behaviour to Mr. Rushworth was careless and cold. She could not, did

not, like him. Sir Thomas resolved to speak seriously to her. Advantageous as

would be the alliance, and long standing and public as was the engagement, her

happiness must not be sacrificed to it. Mr. Rushworth had, perhaps, been

accepted on too short an acquaintance, and, on knowing him better, she was

repenting.

With solemn kindness Sir Thomas addressed her; told her his fears, inquired

into her wishes, entreated her to be open and sincere, and assured her that every

inconvenience should be braved, and the connection entirely given up, if she felt

herself unhappy in the prospect of it. He would act for her and release her. Maria

had a moment’s struggle as she listened, and only a moment’s: when her father

ceased, she was able to give her answer immediately, decidedly, and with no

apparent agitation. She thanked him for his great attention, his paternal kindness,

but he was quite mistaken in supposing she had the smallest desire of breaking

through her engagement, or was sensible of any change of opinion or inclination

since her forming it. She had the highest esteem for Mr. Rushworth’s character

and disposition, and could not have a doubt of her happiness with him.

Sir Thomas was satisfied; too glad to be satisfied, perhaps, to urge the matter

quite so far as his judgment might have dictated to others. It was an alliance

which he could not have relinquished without pain; and thus he reasoned. Mr.

Rushworth was young enough to improve: Mr. Rushworth must and would

improve in good society; and if Maria could now speak so securely of her

happiness with him, speaking certainly without the prejudice, the blindness of

love, she ought to be believed. Her feelings, probably, were not acute; he had

never supposed them to be so: but her comforts might not be less on that account ; and if she could dispense with seeing her husband a leading, shining character, there would certainly be everything else in her favour. A well-disposed young woman, who did not marry for love, was in general but the more attached to her own family; and the nearness of Sotherton to Mansfield must naturally hold out the greatest temptation, and would, in all probability, be a continual supply of the most amiable and innocent enjoyments. Such and such like were the reasonings of Sir Thomas, happy to escape the embarrassing evils of a rupture—the wonder, the reflections, the reproach that must attend it; happy to secure a marriage which would bring him such an addition of respectability and influence; and very happy to think anything of his daughter’s disposition that was most

favourable for the purpose.

To her the conference closed as satisfactorily as to him. She was in a state of

mind to be glad that she had secured her fate beyond recall—that she had

pledged herself anew to Sotherton—that she was safe from the possibility of

giving Crawford the triumph of governing her actions, and destroying her

prospects; and retired in proud resolve, determined only to behave more

cautiously to Mr. Rushworth in future, that her father might not be again

suspecting her.

Had Sir Thomas applied to his daughter within the first three or four days after

Henry Crawford’s leaving Mansfield, before her feelings were at all

tranquillised, before she had given up every hope of him, or absolutely resolved

on enduring his rival, her answer might have been different; but after another

three or four days, when there was no return, no letter, no message—no

symptom of a softened heart—no hope of advantage from separation—her mind

became cool enough to seek all the comfort that pride and self-revenge could

give.

Henry Crawford had destroyed her happiness, but he should not know that he

had done it; he should not destroy her credit, her appearance, her prosperity too.

He should not have to think of her as pining in the retirement of Mansfield for

him, rejecting Sotherton and London, independence and splendour, for his sake.

Independence was more needful than ever; the want of it at Mansfield more

sensibly felt. She was less and less able to endure the restraint which her father

imposed. The liberty which his absence had given was now become absolutely

necessary. She must escape from him and Mansfield as soon as possible, and

find consolation in fortune and consequence, bustle and the world, for a

wounded spirit. Her mind was quite determined, and varied not.

To such feelings delay, even the delay of much preparation, would have been

an evil, and Mr. Rushworth could hardly be more impatient for the marriage than

herself. In all the important preparations of the mind she was complete; being

prepared for matrimony by a hatred of home, restraint, and tranquillity; by the

misery of disappointed affection, and contempt of the man she was to marry. The

rest might wait. The preparations of new carriages and furniture might wait for

London and spring, when her own taste could have fairer play.

The principals being all agreed in this respect, it soon appeared that a very few

weeks would be sufficient for such arrangements as must precede the wedding.

Mrs. Rushworth was quite ready to retire, and make way for the fortunate

young woman whom her dear son had selected; and very early in November

removed herself, her maid, her footman, and her chariot, with true dowager

propriety, to Bath—there to parade over the wonders of Sotherton in her evening

parties—enjoying them as thoroughly, perhaps, in the animation of a card-table

as she had ever done on the spot— and before the middle of the same month the

ceremony had taken place which gave Sotherton another mistress.

It was a very proper wedding. The bride was elegantly dressed—the two

bridesmaids were duly inferior—her father gave her away—her mother stood

with salts in her hand, expecting to be agitated—her aunt tried to cry—and the

service was impressively read by Dr. Grant. Nothing could be objected to when

it came under the discussion of the neighbourhood, except that the carriage

which conveyed the bride and bride-groom and Julia from the church door to

Sotherton was the same chaise which Mr. Rushworth had used for a

twelvemonth before. In everything else the etiquette of the day might stand the

strictest investigation.

It was done, and they were gone. Sir Thomas felt as an anxious father must

feel, and was indeed experiencing much of the agitation which his wife had been

apprehensive of for herself, but had fortunately escaped. Mrs. Norris, most

happy to assist in the duties of the day, by spending it at the Park to support her

sister’s spirits, and drinking the health of Mr. and Mrs. Rushworth in a

supernumerary glass or two, was all joyous delight—for she had made the match

—she had done everything—and no one would have supposed, from her

confident triumph, that she had ever heard of conjugal infelicity in her life, or

could have the smallest insight into the disposition of the niece who had been

brought up under her eye.

The plan of the young couple was to proceed, after a few days, to Brighton,

and take a house there for some weeks. Every public place was new to Maria,

and Brighton is almost as gay in winter as in summer. When the novelty of

amusement there was over, it would be time for the wider range of London.

Julia was to go with them to Brighton. Since rivalry between the sisters had

ceased, they had been gradually recovering much of their former good

understanding; and were at least sufficiently friends to make each of them

exceedingly glad to be with the other at such a time. Some other companion than

Mr. Rushworth was of the first consequence to his lady; and Julia was quite as

eager for novelty and pleasure as Maria, though she might not have struggled

through so much to obtain them, and could better bear a subordinate situation.

Their departure made another material change at Mansfield, a chasm which

required some time to fill up. The family circle became greatly contracted; and

though the Miss Bertrams had latterly added little to its gaiety, they could not but

be missed. Even their mother missed them—and how much more their tenderhearted

cousin, who wandered about the house, and thought of them, and felt for

them, with a degree of affectionate regret which they had never done much to

deserve!

**CHAPTER XXII**

**F**anny’s consequence increased on the departure of her cousins. Becoming, as

she then did, the only young woman in the drawing-room, the only occupier of

that interesting division of a family in which she had hitherto held so humble a

third, it was impossible for her not to be more looked at, more thought of and

attended to, than she had ever been before ; and ‘Where is Fanny?’ became no

uncommon question, even without her being wanted for any one’s convenience.

Not only at home did her value increase, but at the Parsonage too. In that

house which she had hardly entered twice a year since Mr. Norris’s death, she

became a welcome, an invited guest; and, in the gloom and dirt of a November

day, most acceptable to Mary Crawford. Her visits there, beginning by chance,

were continued by solicitation. Mrs. Grant, really eager to get any change for her

sister, could, by the easiest self-deceit, persuade herself that she was doing the

kindest thing by Fanny, and giving her the most important opportunities of

improvement in pressing her frequent calls.

Fanny, having been sent into the village on some errand by her aunt Norris,

was overtaken by a heavy shower close to the Parsonage; and being descried

from one of the windows endeavouring to find shelter under the branches and

lingering leaves of an oak just beyond their premises, was forced, though not

without some modest reluctance on her part, to come in. A civil servant she had

withstood: but when Dr. Grant himself came out with an umbrella, there was

nothing to be done but to be very much ashamed and to get into the house as fast as possible; and to poor Miss Crawford, who had just been contemplating the

dismal rain in a very desponding state of mind, sighing over the ruin of all her

plan of exercise for that morning, and of every chance of seeing a single creature

beyond themselves for the next twenty-four hours, the sound of a little bustle at

the front door, and the sight of Miss Price dripping with wet in the vestibule, was

delightful. The value of an event on a wet day in the country was most forcibly

brought before her. She was all alive again directly, and among the most active

in being useful to Fanny, in detecting her to be wetter than she would at first

allow, and providing her with dry clothes; and Fanny, after being obliged to

submit to all this attention, and to being assisted and waited on by mistresses and

maids, being also obliged, on returning down stairs, to be fixed in their drawing room for an hour while the rain continued, the blessing of something fresh to see and think of was thus extended to Miss Crawford, and might carry on her spirits

to the period of dressing and dinner.

The two sisters were so kind to her, and so pleasant, that Fanny might have

enjoyed her visit could she have believed herself not in the way, and could she

have foreseen that the weather would certainly clear at the end of the hour, and

save her from the shame of having Dr. Grant’s carriage and horses out to take her

home, with which she was threatened. As to anxiety for any alarm that her

absence in such weather might occasion at home, she had nothing to suffer on

that score; for as her being out was known only to her two aunts, she was

perfectly aware that none would be felt, and that in whatever cottage aunt Norris

might choose to establish her during the rain, her being in such cottage would be

indubitable to aunt Bertram.

It was beginning to look brighter, when Fanny, observing a harp in the room,

asked some questions about it, which soon led to an acknowledgment of her

wishing very much to hear it, and a confession, which could hardly be believed,

of her having never yet heard it since its being in Mansfield. To Fanny herself it

appeared a very simple and natural circumstance. She had scarcely ever been at

the Parsonage since the instrument’s arrival, there had been no reason that she

should; but Miss Crawford, calling to mind an early expressed wish on the

subject, was concerned at her own neglect; and ‘Shall I play to you now?’ and

‘What will you have?’ were questions immediately following with the readiest

good humour.

She played accordingly; happy to have a new listener, and a listener who

seemed so much obliged, so full of wonder at the performance, and who showed

herself not wanting in taste. She played till Fanny’s eyes, straying to the window

on the weather’s being evidently fair, spoke what she felt must be done.

‘Another quarter of an hour,’ said Miss Crawford, ‘and we shall see how it

will be. Do not run away the first moment of its holding up. Those clouds look

alarming.’

‘But they are passed over,’ said Fanny. ‘I have been watching them. This

weather is all from the south.’

‘South or north, I know a black cloud when I see it; and you must not set

forward while it is so threatening. And besides, I want to play something more to

you—a very pretty piece—and your cousin Edmund’s prime favourite. You must

stay and hear your cousin’s favourite.’

Fanny felt that she must; and though she had not waited for that sentence to be

thinking of Edmund, such a memento made her particularly awake to his idea,

and she fancied him sitting in that room again and again, perhaps in the very spot

where she sat now, listening with constant delight to the favourite air, played, as

it appeared to her, with superior tone and expression; and though pleased with it

herself, and glad to like whatever was liked by him, she was more sincerely

impatient to go away at the conclusion of it than she had been before; and on this

being evident, she was so kindly asked to call again, to take them in her walk

whenever she could, to come and hear more of the harp, that she felt it necessary

to be done, if no objection arose at home.

Such was the origin of the sort of intimacy which took place between them

within the first fortnight after the Miss Bertrams’ going away,—an intimacy

resulting principally from Miss Crawford’s desire of something new, and which

had little reality in Fanny’s feelings. Fanny went to her every two or three days:

it seemed a kind of fascination: she could not be easy without going, and yet it

was without loving her, without ever thinking like her, without any sense of

obligation for being sought after now when nobody else was to be had; and

deriving no higher pleasure from her conversation than occasional amusement,

and *that* often at the expense of her judgment, when it was raised by pleasantry

on people or subjects which she wished to be respected. She went, however, and

they sauntered about together many a half-hour in Mrs. Grant’s shrubbery, the

weather being unusually mild for the time of the year; and venturing sometimes

even to sit down on one of the benches now comparatively unsheltered,

remaining there perhaps till, in the midst of some tender ejaculation of Fanny’s

on the sweets of so protracted an autumn, they were forced by the sudden swell

of a cold gust shaking down the last few yellow leaves about them to jump up

and walk for warmth.

‘This is pretty, very pretty,’ said Fanny, looking around her as they were thus

sitting together one day: ‘every time I come into this shrubbery I am more struck

with its growth and beauty. Three years ago, this was nothing but a rough

hedgerow along the upper side of the field, never thought of as anything, or

capable of becoming anything; and now it is converted into a walk, and it would

be difficult to say whether most valuable as a convenience or an ornament; and,

perhaps, in another three years we may be forgetting—almost forgetting what it

was before. How wonderful, how very wonderful the operations of time, and the

changes of the human mind!’ And following the latter train of thought, she soon

afterwards added: ‘If any one faculty of our nature may be called *more*

wonderful than the rest, I do think it is memory. There seems something more

speakingly incomprehensible in the powers, the failures, the inequalities of

memory, than in any other of our intelligences. The memory is sometimes so

retentive, so serviceable, so obedient ; at others, so bewildered and so weak; and

at others again, so tyrannic, so beyond control! We are, to be sure, a miracle

every way—but our powers of recollecting and of forgetting do seem peculiarly

past finding out.’

Miss Crawford, untouched and inattentive, had nothing to say; and Fanny,

perceiving it, brought back her own mind to what she thought must interest.

‘It may seem impertinent in *me* to praise, but I must admire the taste Mrs.

Grant has shown in all this. There is such a quiet simplicity in the plan of the

walk!—not too much attempted!’

‘Yes,’ replied Miss Crawford carelessly, ‘it does very well for a place of this

sort. One does not think of extent *here;* and, between ourselves, till I came to

Mansfield I had not imagined a country parson ever aspired to a shrubbery or

anything of the kind.’

‘I am so glad to see the evergreens thrive!’ said Fanny, in reply. ‘My uncle’s

gardener always says the soil here is better than his own, and so it appears from

the growth of the laurels and evergreens in general. The evergreen! How

beautiful, how welcome, how wonderful the evergreen! When one thinks of it,

how astonishing a variety of nature! In some countries we know the tree that

sheds its leaf is the variety, but that does not make it less amazing that the same

soil and the same sun should nurture plants differing in the first rule and law of

their existence. You will think me rhapsodising; but when I am out of doors,

especially when I am sitting out of doors, I am very apt to get into this sort of

wondering strain. One cannot fix one’s eyes on the commonest natural

production without finding food for a rambling fancy.’

‘To say the truth,’ replied Miss Crawford, ‘I am something like the famous

Doge at the court of Lewis XIV.; and may declare that I see no wonder in this

shrubbery equal to seeing myself in it. If anybody had told me a year ago that

this place would be my home, that I should be spending month after month here,

as I have done, I certainly should not have believed them. I have now been here

nearly five months; and, moreover, the quietest five months I ever passed.’

*‘Too* quiet for you, I believe.’

‘I should have thought so *theoretically* myself, but,’ and her eyes brightened

as she spoke, ‘take it all and all, I never spent so happy a summer. But then,’

with a more thoughtful air and lowered voice, ‘there is no saying what it may

lead to.’

Fanny’s heart beat quick, and she felt quite unequal to surmising or soliciting

anything more. Miss Crawford, however, with renewed animation, soon went on

—

‘I am conscious of being far better reconciled to a country residence than I had

ever expected to be. I can even suppose it pleasant to spend *half* the year in the

country, under certain circumstances—very pleasant. An elegant, moderate-sized

house in the centre of family connections; continual engagements among them;

commanding the first society in the neighbourhood ; looked up to, perhaps, as

leading it even more than those of larger fortune, and turning from the cheerful

round of such amusements to nothing worse than a *tête-à-tête* with the person

one feels most agreeable in the world. There is nothing frightful in such a

picture, is there, Miss Price? One need not envy the new Mrs. Rushworth with

such a home as *that.’—‘*Envy Mrs. Rushworth!’ was all that Fanny attempted to

say.—‘Come, come, it would be very unhandsome in us to be severe on Mrs.

Rushworth, for I look forward to our owing her a great many gay, brilliant,

happy hours. I expect we shall be all very much at Sotherton another year. Such

a match as Miss Bertram has made is a public blessing; for the first pleasures of

Mr. Rushworth’s wife must be to fill her house, and give the best balls in the

country.’

Fanny was silent, and Miss Crawford relapsed into thoughtfulness, till

suddenly looking up at the end of a few minutes, she exclaimed, ‘Ah! here he is.’

It was not Mr. Rushworth, however, but Edmund, who then appeared walking

towards them with Mrs. Grant. ‘My sister and Mr. Bertram. I am so glad your

eldest cousin is gone, that he *may* be Mr. Bertram again. There is something in

the sound of Mr. *Edmund* Bertram so formal, so pitiful, so younger-brother-like,

that I detest it.’

‘How differently we feel!’ cried Fanny. ‘To me, the sound of *Mr.* Bertram is so

cold and nothing-meaning, so entirely without warmth or character! It just stands

for a gentleman, and that’s all. But there is nobleness in the name of Edmund. It

is a name of heroism and renown; of kings, princes, and knights; and seems to

breathe the spirit of chivalry and warm affections.’

‘I grant you the name is good in itself, and *Lord* Edmund or *Sir* Edmund

sounds delightfully; but sink it under the chill, the annihilation of a Mr., and Mr.

Edmund is no more than Mr. John or Mr. Thomas. Well, shall we join and

disappoint them of half their lecture upon sitting down out of doors at this time

of year, by being up before they can begin?’

Edmund met them with particular pleasure. It was the first time of his seeing

them together since the beginning of that better acquaintance which he had been

hearing of with great satisfaction. A friendship between two so very dear to him

was exactly what he could have wished; and to the credit of the lover’s

understanding be it stated, that he did not by any means consider Fanny as the

only, or even as the greater, gainer by such a friendship.

‘Well,’ said Miss Crawford, ‘and do not you scold us for our imprudence?

What do you think we have been sitting down for but to be talked to about it, and

entreated and supplicated never to do so again?’

‘Perhaps I might have scolded,’ said Edmund, ‘if either of you had been sitting

down alone; but while you do wrong together, I can overlook a great deal.’

‘They cannot have been sitting long,’ cried Mrs. Grant, ‘for when I went up

for my shawl I saw them from the staircase window, and then they were

walking.’

‘And really,’ added Edmund, ‘the day is so mild, that your sitting down for a

few minutes can be hardly thought imprudent. Our weather must not always be

judged by the calendar. We may sometimes take greater liberties in November

than in May.’

‘Upon my word,’ cried Miss Crawford, ‘you are two of the most disappointing

and unfeeling kind friends I ever met with! There is no giving you a moment’s

uneasiness. You do not know how much we have been suffering, nor what chills

we have felt! But I have long thought Mr. Bertram one of the worst subjects to

work on, in any little manoeuvre against common sense, that a woman could be

plagued with. I had very little hope of *him* from the first; but you, Mrs. Grant,

my sister, my own sister, I think I had a right to alarm you a little.’

‘Do not flatter yourself, my dearest Mary. You have not the smallest chance of

moving me. I have my alarms, but they are quite in a different quarter; and if I

could have altered the weather, you would have had a good sharp east wind

blowing on you the whole time—for here are some of my plants which Robert

will leave out because the nights are so mild, and I know the end of it will be,

that we shall have a sudden change of weather, a hard frost setting in all at once,

taking everybody (at least Robert) by surprise, and I shall lose every one; and

what is worse, cook has just been telling me that the turkey, which I particularly

wished not to be dressed till Sunday, because I know how much more Dr. Grant

would enjoy it on Sunday after the fatigues of the day, will not keep beyond tomorrow.

These are something like grievances, and make me think the weather

most unseasonably close.’

‘The sweets of housekeeping in a country village!’ said Miss Crawford archly.

‘Commend me to the nurseryman and the poulterer.’

‘My dear child, commend Dr. Grant to the deanery of Westminster or St.

Paul’s, and I should be as glad of your nurseryman and poulterer as you could

be. But we have no such people in Mansfield. What would you have me do?’

‘Oh, you can do nothing but what you do already; be plagued very often, and

never lose your temper.’

‘Thank you—but there is no escaping these little vexations, Mary, live where

we may; and when you are settled in town and I come to see you, I dare say I

shall find you with yours, in spite of the nurseryman and the poulterer—or

perhaps on their very account. Their remoteness and unpunctuality, or their

exorbitant charges and frauds, will be drawing forth bitter lamentations.’

‘I mean to be too rich to lament or to feel anything of the sort. A large income

is the best recipe for happiness I ever heard of. It certainly may secure all the

myrtle and turkey part of it.’

‘You intend to be very rich,’ said Edmund, with a look which, to Fanny’s eye,

had a great deal of serious meaning.

‘To be sure. Do not you? Do not we all?’

‘I cannot intend anything which it must be so completely beyond my power to

command. Miss Crawford may choose her degree of wealth. She has only to fix

on her number of thousands a year, and there can be no doubt of their coming.

My intentions are only not to be poor.’

‘By moderation and economy, and bringing down your wants to your income,

and all that. I understand you,—and a very proper plan it is for a person at your

time of life, with such limited means and indifferent connections. What can *you*

want but a decent maintenance? You have not much time before you; and your

relations are in no situation to do anything for you, or to mortify you by the

contrast of their own wealth and consequence. Be honest and poor, by all means

—but I shall not envy you; I do not much think I shall even respect you. I have a

much greater respect for those that are honest and rich.’

‘Your degree of respect for honesty, rich or poor, is precisely what I have no

manner of concern with. I do not mean to be poor. Poverty is exactly what I have

determined against. Honesty, in the something between, in the middle state of

worldly circumstances, is all that I am anxious for your not looking down on.’

‘But I do look down upon it, if it might have been higher. I must look down

upon anything contented with obscurity when it might rise to distinction.’

‘But how may it rise? How may my honesty at least rise to any distinction?’

This was not so very easy a question to answer, and occasioned an ‘Oh!’ of

some length from the fair lady before she could add, ‘You ought to be in

Parliament, or you should have gone into the army ten years ago.’

*‘That* is not much to the purpose now; and as to my being in Parliament, I

believe I must wait till there is an especial assembly for the representation of

younger sons who have little to live on. No, Miss Crawford,’ he added, in a more

serious tone, ‘there *are* distinctions which I should be miserable if I thought

myself without any chance—absolutely without chance or possibility of

obtaining—but they are of a different character.’

A look of consciousness as he spoke, and what seemed a consciousness of

manner on Miss Crawford’s side as she made some laughing answer, was

sorrowful food for Fanny’s observation; and finding herself quite unable to

attend as she ought to Mrs. Grant, by whose side she was now following the

others, she had nearly resolved on going home immediately, and only waited for

courage to say so, when the sound of the great clock at Mansfield Park, striking

three, made her feel that she had really been much longer absent than usual, and

brought the previous self-inquiry of whether she should take her leave or not just

then, and how, to a very speedy issue. With undoubting decision she directly

began her adieus; and Edmund began at the same time to recollect that his

mother had been inquiring for her, and that he had walked down to the

Parsonage on purpose to bring her back.

Fanny’s hurry increased, and, without in the least expecting Edmund’s

attendance, she would have hastened away alone; but the general pace was

quickened, and they all accompanied her into the house, through which it was

necessary to pass. Dr. Grant was in the vestibule, and as they stopped to speak to

him, she found, from Edmund’s manner, that he *did* mean to go with her. He too

was taking leave. She could not but be thankful. In the moment of parting,

Edmund was invited by Dr. Grant to eat his mutton with him the next day; and

Fanny had barely time for an unpleasant feeling on the occasion, when Mrs.

Grant, with sudden recollection, turned to her, and asked for the pleasure of her

company too. This was so new an attention, so perfectly new a circumstance in

the events of Fanny’s life, that she was all surprise and embarrassment; and

while stammering out her great obligation, and her ‘but she did not suppose it

would be in her power,’ was looking at Edmund for his opinion and help. But

Edmund, delighted with her having such a happiness offered, and ascertaining

with half a look and half a sentence that she had no objection but on her aunt’s

account, could not imagine that his mother would make any difficulty of sparing

her, and therefore gave his decided open advice that the invitation should be

accepted; and though Fanny would not venture, even on his encouragement, to

such a flight of audacious independence, it was soon settled that, if nothing were

heard to the contrary, Mrs. Grant might expect her.

‘And you know what your dinner will be,’ said Mrs. Grant, smiling—‘the

turkey—and I assure you a very fine one; for, my dear,’ turning to her husband,

‘cook insists upon the turkey’s being dressed to-morrow.’

‘Very well, very well,’ cried Dr. Grant, ‘all the better; I am glad to hear you

have anything so good in the house. But Miss Price and Mr. Edmund Bertram, I

dare say, would take their chance. We none of us want to hear the bill of fare. A

friendly meeting, and not a fine dinner, is all we have in view. A turkey or a

goose, or a leg of mutton, or whatever you and your cook choose to give us.’

The two cousins walked home together; and, except in the immediate

discussion of this engagement, which Edmund spoke of with the warmest

satisfaction, as so particularly desirable for her in the intimacy which he saw

with so much pleasure established, it was a silent walk; for, having finished that

subject, he grew thoughtful and indisposed for any other.

**CHAPTER XXIII**

**B**ut why should Mrs. Grant ask Fanny?’ said Lady Bertram. ‘How came she to

think of asking Fanny?—Fanny never dines there, you know, in this sort of way.

I cannot spare her, and I am sure she does not want to go. Fanny, you do not

want to go, do you?’

‘If you put such a question to her,’ cried Edmund, preventing his cousin’s

speaking, ‘Fanny will immediately say No; but I am sure, my dear mother, she

would like to go; and I can see no reason why she should not.’

‘I cannot imagine why Mrs. Grant should think of asking her. She never did

before. She used to ask your sisters now and then, but she never asked Fanny.’

‘If you cannot do without me, ma’am——nny, in a self-denying tone.

‘But my mother will have my father with her all the evening.’

‘To be sure, so I shall.’

‘Suppose you take my father’s opinion, ma’am.’

‘That’s well thought of. So I will, Edmund. I will ask Sir Thomas as soon as

he comes in, whether I can do without her.’

‘As you please, ma’am, on that head; but I meant my father’s opinion as to the

*propriety* of the invitation’s being accepted or not; and I think he will consider it

a right thing by Mrs. Grant, as well as by Fanny, that being the first invitation it

should be accepted.’

‘I do not know. We will ask him. But he will be very much surprised that Mrs.

Grant should ask Fanny at all.’

There was nothing more to be said, or that could be said to any purpose, till

Sir Thomas were present; but the subject, involving as it did her own evening’s

comfort for the morrow, was so much uppermost in Lady Bertram’s mind, that

half an hour afterwards on his looking in for a minute in his way from his

plantation to his dressing-room, she called him back again, when he had almost

closed the door, with, ‘Sir Thomas, stop a moment—I have something to say to

you.’

Her tone of calm languor, for she never took the trouble of raising her voice,

was always heard and attended to; and Sir Thomas came back. Her story began;

and Fanny immediately slipped out of the room; for to hear herself the subject of

any discussion with her uncle was more than her nerves could bear. She was

anxious, she knew—more anxious perhaps than she ought to be—for what was it

after all whether she went or stayed?—but if her uncle were to be a great while

considering and deciding, and with very grave looks, and those grave looks

directed to her, and at last decide against her, she might not be able to appear

properly submissive and indifferent. Her cause, meanwhile, went on well. It

began, on Lady Bertram’s part, with-‘I have something to tell you that will

surprise you. Mrs. Grant has asked Fanny to dinner.’

‘Well?’ said Sir Thomas, as if waiting more to accomplish the surprise.

‘Edmund wants her to go. But how can I spare her?’

‘She will be late,’ said Sir Thomas, taking out his watch; ‘but what is your

difficulty?’

Edmund found himself obliged to speak and fill up the blanks in his mother’s

story. He told the whole; and she had only to add, ‘So strange! for Mrs. Grant

never used to ask her.’

‘But is not it very natural,’ observed Edmund, ‘that Mrs. Grant should wish to

procure so agreeable a visitor for her sister ?’

‘Nothing can be more natural,’ said Sir Thomas, after a short deliberation;

‘nor, were there no sister in the case, could anything, in my opinion, be more

natural. Mrs. Grant’s showing civility to Miss Price, to Lady Bertram’s niece,

could never want explanation. The only surprise I can feel is, that this should be

the first time of its being paid. Fanny was perfectly right in giving only a

conditional answer. She appears to feel as she ought. But as I conclude that she

must wish to go, since all young people like to be together, I can see no reason

why she should be denied the indulgence.’

‘But can I do without her, Sir Thomas?’

‘Indeed I think you may.’

‘She always makes tea, you know, when my sister is not here.’

‘Your sister, perhaps, may be prevailed on to spend the day with us, and I shall

certainly be at home.’

‘Very well, then, Fanny may go, Edmund.’

The good news soon followed her. Edmund knocked at her door in his way to

his own.

‘Well, Fanny, it is all happily settled, and without the smallest hesitation on

your uncle’s side. He had but one opinion. You are to go.’

‘Thank you, I am *so* glad,’ was Fanny’s instinctive reply; though when she had

turned from him and shut the door, she could not help feeling, ‘And yet, why

should I be glad? for am I not certain of seeing or hearing something there to

pain me?’

In spite of this conviction, however, she was glad. Simple as such an

engagement might appear in other eyes, it had novelty and importance in hers,

for excepting the day at Sotherton, she had scarcely ever dined out before; and

though now going only half a mile and only to three people, still it was dining

out, and all the little interests of preparation were enjoyments in themselves. She

had neither sympathy nor assistance from those who ought to have entered into

her feelings and directed her taste; for Lady Bertram never thought of being

useful to anybody, and Mrs. Norris, when she came on the morrow, in

consequence of an early call and invitation from Sir Thomas, was in a very illhumour,

and seemed intent only on lessening her niece’s pleasure, both present

and future, as much as possible.

‘Upon my word, Fanny, you are in high luck to meet with such attention and

indulgence! You ought to be very much obliged to Mrs. Grant for thinking of

you, and to your aunt for letting you go, and you ought to look upon it as

something extraordinary : for I hope you are aware that there is no real occasion

for your going into company in this sort of way, or ever dining out at all; and it is

what you must not depend upon ever being repeated. Nor must you be fancying

that the invitation is meant as any particular compliment to you; the compliment

is intended to your uncle and aunt and me. Mrs. Grant thinks it a civility due to

us to take a little notice of you, or else it would never have come into her head,

and you may be very certain that if your cousin Julia had been at home you

would not have been asked at all.’

Mrs. Norris had now so ingeniously done away all Mrs. Grant’s part of the

favour, that Fanny, who found herself expected to speak, could only say that she

was very much obliged to her aunt Bertram for sparing her, and that she was

endeavouring to put her aunt’s evening work in such a state as to prevent her

being missed.

‘Oh, depend upon it, your aunt can do very well without you, or you would

not be allowed to go. *I* shall be here, so you may be quite easy about your aunt.

And I hope you will have a very *agreeable* day, and find it all mighty *delightful.*

But I must observe, that five is the very awkwardest of all possible numbers to

sit down to table; and I cannot but be surprised that such an *elegant* lady as Mrs.

Grant should not contrive better! And round their enormous great wide table,

too, which fills up the room so dreadfully! Had the Doctor been contented to

take my dining-table when I came away, as anybody in their senses would have

done, instead of having that absurd new one of his own, which is wider, literally

wider than the dinner-table here—how infinitely better it would have been! and

how much more he would have been respected! for people are never respected

when they step out of their proper sphere. Remember that, Fanny. Five, only

five, to be sitting round that table! However, you will have dinner enough on it

for ten, I daresay.’

Mrs. Norris fetched breath and went on again.

‘The nonsense and folly of people’s stepping out of their rank and trying to

appear above themselves makes me think it right to give *you* a hint, Fanny, now

that you are going into company without any of us; and I do beseech and entreat

you not to be putting yourself forward, and talking and giving your opinion as if

you were one of your cousins—as if you were dear Mrs. Rushworth or Julia.

*That* will never do, believe me. Remember, wherever you are, you must be the

lowest and last; and though Miss Crawford is in a manner at home at the

Parsonage, you are not to be taking place of her. And as to coming away at night,

you are to stay just as long as Edmund chooses. Leave him to settle *that.’*

‘Yes, ma’am, I should not think of anything else.’

‘And if it should rain,—which I think exceedingly likely, for I never saw it

more threatening for a wet evening in my life,—you must manage as well as you

can, and not be expecting the carriage to be sent for you. I certainly do not go

home to-night, and, therefore, the carriage will not be out on my account; so you

must make up your mind to what may happen, and take your things accordingly.’

Her niece thought it perfectly reasonable. She rated her own claims to comfort

as low even as Mrs. Norris could; and when Sir Thomas soon afterwards, just

opening the door, said, ‘Fanny, at what time would you have the carriage come

round?’ she felt a degree of astonishment which made it impossible for her to

speak.

‘My dear Sir Thomas!’ cried Mrs. Norris, red with anger, ‘Fanny can walk.’

‘Walk!’ repeated Sir Thomas, in a tone of most unanswerable dignity, and

coming further into the room. ‘My niece walk to a dinner engagement at this

time of the year! Will twenty minutes after four suit you?’

‘Yes, sir,’ was Fanny’s humble answer, given with the feelings almost of a

criminal towards Mrs. Norris; and not bearing to remain with her in what might

seem a state of triumph, she followed her uncle out of the room, having stayed

behind him only long enough to hear these words spoken in angry agitation—

‘Quite unnecessary!—a great deal too kind! But Edmund goes;—true—it is

upon Edmund’s account. I observed he was hoarse on Thursday night.’

But this could not impose on Fanny. She felt that the carriage was for herself

and herself alone; and her uncle’s consideration of her, coming immediately after

such representations from her aunt, cost her some tears of gratitude when she

was alone.

The coachman drove round to a minute; another minute brought down the

gentleman; and as the lady had, with a most scrupulous fear of being late, been

many minutes seated in the drawing-room, Sir Thomas saw them off in as good

time as his own correctly punctual habits required.

‘Now I must look at you, Fanny,’ said Edmund, with the kind smile of an

affectionate brother, ‘and tell you how I like you; and as well as I can judge by

this light, you look very nicely indeed. What have you got on?’

‘The new dress that my uncle was so good as to give me on my cousin’s

marriage. I hope it is not too fine; but I thought I ought to wear it as soon as I

could, and that I might not have such another opportunity all the winter. I hope

you do not think me too fine.’

‘A woman can never be too fine while she is all in white. No, I see no finery

about you; nothing but what is perfectly proper. Your gown seems very pretty. I

like these glossy spots. Has not Miss Crawford a gown something the same?’

In approaching the Parsonage they passed close by the stable-yard and coachhouse.

‘Heyday!’ said Edmund, ‘here’s company, here’s a carriage! who have they

got to meet us?’ And letting down the side-glass to distinguish, “Tis Crawford‘s,

Crawford’s barouche, I protest! There are his own two men pushing it back into

its old quarters. He is here, of course. This is quite a surprise, Fanny. I shall be

very glad to see him.’

There was no occasion, there was no time, for Fanny to say how very

differently she felt; but the idea of having such another to observe her was a

great increase of the trepidation with which she performed the very awful

ceremony of walking into the drawing-room.

In the drawing-room Mr. Crawford certainly was; having been just long

enough arrived to be ready for dinner; and the smiles and pleased looks of the

three others standing round him showed how welcome was his sudden resolution

of coming to them for a few days on leaving Bath. A very cordial meeting passed

between him and Edmund; and, with the exception of Fanny, the pleasure was

general; and even to her there might be some advantage in his presence, since

every addition to the party must rather forward her favourite indulgence of being

suffered to sit silent and unattended to. She was soon aware of this herself; for

though she must submit, as her own propriety of mind directed, in spite of her

aunt Norris’s opinion, to being the principal lady in company, and to all the little

distinctions consequent thereon, she found, while they were at table, such a

happy flow of conversation prevailing in which she was not required to take any

part—there was so much to be said between the brother and sister about Bath, so much between the two young men about hunting, so much of politics between

Mr. Crawford and Dr. Grant, and of everything and all together between Mr.

Crawford and Mrs. Grant, as to leave her the fairest prospect of having only to

listen in quiet, and of passing a very agreeable day. She could not compliment

the newly-arrived gentleman, however, with any appearance of interest in a

scheme for extending his stay at Mansfield, and sending for his hunters from

Norfolk, which, suggested by Dr. Grant, advised by Edmund, and warmly urged

by the two sisters, was soon in possession of his mind, and which he seemed to

want to be encouraged even by her to resolve on. Her opinion was sought as to

the probable continuance of the open weather, but her answers were as short and indifferent as civility allowed. She could not wish him to stay, and would much rather not have him speak to her.

Her two absent cousins, especially Maria, were much in her thoughts on

seeing him; but no embarrassing remembrance affected his spirits. Here he was

again on the same ground where all had passed before, and apparently as willing

to stay and be happy without the Miss Bertrams, as if he had never known

Mansfield in any other state. She heard them spoken of by him only in a general

way, till they were all reassembled in the drawing-room, when Edmund, being

engaged apart in some matter of business with Dr. Grant, which seemed entirely

to engross them, and Mrs. Grant occupied at the tea-table, he began talking of

them with more particularity to his other sister. With a significant smile, which

made Fanny quite hate him, he said, ‘So Rushworth and his fair bride are at

Brighton, I understand—happy man!’

‘Yes, they have been there—about a fortnight, Miss Price, have they not? And

Julia is with them.’

‘And Mr. Yates, I presume, is not far off.’

‘Mr. Yates! Oh, we hear nothing of Mr. Yates. I do not imagine he figures

much in the letters to Mansfield Park; do you, Miss Price? I think my friend Julia

knows better than to entertain her father with Mr. Yates.’

‘Poor Rushworth and his two-and-forty speeches!’ continued Crawford.

‘Nobody can ever forget them. Poor fellow! I see him now—his toil and his

despair. Well, I am much mistaken if his lovely Maria will ever want him to

make two-and-forty speeches to her;’-adding, with a momentary seriousness,

‘She is too good for him—much too good.’ And then changing his tone again to

one of gentle gallantry, and addressing Fanny, he said, ‘You were Mr.

Rushworth’s best friend. Your kindness and patience can never be forgotten,

your indefatigable patience in trying to make it possible for him to learn his part

—in trying to give him a brain which nature had denied—to mix up an

understanding for him out of the superfluity of your own! He might not have

sense enough himself to estimate your kindness, but I may venture to say that it

had honour from all the rest of the party.’

Fanny coloured, and said nothing.

‘It is as a dream, a pleasant dream!’ he exclaimed, breaking forth again, after a

few minutes’ musing. ‘I shall always look back on our theatricals with exquisite

pleasure. There was such an interest, such an animation, such a spirit diffused.

Everybody felt it. We were all alive. There was employment, hope, solicitude,

bustle for every hour of the day. Always some little objection, some little doubt,

some little anxiety to be got over. I never was happier.’

With silent indignation, Fanny repeated to herself, ‘Never happier!—never

happier than when doing what you must know was not justifiable !-never happier

than when behaving so dishonourably and unfeelingly!—Oh, what a corrupted

mind!’

‘We were unlucky, Miss Price,’ he continued, in a lower tone, to avoid the

possibility of being heard by Edmund, and not at all aware of her feelings, ‘we

certainly were very unlucky. Another week, only one other week, would have

been enough for us. I think if we had had the disposal of events—if Mansfield

Park had had the government of the winds just for a week or two about the

equinox, there would have been a difference. Not that we would have

endangered his safety by any tremendous weather—but only by a steady

contrary wind, or a calm. I think, Miss Price, we would have indulged ourselves

with a week’s calm in the Atlantic at that season.’

He seemed determined to be answered; and Fanny, averting her face, said with

a firmer tone than usual, ‘As far as *I* am concerned, sir, I would not have delayed

his return for a day. My uncle disapproved it all so entirely when he did arrive,

that in my opinion everything had gone quite far enough.’

She had never spoken so much at once to him in her life before, and never so

angrily to any one; and when her speech was over, she trembled and blushed at

her own daring. He was surprised ; but after a few moments’ silent consideration

of her, replied in a calmer, graver tone, and as if the candid result of conviction,

‘I believe you are right. It was more pleasant than prudent. We were getting too

noisy.’ And then turning the conversation, he would have engaged her on some

other subject, but her answers were so shy and reluctant that he could not

advance in any.

Miss Crawford, who had been repeatedly eyeing Dr. Grant and Edmund, now

observed, ‘Those gentlemen must have some very interesting point to discuss.’

‘The most interesting in the world,’ replied her brother—‘how to make money

—how to turn a good income into a better. Dr. Grant is giving Bertram

instructions about the living he is to step into so soon. I find he takes orders in a

few weeks. They were at it in the dining-parlour. I am glad to hear Bertram will

be so well off. He will have a very pretty income to make ducks and drakes with,

and earned without much trouble. I apprehend he will not have less than seven

hundred a year. Seven hundred a year is a fine thing for a younger brother; and

as of course he will still live at home, it will be all for his *menus plaisirs;* and a

sermon at Christmas and Easter, I suppose, will be the sum total of sacrifice.’

His sister tried to laugh off her feelings by saying, ‘Nothing amuses me more

than the easy manner with which everybody settles the abundance of those who

have a great deal less than themselves. You would look rather blank, Henry, if

your menus *plaisirs* were to be limited to seven hundred a year.’

‘Perhaps I might; but all that you know is entirely comparative. Birthright and

habit must settle the business. Bertram is certainly well off for a cadet of even a

Baronet’s family. By the time he is four or five and twenty he will have seven

hundred a year, and nothing to do for it.’

Miss Crawford *could* have said that there would be a something to do and to

suffer for it, which she could not think lightly of; but she checked herself and let

it pass; and tried to look calm and unconcerned when the two gentlemen shortly

afterwards joined them.

‘Bertram,’ said Henry Crawford, ‘I shall make a point of coming to Mansfield

to hear you preach your first sermon. I shall come on purpose to encourage a

young beginner. When is it to be? Miss Price, will not you join me in

encouraging your cousin? Will not you engage to attend with your eyes steadily

fixed on him the whole time—as I shall do—not to lose a word; or only looking

off just to note down any sentence pre-eminently beautiful? We will provide

ourselves with tablets and a pencil. When will it be? You must preach at

Mansfield, you know, that Sir Thomas and Lady Bertram may hear you.’

‘I shall keep clear of you, Crawford, as long as I can,’ said Edmund; ‘for you

would be more likely to disconcert me, and I should be more sorry to see you

trying at it than almost any other man.’

‘Will he not feel this?’ thought Fanny. ‘No, he can feel nothing as he ought.’

The party being now all united, and the chief talkers attracting each other, she

remained in tranquillity; and as a whist table was formed after tea,—formed

really for the amusement of Dr. Grant, by his attentive wife, though it was not to

be supposed so,—and Miss Crawford took her harp,—she had nothing to do but

to listen; and her tranquillity remained undisturbed the rest of the evening,

except when Mr. Crawford now and then addressed to her a question or

observation, which she could not avoid answering. Miss Crawford was too much

vexed by what had passed to be in a humour for anything but music. With that

she soothed herself and amused her friend.

The assurance of Edmund’s being so soon to take orders coming upon her like

a blow that had been suspended, and still hoped uncertain and at a distance, was

felt with resentment and mortfication. She was very angry with him. She had

thought her influence more. She had begun to think of him—she felt that she had

—with great regard, with almost decided intentions; but she would now meet

him with his own cool feelings. It was plain that he could have no serious views,

no true attachment, by fixing himself in a situation which he must know she

would never stoop to. She would learn to match him in his indifference. She

would henceforth admit his attentions without any idea beyond immediate

amusement. If *he* could so command his affections, *hers* should do her no harm.

**CHAPTER XXIV**

**H**enry Crawford had quite made up his mind by the next morning to give

another fortnight to Mansfield, and having sent for his hunters, and written a few

lines of explanation to the Admiral, he looked round at his sister as he sealed and

threw the letter from him, and seeing the coast clear of the rest of the family,

said, with a smile, ‘And how do you think I mean to amuse myself, Mary, on the

days that I do not hunt? I am grown too old to go out more than three times a

week; but I have a plan for the intermediate days, and what do you think it is?’

‘To walk and ride with me, to be sure.’

‘Not exactly, though I shall be happy to do both, but *that* would be exercise

only to my body, and I must take care of my mind. Besides, *that* would be all

recreation and indulgence, without the wholesome alloy of labour, and I do not

like to eat the bread of idleness. No, my plan is to make Fanny Price in love with

me.’

‘Fanny Price! Nonsense! No, no. You ought to be satisfied with her two

cousins.’

‘But I cannot be satisfied without Fanny Price, without making a small hole in

Fanny Price’s heart. You do not seem properly aware of her claims to notice.

When we talked of her last night, you none of you seemed sensible of the

wonderful improvement that has taken place in her looks within the last six

weeks. You see her every day, and therefore do not notice it, but I assure you she

is quite a different creature from what she was in the autumn. She was then

merely a quiet, modest, not plain-looking girl, but she is now absolutely pretty. I

used to think she had neither complexion nor countenance; but in that soft skin

of hers, so frequently tinged with a blush as it was yesterday, there is decided

beauty; and from what I observed of her eyes and mouth, I do not despair of

their being capable of expression enough when she has anything to express. And

then—her air, her manner, her *tout ensemble,* is so indescribably improved! She

must be grown two inches, at least, since October.’

‘Phoo! phoo! This is only because there were no tall women to compare her

with, and because she has got a new gown, and you never saw her so well

dressed before. She is just what she was in October, believe me. The truth is, that

she was the only girl in company for you to notice, and you must have a

somebody. I have always thought her pretty—not strikingly pretty—but “pretty

enough” as people say; a sort of beauty that grows on one. Her eyes should be

darker, but she has a sweet smile; but as for this wonderful degree of

improvement, I am sure it may all be resolved into a better style of dress and

your having nobody else to look at; and therefore, if you do set about a flirtation

with her, you never will persuade me that it is in compliment to her beauty, or

that it proceeds from anything but your own idleness and folly.’

Her brother gave only a smile to this accusation, and soon afterwards said, ‘I

do not quite know what to make of Miss Fanny. I do not understand her. I could

not tell what she would be at yesterday. What is her character? Is she solemn? Is

she queer? Is she prudish? Why did she draw back and look so grave at me? I

could hardly get her to speak. I never was so long in company with a girl in my

life—trying to entertain her—and succeed so ill! Never met with a girl who

looked so grave on me! I must try to get the better of this. Her looks say, “I will

not like you, I am determined not to like you,” and I say, she shall.’

‘Foolish fellow! And so this is her attraction after all! This it is—her not

caring about you—which gives her such a soft skin and makes her so much

taller, and produces all these charms and graces! I do desire that you will not be

making her really unhappy; a *little* love perhaps may animate and do her good;

but I will not have you plunge her deep, for she is as good a little creature as

ever lived, and has a great deal of feeling.’

‘It can be but for a fortnight,’ said Henry, ‘and if a fortnight can kill her, she

must have a constitution which nothing could save. No, I will not do her any

harm, dear little soul! I only want her to look kindly on me, to give me smiles as

well as blushes, to keep a chair for me by herself wherever we are, and be all

animation when I take it and talk to her; to think as I think, be interested in all

my possessions and pleasures, try to keep me longer at Mansfield, and feel when

I go away that she shall be never happy again. I want nothing more.’

‘Moderation itself!’ said Mary. ‘I can have no scruples now. Well, you will

have opportunities enough of endeavouring to recommend yourself, for we are a

great deal together.’

And without attempting any further remonstrance, she left Fanny to her fate—

a fate which, had not Fanny’s heart been guarded in a way unsuspected by Miss

Crawford, might have been a little harder than she deserved; for although there

doubtless are such unconquerable young ladies of eighteen (or one should not

read about them) as are never to be persuaded into love against their judgment

by all that talent, manner, attention, and flattery can do, I have no inclination to

believe Fanny one of them, or to think that with so much tenderness of

disposition, and so much taste as belonged to her, she could have escaped heartwhole

from the courtship (though the courtship only of a fortnight) of such a

man as Crawford, in spite of there being some previous ill opinion of him to be

overcome, had not her affection been engaged elsewhere. With all the security

which love of another and disesteem of him could give to the peace of mind he

was attacking, his continued attentions—continued, but not obtrusive, and

adapting themselves more and more to the gentleness and delicacy of her

character,—obliged her very soon to dislike him less than formerly. She had by

no means forgotten the past, and she thought as ill of him as ever; but she felt his

powers: he was entertaining; and his manners were so improved, so polite, so

seriously and blamelessly polite, that it was impossible not to be civil to him in

return.

A very few days were enough to effect this; and at the end of those few days

circumstances arose which had a tendency rather to forward his views of

pleasing her, inasmuch as they gave her a degree of happiness which must

dispose her to be pleased with everybody. William, her brother, the so-long absent and dearly-loved brother, was in England again. She had a letter from him

herself, a few hurried happy lines, written as the ship came up Channel, and sent

into Portsmouth, with the first boat that left the *Antwerp,* at anchor, in Spithead;

and when Crawford walked up with the newspaper in his hand, which he had

hoped would bring the first tidings, he found her trembling with joy over this

letter, and listening with a glowing, grateful countenance to the kind invitation

which her uncle was most collectedly dictating in reply.

It was but the day before that Crawford had made himself thoroughly master

of the subject, or had in fact become at all aware of her having such a brother, or

his being in such a ship, but the interest then excited had been very properly

lively, determining him on his return to town to apply for information as to the

probable period of the *Antwerp’s* return from the Mediterranean, etc.; and the

good luck which attended his early examination of ship news, the next morning,

seemed the reward of his ingenuity in finding out such a method of pleasing her,

as well as of his dutiful attention to the Admiral, in having for many years taken

in the paper esteemed to have the earliest naval intelligence. He proved,

however, to be too late. All those fine first feelings, of which he had hoped to be

the exciter, were already given. But his intention, the kindness of his intention,

was thankfully acknowledged—quite thankfully and warmly, for she was

elevated beyond the common timidity of her mind by the flow of her love for

William.

This dear William would soon be amongst them. There could be no doubt of

his obtaining leave of absence immediately, for he was still only a midshipman;

and as his parents, from living on the spot, must already have seen him and be

seeing him perhaps daily, his direct holidays might with justice be instantly

given to the sister, who had been his best correspondent through a period of

seven years, and the uncle who had done most for his support and advancement;

and accordingly the reply to her reply, fixing a very early day for his arrival,

came as soon as possible; and scarcely ten days had passed since Fanny had been

in the agitation of her first dinner visit, when she found herself in an agitation of

a higher nature—watching in the hall, in the lobby, on the stairs, for the first

sound of the carriage which was to bring her a brother.

It came happily while she was thus waiting; and there being neither ceremony

nor fearfulness to delay the moment of meeting, she was with him as he entered

the house, and the first minutes of exquisite feeling had no interruption and no

witnesses, unless the servants chiefly intent upon opening the proper doors could

be called such. This was exactly what Sir Thomas and Edmund had been

separately conniving at, as each proved to the other by the sympathetic alacrity

with which they both advised Mrs. Norris’s continuing where she was, instead of

rushing out into the hall as soon as the noises of the arrival reached them.

William and Fanny soon showed themselves; and Sir Thomas had the pleasure

of receiving, in his *protégé,* certainly a very different person from the one he had

equipped seven years ago, but a young man of an open, pleasant countenance,

and frank, unstudied, but feeling and respectful manners, and such as confirmed

him his friend.

It was long before Fanny could recover from the agitating happiness of such

an hour as was formed by the last thirty minutes of expectation and the first of

fruition; it was some time even before her happiness could be said to make her

happy, before the disappointment inseparable from the alteration of person had

vanished, and she could see in him the same William as before, and talk to him,

as her heart had been yearning to do through many a past year. That time,

however, did gradually come, forwarded by an affection on his side as warm as

her own, and much less encumbered by refinement or self-distrust. She was the

first object of his love, but it was a love which his stronger spirits and bolder

temper made it as natural for him to express as to feel. On the morrow they were

walking about together with true enjoyment, and every succeeding morrow

renewed a *tête-à-tête* which Sir Thomas could not but observe with

complacency, even before Edmund had pointed it out to him.

Excepting the moments of peculiar delight which any marked or unlooked-for

instance of Edmund’s consideration of her in the last few months had excited,

Fanny had never known so much felicity in her life as in this unchecked, equal,

fearless intercourse with the brother and friend, who was opening all his heart to

her, telling her all his hopes and fears, plans, and solicitudes respecting that long thought- of, dearly-earned, and justly-valued blessing of promotion—who could

give her direct and minute information of the father and mother, brothers and

sisters, of whom she very seldom heard—who was interested in all the comforts

and all the little hardships of her home at Mansfield—ready to think of every

member of that home as she directed, or differing only by a less scrupulous

opinion and more noisy abuse of their aunt Norris—and with whom (perhaps the

dearest indulgence of the whole) all the evil and good of their earliest years

could be gone over again, and every former united pain and pleasure retraced

with the fondest recollection. An advantage this, a strengthener of love, in which

even the conjugal tie is beneath the fraternal. Children of the same family, the

same blood, with the same first associations and habits, have some means of

enjoyment in their power which no subsequent connections can supply; and it

must be by a long and unnatural estrangement, by a divorce which no subsequent

connection can justify, if such precious remains of the earliest attachments are

ever entirely outlived. Too often, alas, it is so. Fraternal love, sometimes almost

everything, is at others worse than nothing. But with William and Fanny Price it

was still a sentiment in all its prime and freshness, wounded by no opposition of

interest, cooled by no separate attachment, and feeling the influence of time and

absence only in its increase.

An affection so amiable was advancing each in the opinion of all who had

hearts to value anything good. Henry Crawford was as much struck with it as

any. He honoured the warm-hearted, blunt fondness of the young sailor, which

led him to say, with his hand stretched towards Fanny’s head, ‘Do you know, I

begin to like that queer fashion already, though when I first heard of such things

being done in England I could not believe it, and when Mrs. Brown, and the

other women, at the Commissioner’s, at Gibraltar, appeared in the same trim, I

thought they were mad; but Fanny can reconcile me to anything’; —and saw,

with lively admiration, the glow of Fanny’s cheek, the brightness of her eye, the

deep interest, the absorbed attention, while her brother was describing any of the imminent hazards or terrific scenes which such a period at sea must supply.

It was a picture which Henry Crawford had moral taste enough to value.

Fanny’s attractions increased—increased twofold;—for the sensibility which

beautified her complexion and illumined her countenance was an attraction in

itself. He was no longer in doubt of the capabilities of her heart. She had feeling,

genuine feeling. It would be something to be loved by such a girl, to excite the

first ardours of her young, unsophisticated mind! She interested him more than

he had foreseen. A fortnight was not enough. His stay became indefinite.

William was often called on by his uncle to be the talker. His recitals were

amusing in themselves to Sir Thomas, but the chief object in seeking them was

to understand the reciter, to know the young man by his histories; and he listened

to his clear, simple, spirited details with full satisfaction—seeing in them the

proof of good principles, professional knowledge, energy, courage, and

cheerfulness—everything that could deserve or promise well. Young as he was,

William had already seen a great deal. He had been in the Mediterranean—in the

West Indies—in the Mediterranean again—had been often taken on shore by the

favour of his captain, and in the course of seven years had known every variety

of danger which sea and war together could offer. With such means in his power

he had a right to be listened to; and though Mrs. Norris could fidget about the

room, and disturb everybody in quest of two needle fuls of thread or a second hand shirt button in the midst of her nephew’s account of a shipwreck or an

engagement, everybody else was attentive; and even Lady Bertram could not

hear of such horrors unmoved, or without sometimes lifting her eyes from her

work to say, ‘Dear me! how disagreeable! I wonder anybody can ever go to sea.’

To Henry Crawford they gave a different feeling. He longed to have been at

sea, and seen and done and suffered as much. His heart was warm; his fancy

fired, and he felt the highest respect for a lad who, before he was twenty, had

gone through such bodily hardships, and given such proofs of mind. The glory of

heroism, of usefulness, of exertion, of endurance, made his own habits of selfish

indulgence appear in shameful contrast; and he wished he had been a William

Price, distinguishing himself and working his way to fortune and consequence

with so much self-respect and happy ardour, instead of what he was!

The wish was rather eager than lasting. He was roused from the reverie of

retrospection and regret produced by it, by some inquiry from Edmund as to his

plans for the next day’s hunting; and he found it was as well to be a man of

fortune at once with horses and grooms at his command. In one respect it was

better, as it gave him the means of conferring a kindness where he wished to

oblige. With spirits, courage, and curiosity up to anything, William expressed an

inclination to hunt; and Crawford could mount him without the slightest

inconvenience to himself, and with only some scruples to obviate in Sir Thomas,

who knew better than his nephew the value of such a loan, and some alarms to

reason away in Fanny. She feared for William, by no means convinced by all that

he could relate of his own horsemanship in various countries, of the scrambling

parties in which he had been engaged, the rough horses and mules he had ridden,

or his many narrow escapes from dreadful falls, that he was at all equal to the

management of a high-fed hunter in an English fox-chase; nor, till he returned

safe and well, without accident or discredit, could she be reconciled to the risk,

or feel any of that obligation to Mr. Crawford for lending the horse which he had

fully intended it should produce. When it was proved, however, to have done

William no harm, she could allow it to be a kindness, and even reward the owner

with a smile when the animal was one minute tendered to his use again, and the

next, with the greatest cordiality, and in a manner not to be resisted, made over

to his use entirely so long as he remained in Northamptonshire.

**CHAPTER XXV**

**T**he intercourse of the two families was at this period more nearly restored to

what it had been in the autumn, than any member of the old intimacy had

thought ever likely to be again. The return of Henry Crawford and the arrival of

William Price had much to do with it, but much was still owing to Sir Thomas’s

more than toleration of the neighbourly attempts at the Parsonage. His mind,

now disengaged from the cares which had pressed on him at first, was at leisure

to find the Grants and their young inmates really worth visiting; and though

infinitely above scheming or contriving for any the most advantageous

matrimonial establishment that could be among the apparent possibilities of any

one most dear to him, and disdaining even as a littleness the being quick-sighted

on such points, he could not avoid perceiving, in a grand and careless way, that

Mr. Crawford was somewhat distinguishing his niece—nor perhaps refrain

(though unconsciously) from giving a more willing assent to invitations on that

account.

His readiness, however, in agreeing to dine at the Parsonage, when the general

invitation was at last hazarded, after many debates and many doubts as to

whether it were worth while, ‘because Sir Thomas seemed so ill inclined and

Lady Bertram was so indolent!’—proceeded from good breeding and good-will

alone, and had nothing to do with Mr. Crawford, but as being one in an agreeable

group; for it was in the course of that very visit that he first began to think that

any one in the habit of such idle observations *would have thought* that Mr.

Crawford was the admirer of Fanny Price.

The meeting was generally felt to be a pleasant one, being composed in a

good proportion of those who would talk and those who would listen; and the

dinner itself was elegant and plentiful, according to the usual style of the Grants,

and too much according to the usual habits of all to raise any emotion except in

Mrs. Norris, who could never behold either the wide table or the number of

dishes on it with patience, and who did always contrive to experience some evil

from the passing of the servants behind her chair, and to bring away some fresh

conviction of its being impossible among so many dishes but that some must be

cold.

In the evening it was found, according to the predetermination of Mrs. Grant

and her sister, that after making up the whist table there would remain sufficient

for a round game, and everybody being as perfectly complying and without a

choice as on such occasions they always are, speculation was decided on almost

as soon as whist; and Lady Bertram soon found herself in the critical situation of

being applied to for her own choice between the games, and being required

either to draw a card for whist or not. She hesitated. Luckily Sir Thomas was at

hand.

‘What shall I do, Sir Thomas? Whist and speculation;d which will amuse me

most?’

Sir Thomas, after a moment’s thought, recommended speculation. He was a

whist-player himself, and perhaps might feel that it would not much amuse him

to have her for a partner.

‘Very well,’ was her Ladyship’s contented answer—‘then speculation, if you

please, Mrs. Grant. I know nothing about it, but Fanny must teach me.’

Here Fanny interposed, however, with anxious protestations of her own equal

ignorance; she had never played the game nor seen it played in her life; and

Lady Bertram felt a moment’s indecision again—but upon everybody’s assuring

her that nothing could be so easy, that it was the easiest game on the cards, and

Henry Crawford’s stepping forward with a most earnest request to be allowed to

sit between her Ladyship and Miss Price, and teach them both, it was so settled;

and Sir Thomas, Mrs. Norris, and Dr. and Mrs. Grant being seated at the table of

prime intellectual state and dignity, the remaining six, under Miss Crawford’s

direction, were arranged round the

other. It was a fine arrangement for Henry Crawford, who was close to Fanny,

and with his hands full of business, having two persons’ cards to manage as well

as his own—for though it was impossible for Fanny not to feel herself mistress

of the rules of the game in three minutes, he had yet to inspirit her play, sharpen

her avarice, and harden her heart, which, especially in any competition with

William, was a work of some difficulty; and as for Lady Bertram, he must

continue in charge of all her fame and fortune through the whole evening; and if

quick enough to keep her from looking at her cards when the deal began, must

direct her in whatever was to be done with them to the end of it.

He was in high spirits, doing everything with happy ease, and pre-eminent in

all the lively turns, quick resources, and playful impudence that could do honour

to the game; and the round table was altogether a very comfortable contrast to

the steady sobriety and orderly silence of the other.

Twice had Sir Thomas inquired into the enjoyment and success of his lady, but

in vain; no pause was long enough for the time his measured manner needed;

and very little of her state could be known till Mrs. Grant was able, at the end of

the first rubber, to go to her and pay her compliments.

‘I hope your Ladyship is pleased with the game?’

‘Oh dear, yes. Very entertaining indeed. A very odd game. I do not know what

it is all about. I am never to see my cards; and Mr. Crawford does all the rest.’

‘Bertram,’ said Crawford, some time afterwards, taking the opportunity of a

little languor in the game, ‘I have never told you what happened to me yesterday

in my ride home.’ They had been hunting together, and were in the midst of a

good run, and at some distance from Mansfield, when, his horse being found to

have flung a shoe, Henry Crawford had been obliged to give up and make the

best of his way back. ‘I told you I lost my way after passing that old farmhouse

with the yew trees, because I can never bear to ask; but I have not told you that,

with my usual luck—for I never do wrong without gaining by it—I found myself

in due time in the very place which I had a curiosity to see. I was suddenly, upon

turning the comer of a steepish downy field, in the midst of a retired little village

between gently-rising hills; a small stream before me to be forded, a church

standing on a sort of knoll to my right,—which church was strikingly large and

handsome for the place,—and not a gentleman or half a gentleman’s house to be

seen, excepting one—to be presumed the Parsonage—within a stone’s throw of

the said knoll and church. I found myself, in short, in Thornton Lacey.’

‘It sounds like it,’ said Edmund; ‘but which way did you turn after passing

Sewell’s farm?’

‘I answer no such irrelevant and insidious questions; though were I to answer

all that you could put in the course of an hour, you would never be able to prove

that it was *not* Thornton Lacey—for such it certainly was.’

‘You inquired, then?’

‘No, I never inquire. But I *told* a man mending a hedge that it was Thornton

Lacey, and he agreed to it.’

‘You have a good memory. I had forgotten having ever told you half so much

of the place.’

Thornton Lacey was the name of his impending living, as Miss Crawford well

knew; and her interest in a negotiation for William Price’s knave increased.

‘Well,’ continued Edmund, ‘and how did you like what you saw?’

‘Very much indeed. You are a lucky fellow. There will be work for five

summers at least before the place is liveable.’

‘No, no, not so bad as that. The farmyard must be moved, I grant you; but I

am not aware of anything else. The house is by no means bad, and when the yard

is removed, there may be a very tolerable approach to it.’

‘The farmyard must be cleared away entirely, and planted up to shut out the

blacksmith’s shop. The house must be turned to front the east instead of the

north—the entrance and principal rooms, I mean, must be on that side, where the

view is really very pretty; I am sure it may be done. And *there* must be your

approach—through what is at present the garden. You must make a new garden

at what is now the back of the house; which will be giving it the best aspect in

the world— sloping to the south-east. The ground seems precisely formed for it.

I rode fifty yards up the lane between the church and the house in order to look

about me, and saw how it might all be. Nothing can be easier. The meadows

beyond what *will be* the garden, as well as what now is, sweeping round from

the lane I stood in to the north-east, that is, to the principal road through the

village, must be all laid together of course; very pretty meadows they are, finely

sprinkled with timber. They belong to the living, I suppose. If not, you must

purchase them. Then the stream—something must be done with the stream; but I

could not quite determine what. I had two or three ideas.’

‘And I have two or three ideas also,’ said Edmund, ‘and one of them is, that

very little of your plan for Thornton Lacey will ever be put in practice. I must be

satisfied with rather less ornament and beauty. I think the house and premises

may be made comfortable and given the air of a gentleman’s residence without

any very heavy expense, and that must suffice me; and I hope may suffice all

who care about me.’

Miss Crawford, a little suspicious and resentful of a certain tone of voice and

a certain half-look attending the last expression of his hope, made a hasty finish

of her dealings with William Price; and securing his knave at an exorbitant rate,

exclaimed, ‘There, I will stake my last like a woman of spirit. No cold prudence

for me. I am not born to sit still and do nothing. If I lose the game, it shall not be

from not striving for it.’

The game was hers, and only did not pay her for what she had given to secure

it. Another deal proceeded, and Crawford began again about Thornton Lacey.

‘My plan may not be the best possible; I had not many minutes to form it in:

but you must do a good deal. The place deserves it, and you will find yourself

not satisfied with much less than it is capable of. (Excuse me, your Ladyship

must not see your cards. There, let them lie just before you.) The place deserves

it, Bertram. You talk of giving it the air of a gentleman’s residence. *That* will be

done by the removal of the farmyard; for, independent of that terrible nuisance, I

never saw a house of the kind which had in itself so much the air of a

gentleman’s residence, so much the look of a something above a mere parsonage

house—above the expenditure of a few hundreds a year. It is not a scrambling

collection of low single rooms, with as many roofs as windows—it is not

cramped into the vulgar compactness of a square farmhouse—it is a solid,

roomy, mansion-like looking house, such as one might suppose a respectable old

country family had lived in from generation to generation through two centuries

at least, and were now spending from two to three thousand a year in.’ Miss

Crawford listened, and Edmund agreed to this. ‘The air of a gentleman’s

residence, therefore, you cannot but give it, if you do anything. But it is capable

of much more. (Let me see, Mary; Lady Bertram bids a dozen for that queen; no,

no, a dozen is more than it is worth. Lady Bertram does *not* bid a dozen. She will

have nothing to say to it. Go on, go on.) By some such improvements as I have

suggested (I do not really require you to proceed upon my plan, though, by the

bye, I doubt anybody’s striking out a better) you may give it a higher character.

You may raise it into a *place.* From being the mere gentleman’s residence, it

becomes, by judicious improvement, the residence of a man of education, taste,

modern manners, good connections. All this may be stamped on it, and that

house receive such an air as to make its owner be set down as the great landholder of the parish by every creature travelling the road, especially as there is no real squire’s house to dispute the point—a circumstance, between ourselves, to enhance the value of such a situation in point of privilege and independence beyond all calculation. *You* think with me, I hope’ (turning with a softened voice to Fanny). ’Have you ever seen the place?’

Fanny gave a quick negative, and tried to hide her interest in the subject by an

eager attention to her brother, who was driving as hard a bargain, and imposing

on her as much as he could; but Crawford pursued with ‘No, no, you must not

part with the queen. You have bought her too dearly, and your brother does not

offer half her value. No, no, sir, hands off—hands off. Your sister does not part

with the queen. She is quite determined. The game will be yours,’ turning to her

again, ‘it will certainly be yours.’

‘And Fanny had much rather it were William’s,’ said Edmund, smiling at her.

‘Poor Fanny! not allowed to cheat herself as she wishes!’

‘Mr. Bertram,’ said Miss Crawford, a few minutes afterwards, ‘you know

Henry to be such a capital improver, that you cannot possibly engage in anything

of the sort at Thornton Lacey without accepting his help. Only think how useful

he was at Sotherton! Only think what grand things were produced there by our

all going with him one hot day in August to drive about the grounds, and see his

genius take fire. There we went, and there we came home again; and what was

done there is not to be told!’

Fanny’s eyes were turned on Crawford for a moment with an expression more

than grave, even reproachful; but on catching his were instantly withdrawn. With

something of consciousness he shook his head at his sister, and laughingly

replied, ‘I cannot say there was much done at Sotherton; but it was a hot day, and

we were all walking after each other and bewildered.’ As soon as a general buzz

gave him shelter, he added, in a low voice directed solely at Fanny, ‘I should be

sorry to have my powers of *planning* judged of by the day at Sotherton. I see

things very differently now. Do not think of me as I appeared then.’

Sotherton was a word to catch Mrs. Norris, and being just then in the happy

leisure which followed securing the odd trick by Sir Thomas’s capital play and

her own against Dr. and Mrs. Grant’s great hands, she called out in high good humour,

‘Sotherton! Yes, that is a place indeed, and we had a charming day

there. William, you are quite out of luck; but the next time you come I hope dear

Mr. and Mrs. Rushworth will be at home, and I am sure I can answer for your

being kindly received by both. Your cousins are not of a sort to forget their

relations, and Mr. Rushworth is a most amiable man. They are at Brighton now,

you know—in one of the best houses there, as Mr. Rushworth’s fine fortune

gives them a right to be. I do not exactly know the distance, but when you get

back to Portsmouth, if it is not very far off, you ought to go over and pay your

respects to them; and I could send a little parcel by you that I want to get

conveyed to your cousins.’

‘I should be very happy, aunt—but Brighton is almost by Beachy Head; and if

I could get so far, I could not expect to be welcome in such a smart place as that

—poor scrubby midshipman as I am.’

Mrs. Norris was beginning an eager assurance of the affability he might

depend on, when she was stopped by Sir Thomas’s saying with authority, ‘I do

not advise your going to Brighton, William, as I trust you may soon have more

convenient opportunities of meeting; but my daughters would be happy to see

their cousins anywhere, and you will find Mr. Rushworth most sincerely

disposed to regard all the connections of our family as his own.’

‘I would rather find him private secretary to the First Lord than anything else,’

was William’s only answer, in an under voice, not meant to reach far, and the

subject dropped.

As yet Sir Thomas had seen nothing to remark in Mr. Crawford’s behaviour;

but when the whist table broke up at the end of the second rubber, and, leaving

Dr. Grant and Mrs. Norris to dispute over their last play, he became a looker-on

at the other, he found his niece the object of attentions, or rather of professions,

of a somewhat pointed character.

Henry Crawford was in the first glow of another scheme about Thornton

Lacey; and, not being able to catch Edmund’s ear, was detailing it to his fair

neighbour with a look of considerable earnestness. His scheme was to rent the

house himself the following winter, that he might have a home of his own in that

neighbourhood; and it was not merely for the use of it in the hunting season (as

he was then telling her), though *that* consideration had certainly some weight,

feeling as he did that, in spite of all Dr. Grant’s very great kindness, it was

impossible for him and his horses to be accommodated where they now were

without material inconvenience; but his attachment to that neighbourhood did

not depend upon one amusement or one season of the year: he had set his heart

upon having a something there that he could come to at any time, a little

homestall at his command where all the holidays of his year might be spent, and

he might find himself continuing, improving, and *perfecting* that friendship and

intimacy with the Mansfield Park family which was increasing in value to him

every day. Sir Thomas heard and was not offended. There was no want of

respect in the young man’s address; and Fanny’s reception of it was so proper

and modest—so calm and uninviting—that he had nothing to censure in her. She

said little, assented only here and there, and betrayed no inclination either of

appropriating any part of the compliment to herself or of strengthening his views

in favour of Northamptonshire. Finding by whom he was observed, Henry

Crawford addressed himself on the same subject to Sir Thomas, in a more

everyday tone, but still with feeling.

‘I want to be your neighbour, Sir Thomas, as you have perhaps heard me

telling Miss Price. May I hope for your acquiescence, and for your not

influencing your son against such a tenant?’

Sir Thomas, politely bowing, replied, ‘It is the only way, sir, in which I could

*not* wish you established as a permanent neighbour; but I hope, and believe, that

Edmund will occupy his own house at Thornton Lacey. Edmund, am I saying too

much?’

Edmund, on this appeal, had first to hear what was going on; but, on

understanding the question, was at no loss for an answer.

‘Certainly, sir, I have no idea but of residence. But, Craw ford, though I refuse

you as a tenant, come to me as a friend. Consider the house as half your own

every winter, and we will add to the stables on your own improved plan, and

with all the improvements of your improved plan that may occur to you this

spring.’

‘We shall be the losers,’ continued Sir Thomas. ‘His going, though only eight

miles, will be an unwelcome contraction of our family circle; but I should have

been deeply mortified if any son of mine could reconcile himself to doing less. It

is perfectly natural that you should not have thought much on the subject, Mr.

Crawford. But a parish has wants and claims which can be known only by a

clergyman constantly resident, and which no proxy can be capable of satisfying

to the same extent. Edmund might, in the common phrase, do the duty of

Thornton, that is, he might read prayers and preach, without giving up Mansfield

Park; he might ride over every Sunday to a house nominally inhabited, and go

through divine service; he might be the clergyman of Thornton Lacey every

seventh day, for three or four hours, if that would content him. But it will not. He

knows that human nature needs more lessons than a weekly sermon can convey;

and that if he does not live among his parishioners, and prove himself by

constant attention their well-wisher and friend, he does very little either for their

good or his own.’

Mr. Crawford bowed his acquiescence.

‘I repeat again,’ added Sir Thomas, ‘that Thornton Lacey is the only house in

the neighbourhood in which I should *not* be happy to wait on Mr. Crawford as

occupier.’

Mr. Crawford bowed his thanks.

‘Sir Thomas,’ said Edmund, ‘undoubtedly understands the duty of a parish

priest. We must hope his son may prove that *he* knows it too.’

Whatever effect Sir Thomas’s little harangue might really produce on Mr.

Crawford, it raised some awkward sensations in two of the others,—two of his

most attentive listeners, Miss Crawford and Fanny,—one of whom, having never

before understood that Thornton was so soon and so completely to be his home,

was pondering with downcast eyes on what it would be *not* to see Edmund every

day; and the other, startled from the agreeable fancies she had been previously

indulging on the strength of her brother’s description,—no longer able, in the

picture she had been forming of a future Thornton, to shut out the church, sink

the clergyman, and see only the respectable, elegant, modernised, and occasional

residence of a man of independent fortune,—was considering Sir Thomas, with

decided ill-will, as the destroyer of all this, and suffering the more from that

involuntary forbearance which his character and manner commanded, and from

not daring to relieve herself by a single attempt at throwing ridicule on his cause.

All the agreeable of *her* speculation was over for that hour. It was time to have

done with cards if sermons prevailed; and she was glad to find it necessary to

come to a conclusion and be able to refresh her spirits by a change of place and

neighbour.

The chief of the party were now collected irregularly round the fire, and

waiting the final break-up. William and Fanny were the most detached. They

remained together at the otherwise deserted card-table, talking very comfortably,

and not thinking of the rest, till some of the rest began to think of them. Henry

Crawford’s chair was the first to be given a direction towards them, and he sat

silently observing them for a few minutes; himself, in the meanwhile, observed

by Sir Thomas, who was standing in chat with Dr. Grant.

‘This is the assembly night,’ said William. ‘If I were at Portsmouth, I should

be at it perhaps.’

‘But you do not wish yourself at Portsmouth, William?’

‘No, Fanny, that I do not. I shall have enough of Portsmouth, and of dancing

too, when I cannot have you. And I do not know that there would be any good in

going to the assembly, for I might not get a partner. The Portsmouth girls turn up

their noses at anybody who has not a commission. One might as well be nothing

as a midshipman. One is nothing, indeed. You remember the Gregorys; they are

grown up amazing fine girls, but they will hardly speak to *me,* because Lucy is

courted by a lieutenant.’

‘Oh, shame, shame! But never mind it, William (her own cheeks in a glow of

indignation as she spoke). It is not worth minding. It is no reflection on *you;* it is

no more than what the greatest admirals have all experienced, more or less, in

their time. You must think of that; you must try to make up your mind to it as

one of the hardships which fall to every sailor’s share—like bad weather and

hard living—only with this advantage, that there will be an end to it, that there

will come a time when you will have nothing of that sort to endure. When you

are a lieutenant!—only think, William, when you are a lieutenant, how little you

will care for any nonsense of this kind.’

‘I begin to think I shall never be a lieutenant, Fanny. Everybody gets made but

me.’

‘Oh, my dear William, do not talk so, do not be so desponding. My uncle says

nothing, but I am sure he will do everything in his power to get you made. He

knows, as well as you do, of what consequence it is.’

She was checked by the sight of her uncle much nearer to them than she had

any suspicion of, and each found it necessary to talk of something else.

‘Are you fond of dancing, Fanny?’

‘Yes, very; only I am soon tired.’

‘I should like to go to a ball with you and see you dance. Have you never any

balls at Northampton? I should like to see you dance, and I’d dance with you if

you *would,* for nobody would know who I was here, and I should like to be your

partner once more. We used to jump about together many a time, did not we?

when the hand-organ was in the street? I am a pretty good dancer in my way, but

I dare say you are a better.’ And turning to his uncle, who was now close to

them, ‘Is not Fanny a very good dancer, sir?’

Fanny, in dismay at such an unprecedented question, did not know which way

to look, or how to be prepared for the answer. Some very grave reproof, or at

least the coldest expression of indifference, must be coming to distress her

brother, and sink her to the ground. But, on the contrary, it was no worse than ‘I

am sorry to say that I am unable to answer your question. I have never seen

Fanny dance since she was a little girl; but I trust we shall both think she acquits

herself like a gentlewoman when we do see her, which perhaps we may have an

opportunity of doing ere long.’

‘I have had the pleasure of seeing your sister dance, Mr. Price,’ said Henry

Crawford, leaning forward, ‘and will engage to answer every inquiry which you

can make on the subject, to your entire satisfaction. But I believe (seeing Fanny

looked distressed) it must be at some other time. There is *one* person in company

who does not like to have Miss Price spoken of.’

True enough, he had once seen Fanny dance; and it was equally true that he

would now have answered for her gliding about with quiet, light elegance, and in

admirable time: but in fact he could not for the life of him recall what her

dancing had been, and rather took it for granted that she had been present than

remembered anything about her.

He passed, however, for an admirer of her dancing; and Sir Thomas, by no

means displeased, prolonged the conversation on dancing in general, and was so

well engaged in describing the balls of Antigua, and listening to what his

nephew could relate of the different modes of dancing which had fallen within

his observation, that he had not heard his carriage announced, and was first

called to the knowledge of it by the bustle of Mrs. Norris.

‘Come, Fanny, Fanny, what are you about? We are going. Do not you see your

aunt is going? Quick, quick. I cannot bear to keep good old Wilcox waiting. You

should always remember the coachman and horses. My dear Sir Thomas, we

have settled it that the carriage should come back for you, and Edmund and

William.’

Sir Thomas could not dissent, as it had been his own arrangement, previously

communicated to his wife and sister; but *that* seemed forgotten by Mrs. Norris,

who must fancy that she settled it all herself.

Fanny’s last feeling in the visit was disappointment—for the shawl which

Edmund was quietly taking from the servant to bring and put round her

shoulders was seized by Mr. Crawford’s quicker hand, and she was obliged to be

indebted to his more prominent attention.

**CHAPTER XXVI**

**W**illiam’s desire of seeing Fanny dance made more than a momentary

impression on his uncle. The hope of an opportunity, which Sir Thomas had then

given, was not given to be thought of no more. He remained steadily inclined to

gratify so amiable a feeling—to gratify anybody else who might wish to see

Fanny dance, and to give pleasure to the young people in general; and having

thought the matter over, and taken his resolution in quiet independence, the

result of it appeared the next morning at breakfast, when, after recalling and

commending what his nephew had said, he added, ‘I do not like, William, that

you should leave Northamptonshire without this indulgence. It would give me

pleasure to see you both dance. You spoke of the balls at Northampton. Your

cousins have occasionally attended them; but they would not altogether suit us

now. The fatigue would be too much for your aunt. I believe we must not think

of a Northampton ball. A dance at home would be more eligible; and if——’

‘Ah, my dear Sir Thomas,’ interrupted Mrs. Norris, ‘I knew what was coming.

I knew what you were going to say. If dear Julia were at home, or dearest Mrs.

Rushworth at Sotherton, to afford a reason, an occasion for such a thing, you

would be tempted to give the young people a dance at Mansfield. I know you

would. If they were at home to grace the ball, a ball you would have this very

Christmas. Thank your uncle, William, thank your uncle.’

‘My daughters,’ replied Sir Thomas, gravely interposing, ‘have their pleasures

at Brighton, and I hope are very happy; but the dance which I think of giving at

Mansfield will be for their cousins. Could we be all assembled, our satisfaction

would undoubtedly be more complete, but the absence of some is not to debar

the others of amusement.’

Mrs. Norris had not another word to say. She saw decision in his looks, and

her surprise and vexation required some minutes’ silence to be settled into

composure. A ball at such a time! His daughters absent and herself not

consulted! There was comfort, however, soon at hand. *She* must be the doer of

everything; Lady Bertram would of course be spared all thought and exertion,

and it would all fall upon *her.* She should have to do the honours of the evening;

and this reflection quickly restored so much of her good humour as enabled her

to join in with the others, before their happiness and thanks were all expressed.

Edmund, William, and Fanny did, in their different ways, look and speak as

much grateful pleasure in the promised ball as Sir Thomas could desire.

Edmund’s feelings were for the other two. His father had never conferred a

favour or shown a kindness more to his satisfaction.

Lady Bertram was perfectly quiescent and contented, and had no objections to

make. Sir Thomas engaged for its giving her very little trouble; and she assured

him ‘that she was not at all afraid of the trouble, indeed she could not imagine

there would be any.’

Mrs. Norris was ready with her suggestions as to the rooms he would think

fittest to be used, but found it all prearranged; and when she would have

conjectured and hinted about the day, it appeared that the day was settled too. Sir

Thomas had been amusing himself with shaping a very complete outline of the

business; and as soon as she would listen quietly, could read his list of the

families to be invited, from whom he calculated, with all necessary allowance

for the shortness of the notice, to collect young people enough to form twelve or

fourteen couple; and could detail the considerations which had induced him to

fix on the 22nd as the most eligible day. William was required to be at

Portsmouth on the 24th; the 22nd would therefore be the last day of his visit; but

where the days were so few it would be unwise to fix on any earlier. Mrs. Norris

was obliged to be satisfied with thinking just the same, and with having been on

the point of proposing the 22nd herself, as by far the best day for the purpose.

The ball was now a settled thing, and before the evening a proclaimed thing to

all whom it concerned. Invitations were sent with dispatch, and many a young

lady went to bed that night with her head full of happy cares as well as Fanny. To

her, the cares were sometimes almost beyond the happiness; for, young and

inexperienced, with small means of choice, and no confidence in her own taste—

the ‘how she should be dressed’ was a point of painful solicitude; and the almost

solitary ornament in her possession, a very pretty amber cross which William

had brought her from Sicily, was the greatest distress of all, for she had nothing

but a bit of riband to fasten it to; and though she had worn it in that manner once,

would it be allowable at such a time, in the midst of all the rich ornaments which

she supposed all the other young ladies would appear in? And yet not to wear it!

William had wanted to buy her a gold chain too, but the purchase had been

beyond his means, and therefore not to wear the cross might be mortifying him.

These were anxious considerations; enough to sober her spirits even under the

prospect of a ball given principally for her gratification.

The preparations meanwhile went on, and Lady Bertram continued to sit on

her sofa without any inconvenience from them. She had some extra visits from

the housekeeper, and her maid was rather hurried in making up a new dress for

her: Sir Thomas gave orders, and Mrs. Norris ran about; but all this gave *her* no

trouble, and, as she had foreseen, ‘there was in fact no trouble in the business.’

Edmund was at this time particularly full of cares; his mind being deeply

occupied in the consideration of two important events now at hand, which were

to fix his fate in life—ordination and matrimony—events of such a serious

character as to make the ball, which would be very quickly followed by one of

them, appear of less moment in his eyes than in those of any other person in the

house. On the 23rd he was going to a friend near Peterborough in the same

situation as himself, and they were to receive ordination in the course of

Christmas week. Half his destiny would then be determined—but the other half

might not be so smoothly wooed. His duties would be established, but the wife

who was to share, and animate, and reward those duties might yet be

unattainable. He knew his own mind, but he was not always perfectly assured of

knowing Miss Crawford’s. There were points on which they did not quite agree,

there were moments in which she did not seem propitious; and though trusting

altogether to her affection, so far as to be resolved (almost resolved) on bringing

it to a decision within a very short time, as soon as the variety of business before

him were arranged, and he knew what he had to offer her—he had many anxious

feelings, many doubting hours, as to the result. His conviction of her regard for

him was sometimes very strong; he could look back on a long course of

encouragement, and she was as perfect in disinterested attachment as in

everything else. But at other times doubt and alarm intermingled with his hopes;

and when he thought of her acknowledged disinclination for privacy and

retirement, her decided preference of a London life—what could he expect but a

determined rejection? unless it were an acceptance even more to be deprecated,

demanding such sacrifices of situation and employment on his side as

conscience must forbid.

The issue of all depended on one question. Did she love him well enough to

forego what had used to be essential points—did she love him well enough to

make them no longer essential? And this question, which he was continually

repeating to himself, though oftenest answered with a ‘Yes,’ had sometimes its

‘No.’

Miss Crawford was soon to leave Mansfield, and on this circumstance the ‘no’

and the ‘yes’ had been very recently in alternation. He had seen her eyes sparkle

as she spoke of the dear friend’s letter which claimed a long visit from her in

London, and of the kindness of Henry in engaging to remain where he was till

January that he might convey her thither; he had heard her speak of the pleasure

of such a journey with an animation which had ‘no’ in every tone. But this had

occurred on the first day of its being settled, within the first hour of the burst of

such enjoyment, when nothing but the friends she was to visit was before her. He

had since heard her express herself differently—with other feelings—more

checkered feelings. He had heard her tell Mrs. Grant that she should leave her

with regret; that she began to believe neither the friends nor the pleasures she

was going to were worth those she left behind; and that though she felt she must

go, and knew she should enjoy herself when once away, she was already looking

forward to being at Mansfield again. Was there not a ‘yes’ in all this?

With such matters to ponder over and arrange and rearrange, Edmund could

not, on his own account, think very much of the evening which the rest of the

family were looking forward to with a more equal degree of strong interest.

Independent of his two cousins’ enjoyment in it, the evening was to him of no

higher value than any other appointed meeting of the two families might be. In

every meeting there was a hope of receiving further confirmation of Miss

Crawford’s attachment; but the whirl of a ballroom, perhaps, was not particularly

favourable to the excitement or expression of serious feelings. To engage her

early for the two first dances was all the command of individual happiness which

he felt in his power, and the only preparation for the ball which he could enter

into, in spite of all that was passing around him on the subject from morning till

night.

Thursday was the day of the ball; and on Wednesday morning, Fanny, still

unable to satisfy herself as to what she ought to wear, determined to seek counsel

of the more enlightened, and apply to Mrs. Grant and her sister, whose

acknowledged taste would certainly bear her blameless; and as Edmund and

William were gone to Northampton, and she had reason to think Mr. Crawford

likewise out, she walked down to the Parsonage without much fear of wanting an

opportunity for private discussion; and the privacy of such a discussion was a

most important part of it to Fanny, being more than half ashamed of her own

solicitude.

She met Miss Crawford within a few yards of the Parsonage, just setting out

to call on her; and, as it seemed to her that her friend, though obliged to insist on

turning back, was unwilling to lose her walk, she explained her business at once,

and observed, that if she would be so kind as to give her opinion, it might be all

talked over as well without doors as within. Miss Crawford appeared gratified by

the application, and after a moment’s thought urged Fanny’s returning with her

in a much more cordial manner than before, and proposed their going up into her

room, where they might have a comfortable *coze,* without disturbing Dr. and

Mrs. Grant, who were together in the drawing-room. It was just the plan to suit

Fanny; and with a great deal of gratitude on her side for such ready and kind

attention, they proceeded indoors and upstairs, and were soon deep in the

interesting subject. Miss Crawford, pleased by the appeal, gave her all her best

judgment and taste, made everything easy by her suggestions, and tried to make

everything agreeable by her encouragement. The dress being settled in all its

grander parts,—‘But what shall you have by way of necklace?’ said Miss

Crawford. ‘Shall not you wear your brother’s cross?’ And as she spoke she was

undoing a small parcel which Fanny had observed in her hand when they met.

Fanny acknowledged her wishes and doubts on this point; she did not know how

either to wear the cross, or to refrain from wearing it. She was answered by

having a small trinket-box placed before her, and being requested to choose from

among several gold chains and necklaces. Such had been the parcel with which

Miss Crawford was provided, and such the object of her intended visit; and in

the kindest manner she now urged Fanny’s taking one for the cross and to keep

for her sake, saying everything she could think of to obviate the scruples which

were making Fanny start back at first with a look of horror at the proposal.

‘You see what a collection I have,’ said she: ‘more by half than I ever use or

think of. I do not offer them as new. I offer nothing but an old necklace. You

must forgive the liberty, and oblige me.’

Fanny still resisted, and from her heart. The gift was too valuable. But Miss

Crawford persevered, and argued the case with so much affectionate earnestness

through all the heads of William and the cross, and the ball, and herself, as to be

finally successful. Fanny found herself obliged to yield, that she might not be

accused of pride or indifference, or some other littleness: and having with

modest reluctance given her consent, proceeded to make the selection. She

looked and looked, longing to know which might be least valuable; and was

determined in her choice at last by fancying there was one necklace more

frequently placed before her eyes than the rest. It was of gold, prettily worked;

and though Fanny would have preferred a longer and a plainer chain as more

adapted for her purpose, she hoped, in fixing on this, to be choosing what Miss

Crawford least wished to keep. Miss Crawford smiled her perfect approbation,

and hastened to complete the gift by putting the necklace round her, and making

her see how well it looked. Fanny had not a word to say against its

becomingness, and, excepting what remained of her scruples, was exceedingly

pleased with an acquisition so very apropos. She would rather perhaps have been

obliged to some other person; but this was an unworthy feeling. Miss Crawford

had anticipated her wants with a kindness which proved her a real friend. ‘When

I wear this necklace I shall always think of you,’ said she, ‘and feel how very

kind you were.’

‘You must think of somebody else too when you wear that necklace,’ replied

Miss Crawford. ‘You must think of Henry, for it was his choice in the first place.

He gave it to me, and with the necklace I make over to you all the duty of

remembering the original giver. It is to be a family remembrancer. The sister is

not to be in your mind without bringing the brother too.’

Fanny, in great astonishment and confusion, would have returned the present

instantly. To take what had been the gift of another person—of a brother too,—

impossible!—it must not be!—and with an eagerness and embarrassment quite

diverting to her companion, she laid down the necklace again on its cotton, and

seemed resolved either to take another or none at all. Miss Crawford thought she

had never seen a prettier consciousness. ‘My dear child,’ said she, laughing,

‘what are you afraid of? Do you think Henry will claim the necklace as mine,

and fancy you did not come honestly by it?—or are you imagining he would be

too much flattered by seeing round your lovely throat an ornament which his

money purchased three years ago, before he knew there was such a throat in the

world?—or perhaps—looking archly—you suspect a confederacy between us,

and that what I am now doing is with his knowledge and at his desire?’

With the deepest blushes Fanny protested against such a thought.

‘Well, then,’ replied Miss Crawford more seriously, but without at all

believing her, ‘to convince me that you suspect no trick, and are as unsuspicious

of compliment as I have always found you, take the necklace, and say no more

about it. Its being a gift of my brother’s need not make the smallest difference in

your accepting it, as I assure you it makes none in my willingness to part with it.

He is always giving me something or other. I have such innumerable presents

from him that it is quite impossible for me to value, or for him to remember,

half. And as for this necklace, I do not suppose I have worn it six times: it is very

pretty—but I never think of it; and though you would be most heartily welcome

to any other in my trinket-box, you have happened to fix on the very one which,

if I have a choice, I would rather part with and see in your possession than any

other. Say no more against it, I entreat you. Such a trifle is not worth half so

many words.’

Fanny dared not make any further opposition; and with renewed but less

happy thanks accepted the necklace again, for there was an expression in Miss

Crawford’s eyes which she could not be satisfied with.

It was impossible for her to be insensible of Mr. Crawford’s change of

manners. She had long seen it. He evidently tried to please her—he was gallant

—he was attentive—he was something like what he had been to her cousins: he

wanted, she supposed, to cheat her of her tranquillity as he had cheated them;

and whether he might not have some concern in this necklace! She could not be

convinced that he had not, for Miss Crawford, complaisant as a sister, was

careless as a woman and a friend.

Reflecting and doubting, and feeling that the possession of what she had so

much wished for did not bring much satisfaction, she now walked home again—

with a change rather than a diminution of cares since her treading that path

before.

**CHAPTER XXVII**

**O**n reaching home, Fanny went immediately upstairs to deposit this unexpected

acquisition, this doubtful good of a necklace, in some favourite box in the east

room which held all her smaller treasures; but on opening the door, what was her

surprise to find her cousin Edmund there writing at the table! Such a sight

having never occurred before, was almost as wonderful as it was welcome.

‘Fanny,’ said he directly, leaving his seat and his pen, and meeting her with

something in his hand, ‘I beg your pardon for being here. I came to look for you,

and after waiting a little while in hope of your coming in was making use of your

ink-stand to explain my errand. You will find the beginning of a note to yourself;

but I can now speak my business, which is merely to beg your acceptance of this

little trifle—a chain for William’s cross. You ought to have had it a week ago,

but there has been a delay from my brother’s not being in town by several days

so soon as I expected; and I have only just now received it at Northampton. I

hope you will like the chain itself, Fanny. I endeavoured to consult the simplicity

of your taste; but at any rate I know you will be kind to my intentions, and

consider it, as it really is, a token of the love of one of your oldest friends.’

And so saying, he was hurrying away, before Fanny, overpowered by a

thousand feelings of pain and pleasure, could attempt to speak; but quickened by

one sovereign wish she then called out, ‘Oh, cousin, stop a moment, pray stop!’

He turned back.

‘I cannot attempt to thank you,’ she continued, in a very agitated manner,

‘thanks are out of the question. I feel much more than I can possibly express.

Your goodness in thinking of me in such a way is beyond——’

‘If this is all you have to say, Fanny——’ smiling and turning away again.

‘No, no, it is not. I want to consult you.’

Almost unconsciously she had now undone the parcel he had just put into her

hand, and seeing before her, in all the niceness of jewellers’ packing, a plain gold

chain perfectly simple and neat, she could not help bursting forth again,—‘Oh,

this is beautiful indeed! this is the very thing, precisely what I wished for! this is

the only ornament I have ever had a desire to possess. It will exactly suit my

cross. They must and shall be worn together. It comes, too, in such an acceptable

moment. Oh, cousin, you do not know how acceptable it is.’

‘My dear Fanny, you feel these things a great deal too much. I am most happy

that you like the chain, and that it should be here in time for to-morrow; but your

thanks are far beyond the occasion. Believe me, I have no pleasure in the world

superior to that of contributing to yours. No, I can safely say I have no pleasure

so complete, so unalloyed. It is without a drawback.’

Upon such expressions of affection Fanny could have lived an hour without

saying another word; but Edmund, after waiting a moment, obliged her to bring

down her mind from its heavenly flight by saying, ‘But what is it that you want

to consult me about?’

It was about the necklace, which she was now most earnestly longing to

return, and hoped to obtain his approbation of her doing. She gave the history of

her recent visit, and now her raptures might well be over; for Edmund was so

struck with the circumstance, so delighted with what Miss Crawford had done,

so gratified by such a coincidence of conduct between them, that Fanny could

not but admit the superior power of *one* pleasure over his own mind, though it

might have its drawback. It was some time before she could get his attention to

her plan, or any answer to her demand of his opinion: he was in a reverie of fond

reflection, uttering only now and then a few half-sentences of praise; but when

he did awake and understand, he was very decided in opposing what she wished.

‘Return the necklace! No, my dear Fanny, upon no account. It would be

mortifying her severely. There can hardly be a more unpleasant sensation than

the having anything returned on our hands which we have given with a

reasonable hope of its contributing to the comfort of a friend. Why should she

lose a pleasure which she has shown herself so deserving of?’

‘If it had been given to me in the first instance,’ said Fanny, ‘I should not have

thought of returning it; but being her brother’s present, is not it fair to suppose

that she would rather not part with it, when it is not wanted?’

‘She must not suppose it not wanted, not acceptable at least; and its having

been originally her brother’s gift makes no difference, for as she was not

prevented from offering, nor you from taking, it on that account, it ought not to

affect your keeping it. No doubt it is handsomer than mine, and fitter for a ballroom.’

‘No, it is not handsomer, not at all handsomer in its way, and for my purpose

not half so fit. The chain will agree with William’s cross beyond all comparison

better than the necklace.’

‘For one night, Fanny, for only one night, if it *be* a sacrifice—I am sure you

will, upon consideration, make that sacrifice rather than give pain to one who

has been so studious of your comfort. Miss Crawford’s attentions to you have

been—not more than you were justly entitled to—I am the last person to think

that *could be—*but they have been invariable; and to be returning them with what

must have something the *air* of ingratitude, though I know it could never have

the *meaning,* is not in your nature, I am sure. Wear the necklace, as you are

engaged to do to-morrow evening, and let the chain, which was not ordered with

any reference to the ball, be kept for commoner occasions. This is my advice. I

would not have the shadow of a coolness between the two whose intimacy I have

been observing with the greatest pleasure, and in whose characters there is so

much general resemblance in true generosity and natural delicacy as to make the

few slight differences, resulting principally from situation, no reasonable

hindrance to a perfect friendship. I would not have the shadow of a coolness

arise,’ he repeated, his voice sinking a little, ‘between the two dearest objects I

have on earth.’

He was gone as he spoke; and Fanny remained to tranquillise herself as she

could. She was one of his two dearest—that must support her. But the other!—

the first! She had never heard him speak so openly before, and though it told her

no more than what she had long perceived, it was a stab; for it told of his own

convictions and views. They were decided. He would marry Miss Crawford. It

was a stab, in spite of every longstanding expectation; and she was obliged to

repeat again and again that she was one of his two dearest, before the words gave

her any sensation. Could she believe Miss Crawford to deserve him, it would be

—oh, how different would it be—how far more tolerable! But he was deceived

in her; he gave her merits which she had not; her faults were what they had ever

been, but he saw them no longer. Till she had shed many tears over this

deception, Fanny could not subdue her agitation; and the dejection which

followed could only be relieved by the influence of fervent prayers for his

happiness.

It was her intention, as she felt it to be her duty, to try to overcome all that was

excessive, all that bordered on selfishness, in her affection for Edmund. To call

or to fancy it a loss, a disappointment, would be a presumption, for which she

had not words strong enough to satisfy her own humility. To think of him as

Miss Crawford might be justified in thinking, would in her be insanity. To her,

he could be nothing under any circumstances—nothing dearer than a friend.

Why did such an idea occur to her even enough to be reprobated and forbidden?

It ought not to have touched on the confines of her imagination. She would

endeavour to be rational, and to deserve the right of judging of Miss Crawford’s

character and the privilege of true solicitude for him by a sound intellect and an

honest heart.

She had all the heroism of principle, and was determined to do her duty; but

having also many of the feelings of youth and nature, let her not be much

wondered at if, after making all these good resolutions on the side of selfgovernment,

she seized the scrap of paper on which Edmund had begun writing

to her, as a treasure beyond all her hopes, and reading with the tenderest emotion

these words, ‘My very dear Fanny, you must do me the favour to accept—’

locked it up with the chain, as the dearest part of the gift. It was the only thing

approaching to a letter which she had ever received from him; she might never

receive another; it was impossible that she ever should receive another so

perfectly gratifying in the occasion and the style. Two lines more prized had

never fallen from the pen of the most distinguished author—never more

completely blessed the researches of the fondest biographer. The enthusiasm of a

woman’s love is even beyond the biographer’s. To her, the handwriting itself,

independent of anything it may convey, is a blessedness. Never were such

characters cut by any other human being as Edmund’s commonest handwriting

gave! This specimen, written in haste as it was, had not a fault; and there was a

felicity in the flow of the first four words, in the arrangement of ‘My very dear

Fanny,’ which she could have looked at for ever.

Having regulated her thoughts and comforted her feelings by this happy

mixture of reason and weakness, she was able in due time to go down and

resume her usual employments near her aunt Bertram, and pay her the usual

observances without any apparent want of spirits.

Thursday, predestined to hope and enjoyment, came, and opened with more

kindness to Fanny than such self-willed, unmanageable days often volunteer; for

soon after breakfast a very friendly note was brought from Mr. Crawford to

William, stating, that as he found himself obliged to go to London on the

morrow for a few days, he could not help trying to procure a companion, and

therefore hoped that if William could make up his mind to leave Mansfield half a

day earlier than had been proposed, he would accept a place in his carriage. Mr.

Crawford meant to be in town by his uncle’s accustomary late dinner-hour, and

William was invited to dine with him at the Admiral’s. The proposal was a very

pleasant one to William himself, who enjoyed the idea of travelling post with

four horses and such a good-humoured, agreeable friend; and in likening it to

going up with despatches, was saying at once everything in favour of its

happiness and dignity which his imagination could suggest: and Fanny, from a

different motive, was exceedingly pleased; for the original plan was that William

should go up by the mail from Northampton the following night, which would

not have allowed him an hour’s rest before he must have got into a Portsmouth

coach; and though this offer of Mr. Crawford’s would rob her of many hours of

his company, she was too happy in having William spared from the fatigue of

such a journey to think of anything else. Sir Thomas approved of it for another

reason. His nephew’s introduction to Admiral Crawford might be of service. The

Admiral, he believed, had interest. Upon the whole, it was a very joyous note.

Fanny’s spirits lived on it half the morning, deriving some accession of pleasure

from its writer being himself to go away.

As for the ball so near at hand, she had too many agitations and fears to have

half the enjoyment in anticipation which she ought to have had, or must have

been supposed to have by the many young ladies looking forward to the same

event in situations more at ease, but under circumstances of less novelty, less

interest, less peculiar gratification than would be attributed to her. Miss Price,

known only by name to half the people invited, was now to make her first

appearance, and must be regarded as the queen of the evening. Who could be

happier than Miss Price? But Miss Price had not been brought up to the trade of

*coming out;* and had she known in what light this ball was, in general,

considered respecting her, it would very much have lessened her comfort by

increasing the fears she already had of doing wrong and being looked at. To

dance without much observation or any extraordinary fatigue, to have strength

and partners for about half the evening, to dance a little with Edmund, and not a

great deal with Mr. Crawford, to see William enjoy himself, and be able to keep

away from her aunt Norris, was the height of her ambition, and seemed to

comprehend her greatest possibility of happiness. As these were the best of her

hopes, they could not always prevail; and in the course of a long morning, spent

principally with her two aunts, she was often under the influence of much less

sanguine views. William, determined to make this last day a day of thorough

enjoyment, was out snipe-shooting; Edmund, she had too much reason to

suppose, was at the Parsonage; and, left alone to bear the worrying of Mrs.

Norris, who was cross because the housekeeper would have her own way with

the supper, and whom *she* could not avoid though the housekeeper might, Fanny

was worn down at last to think everything an evil belonging to the ball, and

when sent off with a parting worry to dress, moved as languidly towards her own

room and felt as incapable of happiness as if she had been allowed no share in it.

As she walked slowly upstairs she thought of yesterday; it had been about the

same hour that she had returned from the Parsonage, and found Edmund in the

east room. ‘Suppose I were to find him there again to-day!’ said she to herself, in

a fond indulgence of fancy.

‘Fanny,’ said a voice at that moment near her. Starting and looking up, she saw

across the lobby she had just reached Edmund himself, standing at the head of a

different staircase. He came towards her. ‘You look tired and fagged, Fanny. You

have been walking too far.’

‘No, I have not been out at all.’

‘Then you have had fatigues within doors, which are worse. You had better

have gone out.’

Fanny, not liking to complain, found it easiest to make no answer; and though

he looked at her with his usual kindness, she believed he had soon ceased to

think of her countenance. He did not appear in spirits; something unconnected

with her was probably amiss. They proceeded upstairs together, their rooms

being on the same floor above.

‘I come from Dr. Grant’s,’ said Edmund presently. ’You may guess my errand

there, Fanny.‘ And he looked so conscious, that Fanny could think but of one

errand, which turned her too sick for speech. ’I wished to engage Miss Crawford

for the two first dances,‘ was the explanation that followed, and brought Fanny

to life again, enabling her, as she found she was expected to speak, to utter

something like an inquiry as to the result.

‘Yes,’ he answered, ‘she is engaged to me; but (with a smile that did not sit

easy) she says it is to be the last time that she ever will dance with me. She is not

serious. I think, I hope, I am sure she is not serious—but I would rather not hear

it. She never has danced with a clergyman, she says, and she never *will.* For my

own sake, I could wish there had been no ball just at—I mean not this very

week, this very day—to-morrow I leave home.’

Fanny struggled for speech, and said, ‘I am very sorry that anything has

occurred to distress you. This ought to be a day of pleasure. My uncle meant it

so.’

‘Oh yes, yes, and it will be a day of pleasure. It will all end right. I am only

vexed for a moment. In fact, it is not that I consider the ball as ill-timed;—what

does it signify? But, Fanny,’ stopping her by taking her hand, and speaking low

and seriously, ‘you know what all this means. You see how it is; and could tell

me, perhaps better than I could tell you, how and why I am vexed. Let me talk to

you a little. You are a kind, kind listener. I have been pained by her manner this

morning, and cannot get the better of it. I know her disposition to be as sweet

and faultless as your own, but the influence of her former companions makes her

seem, gives to her conversation, to her professed opinions, sometimes a tinge of

wrong. She does not *think* evil, but she speaks it—speaks it in playfulness—and

though I know it to be playfulness, it grieves me to the soul.’

‘The effect of education,’ said Fanny gently.

Edmund could not but agree to it. ‘Yes, that uncle and aunt! They have injured

the finest mind! for sometimes, Fanny, I own to you, it does appear more than

manner; it appears as if the mind itself was tainted.’

Fanny imagined this to be an appeal to her judgment, and therefore, after a

moment’s consideration, said, ‘If you only want me as a listener, cousin, I will be

as useful as I can; but I am not qualified for an adviser. Do not ask advice of *me.*

I am not competent.’

‘You are right, Fanny, to protest against such an office, but you need not be

afraid. It is a subject on which I should never ask advice; it is the sort of subject

on which it had better never be asked; and few, I imagine, do ask it, but when

they want to be influenced against their conscience. I only want to talk to you.’

‘One thing more. Excuse the liberty—but take care *how* you talk to me. Do

not tell me anything now which hereafter you may be sorry for. The time may

come——’

The colour rushed into her cheeks as she spoke.

‘Dearest Fanny!’ cried Edmund, pressing her hand to his lips, with almost as

much warmth as if it had been Miss Crawford‘s, ’you are all considerate

thought! but it is unnecessary here. The time will never come. No such time as

you allude to will ever come. I begin to think it most improbable; the chances

grow less and less: and even if it should—there will be nothing to be

remembered by either you or me that we need be afraid of, for I can never be

ashamed of my own scruples; and if they are removed, it must be by changes

that will only raise her character the more by the recollection of the faults she

once had. You are the only being upon earth to whom I should say what I have

said; but you have always known my opinion of her; you can bear me witness,

Fanny, that I have never been blinded. How many a time have we talked over her

little errors! You need not fear me; I have almost given up every serious idea of

her; but I must be a blockhead indeed if, whatever befell me, I could think of

your kindness and sympathy without the sincerest gratitude.’

He had said enough to shake the experience of eighteen. He had said enough

to give Fanny some happier feelings than she had lately known, and, with a

brighter look, she answered, ‘Yes, cousin, I am convinced that *you* would be

incapable of anything else, though perhaps some might not. I cannot be afraid of

hearing anything you wish to say. Do not check yourself. Tell me whatever you

like.’

They were now on the second floor, and the appearance of a housemaid

prevented any further conversation. For Fanny’s present comfort it was

concluded, perhaps, at the happiest moment: had he been able to talk another

five minutes, there is no saying that he might not have talked away all Miss

Crawford’s faults and his own despondence. But as it was, they parted with

looks on his side of grateful affection, and with some very precious sensations

on hers. She had felt nothing like it for hours. Since the first joy from Mr.

Crawford’s note to William had worn away, she had been in a state absolutely

the reverse; there had been no comfort around, no hope within her. Now,

everything was smiling. William’s good fortune returned again upon her mind,

and seemed of greater value than at first. The ball, too—such an evening of

pleasure before her! It was now a real animation; and she began to dress for it

with much of the happy flutter which belongs to a ball. All went well—she did

not dislike her own looks; and when she came to the necklaces again her good

fortune seemed complete, for upon trial the one given her by Miss Crawford

would by no means go through the ring of the cross. She had, to oblige Edmund,

resolved to wear it; but it was too large for the purpose. His, therefore, must be

worn; and having, with delightful feelings, joined the chain and the cross, those

memorials of the two most beloved of her heart, those dearest tokens so formed

for each other by everything real and imaginary—and put them round her neck,

and seen and felt how full of William and Edmund they were, she was able,

without an effort, to resolve on wearing Miss Crawford’s necklace too. She

acknowledged it to be right. Miss Crawford had a claim; and when it was no

longer to encroach on, to interfere with, the stronger claims, the truer kindness of

another, she could do her justice even with pleasure to herself. The necklace

really looked very well: and Fanny left her room at last, comfortably satisfied

with herself and all about her. Her aunt Bertram had recollected her on this occasion, with an unusual degree of wakefulness. It had really occurred to her, unprompted, that Fanny, preparing for a ball, might be glad of better help than the upper housemaid’s, and, when dressed herself, she actually sent her own maid to assist her; too late, of course, to be of any use. Mrs. Chapman had just reached the attic floor, when Miss Price came out of her room completely dressed, and only civilities were necessary; but Fanny felt her aunt’s attention almost as much as Lady Bertram or Mrs. Chapman could do themselves.

**CHAPTER XXVIII**

**H**er uncle and both her aunts were in the drawing-room when Fanny went down.

To the former she was an interesting object, and he saw with pleasure the general

elegance of her appearance, and her being in remarkably good looks. The

neatness and propriety of her dress was all that he would allow himself to

commend in her presence, but upon her leaving the room again soon afterwards,

he spoke of her beauty with very decided praise.

‘Yes,’ said Lady Bertram, ‘she looks very well. I sent Chapman to her.’

‘Look well! Oh yes,’ cried Mrs. Norris, ‘she has good reason to look well with

all her advantages; brought up in this family as she has been, with all the benefit

of her cousins’ manners before her. Only think, my dear Sir Thomas, what

extraordinary advantages you and I have been the means of giving her. The very

gown you have been taking notice of is your own generous present to her when

dear Mrs. Rushworth married. What would she have been if we had not taken

her by the hand?’

Sir Thomas said no more; but when they sat down to table the eyes of the two

young men assured him that the subject might be gently touched again when the

ladies withdrew, with more success. Fanny saw that she was approved; and the

consciousness of looking well made her look still better. From a variety of

causes she was happy, and she was soon made still happier; for in following her

aunts out of the room, Edmund, who was holding open the door, said, as she

passed him, ‘You must dance with me, Fanny; you must keep two dances for me;

any two that you like, except the first.’ She had nothing more to wish for. She

had hardly ever been in a state so nearly approaching high spirits in her life. Her

cousins’ former gaiety on the day of a ball was no longer surprising to her; she

felt it to be indeed very charming, and was actually practising her steps about the

drawing-room as long as she could be safe from the notice of her aunt Norris,

who was entirely taken up at first in fresh arranging and injuring the noble fire

which the butler had prepared.

Half an hour followed that would have been at least languid under any other

circumstances, but Fanny’s happiness still prevailed. It was but to think of her

conversation with Edmund; and what was the restlessness of Mrs. Norris? What

were the yawns of Lady Bertram?

The gentlemen joined them; and soon after began the sweet expectation of a

carriage, when a general spirit of ease and enjoyment seemed diffused, and they

all stood about and talked and laughed, and every moment had its pleasure and

its hope. Fanny felt that there must be a struggle in Edmund’s cheerfulness, but it

was delightful to see the effort so successfully made.

When the carriages were really heard, when the guests began really to

assemble, her own gaiety of heart was much subdued; the sight of so many

strangers threw her back into herself; and besides the gravity and formality of

the first great circle, which the manners of neither Sir Thomas nor Lady Bertram

were of a kind to do away, she found herself occasionally called on to endure

something worse. She was introduced here and there by her uncle, and forced to

be spoken to, and to curtsy and speak again. This was a hard duty, and she was

never summoned to it without looking at William as he walked about at his ease

in the background of the scene, and longing to be with him.

The entrance of the Grants and Crawfords was a favourable epoch. The

stiffness of the meeting soon gave way before their popular manners and more

diffused intimacies;—little groups were formed, and everybody grew

comfortable. Fanny felt the advantage, and, drawing back from the toils of

civility, would have been again most happy, could she have kept her eyes from

wandering between Edmund and Mary Crawford. *She* looked all loveliness—and

what might not be the end of it? Her own musings were brought to an end on

perceiving Mr. Crawford before her, and her thoughts were put into another

channel by his engaging her almost instantly for the two first dances. Her

happiness on this occasion was very much *à la mortal,* finely checkered. To be

secure of a partner at first was a most essential good—for the moment of

beginning was now growing seriously near; and she so little understood her own

claims as to think that if Mr. Crawford had not asked her she must have been the

last to be sought after, and should have received a partner only through a series

of inquiry, and bustle, and interference, which would have been terrible; but at

the same time there was a pointedness in his manner of asking her which she did

not like, and she saw his eye glancing for a moment at her necklace—with a

smile—she thought there was a smile—which made her blush and feel wretched.

And though there was no second glance to disturb her, though his object seemed

then to be only quietly agreeable, she could not get the better of her

embarrassment, heightened as it was by the idea of his perceiving it, and had no

composure till he turned away to some one else. Then she could gradually rise

up to the genuine satisfaction of having a partner, a voluntary partner, secured

against the dancing began.

When the company were moving into the ballroom she found herself for the

first time near Miss Crawford, whose eyes and smiles were immediately and

more unequivocally directed as her brother’s had been, and who was beginning

to speak on the subject when Fanny, anxious to get the story over, hastened to

give the explanation of the second necklace—the real chain. Miss Crawford

listened, and all her intended compliments and insinuations to Fanny were

forgotten; she felt only one thing, and her eyes, bright as they had been before,

showing they could yet be brighter, she exclaimed with eager pleasure, ‘Did he?

Did Edmund? That was like himself. No other man would have thought of it. I

honour him beyond expression.’ And she looked around as if longing to tell him

so. He was not near, he was attending a party of ladies out of the room; and Mrs.

Grant coming up to the two girls and taking an arm of each, they followed with

the rest.

Fanny’s heart sank, but there was no leisure for thinking long even of Miss

Crawford’s feelings. They were in the ballroom, the violins were playing, and

her mind was in a flutter that forbade its fixing on anything serious. She must

watch the general arrangements and see how everything was done.

In a few minutes Sir Thomas came to her, and asked if she were engaged; and

the ‘Yes, sir, to Mr. Crawford,’ was exactly what he had intended to hear. Mr.

Crawford was not far off; Sir Thomas brought him to her, saying something

which discovered to Fanny that *she* was to lead the way and open the ball, an

idea that had never occurred to her before. Whenever she had thought on the

minutiae of the evening, it had been as a matter of course that Edmund would

begin with Miss Crawford; and the impression was so strong, that though *her*

*uncle* spoke the contrary, she could not help an exclamation of surprise, a hint of

her unfitness, an entreaty even to be excused. To be urging her opinion against

Sir Thomas’s was a proof of the extremity of the case; but such was her horror at

the first suggestion, that she could actually look him in the face and say she

hoped it might be settled otherwise; in vain, however: Sir Thomas smiled, tried

to encourage her, and then looked too serious, and said too decidedly ‘It must be

so, my dear,’ for her to hazard another word; and she found herself the next

moment conducted by Mr. Crawford to the top of the room, and standing there to

be joined by the rest of the dancers, couple after couple, as they were formed.

She could hardly believe it. To be placed above so many elegant young

women! The distinction was too great. It was treating her like her cousins! And

her thoughts flew to those absent cousins with most unfeigned and truly tender

regret that they were not at home to take their own place in the room, and have

their share of a pleasure which would have been so very delightful to them. So

often as she had heard them wish for a ball at home as the greatest of all

felicities! And to have them away when it was given—and for *her* to be opening

the ball—and with Mr. Crawford too! She hoped they would not envy her that

distinction *now;* but when she looked back to the state of things in the autumn, to

what they had all been to each other when once dancing in that house before, the

present arrangement was almost more than she could understand herself.

The ball began. It was rather honour than happiness to Fanny, for the first

dance at least: her partner was in excellent spirits, and tried to impart them to

her; but she was a great deal too much frightened to have any enjoyment till she

could suppose herself no longer looked at. Young, pretty, and gentle, however,

she had no awkwardnesses that were not as good as graces, and there were few

persons present that were not disposed to praise her. She was attractive, she was

modest, she was Sir Thomas’s niece, and she was soon said to be admired by Mr.

Crawford. It was enough to give her general favour. Sir Thomas himself was

watching her progress down the dance with much complacency; he was proud of

his niece, and without attributing all her personal beauty, as Mrs. Norris seemed

to do, to her transplantation to Mansfield, he was pleased with himself for

having supplied everything else—education and manners she owed to him.

Miss Crawford saw much of Sir Thomas’s thoughts as he stood; and having,

in spite of all his wrongs towards her, a general prevailing desire of

recommending herself to him, took an opportunity of stepping aside to say

something agreeable of Fanny. Her praise was warm, and he received it as she

could wish, joining in it as far as discretion and politeness and slowness of

speech would allow, and certainly appearing to greater advantage on the subject

than his lady did soon afterwards, when Mary, perceiving her on a sofa very

near, turned round before she began to dance to compliment her on Miss Price’s

looks.

‘Yes, she does look very well,’ was Lady Bertram’s placid reply. ‘Chapman

helped her dress. I sent Chapman to her.’ Not but that she was really pleased to

have Fanny admired; but she was so much more struck with her own kindness in

sending Chapman to her, that she could not get it out of her head.

Miss Crawford knew Mrs. Norris too well to think of gratifying *her* by

commendation of Fanny; to her, it was as the occasion offered. ‘Ah, ma’am, how

much we want dear Mrs. Rushworth and Julia to-night!’ and Mrs. Norris paid her

with as many smiles and courteous words as she had time for amid so much

occupation as she found for herself in making up card-tables, giving hints to Sir

Thomas, and trying to move all the chaperons to a better part of the room.

Miss Crawford blundered most towards Fanny herself in her intentions to

please. She meant to be giving her little heart a happy flutter, and filling her with

sensations of delightful self-consequence; and, misinterpreting Fanny’s blushes,

still thought she must be doing so when she went to her after the two first

dances, and said, with a significant look, ‘Perhaps *you* can tell me why my

brother goes to town tomorrow? He says he has business there, but will not tell

me what. The first time he ever denied me his confidence! But this is what we all

come to. All are supplanted sooner or later. Now, I must apply to you for

information. Pray, what is Henry going for?’

Fanny protested her ignorance as steadily as her embarrassment allowed.

‘Well, then,’ replied Miss Crawford, laughing, ‘I must suppose it to be purely

for the pleasure of conveying your brother, and talking of you by the way.’

Fanny was confused, but it was the confusion of discontent; while Miss

Crawford wondered she did not smile, and thought her over-anxious, or thought

her odd, or thought her anything rather than insensible of pleasure in Henry’s

attentions. Fanny had a good deal of enjoyment in the course of the evening; but

Henry’s attentions had very little to do with it. She would much rather *not* have

been asked by him again so very soon, and she wished she had not been obliged

to suspect that his previous inquiries of Mrs. Norris, about the supper hour, were

all for the sake of securing her at that part of the evening. But it was not to be

avoided: he made her feel that she was the object of all; .though she could not

say that it was unpleasantly done, that there was indelicacy or ostentation in his

manner—and sometimes, when he talked of William, he was really not

unagreeable, and showed even a warmth of heart which did him credit. But still

his attentions made no part of her satisfaction. She was happy whenever she

looked at William, and saw how perfectly he was enjoying himself, in every five

minutes that she could walk about with him and hear his account of his partners;

she was happy in knowing herself admired; and she was happy in having the two

dances with Edmund still to look forward to during the greatest part of the

evening, her hand being so eagerly sought after that her indefinite engagement

with *him* was in continual perspective. She was happy even when they did take

place; but not from any flow of spirits on his side, or any such expressions of

tender gallantry as had blessed the morning. His mind was fagged, and her

happiness sprang from being the friend with whom it could find repose. ‘I am

worn out with civility,’ said he. ‘I have been talking incessantly all night, and

with nothing to say. But with *you,* Fanny, there may be peace. You will not want

to be talked to. Let us have the luxury of silence.’ Fanny would hardly even

speak her agreement. A weariness, arising probably in great measure from the

same feelings which he had acknowledged in the morning, was peculiarly to be

respected, and they went down their two dances together with such sober

tranquillity as might satisfy any looker-on that Sir Thomas had been bringing up

no wife for his younger son.

The evening had afforded Edmund little pleasure. Miss Crawford had been in

gay spirits when they first danced together, but it was not her gaiety that could

do him good; it rather sank than raised his comfort; and afterwards—for he

found himself still impelled to seek her again—she had absolutely pained him by

her manner of speaking of the profession to which he was now on the point of

belonging. They had talked—and they had been silent—he had reasoned—she

had ridiculed—and they had parted at last with mutual vexation. Fanny, not able

to refrain entirely from observing them, had seen enough to be tolerably

satisfied. It was barbarous to be happy when Edmund was suffering; yet some

happiness must and would arise from the very conviction that he did suffer.

When her two dances with him were over, her inclination and strength for

more were pretty well at an end; and Sir Thomas having seen her rather walk

than dance down the shortening set, breathless, and with her hand at her side,

gave his orders for her sitting down entirely. From that time Mr. Crawford sat

down likewise.

‘Poor Fanny!’ cried William, coming for a moment to visit her, and working

away his partner’s fan as if for life; ‘how soon she is knocked up! Why, the sport

is but just begun. I hope we shall keep it up these two hours. How can you be

tired so soon?’

‘So soon! my good friend,’ said Sir Thomas, producing his watch with all

necessary caution—‘it is three o’clock, and your sister is not used to these sort of

hours.’

‘Well, then, Fanny, you shall not get up tomorrow before I go. Sleep as long as

you can, and never mind me.’

‘Oh, William!’

‘What! Did she think of being up before you set off?’

‘Oh yes, sir,’ cried Fanny, rising eagerly from her seat to be nearer her uncle;

‘I must get up and breakfast with him. It will be the last time, you know, the last

morning.’

‘You had better not. He is to have breakfasted and be gone by half-past nine.

—Mr. Crawford, I think you call for him at half-past nine.’

Fanny was too urgent, however, and had too many tears in her eyes for denial;

and it ended in a gracious ‘Well, well,’ which was permission.

‘Yes, half-past nine,’ said Crawford to William, as the latter was leaving them,

‘and I shall be punctual, for there will be no kind sister to get up for *me.’* And in

a lower tone to Fanny, ‘I shall have only a desolate house to hurry from. Your

brother will find my ideas of time and his own very different tomorrow’

After a short consideration, Sir Thomas asked Crawford to join the early

breakfast-party in that house instead of eating alone: he should himself be of it;

and the readiness with which his invitation was accepted convinced him that the

suspicions whence, he must confess to himself, this very ball had in great

measure sprung were well founded. Mr. Crawford was in love with Fanny. He

had a pleasing anticipation of what would be. His niece, meanwhile, did not

thank him for what he had just done. She had hoped to have William all to

herself the last morning. It would have been an unspeakable indulgence. But

though her wishes were overthrown, there was no spirit of murmuring within

her. On the contrary, she was so totally unused to have her pleasure consulted, or

to have anything take place at all in the way she could desire, that she was more

disposed to wonder and rejoice in having carried her point so far, than to repine

at the counteraction which followed.

Shortly afterwards, Sir Thomas was again interfering a little with her

inclination, by advising her to go immediately to bed. ‘Advise’ was his word, but

it was the advice of absolute power, and she had only to rise and, with Mr.

Crawford’s very cordial adieus, pass quietly away; stopping at the entrance door,

like the Lady of Branxholm Hall, ’one moment and no more,‘ to view the happy

scene, and take a last look at the five or six determined couple who were still

hard at work—and then, creeping slowly up the principal staircase, pursued by

the ceaseless country-dance, feverish with hopes and fears, soup and negus, sorefooted

and fatigued, restless and agitated, yet feeling, in spite of everything, that

a ball was indeed delightful.

In thus sending her away, Sir Thomas perhaps might not be thinking merely of

her health. It might occur to him that Mr. Crawford had been sitting by her long

enough, or he might mean to recommend her as a wife by showing her

persuadable-ness.

**CHAPTER XXIX**

**T**he ball was over—and the breakfast was soon over too; the last kiss was given,

and William was gone. Mr. Crawford had, as he foretold, been very punctual,

and short and pleasant had been the meal.

After seeing William to the last moment, Fanny walked back into the

breakfast-room with a very saddened heart to grieve over the melancholy

change; and there her uncle kindly left her to cry in peace, conceiving, perhaps,

that the deserted chair of each young man might exercise her tender enthusiasm,

and that the remaining cold pork bones and mustard in William’s plate might but

divide her feelings with the broken egg-shells in Mr. Crawford’s. She sat and

cried *con amore* as her uncle intended, but it was *con amore* fraternal and no

other. William was gone, and she now felt as if she had wasted half his visit in

idle cares and selfish solicitudes unconnected with him.

Fanny’s disposition was such that she could never even think of her aunt

Norris in the meagreness and cheerlessness of her own small house without

reproaching herself for some little want of attention to her when they had been

last together; much less could her feelings acquit her of having done and said

and thought everything by William that was due to him for a whole fortnight.

It was a heavy, melancholy day. Soon after the second breakfast, Edmund

bade them good-bye for a week, and mounted his horse for Peterborough, and

then all were gone. Nothing remained of last night but remembrances, which she

had nobody to share in. She talked to her aunt Bertram—she must talk to

somebody of the ball; but her aunt had seen so little of what had passed, and had

so little curiosity, that it was heavy work. Lady Bertram was not certain of

anybody’s dress or anybody’s place at supper but her own. ‘She could not

recollect what it was that she had heard about one of the Miss Maddoxes, or

what it was that Lady Prescott had noticed in Fanny; she was not sure whether

Colonel Harrison had been talking of Mr. Crawford or of William when he said

he was the finest young man in the room; somebody had whispered something to

her,—she had forgot to ask Sir Thomas what it could be.’ And these were her

longest speeches and clearest communications ; the rest was only a languid ‘Yes

—yes—very well—did you? did he?—I did not see *that*—I should not know one

from the other.’ This was very bad. It was only better than Mrs. Norris’s sharp

answers would have been; but she being gone home with all the supernumerary

jellies to nurse a sick maid, there was peace and good humour in their little party,

though it could not boast much beside.

The evening was heavy like the day. ‘I cannot think what is the matter with

me,’ said Lady Bertram, when the tea-things were removed. ‘I feel quite stupid.

It must be sitting up so late last night. Fanny, you must do something to keep me

awake. I cannot work. Fetch the cards,—I feel so very stupid.’

The cards were brought, and Fanny played at cribbage with her aunt till

bedtime; and as Sir Thomas was reading to himself, no sounds were heard in the

room for the next two hours beyond the reckonings of the game—‘And *that*

makes thirty-one; four in hand and eight in crib. You are to deal, ma’am; shall I

deal for you?’ Fanny thought and thought again of the difference which twentyfour

hours had made in that room and all that part of the house. Last night it had

been hope and smiles, bustle and motion, noise and brilliancy, in the drawingroom,

and out of the drawing-room, and everywhere. Now it was languor, and all

but solitude.

A good night’s rest improved her spirits. She could think of William the next

day more cheerfully; and as the morning afforded her an opportunity of talking

over Thursday night with Mrs. Grant and Miss Crawford in a very handsome

style, with all the heightenings of imagination and all the laughs of playfulness

which are so essential to the shade of a departed ball, she could afterwards bring

her mind without much effort into its everyday state, and easily conform to the

tranquillity of the present quiet week.

They were indeed a smaller party than she had ever known there for a whole

day together, and he was gone on whom the comfort and cheerfulness of every

family-meeting and every meal chiefly depended. But this must be learned to be

endured. He would soon be always gone; and she was thankful that she could

now sit in the same room with her uncle, hear his voice, receive his questions,

and even answer them, without such wretched feelings as she had formerly

known.

‘We miss our two young men,’ was Sir Thomas’s observation on both the first

and second day, as they formed their very reduced circle after dinner; and, in

consideration of Fanny’s swimming eyes, nothing more was said on the first day

than to drink their good health, but on the second it led to something further.

William was kindly commended and his promotion hoped for. ‘And there is no

reason to suppose,’ added Sir Thomas, ‘but that his visits to us may now be

tolerably frequent. As to Edmund, we must learn to do without him. This will be

the last winter of his belonging to us as he has done.’

‘Yes,’ said Lady Bertram, ‘but I wish he was not going away. They are all

going away, I think. I wish they would stay at home.’

This wish was levelled principally at Julia, who had just applied for

permission to go to town with Maria; and as Sir Thomas thought it best for each

daughter that the permission should be granted, Lady Bertram, though in her

own good nature she would not have prevented it, was lamenting the change it

made in the prospect of Julia’s return, which would otherwise have taken place

about this time. A great deal of good sense followed on Sir Thomas’s side,

tending to reconcile his wife to the arrangement. Everything that a considerate

parent *ought* to feel was advanced for her use; and everything that an

affectionate mother *must* feel in promoting her children’s enjoyment was

attributed to her nature. Lady Bertram agreed to it all with a calm ‘Yes’;—and at

the end of a quarter of an hour’s silent consideration spontaneously observed,

‘Sir Thomas, I have been thinking—and I am very glad we took Fanny as we

did, for now the others are away we feel the good of it.’

Sir Thomas immediately improved this compliment by adding, ‘Very true. We

show Fanny what a good girl we think her by praising her to her face—she is

now a very valuable companion. If we have been kind to *her,* she is now quite as

necessary to *us.*’

‘Yes,’ said Lady Bertram presently; ‘and it is a comfort to think that we shall

always have *her.’*

Sir Thomas paused, half smiled, glanced at his niece, and then gravely replied,

‘She will never leave us, I hope, till invited to some other home that may

reasonably promise her greater happiness than she knows here.’

‘And *that* is not very likely to be, Sir Thomas. Who should invite her? Maria

might be very glad to see her at Sotherton now and then, but she would not think

of asking her to live there—and I am sure she is better off here—and besides, I

cannot do without her.’

The week which passed so quietly and peaceably at the great house in

Mansfield had a very different character at the Parsonage. To the young lady at

least in each family it brought very different feelings. What was tranquillity and

comfort to Fanny was tediousness and vexation to Mary. Something arose from

difference of disposition and habit—one so easily satisfied, the other so unused

to endure; but still more might be imputed to difference of circumstances. In

some points of interest they were exactly opposed to each other. To Fanny’s

mind, Edmund’s absence was really in its cause and its tendency a relief. To

Mary it was every way painful. She felt the want of his society every day, almost

every hour; and was too much in want of it to derive anything but irritation from

considering the object for which he went. He could not have devised anything

more likely to raise his consequence than this week’s absence, occurring as it did

at the very time of her brother’s going away, of William Price’s going too, and

completing the sort of general break-up of a party which had been so animated.

She felt it keenly. They were now a miserable trio, confined within doors by a

series of rain and snow, with nothing to do and no variety to hope for. Angry as

she was with Edmund for adhering to his own notions, and acting on them in

defiance of her (and she had been so angry that they had hardly parted friends at

the ball), she could not help thinking of him continually when absent, dwelling

on his merit and affection, and longing again for the almost daily meetings they

lately had. His absence was unnecessarily long. He should not have planned such

an absence—he should not have left home for a week, when her own departure

from Mansfield was so near. Then she began to blame herself. She wished she

had not spoken so warmly in their last conversation. She was afraid she had used

some strong, some contemptuous expressions in speaking of the clergy, and *that*

should not have been. It was ill-bred—it was wrong. She wished such words

unsaid with all her heart.

Her vexation did not end with the week. All this was bad, but she had still

more to feel when Friday came round again and brought no Edmund—when

Saturday came and still no Edmund—and when, through the slight

communication with the other family which Sunday produced, she learnt that he

had actually written home to defer his return, having promised to remain some

days longer with his friend.

If she had felt impatience and regret before,—if she had been sorry for what

she said and feared its too strong effect on him,—she now felt and feared it all

tenfold more. She had, moreover, to contend with one disagreeable emotion

entirely new to her—jealousy. His friend Mr. Owen had sisters—he might find

them attractive. But at any rate his staying away at a time when, according to all

preceding plans, she was to remove to London, meant something that she could

not bear. Had Henry returned, as he talked of doing, at the end of three or four

days, she should now have been leaving Mansfield. It became absolutely

necessary for her to get to Fanny and try to learn something more. She could not

live any longer in such solitary wretchedness; and she made her way to the Park,

through difficulties of walking which she had deemed unconquerable a week

before, for the chance of hearing a little in addition, for the sake of at least

hearing his name.

The first half-hour was lost, for Fanny and Lady Bertram were together, and

unless she had Fanny to herself she could hope for nothing. But at last Lady

Bertram left the room—and then almost immediately Miss Crawford thus began,

with a voice as well regulated as she could:—‘And how do *you* like your cousin

Edmund’s staying away so long? Being the only young person at home, I

consider *you* as the greatest sufferer. You must miss him. Does his staying longer

surprise you?’

‘I do not know,’ said Fanny hesitatingly. ‘Yes—I had not particularly expected

it.’

‘Perhaps he will always stay longer than he talks of. It is the general way all

young men do.’

‘He did not, the only time he went to see Mr. Owen before.’

‘He finds the house more agreeable *now.* He is a very—a very pleasing young

man himself, and I cannot help being rather concerned at not seeing him again

before I go to London, as will now undoubtedly be the case. I am looking for

Henry every day, and as soon as he comes there will be nothing to detain me at

Mansfield. I should like to have seen him once more, I confess. But you must

give my compliments to him. Yes—I think it must be compliments. Is there not a

something wanted, Miss Price, in our language—a something between

compliments and—and love—to suit the sort of friendly acquaintance we have

had together? So many months’ acquaintance! But compliments may be

sufficient here. Was his letter a long one? Does he give you much account of

what he is doing? Is it Christmas gaieties that he is staying for?’

‘I only heard a part of the letter: it was to my uncle—but I believe it was very

short; indeed I am sure it was but a few lines. All that I heard was that his friend

had pressed him to stay longer, and that he had agreed to do so. *A few* days

longer, or *some* days longer, I am not quite sure which.’

‘Oh, if he wrote to his father—but I thought it might have been to Lady

Bertram or you. But if he wrote to his father, no wonder he was concise. Who

could write chat to Sir Thomas? If he had written to you, there would have been

more particulars. You would have heard of balls and parties. He would have sent

you a description of everything and everybody. How many Miss Owens are

there?’

‘Three grown up.’

‘Are they musical?’

‘I do not at all know. I never heard.’

‘That is the first question, you know,’ said Miss Crawford, trying to appear

gay and unconcerned, ‘which every woman who plays herself is sure to ask

another. But it is very foolish to ask questions about any young ladies—about

any three sisters just grown up; for one knows, without being told, exactly what

they are—all very accomplished and pleasing, and *one* very pretty. There is a

beauty in every family,—it is a regular thing. Two play on the pianoforte, and

one on the harp—and all sing—or would sing if they were taught—or sing all

the better for not being taught—or something like it.’

‘I know nothing of the Miss Owens,’ said Fanny calmly.

‘You know nothing and you care less, as people say. Never did tone express

indifference plainer. Indeed how can one care for those one has never seen?

Well, when your cousin comes back, he will find Mansfield very quiet;—all the

noisy ones gone, your brother and mine and myself. I do not like the idea of

leaving Mrs. Grant now the time draws near. She does not like my going.’

Fanny felt obliged to speak. ‘You cannot doubt your being missed by many,’

said she. ‘You will be very much missed.’

Miss Crawford turned her eye on her, as if wanting to hear or see more, and

then laughingly said, ‘Oh yes, missed as every noisy evil is missed when it is

taken away; that is, there is a great difference felt. But I am not fishing; don’t

compliment me. If I *am* missed, it will appear. I may be discovered by those who

want to see me. I shall not be in any doubtful, or distant, or unapproachable

region.’

Now Fanny could not bring herself to speak, and Miss Crawford was

disappointed; for she had hoped to hear some pleasant assurance of her power,

from one who she thought must know; and her spirits were clouded again.

‘The Miss Owens,’—said she, soon afterwards,—‘suppose you were to have

one of the Miss Owens settled at Thornton Lacey: how should you like it?

Stranger things have happened. I daresay they are trying for it. And they are

quite in the right, for it would be a very pretty establishment for them. I do not at

all wonder or blame them. It is everybody’s duty to do as well for themselves as

they can. Sir Thomas Bertram’s son is somebody; and now he is in their own

line. Their father is a clergyman and their brother is a clergyman, and they are all

clergymen together. He is their lawful property, he fairly belongs to them. You

don’t speak, Fanny—Miss Price—you don’t speak. But honestly now, do not you

rather expect it than otherwise?’

‘No,’ said Fanny stoutly, ‘I do not expect it at all.’

‘Not at all!’ cried Miss Crawford with alacrity. ‘I wonder at that. But I daresay

you know exactly—I always imagine you are—perhaps you do not think him

likely to marry at all—or not at present.’

‘No, I do not,’ said Fanny softly, hoping she did not err either in the belief or

the acknowledgment of it.

Her companion looked at her keenly; and gathering greater spirit from the

blush soon produced from such a look, only said, ‘He is best off as he is,’ and

turned the subject.

**CHAPTER XXX**

**M**iss Crawford’s uneasiness was much lightened by this conversation, and she

walked home again in spirits which might have defied almost another week of

the same small party in the same bad weather, had they been put to the proof; but

as that very evening brought her brother down from London again in quite, or

more than quite, his usual cheerfulness, she had nothing further to try her own.

His still refusing to tell her what he had gone for was but the promotion of

gaiety; a day before it might have irritated, but now it was a pleasant joke—

suspected only of concealing something planned as a pleasant surprise to herself.

And the next day *did* bring a surprise to her. Henry had said he should just go

and ask the Bertrams how they did, and be back in ten minutes—but he was

gone above an hour; and when his sister, who had been waiting for him to walk

with her in the garden, met him at last most impatiently in the sweep, and cried

out, ‘My dear Henry, where can you possibly have been all this time?’ he had

only to say that he had been sitting with Lady Bertram and Fanny.

‘Sitting with them an hour and a half!’ exclaimed Mary.

But this was only the beginning of her surprise.

‘Yes, Mary,’ said he, drawing her arm within his, and walking along the sweep

as if not knowing where he was—‘I could not get away sooner—Fanny looked

so lovely! I am quite determined, Mary. My mind is entirely made up. Will it

astonish you? No: you must be aware that I am quite determined to marry Fanny

Price.’

The surprise was now complete; for, in spite of whatever his consciousness

might suggest, a suspicion of his having any such views had never entered his

sister’s imagination; and she looked so truly the astonishment she felt that he

was obliged to repeat what he had said, and more fully and more solemnly. The

conviction of his determination once admitted, it was not unwelcome. There was

even pleasure with the surprise. Mary was in a state of mind to rejoice in a

connection with the Bertram family, and to be not displeased with her brother’s

marrying a little beneath him.

‘Yes, Mary,’ was Henry’s concluding assurance. ‘I am fairly caught. You

know with what idle designs I began—but this is the end of them. I have (I

flatter myself) made no inconsiderable progress in her affections; but my own

are entirely fixed.’

‘Lucky, lucky girl!’ cried Mary as soon as she could speak—‘what a match for

her! My dearest Henry, this must be my *first* feeling; but my *second,* which you

shall have as sincerely, is that I approve your choice from my soul, and foresee

your happiness as heartily as I wish and desire it. You will have a sweet little

wife; all gratitude and devotion. Exactly what you deserve. What an amazing

match for her! Mrs. Norris often talks of her luck; what will she say now? The

delight of all the family, indeed! And she has some *true* friends in it. How *they*

will rejoice. But tell me all about it. Talk to me for ever. When did you begin to

think seriously about her?’

Nothing could be more impossible than to answer such a question, though

nothing be more agreeable than to have it asked. ‘How the pleasing plague had

stolen on him’ he could not say; and before he had expressed the same sentiment

with a little variation of words three times over, his sister eagerly interrupted him

with, ’Ah, my dear Henry, and this is what took you to London! This was your

business! You chose to consult the Admiral, before you made up your mind.’

But this he stoutly denied. He knew his uncle too well to consult him on any

matrimonial scheme. The Admiral hated marriage, and thought it never

pardonable in a young man of independent fortune.

‘When Fanny is known to him,’ continued Henry, ‘he will dote on her. She is

exactly the woman to do away every prejudice of such a man as the Admiral, for

she is exactly such a woman as he thinks does not exist in the world. She is the

very impossibility he would describe—if indeed he has now delicacy of

language enough to embody his own ideas. But till it is absolutely settled—

settled beyond all interference—he shall know nothing of the matter. No, Mary,

you are quite mistaken. You have not discovered my business yet.’

‘Well, well, I am satisfied. I know now to whom it must relate, and am in no

hurry for the rest. Fanny Price—wonderful—quite wonderful! That Mansfield

should have done so much for—that *you* should have found your fate in

Mansfield! But you are quite right, you could not have chosen better. There is

not a better girl in the world, and you do not want for fortune; and as to her

connections, they are more than good. The Bertrams are undoubtedly some of

the first people in this country. She is niece to Sir Thomas Bertram; that will be

enough for the world. But go on, go on. Tell me more. What are your plans?

Does she know her own happiness?’

‘No.’

‘What are you waiting for?’

‘For—for very little more than opportunity. Mary, she is not like her cousins;

but I think I shall not ask in vain.’

‘Oh no, you cannot. Were you even less pleasing—supposing her not to love

you already (of which, however, I can have little doubt)—you would be safe.

The gentleness and gratitude of her disposition would secure her all your own

immediately. From my soul I do not think she would marry you *without* love:

that is, if there is a girl in the world capable of being uninfluenced by ambition, I

can suppose it her; but ask her to love you, and she will never have the heart to

refuse.’

As soon as her eagerness could rest in silence, he was as happy to tell as she

could be to listen; and a conversation followed almost as deeply interesting to

her as to himself, though he had in fact nothing to relate but his own sensations,

nothing to dwell on but Fanny’s charms. Fanny’s beauty of face and figure,

Fanny’s graces of manner and goodness of heart, were the exhaustless theme.

The gentleness, modesty, and sweetness of her character were warmly expatiated

on,—that sweetness which makes so essential a part of every woman’s worth in

the judgment of man, that though he sometimes loves where it is not, he can

never believe it absent. Her temper he had good reason to depend on and to

praise. He had often seen it tried. Was there one of the family, excepting

Edmund, who had not in some way or other continually exercised her patience

and forbearance? Her affections were evidently strong. To see her with her

brother! What could more delightfully prove that the warmth of her heart was

equal to its gentleness? What could be more encouraging to a man who had her

love in view? Then, her understanding was beyond every suspicion, quick and

clear; and her manners were the mirror of her own modest and elegant mind. Nor

was this all. Henry Crawford had too much sense not to feel the worth of good

principles in a wife, though he was too little accustomed to serious reflection to

know them by their proper name; but when he talked of her having such a

steadiness and regularity of conduct, such a high notion of honour, and such an

observance of decorum as might warrant any man in the fullest dependence on

her faith and integrity, he expressed what was inspired by the knowledge of her

being well principled and religious.

‘I could so wholly and absolutely confide in her,’ said he, ‘and that is what I

want.’

Well might his sister, believing as she really did that his opinion of Fanny

Price was scarcely beyond her merits, rejoice in her prospects.

‘The more I think of it,’ she cried, ‘the more am I convinced that you are

doing quite right; and though I should never have selected Fanny Price as the girl

most likely to attach you, I am now persuaded she is the very one to make you

happy. Your wicked project upon her peace turns out a clever thought indeed.

You will both find your good in it.’

‘It was bad, very bad in me against such a creature; but I did not know her

then. And she shall have no reason to lament the hour that first put it into my

head. I will make her very happy, Mary, happier than she has ever yet been

herself, or ever seen anybody else. I will not take her from Northamptonshire. I

shall let Everingham, and rent a place in this neighbourhood; perhaps Stanwix

Lodge. I shall let a seven years’ lease of Everingham. I am sure of an excellent

tenant at half a word. I could name three people now, who would give me my

own terms and thank me.’

‘Ha!’ cried Mary; ‘settle in Northamptonshire! That is pleasant! Then we shall

be all together.’

When she had spoken it, she recollected herself, and wished it unsaid; but

there was no need of confusion; for her brother saw her only as the supposed

inmate of Mansfield parsonage, and replied but to invite her in the kindest

manner to his own house, and to claim the best right in her.

‘You must give us more than half your time,’ said he. ‘I cannot admit Mrs.

Grant to have an equal claim with Fanny and myself, for we shall both have a

right in you. Fanny will be so truly your sister!’

Mary had only to be grateful and give general assurances; but she was now

very fully purposed to be the guest of neither brother nor sister many months

longer.

‘You will divide your year between London and Northamptonshire?’

‘That’s right; and in London, of course, a house of your own; and no longer

with the Admiral. My dearest Henry, the advantage to you of getting away from

the Admiral before your manners are hurt by the contagion of his, before you

have contracted any of his foolish opinions, or learnt to sit over your dinner, as if

it were the best blessing of life!—*You* are not sensible of the gain, for your

regard for him has blinded you; but, in my estimation, your marrying early may

be the saving of you. To have seen you grow like the Admiral in word or deed,

look or gesture, would have broken my heart.’

‘Well, well, we do not think quite alike here. The Admiral has his faults, but

he is a very good man, and has been more than a father to me. Few fathers would

have let me have my own way half so much. You must not prejudice Fanny

against him. I must have them love one another.’

Mary refrained from saying what she felt, that there could not be two persons

in existence whose characters and manners were less accordant: time would

discover it to him; but she could not help *this* reflection on the Admiral. ‘Henry,

I think so highly of Fanny Price, that if I could suppose the next Mrs. Crawford

would have half the reason which my poor ill-used aunt had to abhor the very

name, I would prevent the marriage, if possible; but I know you, I know that a

wife you *loved* would be the happiest of women, and that even when you ceased

to love, she would yet find in you the liberality and good-breeding of a

gentleman.’

The impossibility of not doing everything in the world to make Fanny Price

happy, or of ceasing to love Fanny Price, was of course the groundwork of his

eloquent answer.

‘Had you seen her this morning, Mary,’ he continued, ‘attending with such

ineffable sweetness and patience to all the demands of her aunt’s stupidity,

working with her, and for her, her colour beautifully heightened as she leant over

her work, then returning to her seat to finish a note which she was previously

engaged in writing for that stupid woman’s service, and all this with such

unpretending gentleness, so much as if it were a matter of course that she was

not to have a moment at her own command, her hair arranged so neatly as it

always is, and one little curl falling forward as she wrote, which she now and

then shook back, and in the midst of all this, still speaking at intervals to *me,* or

listening, and as if she liked to listen to what I said. Had you seen her so, Mary,

you would not have implied the possibility of her power over my heart ever

ceasing.’

‘My dearest Henry,’ cried Mary, stopping short, and smiling in his face, ‘how

glad I am to see you so much in love! It quite delights me. But what will Mrs.

Rushworth and Julia say?’

‘I care neither what they say nor what they feel. They will now see what sort

of woman it is that can attach me, that can attach a man of sense. I wish the

discovery may do them any good. And they will now see their cousin treated as

she ought to be, and I wish they may be heartily ashamed of their own

abominable neglect and unkindness. They will be angry,’ he added, after a

moment’s silence, and in a cooler tone, ‘Mrs. Rushworth will be very angry. It

will be a bitter pill to her; that is, like other bitter pills, it will have two moments’

ill-flavour and then be swallowed and forgotten; for I am not such a coxcomb as

to suppose her feelings more lasting than other women’s, though *I* was the object

of them. Yes, Mary, my Fanny will feel a difference indeed, a daily, hourly

difference, in the behaviour of every being who approaches her; and it will be

the completion of my happiness to know that I am the doer of it, that I am the

person to give the consequence so justly her due. Now she is dependent,

helpless, friendless, neglected, forgotten.’

‘Nay, Henry, not by all, not forgotten by all; not friendless or forgotten. Her

cousin Edmund never forgets her.’

‘Edmund—True, I believe he is (generally speaking) kind to her; and so is Sir

Thomas in his way, but it is the way of a rich, superior, long-worded, arbitrary

uncle. What can Sir Thomas and Edmund together do, what *do* they do for her

happiness, comfort, honour, and dignity in the world, to what I *shall* do?’

**CHAPTER XXXI**

**H**enry Crawford was at Mansfield Park again the next morning, and at an earlier

hour than common visiting warrants. The two ladies were together in the

breakfast-room, and, fortunately for him, Lady Bertram was on the very point of

quitting it as he entered. She was almost at the door, and not choosing by any

means to take so much trouble in vain, she still went on, after a civil reception, a

short sentence about being waited for, and a ‘Let Sir Thomas know,’ to the

servant.

Henry, overjoyed to have her go, bowed and watched her off, and without

losing another moment, turned instantly to Fanny, and, taking out some letters,

said, with a most animated look, ‘I must acknowledge myself infinitely obliged

to any creature who gives me such an opportunity of seeing you alone: I have

been wishing it more than you can have any idea. Knowing as I do what your

feelings as a sister are, I could hardly have borne that any one in the house

should share with you in the first knowledge of the news I now bring. He is

made. Your brother is a lieutenant. I have the infinite satisfaction of

congratulating you on your brother’s promotion. Here are the letters which

announce it, this moment come to hand. You will, perhaps, like to see them.’

Fanny could not speak, but he did not want her to speak. To see the expression

of her eyes, the change of her complexion, the progress of her feelings, their

doubt, confusion, and felicity was enough. She took the letters as he gave them.

The first was from the Admiral to inform his nephew, in a few words, of his

having succeeded in the object he had undertaken, the promotion of young Price,

and enclosing two more, one from the Secretary of the First Lord to a friend,

whom the Admiral had set to work in the business, the other from that friend to

himself, by which it appeared that his Lordship had the very great happiness of

attending to the recommendation of Sir Charles; that Sir Charles was much

delighted in having such an opportunity of proving his regard for Admiral

Crawford, and that the circumstance of Mr. William Price’s commission as

Second Lieutenant of H. M. Sloop *Thrush* being made out was spreading general

joy through a wide circle of great people.

While her hand was trembling under those letters, her eye running from one to

the other, and her heart swelling with emotion, Crawford thus continued, with

unfeigned eagerness, to express his interest in the event:—

‘I will not talk of my own happiness,’ said he, ‘great as it is, for I think only of

yours. Compared with you, who has a right to be happy? I have almost grudged

myself my own prior knowledge of what you ought to have known before all the

world. I have not lost a moment, however. The post was late this morning, but

there has not been since a moment’s delay. How impatient, how anxious, how

wild I have been on the subject, I will not attempt to describe; how severely

mortified, how cruelly disappointed, in not having it finished while I was in

London! I was kept there from day to day in the hope of it, for nothing less dear

to me than such an object would have detained me half the time from Mansfield.

But though my uncle entered into my wishes with all the warmth I could desire,

and exerted himself immediately, there were difficulties from the absence of one

friend, and the engagements of another, which at last I could no longer bear to

stay the end of, and knowing in what good hands I left the cause, I came away

on Monday, trusting that many posts would not pass before I should be followed

by such very letters as these. My uncle, who is the very best man in the world,

has exerted himself, as I knew he would after seeing your brother. He was

delighted with him. I would not allow myself, yesterday, to say *how* delighted, or

to repeat half that the Admiral said in his praise. I deferred it all till his praise

should be proved the praise of a friend, as this day *does* prove it. *Now* I may say

that even *I* could not require William Price to excite a greater interest, or be

followed by warmer wishes and higher commendation, than were most

voluntarily bestowed by my uncle after the evening they passed together.’

‘Has this been all *your* doing, then?’ cried Fanny. ‘Good Heaven! how very,

very kind! Have you really was it by *your* desire?—I beg your pardon, but I am

bewildered. Did Admiral Crawford apply?—how was it?—I am stupefied.’

Henry was most happy to make it more intelligible, by beginning at an earlier

stage, and explaining very particularly what he had done. His last journey to

London had been undertaken with no other view than that of introducing her

brother in Hill Street, and prevailing on the Admiral to exert whatever interest he

might have for getting him on. This had been his business. He had

communicated it to no creature; he had not breathed a syllable of it even to

Mary; while uncertain of the issue, he could not have borne any participation of

his feelings, but this had been his business; and he spoke with such a glow of

what his solicitude had been, and used such strong expressions, was so

abounding in the *deepest interest,* in *twofold motives, in views and wishes more*

*than could be told,* that Fanny could not have remained insensible of his drift,

had she been able to attend; but her heart was so full and her senses still so

astonished, that she could listen but imperfectly even to what he told her of

William, and saying only when he paused, ‘How kind! how very kind! Oh, Mr.

Crawford, we are infinitely obliged to you. Dearest, dearest William!’—she

jumped up and moved in haste towards the door, crying out, ‘I will go to my

uncle. My uncle ought to know it as soon as possible.’ But this could not be

suffered. The opportunity was too fair, and his feelings too impatient. He was

after her immediately. ‘She must not go, she must allow him five minutes

longer,’ and he took her hand and led her back to her seat, and was in the middle

of his further explanation, before she had suspected for what she was detained.

When she did understand it, however, and found herself expected to believe that

*she* had created sensations which his heart had never known before, and that

everything he had done for William was to be placed to the account of his

excessive and unequalled attachment to her, she was exceedingly distressed, and

for some moments unable to speak. She considered it all as nonsense, as mere

trifling and gallantry, which meant only to deceive for the hour; she could not

but feel that it was treating her improperly and unworthily, and in such a way as

she had not deserved; but it was like himself, and entirely of a piece with what

she had seen before; and she would not allow herself to show half the

displeasure she felt, because he had been conferring an obligation, which no

want of delicacy on his part could make a trifle to her. While her heart was still

bounding with joy and gratitude on William’s behalf, she could not be severely

resentful of anything that injured only herself; and after having twice drawn back

her hand, and twice attempted in vain to turn away from him, she got up, and

said only, with much agitation, ‘Don’t, Mr. Crawford, pray don’t. I beg you

would not. This is a sort of talking which is very unpleasant to me. I must go

away. I cannot bear it.’ But he was still talking on, describing his affection,

soliciting a return, and, finally, in words so plain as to bear but one meaning

even to *her,* offering himself, hand, fortune, everything, to her acceptance. It was

so, he had said it. Her astonishment and confusion increased; and though still not

knowing how to suppose him serious, she could hardly stand. He pressed for an

answer.

‘No, no, no,’ she cried, hiding her face. ‘This is all nonsense. Do not distress

me. I can hear no more of this. Your kindness to William makes me more

obliged to you than words can express; but I do not want, I cannot bear, I must

not listen to such—no, no, don’t think of me. But you are *not* thinking of me. I

know it is all nothing.’

She had burst away from him, and at that moment Sir Thomas was heard

speaking to a servant in his way towards the room they were in. It was no time

for further assurances or entreaty, though to part with her at a moment when her

modesty alone seemed to his sanguine and preassured mind to stand in the way

of the happiness he sought was a cruel necessity. She rushed out at an opposite

door from the one her uncle was approaching, and was walking up and down the

east room in the utmost confusion of contrary feeling, before Sir Thomas’s

politeness or apologies were over, or he had reached the beginning of the joyful

intelligence which his visitor cme to communicate.

She was feeling, thinking, trembling, about everything; agitated, happy,

miserable, infinitely obliged, absolutely angry. It was all beyond belief! He was

inexcusable, incomprehensible! But such were his habits, that he could do

nothing without a mixture of evil. He had previously made her the happiest of

human beings, and now he had insulted—she knew not what to say—how to

class, or how to regard it. She would not have him be serious, and yet what could

excuse the use of such words and offers, if they meant but to trifle?

But William was a lieutenant. *That* was a fact beyond a doubt, and without an

alloy. She would think of it for ever, and forget all the rest. Mr. Crawford would

certainly never address her so again: he must have seen how unwelcome it was

to her; and in that case, how gratefully she could esteem him for his friendship to

William!

She would not stir further from the east room than the head of the great

staircase, till she had satisfied herself of Mr. Crawford’s having left the house;

but when convinced of his being gone, she was eager to go down and be with her

uncle, and have all the happiness of his joy as well as her own, and all the

benefit of his information or his conjectures as to what would now be William’s

destination. Sir Thomas was as joyful as she could desire, and very kind and

communicative; and she had so comfortable a talk with him about William as to

make her feel as if nothing had occurred to vex her, till she found, towards the

close, that Mr. Crawford was engaged to return and dine there that very day. This

was a most unwelcome hearing, for though he might think nothing of what had

passed, it would be quite distressing to her to see him again so soon.

She tried to get the better of it; tried very hard, as the dinner hour approached,

to feel and appear as usual; but it was quite impossible for her not to look most

shy and uncomfortable when their visitor entered the room. She could not have

supposed it in the power of any concurrence of circumstances to give her so

many painful sensations on the first day of hearing of William’s promotion.

Mr. Crawford was not only in the room—he was soon close to her. He had a

note to deliver from his sister. Fanny could not look at him, but there was no

consciousness of past folly in his voice. She opened her note immediately, glad

to have anything to do, and happy, as she read it, to feel that the fidgetings of her

aunt Norris, who was also to dine there, screened her a little from view.

‘MY DEAR FANNY—for so I may now always call you, to the infinite

relief of a tongue that has been stumbling at *Miss Price* for at least the last

six weeks—I cannot let my brother go without sending you a few lines of

general congratulation, and giving my most joyful consent and approval.

Go on, my dear Fanny, and without fear; there can be no difficulties worth

naming. I choose to suppose that the assurance of *my* consent will be

something; so you may smile upon him with your sweetest smiles this

afternoon, and send him back to me even happier than he goes.—Yours

affectionately, M. C.’

These were not expressions to do Fanny any good; for though she read in too

much haste and confusion to form the clearest judgment of Miss Crawford’s

meaning, it was evident that she meant to compliment her on her brother’s

attachment, and even to appear to believe it serious. She did not know what to do

or what to think. There was wretchedness in the idea of its being serious; there

were perplexity and agitation every way. She was distressed whenever Mr.

Crawford spoke to her, and he spoke to her much too often; and she was afraid

there was a something in his voice and manner in addressing her very different

from what they were when he talked to the others. Her comfort in that day’s

dinner was quite destroyed: she could hardly eat anything; and when Sir Thomas

good-humouredly observed that joy had taken away her appetite, she was ready

to sink with shame, from the dread of Mr. Crawford’s interpretation; for though

nothing could have tempted her to turn her eyes to the right hand, where he sat,

she felt that his were immediately directed towards her.

She was more silent than ever. She would hardly join even when William was

the subject, for his commission came all from the right hand too, and there was

pain in the connection.

She thought Lady Bertram sat longer than ever, and began to be in despair of

ever getting away; but at last they were in the drawing-room, and she was able to

think as she would, while her aunts finished the subject of William’s

appointment in their own style.

Mrs. Norris seemed as much delighted with the saving it would be to Sir

Thomas as with any part of it. *‘Now* William would be able to keep himself,

which would make a vast difference to his uncle, for it was unknown how much

he had cost his uncle; and, indeed, it would make some difference in *her* presents

too. She was very glad that she had given William what she did at parting, very

glad indeed, that it had been in her power, without material inconvenience, just

at that time, to give him something rather considerable; that is, for *her,* with *her*

limited means, for now it would all be useful in helping to fit up his cabin. She

knew he must be at some expense, that he would have many things to buy,

though to be sure his father and mother would be able to put him in the way of

getting everything very cheap—but she was very glad that she had contributed

her mite towards it.’

‘I am glad you gave him something considerable,’ said Lady Bertram, with

most unsuspicious calmness, for *I* gave him only £10.’

‘Indeed!’ cried Mrs. Norris, reddening. ‘Upon my word, he must have gone

off with his pockets well lined! and at no expense for his journey to London

either!’

‘Sir Thomas told me £10 would be enough.’

Mrs. Norris, being not at all inclined to question its sufficiency, began to take

the matter in another point.

‘It is amazing,’ said she, ‘how much young people cost their friends, what

with bringing them up and putting them out in the world! They little think how

much it comes to, or what their parents, or their uncles and aunts, pay for them

in the course of the year. Now, here are my sister Price’s children; take them

altogether, I daresay nobody would believe what a sum they cost Sir Thomas

every year, to say nothing of what *I* do for them.’

‘Very true, sister, as you say. But, poor things! they cannot help it; and you

know it makes very little difference to Sir Thomas. Fanny, William must not

forget my shawl if he goes to the East Indies; and I shall give him a commission

for anything else that is worth having. I wish he may go to the East Indies, that I

may have my shawl. I think I will have two shawls, Fanny.’

Fanny, meanwhile, speaking only when she could not help it, was very

earnestly trying to understand what Mr. and Miss Crawford were at. There was

everything in the world *against* their being serious but his words and manner.

Everything natural, probable, reasonable, was against it; all their habits and ways

of thinking, and all her own demerits. How could *she* have excited serious

attachment in a man who had seen so many, and been admired by so many, and

flirted with so many, infinitely her superiors—who seemed so little open to

serious impressions, even where pains had been taken to please him—who

thought so slightly, so carelessly, so unfeelingly on all such points—who was

everything to everybody, and seemed to find no one essential to him? And

further, how could it be supposed that his sister, with all her high and worldly

notions of matrimony, would be forwarding anything of a serious nature in such

a quarter? Nothing could be more unnatural in either. Fanny was ashamed of her

own doubts. Everything might be possible rather than serious attachment, or

serious approbation of it toward her. She had quite convinced herself of this

before Sir Thomas and Mr. Crawford joined them. The difficulty was in

maintaining the conviction quite so absolutely after Mr. Crawford was in the

room; for once or twice a look seemed forced on her which she did not know

how to class among the common meaning; in any other man, at least, she would

have said that it meant something very earnest, very pointed. But she still tried to

believe it no more than what he might often have expressed towards her cousins

and fifty other women.

She thought he was wishing to speak to her unheard by the rest. She fancied

he was trying for it the whole evening at intervals, whenever Sir Thomas was out

of the room, or at all engaged with Mrs. Norris, and she carefully refused him

every opportunity.

At last—it seemed an at last to Fanny’s nervousness, though not remarkably

late—he began to talk of going away; but the comfort of the sound was impaired

by his turning to her the next moment, and saying, ‘Have you nothing to send to

Mary? No answer to her note? She will be disappointed if she receives nothing

from you. Pray write to her, if it be only a line.’

‘Oh yes, certainly,’ cried Fanny, rising in haste, the haste of embarrassment

and of wanting to get away,—‘I will write directly.’

She went accordingly to the table where she was in the habit of writing for her

aunt, and prepared her materials without knowing what in the world to say. She

had read Miss Crawford’s note only once; and how to reply to anything so

imperfectly understood was most distressing. Quite unpractised in such sort of

note-writing, had there been time for scruples and fears as to style she would

have felt them in abundance: but something must be instantly written; and with

only one decided feeling, that of wishing not to appear to think anything really

intended, she wrote thus, in great trembling both of spirits and hand:—

‘I am very much obliged to you, my dear Miss Crawford, for your kind

congratulations, as far as they relate to my dearest William. The rest of your

note I know means nothing; but I am so unequal to anything of the sort, that

I hope you will excuse my begging you to take no further notice. I have

seen too much of Mr. Crawford not to understand his manners: if he

understood me as well, he would, I daresay, behave differently. I do not

know what I write, but it would be a great favour of you never to mention

the subject again. With thanks for the honour of your note, I remain, dear

Miss Crawford, *etc.* etc.’

The conclusion was scarcely intelligible from increasing fright, for she found

that Mr. Crawford, under pretence of receiving the note, was coming towards

her.

‘You cannot think I mean to hurry you,’ said he, in an under voice, perceiving

the amazing trepidation with which she made up the note; ‘you cannot think I

have any such object. Do not hurry yourself, I entreat.’

‘Oh, I thank you, I have quite done, just done—it will be ready in a moment—

I am very much obliged to you—if you will be so good as to give *that* to Miss

Crawford.’

The note was held out, and must be taken; and as she instantly and with

averted eyes walked towards the fireplace, where sat the others, he had nothing

to do but to go in good earnest.

Fanny thought she had never known a day of greater agitation, both of pain

and pleasure; but happily, the pleasure was not of a sort to die with the day—for

every day would restore the knowledge of William’s advancement, whereas the

pain, she hoped, would return no more. She had no doubt that her note must

appear excessively ill written, that the language would disgrace a child, for her

distress had allowed no arrangement; but at least it would assure them both of

her being neither imposed on nor gratified by Mr. Crawford’s attentions.

**CHAPTER XXXII**

**F**anny had by no means forgotten Mr. Crawford when she awoke the next

morning; but she remembered the purport of her note, and was not less sanguine

as to its effect than she had been the night before. If Mr. Crawford would but go

away! That was what she most earnestly desired;—go and take his sister with

him, as he was to do, and as he returned to Mansfield on purpose to do. And why

it was not done already she could not devise, for Miss Crawford certainly wanted

no delay. Fanny had hoped, in the course of his yesterday’s visit, to hear the day

named; but he had only spoken of their journey as what would take place ere

long.

Having so satisfactorily settled the conviction her note would convey, she

could not but be astonished to see Mr. Crawford, as she accidentally did, coming

up to the house again, and at an hour as early as the day before. His coming

might have nothing to do with her, but she must avoid seeing him if possible;

and being then in her way upstairs, she resolved there to remain, during the

whole of his visit, unless actually sent for; and as Mrs. Norris was still in the

house, there seemed little danger of her being wanted.

She sat some time in a good deal of agitation, listening, trembling, and fearing

to be sent for every moment; but as no footsteps approached the east room she

grew gradually composed, could sit down, and be able to employ herself, and

able to hope that Mr. Crawford had come, and would go, without her being

obliged to know anything of the matter.

Nearly half an hour had passed, and she was growing very comfortable, when

suddenly the sound of a step in regular approach was heard—a heavy step, an

unusual step in that part of the house; it was her uncle’s; she knew it as well as

his voice; she had trembled at it as often, and began to tremble again, at the idea

of his coming up to speak to her, whatever might be the subject. It was indeed

Sir Thomas who opened the door, and asked if she were there, and if he might

come in. The terror of his former occasional visits to that room seemed all

renewed, and she felt as if he were going to examine her again in French and

English.

She was all attention, however, in placing a chair for him, and trying to appear

honoured, and in her agitation had quite overlooked the deficiencies of her

apartment, till he, stopping short as he entered, said, with much surprise, ‘Why

have you no fire to-day?’

There was snow on the ground, and she was sitting in a shawl. She hesitated.

‘I am not cold, sir—I never sit here long at this time of year.’

‘But you have a fire in general?’

‘No, sir.’

‘How comes this about? here must be some mistake. I understood that you had

the use of this room by way of making you perfectly comfortable. In your bedchamber

I know you *cannot* have a fire. Here is some great misapprehension

which must be rectified. It is highly unfit for you to sit, be it only half an hour a

day, without a fire. You are not strong. You are chilly. Your aunt cannot be aware

of this.’

Fanny would rather have been silent; but being obliged to speak, she could not

forbear, in justice to the aunt she loved best, from saying something in which the

words ‘my aunt Norris’ were distinguishable.

‘I understand,’ cried her uncle, recollecting himself, and not wanting to hear

more—‘I understand. Your aunt Norris has always been an advocate, and very

judiciously, for young people’s being brought up without unnecessary

indulgences; but there should be moderation in everything. She is also very

hardy herself, which of course will influence her in her opinion of the wants of

others. And on another account, too, I can perfectly comprehend. I know what

her sentiments have always been. The principle was good in itself, but it may

have been. and I believe *has been,* carried too far in your case. I am aware that

there has been sometimes, in some points, a misplaced distinction; but I think

too well of you, Fanny, to suppose you will ever harbour resentment on that

account. You have an understanding which will prevent you from receiving

things only in part, and judging partially by the event. You will take in the whole

of the past, you will consider times, persons, and probabilities, and you will feel

that *they* were not least your friends who were educating and preparing you for

that mediocrity of condition which *seemed* to be your lot. Though their caution

may prove eventually unnecessary, it was kindly meant; and of this you may be

assured, that every advantage of affluence will be doubled by the little privations

and restrictions that may have been imposed. I am sure you will not disappoint

my opinion of you, by failing at any time to treat your aunt Norris with the

respect and attention that are due to her. But enough of this. Sit down, my dear. I

must speak to you for a few minutes, but I will not detain you long.’

Fanny obeyed, with eyes cast down and colour rising. After a moment’s

pause, Sir Thomas, trying to suppress a smile, went on.

‘You are not aware, perhaps, that I have had a visitor this morning. I had not

been long in my own room, after breakfast, when Mr. Crawford was shown in.

His errand you may probably conjecture.’

Fanny’s colour grew deeper and deeper; and her uncle, perceiving that she

was embarrassed to a degree that made either speaking or looking up quite

impossible, turned away his own eyes, and without any further pause proceeded

in his account of Mr. Crawford’s visit.

Mr. Crawford’s business had been to declare himself the lover of Fanny, make

decided proposals for her, and entreat the sanction of the uncle, who seemed to

stand in the place of her parents; and he had done it all so well, so openly, so

liberally, so properly, that Sir Thomas, feeling, moreover, his own replies and his

own remarks to have been very much to the purpose, was exceedingly happy to

give the particulars of their conversation, and, little aware of what was passing in

his niece’s mind, conceived that by such details he must be gratifying her far

more than himself. He talked, therefore, for several minutes without Fanny’s

daring to interrupt him. She had hardly even attained the wish to do it. Her mind

was in too much confusion. She had changed her position; and, with her eyes

fixed intently on one of the windows, was listening to her uncle in the utmost

perturbation and dismay. For a moment he ceased, but she had barely become

conscious of it, when, rising from his chair, he said, ‘And now, Fanny, having

performed one part of my commission, and shown you everything placed on the

basis the most assured and satisfactory, I may execute the remainder by

prevailing on you to accompany me downstairs, where, though I cannot but

presume on having been no unacceptable companion myself, I must submit to

your finding one still better worth listening to. Mr. Crawford, as you have

perhaps foreseen, is yet in the house. He is in my room and hoping to see you

there.’

There was a look, a start, an exclamation, on hearing this, which astonished

Sir Thomas; but what was his increase of astonishment on hearing her exclaim

—‘Oh no, sir, I cannot, indeed I cannot go down to him. Mr. Crawford ought to

know—he must know that—I told him enough yesterday to convince him—he

spoke to me on this subject yesterday—and I told him without disguise that it

was very disagreeable to me, and quite out of my power to return his good

opinion.’

‘I do not catch your meaning,’ said Sir Thomas, sitting down again. ‘Out of

your power to return his good opinion! what is all this? I know he spoke to you

yesterday, and (as far as I understand) received as much encouragement to

proceed as a well-judging young woman could permit herself to give. I was very

much pleased with what I collected to have been your behaviour on the

occasion; it showed a discretion highly to be commended. But now, when he has

made his overtures so properly, and honourably—what are your scruples *now?’*

‘You are mistaken, sir,’—cried Fanny, forced by the anxiety of the moment

even to tell her uncle that he was wrong,—‘you are quite mistaken. How could

Mr. Crawford say such a thing? I gave him no encouragement yesterday. On the

contrary, I told him—I cannot recollect my exact words—but I am sure I told

him that I would not listen to him, that it was very unpleasant to me in every

respect, and that I begged him never to talk to me in that manner again. I am sure

I said as much as that and more; and I should have said still more, if I had been

quite certain of his meaning anything seriously; but I did not like to be—I could

not bear to be—imputing more than might be intended. I thought it might all

pass for nothing with *him.’*

She could say no more; her breath was almost gone.

‘Am I to understand,’ said Sir Thomas, after a few moments’ silence, ‘that you

mean to *refuse* Mr. Crawford?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Refuse him?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Refuse Mr. Crawford! Upon what plea? For what reason?’

‘I—I cannot like him, sir, well enough to marry him.’

‘This is very strange!’ said Sir Thomas, in a voice of calm displeasure. ‘There

is something in this which my comprehension does not reach. Here is a young

man wishing to pay his addresses to you, with everything to recommend him:

not merely situation in life, fortune, and character, but with more than common

agreeableness, with address and conversation pleasing to everybody. And he is

not an acquaintance of to-day, you have now known him some time. His sister,

moreover, is your intimate friend, and he has been doing *that* for your brother,

which I should suppose would have been almost sufficient recommendation to

you, had there been no other. It is very uncertain when my interest might have

got William on. He has done it already.’

‘Yes,’ said Fanny, in a faint voice, and looking down with fresh shame; and

she did feel almost ashamed of herself, after such a picture as her uncle had

drawn, for not liking Mr. Crawford.

‘You must have been aware,’ continued Sir Thomas, presently,—‘you must

have been some time aware of a particularity in Mr. Crawford’s manners to you.

This cannot have taken you by surprise. You must have observed his attentions;

and though you always received them very properly (I have no accusation to

make on that head), I never perceived them to be unpleasant to you. I am half

inclined to think, Fanny, that you do not quite know your own feelings.’

‘Oh yes, sir, indeed I do. His attentions were always—what I did not like.’

Sir Thomas looked at her with deeper surprise. ‘This is beyond me,’ said he.

‘This requires explanation. Young as you are, and having seen scarcely any one,

it is hardly possible that your affections——’

He paused and eyed her fixedly. He saw her lips formed into a no, though the

sound was inarticulate, but her face was like scarlet. That, however, in so modest

a girl might be very compatible with innocence; and choosing at least to appear

satisfied, he quickly added, ‘No, no, I know *that* is quite out of the question—

quite impossible. Well, there is nothing more to be said.’

And for a few minutes he did say nothing. He was deep in thought. His niece

was deep in thought likewise, trying to harden and prepare herself against further

questioning. She would rather die than own the truth; and she hoped by a little

reflection to fortify herself beyond betraying it.

‘Independently of the interest which Mr. Crawford’s *choice* seemed to justify,’

said Sir Thomas, beginning again, and very composedly, ‘his wishing to marry at

all so early is recommendatory to me. I am an advocate for early marriages,

where there are means in proportion, and would have every young man, with a

sufficient income, settle as soon after four-and-twenty as he can. This is so much

my opinion, that I am sorry to think how little likely my own eldest son, your

cousin, Mr. Bertram, is to marry early; but at present, as far as I can judge,

matrimony makes no part of his plans or thoughts. I wish he were more likely to

fix.’ Here was a glance at Fanny. ‘Edmund I consider from his disposition and

habits as much more likely to marry early than his brother. *He,* indeed, I have

lately thought has seen the woman he could love, which, I am convinced, my

eldest son has not. Am I right? Do you agree with me, my dear?’

‘Yes, sir.’

It was gently, but it was calmly said, and Sir Thomas was easy on the score of

the cousins. But the removal of his alarm did his niece no service: as her

unaccountableness was confirmed, his displeasure increased; and getting up and

walking about the room with a frown, which Fanny could picture to herself,

though she dared not lift up her eyes, he shortly afterwards, and in a voice of

authority, said, ‘Have you any reason, child, to think ill of Mr. Crawford’s

temper?’

‘No, sir.’

She longed to add, ‘But of his principles I have’; but her heart sank under the

appalling prospect of discussion, explanation, and probably non-conviction. Her

ill opinion of him was founded chiefly on observations, which, for her cousins’

sake, she could scarcely dare mention to their father. Maria and Julia, and

especially Maria, were so closely implicated in Mr. Crawford’s misconduct, that

she could not give his character, such as she believed it, without betraying them.

She had hoped that to a man like her uncle, so discerning, so honourable, so

good, the simple acknowledgment of settled *dislike* on her side would have been

sufficient. To her infinite grief she found it was not.

Sir Thomas came towards the table where she sat in trembling wretchedness,

and with a good deal of cold sternness said: ‘It is of no use, I perceive, to talk to

you. We had better put an end to this most mortifying conference. Mr. Crawford

must not be kept longer waiting. I will, therefore, only add, as thinking it my

duty to mark my opinion of your conduct, that you have disappointed every

expectation I had formed, and proved yourself of a character the very reverse of

what I had supposed. For I *had,* Fanny, as I think my behaviour must have

shown, formed a very favourable opinion of you from the period of my return to

England. I had thought you peculiarly free from wilfulness of temper, selfconceit,

and every tendency to that independence of spirit which prevails so

much in modern days, even in young women, and which in young women is

offensive and disgusting beyond all common offence. But you have now shown

me that you can be wilful and perverse, that you can and will decide for yourself,

without any consideration or deference for those who have surely some right to

guide you—without even asking their advice. You have shown yourself very,

very different from anything that I had imagined. The advantage or disadvantage

of your family—of your parents—your brothers and sisters—never seems to

have had a moment’s share in your thoughts on this occasion. How *they* might be

benefited, how *they* must rejoice in such an establishment for you, is nothing to

*you.* You think only of yourself; and because you do not feel for Mr. Crawford

exactly what a young, heated fancy imagines to be necessary for happiness, you

resolve to refuse him at once, without wishing even for a little time to consider

of it,—a little more time for cool consideration, and for really examining your

own inclinations,—and are, in a wild fit of folly, throwing away from you such

an opportunity of being settled in life, eligibly, honourably, nobly settled, as will,

probably, never occur to you again. Here is a young man of sense, of character,

of temper, of manners, and of fortune, exceedingly attached to you, and seeking

your hand in the most handsome and disinterested way; and let me tell you,

Fanny, that you may live eighteen years longer in the world, without being

addressed by a man of half Mr. Crawford’s estate, or a tenth part of his merits.

Gladly would I have bestowed either of my own daughters on him. Maria is

nobly married; but had Mr. Crawford sought Julia’s hand, I should have given it

to him with superior and more heartfelt satisfaction than I gave Maria’s to Mr.

Rushworth.’ After half a moment’s pause—‘And I should have been very much

surprised had either of my daughters, on receiving a proposal of marriage at any

time, which might carry with it only *half* the eligibility of *this,* immediately and

peremptorily, and without paying my opinion or my regard the compliment of

any consultation, put a decided negative on it. I should have been much

surprised, and much hurt, by such a proceeding. I should have thought it a gross

violation of duty and respect. *You* are not to be judged by the same rule. You do

not owe me the duty of a child. But, Fanny, if your heart can acquit you of

*ingratitude*——’

He ceased. Fanny was by this time crying so bitterly, that, angry as he was, he

would not press that article further. Her heart was almost broken by such a

picture of what she appeared to him; by such accusations, so heavy, so

multiplied, so rising in dreadful gradation! Self-willed, obstinate, selfish, and

ungrateful. He thought her all this. She had deceived his expectations; she had

lost his good opinion. What was to become of her?

‘I am very sorry,’ said she, inarticulately, through her tears, ‘I am very sorry

indeed.’

‘Sorry! yes, I hope you are sorry; and you will probably have reason to be

long sorry for this day’s transactions.’

‘If it were possible for me to do otherwise,’ said she, with another strong

effort,—‘but I am so perfectly convinced that I could never make him happy, and

that I should be miserable myself.’

Another burst of tears; but in spite of that burst, and in spite of that great black

word *miserable,* which served to introduce it, Sir Thomas began to think a little

relenting, a little change of inclination, might have something to do with it; and

to augur favourably from the personal entreaty of the young man himself. He

knew her to be very timid, and exceedingly nervous; and thought it not

improbable that her mind might be in such a state as a little time, a little

pressing, a little patience, and a little impatience, a judicious mixture of all on

the lover’s side, might work their usual effect on. If the gentleman would but

persevere—if he had but love enough to persevere—Sir Thomas began to have

hopes; and these reflections having passed across his mind and cheered it, ‘Well,’

said he, in a tone of becoming gravity, but of less anger,—‘well, child, dry up

your tears. There is no use in these tears; they can do no good. You must now

come downstairs with me. Mr. Crawford has been kept waiting too long already.

You must give him your own answer: you cannot expect him to be satisfied with

less; and you only can explain to him the grounds of that misconception of your

sentiments, which, unfortunately for himself, he certainly has imbibed. I am

totally unequal to it.’

But Fanny showed such reluctance, such misery, at the idea of going down to

him, that Sir Thomas, after a little consideration, judged it better to indulge her.

His hopes from both gentleman and lady suffered a small depression in

consequence; but when he looked at his niece, and saw the state of feature and

complexion which her crying had brought her into, he thought there might be as

much lost as gained by an immediate interview. With a few words, therefore, of

no particular meaning, he walked off by himself, leaving his poor niece to sit and

cry over what had passed with very wretched feelings.

Her mind was all disorder. The past, present, future, everything was terrible.

But her uncle’s anger gave her the severest pain of all. Selfish and ungrateful! to

have appeared so to him! She was miserable for ever. She had no one to take her

part, to counsel, or speak for her. Her only friend was absent. He might have

softened his father; but all, perhaps all, would think her selfish and ungrateful.

She might have to endure the reproach again and again; she might hear it, or see

it, or know it to exist for ever in every connection about her. She could not but

feel some resentment against Mr. Crawford; yet, if he really loved her, and were

unhappy too!—it was all wretchedness together.

In about a quarter of an hour her uncle returned; she was almost ready to faint

at the sight of him. He spoke calmly, however, without austerity, without

reproach, and she revived a little. There was comfort, too, in his words, as well

as his manner, for he began with, ‘Mr. Crawford is gone; he has just left me. I

need not repeat what has passed. I do not want to add to anything you may now

be feeling, by an account of what he has felt. Suffice it, that he has behaved in

the most gentleman-like and generous manner; and has confirmed me in a most

favourable opinion of his understanding, heart, and temper. Upon my

representation of what you were suffering, he immediately, and with the greatest

delicacy, ceased to urge to see you for the present.’

Here Fanny, who had looked up, looked down again. ‘Of course,’ continued

her uncle, ‘it cannot be supposed but that he should request to speak with you

alone, be it only for five minutes; a request too natural, a claim too just, to be

denied. But there is no time fixed, perhaps tomorrow, or whenever your spirits

are composed enough. For the present you have only to tranquillise yourself.

Check these tears; they do but exhaust you. If, as I am willing to suppose, you

wish to show me any observance, you will not give way to these emotions, but

endeavour to reason yourself into a stronger frame of mind. I advise you to go

out, the air will do you good; go out for an hour on the gravel, you will have the

shrubbery to yourself, and will be the better for air and exercise. And, Fanny

(turning back again for a moment), I shall make no mention below of what has

passed; I shall not even tell your aunt Bertram. There is no occasion for

spreading the disappointment; say nothing about it yourself.’

This was an order to be most joyfully obeyed; this was an act of kindness

which Fanny felt at her heart. To be spared from her aunt Norris’s interminable

reproaches!—he left her in a glow of gratitude. Anything might be bearable

rather than such reproaches. Even to see Mr. Crawford would be less

overpowering.

She walked out directly, as her uncle recommended, and followed his advice

throughout, as far as she could; did check her tears, did earnestly try to compose

her spirits and strengthen her mind. She wished to prove to him that she did

desire his comfort, and sought to regain his favour; and he had given her another

strong motive for exertion, in keeping the whole affair from the knowledge of

her aunts. Not to excite suspicion by her look or manner was now an object

worth attaining; and she felt equal to almost anything that might save her from

her aunt Norris.

She was struck, quite struck, when, on returning from her walk, and going into

the east room again, the first thing which caught her eye was a fire lighted and

burning. A fire! it seemed too much; just at that time to be giving her such an

indulgence, was exciting even painful gratitude. She wondered that Sir Thomas

could have leisure to think of such a trifle again; but she soon found, from the

voluntary information of the housemaid, who came in to attend it, that so it was

to be every day. Sir Thomas had given orders for it.

‘I must be a brute, indeed, if I can be really ungrateful!’ said she, in soliloquy.

‘Heaven defend me from being ungrateful!’

She saw nothing more of her uncle, nor of her aunt Norris, till they met at

dinner. Her uncle’s behaviour to her was then as nearly as possible what it had

been before; she was sure he did not mean there should be any change, and that

it was only her own conscience that could fancy any; but her aunt was soon

quarrelling with her; and when she found how much and how unpleasantly her

having only walked out without her aunt’s knowledge could be dwelt on, she felt

all the reason she had to bless the kindness which saved her from the same spirit

of reproach, exerted on a more momentous subject.

‘If I had known you were going out, I should have got you just to go as far as

my house with some orders for Nanny,’ said she, ‘which I have since, to my very

great inconvenience, been obliged to go and carry myself. I could very ill spare

the time, and you might have saved me the trouble, if you would only have been

so good as to let us know you were going out. It would have made no difference

to you, I suppose, whether you had walked in the shrubbery or gone to my

house.’

‘I recommended the shrubbery to Fanny as the driest place,’ said Sir Thomas.

‘Oh,’ said Mrs. Norris, with a moment’s check, ‘that was very kind of you, Sir

Thomas; but you do not know how dry the path is to my house. Fanny would

have had quite as good a walk there, I assure you, with the advantage of being of

some use, and obliging her aunt; it is all her fault. If she would but have let us

know she was going out—but there is a something about Fanny, I have often

observed it before—she likes to go her own way to work; she does not like to be

dictated to; she takes her own independent walk, whenever she can; she certainly

has a little spirit of secrecy, and independence, and nonsense about her, which I

would advise her to get the better of.’

As a general reflection on Fanny, Sir Thomas thought nothing could be more

unjust, though he had been so lately expressing the same sentiments himself, and

he tried to turn the conversation; tried repeatedly before he could succeed; for

Mrs. Norris had not discernment enough to perceive, either now, or at any other

time, to what degree he thought well of his niece, or how very far he was from

wishing to have his own children’s merits set off by the depreciation of hers. She

was talking *at* Fanny, and resenting this private walk, half through the dinner.

It was over, however, at last; and the evening set in with more composure to

Fanny, and more cheerfulness of spirits than she could have hoped for after so

stormy a morning: but she trusted, in the first place, that she had done right, that

her judgment had not misled her; for the purity of her intentions she could

answer; and she was willing to hope, secondly, that her uncle’s displeasure was

abating, and would abate further as he considered the matter with more

impartiality, and felt, as a good man must feel, how wretched and how

unpardonable, how hopeless and how wicked, it was to marry without affection.

When the meeting with which she was threatened for the morrow was past,

she could not but flatter herself that the subject would be finally concluded, and

Mr. Crawford once gone from Mansfield, that everything would soon be as if no

such subject had existed. She would not, could not, believe that Mr. Crawford’s

affection for her could distress him long; his mind was not of that sort. London

would soon bring its cure. In London he would soon learn to wonder at his

infatuation, and be thankful for the right reason in her which had saved him from

its evil consequences.

While Fanny’s mind was engaged in these sort of hopes, her uncle was soon

after tea called out of the room; an occurrence too common to strike her, and she

thought nothing of it till the butler reappeared ten minutes afterwards, and

advancing decidedly towards herself, said, ‘Sir Thomas wishes to speak with

you, ma’am, in his own room.‘ Then it occurred to her what might he going on;

a suspicion rushed over her mind which drove the colour from her cheeks; but

instantly rising, she was preparing to obey, when Mrs. Norris called out, ‘Stay,

stay, Fanny! what are you about? where are you going? don’t be in such a hurry.

Depend upon it, it is not you that are wanted; depend upon it, it is me (looking at

the butler); but you are so very eager to put yourself forward. What should Sir

Thomas want you for? It is me, Baddeley, you mean; I am coming this moment.

You mean me, Baddeley, I am sure; Sir Thomas wants me, not Miss Price.’

But Baddeley was stout. ‘No, ma’am, it is Miss Price; I am certain of its being

Miss Price.‘ And there was a half-smile with the words which meant, ’I do not

think *you* would answer the purpose at all.’

Mrs. Norris, much discontented, was obliged to compose herself to work

again; and Fanny, walking off in agitating consciousness, found herself; as she

anticipated, in another minute alone with Mr. Crawford.

**CHAPTER XXXIII**

**T**he conference was neither so short, nor so conclusive, as the lady had designed.

The gentleman was not so easily satisfied. He had all the disposition to persevere

that Sir Thomas could wish him. He had vanity, which strongly inclined him, in

the first place, to think she did love him, though she might not know it herself;

and which, secondly, when constrained at last to admit that she did know her

own present feelings, convinced him that he should be able in time to make

those feelings what he wished.

He was in love, very much in love; and it was a love which, operating on an

active, sanguine spirit, of more warmth than delicacy, made her affection appear

of greater consequence because it was withheld, and determined him to have the

glory, as well as the felicity, of forcing her to love him.

He would not despair: he would not desist. He had every well-grounded

reason for solid attachment; he knew her to have all the worth that could justify

the warmest hopes of lasting happiness with her; her conduct at this very time,

by speaking the disinterestedness and delicacy of her character (qualities which

he believed most rare indeed), was of a sort to heighten all his wishes, and

confirm all his resolutions. He knew not that he had a pre-engaged heart to

attack. Of *that* he had no suspicion. He considered her rather as one who had

never thought on the subject enough to be in danger; who had been guarded by

youth, a youth of mind as lovely as of person; whose modesty had prevented her

from understanding his attentions, and who was still overpowered by the

suddenness of addresses so wholly unexpected, and the novelty of a situation

which her fancy had never taken into account.

Must it not follow of course that, when he was understood, he should

succeed?—he believed it fully. Love such as his, in a man like himself, must

with perseverance secure a return, and at no great distance; and he had so much

delight in the idea of obliging her to love him in a very short time, that her not

loving him now was scarcely regretted. A little difficulty to be overcome was no

evil to Henry Crawford. He rather derived spirits from it. He had been apt to

gain hearts too easily. His situation was new and animating.

To Fanny, however, who had known too much opposition all her life to find

any charm in it, all this was unintelligible. She found that he did mean to

persevere; but how he could, after such language from her as she felt herself

obliged to use, was not to be understood. She told him that she did not love him,

could not love him, was sure she never should love him; that such a change was

quite impossible; that the subject was most painful to her; that she must entreat

him never to mention it again, to allow her to leave him at once, and let it be

considered as concluded for ever. And when further pressed, had added, that in

her opinion their dispositions were so totally dissimilar as to make mutual

affection incompatible; and that they were unfitted for each other by nature,

education, and habit. All this she had said, and with the earnestness of sincerity:

yet this was not enough, for he immediately denied there being anything

uncongenial in their characters, or anything unfriendly in their situations; and

positively declared that he would still love and still hope!

Fanny knew her own meaning, but was no judge of her own manner. Her

manner was incurably gentle; and she was not aware how much it concealed the

sternness of her purpose. Her diffidence, gratitude, and softness, made every

expression of indifference seem almost an effort of self-denial; seem, at least, to

be giving nearly as much pain to herself as to him. Mr. Crawford was no longer

the Mr. Crawford who, as the clandestine, insidious, treacherous admirer of

Maria Bertram, had been her abhorrence, whom she had hated to see or to speak

to, in whom she could believe no good quality to exist, and whose power, even

of being agreeable, she had barely acknowledged. He was now the Mr. Crawford

who was addressing herself with ardent, disinterested love; whose feelings were

apparently become all that was honourable and upright, whose views of

happiness were all fixed on a marriage of attachment; who was pouring out his

sense of her merits, describing and describing again his affection, proving, as far

as words could prove it, and in the language, tone, and spirit of a man of talent

too, that he sought her for her gentleness and her goodness; and to complete the

whole, he was now the Mr. Crawford who had procured William’s promotion!

Here was a change, and here were claims which could not but operate! She

might have disdained him in all the dignity of angry virtue, in the grounds of

Sotherton, or the theatre at Mansfield Park; but he approached her now with

rights that demanded different treatment. She must be courteous, and she must

be compassionate. She must have a sensation of being honoured, and whether

thinking of herself or her brother, she must have a strong feeling of gratitude.

The effect of the whole was a manner so pitying and agitated, and words

intermingled with her refusal so expressive of obligation and concern, that, to a

temper of vanity and hope like Crawford’s, the truth, or at least the strength, of

her indifference might well be questionable; and he was not so irrational as

Fanny considered him, in the professions of persevering, assiduous, and not

desponding attachment which closed the interview.

It was with reluctance that he suffered her to go; but there was no look of

despair in parting to belie his words, or give her hopes of his being less

unreasonable than he professed himself.

Now she was angry. Some resentment did arise at a perseverance so selfish

and ungenerous. Here was again a want of delicacy and regard for others which

had formerly so struck and disgusted her. Here was again a something of the

same Mr. Crawford whom she had so reprobated before. How evidently was

there a gross want of feeling and humanity where his own pleasure was

concerned; and, alas! how always known no principle to supply as a duty what

the heart was deficient in. Had her own affections been as free—as perhaps they

ought to have been—he never could have engaged them.

So thought Fanny in good truth and sober sadness, as she sat musing over that

too great indulgence and luxury of a fire upstairs—wondering at the past and

present, wondering at what was yet to come, and in a nervous agitation which

made nothing clear to her but the persuasion of her being never under any

circumstances able to love Mr. Crawford, and the felicity of having a fire to sit

over and think of it.

Sir Thomas was obliged or obliged himself to wait till the morrow for a

knowledge of what had passed between the young people. He then saw Mr.

Crawford, and received his account. The first feeling was disappointment: he

had hoped better things; he had thought that an hour’s entreaty from a young

man like Crawford could not have worked so little change on a gentle-tempered

girl like Fanny; but there was speedy comfort in the determined views and

sanguine perseverance of the lover; and when seeing such confidence of success

in the principal, Sir Thomas was soon able to depend on himself.

Nothing was omitted, on his side, of civility, compliment, or kindness, that

might assist the plan. Mr. Crawford’s steadiness was honoured, and Fanny was

praised, and the connection was still the most desirable in the world. At

Mansfield Park Mr. Crawford would always be welcome; he had only to consult

his own judgment and feelings as to the frequency of his visits, at present or in

future. In all the niece’s family and friends there could be but one opinion, one

wish, on the subject; the influence of all who loved her must incline one way.

Everything was said that could encourage, every encouragement received with

grateful joy, and the gentlemen parted the best of friends.

Satisfied that the cause was now on a footing the most proper and hopeful, Sir

Thomas resolved to abstain from all further importunity with his niece, and to

show no open interference. Upon her disposition he believed kindness might be

the best way of working. Entreaty should be from one quarter only. The

forbearance of her family on a point, respecting which she could be in no doubt

of their wishes, might be their surest means of forwarding it. Accordingly on this

principle Sir Thomas took the first opportunity of saying to her, with a mild

gravity, intended to be overcoming, ‘Well, Fanny, I have seen Mr. Crawford

again, and learn from him exactly how matters stand between you. He is a most

extraordinary young man, and whatever be the event, you must feel that you

have created an attachment of no common character; though, young as you are,

and little acquainted with the transient, varying, unsteady nature of love, as it

generally exists, you cannot be struck as I am with all that is wonderful in a

perseverance of this sort against discouragement. With him, it is entirely a matter

of feeling; he claims no merit in it, perhaps is entitled to none. Yet, having

chosen so well, his constancy has a respectable stamp. Had his choice been less

unexceptionable, I should have condemned his persevering.’

‘Indeed, sir,’ said Fanny, ‘I am very sorry that Mr. Crawford should continue

to—I know that it is paying me a very great compliment, and I feel most

undeservedly honoured, but I am so perfectly convinced, and I have told him so,

that it will never be in my power——’

‘My dear,’ interrupted Sir Thomas, ‘there is no occasion for this. Your feelings

are as well known to me as my wishes and regrets must be to you. There is

nothing more to be said or done. From this hour the subject is never to be

revived between us. You will have nothing to fear, or to be agitated about. You

cannot suppose me capable of trying to persuade you to marry against your

inclinations. Your happiness and advantage are all that I have in view, and

nothing is required of you but to bear with Mr. Crawford’s endeavours to

convince you that they may not be incompatible with his. He proceeds at his

own risk. You are on safe ground. I have engaged for your seeing him whenever

he calls, as you might have done had nothing of this sort occurred. You will see

him with the rest of us, in the same manner, and, as much as you can, dismissing

the recollection of everything unpleasant. He leaves Northamptonshire so soon,

that even this slight sacrifice cannot be often demanded. The future must be very

uncertain. And now, my dear Fanny, this subject is closed between us.’

The promised departure was all that Fanny could think of with much

satisfaction. Her uncle’s kind expressions, however, and forbearing manner, were

sensibly felt; and when she considered how much of the truth was unknown to

him, she believed she had no right to wonder at the line of conduct he pursued.

He who had married a daughter to Mr. Rushworth. Romantic delicacy was

certainly not to be expected from him. She must do her duty, and trust that time

might make her duty easier than it now was.

She could not, though only eighteen, suppose Mr. Crawford’s attachment

would hold out for ever; she could not but imagine that steady, unceasing

discouragement from herself would put an end to it in time. How much time she

might, in her own fancy, allot for its dominion, is another concern. It would not

be fair to inquire into a young lady’s exact estimate of her own perfections.

In spite of his intended silence, Sir Thomas found himself once more obliged

to mention the subject to his niece; to prepare her briefly for its being imparted

to her aunts—a measure which he would still have avoided, if possible, but

which became necessary from the totally opposite feelings of Mr. Crawford, as

to any secrecy of proceeding. He had no idea of concealment. It was all known

at the Parsonage, where he loved to talk over the future with both his sisters; and

it would be rather gratifying to him to have enlightened witnesses of the progress

of his success. When Sir Thomas understood this, he felt the necessity of making

his own wife and sister-in-law acquainted with the business without delay;

though, on Fanny’s account, he almost dreaded the effect of the communication

to Mrs. Norris as much as Fanny herself. He deprecated her mistaken but wellmeaning

zeal. Sir Thomas, indeed, was, by this time, not very far from classing

Mrs. Norris as one of those well-meaning people who are always doing mistaken

and very disagreeable things.

Mrs. Norris, however, relieved him. He pressed for the strictest forbearance

and silence towards their niece; she not only promised, but did observe it. She

only looked her increased ill-will. Angry she was, bitterly angry; but she was

more angry with Fanny for having received such an offer than for refusing it. It

was an injury and affront to Julia, who ought to have been Mr. Crawford’s

choice; and, independently of that, she disliked Fanny because she had neglected

her; and she would have grudged such an elevation to one whom she had been

always trying to depress.

Sir Thomas gave her more credit for discretion on the occasion than she

deserved; and Fanny could have blessed her for allowing her only to see her

displeasure, and not to hear it.

Lady Bertram took it differently. She had been a beauty, and a prosperous

beauty, all her life; and beauty and wealth were all that excited her respect. To

know Fanny to be sought in marriage by a man of fortune raised her, therefore,

very much in her opinion. By convincing her that Fanny *was* very pretty, which

she had been doubting about before, and that she would be advantageously

married, it made her feel a sort of credit in calling her niece.

‘Well, Fanny,’ said she, as soon as they were alone together afterwards,—and

she really had known something like impatience to be alone with her, and her

countenance, as she spoke, had extraordinary animation,—‘Well, Fanny, I have

had a very agreeable surprise this morning. I must just speak of it *once,* I told Sir

Thomas I must *once,* and then I shall have done. I give you joy, my dear niece.’

And looking at her complacently, she added, ‘Humph—we certainly are a

handsome family.’

Fanny coloured, and doubted at first what to say; when, hoping to assail her

on her vulnerable side, she presently answered—

‘My dear aunt, *you* cannot wish me to do differently from what I have done, I

am sure. *You* cannot wish me to marry; for you would miss me, should not you?

—Yes, I am sure you would miss me too much for that.’

‘No, my dear, I should not think of missing you, when such an offer as this

comes in your way. I could do very well without you, if you were married to a

man of such good estate as Mr. Crawford. And you must be aware, Fanny, that it

is every young woman’s duty to accept such a very unexceptionable offer as

this.’

This was almost the only rule of conduct, the only piece of advice, which

Fanny had ever received from her aunt in the course of eight years and a half. It

silenced her. She felt how unprofitable contention would be. If her aunt’s

feelings were against her, nothing could be hoped from attacking her

understanding. Lady Bertram was quite talkative.

‘I will tell you what, Fanny,’ said she,—‘I am sure he fell in love with you at

the ball; I am sure the mischief was done that evening. You did look remarkably

well. Everybody said so. Sir Thomas said so. And you know you had Chapman

to help you dress. I am very glad I sent Chapman to you. I shall tell Sir Thomas

that I am sure it was done that evening.’ And, still pursuing the same cheerful

thoughts, she soon afterwards added,—‘And I will tell you what, Fanny—which

is more than I did for Maria—the next time pug has a litter you shall have a

puppy.’

**CHAPTER XXXIV**

**E**dmund had great things to hear on his return. Many surprises were awaiting

him. The first that occurred was not least in interest,—the appearance of Henry

Crawford and his sister walking together through the village, as he rode into it.

He had concluded,—he had meant them to be far distant. His absence had been

extended beyond a fortnight purposely to avoid Miss Crawford. He was

returning to Mansfield with spirits ready to feed on melancholy remembrances

and tender associations, when her own fair self was before him, leaning on her

brother’s arm; and he found himself receiving a welcome, unquestionably

friendly, from the woman whom, two moments before, he had been thinking of

as seventy miles off, and as further, much further, from him in inclination than

any distance could express.

Her reception of him was of a sort which he could not have hoped for, had he

expected to see her. Coming as he did from such a purport fulfilled as had taken

him away, he would have expected anything rather than a look of satisfaction,

and words of simple, pleasant meaning. It was enough to set his heart in a glow,

and to bring him home in the properest state for feeling the full value of the other

joyful surprises at hand.

William’s promotion, with all its particulars, he was soon master of; and with

such a secret provision of comfort within his own breast to help the joy, he found

in it a source of most gratifying sensation and unvarying cheerfulness all

dinnertime.

After dinner, when he and his father were alone, he had Fanny’s history; and

then all the great events of the last fortnight and the present situation of matters

at Mansfield were known to him.

Fanny suspected what was going on. They sat so much longer than usual in

the dining-parlour, that she was sure they must be talking of her; and when tea at

last brought them away, and she was to be seen by Edmund again, she felt

dreadfully guilty. He came to her, sat down by her, took her hand, and pressed it

kindly; and at that moment she thought that, but for the occupation and the scene

which the tea-things afforded, she must have betrayed her emotion in some

unpardonable excess.

He was not intending, however, by such action, to be conveying to her that

unqualified approbation and encouragement which her hopes drew from it. It

was designed only to express his participation in all that interested her, and to

tell her that he had been hearing what quickened every feeling of affection. He

was, in fact, entirely on his father’s side of the question. His surprise was not so

great as his father‘s, at her refusing Crawford, because, so far from supposing

her to consider him with anything like a preference, he had always believed it to

be rather the reverse, and could imagine her to be taken perfectly unprepared,

but Sir Thomas could not regard the connection as more desirable than he did. It

had every recommendation to him; and while honouring her for what she had

done under the influence of her present indifference, honouring her in rather

stronger terms than Sir Thomas could quite echo, he was most earnest in hoping,

and sanguine in believing, that it would be a match at last, and that, united by

mutual affection, it would appear that their dispositions were as exactly fitted to

make them blessed in each other, as he was now beginning seriously to consider

them. Crawford had been too precipitate. He had not given her time to attach

herself. He had begun at the wrong end. With such powers as his, however, and

such a disposition as hers, Edmund trusted that everything would work out a

happy conclusion. Meanwhile, he saw enough of Fanny’s embarrassment to

make him scrupulously guard against exciting it a second time by any word, or

look, or movement.

Crawford called the next day, and on the score of Edmund’s return, Sir

Thomas felt himself more than licensed to ask him to stay to dinner; it was really

a necessary compliment. He stayed of course, and Edmund had then ample

opportunity for observing how he sped with Fanny, and what degree of

immediate encouragement for him might be extracted from her manners; and it

was so little, so very, very little (every chance, every possibility of it, resting

upon her embarrassment only, if there was not hope in her confusion, there was

hope in nothing else), that he was almost ready to wonder at his friend’s

perseverance. Fanny was worth it all; he held her to be worth every effort of

patience, every exertion of mind—but he did not think he could have gone on

himself with any woman breathing, without something more to warm his

courage than his eyes could discern in hers. He was very willing to hope that

Crawford saw clearer; and this was the most comfortable conclusion for his

friend that he could come to from all that he observed to pass before, and at, and

after dinner.

In the evening a few circumstances occurred which he thought more

promising. When he and Crawford walked into the drawing-room, his mother

and Fanny were sitting as intently and silently at work as if there were nothing

else to care for. Edmund could not help noticing their apparently deep

tranquillity.

‘We have not been so silent all the time,’ replied his mother. ‘Fanny has been

reading to me, and only put the book down upon hearing you coming.’ And sure

enough there was a book on the table which had the air of being very recently

closed, a volume of Shakespeare. ‘She often reads to me out of those books; and

she was in the middle of a very fine speech of that man’s—What’s his name,

Fanny ?—when we heard your footsteps.’

Crawford took the volume. ‘Let me have the pleasure of finishing that speech

to your Ladyship,’ said he. ‘I shall find it immediately.’ And by carefully giving

way to the inclination of the leaves, he did find it, or within a page or two, quite

near enough to satisfy Lady Bertram, who assured him, as soon as he mentioned

the name of Cardinal Wolsey, that he had got the very speech. Not a look or an

offer of help had Fanny given; not a syllable for or against. All her attention was

for her work. She seemed determined to be interested by nothing else. But taste

was too strong in her. She could not abstract her mind five minutes; she was

forced to listen; his reading was capital, and her pleasure in good reading

extreme. To *good* reading, however, she had been long used; her uncle read well

—her cousins all—Edmund very well; but in Mr. Crawford’s reading there was a

variety of excellence beyond what she had ever met with. The King, the Queen,

Buckingham, Wolsey, Cromwell, all were given in turn; for with the happiest

knack, the happiest power of jumping and guessing, he could always light, at

will, on the best scene, or the best speeches of each; and whether it were dignity

or pride, or tenderness or remorse, or whatever were to be expressed, he could

do it with equal beauty. It was truly dramatic. His acting had first taught Fanny

what pleasure a play might give, and his reading brought all his acting before her

again; nay, perhaps with greater enjoyment, for it came unexpectedly, and with

no such drawback as she had been used to suffer in seeing him on the stage with

Miss Bertram.

Edmund watched the progress of her attention, and was amused and gratified

by seeing how she gradually slackened in the needlework, which, at the

beginning, seemed to occupy her totally; how it fell from her hand while she sat

motionless over it—and at last, how the eyes which had appeared so studiously

to avoid him throughout the day were turned and fixed on Crawford, fixed on

him for minutes, fixed on him, in short, till the attraction drew Crawford’s upon

her, and the book was closed, and the charm was broken. Then she was shrinking

again into herself, and blushing and working as hard as ever; but it had been

enough to give Edmund encouragement for his friend, and as he cordially

thanked him, he hoped to be expressing Fanny’s secret feelings too.

‘That play must be a favourite with you,’ said he; ‘you read as if you knew it

well.’

‘It will be a favourite, I believe, from this hour,’ replied Crawford; ‘but I do

not think I have had a volume of Shakespeare in my hand before since I was

fifteen. I once saw Henry the Eighth acted,—or I have heard of it from

somebody who did—I am not certain which. But Shakespeare one gets

acquainted with without knowing how. It is a part of an Englishman’s

constitution. His thoughts and beauties are so spread abroad that one touches

them everywhere; one is intimate with him by instinct. No man of any brain can

open at a good part of one of his plays without falling into the flow of his

meaning immediately.’

‘No doubt one is familiar with Shakespeare in a degree,’ said Edmund, ‘from

one’s earliest years. His celebrated passages are quoted by everybody: they are

in half the books we open, and we all talk Shakespeare, use his similes, and

describe with his descriptions; but this is totally distinct from giving his sense as

you gave it. To know him in bits and scraps is common enough; to know him

pretty thoroughly is, perhaps, not uncommon; but to read him well aloud is no

everyday talent.’

‘Sir, you do me honour,’ was Crawford’s answer, with a bow of mock gravity.

Both gentlemen had a glance at Fanny, to see if a word of accordant praise

could be extorted from her; yet both feeling that it could not be. Her praise had

been given in her attention; *that* must content them.

Lady Bertram’s admiration was expressed, and strongly too. ‘It was really like

being at a play,’ said she. ‘I wish Sir Thomas had been here.’

Crawford was excessively pleased. If Lady Bertram, with all her

incompetency and languor, could feel this, the inference of what her niece, alive

and enlightened as she was, must feel, was elevating.

‘You have a great turn for acting, I am sure, Mr. Crawford,’ said her Ladyship

soon afterwards—‘and I will tell you what, I think you will have a theatre, some

time or other, at your house in Norfolk. I mean when you are settled there. I do,

indeed. I think you will fit up a theatre at your house in Norfolk.’

‘Do you, ma’am?‘ cried he, with quickness. ’No, no, that will never be. Your

Ladyship is quite mistaken. No theatre at Everingham! Oh no.‘ And he looked at

Fanny with an expressive smile, which evidently meant, ’That lady will never

allow a theatre at Everingham.’

Edmund saw it all, and saw Fanny so determined *not* to see it, as to make it

clear that the voice was enough to convey the full meaning of the protestation;

and such a quick consciousness of compliment, such a ready comprehension of a

hint, he thought, was rather favourable than not.

The subject of reading aloud was further discussed. The two young men were

the only talkers, but they, standing by the fire, talked over the too common

neglect of the qualification, the total inattention to it, in the ordinary schoolsystem

for boys, the consequently natural, yet in some instances almost

unnatural, degree of ignorance and uncouthness of men, of sensible and wellinformed

men, when suddenly called to the necessity of reading aloud, which

had fallen within their notice, giving instances of blunders, and failures with

their secondary causes, the want of management of the voice, of proper

modulation and emphasis, of foresight and judgment, all proceeding from the

first cause, want of early attention and habit; and Fanny was listening again with

great entertainment.

‘Even in my profession,’ said Edmund, with a smile, ‘how little the art of

reading has been studied! how little a clear manner, and good delivery, have

been attended to! I speak rather of the past, however, than the present. There is

now a spirit of improvement abroad; but among those who were ordained

twenty, thirty, forty years ago, the larger number, to judge by their performance,

must have thought reading was reading, and preaching was preaching. It is

different now. The subject is more justly considered. It is felt that distinctness

and energy may have weight in recommending the most solid truths; and,

besides, there is more general observation and taste, a more critical knowledge

diffused than formerly; in every congregation there is a larger proportion who

know a little of the matter, and who can judge and criticise.’

Edmund had already gone through the service once since his ordination; and

upon this being understood, he had a variety of questions from Crawford as to

his feelings and success; questions which being made—though with the vivacity

of friendly interest and quick taste—without any touch of that spirit of banter or

air of levity which Edmund knew to be most offensive to Fanny, he had true

pleasure in satisfying; and when Crawford proceeded to ask his opinion and give

his own as to the properest manner in which particular passages in the service

should be delivered, showing it to be a subject on which he had thought before,

and thought with judgment, Edmund was still more and more pleased. This

would be the way to Fanny’s heart. She was not to be won by all that gallantry

and wit, and good-nature together, could do; or at least, she would not be won by

them nearly so soon, without the assistance of sentiment and feeling, and

seriousness on serious subjects.

‘Our liturgy,’ observed Crawford, ‘has beauties, which not even a careless,

slovenly style of reading can destroy; but it has also redundancies and repetitions

which require good reading not to be felt. For myself, at least, I must confess

being not always so attentive as I ought to be (here was a glance at Fanny); that

nineteen times out of twenty I am thinking how such a prayer ought to be read,

and longing to have it to read myself—Did you speak?’ stepping eagerly to

Fanny, and addressing her in a softened voice; and upon her saying, ‘No,’ he

added, ‘Are you sure you did not speak? I saw your lips move. I fancied you

might be going to tell me I ought to be more attentive, and not *allow* my

thoughts to wander. Are not you going to tell me so?’

‘No, indeed, you know your duty too well for me to—even supposing—’

She stopped, felt herself getting into a puzzle, and could not be prevailed on to

add another word, not by dint of several minutes of supplication and waiting. He

then returned to his former station, and went on as if there had been no such

tender interruption.

‘A sermon, well delivered, is more uncommon even than prayers well read. A

sermon, good in itself, is no rare thing. It is more difficult to speak well than to

compose well; that is, the rules and trick of composition are oftener an object of

study. A thoroughly good sermon, thoroughly well delivered, is a capital

gratification. I can never hear such a one without the greatest admiration and

respect, and more than half a mind to take orders and preach myself. There is

something in the eloquence of the pulpit, when it is really eloquence, which is

entitled to the highest praise and honour. The preacher who can touch and affect

such a heterogeneous mass of hearers, on subjects limited, and long worn

threadbare in all common hands; who can say anything new or striking, anything

that rouses the attention, without offending the taste, or wearing out the feelings

of his hearers, is a man whom one could not (in his public capacity) honour

enough. I should like to be such a man.’

Edmund laughed.

‘I should indeed. I never listened to a distinguished preacher in my life

without a sort of envy. But then, I must have a London audience. I could not

preach, but to the educated; to those who were capable of estimating my

composition. And I do not know that I should be fond of preaching often; now

and then, perhaps, once or twice in the spring, after being anxiously expected for

half a dozen Sundays together; but not for a constancy; it would not do for a

constancy.’

Here Fanny, who could not but listen, involuntarily shook her head, and

Crawford was instantly by her side again, entreating to know her meaning; and

as Edmund perceived, by his drawing in a chair, and sitting down close by her,

that it was to be a very thorough attack, that looks and undertones were to be

well tried, he sank as quietly as possible into a corner, turned his back, and took

up a newspaper, very sincerely wishing that dear little Fanny might be persuaded

into explaining away that shake of the head to the satisfaction of her ardent

lover; and as earnestly trying to bury every sound of the business from himself in

murmurs of his own, over the various advertisements of ‘A most desirable Estate

in South Wales’—‘To Parents and Guardians’—and a ‘Capital season’d Hunter.’

Fanny, meanwhile, vexed with herself for not having been as motionless as

she was speechless, and grieved to the heart to see Edmund’s arrangements, was

trying, by everything in the power of her modest, gentle nature, to repulse Mr.

Crawford, and avoid both his looks and inquiries; and he, unrepulsable, was

persisting in both.

‘What did that shake of the head mean?’ said he. ‘What was it meant to

express? Disapprobation, I fear. But of what? What had I been saying to

displease you? Did you think me speaking improperly? lightly, irreverently on

the subject? Only tell me if I was. Only tell me if I was wrong. I want to be set

right. Nay, nay, I entreat you; for one moment put down your work. What did

that shake of the head mean?’

In vain was her ‘Pray, sir, don’t—pray, Mr. Crawford‘—repeated twice over;

and in vain did she try to move away. In the same low, eager voice, and the same

close neighbourhood, he went on, re-urging the same questions as before. She

grew more agitated and displeased.

‘How can you, sir? You quite astonish me—I wonder how you can——’

‘Do I astonish you?’ said he. ‘Do you wonder? Is there anything in my present

entreaty that you do not understand? I will explain to you instantly all that makes

me urge you in this manner, all that gives me an interest in what you look and

do, and excites my present curiosity. I will not leave you to wonder long.’

In spite of herself, she could not help half a smile, but she said nothing.

‘You shook your head at my acknowledging that I should not like to engage in

the duties of a clergyman always for a constancy. Yes, that was the word.

Constancy, I am not afraid of the word. I would spell it, read it, write it with

anybody. I see nothing alarming in the word. Did you think I ought?’

‘Perhaps, sir,’ said Fanny, wearied at last into speaking—‘perhaps, sir, I

thought it was a pity you did not always know yourself as well as you seemed to

do at that moment.’

Crawford, delighted to get her to speak at any rate, was determined to keep it

up; and poor Fanny, who had hoped to silence him by such an extremity of

reproof, found herself sadly mistaken, and that it was only a change from one

object of curiosity and one set of words to another. He had always something to

entreat the explanation of. The opportunity was too fair. None such had occurred

since his seeing her in her uncle’s room, none such might occur again before his

leaving Mansfield. Lady Bertram’s being just on the other side of the table was a

trifle, for she might always be considered as only half awake, and Edmund’s

advertisements were still of the first utility.

‘Well,’ said Crawford, after a course of rapid questions and reluctant answers

—‘I am happier than I was, because I now understand more clearly your opinion

of me. You think me unsteady—easily swayed by the whim of the moment—

easily tempted—easily put aside. With such an opinion, no wonder that——But

we shall see. It is not by protestations that I shall endeavour to convince you I

am wronged, it is not by telling you that my affections are steady. My conduct

shall speak for me—absence, distance, time shall speak for me. They shall prove

that, as far as you can be deserved by anybody, I do deserve you. You are

infinitely my superior in merit; all *that* I know. You have qualities which I had

not before supposed to exist in such a degree in any human creature. You have

some touches of the angel in you beyond what—not merely beyond what one

sees, because one never sees anything like it; but beyond what one fancies might

be. But still I am not frightened. It is not by equality of merit that you can be

won. That is out of the question. It is he who sees and worships your merit the

strongest, who loves you most devotedly, that has the best right to a return.

There I build my confidence. By that right I do and will deserve you; and when

once convinced that my attachment is what I declare it, I know you too well not

to entertain the warmest hopes—Yes, dearest, sweetest Fanny—Nay’—seeing

her draw back displeased—‘forgive me. Perhaps I have as yet no right—but by

what other name can I call you? Do you suppose you are ever present to my

imagination under any other? No, it is “Fanny” that I think of all day, and dream

of all night. You have given the name such reality of sweetness, that nothing else

can now be descriptive of you.’

Fanny could hardly have kept her seat any longer, or have refrained from at

least trying to get away in spite of all the too public opposition she foresaw to it,

had it not been for the sound of approaching relief, the very sound which she had

been long watching for, and long thinking strangely delayed.

The solemn procession, headed by Baddeley, of tea-board, urn, and cakebearers,

made its appearance, and delivered her from a grievous imprisonment of

body and mind. Mr. Crawford was obliged to move. She was at liberty, she was

busy, she was protected.

Edmund was not sorry to be admitted again among the number of those who

might speak and hear. But though the conference had seemed full long to him,

and though on looking at Fanny he saw rather a flush of vexation, he inclined to

hope that so much could not have been said and listened to without some profit

to the speaker.

**CHAPTER XXXV**

**E**dmund had determined that it belonged entirely to Fanny to choose whether her

situation with regard to Crawford should be mentioned between them or not; and

that if she did not lead the way, it should never be touched on by him; but after a

day or two of mutual reserve, he was induced by his father to change his mind,

and try what his influence might do for his friend.

A day, and a very early day, was actually fixed for the Crawfords’ departure;

and Sir Thomas thought it might be as well to make one more effort for the

young man before he left Mansfield, that all his professions and vows of

unshaken attachment might have as much hope to sustain them as possible.

Sir Thomas was most cordially anxious for the perfection of Mr. Crawford’s

character in that point. He wished him to be a model of constancy; and fancied

the best means of effecting it would be by not trying him too long.

Edmund was not unwilling to be persuaded to engage in the business; he

wanted to know Fanny’s feelings. She had been used to consult him in every

difficulty, and he loved her too well to bear to be denied her confidence now; he

hoped to be of service to her, he thought he must be of service to her—whom

else had she to open her heart to? If she did not need counsel, she must need the

comfort of communication. Fanny estranged from him, silent and reserved, was

an unnatural state of things; a state which he must break through, and which he

could easily learn to think she was wanting him to break through.

‘I will speak to her, sir; I will take the first opportunity of speaking to her

alone,’ was the result of such thoughts as these; and upon Sir Thomas’s

information of her being at that very time walking alone in the shrubbery, he

instantly joined her.

‘I am come to walk with you, Fanny,’ said he. ‘Shall I?’— (drawing her arm

within his); ‘it is a long while since we have had a comfortable walk together.’

She assented to it all rather by look than word. Her spirits were low.

‘But, Fanny,’ he presently added, ‘in order to have a comfortable walk,

something more is necessary than merely pacing this gravel together. You must

talk to me. I know you have something on your mind. I know what you are

thinking of. You cannot suppose me uninformed. Am I to hear of it from

everybody but Fanny herself?’

Fanny, at once agitated and dejected, replied, ‘If you hear of it from

everybody, cousin, there can be nothing for me to tell.’

‘Not of facts, perhaps; but of feelings, Fanny. No one but you can tell me

them. I do not mean to press you, however. If it is not what you wish yourself, I

have done. I had thought it might be a relief.’

‘I am afraid we think too differently, for me to find any relief in talking of

what I feel.’

‘Do you suppose that we think differently? I have no idea of it. I daresay that,

on a comparison of our opinions, they would be found as much alike as they

have been used to be: to the point—I consider Crawford’s proposals as most

advantageous and desirable, if you could return his affection. I consider it as

most natural that all your family should wish you could return it; but that as you

cannot, you have done exactly as you ought in refusing him. Can there be any

disagreement between us here?’

‘Oh no! But I thought you blamed me. I thought you were against me. This is

such a comfort!’

‘This comfort you might have had sooner, Fanny, had you sought it. But how

could you possibly suppose me against you? How could you imagine me an

advocate for marriage without love? Were I even careless in general on such

matters, how could you imagine me so where *your* happiness was at stake?’

‘My uncle thought me wrong, and I knew he had been talking to you.’

‘As far as you have gone, Fanny, I think you perfectly right. I may be sorry, I

may be surprised—though hardly *that,* for you had not had time to attach

yourself: but I think you perfectly right. Can it admit of a question? It is

disgraceful to us if it does. You did not love him—nothing could have justified

your accepting him.’

Fanny had not felt so comfortable for days and days.

‘So far your conduct has been faultless, and they were quite mistaken who

wished you to do otherwise. But the matter does not end here. Crawford’s is no

common attachment; he perseveres, with the hope of creating that regard which

had not been created before. This, we know, must be a work of time. But’ (with

an affectionate smile) ’let him succeed at last, Fanny, let him succeed at last. You

have proved yourself upright and disinterested, prove yourself grateful and

tender-hearted; and then you will be the perfect model of a woman, which I have

always believed you born for.‘

‘Oh! never, never, never; he never will succeed with me.’ And she spoke with

a warmth which quite astonished Edmund, and which she blushed at the

recollection of herself, when she saw his look, and heard him reply, ‘Never!

Fanny:—so very determined and positive! This is not like yourself, your rational

self.’

‘I mean,’ she cried, sorrowfully, correcting herself, ‘that I *think* I never shall,

as far as the future can be answered for—I think I never shall return his regard.’

‘I must hope better things. I am aware, more aware than Crawford can be, that

the man who means to make you love him (you having due notice of his

intentions) must have very uphill work, for there are all your early attachments

and habits in battle array; and before he can get your heart for his own use, he

has to unfasten it from all the holds upon things animate and inanimate, which so

many years’ growth has confirmed, and which are considerably tightened for the

moment by the very idea of separation. I know that the apprehension of being

forced to quit Mansfield will for a time be arming you against him. I wish he had

not been obliged to tell you what he was trying for. I wish he had known you as

well as I do, Fanny. Between us, I think we should have won you. My theoretical

and his practical knowledge together could not have failed. He should have

worked upon my plans. I must hope, however, that time, proving him (as I firmly

believe it will) to deserve you by his steady affection, will give him his reward. I

cannot suppose that you have not the *wish* to love him—the natural wish of

gratitude. You must have some feeling of that sort. You must be sorry for your

own indifference.’

‘We are so totally unlike,’ said Fanny, avoiding a direct answer, ‘we are so

very, very different in all our inclinations and ways, that I consider it as quite

impossible we should ever be tolerably happy together, even if I *could* like him.

There never were two people more dissimilar. We have not one taste in common.

We should be miserable.’

‘You are mistaken, Fanny. The dissimilarity is not so strong. You are quite

enough alike. You *have* tastes in common. You have moral and literary tastes in

common. You have both warm hearts and benevolent feelings; and, Fanny, who

that heard him read, and saw you listen to Shakespeare the other night, will think

you unfitted as companions? You forget yourself: there is a decided difference in

your tempers, I allow. He is lively, you are serious; but so much the better; his

spirits will support yours. It is your disposition to be easily dejected, and to

fancy difficulties greater than they are. His cheerfulness will counteract this. He

sees difficulties nowhere; and his pleasantness and gaiety will be a constant

support to you. Your being so far unlike, Fanny, does not in the smallest degree

make against the probability of your happiness together: do not imagine it. I am

myself convinced that it is rather a favourable circumstance. I am perfectly

persuaded that the tempers had better be unlike; I mean unlike in the flow of the

spirits, in the manners, in the inclination for much or little company, in the

propensity to talk or to be silent, to be grave or to be gay. Some opposition here

is, I am thoroughly convinced, friendly to matrimonial happiness. I exclude

extremes of course; and a very close resemblance in all those points would be

the likeliest way to produce an extreme. A counteraction, gentle and continual, is

the best safeguard of manners and conduct.’

Full well could Fanny guess where his thoughts were now. Miss Crawford’s

power was all returning. He had been speaking of her cheerfully from the hour

of his coming home. His avoiding her was quite at an end. He had dined at the

Parsonage only the preceding day.

After leaving him to his happier thoughts for some minutes, Fanny, feeling it

due to herself, returned to Mr. Crawford, and said, ‘It is not merely in *temper*

that I consider him as totally unsuited to myself; though in that respect. I think

the difference between us too great, infinitely too great; his spirits often oppress

me—but there is something in him which I object to still more. I must say,

cousin, that I cannot approve his character. I have not thought well of him from

the time of the play. I then saw him behaving, as it appeared to me, so very

improperly and unfeelingly—I may speak of it now because it is all over—so

improperly by poor Mr. Rushworth, not seeming to care how he exposed or hurt

him, and paying attentions to my cousin Maria, which—in short, at the time of

the play, I received an impression which will never be got over.’

‘My dear Fanny,’ replied Edmund, scarcely hearing her to the end, ‘let us not,

any of us, be judged by what we appeared at that period of general folly. The

time of the play is a time which I hate to recollect. Maria was wrong, Crawford

was wrong, we were all wrong together; but none so wrong as myself. Compared

with me, all the rest were blameless. I was playing the fool with my eyes open.’

‘As a bystander,’ said Fanny. ‘perhaps I saw more than you did; and I do think

that Mr. Rushworth was sometimes very jealous.’

‘Very possibly. No wonder. Nothing could be more improper than the whole

business. I am shocked whenever I think that Maria could be capable of it; but if

she could undertake the part, we must not be surprised at the rest.’

‘Before the play, I am much mistaken if *Julia* did not think he was paying her

attentions.’

Julia!—I have heard before from some one of his being in love with Julia, but

I could never see anything of it. And, Fanny, though I hope I do justice to my

sisters’ good qualities, I think it very possible that they might, one or both, be

more desirous of being admired by Crawford, and might show that desire rather

more unguardedly than was perfectly prudent. I can remember that they were

evidently fond of his society; and with such encouragement, a man like

Crawford, lively, and it may be a little unthinking, might be led on to—there

could be nothing very striking, because it is clear that he had no pretensions: his

heart was reserved for you. And I must say, that its being for you has raised him

inconceivably in my opinion. It does him the highest honour; it shows his proper

estimation of the blessing of domestic happiness and pure attachment. It proves

him unspoiled by his uncle. It proves him, in short, everything that I had been

used to wish to believe him, and feared he was not.’

‘I am persuaded that he does not think as he ought on serious subjects.’

‘Say rather that he has not thought at all upon serious subjects, which I believe

to be a good deal the case. How could it be otherwise, with such an education

and adviser? Under the disadvantages, indeed, which both have had, is it not

wonderful that they should be what they are? Crawford’s *feelings,* I am ready to

acknowledge, have hitherto been too much his guides. Happily, those feelings

have generally been good. You will supply the rest; and a most fortunate man he

is to attach himself to such a creature—to a woman who, firm as a rock in her

own principles, has a gentleness of character so well adapted to recommend

them. He has chosen his partner, indeed, with rare felicity. He will make you

happy, Fanny, I know he will make you happy; but you will make him

everything.’

‘I would not engage in such a charge,’ cried Fanny, in a shrinking accent—‘in

such an office of high responsibility!’

‘As usual, believing yourself unequal to anything!—fancying everything too

much for you! Well, though I may not be able to persuade you into different

feelings, you will be persuaded into them, I trust. I confess myself sincerely

anxious that you may. I have no common interest in Crawford’s well-doing. Next

to your happiness, Fanny, his has the first claim on me. You are aware of my

having no common interest in Crawford.’

Fanny was too well aware of it to have anything to say; and they walked on

together some fifty yards in mutual silence and abstraction. Edmund first began

again:—

‘I was very much pleased by her manner of speaking of it yesterday,

particularly pleased, because I had not depended upon her seeing everything in

so just a light. I knew she was very fond of you, but yet I was afraid of her not

estimating your worth to her brother quite as it deserved, and of her regretting

that he had not rather fixed on some woman of distinction or fortune. I was

afraid of the bias of those worldly maxims, which she has been too much used to

hear. But it was very different. She spoke of you, Fanny, just as she ought. She

desires the connection as warmly as your uncle or myself. We had a long talk

about it. I should not have mentioned the subject, though very anxious to know

her sentiments; but I had not been in the room five minutes before she began

introducing it with all that openness of heart, and sweet peculiarity of manner,

that spirit and ingenuousness which are so much a part of herself. Mrs. Grant

laughed at her for her rapidity.’

‘Was Mrs. Grant in the room, then?’

‘Yes, when I reached the house I found the two sisters together by themselves;

and when once we had begun, we had not done with you, Fanny, till Crawford

and Dr. Grant came in.’

‘It is above a week since I saw Miss Crawford.’

‘Yes, she laments it; yet owns it may have been best. You will see her,

however, before she goes. She is very angry with you, Fanny; you must be

prepared for that. She calls herself very angry, but you can imagine her anger. It

is the regret and disappointment of a sister, who thinks her brother has a right to

everything he may wish for, at the first moment. She is hurt, as you would be for

William; but she loves and esteems you with all her heart.’

‘I knew she would be very angry with me.’

‘My dearest Fanny,’ cried Edmund, pressing her arm closer to him, ‘do not let

the idea of her anger distress you. It is anger to be talked of rather than felt. Her

heart is made for love and kindness, not for resentment. I wish you could have

overheard her tribute of praise; I wish you could have seen her countenance,

when she said that you *should be* Henry’s wife. And I observed that she always

spoke of you as “Fanny,” which she was never used to do; and it had a sound of

most sisterly cordiality.’

‘And Mrs. Grant, did she say—did she speak—was she there all the time?’

‘Yes, she was agreeing exactly with her sister. The surprise of your refusal,

Fanny, seems to have been unbounded. That you could refuse such a man as

Henry Crawford seems more than they can understand. I said what I could for

you; but in good truth, as they stated the case—you must prove yourself to be in

your senses as soon as you can, by a different conduct; nothing else will satisfy

them. But this is teasing you. I have done. Do not turn away from me.’

‘I *should* have thought,’ said Fanny, after a pause of recollection and exertion,

‘that every woman must have felt the possibility of a man’s not being approved,

not being loved, by some one of her sex at least, let him be ever so generally

agreeable. Let him have all the perfections in the world, I think it ought not to be

set down as certain that a man must be acceptable to every woman he may

happen to like himself. But even supposing it is so, allowing Mr. Crawford to

have all the claims which his sisters think he has, how was I to be prepared to

meet him with any feeling answerable to his own? He took me wholly by

surprise. I had not an idea that his behaviour to me before had any meaning; and

surely I was not to be teaching myself to like him only because he was taking

what seemed very idle notice of me. In my situation, it would have been the

extreme of vanity to be forming expectations on Mr. Crawford. I am sure his

sisters, rating him as they do, must have thought it so, supposing he had meant

nothing. How then was I to be—to be in love with him the moment he said he

was with me? How was I to have an attachment at his service, as soon as it was

asked for? His sisters should consider me as well as him. The higher his deserts,

the more improper for me ever to have thought of him. And, and—we think very

differently of the nature of women, if they can imagine a woman so very soon

capable of returning an affection as this seems to imply.’

‘My dear, dear Fanny, now I have the truth. I know this to be the truth; and

most worthy of you are such feelings. I had attributed them to you before. I

thought I could understand you. You have now given exactly the explanation

which I ventured to make for you to your friend and Mrs. Grant, and they were

both better satisfied, though your warm-hearted friend was still run away with a

little by the enthusiasm of her fondness for Henry. I told them that you were of

all human creatures the one over whom habit had most power and novelty least;

and that the very circumstance of the novelty of Crawford’s addresses was

against him. Their being so new and so recent was all in their disfavour; that you

could tolerate nothing that you were not used to; and a great deal more to the

same purpose, to give them a knowledge of your character. Miss Crawford made

us laugh by her plans of encouragement for her brother. She meant to urge him

to persevere in the hope of being loved in time, and of having his addresses most

kindly received at the end of about ten years’ happy marriage.’

Fanny could with difficulty give the smile that was here asked for. Her

feelings were all in revolt. She feared she had been doing wrong, saying too

much, overacting the caution which she had been fancying necessary, in

guarding against one evil laying herself open to another; and to have Miss

Crawford’s liveliness repeated to her at such a moment, and on such a subject,

was a bitter aggravation.

Edmund saw weariness and distress in her face, and immediately resolved to

forbear all further discussion; and not even to mention the name of Crawford

again, except as it might be connected with what *must* be agreeable to her. On

this principle, he soon afterwards observed—

‘They go on Monday. You are sure, therefore, of seeing your friend either tomorrow

or Sunday. They really go on Monday; and I was within a trifle of being

persuaded to stay at Lessingby till that very day! I had almost promised it. What

a difference it might have made! Those five or six days more at Lessingby might

have been felt all my life!’

‘You were near staying there?’

‘Very. I was most kindly pressed, and had nearly consented. Had I received

any letter from Mansfield to tell me how you were all going on, I believe I

should certainly have stayed; but I knew nothing that had happened here for a

fortnight, and felt that I had been away long enough.’

‘You spent your time pleasantly there?’

‘Yes; that is, it was the fault of my own mind if I did not. They were all very

pleasant. I doubt their finding me so. I took uneasiness with me, and there was

no getting rid of it till I was in Mansfield again.’

‘The Miss Owens—you liked them, did not you?’

‘Yes, very well. Pleasant, good-humoured, unaffected girls. But I am spoilt,

Fanny, for common female society. Good-humoured, unaffected girls, will not do

for a man who has been used to sensible women. They are two distinct orders of

being. You and Miss Crawford have made me too nice.’

Still, however, Fanny was oppressed and wearied; he saw it in her looks, it

could not be talked away, and, attempting it no more, he led her directly, with the

kind authority of a privileged guardian, into the house.

**THE END**