BURNEY FANNY

CECILIA; OR, MEMOIRS OF AN HEIRESS. VOLUME 1

Fanny Burney

Cecilia; Or, Memoirs of an Heiress. Volume 1

Burney F.

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Содержание

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PREFACE

"Fanny's Cecilia came out last summer, and is as much liked and read, I believe, as any book ever was," wrote Charlotte Burney in Jan. 1783. "She had 250 pounds for it from Payne and Cadell. Most people say she ought to have had a thousand. It is now going into the third edition, though Payne owns that they printed two thousand at the first edition, and Lowndes told me five hundred was the common number for a novel." {Footnote: *The Early Diary of Frances Burney, with a selection from her correspondence, and from the journals of her sisters Susan and Charlotte Burney.* Edited by Annie Raine Ellis. 1889. Vol. II. p. 307.}

The manuscript of *Cecilia* was submitted to Dr Burney and Mr Crisp during its composition, and their suggestions were in some cases adopted, as we learn from the *Diary*. Dr Johnson was not consulted, but a desire at once to imitate and to please him evidently controlled the work.

Under these circumstances it is naturally less fresh and spontaneous than *Evelina*, but it is more mature. The touch is surer and the plot more elaborate. We cannot to-day fully appreciate the "conflict scene between mother and son," for which, Miss Burney tells us, the book was written; but the pictures of eighteenth century affectations are all alive, and the story is thoroughly absorbing, except, perhaps, in the last book.

Miss Burney often took the name of her characters from her acquaintances, and it seems probable that some of the "types" in *Cecilia* are also drawn from real life. The title of Miss Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* was borrowed from *Cecilia*, and some points of resemblance may be traced between the two novels.

The present edition is reprinted from:—

CECILIA, or, Memoirs of an Heiress. By the author of Evelina. In five volumes. London: Printed for T. Payne and Son, at the Newsgate, and T. Cadell in the Strand. MDCCLXXXII. R. B. J.

THE RIGHT HON. EDMUND BURKE TO MISS F. BURNEY. (AFTER READING CECILIA.)

Madam,—I should feel exceedingly to blame if I could refuse to myself the natural satisfaction, and to you the just but poor return, of my best thanks for the very great instruction and entertainment I have received from the new present you have bestowed on the public. There are few—I believe I may say fairly there are none at all—that will not find themselves better informed concerning human nature, and their stock of observation enriched, by reading your "Cecilia." They certainly will, let their experience in life and manners be what it may. The arrogance of age must submit to be taught by youth. You have crowded into a few small volumes an incredible variety of characters; most of them well planned, well supported, and well contrasted with each other. If there be any fault in this respect, it is one in which you are in no great danger of being imitated. Justly as your characters are drawn, perhaps they are too numerous. But I beg pardon; I fear it is quite in vain to preach economy to those who are come young to excessive and sudden opulence.

I might trespass on your delicacy if I should fill my letter to you with what I fill my conversation to others. I should be troublesome to you alone if I should tell you all I feel and think on the natural vein of humour, the tender pathetic, the comprehensive and noble moral, and the sagacious observation, that appear quite throughout that extraordinary performance.

In an age distinguished by producing extraordinary women, I hardly dare to tell you where my opinion would place you amongst them. I respect your modesty, that will not endure the commendations which your merit forces from everybody.

I have the honour to be, with great gratitude, respect, and esteem, madam, your most obedient and most humble servant,

EDM. BURKE

WHITEHALL, *July 19, 1782*.

My best compliments and congratulations to Dr Burney on the great honour acquired to his family.

ADVERTISEMENT

The indulgence shewn by the Public to Evelina, which, unpatronized, unaided, and unowned, past through Four Editions in one Year, has encouraged its Author to risk this SECOND attempt. The animation of success is too universally acknowledged, to make the writer of the following sheets dread much censure of temerity; though the precariousness of any power to give pleasure, suppresses all vanity of confidence, and sends CECILIA into the world with scarce more hope, though far more encouragement, than attended her highly-honoured predecessor, Evelina.

July, 1782

BOOK I

CHAPTER i. – A JOURNEY

"Peace to the spirits of my honoured parents, respected be their remains, and immortalized their virtues! may time, while it moulders their frail relicks to dust, commit to tradition the record of their goodness; and Oh, may their orphan-descendant be influenced through life by the remembrance of their purity, and be solaced in death, that by her it was unsullied!"

Such was the secret prayer with which the only survivor of the Beverley family quitted the abode of her youth, and residence of her forefathers; while tears of recollecting sorrow filled her eyes, and obstructed the last view of her native town which had excited them.

Cecilia, this fair traveller, had lately entered into the one-and-twentieth year of her age. Her ancestors had been rich farmers in the county of Suffolk, though her father, in whom a spirit of elegance had supplanted the rapacity of wealth, had spent his time as a private country gentleman, satisfied, without increasing his store, to live upon what he inherited from the labours of his predecessors. She had lost him in her early youth, and her mother had not long survived him. They had bequeathed to her 10,000 pounds, and consigned her to the care of the Dean of –, her uncle. With this gentleman, in whom, by various contingencies, the accumulated possessions of a rising and prosperous family were centred, she had passed the last four years of her life; and a few weeks only had yet elapsed since his death, which, by depriving her of her last relation, made her heiress to an estate of 3000 pounds per annum; with no other restriction than that of annexing her name, if she married, to the disposal of her hand and her riches.

But though thus largely indebted to fortune, to nature she had yet greater obligations: her form was elegant, her heart was liberal; her countenance announced the intelligence of her mind, her complexion varied with every emotion of her soul, and her eyes, the heralds of her speech, now beamed with understanding and now glistened with sensibility.

For the short period of her minority, the management of her fortune and the care of her person, had by the Dean been entrusted to three guardians, among whom her own choice was to settle her residence: but her mind, saddened by the loss of all her natural friends, coveted to regain its serenity in the quietness of the country, and in the bosom of an aged and maternal counsellor, whom she loved as her mother, and to whom she had been known from her childhood.

The Deanery, indeed, she was obliged to relinquish, a long repining expectant being eager, by entering it, to bequeath to another the anxiety and suspense he had suffered himself; though probably without much impatience to shorten their duration in favour of the next successor; but the house of Mrs Charlton, her benevolent friend, was open for her reception, and the alleviating tenderness of her conversation took from her all wish of changing it.

Here she had dwelt since the interment of her uncle; and here, from the affectionate gratitude of her disposition, she had perhaps been content to dwell till her own, had not her guardians interfered to remove her.

Reluctantly she complied; she quitted her early companions, the friend she most revered, and the spot which contained the relicks of all she had yet lived to lament; and, accompanied by one of her guardians, and attended by two servants, she began her journey from Bury to London.

Mr Harrel, this gentleman, though in the prime of his life, though gay, fashionable and splendid, had been appointed by her uncle to be one of her trustees; a choice which had for object the peculiar gratification of his niece, whose most favourite young friend Mr Harrel had married, and in whose house he therefore knew she would most wish to live.

Whatever good-nature could dictate or politeness suggest to dispel her melancholy, Mr Harrel failed not to urge; and Cecilia, in whose disposition sweetness was tempered with dignity, and gentleness with fortitude, suffered not his kind offices to seem ineffectual; she kissed her hand at the last glimpse a friendly hill afforded of her native town, and made an effort to forget the regret with which she lost sight of it. She revived her spirits by plans of future happiness, dwelt upon the delight with which she should meet her young friend, and, by accepting his consolation, amply rewarded his trouble.

Her serenity, however, had yet another, though milder trial to undergo, since another friend was yet to be met, and another farewell was yet to be taken.

At the distance of seven miles from Bury resided Mr Monckton, the richest and most powerful man in that neighbourhood, at whose house Cecilia and her guardian were invited to breakfast in their journey.

Mr Monckton, who was the younger son of a noble family, was a man of parts, information and sagacity; to great native strength of mind he added a penetrating knowledge of the world, and to faculties the most skilful of investigating the character of every other, a dissimulation the most profound in concealing his own. In the bloom of his youth, impatient for wealth and ambitious of power, he had tied himself to a rich dowager of quality, whose age, though sixty-seven, was but among the smaller species of her evil properties, her disposition being far more repulsive than her wrinkles. An inequality of years so considerable, had led him to expect that the fortune he had thus acquired, would speedily be released from the burthen with which it was at present incumbered; but his expectations proved as vain as they were mercenary, and his lady was not more the dupe of his protestations than he was himself of his own purposes. Ten years he had been married to her, yet her health was good, and her faculties were unimpaired; eagerly he had watched for her dissolution, yet his eagerness had injured no health but his own! So short-sighted is selfish cunning, that in aiming no further than at the gratification of the present moment, it obscures the evils of the future, while it impedes the perception of integrity and honour.

His ardour, however, to attain the blessed period of returning liberty, deprived him neither of spirit nor inclination for intermediate enjoyment; he knew the world too well to incur its censure by ill-treating the woman to whom he was indebted for the rank he held in it; he saw her, indeed, but seldom, yet he had the decency, alike in avoiding as in meeting her, to shew no abatement of civility and good breeding: but, having thus sacrificed to ambition all possibility of happiness in domestic life, he turned his thoughts to those other methods of procuring it, which he had so dearly purchased the power of essaying.

The resources of pleasure to the possessors of wealth are only to be cut off by the satiety of which they are productive: a satiety which the vigorous mind of Mr Monckton had not yet suffered him to experience; his time, therefore, was either devoted to the expensive amusements of the metropolis, or spent in the country among the gayest of its diversions.

The little knowledge of fashionable manners and of the characters of the times of which Cecilia was yet mistress, she had gathered at the house of this gentleman, with whom the Dean her uncle had been intimately connected: for as he preserved to the world the same appearance of decency he supported to his wife, he was everywhere well received, and being but partially known, was extremely respected: the world, with its wonted facility, repaying his circumspect attention to its laws, by silencing the voice of censure, guarding his character from impeachment, and his name from reproach.

Cecilia had been known to him half her life; she had been caressed in his house as a beautiful child, and her presence was now solicited there as an amiable acquaintance. Her visits, indeed, had by no means been frequent, as the ill-humour of Lady Margaret Monckton had rendered them painful to her; yet the opportunities they had afforded her of mixing with people of fashion, had served to prepare her for the new scenes in which she was soon to be a performer.

Mr Monckton, in return, had always been a welcome guest at the Deanery; his conversation was to Cecilia a never-failing source of information, as his knowledge of life and manners enabled him to start those subjects of which she was most ignorant; and her mind, copious for the admission and intelligent for the arrangement of knowledge, received all new ideas with avidity.

Pleasure given in society, like money lent in usury, returns with interest to those who dispense it: and the discourse of Mr Monckton conferred not a greater favour upon Cecilia than her attention to it repaid. And thus, the speaker and the hearer being mutually gratified, they had always met with complacency, and commonly parted with regret.

This reciprocation of pleasure had, however, produced different effects upon their minds; the ideas of Cecilia were enlarged, while the reflections of Mr Monckton were embittered. He here saw an object who to all the advantages of that wealth he had so highly prized, added youth, beauty, and intelligence; though much her senior, he was by no means of an age to render his addressing her an impropriety, and the entertainment she received from his conversation, persuaded him that her good opinion might with ease be improved into a regard the most partial. He regretted the venal rapacity with which he had sacrificed himself to a woman he abhorred, and his wishes for her final decay became daily more fervent. He knew that the acquaintance of Cecilia was confined to a circle of which he was himself the principal ornament, that she had rejected all the proposals of marriage which had hitherto been made to her, and, as he had sedulously watched her from her earliest years, he had reason to believe that her heart had escaped any dangerous impression. This being her situation, he had long looked upon her as his future property; as such he had indulged his admiration, and as such he had already appropriated her estate, though he had not more vigilantly inspected into her sentiments, than he had guarded his own from a similar scrutiny.

The death of the Dean her uncle had, indeed, much alarmed him; he grieved at her leaving Suffolk, where he considered himself the first man, alike in parts and in consequence, and he dreaded her residing in London, where he foresaw that numerous rivals, equal to himself in talents and in riches, would speedily surround her; rivals, too, youthful and sanguine, not shackled by present ties, but at liberty to solicit her immediate acceptance. Beauty and independence, rarely found together, would attract a crowd of suitors at once brilliant and assiduous; and the house of Mr Harrel was eminent for its elegance and gaiety; but yet, undaunted by danger, and confiding in his own powers, he determined to pursue the project he had formed, not fearing by address and perseverance to ensure its success.

CHAPTER ii. – AN ARGUMENT

Mr Monckton had, at this time, a party of company assembled at his house for the purpose of spending the Christmas holidays. He waited with anxiety the arrival of Cecilia, and flew to hand her from the chaise before Mr Harrel could alight. He observed the melancholy of her countenance, and was much pleased to find that her London journey had so little power to charm her. He conducted her to the breakfast parlour, where Lady Margaret and his friends expected her.

Lady Margaret received her with a coldness that bordered upon incivility; irascible by nature and jealous by situation, the appearance of beauty alarmed, and of chearfulness disgusted her. She regarded with watchful suspicion whoever was addressed by her husband, and having marked his frequent attendance at the Deanery, she had singled out Cecilia for the object of her peculiar antipathy; while Cecilia, perceiving her aversion though ignorant of its cause, took care to avoid all intercourse with her but what ceremony exacted, and pitied in secret the unfortunate lot of her friend.

The company now present consisted of one lady and several gentlemen.

Miss Bennet, the lady, was in every sense of the phrase, the humble companion of Lady Margaret; she was low-born, meanly educated, and narrow-minded; a stranger alike to innate merit or acquired accomplishments, yet skilful in the art of flattery, and an adept in every species of low cunning. With no other view in life than the attainment of affluence without labour, she was not more the slave of the mistress of the house, than the tool of its master; receiving indignity without murmur, and submitting to contempt as a thing of course.

Among the gentlemen, the most conspicuous, by means of his dress, was Mr Aresby, a captain in the militia; a young man who having frequently heard the words red-coat and gallantry put together, imagined the conjunction not merely customary, but honourable, and therefore, without even pretending to think of the service of his country, he considered a cockade as a badge of politeness, and wore it but to mark his devotion to the ladies, whom he held himself equipped to conquer, and bound to adore.

The next who by forwardness the most officious took care to be noticed, was Mr Morrice, a young lawyer, who, though rising in his profession, owed his success neither to distinguished abilities, nor to skill-supplying industry, but to the art of uniting suppleness to others with confidence in himself. To a reverence of rank, talents, and fortune the most profound, he joined an assurance in his own merit, which no superiority could depress; and with a presumption which encouraged him to aim at all things, he blended a good-humour that no mortification could lessen. And while by the pliability of his disposition he avoided making enemies, by his readiness to oblige, he learned the surest way of making friends by becoming useful to them.

There were also some neighbouring squires; and there was one old gentleman, who, without seeming to notice any of the company, sat frowning in a corner.

But the principal figure in the circle was Mr Belfield, a tall, thin young man, whose face was all animation, and whose eyes sparkled with intelligence. He had been intended by his father for trade, but his spirit, soaring above the occupation for which he was designed, from repining led him to resist, and from resisting, to rebel. He eloped from his friends, and contrived to enter the army. But, fond of the polite arts, and eager for the acquirement of knowledge, he found not this way of life much better adapted to his inclination than that from which he had escaped; he soon grew weary of it, was reconciled to his father, and entered at the Temple. But here, too volatile for serious study, and too gay for laborious application, he made little progress: and the same quickness of parts and vigour of imagination which united with prudence, or accompanied by judgment, might have raised him to the head of his profession, being unhappily associated with fickleness and caprice, served only to impede his improvement, and obstruct his preferment. And now, with little business, and that little neglected, a small fortune, and that fortune daily becoming less, the admiration of the world, but that

admiration ending simply in civility, he lived an unsettled and unprofitable life, generally caressed, and universally sought, yet careless of his interest and thoughtless of the future; devoting his time to company, his income to dissipation, and his heart to the Muses.

"I bring you," said Mr Monckton, as he attended Cecilia into the room, "a subject of sorrow in a young lady who never gave disturbance to her friends but in quitting them."

"If sorrow," cried Mr Belfield, darting upon her his piercing eyes, "wears in your part of the world a form such as this, who would wish to change it for a view of joy?"

"She's divinely handsome, indeed!" cried the Captain, affecting an involuntary exclamation.

Meantime, Cecilia, who was placed next to the lady of the house, quietly began her breakfast; Mr Morrice, the young lawyer, with the most easy freedom, seating himself at her side, while Mr Monckton was elsewhere arranging the rest of his guests, in order to secure that place for himself.

Mr Morrice, without ceremony, attacked his fair neighbour; he talked of her journey, and the prospects of gaiety which it opened to her view; but by these finding her unmoved, he changed his theme, and expatiated upon the delights of the spot she was quitting. Studious to recommend himself to her notice, and indifferent by what means, one moment he flippantly extolled the entertainments of the town; and the next, rapturously described the charms of the country. A word, a look sufficed to mark her approbation or dissent, which he no sooner discovered, than he slided into her opinion, with as much facility and satisfaction as if it had originally been his own.

Mr Monckton, suppressing his chagrin, waited some time in expectation that when this young man saw he was standing, he would yield to him his chair: but the remark was not made, and the resignation was not thought of. The Captain, too, regarding the lady as his natural property for the morning, perceived with indignation by whom he was supplanted; while the company in general, saw with much surprize, the place they had severally foreborne to occupy from respect to their host, thus familiarly seized upon by the man who, in the whole room, had the least claim, either from age or rank, to consult nothing but his own inclination.

Mr Monckton, however, when he found that delicacy and good manners had no weight with his guest, thought it most expedient to allow them none with himself; and therefore, disguising his displeasure under an appearance of facetiousness, he called out, "Come, Morrice, you that love Christmas sports, what say you to the game of move-all?"

"I like it of all things!" answered Morrice, and starting from his chair, he skipped to another.

"So should I too," cried Mr Monckton, instantly taking his place, "were I to remove from any seat but this."

Morrice, though he felt himself outwitted, was the first to laugh, and seemed as happy in the change as Mr Monckton himself.

Mr Monckton now, addressing himself to Cecilia, said, "We are going to lose you, and you seem concerned at leaving us; yet, in a very few months you will forget Bury, forget its inhabitants, and forget its environs."

"If you think so," answered Cecilia, "must I not thence infer that Bury, its inhabitants, and its environs, will in a very few months forget me?"

"Ay, ay, and so much the better!" said Lady Margaret, muttering between her teeth, "so much the better!"

"I am sorry you think so, madam," cried Cecilia, colouring at her ill-breeding.

"You will find," said Mr Monckton, affecting the same ignorance of her meaning that Cecilia really felt, "as you mix with the world, you will find that Lady Margaret has but expressed what by almost every body is thought: to neglect old friends, and to court new acquaintance, though perhaps not yet avowedly delivered as a precept from parents to children, is nevertheless so universally recommended by example, that those who act differently, incur general censure for affecting singularity."

"It is happy then, for me," answered Cecilia, "that neither my actions nor myself will be sufficiently known to attract public observation."

"You intend, then, madam," said Mr Belfield, "in defiance of these maxims of the world, to be guided by the light of your own understanding."

"And such," returned Mr Monckton, "at first setting out in life, is the intention of every one. The closet reasoner is always refined in his sentiments, and always confident in his virtue; but when he mixes with the world, when he thinks less and acts more, he soon finds the necessity of accommodating himself to such customs as are already received, and of pursuing quietly the track that is already marked out."

"But not," exclaimed Mr Belfield, "if he has the least grain of spirit! the beaten track will be the last that a man of parts will deign to tread,

> For common rules were ne'er designed
> Directors of a noble mind."

"A pernicious maxim! a most pernicious maxim!" cried the old gentleman, who sat frowning in a corner of the room.

"Deviations from common rules," said Mr Monckton, without taking any notice of this interruption, "when they proceed from genius, are not merely pardonable, but admirable; and you, Belfield, have a peculiar right to plead their merits; but so little genius as there is in the world, you must surely grant that pleas of this sort are very rarely to be urged."

"And why rarely," cried Belfield, "but because your general rules, your appropriated customs, your settled forms, are but so many absurd arrangements to impede not merely the progress of genius, but the use of understanding? If man dared act for himself, if neither worldly views, contracted prejudices, eternal precepts, nor compulsive examples, swayed his better reason and impelled his conduct, how noble indeed would he be! *how infinite in faculties! in apprehension how like a God!*"[1]

"All this," answered Mr Monckton, "is but the doctrine of a lively imagination, that looks upon impossibilities simply as difficulties, and upon difficulties as mere invitations to victory. But experience teaches another lesson; experience shows that the opposition of an individual to a community is always dangerous in the operation, and seldom successful in the event;—never, indeed, without a concurrence strange as desirable, of fortunate circumstances with great abilities."

"And why is this," returned Belfield, "but because the attempt is so seldom made? The pitiful prevalence of general conformity extirpates genius, and murders originality; the man is brought up, not as if he were 'the noblest work of God,' but as a mere ductile machine of human formation: he is early taught that he must neither consult his understanding, nor pursue his inclinations, lest, unhappily for his commerce with the world, his understanding should be averse to fools, and provoke him to despise them; and his inclinations to the tyranny of perpetual restraint, and give him courage to abjure it."

"I am ready enough to allow," answered Mr Monckton, "that an eccentric genius, such, for example, as yours, may murmur at the tediousness of complying with the customs of the world, and wish, unconfined, and at large, to range through life without any settled plan or prudential restriction; but would you, therefore, grant the same licence to every one? would you wish to see the world peopled with defiers of order, and contemners of established forms? and not merely excuse the irregularities resulting from uncommon parts, but encourage those, also, to lead, who without blundering cannot even follow?"

"I would have *all* men," replied Belfield, "whether philosophers or ideots, act for themselves. Every one would then appear what he is; enterprize would be encouraged, and imitation abolished;

[1] Hamlet.

genius would feel its superiority, and folly its insignificance; and then, and then only, should we cease to be surfeited with that eternal sameness of manner and appearance which at present runs through all ranks of men."

"Petrifying dull work this, *mon ami!*" said the Captain, in a whisper to Morrice, "*de grace*, start some new game."

"With all my heart," answered he; and then, suddenly jumping up, exclaimed, "A hare! a hare!"

"Where?—where?—which way?" and all the gentlemen arose, and ran to different windows, except the master of the house, the object of whose pursuit was already near him.

Morrice, with much pretended earnestness, flew from window to window, to trace footsteps upon the turf which he knew had not printed it: yet, never inattentive to his own interest, when he perceived in the midst of the combustion he had raised, that Lady Margaret was incensed at the noise it produced, he artfully gave over his search, and seating himself in a chair next to her, eagerly offered to assist her with cakes, chocolate, or whatever the table afforded.

He had, however, effectually broken up the conversation; and breakfast being over, Mr Harrel ordered his chaise, and Cecilia arose to take leave.

And now not without some difficulty could Mr Monckton disguise the uneasy fears which her departure occasioned him. Taking her hand, "I suppose," he said, "you will not permit an old friend to visit you in town, lest the sight of him should prove a disagreeable memorial of the time you will soon regret having wasted in the country?"

"Why will you say this, Mr Monckton?" cried Cecilia; "I am sure you cannot think it."

"These profound studiers of mankind, madam," said Belfield, "are mighty sorry champions for constancy or friendship. They wage war with all expectations but of depravity, and grant no quarter even to the purest designs, where they think there will be any temptation to deviate from them."

"Temptation," said Mr Monckton, "is very easy of resistance in theory; but if you reflect upon the great change of situation Miss Beverley will experience, upon the new scenes she will see, the new acquaintance she must make, and the new connections she may form, you will not wonder at the anxiety of a friend for her welfare."

"But I presume," cried Belfield, with a laugh, "Miss Beverley does not mean to convey her person to town, and leave her understanding locked up, with other natural curiosities, in the country? Why, therefore, may not the same discernment regulate her adoption of new acquaintance, and choice of new connections, that guided her selection of old ones? Do you suppose that because she is to take leave of you, she is to take leave of herself?"

"Where fortune smiles upon youth and beauty," answered Mr Monckton, "do you think it nothing that their fair possessor should make a sudden transition of situation from the quietness of a retired life in the country, to the gaiety of a splendid town residence?"

"Where fortune *frowns* upon youth and beauty," returned Belfield, "they may not irrationally excite commiseration; but where nature and chance unite their forces to bless the same object, what room there may be for alarm or lamentation I confess I cannot divine."

"What!" cried Mr Monckton, with some emotion, "are there not sharpers, fortune-hunters, sycophants, wretches of all sorts and denominations, who watch the approach of the rich and unwary, feed upon their inexperience, and prey upon their property?"

"Come, come," cried Mr Harrel, "it is time I should hasten my fair ward away, if this is your method of describing the place she is going to live in."

"Is it possible," cried the Captain, advancing to Cecilia, "that this lady has never yet tried the town?" and then, lowering his voice, and smiling languishingly in her face, he added, "Can anything so divinely handsome have been immured in the country? Ah! *quelle honte!* do you make it a principle to be so cruel?"

Cecilia, thinking such a compliment merited not any other notice than a slight bow, turned to Lady Margaret, and said, “Should your ladyship be in town this winter, may I expect the honour of hearing where I may wait upon you?”

“I don’t know whether I shall go or not,” answered the old lady, with her usual ungraciousness.

Cecilia would now have hastened away, but Mr Monckton, stopping her, again expressed his fears of the consequences of her journey; “Be upon your guard,” he cried, “with all new acquaintance; judge nobody from appearances; form no friendship rashly; take time to look about you, and remember you can make no alteration in your way of life, without greater probability of faring worse, than chance of faring better. Keep therefore as you are, and the more you see of others, the more you will rejoice that you neither resemble nor are connected with them.”

“This from you, Mr Monckton!” cried Belfield, “what is become of your conformity system? I thought all the world was to be alike, or only so much the worse for any variation?”

“I spoke,” said Mr Monckton, “of the world in general, not of this lady in particular; and who that knows, who that sees her, would not wish it were possible she might continue in every respect exactly and unalterably what she is at present?”

“I find,” said Cecilia, “you are determined that flattery at least, should I meet with it, shall owe no pernicious effects to its novelty.”

“Well, Miss Beverley,” cried Mr Harrel, “will you now venture to accompany me to town? Or has Mr Monckton frightened you from proceeding any farther?”

“If,” replied Cecilia, “I felt no more sorrow in quitting my friends, than I feel terror in venturing to London, with how light a heart should I make the journey!”

“Brava!” cried Belfield, “I am happy to find the discourse of Mr Monckton has not intimidated you, nor prevailed upon you to deplore your condition in having the accumulated misery of being young, fair and affluent.”

“Alas! poor thing!” exclaimed the old gentleman who sat in the corner, fixing his eyes upon Cecilia with an expression of mingled grief and pity.

Cecilia started, but no one else paid him any attention.

The usual ceremonies of leave-taking now followed, and the Captain, with most obsequious reverence, advanced to conduct Cecilia to the carriage; but in the midst of the dumb eloquence of his bows and smiles, Mr Morrice, affecting not to perceive his design, skipped gaily between them, and, without any previous formality, seized the hand of Cecilia himself; failing not, however, to temper the freedom of his action by a look of respect the most profound.

The Captain shrugged and retired. But Mr Monckton, enraged at his assurance, and determined it should nothing avail him, exclaimed, “Why how now, Morrice, do you take away the privilege of my house?”

“True, true;” answered Morrice, “you members of parliament have an undoubted right to be tenacious of your privileges.” Then, bowing with a look of veneration to Cecilia, he resigned her hand with an air of as much happiness as he had taken it.

Mr Monckton, in leading her to the chaise, again begged permission to wait upon her in town: Mr Harrel took the hint, and entreated him to consider his house as his own; and Cecilia, gratefully thanking him for his solicitude in her welfare, added, “And I hope, sir, you will honour me with your counsel and admonitions with respect to my future conduct, whenever you have the goodness to let me see you.”

This was precisely his wish. He begged, in return, that she would treat him with confidence, and then suffered the chaise to drive off.

CHAPTER iii. – AN ARRIVAL

As soon as they lost sight of the house, Cecilia expressed her surprise at the behaviour of the old gentleman who sat in the corner, whose general silence, seclusion from the company, and absence of mind, had strongly excited her curiosity.

Mr Harrel could give her very little satisfaction: he told her that he had twice or thrice met him in public places, where everybody remarked the singularity of his manners and appearance, but that he had never discoursed with anyone to whom he seemed known; and that he was as much surprised as herself in seeing so strange a character at the house of Mr Monckton.

The conversation then turned upon the family they had just quitted, and Cecilia warmly declared the good opinion she had of Mr Monckton, the obligations she owed to him for the interest which, from her childhood, he had always taken in her affairs; and her hopes of reaping much instruction from the friendship of a man who had so extensive a knowledge of the world.

Mr Harrel professed himself well satisfied that she should have such a counsellor; for though but little acquainted with him, he knew he was a man of fortune and fashion, and well esteemed in the world. They mutually compassionated his unhappy situation in domestic life, and Cecilia innocently expressed her concern at the dislike Lady Margaret seemed to have taken to her; a dislike which Mr Harrel naturally enough imputed to her youth and beauty, yet without suspecting any cause more cogent than a general jealousy of attractions of which she had herself so long outlived the possession.

As their journey drew near to its conclusion, all the uneasy and disagreeable sensations which in the bosom of Cecilia had accompanied its commencement, gave way to the expectation of quick approaching happiness in again meeting her favourite young friend.

Mrs Harrel had in childhood been her playmate, and in youth her school-fellow; a similarity of disposition with respect to sweetness of temper, had early rendered them dear to each other, though the resemblance extended no farther, Mrs Harrel having no pretensions to the wit or understanding of her friend; but she was amiable and obliging, and therefore sufficiently deserving affection, though neither blazing with attractions which laid claim to admiration, nor endowed with those superior qualities which mingle respect in the love they inspire.

From the time of her marriage, which was near three years, she had entirely quitted Suffolk, and had had no intercourse with Cecilia but by letter. She was now just returned from Violet Bank, the name given by Mr Harrel to a villa about twelve miles from London, where with a large party of company she had spent the Christmas holidays.

Their meeting was tender and affectionate; the sensibility of Cecilia's heart flowed from her eyes, and the gladness of Mrs Harrel's dimpled her cheeks.

As soon as their mutual salutations, expressions of kindness, and general inquiries had been made, Mrs Harrel begged to lead her to the drawing-room, "where," she added, "you will see some of my friends, who are impatient to be presented to you."

"I could have wished," said Cecilia, "after so long an absence, to have passed this first evening alone with you."

"They are all people who particularly desired to see you," she answered, "and I had them by way of entertaining you, as I was afraid you would be out of spirits at leaving Bury."

Cecilia, finding the kindness of her intentions, forbore any further expostulation, and quietly followed her to the drawing-room. But as the door was opened, she was struck with amazement upon finding that the apartment, which was spacious, lighted with brilliancy, and decorated with magnificence, was more than half filled with company, every one of which was dressed with gaiety and profusion.

Cecilia, who from the word friends, expected to have seen a small and private party, selected for the purpose of social converse, started involuntarily at the sight before her, and had hardly courage to proceed.

Mrs Harrel, however, took her hand and introduced her to the whole company, who were all severally named to her; a ceremonial which though not merely agreeable but even necessary to those who live in the gay world, in order to obviate distressing mistakes, or unfortunate implications in discourse, would by Cecilia have been willingly dispensed with, since to her their names were as new as their persons, and since knowing nothing of their histories, parties or connections, she could to nothing allude: it therefore served but to heighten her colour and increase her embarrassment.

A native dignity of mind, however, which had early taught her to distinguish modesty from bashfulness, enabled her in a short time to conquer her surprise, and recover her composure. She entreated Mrs Harrel to apologise for her appearance, and being seated between two young ladies, endeavoured to seem reconciled to it herself.

Nor was this very difficult; for while her dress, which she had not changed since her journey, joined to the novelty of her face, attracted general observation, the report of her fortune, which had preceded her entrance, secured to her general respect. She soon found, too, that a company was not necessarily formidable because full dressed, that familiarity could be united with magnificence, and that though to her, every one seemed attired to walk in a procession, or to grace a drawing-room, no formality was assumed, and no solemnity was affected: every one was without restraint, even rank obtained but little distinction; ease was the general plan, and entertainment the general pursuit.

Cecilia, though new to London, which city the ill-health of her uncle had hitherto prevented her seeing, was yet no stranger to company; she had passed her time in retirement, but not in obscurity, since for some years past she had presided at the table of the Dean, who was visited by the first people of the county in which he lived: and notwithstanding his parties, which were frequent though small, and elegant though private, had not prepared her for the splendour or the diversity of a London assembly, they yet, by initiating her in the practical rules of good breeding, had taught her to subdue the timid fears of total inexperience, and to repress the bashful feelings of shamefaced awkwardness; fears and feelings which rather call for compassion than admiration, and which, except in extreme youth, serve but to degrade the modesty they indicate.

She regarded, therefore, the two young ladies between whom she was seated, rather with a wish of addressing, than a shyness of being attacked by them; but the elder, Miss Larolles, was earnestly engaged in discourse with a gentleman, and the younger, Miss Leeson, totally discouraged her, by the invariable silence and gravity with which from time to time she met her eyes.

Uninterrupted, therefore, except by occasional speeches from Mr and Mrs Harrel, she spent the first part of the evening merely in surveying the company.

Nor was the company dilatory in returning her notice, since from the time of her entrance into the room, she had been the object of general regard.

The ladies took an exact inventory of her dress, and internally settled how differently they would have been attired if blessed with equal affluence.

The men disputed among themselves whether or not she was painted; and one of them asserting boldly that she rouged well, a debate ensued, which ended in a bet, and the decision was mutually agreed to depend upon the colour of her cheeks by the beginning of April, when, if unfaded by bad hours and continual dissipation, they wore the same bright bloom with which they were now glowing, her champion acknowledged that his wager would be lost.

In about half an hour the gentleman with whom Miss Larolles had been talking, left the room, and then that young lady, turning suddenly to Cecilia, exclaimed, “How odd Mr Meadows is! Do you know, he says he shan’t be well enough to go to Lady Nyland’s assembly! How ridiculous! as if that could hurt him.”

Cecilia, surprised at an attack so little ceremonious, lent her a civil, but silent attention.

"You shall be there, shan't you?" she added.

"No, ma'am, I have not the honour of being at all known to her ladyship."

"Oh, there's nothing in that," returned she, "for Mrs Harrel can acquaint her you are here, and then, you know, she'll send you a ticket, and then you can go."

"A ticket?" repeated Cecilia, "does Lady Nyland only admit her company with tickets?"

"Oh, lord!" cried Miss Larolles, laughing immoderately, "don't you know what I mean? Why, a ticket is only a visiting card, with a name upon it; but we all call them tickets now."

Cecilia thanked her for the information, and then Miss Larolles enquired how many miles she had travelled since morning?

"Seventy-three," answered Cecilia, "which I hope will plead my apology for being so little dressed."

"Oh, you're vastly well," returned the other, "and for my part, I never think about dress. But only conceive what happened to me last year! Do you know I came to town the twentieth of March! was not that horrid provoking?"

"Perhaps so," said Cecilia, "but I am sure I cannot tell why."

"Not tell why?" repeated Miss Larolles, "why, don't you know it was the very night of the grand private masquerade at Lord Darien's? I would not have missed it for the whole universe. I never travelled in such an agony in my life: we did not get to town till monstrous late, and then do you know I had neither a ticket nor a habit! Only conceive what a distress! well, I sent to every creature I knew for a ticket, but they all said there was not one to be had; so I was just like a mad creature—but about ten or eleven o'clock, a young lady of my particular acquaintance, by the greatest good luck in the world happened to be taken suddenly ill; so she sent me her ticket,—was not that delightful?"

"For *her*, extremely!" said Cecilia, laughing.

"Well," she continued, "then I was almost out of my wits with joy; and I went about, and got one of the sweetest dresses you ever saw. If you'll call upon me some morning, I'll shew it you."

Cecilia, not prepared for an invitation so abrupt, bowed without speaking, and Miss Larolles, too happy in talking herself to be offended at the silence of another, continued her narration.

"Well, but now comes the vilest part of the business; do you know, when everything else was ready, I could not get my hair-dresser! I sent all over the town,—he was nowhere to be found; I thought I should have died with vexation; I assure you I cried so that if I had not gone in a mask, I should have been ashamed to be seen. And so, after all this monstrous fatigue, I was forced to have my hair dressed by my own maid, quite in a common way; was not it cruelly mortifying?"

"Why yes," answered Cecilia, "I should think it was almost sufficient to make you regret the illness of the young lady who sent you her ticket."

They were now interrupted by Mrs Harrel, who advanced to them followed by a young man of a serious aspect and modest demeanour, and said, "I am happy to see you both so well engaged; but my brother has been reproaching me with presenting everybody to Miss Beverley but himself."

"I cannot hope," said Mr Arnott, "that I have any place in the recollection of Miss Beverley, but long as I have been absent from Suffolk, and unfortunate as I was in not seeing her during my last visit there, I am yet sure, even at this distance of time, grown and formed as she is, I should instantly have known her."

"Amazing!" cried an elderly gentleman, in a tone of irony, who was standing near them, "for the face is a very common one!"

"I remember well," said Cecilia, "that when you left Suffolk I thought I had lost my best friend."

"Is that possible?" cried Mr Arnott, with a look of much delight.

"Yes, indeed, and not without reason, for in all disputes you were my advocate; in all plays, my companion; and in all difficulties, my assistant."

"Madam," cried the same gentleman, "if you liked him because he was your advocate, companion, and assistant, pray like me too, for I am ready to become all three at once."

"You are very good," said Cecilia, laughing, "but at present I find no want of any defender."

"That's pity," he returned, "for Mr Arnott seems to me very willing to act the same parts over again with you."

"But for that purpose he must return to the days of his childhood."

"Ah, would to heaven it were possible!" cried Mr Arnott, "for they were the happiest of my life."

"After such a confession," said his companion, "surely you will let him attempt to renew them? 'tis but taking a walk backwards; and though it is very early in life for Mr Arnott to sigh for that retrograde motion, which, in the regular course of things, we shall all in our turns desire, yet with such a motive as recovering Miss Beverley for a playfellow, who can wonder that he anticipates in youth the hopeless wishes of age?"

Here Miss Larolles, who was one of that numerous tribe of young ladies to whom all conversation is irksome in which they are not themselves engaged, quitted her place, of which Mr Gosport, Cecilia's new acquaintance, immediately took possession.

"Is it utterly impossible," continued this gentleman, "that I should assist in procuring Mr Arnott such a renovation? Is there no subaltern part I can perform to facilitate the project? for I will either *hide* or *seek* with any boy in the parish; and for a *Q in the corner*, there is none more celebrated."

"I have no doubt, sir," answered Cecilia, "of your accomplishments; and I should be not a little entertained with the surprize of the company if you could persuade yourself to display them."

"And what," cried he, "could the company do half so well as to rise also, and join in the sport? it would but interrupt some tale of scandal, or some description of a *toupee*. Active wit, however despicable when compared with intellectual, is yet surely better than the insignificant click-clack of modish conversation," casting his eyes towards Miss Larolles, "or even the pensive dullness of affected silence," changing their direction towards Miss Leeson.

Cecilia, though surprised at an attack upon the society her friend had selected, by one who was admitted to make a part of it, felt its justice too strongly to be offended at its severity.

"I have often wished," he continued, "that when large parties are collected, as here, without any possible reason why they might not as well be separated, something could be proposed in which each person might innocently take a share: for surely after the first half-hour, they can find little new to observe in the dress of their neighbours, or to display in their own; and with whatever seeming gaiety they may contrive to fill up the middle and end of the evening, by wire-drawing the comments afforded by the beginning, they are yet so miserably fatigued, that if they have not four or five places to run to every night, they suffer nearly as much from weariness of their friends in company, as they would do from weariness of themselves in solitude."

Here, by the general breaking up of the party, the conversation was interrupted, and Mr Gosport was obliged to make his exit; not much to the regret of Cecilia, who was impatient to be alone with Mrs Harrel.

The rest of the evening, therefore, was spent much more to her satisfaction; it was devoted to friendship, to mutual enquiries, to kind congratulations, and endearing recollections; and though it was late when she retired, she retired with reluctance.

CHAPTER iv. – A SKETCH OF HIGH LIFE

Eager to renew a conversation which had afforded her so much pleasure, Cecilia, neither sensible of fatigue from her change of hours nor her journey, arose with the light, and as soon as she was dressed, hastened to the breakfast apartment.

She had not, however, been more impatient to enter than she soon became to quit it; for though not much surprized to find herself there before her friend, her ardour for waiting her arrival was somewhat chilled, upon finding the fire but just lighted, the room cold, and the servants still employed in putting it in order.

At 10 o'clock she made another attempt: the room was then better prepared for her reception, but still it was empty. Again she was retiring, when the appearance of Mr Arnott stopped her.

He expressed his surprize at her early rising, in a manner that marked the pleasure it gave to him; and then, returning to the conversation of the preceding evening, he expatiated with warmth and feeling upon the happiness of his boyish days, remembered every circumstance belonging to the plays in which they had formerly been companions, and dwelt upon every incident with a minuteness of delight that shewed his unwillingness ever to have done with the subject.

This discourse detained her till they were joined by Mrs Harrel, and then another, more gay and more general succeeded to it.

During their breakfast, Miss Larolles was announced as a visitor to Cecilia, to whom she immediately advanced with the intimacy of an old acquaintance, taking her hand, and assuring her she could no longer defer the honour of waiting upon her.

Cecilia, much amazed at this warmth of civility from one to whom she was almost a stranger, received her compliment rather coldly; but Miss Larolles, without consulting her looks, or attending to her manner, proceeded to express the earnest desire she had long had to be known to her; to hope they should meet very often; to declare nothing could make her so happy; and to beg leave to recommend to her notice her own milliner.

"I assure you," she continued, "she has all Paris in her disposal; the sweetest caps! the most beautiful trimmings! and her ribbons are quite divine! It is the most dangerous thing you can conceive to go near her; I never trust myself in her room but I am sure to be ruined. If you please, I'll take you to her this morning."

"If her acquaintance is so ruinous," said Cecilia, "I think I had better avoid it."

"Oh, impossible! there's no such thing as living without her. To be sure she's shockingly dear, that I must own; but then who can wonder? She makes such sweet things, 'tis impossible to pay her too much for them."

Mrs Harrel now joining in the recommendation, the party was agreed upon, and accompanied by Mr Arnott, the ladies proceeded to the house of the milliner.

Here the raptures of Miss Larolles were again excited: she viewed the finery displayed with delight inexpressible, enquired who were the intended possessors, heard their names with envy, and sighed with all the bitterness of mortification that she was unable to order home almost everything she looked at.

Having finished their business here, they proceeded to various other dress manufacturers, in whose praises Miss Larolles was almost equally eloquent, and to appropriate whose goods she was almost equally earnest: and then, after attending this loquacious young lady to her father's house, Mrs Harrel and Cecilia returned to their own.

Cecilia rejoiced at the separation, and congratulated herself that the rest of the day might be spent alone with her friend.

"Why, no," said Mrs Harrel, "not absolutely alone, for I expect some company at night."

"Company again to-night?"

"Nay, don't be frightened, for it will be a very small party; not more than fifteen or twenty in all."

"Is that so small a party?" said Cecilia, smiling; "and how short a time since would you, as well as I, have reckoned it a large one!"

"Oh, you mean when I lived in the country," returned Mrs Harrel; "but what in the world could I know of parties or company then?"

"Not much, indeed," said Cecilia, "as my present ignorance shews."

They then parted to dress for dinner.

The company of this evening were again all strangers to Cecilia, except Miss Leeson, who was seated next to her, and whose frigid looks again compelled her to observe the same silence she so resolutely practised herself. Yet not the less was her internal surprise that a lady who seemed determined neither to give nor receive any entertainment, should repeatedly chuse to show herself in a company with no part of which she associated.

Mr Arnott, who contrived to occupy the seat on her other side, suffered not the silence with which her fair neighbour had infected her to spread any further: he talked, indeed, upon no new subject; and upon the old one, of their former sports and amusements, he had already exhausted all that was worth being mentioned; but not yet had he exhausted the pleasure he received from the theme; it seemed always fresh and always enchanting to him; it employed his thoughts, regaled his imagination, and enlivened his discourse. Cecilia in vain tried to change it for another; he quitted it only by compulsion, and returned to it with redoubled eagerness.

When the company was retired, and Mr Arnott only remained with the ladies, Cecilia, with no little surprise, inquired for Mr Harrel, observing that she had not seen him the whole day.

"O!" cried his lady, "don't think of wondering at that, for it happens continually. He dines at home, indeed, in general, but otherwise I should see nothing of him at all."

"Indeed? why, how does he fill up his time?"

"That I am sure I cannot tell, for he never consults me about it; but I suppose much in the same way that other people do."

"Ah, Priscilla!" cried Cecilia, with some earnestness, "how little did I ever expect to see you so much a fine lady!"

"A fine lady?" repeated Mrs Harrel; "why, what is it I do? Don't I live exactly like every body else that mixes at all with the world?"

"You, Miss Beverley," said Mr Arnott in a low voice, "will I hope give to the world an example, not take one from it."

Soon after, they separated for the night.

The next morning, Cecilia took care to fill up her time more advantageously, than in wandering about the house in search of a companion she now expected not to find: she got together her books, arranged them to her fancy, and secured to herself for the future occupation of her leisure hours, the exhaustless fund of entertainment which reading, that richest, highest, and noblest source of intellectual enjoyment, perpetually affords.

While they were yet at breakfast, they were again visited by Miss Larolles. "I am come," cried she, eagerly, "to run away with you both to my Lord Belgrade's sale. All the world will be there; and we shall go in with tickets, and you have no notion how it will be crowded."

"What is to be sold there?" said Cecilia.

"Oh, every thing you can conceive; house, stables, china, laces, horses, caps, everything in the world."

"And do you intend to buy any thing?"

"Lord, no; but one likes to see the people's things."

Cecilia then begged they would excuse her attendance.

"O, by no means!" cried Miss Larolles; "you must go, I assure you; there'll be such a monstrous crowd as you never saw in your life. I dare say we shall be half squeezed to death."

"That," said Cecilia, "is an inducement which you must not expect will have much weight with a poor rustic just out of the country: it must require all the polish of a long residence in the metropolis to make it attractive."

"O but do go, for I assure you it will be the best sale we shall have this season. I can't imagine, Mrs Harrel, what poor Lady Belgrade will do with herself; I hear the creditors have seized every thing; I really believe creditors are the cruelest set of people in the world! they have taken those beautiful buckles out of her shoes! Poor soul! I declare it will make my heart ache to see them put up. It's quite shocking, upon my word. I wonder who'll buy them. I assure you they were the prettiest fancied I ever saw. But come, if we don't go directly, there will be no getting in."

Cecilia again desired to be excused accompanying them, adding that she wished to spend the day at home.

"At home, my dear?" cried Mrs Harrel; "why we have been engaged to Mrs Mears this month, and she begged me to prevail with you to be of the party. I expect she'll call, or send you a ticket, every moment."

"How unlucky for me," said Cecilia, "that you should happen to have so many engagements just at this time! I hope, at least, there will not be any for to-morrow."

"O yes; to-morrow we go to Mrs Elton's."

"Again to-morrow? and how long is this to last?"

"O, heaven knows; I'll shew you my catalogue."

She then produced a book which contained a list of engagements for more than three weeks. "And as these," she said, "are struck off, new ones are made; and so it is we go on till after the birth-day."

When this list had been examined and commented upon by Miss Larolles, and viewed and wondered at by Cecilia, it was restored to its place, the two ladies went together to the auction, permitting Cecilia, at her repeated request, to return to her own apartment.

She returned, however, neither satisfied with the behaviour of her friend, nor pleased with her own situation: the sobriety of her education, as it had early instilled into her mind the pure dictates of religion, and strict principles of honour, had also taught her to regard continual dissipation as an introduction to vice, and unbounded extravagance as the harbinger of injustice. Long accustomed to see Mrs Harrel in the same retirement in which she had hitherto lived herself, when books were their first amusement, and the society of each other was their chief happiness, the change she now perceived in her mind and manners equally concerned and surprised her. She found her insensible to friendship, indifferent to her husband, and negligent of all social felicity. Dress, company, parties of pleasure, and public places, seemed not merely to occupy all her time; but to gratify all her wishes. Cecilia, in whose heart glowed the warmest affections and most generous virtue, was cruelly depressed and mortified by this disappointment; yet she had the good sense to determine against upbraiding her, well aware that if reproach has any power over indifference, it is only that of changing it into aversion.

Mrs Harrel, in truth, was innocent of heart, though dissipated in life; married very young, she had made an immediate transition from living in a private family and a country town, to becoming mistress of one of the most elegant houses in Portman-square, at the head of a splendid fortune, and wife to a man whose own pursuits soon showed her the little value he himself set upon domestic happiness. Immersed in the fashionable round of company and diversions, her understanding, naturally weak, was easily dazzled by the brilliancy of her situation; greedily, therefore, sucking in air impregnated with luxury and extravagance, she had soon no pleasure but to vie with some rival in elegance, and no ambition but to exceed some superior in expence.

The Dean of–in naming Mr Harrel for one of the guardians of his niece, had no other view than that of indulging her wishes by allowing her to reside in the house of her friend: he had little personal knowledge of him, but was satisfied with the nomination, because acquainted with his

family, fortune, and connections, all which persuaded him to believe without further enquiry, that it was more peculiarly proper for his niece than any other he could make.

In his choice of the other two trustees he had been more prudent; the first of these, the honourable Mr Delvile, was a man of high birth and character; the second, Mr Briggs, had spent his whole life in business, in which he had already amassed an immense fortune, and had still no greater pleasure than that of encreasing it. From the high honour, therefore, of Mr Delvile, he expected the most scrupulous watchfulness that his niece should in nothing be injured, and from the experience of Mr Briggs in money matters, and his diligence in transacting business, he hoped for the most vigilant observance that her fortune, while under his care, should be turned to the best account. And thus, as far as he was able, he had equally consulted her pleasure, her security, and her pecuniary advantage.

Mrs Harrel returned home only in time to dress for the rest of the day.

When Cecilia was summoned to dinner, she found, besides her host and hostess and Mr Arnott, a gentleman she had not before seen, but who as soon as she entered the parlour, Mr Harrel presented to her, saying at the same time he was one of the most intimate of his friends.

This gentleman, Sir Robert Floyer, was about thirty years of age; his face was neither remarkable for its beauty nor its ugliness, but sufficiently distinguished by its expression of invincible assurance; his person, too, though neither striking for its grace nor its deformity, attracted notice from the insolence of his deportment. His manners, haughty and supercilious, marked the high opinion he cherished of his own importance; and his air and address, at once bold and negligent, announced his happy perfection in the character at which he aimed, that of an accomplished man of the town.

The moment Cecilia appeared, she became the object of his attention, though neither with the look of admiration due to her beauty, nor yet with that of curiosity excited by her novelty, but with the scrutinizing observation of a man on the point of making a bargain, who views with fault-seeking eyes the property he means to cheapen.

Cecilia, wholly unused to an examination so little ceremonious, shrunk abashed from his regards: but his conversation was not less displeasing to her than his looks; his principal subjects, which were horse-racing, losses at play, and disputes at gaming-tables, could afford her but little amusement, because she could not understand them; and the episodes with which they were occasionally interspersed, consisting chiefly of comparative strictures upon celebrated beauties, hints of impending bankruptcies, and witticisms upon recent divorces, were yet more disagreeable to her, because more intelligible. Wearied, therefore, with uninteresting anecdotes, and offended with injudicious subjects of pleasantry, she waited with impatience for the moment of retiring; but Mrs Harrel, less eager, because better entertained, was in no haste to remove, and therefore she was compelled to remain quiet, till they were both obliged to arise, in order to fulfil their engagement with Mrs Mears.

As they went together to the house of that lady, in Mrs Harrel's vis-a-vis, Cecilia, not doubting but their opinions concerning the Baronet would accord, instantly and openly declared her disapprobation of every thing he had uttered; but Mrs Harrel, far from confirming her expectations, only said, "I am sorry you don't like him, for he is almost always with us?"

"Do you like him, then, yourself?"

"Extremely; he is very entertaining and clever, and knows the world."

"How judiciously do you praise him!" cried Cecilia; "and how long might you deliberate before you could add another word to his panegyric!"

Mrs Harrel, satisfied to commend, without even attempting to vindicate him, was soon content to change the subject; and Cecilia, though much concerned that the husband of her friend had made so disgraceful an election of a favourite, yet hoped that the lenity of Mrs Harrel resulted from her desire to excuse his choice, not from her own approbation.

CHAPTER v. – AN ASSEMBLY

Mrs Mears, whose character was of that common sort which renders delineation superfluous, received them with the customary forms of good breeding.

Mrs Harrel soon engaged herself at a card-table; and Cecilia, who declined playing, was seated next to Miss Leeson, who arose to return the courtesy she made in advancing to her, but that past, did not again even look at her.

Cecilia, though fond of conversation and formed for society, was too diffident to attempt speaking where so little encouraged; they both, therefore, continued silent, till Sir Robert Floyer, Mr Harrel, and Mr Arnott entered the room together, and all at the same time advanced to Cecilia.

"What," cried Mr Harrel, "don't you chuse to play, Miss Beverley?"

"I flatter myself," cried Mr Arnott, "that Miss Beverley never plays at all, for then, in one thing, I shall have the honour to resemble her."

"Very seldom, indeed," answered Cecilia, "and consequently very ill."

"O, you must take a few lessons," said Mr Harrel, "Sir Robert Floyer, I am sure, will be proud to instruct you."

Sir Robert, who had placed himself opposite to her, and was staring full in her face, made a slight inclination of his head, and said, "Certainly."

"I should be a very unpromising pupil," returned Cecilia, "for I fear I should not only want diligence to improve, but desire."

"Oh, you will learn better things," said Mr Harrel; "we have had you yet but three days amongst us,—in three months we shall see the difference."

"I hope not," cried Mr Arnott, "I earnestly hope there will be none!"

Mr Harrel now joined another party; and Mr Arnott seeing no seat vacant near that of Cecilia, moved round to the back of her chair, where he patiently stood for the rest of the evening. But Sir Robert still kept his post, and still, without troubling himself to speak, kept his eyes fixed upon the same object.

Cecilia, offended by his boldness, looked a thousand ways to avoid him; but her embarrassment, by giving greater play to her features, served only to keep awake an attention which might otherwise have wearied. She was almost tempted to move her chair round and face Mr Arnott, but though she wished to shew her disapprobation of the Baronet, she had not yet been reconciled by fashion to turning her back upon the company at large, for the indulgence of conversing with some particular person: a fashion which to unaccustomed observers seems rude and repulsive, but which, when once adopted, carries with it imperceptibly its own recommendation, in the ease, convenience and freedom it promotes.

Thus disagreeably stationed, she found but little assistance from the neighbourhood of Mr Arnott, since even his own desire of conversing with her, was swallowed up by an anxious and involuntary impulse to watch the looks and motions of Sir Robert.

At length, quite tired of sitting as if merely an object to be gazed at, she determined to attempt entering into conversation with Miss Leeson.

The difficulty, however, was not inconsiderable how to make the attack; she was unacquainted with her friends and connections, uninformed of her way of thinking, or her way of life, ignorant even of the sound of her voice, and chilled by the coldness of her aspect: yet, having no other alternative, she was more willing to encounter the forbidding looks of this lady, than to continue silently abashed under the scrutinizing eyes of Sir Robert.

After much deliberation with what subject to begin, she remembered that Miss Larolles had been present the first time they had met, and thought it probable they might be acquainted with each other; and therefore, bending forward, she ventured to enquire if she had lately seen that young lady?

Miss Leeson, in a voice alike inexpressive of satisfaction or displeasure, quietly answered, “No, ma’am.”

Cecilia, discouraged by this conciseness, was a few minutes silent; but the perseverance of Sir Robert in staring at her, exciting her own in trying to avoid his eyes, she exerted herself so far as to add, “Does Mrs Mears expect Miss Larolles here this evening?”

Miss Leeson, without raising her head, gravely replied, “I don’t know, ma’am.”

All was now to be done over again, and a new subject to be started, for she could suggest nothing further to ask concerning Miss Larolles.

Cecilia had seen, little of life, but that little she had well marked, and her observation had taught her, that among fashionable people, public places seemed a never-failing source of conversation and entertainment: upon this topic, therefore, she hoped for better success; and as to those who have spent more time in the country than in London, no place of amusement is so interesting as a theatre, she opened the subject she had so happily suggested, by an enquiry whether any new play had lately come out?

Miss Leeson, with the same dryness, only answered, “Indeed, I can’t tell.”

Another pause now followed, and the spirits of Cecilia were considerably dampt; but happening accidentally to recollect the name of Almack, she presently revived, and, congratulating herself that she should now be able to speak of a place too fashionable for disdain, she asked her, in a manner somewhat more assured, if she was a subscriber to his assemblies?

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Do you go to them constantly?”

“No, ma’am.”

Again they were both silent. And now, tired of finding the ill-success of each particular enquiry, she thought a more general one might obtain an answer less laconic, and therefore begged she would inform her what was the most fashionable place of diversion for the present season?

This question, however, cost Miss Leeson no more trouble than any which had preceded it, for she only replied, “Indeed I don’t know.”

Cecilia now began to sicken of her attempt, and for some minutes to give it up as hopeless; but afterwards when she reflected how frivolous were the questions she had asked, she felt more inclined to pardon the answers she had received, and in a short time to fancy she had mistaken contempt for stupidity, and to grow less angry with Miss Leeson than ashamed of herself.

This supposition excited her to make yet another trial of her talents for conversation, and therefore, summoning all the courage in her power, she modestly apologised for the liberty she was taking, and then begged her permission to enquire whether there was anything new in the literary way that she thought worth recommending?

Miss Leeson now turned her eyes towards her, with a look that implied a doubt whether she had heard right; and when the attentive attitude of Cecilia confirmed her question, surprise for a few instants took place of insensibility, and with rather more spirit than she had yet shown, she answered, “Indeed, I know nothing of the matter.”

Cecilia was now utterly disconcerted; and half angry with herself, and wholly provoked with her sullen neighbour, she resolved to let nothing in future provoke her to a similar trial with so unpromising a subject.

She had not, however, much longer to endure the examination of Sir Robert, who being pretty well satisfied with staring, turned upon his heel, and was striding out of the room, when he was stopt by Mr Gosport, who for some time had been watching him.

Mr Gosport was a man of good parts, and keen satire: minute in his observations, and ironical in his expressions.

“So you don’t play, Sir Robert?” he cried.

“What, here? No, I am going to Brookes’s.”

"But how do you like Harrel's ward? You have taken a pretty good survey of her."

"Why, faith, I don't know; but not much, I think; she's a devilish fine woman, too; but she has no spirit, no life."

"Did you try her? Have you talked to her?"

"Not I, truly!"

"Nay, then how do you mean to judge of her?"

"O, faith, that's all over, now; one never thinks of talking to the women by way of trying them."

"What other method, then, have you adopted?"

"None."

"None? Why, then, how do you go on?"

"Why, they talk to us. The women take all that trouble upon themselves now."

"And pray how long may you have commenced *fade macaroni?* For this is a part of your character with which I was not acquainted."

"Oh, hang it, 'tis not from *ton*; no, it's merely from laziness. Who the d–l will fatigue himself with dancing attendance upon the women, when keeping them at a distance makes them dance attendance upon us?"

Then stalking from him to Mr Harrel, he took him by the arm, and they left the room together.

Mr Gosport now advanced to Cecilia, and addressing her so as not to be heard by Miss Leeson, said, "I have been wishing to approach you, some time, but the fear that you are already overpowered by the loquacity of your fair neighbour makes me cautious of attempting to engage you."

"You mean," said Cecilia, "to laugh at *my* loquacity, and indeed its ill success has rendered it sufficiently ridiculous."

"Are you, then, yet to learn," cried he, "that there are certain young ladies who make it a rule never to speak but to their own cronies? Of this class is Miss Leeson, and till you get into her particular coterie, you must never expect to hear from her a word of two syllables. The TON misses, as they are called, who now infest the town, are in two divisions, the SUPERCILIOUS, and the VOLUBLE. The SUPERCILIOUS, like Miss Leeson, are silent, scornful, languid, and affected, and disdain all converse but with those of their own set: the VOLUBLE, like Miss Larolles, are flirting, communicative, restless, and familiar, and attack without the smallest ceremony, every one they think worthy their notice. But this they have in common, that at home they think of nothing but dress, abroad, of nothing but admiration, and that every where they hold in supreme contempt all but themselves."

"Probably, then," said Cecilia, "I have passed tonight, for one of the VOLUBLES; however, all the advantage has been with the SUPERCILIOUS, for I have suffered a total repulse."

"Are you sure, however, you have not talked too well for her?"

"O, a child of five years old ought to have been whipt for not talking better!"

"But it is not capacity alone you are to consult when you talk with misses of the TON; were their understandings only to be considered, they would indeed be wonderfully easy of access! in order, therefore, to render their commerce somewhat difficult, they will only be pleased by an observance of their humours: which are ever most various and most exuberant where the intellects are weakest and least cultivated. I have, however, a receipt which I have found infallible for engaging the attention of young ladies of whatsoever character or denomination."

"O, then," cried Cecilia, "pray favour me with it, for I have here an admirable opportunity to try its efficacy."

"I will give it you," he answered, "with full directions. When you meet with a young lady who seems resolutely determined not to speak, or who, if compelled by a direct question to make some answer, drily gives a brief affirmative, or coldly a laconic negative–"

"A case in point," interrupted Cecilia.

"Well, thus circumstanced," he continued, "the remedy I have to propose consists of three topics of discourse."

"Pray what are they?"

"Dress, public places, and love."

Cecilia, half surprised and half diverted, waited a fuller explanation without giving any interruption.

"These three topics," he continued, "are to answer three purposes, since there are no less than three causes from which the silence of young ladies may proceed: sorrow, affectation, and stupidity."

"Do you, then," cried Cecilia, "give nothing at all to modesty?"

"I give much to it," he answered, "as an excuse, nay almost as an equivalent for wit; but for that sullen silence which resists all encouragement, modesty is a mere pretence, not a cause."

"You must, however, be somewhat more explicit, if you mean that I should benefit from your instructions."

"Well, then," he answered, "I will briefly enumerate the three causes, with directions for the three methods of cure. To begin with sorrow. The taciturnity which really results from that is attended with an incurable absence of mind, and a total unconsciousness of the observation which it excites; upon this occasion, public places may sometimes be tried in vain, and even dress may fail; but love—"

"Are you sure, then," said Cecilia, with a laugh, "that sorrow has but that one source?"

"By no means," answered he, "for perhaps papa may have been angry, or mama may have been cross; a milliner may have sent a wrong pompoon, or a chaperon to an assembly may have been taken ill—"

"Bitter subjects of affliction, indeed! And are these all you allow us?"

"Nay, I speak but of young ladies of fashion, and what of greater importance can befall them? If, therefore, the grief of the fair patient proceeds from papa, mama, or the chaperon, then the mention of public places, those endless incentives of displeasure between the old and the young, will draw forth her complaints, and her complaints will bring their own cure, for those who lament find speedy consolation: if the milliner has occasioned the calamity, the discussion of dress will have the same effect; should both these medicines fail, love, as I said before, will be found infallible, for you will then have investigated every subject of uneasiness which a youthful female in high life can experience."

"They are greatly obliged to you," cried Cecilia, bowing, "for granting them motives of sorrow so honourable, and I thank you in the name of the whole sex."

"You, madam," said he, returning her bow, "are I hope an exception in the happiest way, that of having no sorrow at all. I come, now, to the silence of affectation, which is presently discernible by the roving of the eye round the room to see if it is heeded, by the sedulous care to avoid an accidental smile, and by the variety of disconsolate attitudes exhibited to the beholders. This species of silence has almost without exception its origin in that babyish vanity which is always gratified by exciting attention, without ever perceiving that it provokes contempt. In these cases, as nature is wholly out of the question, and the mind is guarded against its own feelings, dress and public places are almost certain of failing, but here again love is sure to vanquish; as soon as it is named, attention becomes involuntary, and in a short time a struggling simper discomposes the arrangement of the features, and then the business is presently over, for the young lady is either supporting some system, or opposing some proposition, before she is well aware that she has been cheated out of her sad silence at all."

"So much," said Cecilia, "for sorrow and for affectation. Proceed next to stupidity; for that, in all probability, I shall most frequently encounter."

"That always must be heavy work," returned he, "yet the road is plain, though it is all up hill. Love, here, may be talked of without exciting any emotion, or provoking any reply, and dress may be dilated upon without producing any other effect than that of attracting a vacant stare; but public places are indubitably certain of success. Dull and heavy characters, incapable of animating from wit or from reason, because unable to keep pace with them, and void of all internal sources of entertainment,

require the stimulation of shew, glare, noise, and bustle, to interest or awaken them. Talk to them of such subjects, and they adore you; no matter whether you paint to them joy or horror, let there but be action, and they are content; a battle has charms for them equal to a coronation, and a funeral amuses them as much as a wedding."

"I am much obliged to you," said Cecilia, smiling, "for these instructions; yet I must confess I know not how upon the present occasion to make use of them: public places I have already tried, but tried in vain; dress I dare not mention, as I have not yet learned its technical terms—"

"Well, but," interrupted he, "be not desperate; you have yet the third topic unessayed."

"O, that," returned she, laughing, "I leave to you."

"Pardon me," cried he; "love is a source of loquacity only with yourselves: when it is started by men, young ladies dwindle into mere listeners. *Simpering* listeners, I confess; but it is only with one another that you will discuss its merits."

At this time they were interrupted by the approach of Miss Larolles, who, tripping towards Cecilia, exclaimed, "Lord, how glad I am to see you! So you would not go to the auction! Well, you had a prodigious loss, I assure you. All the wardrobe was sold, and all Lady Belgrade's trinkets. I never saw such a collection of sweet things in my life. I was ready to cry that I could not bid for half a hundred of them. I declare I was kept in an agony the whole morning. I would not but have been there for the world. Poor Lady Belgrade! you really can't conceive how I was shocked for her. All her beautiful things sold for almost nothing. I assure you, if you had seen how they went, you would have lost all patience. It's a thousand pities you were not there."

"On the contrary," said Cecilia, "I think I had a very fortunate escape, for the loss of patience without the acquisition of the trinkets, would have been rather mortifying."

"Yes," said Mr Gosport; "but when you have lived some time longer in this commercial city, you will find the exchange of patience for mortification the most common and constant traffic amongst its inhabitants."

"Pray, have you been here long?" cried Miss Larolles, "for I have been to twenty places, wondering I did not meet with you before. But whereabouts is Mrs Mears? O, I see her now; I'm sure there's no mistaking her; I could know her by that old red gown half a mile off. Did you ever see such a frightful thing in your life? And it's never off her back. I believe she sleeps in it. I am sure I have seen her in nothing else all winter. It quite tires one's eye. She's a monstrous shocking dresser. But do you know I have met with the most provoking thing in the world this evening? I declare it has made me quite sick. I was never in such a passion in my life. You can conceive nothing like it."

"Like what?" cried Cecilia, laughing; "your passion, or your provocation?"

"Why, I'll tell you what it was, and then you shall judge if it was not quite past endurance. You must know I commissioned a particular friend of mine, Miss Moffat, to buy me a trimming when she went to Paris; well, she sent it me over about a month ago by Mr Meadows, and it's the sweetest thing you ever saw in your life; but I would not make it up, because there was not a creature in town, so I thought to bring it out quite new in about a week's time, for you know any thing does till after Christmas. Well, to-night at Lady Jane Dranet's, who should I meet but Miss Moffat! She had been in town some days, but so monstrously engaged I could never find her at home. Well, I was quite delighted to see her, for you must know she's a prodigious favourite with me, so I ran up to her in a great hurry to shake hands, and what do you think was the first thing that struck my eyes? Why, just such a trimming as my own, upon a nasty, odious gown, and half dirty! Can you conceive anything so distressing? I could have cried with pleasure."

"Why so?" said Cecilia. "If her trimming is dirty, yours will look the more delicate."

"O Lord! but it's making it seem quite an old thing! Half the town will get something like it. And I quite ruined myself to buy it. I declare, I don't think anything was ever half so mortifying. It distressed me so, I could hardly speak to her. If she had stayed a month or two longer, I should not

have minded it, but it was the cruellest thing in the world to come over just now. I wish the Custom-house officers had kept all her cloaths till summer."

"The wish is tender, indeed," said Cecilia, "for a *particular friend*."

Mrs Mears now rising from the card-table, Miss Larolles tript away to pay her compliments to her.

"Here, at least," cried Cecilia, "no receipt seems requisite for the cure of silence! I would have Miss Larolles be the constant companion of Miss Leeson: they could not but agree admirably, since that SUPERCILIOUS young lady seems determined never to speak, and the VOLUBLE Miss Larolles never to be silent. Were each to borrow something of the other, how greatly would both be the better!"

"The composition would still be a sorry one," answered Mr Gosport, "for I believe they are equally weak, and equally ignorant; the only difference is, that one, though silly, is quick, the other, though deliberate, is stupid. Upon a short acquaintance, that heaviness which leaves to others the whole weight of discourse, and whole search of entertainment, is the most fatiguing, but, upon a longer intimacy, even that is less irksome and less offensive, than the flippancy which hears nothing but itself."

Mrs Harrel arose now to depart, and Cecilia, not more tired of the beginning of the evening than entertained with its conclusion, was handed to the carriage by Mr Arnott.

CHAPTER vi. – A BREAKFAST

The next morning, during breakfast, a servant acquainted Cecilia that a young gentleman was in the hall, who begged to speak with her. She desired he might be admitted; and Mrs Harrel, laughing, asked if she ought not to quit the room; while Mr Arnott, with even more than his usual gravity, directed his eye towards the door to watch who should enter.

Neither of them, however, received any satisfaction when it was opened, for the gentleman who made his appearance was unknown to both: but great was the amazement of Cecilia, though little her emotion, when she saw Mr Morrice!

He came forward with an air of the most profound respect for the company in general, and obsequiously advancing to Cecilia, made an earnest enquiry into her health after her journey, and hoped she had heard good news from her friends in the country.

Mrs Harrel, naturally concluding both from his visit and behaviour, that he was an acquaintance of some intimacy, very civilly offered him a seat and some breakfast, which, very frankly, he accepted. But Mr Arnott, who already felt the anxiety of a rising passion which was too full of veneration to be sanguine, looked at him with uneasiness, and waited his departure with impatience.

Cecilia began to imagine he had been commissioned to call upon her with some message from Mr Monckton: for she knew not how to suppose that merely and accidentally having spent an hour or two in the same room with her, would authorize a visiting acquaintance. Mr Morrice, however, had a faculty the most happy of reconciling his pretensions to his inclination; and therefore she soon found that the pretence she had suggested appeared to him unnecessary. To lead, however, to the subject from which she expected his excuse, she enquired how long he had left Suffolk?

“But yesterday noon, ma’am,” he answered, “or I should certainly have taken the liberty to wait upon you before.”

Cecilia, who had only been perplexing herself to devise some reason why he came at all, now looked at him with a grave surprize, which would totally have abashed a man whose courage had been less, or whose expectations had been greater; but Mr Morrice, though he had hazarded every danger upon the slightest chance of hope, knew too well the weakness of his claims to be confident of success, and had been too familiar with rebuffs to be much hurt by receiving them. He might possibly have something to gain, but he knew he had nothing to lose.

“I had the pleasure,” he continued, “to leave all our friends well, except poor Lady Margaret, and she has had an attack of the asthma; yet she would not have a physician, though Mr Monckton would fain have persuaded her: however, I believe the old lady knows better things.” And he looked archly at Cecilia: but perceiving that the insinuation gave her nothing but disgust, he changed his tone, and added, “It is amazing how well they live together; nobody would imagine the disparity in their years. Poor old lady! Mr Monckton will really have a great loss of her when she dies.”

“A loss of her!” repeated Mrs Harrel, “I am sure she is an exceeding ill-natured old woman. When I lived at Bury, I was always frightened out of my wits at the sight of her.”

“Why indeed, ma’am,” said Morrice, “I must own her appearance is rather against her: I had myself a great aversion to her at first sight. But the house is chearful,—very chearful; I like to spend a few days there now and then of all things. Miss Bennet, too, is agreeable enough, and–”

“Miss Bennet agreeable!” cried Mrs Harrel, “I think she’s the most odious creature I ever knew in my life; a nasty, spiteful old maid!”

“Why indeed, ma’am, as you say,” answered Morrice, “she is not very young; and as to her temper, I confess I know very little about it; and Mr Monckton is likely enough to try it, for he is pretty severe.”

"Mr Monckton," cried Cecilia, extremely provoked at hearing him censured by a man she thought highly honoured in being permitted to approach him, "whenever *I* have been his guest, has merited from me nothing but praise and gratitude."

"O," cried Morrice, eagerly, "there is not a more worthy man in the world! he has so much wit, so much politeness! I don't know a more charming man anywhere than my friend Mr Monckton." Cecilia now perceiving that the opinions of her new acquaintance were as pliant as his bows, determined to pay him no further attention, and hoped by sitting silent to force from him the business of his visit, if any he had, or if, as she now suspected, he had none, to weary him into a retreat.

But this plan, though it would have succeeded with herself, failed with Mr Morrice, who to a stock of good humour that made him always ready to oblige others, added an equal portion of insensibility that hardened him against all indignity. Finding, therefore, that Cecilia, to whom his visit was intended, seemed already satisfied with its length, he prudently forbore to torment her; but perceiving that the lady of the house was more accessible, he quickly made a transfer of his attention, and addressed his discourse to her with as much pleasure as if his only view had been to see her, and as much ease as if he had known her all his life.

With Mrs Harrel this conduct was not injudicious; she was pleased with his assiduity, amused with his vivacity, and sufficiently satisfied with his understanding. They conversed, therefore, upon pretty equal terms, and neither of them were yet tired, when they were interrupted by Mr Harrel, who came into the room, to ask if they had seen or heard any thing of Sir Robert Floyer?

"No," answered Mrs Harrel, "nothing at all."

"I wish he was hanged," returned he, "for he has kept me waiting this hour. He made me promise not to ride out till he called and now he'll stay till the morning is over."

"Pray where does he live, sir?" cried Morrice, starting from his seat.

"In Cavendish Square, sir," answered Mr Harrel, looking at him with much surprise.

Not a word more said Morrice, but scampered out of the room.

"Pray who is this Genius?" cried Mr Harrel, "and what has he run away for?"

"Upon my word I know nothing at all of him," said Mrs Harrel; "he is a visitor of Miss Beverley's."

"And I, too," said Cecilia, "might almost equally disclaim all knowledge of him; for though I once saw, I never was introduced to him."

She then began a relation of her meeting him at Mr Monckton's house, and had hardly concluded it, before again, and quite out of breath, he made his appearance.

"Sir Robert Floyer, sir," said he to Mr Harrel, "will be here in two minutes."

"I hope, sir," said Mr Harrel, "you have not given yourself the trouble of going to him?"

"No, sir, it has given me nothing but pleasure; a run these cold mornings is the thing I like best."

"Sir, you are extremely good," said Mr Harrel, "but I had not the least intention of your taking such a walk upon my account."

He then begged him to be seated, to rest himself, and to take some refreshment; which civilities he received without scruple.

"But, Miss Beverley," said Mr Harrel, turning suddenly to Cecilia, "you don't tell me what you think of my friend?"

"What friend, sir?"

"Why, Sir Robert Floyer; I observed he never quitted you a moment while he stayed at Mrs Mears."

"His stay, however, was too short," said Cecilia, "to allow me to form a fair opinion of him."

"But perhaps," cried Morrice, "it was long enough to allow you to form a *foul* one."

Cecilia could not forbear laughing to hear the truth thus accidentally blundered out; but Mr Harrel, looking very little pleased, said, "Surely you can find no fault with him? he is one of the most fashionable men I know."

"My finding fault with him then," said Cecilia, "will only farther prove what I believe is already pretty evident, that I am yet a novice in the art of admiration."

Mr Arnott, animating at this speech, glided behind her chair, and said, "I knew you could not like him! I knew it from the turn of your mind;—I knew it even from your countenance!"

Soon after, Sir Robert Floyer arrived.

"You are a pretty fellow, a'n't you," cried Mr Harrel, "to keep me waiting so long."

"I could not come a moment sooner; I hardly expected to get here at all, for my horse has been so confounded resty I could not tell how to get him along."

"Do you come on horseback through the streets, Sir Robert?" asked Mrs Harrel.

"Sometimes; when I am lazy. But what the d–l is the matter with him I don't know; he has started at everything. I suspect there has been some foul play with him."

"Is he at the door, sir?" cried Morrice.

"Yes," answered Sir Robert.

"Then I'll tell you what's the matter with him in a minute;" and away again ran Morrice.

"What time did you get off last night, Harrel?" said Sir Robert.

"Not very early; but you were too much engaged to miss me. By the way," lowering his voice, "what do you think I lost?"

"I can't tell indeed, but I know what I gained: I have not had such a run of luck this winter."

They then went up to a window to carry on their enquiries more privately.

At the words *what do you think I lost*, Cecilia, half starting, cast her eyes uneasily upon Mrs Harrel, but perceived not the least change in her countenance. Mr Arnott, however, seemed as little pleased as herself, and from a similar sensation looked anxiously at his sister.

Morrice now returning, called out, "He's had a fall, I assure you!"

"Curse him!" cried Sir Robert, "what shall I do now? he cost me the d–l and all of money, and I have not had him a twelvemonth. Can you lend me a horse for this morning, Harrel?"

"No, I have not one that will do for you. You must send to Astley."

"Who can I send? John must take care of this."

"I'll go, sir," cried Morrice, "if you'll give me the commission."

"By no means, sir," said Sir Robert, "I can't think of giving you such an office."

"It is the thing in the world I like best," answered he; "I understand horses, and had rather go to Astley's than any where."

The matter was now settled in a few minutes, and having received his directions, and an invitation to dinner, Morrice danced off, with a heart yet lighter than his heels.

"Why, Miss Beverley," said Mr Harrel, "this friend of yours is the most obliging gentleman I ever met with; there was no avoiding asking him to dinner."

"Remember, however," said Cecilia, who was involuntarily diverted at the successful officiousness of her new acquaintance, "that if you receive him henceforth as your guest, he obtains admission through his own merits, and not through my interest."

At dinner, Morrice, who failed not to accept the invitation of Mr Harrel, was the gayest, and indeed the happiest man in the company: the effort he had made to fasten himself upon Cecilia as an acquaintance, had not, it is true, from herself met with much encouragement; but he knew the chances were against him when he made the trial, and therefore the prospect of gaining admission into such a house as Mr Harrel's, was not only sufficient to make amends for what scarcely amounted to a disappointment, but a subject of serious comfort from the credit of the connection, and of internal exultation at his own management and address.

In the evening, the ladies, as usual, went to a private assembly, and, as usual, were attended to it by Mr Arnott. The other gentlemen had engagements elsewhere.

CHAPTER vii. – A PROJECT

Several days passed on nearly in the same manner; the mornings were all spent in gossipping, shopping and dressing, and the evenings were regularly appropriated to public places, or large parties of company.

Meanwhile Mr Arnott lived almost entirely in Portman Square; he slept, indeed, at his own lodgings, but he boarded wholly with Mr Harrel, whose house he never for a moment quitted till night, except to attend Cecilia and his sister in their visitings and rambles.

Mr Arnott was a young man of unexceptionable character, and of a disposition mild, serious and benignant: his principles and blameless conduct obtained the universal esteem of the world, but his manners, which were rather too precise, joined to an uncommon gravity of countenance and demeanour, made his society rather permitted as a duty, than sought as a pleasure.

The charms of Cecilia had forcibly, suddenly and deeply penetrated his heart; he only lived in her presence, away from her he hardly existed: the emotions she excited were rather those of adoration than of love, for he gazed upon her beauty till he thought her more than human, and hung upon her accents till all speech seemed impertinent to him but her own. Yet so small were his expectations of success, that not even to his sister did he hint at the situation of his heart: happy in an easy access to her, he contented himself with seeing, hearing and watching her, beyond which bounds he formed not any plan, and scarce indulged any hope.

Sir Robert Floyer, too, was a frequent visitor in Portman Square, where he dined almost daily. Cecilia was chagrined at seeing so much of him, and provoked to find herself almost constantly the object of his unrestrained examination; she was, however, far more seriously concerned for Mrs Harrel, when she discovered that this favourite friend of her husband was an unprincipled spendthrift, and an extravagant gamester, for as he was the inseparable companion of Mr Harrel, she dreaded the consequence both of his influence and his example.

She saw, too, with an amazement that daily increased, the fatigue, yet fascination of a life of pleasure: Mr Harrel seemed to consider his own house merely as an hotel, where at any hour of the night he might disturb the family to claim admittance, where letters and messages might be left for him, where he dined when no other dinner was offered him, and where, when he made an appointment, he was to be met with. His lady, too, though more at home, was not therefore more solitary; her acquaintance were numerous, expensive and idle, and every moment not actually spent in company, was scrupulously devoted to making arrangements for that purpose.

In a short time Cecilia, who every day had hoped that the next would afford her greater satisfaction, but who every day found the present no better than the former, began to grow weary of eternally running the same round, and to sicken at the irksome repetition of unremitting yet uninteresting dissipation. She saw nobody she wished to see, as she had met with nobody for whom she could care; for though sometimes those with whom she mixed appeared to be amiable, she knew that their manners, like their persons, were in their best array, and therefore she had too much understanding to judge decisively of their characters. But what chiefly damped her hopes of forming a friendship with any of the new acquaintance to whom she was introduced, was the observation she herself made how ill the coldness of their hearts accorded with the warmth of their professions; upon every first meeting, the civilities which were shewn her, flattered her into believing she had excited a partiality that a very little time would ripen into affection; the next meeting commonly confirmed the expectation; but the third, and every future one, regularly destroyed it. She found that time added nothing to their fondness, nor intimacy to their sincerity; that the interest in her welfare which appeared to be taken at first sight, seldom, with whatever reason, increased, and often without any, abated; that the distinction she at first met with, was no effusion of kindness, but of curiosity, which is scarcely sooner gratified than satiated; and that those who lived always the life into which

she had only lately been initiated, were as much harassed with it as herself, though less spirited to relinquish, and more helpless to better it, and that they coveted nothing but what was new, because they had experienced the insufficiency of whatever was familiar.

She began now to regret the loss she sustained in quitting the neighbourhood, and being deprived of the conversation of Mr Monckton, and yet more earnestly to miss the affection and sigh for the society of Mrs Charlton, the lady with whom she had long and happily resided at Bury; for she was very soon compelled to give up all expectation of renewing the felicity of her earlier years, by being restored to the friendship of Mrs Harrel, in whom she had mistaken the kindness of childish intimacy for the sincerity of chosen affection; and though she saw her credulous error with mortification and displeasure, she regretted it with tenderness and sorrow. “What, at last,” cried she, “is human felicity, who has tasted, and where is it to be found? If I, who, to others, seem marked out for even a partial possession of it,—distinguished by fortune, caressed by the world, brought into the circle of high life, and surrounded with splendour, seek without finding it, yet losing, scarce know how I miss it!”

Ashamed upon reflection to believe she was considered as an object of envy by others, while repining and discontented herself, she determined no longer to be the only one insensible to the blessings within her reach, but by projecting and adopting some plan of conduct better suited to her taste and feelings than the frivolous insipidity of her present life, to make at once a more spirited and more worthy use of the affluence, freedom, and power which she possessed.

A scheme of happiness at once rational and refined soon presented itself to her imagination. She purposed, for the basis of her plan, to become mistress of her own time, and with this view, to drop all idle and uninteresting acquaintance, who, while they contribute neither to use nor pleasure, make so large a part of the community, that they may properly be called the underminers of existence; she could then shew some taste and discernment in her choice of friends, and she resolved to select such only as by their piety could elevate her mind, by their knowledge improve her understanding, or by their accomplishments and manners delight her affections. This regulation, if strictly adhered to, would soon relieve her from the fatigue of receiving many visitors, and therefore she might have all the leisure she could desire for the pursuit of her favourite studies, music and reading.

Having thus, from her own estimation of human perfection, culled whatever was noblest for her society, and from her own ideas of sedentary enjoyments arranged the occupations of her hours of solitude, she felt fully satisfied with the portion of happiness which her scheme promised to herself, and began next to consider what was due from her to the world.

And not without trembling did she then look forward to the claims which the splendid income she was soon to possess would call upon her to discharge. A strong sense of DUTY, a fervent desire to ACT RIGHT, were the ruling characteristics of her mind: her affluence she therefore considered as a debt contracted with the poor, and her independence as a tie upon her liberality to pay it with interest.

Many and various, then, soothing to her spirit and grateful to her sensibility, were the scenes which her fancy delineated; now she supported an orphan, now softened the sorrows of a widow, now snatched from iniquity the feeble trembler at poverty, and now rescued from shame the proud struggler with disgrace. The prospect at once exalted her hopes, and enraptured her imagination; she regarded herself as an agent of Charity, and already in idea anticipated the rewards of a good and faithful delegate; so animating are the designs of disinterested benevolence! so pure is the bliss of intellectual philanthropy!

Not immediately, however, could this plan be put in execution; the society she meant to form could not be selected in the house of another, where, though to some she might shew a preference, there were none she could reject: nor had she yet the power to indulge, according to the munificence of her wishes, the extensive generosity she projected: these purposes demanded a house of her own, and the unlimited disposal of her fortune, neither of which she could claim till she became of age. That period, however, was only eight months distant, and she pleased herself with the intention of meliorating her plan in the meantime, and preparing to put it in practice.

But though, in common with all the race of still-expecting man, she looked for that happiness in the time to come which the present failed to afford, she had yet the spirit and good sense to determine upon making every effort in her power to render her immediate way of life more useful and contented.

Her first wish, therefore, now, was to quit the house of Mr Harrel, where she neither met with entertainment nor instruction, but was perpetually mortified by seeing the total indifference of the friend in whose society she had hoped for nothing but affection.

The will of her uncle, though it obliged her while under age to live with one of her guardians, left her at liberty to chuse and to change amongst them according to her wishes or convenience: she determined, therefore, to make a visit herself to each of them, to observe their manners and way of life, and then, to the best of her judgment, decide with which she could be most contented: resolving, however, not to hint at her intention till it was ripe for execution, and then honestly to confess the reasons of her retreat.

She had acquainted them both of her journey to town the morning after her arrival. She was almost an entire stranger to each of them, as she had not seen Mr Briggs since she was nine years old, nor Mr Delvile within the time she could remember.

The very morning that she had settled her proceedings for the arrangement of this new plan, she intended to request the use of Mrs Harrel's carriage, and to make, without delay, the visits preparatory to her removal; but when she entered the parlour upon a summons to breakfast, her eagerness to quit the house gave way, for the present, to the pleasure she felt at the sight of Mr Monckton, who was just arrived from Suffolk.

She expressed her satisfaction in the most lively terms, and scrupled not to tell him she had not once been so much pleased since her journey to town, except at her first meeting with Mrs Harrel.

Mr Monckton, whose delight was infinitely superior to her own, and whose joy in seeing her was redoubled by the affectionate frankness of her reception, stifled the emotions to which her sight gave rise, and denying himself the solace of expressing his feelings, seemed much less charmed than herself at the meeting, and suffered no word nor look to escape him beyond what could be authorised by friendly civility.

He then renewed with Mrs Harrel an acquaintance which had been formed before her marriage, but which {he} had dropt when her distance from Cecilia, upon whose account alone he had thought it worth cultivation, made it no longer of use to him. She afterwards introduced her brother to him; and a conversation very interesting to both the ladies took place, concerning several families with which they had been formerly connected, as well as the neighbourhood at large in which they had lately dwelt.

Very little was the share taken by Mr Arnott in these accounts and enquiries; the unaffected joy with which Cecilia had received Mr Monckton, had struck him with a sensation of envy as involuntary as it was painful; he did not, indeed, suspect that gentleman's secret views; no reason for suspicion was obvious, and his penetration sunk not deeper than appearances; he knew, too, that he was married, and therefore no jealousy occurred to him; but still she had smiled upon him!—and he felt that to purchase for himself a smile of so much sweetness, he would have sacrificed almost all else that was valuable to him upon earth.

With an attention infinitely more accurate, Mr Monckton had returned his observations. The uneasiness of his mind was apparent, and the anxious watchfulness of his eyes plainly manifested whence it arose. From a situation, indeed, which permitted an intercourse the most constant and unrestrained with such an object as Cecilia, nothing less could be expected, and therefore he considered his admiration as inevitable; all that remained to be discovered, was the reception it had met from his fair enslaver. Nor was he here long in doubt; he soon saw that she was not merely free from all passion herself, but had so little watched Mr Arnott as to be unconscious she had inspired any.

Yet was his own serenity, though apparently unmoved, little less disturbed in secret than that of his rival; he did not think him a formidable candidate, but he dreaded the effects of intimacy,

fearing she might first grow accustomed to his attentions, and then become pleased with them. He apprehended, also, the influence of his sister and of Mr Harrel in his favour; and though he had no difficulty to persuade himself that any offer he might now make would be rejected without hesitation, he knew too well the insidious properties of perseverance, to see him, without inquietude, situated so advantageously.

The morning was far advanced before he took leave, yet he found no opportunity of discoursing with Cecilia, though he impatiently desired to examine into the state of her mind, and to discover whether her London journey had added any fresh difficulties to the success of his long-concerted scheme. But as Mrs Harrel invited him to dinner, he hoped the afternoon would be more propitious to his wishes.

Cecilia, too, was eager to communicate to him her favourite project, and to receive his advice with respect to its execution. She had long been used to his counsel, and she was now more than ever solicitous to obtain it, because she considered him as the only person in London who was interested in her welfare.

He saw, however, no promise of better success when he made his appearance at dinner time, for not only Mr Arnott was already arrived, but Sir Robert Floyer, and he found Cecilia so much the object of their mutual attention, that he had still less chance than in the morning of speaking to her unheard.

Yet was he not idle; the sight of Sir Robert gave abundant employment to his penetration, which was immediately at work, to discover the motive of his visit: but this, with all his sagacity, was not easily decided; for though the constant direction of his eyes towards Cecilia, proved, at least, that he was not insensible of her beauty, his carelessness whether or not she was hurt by his examination, the little pains he took to converse with her, and the invariable assurance and negligence of his manners, seemed strongly to demonstrate an indifference to the sentiments he inspired, totally incompatible with the solicitude of affection.

In Cecilia he had nothing to observe but what his knowledge of her character prepared him to expect, a shame no less indignant than modest at the freedom with which she saw herself surveyed.

Very little, therefore, was the satisfaction which this visit procured him, for soon after dinner the ladies retired; and as they had an early engagement for the evening, the gentlemen received no summons to their tea-table. But he contrived, before they quitted the room, to make an appointment for attending them the next morning to a rehearsal of a new serious Opera.

He stayed not after their departure longer than decency required, for too much in earnest was his present pursuit, to fit him for such conversation as the house in Cecilia's absence could afford him.

CHAPTER viii. – AN OPERA REHEARSAL

The next day, between eleven and twelve o'clock, Mr Monckton was again in Portman Square; he found, as he expected, both the ladies, and he found, as he feared, Mr Arnott prepared to be of their party. He had, however, but little time to repine at this intrusion, before he was disturbed by another, for, in a few minutes, they were joined by Sir Robert Floyer, who also declared his intention of accompanying them to the Haymarket.

Mr Monckton, to disguise his chagrin, pretended he was in great haste to set off, lest they should be too late for the overture: they were, therefore, quitting the breakfast room, when they were stopt by the appearance of Mr Morrice.

The surprise which the sight of him gave to Mr Monckton was extreme; he knew that he was unacquainted with Mr Harrel, for he remembered they were strangers to each other when they lately met at his house; he concluded, therefore, that Cecilia was the object of his visit, but he could frame no conjecture under what pretence.

The easy terms upon which he seemed with all the family by no means diminished his amazement; for when Mrs Harrel expressed some concern that she was obliged to go out, he gaily begged her not to mind him, assuring her he could not have stayed two minutes, and promising, unasked, to call again the next day: and when she added, "We would not hurry away so, only we are going to a rehearsal of an Opera," he exclaimed with quickness, "A rehearsal!—are you really? I have a great mind to go too!"

Then, perceiving Mr Monckton, he bowed to him with great respect, and enquired, with no little solemnity, how he had left Lady Margaret, hoped she was perfectly recovered from her late indisposition, and asked sundry questions with regard to her plan for the winter.

This discourse was ill constructed for rendering his presence desirable to Mr Monckton; he answered him very drily, and again pressed their departure.

"O," cried Morrice, "there's no occasion for such haste; the rehearsal does not begin till one."

"You are mistaken, sir," said Mr Monckton; "it is to begin at twelve o'clock."

"O ay, very true," returned Morrice; "I had forgot the dances, and I suppose they are to be rehearsed first. Pray, Miss Beverley, did you ever see any dances rehearsed?"

"No, sir."

"You will be excessively entertained, then, I assure you. It's the most comical thing in the world to see those signores and signoras cutting capers in a morning. And the *figuranti* will divert you beyond measure; you never saw such a shabby set in your life: but the most amusing thing is to look in their faces, for all the time they are jumping and skipping about the stage as if they could not stand still for joy, they look as sedate and as dismal as if they were so many undertaker's men."

"Not a word against dancing!" cried Sir Robert, "it's the only thing carries one to the Opera; and I am sure it's the only thing one minds at it."

The two ladies were then handed to Mrs Harrel's *vis-a-vis*; and the gentlemen, joined without further ceremony by Mr Morrice, followed them to the Haymarket.

The rehearsal was not begun, and Mrs Harrel and Cecilia secured themselves a box upon the stage, from which the gentlemen of their party took care not to be very distant.

They were soon perceived by Mr Gosport, who instantly entered into conversation with Cecilia. Miss Larolles, who with some other ladies came soon after into the next box, looked out to courtsie and nod, with her usual readiness, at Mrs Harrel, but took not any notice of Cecilia, though she made the first advances.

"What's the matter now?" cried Mr Gosport; "have you affronted your little prattling friend?"

"Not with my own knowledge," answered Cecilia; "perhaps she does not recollect me."

Just then Miss Larolles, tapping at the door, came in from the next box to speak to Mrs Harrel; with whom she stood chatting and laughing some minutes, without seeming to perceive that Cecilia was of her party.

"Why, what have you done to the poor girl?" whispered Mr Gosport; "did you talk more than herself when you saw her last?"

"Would that have been possible?" cried Cecilia; "however, I still fancy she does not know me."

She then stood up, which making Miss Larolles involuntarily turn towards her, she again courtsied; a civility which that young lady scarce deigned to return, before, bridling with an air of resentment, she hastily looked another way, and then, nodding good-humouredly at Mrs Harrel, hurried back to her party.

Cecilia, much amazed, said to Mr Gosport, "See now how great was our presumption in supposing this young lady's loquacity always at our devotion!"

"Ah, madam!" cried he, laughing, "there is no permanency, no consistency in the world! no, not even in the tongue of a VOLUBLE! and if that fails, upon what may we depend?"

"But seriously," said Cecilia, "I am sorry I have offended her, and the more because I so little know how, that I can offer her no apology."

"Will you appoint me your envoy? Shall I demand the cause of these hostilities?"

She thanked him, and he followed Miss Larolles; who was now addressing herself with great earnestness to Mr Meadows, the gentleman with whom she was conversing when Cecilia first saw her in Portman Square. He stopt a moment to let her finish her speech, which, with no little spirit, she did in these words, "I never knew anything like it in my life; but I shan't put up with such airs, I assure her!"

Mr Meadows made not any other return to her harangue, but stretching himself with a languid smile, and yawning: Mr Gosport, therefore, seizing the moment of cessation, said, "Miss Larolles, I hear a strange report about you."

"Do you?" returned she, with quickness, "pray what is it? something monstrous impertinent, I dare say,–however, I assure you it i'n't true."

"Your assurance," cried he, "carries conviction indisputable, for the report was that you had left off talking."

"O, was that all?" cried she, disappointed, "I thought it had been something about Mr Sawyer, for I declare I have been plagued so about him, I am quite sick of his name."

"And for my part, I never heard it! so fear nothing from me upon his account."

"Lord, Mr Gosport, how can you say so? I am sure you must know about the Festino that night, for it was all over the town in a moment."

"What festino?"

"Well, only conceive, how provoking!—why, I know nothing else was talked of for a month!"

"You are most formidably stout this morning! it is not two minutes since I saw you fling the gauntlet at Miss Beverley, and yet you are already prepared for another antagonist."

"O as to Miss Beverley, I must really beg you not to mention her; she has behaved so impertinently, that I don't intend ever to speak to her again."

"Why, what has she done?"

"O she's been so rude you've no notion. I'll tell you how it was. You must know I met her at Mrs Harrel's the day she came to town, and the very next morning I waited on her myself, for I would not send a ticket, because I really wished to be civil to her; well, the day after, she never came near me, though I called upon her again; however, I did not take any notice of that; but when the third day came, and I found she had not even sent me a ticket, I thought it monstrous ill bred indeed; and now there has passed more than a week, and yet she has never called: so I suppose she don't like me; so I shall drop her acquaintance."

Mr Gosport, satisfied now with the subject of her complaint, returned to Cecilia, and informed her of the heavy charge which was brought against her.

"I am glad, at least, to know my crime," said she, "for otherwise I should certainly have sinned on in ignorance, as I must confess I never thought of returning her visits: but even if I had, I should not have supposed I had yet lost much time."

"I beg your pardon there," said Mrs Harrel; "a first visit ought to be returned always by the third day."

"Then have I an unanswerable excuse," said Cecilia, "for I remember that on the third day I saw her at your house."

"O that's nothing at all to the purpose; you should have waited upon her, or sent her a ticket, just the same as if you had not seen her."

The overture was now begun, and Cecilia declined any further conversation. This was the first Opera she had ever heard, yet she was not wholly a stranger to Italian compositions, having assiduously studied music from a natural love of the art, attended all the best concerts her neighbourhood afforded, and regularly received from London the works of the best masters. But the little skill she had thus gained, served rather to increase than to lessen the surprize with which she heard the present performance,—a surprize of which the discovery of her own ignorance made not the least part. Unconscious from the little she had acquired how much was to be learnt, she was astonished to find the inadequate power of written music to convey any idea of vocal abilities: with just knowledge enough, therefore, to understand something of the difficulties, and feel much of the merit, she gave to the whole Opera an avidity of attention almost painful from its own eagerness.

But both the surprize and the pleasure which she received from the performance in general, were faint, cold, and languid, compared to the strength of those emotions when excited by Signore Pacchierotti in particular; and though not half the excellencies of that superior singer were necessary either to amaze or charm her unaccustomed ears, though the refinement of his taste and masterly originality of his genius, to be praised as they deserved, called for the judgment and knowledge of professors, yet a natural love of music in some measure supplied the place of cultivation, and what she could neither explain nor understand, she could feel and enjoy.

The opera was Artaserse; and the pleasure she received from the music was much augmented by her previous acquaintance with that interesting drama; yet, as to all noviciates in science, whatever is least complicated is most pleasing, she found herself by nothing so deeply impressed, as by the plaintive and beautiful simplicity with which Pacchierotti uttered the affecting repetition of *sono innocente*! his voice, always either sweet or impassioned, delivered those words in a tone of softness, pathos, and sensibility, that struck her with a sensation not more new than delightful.

But though she was, perhaps, the only person thus astonished, she was by no means the only one enraptured; for notwithstanding she was too earnestly engaged to remark the company in general, she could not avoid taking notice of an old gentleman who stood by one of the side scenes, against which he leant his head in a manner that concealed his face, with an evident design to be wholly absorbed in listening: and during the songs of Pacchierotti he sighed so deeply that Cecilia, struck by his uncommon sensibility to the power of music, involuntarily watched him, whenever her mind was sufficiently at liberty to attend to any emotions but its own.

As soon as the rehearsal was over, the gentlemen of Mrs Harrel's party crowded before her box; and Cecilia then perceived that the person whose musical enthusiasm had excited her curiosity, was the same old gentleman whose extraordinary behaviour had so much surprized her at the house of Mr Monckton. Her desire to obtain some information concerning him again reviving, she was beginning to make fresh enquiries, when she was interrupted by the approach of Captain Aresby.

That gentleman, advancing to her with a smile of the extremest self-complacency, after hoping, in a low voice, he had the honour of seeing her well, exclaimed, "How wretchedly empty is the town! petrifying to a degree! I believe you do not find yourself at present *obsede* by too much company?"

"*At present*, I believe the contrary!" cried Mr Gosport.

"Really!" said the Captain, unsuspicious of his sneer, "I protest I have hardly seen a soul. Have you tried the Pantheon yet, ma'am?"

"No, sir."

"Nor I; I don't know whether people go there this year. It is not a favourite *spectacle* with me; that sitting to hear the music is a horrid bore. Have you done the Festino the honour to look in there yet?"

"No, sir."

"Permit me, then, to have the honour to beg you will try it."

"O, ay, true," cried Mrs Harrel; "I have really used you very ill about that; I should have got you in for a subscriber: but Lord, I have done nothing for you yet, and you never put me in mind. There's the ancient music, and Abel's concert;—as to the opera, we may have a box between us;—but there's the ladies' concert we must try for; and there's—O Lord, fifty other places we must think of!"

"Oh times of folly and dissipation!" exclaimed a voice at some distance; "Oh mignons of idleness and luxury! What next will ye invent for the perdition of your time! How yet further will ye proceed in the annihilation of virtue!"

Everybody stared; but Mrs Harrel coolly said, "Dear, it's only the man-hater!"

"The man-hater?" repeated Cecilia, who found that the speech was made by the object of her former curiosity; "is that the name by which he is known?"

"He is known by fifty names," said Mr Monckton; "his friends call him the *moralist*; the young ladies, the *crazy-man*; the macaronies, the *bore*; in short, he is called by any and every name but his own."

"He is a most petrifying wretch, I assure you," said the Captain; "I am *obsede* by him *partout*; if I had known he had been so near, I should certainly have said nothing."

"That you have done so well," cried Mr Gosport, "that if you had known it the whole time, you could have done it no better."

The Captain, who had not heard this speech, which was rather made at him than to him, continued his address to Cecilia; "Give me leave to have the honour of hoping you intend to honour our select masquerade at the Pantheon with your presence. We shall have but five hundred tickets, and the subscription will only be three guineas and a half."

"Oh objects of penury and want!" again exclaimed the incognito; "Oh vassals of famine and distress! Come and listen to this wantonness of wealth! Come, naked and breadless as ye are, and learn how that money is consumed which to you might bring raiment and food!"

"That strange wretch," said the Captain, "ought really to be confined; I have had the honour to be *degoute* by him so often, that I think him quite obnoxious. I make it quite a principle to seal up my lips the moment I perceive him."

"Where is it, then," said Cecilia, "that you have so often met him?"

"O," answered the Captain, "*partout*; there is no greater bore about town. But the time I found him most petrifying was once when I happened to have the honour of dancing with a very young lady, who was but just come from a boarding-school, and whose friends had done me the honour to fix upon me upon the principle of first bringing her out: and while I was doing *mon possible* for killing the time, he came up, and in his particular manner, told her I had no meaning in any thing I said! I must own I never felt more tempted to be *enrage* with a person in years, in my life."

Mr Arnott now brought the ladies word that their carriage was ready, and they quitted their box: but as Cecilia had never before seen the interior parts of a theatre, Mr Monckton, hoping while they loitered to have an opportunity of talking with her, asked Morrice why he did not *shew the lions?* Morrice, always happy in being employed, declared it was *just the thing he liked best*, and begged permission to do the honours to Mrs Harrel, who, ever eager in the search of amusement, willingly accepted his offer.

They all, therefore, marched upon the stage, their own party now being the only one that remained.

"We shall make a triumphal entry here," cried Sir Robert Floyer; "the very tread of the stage half tempts me to turn actor."

"You are a rare man," said Mr Gosport, "if, at your time of life, that is a turn not already taken."

"My time of life!" repeated he; "what do you mean by that? do you take me for an old man?"

"No, sir, but I take you to be past childhood, and consequently to have served your apprenticeship to the actors you have mixed with on the great stage of the world, and, for some years at least, to have set up for yourself."

"Come," cried Morrice, "let's have a little spouting; 'twill make us warm."

"Yes," said Sir Robert, "if we spout to an animating object. If Miss Beverley will be Juliet, I am Romeo at her service."

At this moment the incognito, quitting the corner in which he had planted himself, came suddenly forward, and standing before the whole group, cast upon Cecilia a look of much compassion, and called out, "Poor simple victim! hast thou already so many pursuers? yet seest not that thou art marked for sacrifice! yet knowest not that thou art destined for prey!"

Cecilia, extremely struck by this extraordinary address, stopt short and looked much disturbed: which, when he perceived, he added, "Let the danger, not the warning affect you! discard the sycophants that surround you, seek the virtuous, relieve the poor, and save yourself from the impending destruction of unfeeling prosperity!"

Having uttered these words with vehemence and authority, he sternly passed them, and disappeared.

Cecilia, too much astonished for speech, stood for some time immoveable, revolving in her mind various conjectures upon the meaning of an exhortation so strange and so urgent.

Nor was the rest of the company much less discomposed: Sir Robert, Mr Monckton, and Mr Arnott, each conscious of their own particular plans, were each apprehensive that the warning pointed at himself: Mr Gosport was offended at being included in the general appellation of sycophants; Mrs Harrel was provoked at being interrupted in her ramble; and Captain Aresby, sickening at the very sight of him, retreated the moment he came forth.

"For heaven's sake," cried Cecilia, when somewhat recovered from her consternation, "who can this be, and what can he mean? You, Mr Monckton, must surely know something of him; it was at your house I first saw him."

"Indeed," answered Mr Monckton, "I knew almost nothing of him then, and I am but little better informed now. Belfield picked him up somewhere, and desired to bring him to my house: he called him by the name of Albany: I found him a most extraordinary character, and Belfield, who is a worshipper of originality, was very fond of him."

"He's a devilish crabbed old fellow," cried Sir Robert, "and if he goes on much longer at this confounded rate, he stands a very fair chance of getting his ears cropped."

"He is a man of the most singular conduct I have ever met with," said Mr Gosport; "he seems to hold mankind in abhorrence, yet he is never a moment alone, and at the same time that he intrudes himself into all parties, he associates with none: he is commonly a stern and silent observer of all that passes, or when he speaks, it is but to utter some sentence of rigid morality, or some bitterness of indignant reproof."

The carriage was now again announced, and Mr Monckton taking Cecilia's hand, while Mr Morrice secured to himself the honour of Mrs Harrel's, Sir Robert and Mr Gosport made their bows and departed. But though they had now quitted the stage, and arrived at the head of a small stair case by which they were to descend out of the theatre, Mr Monckton, finding all his tormentors retired, except Mr Arnott, whom he hoped to elude, could not resist making one more attempt for a few

moments' conversation with Cecilia; and therefore, again applying to Morrice, he called out, "I don't think you have shewn the ladies any of the contrivances behind the scenes?"

"True," cried Morrice, "no more I have; suppose we go back?"

"I shall like it vastly," said Mrs Harrel; and back they returned.

Mr Monckton now soon found an opportunity to say to Cecilia, "Miss Beverley, what I foresaw has exactly come to pass; you are surrounded by selfish designers, by interested, double-minded people, who have nothing at heart but your fortune, and whose mercenary views, if you are not guarded against them–"

Here a loud scream from Mrs Harrel interrupted his speech; Cecilia, much alarmed, turned from him to enquire the cause, and Mr Monckton was obliged to follow her example: but his mortification was almost intolerable when he saw that lady in a violent fit of laughter, and found her scream was only occasioned by seeing Mr Morrice, in his diligence to do the honours, pull upon his own head one of the side scenes!

There was now no possibility of proposing any further delay; but Mr Monckton, in attending the ladies to their carriage, was obliged to have recourse to his utmost discretion and forbearance, in order to check his desire of reprimanding Morrice for his blundering officiousness.

Dressing, dining with company at home, and then going out with company abroad, filled up, as usual, the rest of the day.

CHAPTER ix. – A SUPPLICATION

The next morning Cecilia, at the repeated remonstrances of Mrs Harrel, consented to call upon Miss Larolles. She felt the impracticability of beginning at present the alteration in her way of life she had projected, and therefore thought it most expedient to assume no singularity till her independency should enable her to support it with consistency; yet greater than ever was her internal eagerness to better satisfy her inclination and her conscience in the disposition of her time, and the distribution of her wealth, since she had heard the emphatic charge of her unknown Mentor.

Mrs Harrel declined accompanying her in this visit, because she had appointed a surveyor to bring a plan for the inspection of Mr Harrel and herself, of a small temporary building, to be erected at Violet-Bank, for the purpose of performing plays in private the ensuing Easter.

When the street door was opened for her to get into the carriage, she was struck with the appearance of an elderly woman who was standing at some distance, and seemed shivering with cold, and who, as she descended the steps, joined her hands in an act of supplication, and advanced nearer to the carriage.

Cecilia stopt to look at her: her dress, though parsimonious, was too neat for a beggar, and she considered a moment what she could offer her. The poor woman continued to move forward, but with a slowness of pace that indicated extreme weakness; and, as she approached and raised her head, she exhibited a countenance so wretched, and a complexion so sickly, that Cecilia was impressed with horror at the sight.

With her hands still joined, and a voice that seemed fearful of its own sound, “Oh madam,” she cried, “that you would but hear me!”

“Hear you!” repeated Cecilia, hastily feeling for her purse; “most certainly, and tell me how I shall assist you.”

“Heaven bless you for speaking so kindly, madam!” cried the woman, with a voice more assured; “I was sadly afraid you would be angry, but I saw the carriage at the door, and I thought I would try; for I could be no worse; and distress, madam, makes very bold.”

“Angry!” said Cecilia, taking a crown from her purse; “no, indeed!—who could see such wretchedness, and feel any thing but pity?”

“Oh madam,” returned the poor woman, “I could almost cry to hear you talk so, though I never thought to cry again, since I left it off for my poor Billy!”

“Have you, then, lost a son?”

“Yes, madam; but he was a great deal too good to live, so I have quite left off grieving for him now.”

“Come in, good woman,” said Cecilia, “it is too cold to stand here, and you seem half-starved already: come in, and let me have some talk with you.”

She then gave orders that the carriage should be driven round the square till she was ready, and making the woman follow her into a parlour, desired to know what she should do for her; changing, while she spoke, from a movement of encreasing compassion, the crown which she held in her hand for double that sum.

“You can do everything, madam,” she answered, “if you will but plead for us to his honour: he little thinks of our distress, because he has been afflicted with none himself, and I would not be so troublesome to him, but indeed, indeed, madam, we are quite pinched for want!”

Cecilia, struck with the words, *he little thinks of our distress, because he has been afflicted with none himself*, felt again ashamed of the smallness of her intended donation, and taking from her purse another half guinea, said, “Will this assist you? Will a guinea be sufficient to you for the present?”

“I humbly thank you, madam,” said the woman, curtsying low, “shall I give you a receipt?”

"A receipt?" cried Cecilia, with emotion, "for what? Alas, our accounts are by no means balanced! but I shall do more for you if I find you as deserving an object as you seem to be."

"You are very good, madam; but I only meant a receipt in part of payment."

"Payment for what? I don't understand you."

"Did his honour never tell you, madam, of our account?"

"What account?"

"Our bill, madam, for work done to the new Temple at Violet-Bank: it was the last great work my poor husband was able to do, for it was there he met with his misfortune."

"What bill? What misfortune?" cried Cecilia; "what had your husband to do at Violet-Bank?"

"He was the carpenter, madam. I thought you might have seen poor Hill the carpenter there."

"No, I never was there myself. Perhaps you mistake me for Mrs Harrel."

"Why, sure, madam, a'n't you his honour's lady?"

"No. But tell me, what is this bill?"

"'Tis a bill, madam, for very hard work, for work, madam, which I am sure will cost my husband his life; and though I have been after his honour night and day to get it, and sent him letters and petitions with an account of our misfortunes, I have never received so much as a shilling! and now the servants won't even let me wait in the hall to speak to him. Oh, madam! you who seem so good, plead to his honour in our behalf! tell him my poor husband cannot live! tell him my children are starving! and tell him my poor Billy, that used to help to keep us, is dead, and that all the work I can do by myself is not enough to maintain us!"

"Good heaven!" cried Cecilia, extremely moved, "is it then your own money for which you sue thus humbly?"

"Yes, madam, for my own just and honest money, as his honour knows, and will tell you himself."

"Impossible!" cried Cecilia, "he cannot know it; but I will take care he shall soon be informed of it. How much is the bill?"

"Two-and-twenty pounds, madam."

"What, no more?"

"Ah, madam, you gentlefolks little think how much that is to poor people! A hard working family, like mine, madam, with the help of 20 pounds will go on for a long while quite in paradise."

"Poor worthy woman!" cried Cecilia, whose eyes were filled with tears of compassion, "if 20 pounds will place you in paradise, and that 20 pounds only your just right, it is hard, indeed, that you should be kept without it; especially when your debtors are too affluent to miss it. Stay here a few moments, and I will bring you the money immediately."

Away she flew, and returned to the breakfast room, but found there only Mr Arnott, who told her that Mr Harrel was in the library, with his sister and some gentlemen. Cecilia briefly related her business, and begged he would inform Mr Harrel she wished to speak to him directly. Mr Arnott shook his head, but obeyed.

They returned together, and immediately.

"Miss Beverley," cried Mr Harrel, gaily, "I am glad you are not gone, for we want much to consult with you. Will you come up stairs?"

"Presently," answered she; "but first I must speak to you about a poor woman with whom I have accidentally been talking, who has begged me to intercede with you to pay a little debt that she thinks you have forgotten, but that probably you have never heard mentioned."

"A debt?" cried he, with an immediate change of countenance, "to whom?"

"Her name, I think, is Hill; she is wife to the carpenter you employed about a new temple at Violet-Bank."

"O, what—what, that woman?—Well, well, I'll see she shall be paid. Come, let us go to the library."

"What, with my commission so ill executed? I promised to petition for her to have the money directly."

"Pho, pho, there's no such hurry; I don't know what I have done with her bill."

"I'll run and get another."

"O upon no account! She may send another in two or three days. She deserves to wait a twelvemonth for her impertinence in troubling you at all about it."

"That was entirely accidental: but indeed you must give me leave to perform my promise and plead for her. It must be almost the same to you whether you pay such a trifle as 20 pounds now or a month hence, and to this poor woman the difference seems little short of life or death, for she tells me her husband is dying, and her children are half-famished; and though she looks an object of the cruellest want and distress herself, she appears to be their only support."

"O," cried Mr Harrel, laughing, "what a dismal tale has she been telling you! no doubt she saw you were fresh from the country! But if you give credit to all the farragos of these trumpery impostors, you will never have a moment to yourself, nor a guinea in your purse."

"This woman,'" answered Cecilia, "cannot be an impostor, she carries marks but too evident and too dreadful in her countenance of the sufferings which she relates."

"O," returned he, "when you know the town better you will soon see through tricks of this sort; a sick husband and five small children are complaints so stale now, that they serve no other purpose in the world but to make a joke."

"Those, however, who can laugh at them must have notions of merriment very different to mine. And this poor woman, whose cause I have ventured to undertake, had she no family at all, must still and indisputably be an object of pity herself, for she is so weak she can hardly crawl, and so pallid that she seems already half dead."

"All imposition, depend upon it! The moment she is out of your sight her complaints will vanish."

"Nay, sir," cried Cecilia, a little impatiently, "there is no reason to suspect such deceit, since she does not come hither as a beggar, however well the state of beggary may accord with her poverty: she only solicits the payment of a bill, and if in that there is any fraud, nothing can be so easy as detection."

Mr Harrel bit his lips at this speech, and for some instants looked much disturbed; but soon recovering himself, he negligently said, "Pray, how did she get at you?"

"I met her at the street door. But tell me, is not her bill a just one?"

"I cannot say; I have never had time to look at it."

"But you know who the woman is, and that her husband worked for you, and therefore that in all probability it is right,—do you not?"

"Yes, yes, I know who the woman is well enough; she has taken care of that, for she has pestered me every day these nine months."

Cecilia was struck dumb by this speech: hitherto she had supposed that the dissipation of his life kept him ignorant of his own injustice; but when she found he was so well informed of it, yet, with such total indifference, could suffer a poor woman to claim a just debt every day for nine months together, she was shocked and astonished beyond measure. They were both some time silent, and then Mr Harrel, yawning and stretching out his arms, indolently asked, "Pray, why does not the man come himself?"

"Did I not tell you," answered Cecilia, staring at so absent a question, "that he was very ill, and unable even to work?"

"Well, when he is better," added he, moving towards the door, "he may call, and I will talk to him."

Cecilia, all amazement at this unfeeling behaviour, turned involuntarily to Mr Arnott, with a countenance that appealed for his assistance; but Mr Arnott hung his head, ashamed to meet her eyes, and abruptly left the room.

Meantime Mr Harrel, half-turning back, though without looking Cecilia in the face, carelessly said, “Well, won’t you come?”

“No, sir,” answered she, coldly.

He then returned to the library, leaving her equally displeased, surprised, and disconcerted at the conversation which had just passed between them. “Good heaven,” cried she to herself, “what strange, what cruel insensibility! to suffer a wretched family to starve, from an obstinate determination to assert that they can live! to distress the poor by retaining the recompense for which alone they labour, and which at last they must have, merely from indolence, forgetfulness, or insolence! Oh how little did my uncle know, how little did I imagine to what a guardian I was entrusted!” She now felt ashamed even to return to the poor woman, though she resolved to do all in her power to soften her disappointment and relieve her distress.

But before she had quitted the room one of the servants came to tell her that his master begged the honor of her company up stairs. “Perhaps he relents!” thought she; and pleased with the hope, readily obeyed the summons.

She found him, his lady, Sir Robert Floyer, and two other gentlemen, all earnestly engaged in an argument over a large table, which was covered with plans and elevations of small buildings.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.