

CAROLINE;  
OR, THE  
DIVERSITIES  
OF  
*FORTUNE*:  
A  
NOVEL.  
IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOLUME THIRD.

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CAROLINE,

OR THE

*DIVERSITIES of FORTUNE.*

CHAPTER XXVI.

*The City Beau.*

VARIOUS were the reflections, which, by turns, possessed the mind of our heroine, during her journey. The certainty of being tenderly beloved by the only man in the world to whom her heart could ever give a preference, could not but be attended with pleasure, yet the apprehension of never beholding him more, and the strange mystery in which a part of his sentiments and conduct towards her were involved, clouded the sun-shine of her future hopes. Again and again did she revolve his words in her thought. If he loved her, what was that irremoveable bar to his happiness, which obliged him to relinquish her? What was that cruel honour which tore him from her? By what would it be sullied in a union with her? Was not her family as ancient, as respectable as his own! Her fortune, perhaps, was not sufficiently large. She had heard that his father had considerably impaired his estate at the gaming table, but why, if that was the case, did he talk of honour? Prudence would have been a proper name. Thus musing she drew near the city, which had lately been the theatre of scenes so interesting; a something painful, yet not unpleasing, played about her heart, when she reflected that it probably at that moment contained the person upon whom her future happiness depended. Precarious dependence! Yet in spite of her struggles she felt that it was absolute. Her eyes watched every passenger, and examined every countenance in hopes of discovering the only one upon which they could dwell with delight; and when the carriage passed where she first beheld him, she seemed to expect a second disaster, and almost to wish it, in expectation of another deliverance; but not another deliverer, such an obligation from any other would, in her present disposition of mind, have been worse than suffering from the want of it.

Full of these ideas she alighted, at her uncle's, in Ely-place. She found the house entirely lighted up and full of company. Mrs. Sanders, being told who was below, immediately hastened down to receive her, which she did in the kindest manner, insisting upon her walking up into the drawing room, where she said there were none but friends; that her habit was very handsome, and no-body could expect any thing else after a journey. Our heroine, unwilling to detain her from her company, complied, and was introduced to about a dozen people, all dressed in the very extreme of the fashion, among whom she instantly recollected Mrs. Alderman Perks and her daughter. Charlotte, who was sitting at a card table, jumped up the moment she beheld her cousin, and flying to her with the greatest joy, exclaimed "Oh dear me, Miss Ashford, is it you? I am glad to see you! When did you come to town?" Before she had time to answer, Mrs. and Miss Perks advanced, and with great civility assured her how glad they were to see her in London.

She was next presented to a grave consequential looking woman, very showy and vulgar in her appearance—"This, my dear (said Mrs. Sanders) is my Lady Mason, with whom I hope you will soon have the honour to be better acquainted, and this is Miss Mason." Caroline courtesied respectfully to both, and her salutation was returned in the same silent manner. She was then introduced to Lady Glymp and her three daughters, who made up the whole of the female part of the company. The men consisted of Mr. Sanders, Sir John Mason, Sir Timothy Glymp, Mr. Clare, an admirer of one of the Miss Glymps, and two other young men, who seemed to be better pleased with, and to fancy themselves fitter for the drawing room than the counting-house.

Caroline was no sooner seated than one of the young men, who were cut out at the Whist-table, sauntered up to her with a conceited pertness, and enquired if she had come a long journey, to which she answered "Only seventy miles." "And pray how long do you think you might be in driving it?" said he. Caroline replied, that she had been upon the road all day. "You must have come very slow then (said he) why it was but the other day that I and another young fellow, a buck of my acquaintance, took chaise to Margate, which is about the distance you mention; we set out from Gracechurch-street, at seven—No, it was not seven, about six o'clock in the morning. Well, we stopped to breakfast at Shooter's-hill, we had something again at South-Shields, we dined at Rochester, refreshed ourselves again at Canterbury, and got to Margate by six in the afternoon." "You were better travellers than I pretend to be." Replied our heroine. "Oh I hates to drive slow (answered he). I have got one of the best trotters in town, and when I rides it is very seldom at less than fourteen or fifteen miles an hour. But the ladies are so fearful! Pray, Mam, have you been at the New Riding School? I think it beats either Hughes or Astley." Caroline answered, that she had never seen either of them. He was upon the point of adding something to this entertaining conversation, when Miss Mason, rising from the card-table, called out "Come, Mr. Young, you are wanted." "I am ready and willing, Mam." Replied he; and bowing affectedly, to our heroine, danced up to the table. "Yes, yes (cried Sir Timothy) Mr. Young is always ready to obey the ladies. Come, Miss Sanders, you are the gentleman's partner." "A good hint (rejoined Sir John) what say you, Mrs. Sanders, have you any objection to a partnership taking place between Mr. Young and Miss?" This piece of wit occasioned an universal laugh, and produced a great deal more of the same kind at the expence of Mr. Clare and Miss Molly Glymp. Between whom, Sir John affirmed, copartnership deeds were already drawn, if not signed and executed.

During all this merriment our heroine sat an unconcerned listener. Miss Mason and the youngest Miss Glymp, being cut out, had seated themselves on the opposite side of the room, and were conversing with much seriousness, not appearing at all to attend to the diversion which was going forward, when Mrs. Perks, coming up to Caroline, told her she was sorry to see young ladies so unsociable, and, taking her by the hand, led her across the room to that side on which Miss Mason and her friend sat in deep and earnest discourse, and telling them she had brought them another companion, seated her by their side and walked back to her own place. The young ladies gave Caroline a kind of half look, and as if restrained by her presence, entirely ceased their conversation. She strove to renew it by introducing several new subjects but in vain, a cold yes, Mame, or no, Mame, was all she could obtain, and she had just relinquished further attempts when Mr. Sanders coming up, took hold of her hand which he shook with great affectation. "Well,

my dear (said he) and how did you leave Sir Marmaduke and my Lady? Is your old good-for-nothing uncle, Lord Walton, dead yet? Why don't you kill half a score of them and get into possession?" "Are you related to my Lord Walton?" said Miss Mason, turning to Caroline with a look of complacency. "Yes (answered Mr. Sanders) if she was any the better for it, she is his great niece." He was that moment called for by Lady Glymp, but he had staid long enough to procure our heroine all the civility and attention from the ladies, by whom she was seated, that she could possibly desire.

Miss Mason said she should be happy to see her and Miss Sanders at Black-heath, where they generally resided in the summer; "we seldom come to be quite in town till near Christmas, continued she, and I would, by my own choice, never approach it from the birth-day till November; it is really frightful to drive along the streets at this time of year, but Lady Mason will visit her friends, and makes such a fuss to have me with her, that rather than be teased I sometimes prevail upon myself to come." Caroline answered that the country was certainly preferable during the heats of summer. "What do you think of Tunbridge?" cried Miss Glymp. "Why Tunbridge is tolerable (answered Miss Mason) but there is too great a mixture of company, but that indeed is the fault of all watering places. One can never be select. If it was not for that I should be fond of Bath; but it quite spoils one's pleasure to be seated by one does not know who. There is nothing like genteel private parties; when you are in the house of a person of real fashion you are secure from such mortifications and feel quite at your ease."

The driving up of Lady Mason's carriage, and her rising to be gone, put an end to Miss Mason's speech, and she took her leave after having renewed her invitation to Black-heath, where Mrs. Sanders promised that her niece and daughter should very shortly attend her.

As soon as they quitted the room, the whole company ran to the windows in order to look at their coach. "Is that their new coach?" cried Mrs. Sanders. "No, no (answered Lady Glymp) that is the coach they had new when Sir John was Lord Mayor." "That was before he was Sir John" said Mrs. Sanders. "Yes, yes (replied Mrs. Perks) he was then only plain Alderman Mason, and I remember before he was that. It is no disgrace to rise from a small beginning, but when people hold their heads so very high, it makes one think of it whether we will or no." "They may well hold their heads high (said Mr. Sanders) Sir John does not rise any day of the week worth less than a hundred and fifty thousand pounds. He has been a lucky man." "I suppose (said Mr. Young) Miss Mason is the first fortune in the city, she's really a very fine girl." "Dear me (exclaimed Miss Glymp) do you think so! in my opinion she was much handsomer two years ago." "And she was not so conceited then (cried Miss Perks) I used to like her well enough, but now I can't abide to be in the room with her." "Oh she thinks of nothing but Lords and Dukes; she's affronted if a merchant does but look at her to be sure (said Miss Molly Glymp) I can tell her, let her give herself what airs she pleases, her betters marry merchants every day." "Well, well (cried Mr. Sanders) it is hard if a hundred and fifty thousand pounds won't purchase a Lord now they are so plenty; all the city ladies may hope for titles if they can but supply money." Here they were interrupted by a servant, who informed Sir Timothy and Mr. Perks that their coaches were in waiting, and after a few usual compliments and invitations, those agreeable families took their leave.

As soon as they were alone Mrs. Sanders again welcomed her niece, saying, she hoped this visit would be a long one. Upon which Caroline told her and her uncle, that a

misunderstanding having happened between her and Sir Marmaduke, she was come to town with an intention of chusing another guardian, and if he had no objection to the trouble, for the short time it would be necessary, he would greatly oblige her by allowing her to name him. To this he readily assented, assuring her that he should think nothing a trouble which could render him useful to the daughter of his poor dear Caroline. She then turned to Mrs. Sanders, saying, that the other part of her request ought to be made to her, and having informed her upon what terms she had lived in the house of Sir Marmaduke Ashton, begged to know if she could be conveniently accommodated in theirs upon the same. No objection was made to this proposal by Mr. or Mrs. Sanders, and Charlotte was almost wild with joy when she understood that her cousin was actually come to live with them, saying she should not mind going to the country-house, at Highgate, now she had a companion, but it used to be so dull she could not bear the name of it.

The apartment assigned to our heroine being only one room, and that a small one, was at first a great inconvenience to her who had always been accustomed to two; however, as she thought her uncle's house a more proper situation for her than being alone in a lodging, which was her only alternative, she submitted to necessity. Her cousin had a good harpsichord which rendered it useless to unpack her's, and as she had no place in which to dispose her books they were likewise left in the state wherein they arrived from Ashford-Park, and Lane's circulating library supplied the want of them. The form of chusing a guardian was soon performed, and Sir Marmaduke, that he might entirely quit himself of what he esteemed so troublesome a charge, paid up the eleven thousand pounds belonging to her that he had in his hands; which was, for the present, placed in those of her uncle, till such time as proper land-security could be had for it, he being a strong anti-ministerialist, and no friend to the public funds.

Thus was our heroine once more fixed in a new habitation; it was not indeed exactly what she wished, but it was the best that at present offered itself, and she resolved to bear with its inconveniencies, at least till she could fix upon some other more eligible. The most unpleasing circumstance she experienced, was the impossibility of being alone, or commanding an hour of leasure at her own disposal. She was constantly expected to visit with her aunt, and to receive all her company. Nothing could excuse her from making one at the card-table, which was placed as regularly as the return of the evening. If she offered to absent herself Mrs. Sanders thought she was not well, and teased her with slops and enquiries; or she believed that the company to whom she introduced her was not agreeable, and felt herself affronted in the persons of her acquaintance. This might have been supported, had her mornings been unmolested, but Charlotte was never out of her sight, she had good-nature and a disposition naturally affectionate; Caroline took great pains to improve her mind, and correct that forward petulance of manner which proceeded rather from want of information than any fault of temper. She was a great admirer of her cousin's accomplishments, and grateful for the trouble she gave herself about her, but she had no moderation in her demands, and would follow her about like a shadow. Caroline felt the inconvenience but had too much good nature to remove it; the pleasure of being useful to her cousin was the consideration which enabled her to endure it, for she every day saw her improve, both in mind and person, the sensibility of the one giving delicacy and character and increasing information to the other.

Caroline had hoped, when they were at their country-house, as their little villa, at Highgate, was styled, that their time would be less devoted to the disgusting round of

second-hand dissipation in which they lived in town; but she found not the smallest alteration; the neighbourhood was small, but they met the oftener, and the card-table was never unfurnished; so that the only difference between this and London was, that there she saw variety of disagreeable people, and here met the same again and again through the week.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### *A Misfortune.*

A few weeks passed in the manner above described. The approach of winter began to be perceivable in all the vegetable world, and Mrs. Sanders (who only lived in the country a part of the summer, because every body who was worth thirty thousand pounds did the same) began to talk with pleasure of returning to her beloved London, to concert plans of amusement, for the ensuing season, when a circumstance happened, which at once put an end to all her prospects of happiness, and plunged her into the depth of sorrow, disappointment, and despair. This was nothing less than the sudden bankruptcy of her husband. We have before hinted that besides Mr. Sanders's business of a Soap-boiler, he was a dabbler in the Alley. A man who has once acquired a propensity to gaming, of any description can seldom answer for the lengths he may be tempted to go by an apparently favourable opportunity. The eleven thousand pounds which he had received for our heroine furnished the temptation, he began to speculate, and led on by the prospect of sudden and immense advantage, ventured not only that but a sum equal to his own capital. An unexpected turn in public affairs ruined his expectations, he was unable to make good his payments, and obliged to give up the little that was left for the benefit of his creditors.

The family were removed to a barely decent ready furnished lodging, where our heroine, though so great a sufferer by the rashness of her uncle, was obliged to exert all her spirits and resolution, in any degree to support those of Mrs. Sanders and Charlotte, especially the former, who was, beyond measure, depressed. The perfectly honest character of Mr. Sanders, previous to this unfortunate affair, gave them hopes that his certificate would be signed by all to whom he was indebted, especially as his niece, who was his principal creditor, declared herself ready to do any thing for his advantage, and they had no doubt of his being able to procure credit, in order to begin business again; but, alas, how changed would be their situation! from independant affluence, they must number themselves among those who subsist upon the profits of the day. Nor were the real inconvenience they suffered those which occasioned them the greatest pain, the thoughts of what would be said by their old acquaintance, the insolent triumph of some, the coolness of others, and the self-satisfied pitty of all, stung them to the soul, and they were far more pained to be deprived of the appearance than the reality of happiness.

The situation of our heroine was not less distressful than theirs, but her understanding was stronger and her mind supported by motives of resolution and patience to which they were strangers. Upon seriously reviewing her present circumstance and future prospects, she was less alarmed or disturbed than at first she had been; the thousand pounds in the hands of Dr. Seward was still safe, and when the affair of her uncle's banckruptcy was settled she expected to receive at least another; with this she determined to go back to Mrs. Williams's where such a fortune would be affluence. She should give up nothing by this retreat which affected her comfort, on the contrary, peace and leisure were what she most ardently desired. The world had few charms for her, and those expectations of future happiness so naturally and useful to the human mind, were in her's clouded by disappointment, and almost sunk in despair. What at present gave her

the greatest uneasiness was the thoughts of disturbing Mrs. Forester, in the state of ease and comfort wherein she had herself placed her. The sum of which she was now possessed would not maintain them both in it; if she went down to Mrs. Williams's, Mrs. Forester and little Mary must seek shelter again at the cottage, which in the cold and damp of winter, they would find far more inconvenient than when they before resided there. She could not endure to think of it; a few months would probably take them off her hands. She was resolved to enquire whither it was not possible for her to support herself without being a burden upon her distressed relations, for that short time. The benevolence, the nobleness of the resolution, flattered her natural generosity, and she determined to go immediately and consult a couple of young women whose shop she had often visited.

They were the daughters of a clergyman, and having been genteelly educated, and by his death left in an unprovided state, had taken a shop in which they maintained themselves in credit and comfort, by executing works of taste and ingenuity. They embroidered, painted upon silk, made and taught fillagree, cloth, wafer, and foil works, in all of which Caroline excelled, and she had no doubt of obtaining from them as much employment as would enable her to support herself till Mrs. Forester should be provided for.

She was preparing to set out for Golden-square, where Miss Clarks lived, when the servant (for they had now only one) presented a note to her, which she said was brought by a man in a rich livery, who waited for an answer. Upon breaking the seal she found it to contain these words.

*Dear Madam,*

THE unexpected misfortunes of your uncle give us a great concern, and we are sorry to find that you are so deeply involved in them. If an apartment in my house will be acceptable to you, there is one at your service: I have long been looking out for an unexceptionable companion for my daughter, I believe you to be such, and she has taken a particular liking to you. If you chuse to come a carriage shall be sent for you to-morrow morning, and all things be made agreeable.

I am, Madam,

Your humble servant,

J. MASON.

Caroline remained some moments in doubt what answer to return to this invitation, but the persuasions of her aunt and cousin at last determined her to accept it; she therefore wrote a respectful note in which she thanked Sir John for the favourable opinion he had expressed of her, and the offer of his protection, which she thankfully accepted, and promised to be in readiness to attend Miss Mason at the time he had appointed.

Little preparations were necessary for her removal, poor Charlotte assisted her in that little, and saw her depart with tears of unfeigned sorrow and affection. A little before

five o'clock she alighted at her new residence, on Black-heath, and was desired by the house-keeper (who met her at the door) to walk into Miss Mason's dressing-room where she expected her. When she entered, that young lady was seated upon an embroidered Ottoman, dressed in a chemise of beautiful painted gauze with suitable ornaments of the most delicate and expensive kind; she was playing with a sanguine\* of an uncommonly beautiful colour, it had a chain of enameled gold about its neck, to which was fastened a piece of silk-cord, with a tassel of gold at the end, by which she held her favourite to prevent its escape.

The moment our heroine appeared she flew to her in a rapture, exclaiming, "Ah, my dear associate! I rejoice to see you! how happy shall I be in a companion of your sensibility and refinement! how good you are to oblige me with your company!" Caroline thanked her for the kind sentiments which had induced her to make such a request, and which had obtained for her a situation which so many would think themselves happy to gain. "Yes, my dear (answered Miss Mason) I might certainly have choice of companions, low minded girls who have neither birth nor accomplishments to recommend them; creatures with whom ones jewels would be unsafe; but they are not the kind for me. With Miss Ashford I may appear in public with propriety, I shall feel easy while I am conversing with you, and not be ashamed to hear people ask who I have got along with me. How should I blush to hear such a question answered with, it is Miss Sanders, the Soap-boiler, Miss Glymp, the Brewer—Oh! horrible! it is sufficiently mortifying that my father will still keep open his banking-house, though as he has carried it on so long, and is so universally known he may just as well go on with it, especially as the advantages of it every year add some thousand pounds to my fortune, which if he lives a few years longer, and follows business with assiduity, will be two hundred thousand pounds."

Our heroine found some difficulty in answering this voluble communicative young lady; she might, however, have saved herself the trouble of considering, a listener being what Miss Mason was fond of, not a speaker, she was delighted to have a woman of family for her dependant and companion; for though without the smallest pretensions to it herself, family consequence was the thing in which she delighted, and the grand, almost only wish of her heart, was to possess a title; this she conceived to be the height of human felicity, and to purchase it she would willingly have trusted her vast fortune in the hands of the most worthless and disagreeable man living.

In the dining-parlour Caroline was received by the Knight and his Lady with the utmost graciousness. They both expressed great satisfaction at having found an intimate and constant companion for their daughter, so every way suitable to their wishes, and told her that they should from that hour consider her as an established part of their family: Sir John added, that if she behaved with propriety, and contributed to the happiness of his Betsy, she should never want a friend, and he would make her such a present at the end of every quarter as should enable her to appear like a gentlewoman, as he understood she was. "Aye (cried the old Lady) we have only one child for all our riches, and it is hard indeed if we cannot make her happy. I assure you, Miss Ashford, if we find you can make yourself agreeable to her, we shall never think we can pay you high enough; you shall have no occasion to repent coming into our family."

\* A small monkey.

Caroline was unused to make servile speeches or act the dependant; she strove to thank Lady Mason, but she could not find words which she believed would satisfy her without offending her own honour and sincerity, she therefore only bowed in silence. She already felt how unfit she was for the situation in which her perverse destiny had placed her, and wished she had continued with her uncle Sanders's family, and supported herself by the work of her hands rather than the labour of her mind. She found it was expected that she should keep Miss Mason constantly cheerful, that she should be ready to work for her, read to her, walk with her, or perform any other little office which could contribute to her ease and convenience. Few women were better qualified for such an undertaking, for she possessed talents for conversation very uncommon, could perform every kind of ornamental female work with particular elegance, and in superior accomplishments she was equalled by few; but the knowledge that exertion was expected from her damped the inclination, and even power of performance, and she was often graver than common because she knew that extraordinary gaiety was looked for. Miss Mason, however, appeared very well satisfied with her. She had constantly a person about her to whom (as she used to say) she was not afraid to speak; one who would listen to all her tales of distress, and if she did not flatter her foibles, by her good sense often relieved her fancied anxieties.

She had for some time passed fancied herself in love with a young Baronet, with whom she danced at the last Easter ball. He had made proposals to her father, but being much in debt, and having a number of younger brothers and sisters, he demanded sixty thousand pound to be paid down, and the old Knight refused to advance more than forty. This his daughter considered as the height of cruelty, and she would often when alone with our heroine lament herself as the most unfortunate girl upon earth. She would willingly have accompanied him to the North, but he had never made her such a proposal, and she could not mention it first. The obstinacy of her father was supported, not only by his knowledge of the value of money, but his desire of marrying his daughter to a great Dutch merchant, worth three hundred thousand pounds: this match he would often press, representing the immense advantages of it in comparison to one with a needy spend-thrift, who had only a feather to present her with in exchange for her bags of solid gold. The mention of this affair would at any time throw her into hysterics; she would upbraid her father with an intention to make her miserable—of killing her; and the contests generally ended in a promise from the old man that he would see what could be done. These promises, however, had been so often repeated that they began to lose their effect, and it is uncertain to what lengths of imprudence her impatience and resentment would have led her, had not the persuasions and arguments of her new friend in some degree abated and regulated her passions.

The task of perpetually combating folly, however useful, is irksome and fatiguing, and the sensible intelligent mind of Caroline felt its full effect. She was often upon the point of relinquishing a situation so unpleasant, but the fear of encountering difficulties of a still more disagreeable nature, and the comfortable reflection that a few months would release her from it, had hitherto enabled her to endure it, when the arrival of Mrs. Meadows, an intimate Bath friend of Miss Mason's, from whom she had long expected a visit, eased her of much fatigue and rendered her situation more tolerable.

Mrs. Meadows was young, handsome, and sprightly: she had been married while a girl to a man of at least double her age, and in no respect qualified to engage her

affection; after a few years of jealousy on his side, and aversion on hers, they parted; he continued to live at his family mansion with his horses and hounds, while she fled about the kingdom, in pursuit of her only idol, Pleasure. Her summers were generally spent at watering-places, where her person and situation (of all others the most disadvantageous to female virtue and honour) drew around her a croud of admirers. She had, however, by flirting with all a-like, and shewing particular favour to none, escaped every thing but general scandal; no one could point out any single instance of her misconduct, though every one was ready to blame her whole behaviour. She was received with transport by Miss Mason, and a few days after her arrival the whole family removed to town, which now, it being the latter end of October, began to fill pretty fast.

The very day after our heroine's arrival, in London, she visited her uncle and his family; she found them still in the state wherein she had left them six weeks before, but in hopes of shortly having their affairs settled in such a manner as to give them a prospect of beginning life again with better success. They appeared quite reconciled to their situation, and no longer to experience those disturbances of thought which they felt when she last parted from them, so naturally and happily does the mind accommodate itself to the different situations and vicissitudes to which human life is subject.

Upon her return Caroline found the two friends in earnest conversation; they were speaking of a gentleman who had just paid a visit to Mrs. Meadows, whom they mentioned in a high strain of commendation. "I think (said Miss Mason) Col. Vincent is one of the handsomest men I ever beheld." "And he is so very pleasing (answered Mrs. Meadows) so perfectly the man of fashion. Then he is the best tempered man in the world, and has all the warmth, generosity, and bravery of a hero." "I know but one man (replied Miss Mason, with a sigh) who is in my opinion more agreeable." "That one is, I must acknowledge, a stranger to me (answered Mrs. Meadows) if I was a single woman, and worth two hundred thousand pounds, I should know how to bestow it." "Good Heavens! (exclaimed Miss Mason) and would you actually bestow it upon a plain Mr.?" "Why not (cried her friend) what amazing happiness, my dear creature, do you expect in the possession of a title? Believe me, before you two I can speak in confidence; I had rather be the beloved wife of Col. Vincent than the first Duchess in the kingdom." "I think (replied Miss Mason) a title is an agreeable decoration, if it was only that it takes one up to the top of the room instead of dangling at the bottom among people one cannot venture to speak to. But exclusive of this my affections are engaged beyond a possibility of recal or exchange." A deep sigh succeeded these words, and she reclined upon the sofa on which they were seated in the most elegant and languishing attitude.

She had scarce pronounced these words when the drawing-room door opened, and Sir John entered with looks of the most consequential pleasure. "Well, Betsy (exclaimed he) I must have no more sighing and whining; no more crying after your Sir Williams and Sir Harrys; I have got a Lord for thee, my girl, a Peer of the realm, none of your paltry Scotch or Irish titles, but of Great-Britain. What say you to being Countess of D. hey!" "Lord, Sir John (cried she, her face crimsoned all over with surprize) how abrupt you are! sure a little preparation might have been judged necessary before such a circumstance was divulged! had you communicated your intelligence to Mrs. Meadows or Miss Ashford, they would have broke it to me by degrees, and not have shocked me in this manner." "Shocked you! (exclaimed Sir John) zounds, what would the girl be at? Shocked, indeed—at the thoughts of being a Countess! Why I know thou wouldst give

thy eyes for such a title. Have I not heard thee say, myself, that thou wouldst marry a Duke though he were a negro? so I fancy a handsome young Viscount won't make you faint." "Dear me, Sir John (cried she) you should not repeat what one says in the moment of levity. You know how much I have encouraged Sir Charles Woodhouse; how can I ever think of any other?" "Nay (replied her father, if that is the case I have done, if you can fancy none but that scape-grace, I must let Lord D. know that you are engaged, and there's an end of the matter." "Lord, Papa, you are so hasty! (cried she) if one wished to obey you and get the better of a weak inclination, you allow one no time." There is no time to be allowed (answered the Knight) my Lord expects an answer to-night, and if his addresses are received he will be here to-morrow morning, and it will be your own fault if you are not a Countess before the week is out. I have promised him fifty thousand down; there's for you, Betsy! Ought you not to be a good girl and make yourself happy to reward me for parting with such a sum?" "I acknowledge my obligations, Sir (answered she) and am resolved to act in every thing as you shall think proper." "That's a good girl (replied Sir John) then I shall tell my Lord that he may come. I need not tell you to put on your finery, I warrant that will be done without my telling. I leave you to consult one another, you women understand these affairs best." So saying he nodded to each and left the room.

The emotion of our heroine was almost as great as that of Miss Mason, when she heard her old lover Lord D. announced as the destined future husband of a city heiress. She easily conceived that a fashionable derangement in his finances might have rendered such a step convenient, and did not wonder that so immense a fortune as that of Miss Mason, should attract his attention? but that she should be thus repeatedly thrown in his way, in circumstances so awkward and embarrassing, filled her with confusion and uneasiness. She feared, least something of the same kind should happen here as at Ashford park, that is, that she should be the means of disturbing the expected happiness of a person who professed herself her friend. She resolved, however, to be upon her guard in every look and action, by which means she hoped to check any improper attentions from Lord D. should he be imprudent enough to pay her any such.

As for Miss Mason, having entirely conquered her passion for Sir Charles Woodhouse, the remainder of the day passed in a delirium of happiness, in planning parties for public places, to which my Lord was to escort her; in chusing wedding clothes, giving rich liveries, fitting up houses, and regulating a retinue. And she retired at night to dream of titles, plate, jewels, equipage, and the charming extravaganza of high life.

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### *The Fashionable Lover.*

THE following morning Miss Mason was up sooner than usual; before eleven she sent her maid into Caroline's apartment, to request that she would favor her with her advice about her dress. Our heroine was reading, as she had been for more than two hours, when this message was brought; she immediately laid aside her book, and went to attend the important consultation.

Upon entering Miss Mason's room, she saw several elegant morning dresses exposed to view, upon which she was gazing with the most unresolved countenance, not able to fix upon one for her appearance this important morning. "Come hither, my dear Ashford, give me your opinion, which of those dresses shall I put on? I have a high opinion of your taste. If I could but look like you do in that dimity! Don't you think these are all frightful? I wish I had time to send to Chambaud, she would have got me something tollerable. How provoking it is that my clouded tiffany is not come home!" "In my opinion (answered Caroline) that India dress is extremely elegant, and particularly becoming to you; and suppose you put on the handkerchief and cap that you had from Paris, I think they will suit it exactly, they are in the same style." "So I will (exclaimed Miss Mason) that will do exactly! You have really more taste than any body I ever met with! The first time I go to court, I am resolved to be dressed entirely by your directions." Caroline thanked her with a smile, for such a proof of her confidence, saying she should take particular care to exert all her judgment upon such an occasion. "Nay, you will have yourself to decorate too, answered Miss Mason, for I am resolved you shall be presented along with me; your family and connexions make it very proper, and I would have the world know that my friend and companion is of consequence enough to receive such an honour."

Mrs. Meadows now entered, and happening greatly to admire the dress she had chosen, and declaring she would look quite irresistible, put her into so good a humour, that it was put on without either fretting or delay, and rather before twelve o'clock, they all walked down to breakfast, perfectly satisfied with the execution of this grand affair.

Though Sir John and his Lady indulged their daughter with her own hours, it was their custom to breakfast exactly at nine, having, in the younger part of their lives, been used to early ones, as well as to many other rational and comfortable practices, which, in compliance with her humours, they had given up. The three friends, therefore, sat down to that repast without any one to partake or interrupt their chat, which entirely turned upon Lord D——, and the probable consequence of his expected visit, till a servant delivered a note to Mrs. Meadows, which, as she read, the colour flushed in her cheeks, and she put it up, without mentioning any thing of its contents. A few moments afterwards, she proposed to Miss Mason their going that evening to the Opera, to which her friend readily consented, provided Lord D—— should happen to be disengaged, and would go with them; adding that she did not think it would be proper, in her situation, to appear in public attended by any other person. Our heroine smiled, and Mrs. Meadows raillied her upon her very extraordinary attention to propriety, saying, if that is the case, you must spare Miss Ashford for one evening, I can procure twenty beaus in town, and

we'll return after the Opera is over, for I have set my heart upon going, and am resolved not to be disappointed, if I venture alone. Just as she had spoken these words, a thundering at the door announced the arrival of some visitor of consequence. The ladies started up, and hurried into Miss Mason's dressing-room, which had been put into the highest order, for the reception of her expected guest. She flew to the glass, took a transient view of herself, then sinking into a fanteuil, waited with a fluttering heart, for his appearance.

In a few moments his Lordship was announced, and entered the room attended by Sir John, who in a manner he meant to be quite the thing, led him to his daughter. He thanked her for the honour she had done him in admitting his visit, with that easy respect and gallantry which a man of the ton can assume, when he stands in need of a certain number of thousand pounds, which the person to whom it is addressed, has in her power to bestow upon him. Having finished his compliments to her, he turned to Mrs. Meadows and Caroline, each of whom he favoured with a respectable bow, without expressing the least surprise at the sight of the latter, or appearing at all embarrassed by her presence; he only enquired when she left Ashford Park, and whether Sir Marmaduke and his family would be in town that winter? She answered that it was three months since she had left the country, and that she was intirely ignorant of any of her uncle's designs.

Miss Mason was not at all surprised to find that our heroine was acquainted with Lord D——, knowing that she had relations of equal rank; on the contrary, she was pleased that he should find a woman of fashion, whom he knew to be such, in her house. But when she observed him address his whole conversation to her, she began to feel herself neglected, and tried a thousand little affected airs to attract his attention. His Lordship asked our heroine if she had seen Mrs. Murray, since they met in her apartment, and upon her answering in the negative, he told her that he had intirely lost her favour, and that he verily believed she would leave her fortune to the people who took care of her house, for she now absolutely refused to see any of her relations; adding, that Lady Walton had been refused admission, and none of the Ashfords were permitted to come near her. She accuses us (continued he) of having endeavoured to cheat and deceive her, and vows that she will dispose of her riches in such a manner as shall vex and mortify us all.

During this conversation Miss Mason sat with great impatience, till being quite weary of expecting her turn of attention, she resolved to put an end to it, and at the same time inform her lover (as she accounted him) on what footing Caroline was in the family. Complaining, therefore, of a little head ake, Miss Ashford (said she, with affected negligence) reach me that smelling bottle. Meaning one which lay upon the toilet on the opposite side of the room. This was a liberty she had never taken before, neither when they were alone or in company: our heroine hesitated a moment, then stepping a-cross the room with an easy negligence was about to have brought it, telling her at the same time that as she was not well, she must be indulged, but Lord D. starting up insisted upon her keeping her seat, saying to Miss Mason, with a look that reproached her indelicacy, that such an office would to *him* be an honour. Notwithstanding the look and emphasis with which he spoke, she received it from him with much graciousness. Her manner reminded him of the business upon which he came, which was nothing less important than falling in love; had he been visiting a woman of quality with a matrimonial intention, such a ceremony would have been wholly unnecessary, but with the daughter of a citizen he

knew it would be insisted upon. Forcing himself therefore from the point of attraction he began to caress the sanguine which his mistress held on her lap, telling her that the tenderness she lavished upon that little animal was enough to render a lover uneasy. This she considered as an elegant declaration of his passion, and a few compliments which succeeded put her into such a perfect good humour that she appeared to have wholly forgot her head-ache, and proposed the party to the Opera. His Lordship readily offered to attend them; he said, he was engaged at dinner, but promised to slip away immediately as soon as it was over and call for them; adding, that he hoped they would honour his box. Miss Mason smiled and bowed her assent but Mrs. Meadows begged, if it was not quite disagreeable to them, that they would indulge her by sitting in the pit; Lord D. assured her every part of the house, would with such a party be the same to him, and the pit was accordingly fixed upon. The Viscount then took his leave promising to wait upon them again at the proper hour.

He was no sooner gone and Miss Mason and her friend had passed a few encomiums on his person and address, then the great work of dressing, which had ended not more than two hours before, again commenced, and fresh consultations were held upon the important subject. Caroline declared herself quite at liberty to advise and assist as she was in her own person uninterested in the preparation, being resolved not to make one in the party. As Miss Mason was properly escorted, she was not at all displeased by the absence of one who took up too much of that attention which she wished, and thought she had a right wholly to engross. They were with difficulty ready dressed by dinner, and soon after it was removed Lord D.'s coach, in which they had promised to go, drove up to the door. As soon as his Lordship had handed in Miss Mason and Mrs. Meadows, he asked where Miss Ashford was, to which the former lady replied, with a toss of her head, that Caroline did not always go with her to public places.

When our heroine was alone, a serious unpleasant train of reflections took possession of her mind. She reviewed her passed life, and sighed over that happy part of it which was spent under the dear regretted protection of a paternal roof. The mortifying vicissitudes she had since experienced next presented themselves, and lastly, her present uncertain and irksome situation. Such was her entertainment when the ladies returned. Lord D—— had an engagement for the evening, which prevented his staying supper, to which he was much pressed by Sir John and his Lady, who returned him many unnecessary thanks for the care he had taken of their Betsy. He made polite returns to all their fine speeches, without appearing by any change of countenance, to think them absurd, and took leave with no other compliment to our Heroine, than a very slight bow.

The ladies were full of the agreeable evening they had spent, and Caroline understood that Colonel Vincent had been of the party. Miss Mason began already to act the Countess; talked of people of the first rank as her intimates and equals, and diverted herself extremely, at the mortification her presence, attended by Lord D——, appeared to give Sir William Woodhouse, who, she said, looked frightful, and more like a fool than any creature she ever beheld; adding, that when he came to speak to her, she really could not help laughing in his face.

The next morning the subject was renewed, and appeared to afford, if possible, more amusement than the night before; when Miss Mason's gait was, for the present,

clouded by her friend Mrs. Meadows, who informed her she must, in a few days, put an end to her present visit, being under an engagement to join a party of friends in the South of France, where they purposed to spend the winter, and return again to England in the spring.

It was in vain that her friend made the strongest opposition to this scheme; she assured her the plan had been laid, and her promise given, before her arrival at Blackheath; that the party consisted of her particular friends, and she could by no means think of disappointing them.

This piece of information greatly damped the spirits of Miss Mason; she had been all her life too much indulged in every wish, to endure the smallest contradiction to her inclinations with patience. After telling Mrs. Meadows that she thought she had possessed one friend, but found she was mistaken, she left the room in tears of anger and disappointment.

The door was no sooner closed, than Mrs. Meadows began to animadvert upon the caprice and childishness of Miss Mason's temper, which she attributed partly to weakness of understanding, and partly to a bad education. "Do you know, (continued she) that she has taken it into her head to be jealous of Lord D—— and you. She says she is sure there has been more between you than a common acquaintance; which opinion is strengthened by a report his valet has spread in the family; namely, that his Lord offered to marry you the last time he was at Ashford Park, and that it would actually have been a match, but for some quarrel in the family. This account her maid has carried her, and she is now only waiting for some excuse to part with you. The smallest will do, for she is determined upon it."

"She need not trouble herself to find excuses (replied Caroline, a little warmly) had she expressed to me the most distant wish, it would have had all the effect of a formal dismissal. I am greatly obliged to you for saving me such a mortification, which I will secure myself against, by leaving the house this very day."

"I by no means blame your resolution, (answered Mrs. Meadows) but where will you go? Are you provided with any eligible situation when you leave this family? I have been informed of your late misfortune, as well as your intirely dependant circumstances, by Miss Mason, who gave the whole detail to Lord D——, the evening we went to the Opera, at the same time telling him that when she took you into her protection, you had not bread to live upon, and with the rest of your relations, had taken shelter in a wretched alley, up four pair of stairs."

"My uncle's family, with whom I lived (answered Caroline) have a first floor, in Red-Lyon Street, Holborn. Their circumstances, however, are very distressful, and I cannot think of taking from them the smallest part of their little, especially as after what has passed, they may think themselves obliged to support me."

“Believe me and so they are, in my opinion (answered Mrs. Meadows.) I think you have a right to divide their last bit of bread with them.”

“Whatever may be my right, (replied Caroline) I have no inclination to do it. They never wished or intended to injure me; on the contrary, I have every reason to believe myself greatly beloved by them; and if at present I can give them no assistance, at least I will not be a burthen to them.”

“Come along with me (said Mrs. Meadows) the journey I am about to take will, in all probability, be a pleasant one; I shall esteem myself happy in such a companion, and will omit nothing in my power to render your situation comfortable.”

Caroline thanked her in the warmest terms for her friendly proposal. She was fond of traveling, and next to Italy, she should like to visit the South of France, a fine climate was her delight. Mrs. Meadows was sensible, and apparently good natured. At all events, three or four months would soon pass, and by the time she returned, her little fortune would, in all probability, be her own. She resolved to venture, and after a minute or two of consideration, answered, that she would attend her.

Mrs. Meadows appeared highly pleased with her resolution, and Caroline retired to her apartment, to put all things in readiness for her removal from Great George-Street. She did not see Miss Mason till dinner, when she told her a circumstance had happened which obliged her to take leave of her that very afternoon.

“What (said the old lady) are you going to leave Betsy? I would have you consider of it, Miss Ashford. You will not find it easy to get into such another family; but people never know when they are well till they are worse.”

“Have you any thing to complain of, (said the Knight.) Have you not been treated like a gentlewoman?”

“I have no complaints, Sir, (answered our Heroine) but I must in some degree consult my own convenience, which at present obliges me to take this step.” Miss Mason was intirely silent, and when Caroline begged leave to send a servant to call a hackney coach, she made not the least opposition to her intention. He soon returned to let her know that it was ready, and all her things put into it. Upon which she arose, and taking a formal leave of the whole family, stepped in, and directed the coachman to drive to Red-Lyon Street.

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### *An Expedition.*

SHE found her relations still in the same situation, but in hopes that it would soon alter for the better. They were much concerned to hear of her having left Miss Mason, and almost frightened at the thought of her going abroad. Mrs. Sanders declared if any misfortune befel her, she should never be happy in her mind any more, and Charlotte wept to think that the sea would divide her from her dear cousin. Caroline endeavoured to reason them out of fears so ill grounded, and assured them that she looked forward to her expected journey as a very great pleasure, and what she should much prefer to staying in England. That evening she received a note from Mrs. Meadows, to inform her that she had resolved upon leaving London the very next day but one, and would call for her by ten in the morning.

At the hour appointed, that lady, in a hired post chaise and four, attended by a servant in, and another out of livery, stopped at the door of the house in which Mr. Sanders lodged, and our Heroine having taken an affectionate leave of him and his family, immediately joining her, they drove away at a considerable speed, taking the road to Dover. She found in Mrs. Meadows, now that they were no longer encumbered with the affected trifling of Miss Mason, a lively, sensible companion, who knew much of the world and its follies, which in the general course of her conduct, she countenanced and complied with; but in her better and unimpassioned judgment, despised. The weather being remarkably open and fine, their journey was extremely pleasant, and they embarked in the highest spirits, being joined, at Dover, by two female servants, who had arrived from town, that morning, in a stage coach.

During their passage, our Heroine and her new patroness appeared every hour more and more pleased with each other; the courage of Mrs. Meadows, which seemed intirely unmoved by the prospects of any difficulty they might encounter, removed, in a great measure, the fears of her companion. She laughed at the ideal necessity, as she called it, of always being escorted by men; as if, she said, a woman of sense, who had money at her command, and servants to attend her, could not take care of herself; but must, like a child, be perpetually dangled after, for fear she should fall down, or cut her fingers. Upon Caroline's inquiring some of the particulars of her intended rout, she told her she did not mean to go immediately to the place of general rendezvous, but to make a short visit to the Countess Du Barrongue, who was her distant relation, and lived within twelve miles of Paris, in which she had a magnificent house; but contrary to the general custom in France, she and the Count spent almost the whole year in the country. There, continued Mrs. Meadows, I hope to be joined by my friend Colonel Vincent, who will see us safe to the end of our journey.

Caroline was extremely surprised to hear of Mrs. Meadows being followed to the Continent by a person for whom she had more than once heard her profess so dangerous a preference. She remonstrated against her imprudence in having permitted him to take

such a step. Mrs. Meadows laughed at first, at what she called Caroline's prudery, but finding her very serious in her opinion, she assured her that if she knew the character of the Colonel, it would intirely remove her scruples. It is, continued she, of the most excellent and uncommon kind, and I shall esteem myself as safe under his care, as if I was surrounded by a whole guard of Spanish Duenas. Caroline replied, that though the honour of Colonel Vincent, and her own conscious integrity, might be a sufficient security against impertinance or insult, they could hardly be so universally acknowledged as to stop the voice of public censure, and she must, on such an occasion, expect its cries to be of the loudest kind; adding, that if the circumstance of his being to make one of the party, had been communicated to her before they sailed, she should certainly have declined the honour of attending her.

Much altercation took place between them upon this subject, and Mrs. Meadows at last appeared convinced, by the arguments of her friend, that she had been guilty of a real imprudence. She promised to write to the Colonel the moment she landed, and forbid his coming, a promise with which our Heroine appeared satisfied, and she accordingly wrote as soon as they got on shore. They travelled with as much expedition as the badness of the carriage would allow, till they arrived at the house, or rather palace, of the Count Du Barrongue, which was an elegant and stately edifice, situated in the finest part of one of the finest countries in the world.

They were received by the Countess, her husband being upon business in a distant province, rather with politeness, than affection or pleasure. Her coldness did not appear to disturb Mrs. Meadows, but sensibly hurt our Heroine, who would have persuaded her to leave the house the very next day; but she said it was the Countess's manner, exactly what she expected, and that she should continue there as long as it suited her convenience. A single day was sufficient to convince Caroline of the falsity of this account; the Countess's manner being particularly kind and obliging to all about her, by every one of whom she seemed exceedingly beloved, particularly by a young lady who lived with her as a companion, and who was her distant relation. All her coldness seemed to be reserved for her new guests. She expressed much wonder at their taking so long a journey with only the protection of domestics, and once or twice hinted her dislike to all violations of family duties, and the disgraceful state of voluntary widdowhood. Miss Dunford, that being the name of her young friend, behaved to them, especially to Caroline, with more attention. She appeared particularly pleased with her, and took every opportunity of conversing with, and shewing her marks of kindness, which were more than usually acceptable in her present situation, when she was dissatisfied with herself, and every thing about her.

She blamed her own hasty want of consideration, in accepting Mrs. Meadows's invitation to accompany her in so long a journey, without a further knowledge of her character, or the advice of some friend who knew the world better than herself; she might have consulted Doctor Seward; he would have pointed out the impropriety of her friend's situation and conduct. She admired the Countess Du Barrongue; the more she saw of her, the more was she convinced that Mrs. Meadows would not be treated by her with so little consideration, had she not deserved to forfeit her esteem; and she strove by every means

in her power, without further lessening that lady, to convince the Countess that she never had been a partaker of her follies. These endeavours appeared to be in some degree successful. The elegant simplicity of her manners, the unaffected rectitude of her sentiments, the strength of her understanding, and apparent goodness of her heart, all tended to change the opinion which she at first seemed to have formed of her, and she began upon every occasion to distinguish her by more of that benevolent friendliness which appeared so natural to her disposition, than she had before favoured her with.

One morning, when Mrs. Meadows and Miss Dunford were walking in the gardens, the Countess asked Caroline how long she had been acquainted with the former; her answer led to further enquiries, and ended in a short detail of all the events of her life. This she told in a summary way, without naming particular persons, except her near relations, and wholly omitting those circumstances which did most honour to her charms or benevolence. The Countess appeared much interested and affected by the account of so many vicissitudes and misfortunes having befallen so young and lovely a creature. She no longer blamed, but lamented her connection with Mrs. Meadows, who, though her relation, was, she said, by no means a proper director for a young woman of honour and virtue. She then asked her if she had not a brother at that time abroad upon his travels; and upon her answering in the affirmative, told her that he had been recommended to the Count and herself, by the father of Miss Dunford, who then lived in London, and had a few months past, favoured them with his company for some days. Caroline had never heard of the name of Dunford, and could not help wondering by what means he, who before he left England, had stirred so little from Broomfield, became acquainted with him.

When Mrs. Meadows and Miss Dunford returned from their walks, the Countess addressed the latter with a smile, saying, "Do you know, my dear, that I have made a discovery; Miss Ashford is sister to the gentleman of that name, who was recommended to us by your father: you know who I mean Harriot," continued she, archly. "Dear me, (exclaimed Miss Dunford, blushing excessively) Is it possible, Madam, you can be Mr. Ashford's sister? I have heard him say, indeed, that he has one, but I always understood that she was under the protection of relations, from whom she had large expectations." "Miss Ashford (answered the Countess) has just favoured me with an account of the accident by which she has been thrown out of that protection. Her history of her family and connections being exactly similar with that given us by her brother, immediately convinced me that they must belong to the same family." Miss Dunford then asked several questions, particularly what was become of the family who had taken up their residence with Lord W——, a little before Mr. Ashford left England. And upon being informed that the old lady was married to that nobleman, she exclaimed, that is exactly what I expected; I told Mr. Ashford what would happen. But when she heard of the use she had made of her power and influence over her husband, she appeared uncommonly affected, and her countenance expressed the utmost disdain and resentment. Caroline, who attributed this concern to the interest she kindly took in her welfare, felt the most lively gratitude, and a liking which she had conceived for this amiable and pleasing girl, began from that moment, to strengthen into affection and friendship. From that time the Countess continued to treat our Heroine with the most flattering distinction, seeming

anxious, by her present kindness, to make her amends for the past neglect she had suffered in her house. She warmly declared against her proceeding with Mrs. Meadows to the end of her intended journey, telling her, that though she was ignorant of whom the party she was going to join consisted, she had too much reason to believe it would not be composed of such persons as would prove agreeable to a woman of her delicacy and understanding; adding, that there was a family of her particular friends then at Paris, who would set out on their return for England in about a fortnight; that she would take care to recommend her to them in such a manner, as would not only induce them to afford her their protection till their arrival in London, but if she chose it, engage them to place her in an eligible situation, better suited to her merits and disposition.

The gratitude of our Heroine was without bounds, she informed the Countess that she hoped, in a few months to be possessed of a sum sufficient to maintain her in comfort and independence, and that till then she would thankfully accept such a situation as that she mentioned; upon which the Countess desired her to be quite easy, for it should be her business to see that such a one was provided for her; that she knew she might depend upon her friend, Mrs. Lane, whose connections put it often in her power to be useful to her acquaintance, and whose disposition rendered every act of kindness a pleasure to her.

Some days after these assurances had been received, the whole family were seated round a working-table; the Countess was embroidering the border of a skirt, Miss Dunford weaving lace, Mrs. Meadows playing with a squirrel, and our Heroine reading a comedy of Moliere's, when a servant entered the room and informed Mrs. Meadows that an English gentleman had just stopped at the gate and ordered him to inform her that his name was Vincent. Caroline had mentioned to the Countess some apprehensions of her attachment to that gentleman; the moment, therefore, that she heard his name announced she gave her a look of the most piercing and expressive kind. Her face was covered with crimson, not the artless blush of sensibility and innocence, but the deep one of guilty pleasure and apprehension. Recovering in a moment—"Have I your permission to ask my friend in for a few moments (said she) he is a gentleman of unexceptionable character, and being nearly related to some of those intimates with whom I mean to pass the winter, intends to join them for a few weeks only, and is, I suppose, polite enough to call upon us in his way, to offer himself as our escort for the remainder of our journey."

"He has taken a considerable round, in order to pay this compliment (replied the Countess) but request the gentleman to walk in (continued she, turning to the servant) I cannot let any person remain at my gate who belongs to a present part of my family." She spoke these words with a stately coldness which would have awed any one less blessed with convenient effrontery than was her relation, who with great composure thanked her for her politeness, and rising walked towards the door in order to be ready to receive her friend. The door opened, and the Colonel entering, flew to Mrs. Meadows, and taking her by the hand, which she held out to him—"My dear Madam (said he) how shall I express my felicity in seeing you!" At the same instant Caroline and he happening to cast their eyes upon each other, the words, Miss Ashford and Capt. West, were repeated with the greatest astonishment. Capt. West (exclaimed the Countess and Miss Dunford, in the same moment) is it Capt. West?

The Colonel had by this time approached our Heroine. "I do not wonder at your surprise, my dear Madam, if you have neither heard of my promotion or change of name. The first was his Majesty's pleasure. The second was a whim of an old uncle of my father's, who having spent his whole life in hoarding a fortune, chose to perpetuate his folly as far as possible by bequeathing his name together with the possession of it, both of which I at present acknowledge as my own." "I am glad, Sir (answered Caroline) that his whim has been of so much advantage to you." "But how, Miss Ashford (continued he) how shall I apologize for the folly, the madness of which I was guilty the last time I had the happiness of meeting you? Yet I have done all in my power to deserve forgiveness. Indeed I did not, till that evening, know how deeply I had unintentionally been the means of injuring you."

"What do you mean, Sir, (said Caroline) before this excellent lady, who honours me with her friendship, you may speak as freely as if we were alone; what injury do you speak of?" "It is an affair I cannot explain, (answered he) without exposing the injustice of a mother; but the guilty deserve shame; at all events the innocent should be righted. I need not remind you (continued he) of the disturbance I made the evening we met at Vauxhall; as soon as you and your party had quitted the gardens, the gentleman by whom you were attended, whose name, half-inebriated as I was, I do not recollect, insisted upon my giving him my address, which I was upon the point of doing when Mr. Craven, who I had before met in the gardens, joined us; he blamed your friend for the warmth he expressed about a matter so common, and told him that if he really had any serious thoughts of the girl he had just parted with (such was his expression) he might think himself happy in escaping her, for that she had long lost all pretensions to consideration from a man of honour; adding, that as one instance of what he asserted, and of my superior and prior right to her favour, it was on my account she was discarded from her uncle, Lord Walton's, and that all the rest of her family refused to take notice of her.

I was warm in my resentment of this scandal; but what is the resentment or assertion of a drunken man? Mr. Craven said much which I did not understand, but I recollect that he said I left the house early in the morning and you in the afternoon, and that the whole neighbourhood, who indeed had their suspicions before, were fully convinced of the cause; which Lady Walton, by every thing but words had acknowledged; he added, that you resided for some time in the neighbourhood where your father had been greatly respected, and that all your old friends were so well assured of your faulty conduct that they had refused to visit or take the smallest notice of you."

During this account the countenance of our Heroine underwent many changes. Shame, surprise, and indignation, by turns, took possession of her soul. The circumstance of her having been entirely neglected by the neighbourhood, during her residence at the house of farmer Williams, had, at the time, a little amazed her, but as it was exactly what she wished, and no accident happened to throw her into the way of them, she believed it to proceed from the mean disposition of mankind, who fly from misfortune as a pestilential disorder, and gave herself little concern about it. She could now account for the conduct of Sir William Beaumont, and clearly discern wherein his honour and love

stood in opposition to each other. A flood of tears accompanied this thought, and she cast her eyes to heaven in an agony of grief which greatly affected the Countess, who said every thing in her power to console her, telling her that now the cruel reports which had been spread were known, they would be easily refuted; adding, that she should herself be in England in a few months, and she would then take care to inform any persons whom she would point out to her, of the real state of the case, and did not doubt but it would be in her power to set all straight again.

Col. Vincent then proceeded to inform our Heroine, that when his senses returned and he began to reflect upon what had passed, which swam like a broken dream before his memory; he collected enough of the cruel situation which the barbarity of his mother, and the general propensity of mankind to believe tales of scandal and detraction, however improbable, had plunged her into; to induce him, as the only amends in his power to make her, to write a full account of all that had happened to Lord Walton; he informed him of every particular respecting the rise and progress of his passion for her, of the resolution which he knew his mother had formed to banish her from his house before she was acquainted with it, and the arts she afterwards made use of to engage her to accept him for her husband, affronting every one whom she thought likely to be his rival, among whom Mr. Craven was one; and at last, when her steady refusal had defeated all her schemes, he requested of him to call to mind the infamous arts by which, as he had been informed, she drove the lovely fugitive from his protection. The care she had taken, by falling ill, and various other pretences to prevent his meeting her during her residence at Ashford-Park, and the false and infamous tales which she every day invented to keep up his resentment against her. I concluded, continued Col. Vincent, with requesting his Lordship to do justice to his own honour and that of the loveliest and most amiable woman that ever adorned his family, by restoring her to the place in his favour which she had once so deservedly possessed.

Caroline thanked him for the friendliness of his conduct, but said she had little hope of reaping any advantage from it; that she knew Lady Walton's power over her husband extended further than the mere art of deceiving him; that she believed she had never done that more than in part, for she had reason to know that he feared her too much to appear to doubt any thing she wished him to believe. Col. Vincent shook his head in silence.

The Countess was so much pleased with an indisputable confirmation of Caroline's account of herself, that she politely invited the Colonel to stay all night, a permission which he thankfully accepted, and supper being served in, they all seated themselves, with some degree of satisfaction, at the table, except Mrs. Meadows, who appeared quite disconcerted, and out of all patience with the entire neglect she suffered during the whole evening. The Colonel seemed, for some time, to have forgot that such a person existed, and though a few hours before he was posting in pursuit of her, firmly persuaded that happiness was attendant upon her smiles, the sight of our Heroine, who had made a stronger impression upon his heart than any other had ever been able to do, instantly extinguished the transient flame she had raised, and he now heartily wished her ten thousand miles distant from his sight.

Supper was scarce removed when a note was delivered to the Countess, which, as soon as she had perused—“This is unlucky (she exclaimed) Mrs. Lane writes me word that she means to leave Paris the day after to-morrow. She has already been apprised of your intention, Miss Ashford, of returning with her to London, and she begs you will be with her as early to-morrow evening as will be convenient to you. She likewise promises to take you entirely under her care and protection, and to do every thing we wish.”

“Miss Ashford returning to London! (exclaimed Mrs. Meadows) what do you mean?” “Do not, Mrs. Meadows (answered the Countess, with a look of piercing severity) ask an explanation which it would give you pain to hear? You know that it is not proper for Miss Ashford to attend you! rest satisfied with that consciousness.” The assurance of Mrs. Meadows was not equal to answering this speech, she was silent, and the Countess told Caroline she was extremely mortified that her expectation of some relations of the Count’s who were coming to spend a few weeks with them, and who would probably arrive the next day, put it out of her power to attend her to Paris, which she greatly wished to do. But that her carriage and servants upon whose attention she could depend should convey her safe to the house of Mrs. Lane. Col. Vincent respectfully offered to escort her, which she politely declined, till the Countess, who was very fearful in travelling, and had no notion of safety without a male protector, pressed her to accept his offered attendance, to which, with some difficulty, she was at last persuaded to consent, and it was agreed that she should set out the next afternoon, in the Countess’s carriage, that lady not chusing to venture her in the hired one which brought Col. Vincent.

## CHAPTER XXX.

### *A Rejection.*

OUR Heroine had but just entered her apartment upon the evening preceding her departure, when she was followed by Mrs. Meadows, who strongly remonstrated against her design of going back to England. She promised, provided she would proceed with her according to her first intention, to be wholly guided by her advice, and positively to forbid Col. Vincent's following her. Caroline begged that she would not request what she could not grant. She advised, nay entreated that she would at all events forbid that gentleman's attendance, and by no means suffer him to follow or be with her, as she valued the smallest remains of honour and reputation. Mrs. Meadows, finding nothing she could say had the least effect in prevailing upon her to change the resolution she had made to return, began to upbraid her with caprice and suspiciousness of temper. She complained of the ill-usage with which she treated her, by going with her so far and then deceiving and leaving her without a companion, saying, if she had not appeared perfectly willing to accompany her she should have enquired for some other, and might probably have heard of one less full of false delicacy and affected scruples.

To this Caroline answered, that the purpose for which she was chosen as her companion, namely, that of leaving the kingdom in some degree of credit, was already answered; that she would find her extremely ill-suited to such a party as she feared she was about to join, and was convinced, that were she to accompany her according to her first intention, she should only be an incumbrance to her, a poor lifeless, preaching, old-fashioned being; and before the winter was half over she would wish to rid herself of a spy, a stupid monitor, and a dead weight upon her pleasures. In short, Mrs. Meadows, after having in vain exerted all her eloquence in endeavouring to prevail in a point upon which she had set her heart rather out of whim and a desire to disappoint the Countess than from any pleasure she hoped for in the company of our Heroine, took her leave, telling her, that if the truth was known, she believed her motive for leaving her was the desire of having Col. Vincent all to herself, and that the kind and excellent advice of which she had been so very liberal was rather the offspring of jealousy than of friendliness or prudence.

The next morning Mrs. Meadows did not make her appearance, sending word by her woman that she was not well and would drink a dish of coffee in her chamber. The moment breakfast was removed, the Colonel rising, begged he might be favoured by the Countess with five minutes walk in the garden. His request was immediately complied with; and while they were walking, many kind and obliging things passed between Caroline and Miss Dunford. They mutually expressed the utmost unwillingness to part from each other, promised to think of each other often, and to keep up a regular correspondence till they had again the happiness of meeting, of which the journey the Countess proposed shortly to take gave them the most agreeable prospect.

They had just finished these little arrangements so interesting to the sensible feeling heart new to the charm of youthful friendship, when the Countess and Col. Vincent returned; the former, without sitting down, requested Caroline to return with her

into the garden; she instantly followed her, and as soon as they had got to a retired walk, where the sun, glittering among the ever-greens, made a perpetual summer, she turned towards her with a smile, and said “Do you know, Miss Ashford, that I am commenced matchmaker, and have a great inclination to make the first trial of my talents in my new profession upon you. You look surprised! I will explain myself: it is with sincere regret that I see a young person of your beauty, merit, and accomplishments, in a situation so friendless and unprotected. The cruel injustice you have already suffered, and the constant injuries you have still to apprehend from enemies whom interest, and since they have ventured such unwarrantable lengths, self-defence will for ever continue such, alarms me for your future welfare, and there are few things that would afford me greater pleasure than seeing you the wife of a worthy man who loves, and will make your happiness his study. Such, if I am not much deceived, is Col. Vincent. He has commissioned, nay intreated me to lay his heart, hand, and fortune, at your feet. The first, he says, has long been yours, and the last, which is now considerable, shall be disposed of absolutely at your choice and direction. Nothing can be more generous than his proposal, nor could any thing be more respectful than the manner in which it was made—now, my love, what answer shall I return him? In my opinion, it ought to be favourable.”

“How much, my dear madam, (answered Caroline) am I obliged to you for the kind concern you express about me. The recommendations with which you have already favoured me, will, I doubt not, secure me from present inconvenience; but there is none I would not encounter, rather than become the wife of a man whom it is not in my power either to love or esteem.” “Is not my dear young friend a little romantic? (said the Countess, with a smile) Colonel Vincent does not appear to me to want understanding, good nature, or generosity; three qualities, believe me, of essential consequence in the married state. He may not, perhaps, be quite so refined, so elegant, and well informed, as your imagination may paint the irresistible mortal who is to conquer and possess your heart. But my dear Caroline, with all her charms, may pass through life without ever meeting with such an accomplished being.”

“And why not pass through life in my present single state? (interrupted Caroline) it is not surely necessary that I should alter it! on the contrary, it would in my present disposition of mind, be highly criminal. Colonel Vincent is exactly the same man whom I once refused; what should change my sentiments, but motives of the most mean and sordid nature? Passion may for a while render him blind to them, but passion will not last for ever; and when he begins to see things by the light of unclouded reason, what have I to expect from the resentment and disappointed affection of a man who has been accustomed to act only from feeling, without the restraint of principle? Should I not have cause to fear the worst evils, with that greatest of aggravations, the consciousness of deserving them? These are surely reasons sufficient to vindicate my absolute refusal of the Colonel’s generous offers. But there is still a stronger, a more unsurmountable one. I will be perfectly sincere with you madam, my affections are already in possession of another. I have not the smallest prospect of happiness from my attachment, nor do I know, or probably ever shall, in what part of the world the object of it resides; but it is unconquerable, and will for ever preclude all others.”

“I have done (answered the Countess) never will I again urge you upon a subject so painful. But surely, my sweet girl, nature never endowed you with so many perfections, only to distress others, without contributing to your own happiness! it cannot be, continued she warmly, this beloved wanderer will return, and I shall yet see you in a situation worthy of your merits.”

Our Heroine then requested the Countess to assure Colonel Vincent of her gratitude for the generous proposal he had made her, but at the same time to give him the most complete and absolute refusal. She likewise begged that a promise might be obtained from him, of never mentioning the affair to her during the ride they were to take in the afternoon, otherwise, she said, it was her determination to go alone. The Countess promised to do all she requested, and returned into the house for that purpose, while Caroline, who was in a few minutes joined by Miss Dunford, continued to walk till the dinner bell gave them notice to return.

They found the Countess, Mrs. Meadows, and Colonel Vincent, sitting at a distance from each other. The latter had his arms folded, and the most visible dejection in his countenance; Mrs. Meadows had a fretful impatience in hers, and when Caroline entered, rage sparkled in her eyes, which the presence of persons she knew to be so much attached to her rival, obliged her to suppress. Dinner had been removed but a few moments when a servant entered to inform the Countess that one of the wheels of the coach was in such a very bad condition that he durst not venture to drive with it so far as Paris till it was thoroughly repaired, the doing of which would at least take up half a day. She appeared greatly mortified by this account, it being then the only one she had then at home, one being gone to meet part of the company she expected, and the other with the Count. Caroline begged she would not give herself any uneasiness as the chaise in which Col. Vincent travelled would do perfectly well; upon which she ordered the servant to examine both that and the harness to see that they were in order, and upon his reporting that all was tight and strong, she consented that her fair friend should venture in it. Orders were accordingly given to have it got in readiness, and in a few minutes it drove up to the door, attended by two servants belonging to the Colonel.

With tears of affection and gratitude our Heroine approached to take leave of her noble friend, who, tenderly embracing, bade her adieu, repeating the assurances she had already given her of lasting friendship and amity; at the same time presenting her a small pocket book, she requested that she would keep it for her sake. Caroline kissed the little remembrance, promising never, voluntarily, to part with it but with life. Miss Dunford was drowned in tears. She affectionately embraced her, bidding her remember her promise of writing soon, and of continuing to love her. She returned her embrace with equal tenderness, and answering only by a look full of expression, hurried into the chaise, which, the moment the Colonel had followed her, drove away, leaving her friends to gaze after, and pursue it with their best and kindest wishes.

They had travelled some miles before either of them spoke; both, at last, began to wish a silence which appeared so unfriendly was broken, but neither could think of a subject proper for the purpose; at length the Colonel began by praising the understanding

and agreeable qualities of the Countess du Barrongue, he could not have pitched upon a better; Caroline seized the occasion to pour forth the effusions of her warmly grateful heart. She was in the middle of a panegyric upon the uncommon benevolence and sweetness of her disposition, when an elegant carriage, attended by three footmen, appeared in view; it drove at a considerable rate; notwithstanding which, as it passed, our Heroine distinctly beheld Sir William Beaumont. She was convinced that he knew her, for swift as the carriages passed each other, she saw him start and throw himself forward as it were to command a fuller view of her. Nothing could exceed her vexation at being seen, by him, in a carriage with Col. Vincent; could any thing be a stronger confirmation of his unjust suspicions? could any thing be more completely unfortunate?

The Colonel, surprised by her sudden change of countenance, and the abrupt manner in which her conversation broke off, began to fear that she was ill, and enquired with much respect and solicitude if he could do or cause any thing to be done for her relief; adding, that if she chose to turn back again, which he would really advise her to do, he would immediately give orders to the servants for that purpose. Caroline, roused by this enquiry, replied, that she only felt a transient faintness and should be well in a moment, desiring he would not be alarmed or think of returning, as what she then felt was the effect of a disorder to which she had been lately subject, which though painful and troublesome was by no means dangerous. The Colonel expressed the greatest concern for her indisposition, entreating that as soon as she arrived in London, she would take the advice of an eminent physician. She thanked him for his friendly anxiety about her, and said she would certainly omit nothing in her power entirely to eradicate a complaint which was attended with so much uneasiness.

Thus sometimes conversing, with long intervals of silence, they entered Paris, driving directly to the hotel, where Mr. and Mrs. Lane (who had been moving from place to place, and only spent a few days in that city) had informed the Countess she would find them. Upon ordering one of the servants to enquire if they were then in the house, he was answered in the affirmative, and that they had given orders if a young lady enquired for them to have her immediately shewn to their apartments. On hearing this the Colonel jumped out and offered his hand to our Heroine, when just as she was stepping down, the carriage she had lately met passed slowly by, and she saw Sir William looking at her with an earnest and observing aspect. The moment he perceived her eye meet his, he gave a signal to his servants, and the horses setting off at full speed were out of sight in an instant.

Caroline was for a moment unable to move, till reminded of her situation by Col. Vincent who asked her if it would not be more agreeable to her to walk in than to stand at the door of a hotel. She reached with some difficulty a room, that was close by, where, sinking into the first chair, she fainted away. The Colonel's fright was excessive; he ordered a servant to inform Mrs. Lane, that Miss Ashford was there, but too ill to attend her immediately. This message brought down both her and her husband, who had her carried up into their room, where with proper assistance she soon recovered, and was received by Mrs. Lane with the most cordial politeness; she assured her that nothing in her power should be omitted to serve her, and that till an eligible situation could be found for her reception, she should be happy to consider her as a part of her own family;

adding, that her duty as well as inclination would lead her to oblige and be useful to a person so strongly recommended by the Countess du Barrongue.

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### *The Dismission.*

CAROLINE was a little mortified to leave a city so celebrated as Paris, without at least enjoying a transient view of it. She would willingly have stayed a few days longer, which she persuaded herself was in order to see the many things it contained so well worth inspection. But a conscious blush which spread itself over her fair face while she half expressed the wish, would have convinced any person of discernment that it was secretly prompted by a cause, a hope more interesting. She enquired if there was an Opera that night, upon which Mrs. Lane replied that there was, and if it would be agreeable to her she and Mr. Lane would attend her to it. This offer she gladly accepted and they went accordingly. During the first part of the performance her eyes were incessantly wandering from one box to another in hope of discovering the only object which in the present state of her mind could fix their attention, but her search was in vain, no Sir Wm. Beaumont appeared; she strove to confine her thoughts to the entertainments of the stage, but this was equally vain, and she returned with scarce the smallest remembrance of any circumstance which had passed, except her disappointment.

Soon after their return to the hotel, they retired to rest; and, early in the morning, quitted Paris, proceeding with all possible expedition towards Calais, where they embarked for England; and after a quick passage and pleasant journey, arrived at Mr. Lane's house, in Sackvill Street. There our Heroine was welcomed in the kindest manner, Mrs. Lane requesting that she would think herself at home till such time as a suitable situation could be found for her. This amiable and worthy couple lived in all the elegance and cheerfulness which youth, health, taste, and fortune, can be supposed to ensure. Nor were their enjoyments deadened by excess, or their hearts hardened by extravagance and dissipation. They were known and visited by all the fashionable world, but, except twice a year, none but a select and favoured number were ever admitted into their house, which was constantly filled with people of the first characters and abilities in the kingdom; their conversation and society being greatly preferred by them both, to the insipid affection of uninformed elegance. In their most favourite friends, as in themselves, politeness and understanding united, but where both could not be had they constantly preferred the latter.

Mrs. Lane was so much pleased with our Heroine, and so desirous of presenting her to such of her friends whose conversation she thought would afford her entertainment, that a week passed before she could find an opportunity of going to Red-Lyon Street. An hour of leisure at last presenting itself, she informed her friend where she wished to go, who immediately desired that she would make use of her coach upon that or any other occasion. But Caroline rather chusing to pay this visit in a hackney one, a servant was ordered to attend her, and she stopped at the house where Mr. Sanders used to lodge. The mistress of the house coming to the door, to answer to her enquiry, whether Mr. or Mrs. Sanders were at home, answered, that Mr. Sanders had been dead more than a month, and that his wife and daughter were gone down to Cornwall where she believed they intended to live with some relations who had sent to invite them. This account

greatly shocked her. She found the woman knew nothing of his affairs, and therefore ordered the coachman to drive directly back to Sackvill-Street.

As soon as she entered, Mrs. Lane's woman requested, in the name of her lady, that she would step into her dressing-room, having, she said, something to communicate to her, which she hoped would afford her pleasure. She instantly obeyed the summons, and as soon as she entered Mrs. Lane told her, that she had just received a letter from a lady in Oxfordshire, to whom she had written about her, knowing that she wished for a companion, provided she could meet with one whose education, manners, and connections, were unexceptionable; and that she was so much pleased with the account she had sent of her, that she wished her to set out for her house immediately. She is an old lady, continued Mrs. Lane, who lives upon a handsome jointure, in a very genteel though private manner. She will require nothing from you, but such little kind offices as your own good nature will prompt you unasked to perform. I have heard you several times say, that you did not wish to be placed in too gay a family, and that you should prefer a country to a town residence. On these accounts I hope the house of Mrs. Vincent will be agreeable to you, but should it prove otherwise, you have nothing to do but return to me, and I will look out for one more eligible.

Caroline returned a thousand thanks to her kind patroness for the obliging and friendly interest she took in her affairs. Said she could not wish for any-thing that appeared more promising for the time she should probably stand in need of it, than the settlement now offered her, and that she would with her permission attend Mrs. Vincent the very next day. This being settled to the satisfaction of both, she went into her apartment to arrange some little matters preparatory to her departure. Looking into the trunk in which her clothes were contained, the pocket-book that had been given to her by the Countess du Barrongue, which she had placed there for security, during her journey, presented itself to her view; she took it up, and imprinting upon it a grateful kiss, opened it, expecting to see the inside equal in elegance to its external appearance; when, to her excessive surprise, she beheld an English bank-note for one hundred pounds, with the words Miss Ashford written in that lady's own hand upon the back of it. Tears of affectionate sensibility flowed from her eyes, at sight of this generous testimony of friendship, and she replaced it more delighted by the motives which had made it hers, than with the possession of it; though she considered that as a comfortable security against any disagreeable accident that might befall her before the time on which she hoped to reclaim her own little independency.

The following morning she set out in a hired chaise, attended by one of Mr. Lane's servants, for Oxfordshire, and before the close of the evening arrived at the house of Mrs. Vincent, where she was received by the old lady with great kindness, and the weather being extremely cold, placed, in a great chair by the side of a large fire, the comfortable warmth of which revived her half frozen senses.

The house was large and convenient; but it was scantily furnished, and every thing in it was of a kind as little expensive as was consistent with common comfort. There were no more servants than were absolutely necessary to keep it in decent order, no

pleasure grounds, but a tolerable kitchen garden, no carriage but an old post chaise which just served to drag the old lady an airing; in short, every thing appeared to be for mere use, without the smallest regard to propriety, elegance, or pleasure. Our Heroine was not greatly delighted with the face of things in her new habitation, but she resolved to endure much restraint and inconvenience rather than change it before the time, when she expected to possess her little fortune. A great part of her time here was perfectly at her own disposal, but there were no means of spending it pleasantly. There was no books, no musical instruments; she had at the time of her uncle's misfortune sent hers, which had never been unpacked since her removal from Ashford-Park, to Mrs. Williams's. And as her continuance with Mrs. Vincent would in all probability be short, as it depended upon Mrs. Forester's removal, she did not think it worth while to send for them. The old lady never left her bed before noon; after she had taken her chocolate an airing regularly succeeded, on which she expected Caroline constantly to attend her; she never went but one road, and exactly to the third mile stone, at which her horses turned back without waiting for directions from the driver. Dinner, which consisted of some little dish delicately cooked up for herself and a plain joint for the family, was always ready by the time of her return. After which she slept for an hour in her easy chair, and when she woke was fond of hearing Caroline read some religious book, of which a small number, all of the methodistical kind, were ranged upon a shelf in her bed room, where, except at dinner time, she constantly sat. She never drank tea nor allowed it to any of her family, but as a particular favour and distinction granted permission to our Heroine to use it. From tea time to supper, if she was not too much fatigued, the book was resumed, for she used to say a large portion of each day ought to be devoted to acts of piety and the fulfilling of the law; and as reading and praying were the only good things she felt herself disposed to do, or rather could do without applying to her purse, she laid the greatest stress upon, and never omitted them be the occasion what it would.

Such was the life which the young, beautiful, elegant, and well-informed Caroline was condemned to lead. She strove to support her spirits with a reflection that it would not probably be long before she heard from Mrs. Forester an account of her brother's return to England. She remembered that she used to say he would be at home before Christmas; that festival was now at no great distance, and she might reasonably hope that a few weeks would bring her the welcome information. The hope of independence was still sweet, though the retirement of which she used to think with so much pleasure had lost all its charms. The death of Mrs. Seward had robbed her of the only person whose friendship and society she depended upon. The false and scandalous reports which had been so maliciously circulated and believed in the neighbourhood distressed her, and last not least, her heart which, while she so much enjoyed the sweets of retirement, was undisturbed and easy, now felt an anxious restlessness, which required something more to divert or sooth it than solitude could afford. No state could, however, be more completely irksome than what she at present experienced, and a whole long month passed away in which she had no pleasure except from the kind and affectionate letters which she received from the Countess du Barrongue and Miss Dunford, in answer to those she had written to them upon her first arrival in England; they were directed to Mrs. Lane, and by her forwarded to the place of her present residence: This satisfaction, which was of the

purest kind, excepted, not a circumstance occurred which could enliven a single moment; the evening was long and melancholy, the morning dreary and hopeless.

She had one evening been reading till both her eyes and voice were fatigued, and was still going on because any thing was better than the peevish enthusiastick conversation of Mrs. Vincent, when they heard a coach drive up to the door; it was the first sound of the kind, except that of Mrs. Vincent's own post-chaise, which she had heard since her residence in the house, and the surprise it occasioned in her was nearly as great as that of the old lady appeared to be. "Bless me (exclaimed the latter) who can it be? I am sure I expect nobody. My nephew is abroad, sure it cannot be my niece! Go down Martha (continued she, turning to her house-keeper, who happened to be in the room) and let me know who it is; let nobody come up till I know who they are. They may be thieves who have taken this method of getting into the house. Run down and tell John to know who they are before he opens the hall door." Away ran the housekeeper with the swiftness of fear, but in a few moments returned with all the joy of relieved terror in her countenance, crying, "O dear Mam, to be sure it is young madam herself, and she has got a fine young gentleman with her, who she bade me tell you is her husband, and that they have been at his uncle's, and have called upon you in their way to town. O dear me, Mam, she is so fine, and has got such a coach!"—"Hold your fool's tongue (exclaimed Mrs. Vincent) it is my niece, let her come up. I suppose she has married some wild extravagant young fellow, and wants me to give them something to live upon. Believe me I think her brother has had enough to satisfy one family, and I have relations of my own, and cannot bestow every thing upon my husband's." As she spoke these words the door opened, and what was the astonishment of our Heroine when Mr. Craven entered, leading in Miss West.

They walked directly up to Mrs. Vincent, and the latter in a few words informed her, that being lately married to one of the most considerable gentlemen in the county of Westmoreland, and a man whose excellent and agreeable qualities were far more valuable than his large fortune, she thought it would give her pleasure to see them, and therefore would not pass so near to her house without paying their duty to her; she had just finished her speech with her usual volubility and liveliness, when happening to turn her eyes towards Caroline, she gave an involuntary start; but instantly recovering, she drew herself up, and returned, for our Heroine's obliging enquiries after her health, only a very stiff courtesy. As for Mr. Craven, his looks betrayed not the smallest token of recollection, and during the whole evening they both behaved to her in all respects, except politeness, as perfect strangers. Mrs. Vincent was fond of politics, and delighted to hear that her new nephew was a speaker in the house; nay she remembered to have read his speeches and approved his sentiments and opinions. Before the evening was at an end she became so fond of him that all her own relations were wholly forgotten, and she promised to stand god-mother to his first child, and leave it all she was worth, which she told them, one way or other, amounted to a sum worth its acceptance.

As they seemed inclined to sit up late, Caroline, who was weary of being a mere cypher, attending to conversation so little pleasant or interesting, retired to bed, leaving the field clear to the enemy. So perfectly free from art or malice, was her own bosom,

that she could neither suspect or guard against them from others. Nor did her present situation appear to her sufficiently desirable to induce any one to disturb her in it. She therefore lay down without the smallest apprehensions concerning what was passing in Mrs. Vincent's apartment, or the least curiosity about it.

The next morning, upon entering the parlour where she usually breakfasted, she found three cups and saucers placed upon the tea-board, from which she understood that Mr. and Mrs. Craven intended to breakfast with her. A little resentment for their last night's behaviour, and dislike to the thoughts of giving them an opportunity of repeating it, determined her to return to her chamber, but just as she was leaving the room Mr. Craven entered: He approached her with more than usual softness in his eyes and manner. "How extremely am I concerned, Miss Ashford (said he) to find you in so friendless and disagreeable a situation. Is there any thing in my power to serve you? I beseech you to command my interest and fortune." "All the power you had to injure me, Sir, (replied Caroline) you have exerted. Your services I am not in want of. I must indeed be poor when I would owe obligations to a man I despise!"

"My dear creature (cried he) these slights are absurd and useless. You are not now that angel whom every one approached with love which bordered upon adoration. You have proved yourself a woman and must expect to be treated as such; but you are still a lovely, a bewitching one, and if my whole fortune will purchase your favour I shall esteem it well expended." A look of inexpressible amazement, which these words occasioned in our Heroine, was quickly changed into one of ineffable contempt, too strong to admit of any expression in which words could clothe it. Without deigning to speak she quitted the room, leaving the astonished Craven almost convinced that such real and unaffected dignity could only be the attendant of virtue. But this effort only supported her till she reached her chamber; there, throwing herself into a chair in an agony of mind not easily to be described, she sat a few moments almost unable to breathe; a shower of tears at length relieved her full heart, and gave vent to feelings too exquisitely painful to be long endured. "And am I (she exclaimed) sunk so very low! Am I so lost to honour and esteem as to be subject to so gross, so disgraceful an insult? Oh, my father! my preceptor, guide, and friend! what would you feel did you know the misfortunes to which your poor unhappy daughter is exposed?" A fresh torrent of tears followed these ejaculations, and she sunk back in her chair in a state of mixed mortification, resentment, and disdain. At length the latter principle, by degrees, began to gain possession of her mind; wiping away her tears she rose with calm dignity, exclaiming, in an even and steady voice—"Mean unworthy man! thou art below my resentment! The anguish I feel is a compliment to thy consequence which it never can deserve; but it is passed, neither thy malice nor insult shall cost me another tear."

While the mind of our Heroine was thus disturbed, having, by the utmost exertion of her reason, but half-calmed and composed it, she heard a coach drive up to the door, and in a few minutes saw Mr. and Mrs. Craven step in. The assurance that they were gone did more to re-establish her tranquility than any argument with which her understanding could furnish her; she had nearly regained her former serenity when Mrs. Martha came to her door to inform her that her Mistress would be glad to see her immediately. In a few

moments she went to her room, where she found the old lady half-dressed, with much ill-humour and vexation in her looks.

“I cannot imagine (said she, as Caroline entered) what Mrs. Lane could mean by sending such a person down who is so ill-suited to my purposes. I wanted a young woman who is not above being useful. One who can get up my small linen, sit up with me when I am not well, in turn with Martha, and make a bit of paste or a custard upon occasion.” “I think, indeed (replied Caroline, calmly) such a one would be much better suited to your family, and I am ready to make room for her this very day. If you will be obliging enough to let one of your servants step to Oxford (for they were not three miles distant from that city) and order a post-chaise I will quit your house in three hours.” “Oh, I suppose (replied Mrs. Vincent) you have places enough to go to; girls, of your stamp, never want friends or accommodations while you have whole faces; yes, yes, go along, I want no such. As for a post-chaise—I think the stage-coach will do very well. Your trumpery shall all be carried to Gooddy Hart’s, by the road side, and there you may go too, and wait for the first place you can get. Go, go (continued she) make no speeches; the sooner you are out of the house the better.”

Poor Caroline, before depressed, was for a moment stupified by this unmerited ill treatment. She was too well acquainted with the person from whom she now received it to attempt to persuade or undeceive her. She therefore instantly hurried out of her apartment, and returning to her own, in a few minutes put her things into travelling order, and her trunk being corded by the footman, was carried to a cottage by the side of the road, through which the stage coaches passed, to which place she immediately followed it. She had not waited more than half an hour when one of them appeared, and the coachman being asked if he had any room on the inside, answered, that he was full, but he could take the young woman on the box if that would do. The next which came in sight was hailed in the same manner, and answered that he had room in plenty. Upon the door being opened, Caroline found that the vehicle contained only one old lady, of a respectable appearance. This circumstance gave her much satisfaction, for never having before been in a conveyance of that kind, she had not conceived the most favourable opinion of the general manners of those who travelled in them. Getting in, therefore, with great alacrity, she directed her trunk to be put in the basket, and the carriage drove off on its way to London.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### *The Benevolent Man.*

OUR Heroine and her fellow traveller soon entered into chat upon the different subjects that presented themselves as they passed along; the old Lady upon several occasions gave proofs of observation and understanding superior to what is every day met with; Caroline was greatly pleased with her conversation, and in return she appeared much taken with her. Indeed it was her general fortune to render herself particularly pleasing to old people, for whom she always professed great respect and tenderness, and never failed when the least benevolence and goodness was discoverable about them, to treat them with every possible mark of attention.

They were thus journeying on, enjoying the sunshine of a remarkably clear evening, when the word stop suddenly sounded in their ears, and a determined fierce looking man rode up to the door with a pistol in his hand, ordering them immediately to deliver their money; he had not much resistance to apprehend, both the ladies had watches, and each a purse, which they instantly offered; the old lady begging that he would be so good as to keep his pistol out of the coach; not satisfied with this prize he insisted upon searching them, and began with the old lady in so rude and violent a manner, that the terrified Caroline immediately pulled every thing out of her pockets, in one of which she had unfortunately put the present given her by the Countess du Barrongue. Having taken possession of every thing the travellers had about them, he politely wished them a good journey, and rode off.

Poor Caroline endured this loss with that resolution with which necessity always inspires a mind directed by philosophy and good sense; she submitted because resistance was impossible, and submitted with patience because she knew it was in vain to repine; the loss of her pocket-book was the only circumstance to which she found it difficult to reconcile her mind, she reproached herself for having been so careless as to travel with it about her, and with wanting presence of mind enough to request the highwayman to return it, which had he been put into possession of its contents, it was probable he would not have refused. These reflections were disturbed by her companion, who said she hoped she had some friend to meet her at the inn, in London, as she was now robbed of her money and of course would want the means of paying for her passage. To which Caroline replied, that the friends to whom she was going were of considerable consequence, and would readily supply her with what she had occasion for, but the cause of her coming to town being a sudden one, they were wholly unacquainted with it. "Well (answered the old lady) you must send a porter from the inn to let them know what has happened, that will be your only way." Caroline replied, that she had a pretty large trunk full of valuable cloaths, which if it was necessary she could put into the hands of the master of the inn as a security for payment; to which her fellow traveller answered, that would do very well.

It was early in the morning when the coach stopt at the Swan and Two Necks, Lad-lane. As soon as they alighted a young man stepped up to the old lady, crying "Well,

mother, I am glad to see you returned at last; faith, if you had staid much longer I must have got married, there's no living without a house-keeper." She seemed equally pleased to meet him, and desired him to call a coach and put her bundles into it, for she longed to be at home. Caroline, who was frighted at the thoughts of being left alone in her perplexed situation, begged she would have the goodness to stay till her payment was settled; upon which she related to her son the disaster that had happened to them, and desiring him to call the landlord, walked into a small room by the side of the bar, in order to adjust the affair. When the master of the inn appeared, he heard the case with great civility, and upon being informed that a good deposit would be put into his hands, said it would be the same as payment. The trunk was then ordered to be brought, but upon the return of the waiter, who was sent for it, they were informed that no such thing was to be found. It was in vain that a further search was made among the baggage, which came in and about the machine, it was no where to be met with, and as it was not entered, no account could be given of it.

This misfortune was of a serious nature, and our Heroine felt it in the severest manner; but this was neither a fit time or place for lamentation. What was to be done? While this question was debating, the young man asked what the money was that she owed? and being told, offered to pay it, saying, there was honesty in the young lady's face, and if she never paid it, he could not give so many shillings to a prettier woman. He accordingly satisfied the landlord, and taking five shillings out of a handful of silver which he held, offered it to our Heroine, telling her perhaps she might want it to pay coach hire.

Caroline thanked him in the most grateful manner, but declined further to increase her debt than was absolutely necessary, saying, the friends to whom she was going, would, she doubted not, both supply her present wants, and enable her to repay the sum she had borrowed, for which purpose he gave her his address. He then called a hackney coach, into which he handed her, and at her request, directed it to drive to Sackville-Street.

Upon her arrival, the door was opened by a woman servant, she was just stepping out of the coach, when to her unexpressible concern and mortification, she was informed that Mr. and Mrs. Lane were gone to their country seat, an hundred miles distant from town, to spend the holidays, and that no-body was left in the house but herself, who lived, during their absence, upon board wages. This intelligence completed her misfortunes. She was left without a shilling, without a friend to whom she could apply for the smallest assistance; in the midst of a city, to which she was utterly a stranger, and in which she knew not where to shelter herself from insult and barbarity. She looked at the coachman, who stood with his hat off, and the door in his hand, to receive her further orders, with terror, neither daring to get out (conscious that she had nothing wherewith to satisfy his demand) or to increase her debt, by ordering him to drive further. During this dreadful state of terror and uncertainty, she recollected the card given her by the young man who had paid her passage in the stage, and taking it out of her pocket, ordered him to drive to the Hay market.

It would be in vain to attempt a picture of her state of mind while she passed along; all her resolution and philosophy sunk before the dreadful apprehension of being turned into the streets a friendless wanderer, exposed to every danger of unprotected helplessness, every insult of wanton cruelty. Full of these fearful ideas she saw the coach stop before a grocer's shop, and the young man she had seen at the inn standing behind the counter serving a customer; he immediately came to the door, and seeing who was in the carriage, very civilly desired her to walk in, to which she making no objection, he pulled down the step and offered her his hand.

With trembling limbs and a palpitating heart she followed him into a little parlour at the back of the shop, where the old lady with whom she had travelled, sat looking over some papers, which a servant girl was shewing her. "Aye (aye cried she, just as Caroline crossed the shop) here has been fine doings indeed! well might Tom say he wanted a house-keeper; why what a quantity of bread has here been used; and for porter, I'm sure here's twice as much set down as ever was used by him." "Why Mam because my master keeps a great deal more company when you are out than when your at home (answered the servant) I'm sure nothing's wasted nor given away neither; and many's the day when my master dined out that I was short enough; there's not many servants would put up with it. "You're a saucy hussy (answered her mistress) you are too well used and don't know what you would have."

Here she was interrupted by her son, who leading in Caroline, told her the young lady for whom he paid the passage in the stage coach, was come to return the money; at which words her countenance, which before had been very cloudy, cleared up at once, and she begged her to sit down, saying she wished every body were as honest as her it would give people pleasure to assist them. Poor Caroline's agitation increased by these words to such a degree that she had hardly breath to inform her that finding her friend's family out of town, and not knowing any body to whom she might apply for assistance, she was come to intreat that they would recommend her to some person who would trust her with subsistance for one week, by which time she should receive remittances from the country.

The face of her auditor screwed up to the most supercilious coldness as our Heroine proceeded with her request, and when she had done speaking, she asked her how she could suppose they would venture to recommend her into any family, who were utterly unacquainted with her character? "For my part, continued she, I suffered enough already by taking strangers into my house; two years ago I lost all the linen of one of my beds, two table spoons, and an India handkerchief, and all by a girl as genteel and well spoken as yourself; there's no trusting to appearances; sharpers and girls of the town can take any shape, and look as honest and as modest as they please; besides you cannot expect that we should do any thing for you, who have already trusted you so far without knowing whether we shall ever be paid or not; believe me, a tradesman has much ado to live and pay every body their own without suffering himself to be taken in by every swindler: what with the shop tax, and the tax upon windows and maid servants, and one thing or other a man can hardly stand upon his legs, much more maintain all the

necessitous people he meets with; besides if I were inclined to let you be here, I have not a spare bed if I had the world for it.”

“It was not my intention (replied Caroline) to trouble you by remaining here, but I thought you could possibly be good enough to inform me where I might be taken in for only one week, I am certain of receiving a remittance by that time.”

“I can really do no such thing (replied the mistress of the house) I would not upon any account recommend you without I knew your character; as you go along the street you will see a great many lodgings to let, some or other of them may probably take you in, for there are some of all sorts; if ever you get any money I hope you will remember to pay Tom, if not, the first loss is the best; so I would not have you to lose your time, for I can do nothing more for you.”

“Good God! (exclaimed Caroline) what shall I do? how shall I pay for the coach?” “Nay (returned the woman) that’s your business; people ought to know how to pay for coaches before they ride in them; you cannot expect us who are quite strangers to lend you so much money.” At this moment the young man, who had been out in the shop, returned, and hearing his mother’s last words, asked what money she wanted; adding, that if a few shillings would be of use to her she was welcome to them. “Oh to be sure (exclaimed his mother) you are wonderfully generous! and pray when do you expect to have it again? but there are many kinds of payments, and I suppose she is one of those who will not stand upon trifles.”

At these words our Heroine started up, her cheeks glowing with indignation, which for a moment overpowered all other sensations. “Be assured, madam (said she) that the moment I possess such a sum you shall be repaid what I owe you; in the mean time I will rid you of the further trouble you seem to apprehend from me.” So saying she left the room, and was about to quit the house, when the sight of the coach, which still stood unpaid before the door, met her eyes; she started, a trembling seized her whole frame, and the coachman, (a large, dark, ill-looking fellow) appearing, completed her terrors; she turned pale, and fainted away upon the ground.

Upon recovering she found herself once more in the little parlour, supported by the old woman and a benevolent looking old gentleman, who seemed to view her condition with particular concern. “How do you do, young lady? (said he with tenderness) be comforted, your coach is paid, and I will furnish you with whatever you are in want of; I am a father, and upon this occasion wish to act the part of one to you.”

Tears of gratitude and thankfulness, broken by the violence of her emotions, were all that poor Caroline could return for the goodness of her unknown friend, who turning to the mistress of the house “Cannot you, Mrs. Glover, let this young lady board and lodge with you? (said he) I believe you will have no objection to taking my word for her security; but if you have I will pay you beforehand.” “No, no Sir, answered Mrs. Glover) I know your pay too well; upon those terms she shall be welcome to board with us as long as she pleases.”

“Very well (replied the old gentleman) I am truly glad that I happened to come in as I did.” “Oh, Sir exclaimed Caroline) from what wretchedness, what extreme danger have you saved me! but for you”—“No more of this my good madam at present (interrupted he) come Mrs. Glover, get a dish of tea, your boarder looks ill and wants refreshment.” This order was to Caroline truly acceptable; she was very thirsty, and began to feel great weariness, with an uncomfortable pain in her head and limbs; her eyes and cheeks burning, while her feet were cold as marble. After drinking several dishes of tea she told the mistress of the house that she would, with her permission, lie down upon the bed for an hour or two, as she found herself very weary and heavy; Mr. Wilson, for by that name the benevolent friend, to whom she was so much obliged was known, desired she would let him feel her pulse, which as soon as he had done, looking very grave, he requested Mrs. Glover to put her quite to bed, and make her plenty of white wine whey, saying she was in a very high fever. She was accordingly undressed, and the medicine prescribed administered; but the excessive perturbations of her mind had too much affected the delicate frame upon which it acted; she soon became delirious, and a physician who was called in, gave it as his opinion that her life was in considerable danger. In this state she remained near a week, during which time nothing was spared by the generous Mr. Wilson that could contribute to her recovery. The fever at length left her, but in so weak a state that she was unable to rise from her bed.

At the first return of her senses, the past distressful events appeared like an uneasy dream; it was some time before she could perfectly recollect the circumstances that connected them; and her weakened mind, unable long to support reflection, became confused as it endeavoured to pierce thro’ the vail which seemed to obscure it. By degrees, however, this vail removed, and she clearly recollected every situation thro’ which she had struggled, with so much difficulty and pain. In proportion as she became sensible of the past, her anxiety for the future increased, and the uneasiness of her mind had more than once endangered a relapse. Mr. Wilson often visited her, and constantly gave her the kindest assurances of his continued friendship and protection. He would neither suffer her to mention her obligations, nor the means by which she proposed to discharge the pecuniary part of them, telling her she must first get well, and he would then hear all she had to say, and assist her in every thing that lay in his power. I have a daughter of my own, would he cry, as young, as amiable, and almost as handsome as yourself; were she in such distress, how would I wish her to be treated? even so will I treat you; and till you are quite recovered, and able to return to your friends, you must look upon me as a father.”

“Ah! (replied Caroline) clasping her fair hands together, and raising her fine eyes to Heaven, I have no father, no friends! once I had both, but now I am forlorn and destitute.”

“Then I will be your father, your friend, (exclaimed the old gentleman, with a look of extreme tenderness and benevolence.) I am not now very rich, but I shortly expect to be so, and then I will consider you as my second daughter. My girl has a generous open heart, and will rejoice at the acquisition of such a sister.”

This encouraging kindness greatly contributed to facilitate the recovery of our Heroine, who, in a few days after the fever had left her, felt her strength so much restored, as to be able to rise, walk about the room, and venture to converse with freedom. She gave Mr. Wilson such a sketch of her history, as appeared extremely to interest him, and he often, during her recital, declared that she should never again undergo difficulties and distresses, so ill suited to the delicacy of her frame, and the sensibility of her heart. In return for her confidence, he informed her that his name was not Wilson, but being involved in a long and expensive law suit, upon which a principal part of his estate depended, he had broken up house-keeping, and his daughter being with a relation as companion, he had resolved to live in the most private and æconomical manner, till it was finally decided, an event for which he hoped every day. That by changing his name, he the more effectually secreted himself from his former acquaintance, with whom, should the decree be unfavourable, he never more intended to mix; as the payment of arrears, the estate having been many years in his possession before the present claim was heard of, would reduce his fortune to only a comfortable maintenance. But if on the contrary, it should be given in his favour, as he had every reason to believe it would, the saving he had made, would pay the whole expence of the suit, and he should resume his old way of living, with double pleasure and security. He added, that the claimant was a man of very large fortune, and powerful connections, but he trusted in his right, and had great confidence that the decree would be such as he wished.

As soon as our Heroine found herself equal to the task, she wrote to Dr. Seward an account of all that had befallen her, begging that he would see Mrs. Forester, and let her know the situation she was at present in, and the necessity she was under of sharing with her the little income she had hoped to continue to her, till she was better provided for; but requested that if her brother was not yet arrived, she would continue where she was, till her coming down, when they would consult what further steps were best to be taken. She begged the Doctor to send her up 50l. out of the principal of her thousand, which she said she hoped would discharge all the debts she had contracted, and bring her once more to the only spot where she had a probability of finding peace and security. This task being performed, she felt her mind more at ease, not doubting but the Doctor would do every thing she wished, she already fancied herself the inhabitant of Mrs. Williams's little apartments, and after the dreadful anxieties and anguish of mind she had experienced, peace and independance, though in a situation the most obscure, appeared real blessings.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### *A Discovery.*

THE very morning after Caroline had written to Dr. Seward, she was sitting in her apartment, making some linen she greatly stood in need of, with money to purchase which, Mr. Wilson had supplied her, when that excellent man knocked at her door to request that she would come down to his dining-room, saying, he had a good fire, and a change of rooms was better for the health than constantly sitting in one. She had every evening since her recovery drank tea with him there, and now readily accepted his invitation. He gave her his hand in coming down stairs, as she was still but weak, and placing her by the side of his fire, insisted upon her taking a cup of chocolate which he had prepared for her. He then took up a volume of Cook's last Voyages, and sitting down on the opposite side began to read; which though rather a monotonist, he did in a sensible and entertaining manner, frequently stopping to make remarks, which were often new, and always judicious.

While they were thus comfortably employed, a coach stopped at the house, and in a few moments they heard a smart rap at the door of the room in which they were sitting. Without waiting for an answer it was opened, and in rushed Miss Dunford. She flew to Mr. Wilson with extreme joy, who clasping her in his arms exclaimed "My dear Harriot! my own girl!" She threw her arms round his neck with all the fondness of an infant, crying "My dear, dear father, how glad I am to see you!" Caroline remained in the most pleasing wonder, when Miss Dunford turning her eyes upon her, started with amazement, exclaiming "Miss Ashford! is it possible!" Caroline met her embrace with all the ardour of affectionate friendship. "Is it possible, indeed (repeated she) is it possible, that it is to the father of my dear Harriot, I am indebted for the preservation of my life, for my escape from dangers far more dreadful than death! How wonderful is the guidance of providence (continued she, lifting her eyes to heaven) how little have I deserved to be so much the object of its care!" The old gentleman was quite transported; he had forbore to enquire particularly into her family from motives of delicacy, which ever declines to know more than it is wished; and she had avoided giving them, as believing it a subject uninteresting to him, and painful to herself, having so little that was worthy to relate of it. He joined the hands of the fair friends, calling them his daughters, fervently praying of heaven that he might be enabled to support them as such.

Being again seated Miss Dunford told our Heroine that the Countess du Barrongue, was then at Mr. Lane's in Sackvill Street, that they came sooner to England than they intended on account of business, and took possession of Mr. Lane's house, which they found uninhabited, except by one woman servant; that the family returned as soon as they were informed of their arrival, and were now all in town, as was a sister and brother of the Countess's. That they had sent a servant down to Mrs. Vincent's on purpose to bring her back, Mrs. Lane having heard a very strange character of that lady during her late visit to the country, quite different from that she had received before, which induced her to recommend her as her companion; and that the account of her being

returned to London a fortnight before the inquiry was made, had given the Countess, Mrs. Lane, and herself, extreme uneasiness. But it will now be all at an end (continued she) for you must come with me back, where you will be received with as much joy as affection. Caroline having expressed the pleasure she felt at the hope of so soon beholding such kind and amiable friends, Miss Dunford, with some hesitation, and not without blushes, told her she could likewise give her some account of her brother. "He was with us more than a week (continued she) a short time before our coming to England. The Countess gave him a minute detail of all that had befallen you from the time he saw you last, to your setting out for Paris; and shewed him the letter which you had written her from Mrs. Vincent's. He appeared extremely surprised, and equally pleased with the account, which I found was very different from those he had received from Lord and Lady Walton, which were full of complaints against your levity and disrespectful behaviour. And as (he said) he was not quite satisfied with your conduct when he left England they had made the deeper impression upon his mind; he had, till the Countess gave him this information believed that you lived with your uncle Sir Marmaduke, and being much offended by proceedings so different from those he once expected from you, had resolved to take no notice of you, either by letter, or any other way, till his return, as the most marked expression of his disapprobation. But he now longs to embrace and beg your pardon for the unjust and cruel neglect he has been guilty of. Indeed (continued Miss Dunford) he began himself to feel the effects of Lady Walton's malignant influence, a considerable part of his stipend was stopped, and he was forbidden to return at the time he intended. And I have no doubt but she would have completely ruined his expectations had not the death of his uncle put an end to her machinations."

"The death of his uncle (exclaimed Caroline) is Lord Walton dead?" "He has been dead this fortnight (replied Harriot) and your brother is in possession of Broomfield, and except the dowager's jointure, his whole fortune." The shock, the mixture of surprise, joy, and regret, which at once took possession of our Heroine's mind, was nearly too much for her weak frame. Mr. Dunford observing her paleness, stepped to a side-board where a bottle of water stood, and pouring out a glassful begged her to drink it. She swallowed part of it and immediately felt herself revived. A shower of tears which fell to the memory of her uncle's passed kindness still further relieved her, and in about half an hour she was well enough to accompany Mr. and Miss Dunford to Mr. Lane's.

When they arrived in Sackvill Street, they were informed that the ladies were all dressing, Miss Dunford therefore leaving her father in the breakfast parlour, desired Caroline to walk up with her; she put her into her own chamber which was next to that in which the Countess slept, then stepping to that lady informed who she had found, and in a few words related the accidents which had thrown her into the protection of her father. The Countess impatiently begged to see her, and the moment she appeared, embracing her with the greatest tenderness "My dear creature (exclaimed she) have we at last found you? how many hearts will your safety and presence rejoice!" She then sent her woman to Mrs. Lane, to inform her of the happy news; in a few moments that lady entering the room expressed the highest pleasure at seeing her, and begged her pardon, for the many uncomfortable hours she had occasioned her by so entirely mistaking the character of Mrs. Vincent, of whom he had heard the most respectable one. The Countess was

extremely surprised to hear that she was widow to the person from whom Col. Vincent inherited his name and fortune, and was filled with indignation at the insolent behaviour of his sister. When the name of Craven, was mentioned Miss Dunford exclaimed "What Mr. Craven of Westmoreland? He is the person who sues my father for the Cumberland estate. We are near relations and were upon the most intimate terms till about three years since, when my father happening to have a dispute with one of his neighbours about a private road, requested Mr. Craven to look over some of his papers, in which he either found or fancied a title to a large estate which descended to our family from a distant branch. It was at his house that my father became acquainted with your brother, Miss Ashford, and out of regard and friendship to him Lord Walton forbade all intercourse between them after the quarrel and law-suit was commenced." "I sincerely hope (replied the Countess) that a few days will make him smart for his folly. But, my dear Miss Ashford, do you know that we have a heavy charge against you? We have discovered that in the relation of your little history you have omitted transactions of a very important nature, in which your character is greatly concerned, and which shews your conduct and disposition in a light wherein you did not chuse to place them. You look surprised; but it is in vain to justify your sincerity, or deny facts; we have, in the house, witnesses that will testify against you." "Let us, however, give her fair play (said Mrs. Lane) she shall meet her accusers face to face. I just now heard them go into the drawing-room; come, Miss Dunford, bring the culprit along, she shall take her trial this moment." So saying, she took the hand of our Heroine, who, though conscious of no guilt, felt some uneasiness, and the Countess stepping before and throwing open the door of the drawing-room, the first objects which presented themselves to her eyes were Mrs. Forester and little Mary.

"Oh, my dear little Mama! (exclaimed the latter) look, look, Mama, it is Miss Ashford!" So saying, she flew to her in a transport of joy. Caroline, stooping down, received her in her arms, while the grateful mother, unable to express her feelings, seized one of her hands, upon which she impressed a fervent kiss. "These, my dear Caroline (said the Countess) are your accusers; these whom you have saved from perishing in want, whom you have supported, at the expence of your own comfort, almost of your life. Little did I think when you told me that you looked forward to a day of independance, that it was your goodness to my sister which kept it at a distance." "Your sister! (cried Caroline) Is it possible that I can have been so fortunate?" "Yes, my dear preserver, my friend, my protectress (exclaimed Mrs. Forester) this is the sister to whose superior virtues and understanding I bore testimony when you kindly listened to my melancholy story. But oh! how could I ever have endured reflection, had your goodness to us been attended by the dreadful effects of which my sister speaks! had I suspected the change in your condition, I would have begged for my support ere you should have suffered such inconveniencies while I enjoyed the comforts of life at your expence." "Let us not, my dear Madam (answered our Heroine) think upon the disagreeable events that are passed. Sincerely do I congratulate you upon the happy change in your circumstances, which will, I trust, both for your sake and that of this sweet child, continue in future as happy as you can wish them." "I have (replied Mrs. Forester) the kindest and most generous of sisters, who, like you, bids me forget all the pains that are passed. My father has been dead some months; the time of his decease happened while I was in my deepest distress at the cottage. My brother has likewise been in England, but as I was then cut off from all

intelligence, both these circumstances escaped my knowledge, till I last week read an account in a public paper of his election for the county which my father represented. I immediately came to town, and to my inexpressible joy had the good fortune of finding my sister. My brother (continued Mrs. Forester) I have not yet seen, nor can I think of his arrival, which is every hour expected, without fear.”

“Your apprehensions, my dear (replied the Countess) are altogether unnecessary: there is not a worthier, more amiable, or generous man upon earth than our brother. My father’s circumstances, at the time of his death, were much better than was generally expected, which, together with the estate left him by my uncle, which is more than five thousand pounds a year, puts it amply in his power to provide for you and our dear little Mary, especially as the Count absolutely refuses the fortune he has generously offered me.”

While this explanation was making, Mr. Dunford, who had stood quite still at a farther part of the room, advanced, and the Countess, her sister, and Mrs. Lane, surrounded him in a moment; as soon as he could disengage himself from them, he took the hand of our Heroine, and, kissing it with parental fondness “I have heard (said he) that men were subject to be deceived by false appearances; I thought I only had a beautiful woman under my care, but find it was an angel.” Caroline smiled at this affectionate piece of gallantry, and replied, that she feared a little further acquaintance would too certainly convince him that his benevolence and protection had been exerted in favour of a weak erring mortal.

Dinner being now announced they all walked down to the dining-parlour, Miss Dunford taking one of Caroline’s hands and little Mary the other; on their way down the former told her she was almost as much surprised as herself at the Countess’s accusations, for having been out when Mrs. Forester arrived, she had not heard any particulars of her story. In the parlour they were joined by Mr. Lane and the Count; and Caroline, who was a favourite with both of them, was again welcomed and congratulated. Having sat a short time after the cloath was removed, the ladies retired to the drawing-room, where they were soon joined by the gentlemen: a Whist-table being placed, the Count and Countess, Mr. and Mrs. Lane, Mr. Dunford and Mrs. Forester drew for places; the first and last couple sat down, while the other joined Caroline and Miss Dunford in sensible and lively chat, while little Mary ran prattling first to one and then the other, admired and caressed by all.

## CHAPTER XXXIV.

### *Another Discovery.*

THEY had not long continued in this situation when a travelling chaise and four stopped at the door. "My brother (exclaimed the Countess) in a joyful accent, come, come, Mary, don't look as if you expected a Spanish Don full of rage and vengeance, believe me you have nothing to apprehend from his anger and resentment, they have long been changed into pity." Mrs. Forester still looked uneasy, and was scarce able to rise as the whole company did when the door opened; but judge the astonishment and confusion of our Heroine when the servant announced Sir Wm. Beaumont, and she beheld that so much beloved author of many an uneasy moment enter.

Every eye sparkled with joy when he appeared, and all present, Mrs. Forester and Caroline excepted, thronged round to welcome him. He returned their salutations in the most kind and graceful manner, and when the Countess presented her sister, telling him that the poor prodigal was returned both to them and to herself, he embraced her with the most unrepublishing tenderness, assuring her that it should be his care to banish from her mind every remembrance of passed sorrows, and to render her future life as happy as the extent of his power could make it; he then turned to the beautiful little Mary, and bestowed upon her such praises and caresses as delighted the heart of her fond parent. While he was thus employed, and Mr. Lane was requesting him and the rest of the party to be reseated, the Countess took the trembling hand of Caroline, and leading her up more dead than alive towards her brother "I must not (said she) forget to present to you a third sister, and one who is worth the other two put together, nay, my dear Miss Ashford, surely you will not deny me the pleasure of beginning an acquaintance between two persons, who are so happily formed by similar virtues and excellences for intimacy and friendship."

Sir William approached our Heroine with visible emotion. "To behold Miss Ashford (said he) and to wish her happy must ever be the same act. Were it safe to judge of the mind by its proper index, I should without hesitation pronounce her faultless." As these words did not imply a former knowledge, Caroline endeavoured to recover herself, and courtesying with the distant civility of a stranger, was silently retiring to her chair, when Mrs. Forester taking hold of her other hand, with eyes full of affection "You tell me, Sir William, (said she) that my return to my family gives you satisfaction, behold in this most amiable of women the guardian angel who preserved me and this helpless innocent from perishing in want and obscurity; to her bounty were we many months indebted for the support of life, a bounty which her own severe distress could not induce her to withdraw." "I am sorry (replied Sir William, with a softened look and accent) that goodness and beauty ever should be subject to misfortune, but such is the inequality and imperfection of human things; while the sun shines in its fullest splendour on one part of the landscape, a dark and heavy cloud overshadows the other." He spoke these words with a strong emphasis, and a sigh which seemed to struggle from the bottom of his heart.

Caroline was too much affected, she turned aside to hide her emotions, and it was with much difficulty that she kept herself from fainting.

In a few moments every body had resumed their places, Mr. and Mrs. Lane were called for at the card table, and the Count and Countess cut out; at the same time some more friends dropping in, a second was ordered, and Caroline and Miss Dunford drawn for by the gentlemen. Our Heroine fell to the share of Sir Wm. Beaumont, who with great politeness and gallantry informed her of his good fortune, and handed her to the table. As they passed the Countess, she turned to her Lord, and in a whisper loud enough to be distinctly heard by the whole company—"What a charming couple are they (said she) I sincerely wish the partnership was for life." The pale cheeks of Caroline were instantly in a glow, and the hand Sir William held, which before was very steady, trembled so much that the Baronet, who partook of her emotions, immediately relinquished it, but not without a gentle involuntary pressure which greatly increased its violence. During the whole rubber she never ventured to lift her eyes to his, scarce was she able to speak the few words necessary to the game, and when Miss Dunford, who as well as herself was naturally very cheerful, said any lively thing which forced a smile, it resembled those of dying saints, patience and sweetness triumphing over anguish.

Sir William kept his eyes almost constantly fixed upon her face; his inattention to play was evident, and his countenance now expressed the highest degree of admiration, now the tenderest pity, and now the deepest regret. The Countess who watched him closely beheld these emotions with surprise, nor could she by any means account for those which appeared in her fair friend, but she was so much concerned for her apparent indisposition, that as soon as the rubber was ended she insisted upon her not beginning another, saying she plainly saw that the fatigue was too much for her, she accordingly arose, and followed by her partner seated herself by the fire. He enquired with much anxiety how long she had been ill, what advice she had had, and several other particulars, in which he appeared greatly interested. She longed to enter into an explanation of her conduct, once and again her lips were open to ask him if he recollected seeing her at Paris, knowing that the mention of Colonel Vincent would have led directly to the subject; but the effort was vain, something at the moment she was about to speak seemed to deprive her of breath, and they closed again in silence; she therefore gave up the design, leaving it to the course of events to clear her or not in his opinion, as chance and accident should direct. After a little time, however, her spirits were sufficiently recovered to enter into conversation with him, if not with her usual liveliness, in a manner so sensible, elegant, and pleasing, that Sir William seemed to be upon the point of forgetting that rigid honour which was wont to keep inclination in awe; when suddenly starting as from a dream, he arose, and folding his arms across his bosom, remained for some moments in a state of profound thoughtfulness, then assuming an air of easy cheerfulness, "you mean to play no more this evening, Miss Ashford, said he, I think I shall undertake another rubber," so saying he bowed carelessly and walked to the card table, where, leaning over the back of Miss Dunford's chair, he continued to watch the progress of the game till it was ended, and it being the last of the rubber, he immediately cut in and sat down to play.

Mr. Dunford and Mrs. Forester being out, joined our Heroine the moment Sir William quitted her, and they were chatting upon a variety of subjects, when she was suddenly seized with such a shivering fit that the chair upon which she sat shook with the violence of her agitation. The company were extremely alarmed, and her altered countenance, which from paleness had assumed the highest flush of hectic crimson, increased their apprehensions. Sir William was among the first and most concerned who approached her; he took her hand which a moment before had been cold as marble, but now glowed as if scorched by an internal fire, and feeling her high and irregular pulse, his face was over-spread with a livid paleness, and he begged the Countess immediately to send for the best assistance.

All joined in intreating her to go to bed, with which she would willingly have complied, but found herself unable to stand, or rise from her chair. While all were offering their assistance, Sir William, with a tenderness and delicacy peculiar to himself, took her gently in his arms, and carrying her with the same care with which a mother bears her favourite child, placed her in an easy chair by the side of her bed. Every one then retired, except the Countess, her woman, and Mrs. Forester, who soon undressed and put her to bed, where she was no sooner placed, than they sent the servant to give particular orders to have the house kept quiet, and the knocker muffled.

As soon as she was gone, the Countess coming to the bed side, and taking the burning hand, which her fair friend, by way of bidding her good night, held out, she affectionately kissed it, and looking upon her with extreme tenderness “My dearest Caroline, my friend, my sister (exclaimed she) what is it that distresses you? Tell me, my love? I too plainly perceive it is the agitation and disturbance of your mind, which tears that delicate frame to pieces.”

“Ah! Madam (replied our Heroine) seek not to discover more of my weaknesses than you are already acquainted with. Add not to my misfortunes, the loss of your esteem.”

“That is impossible (replied she) my esteem, my warmest affection, you must for ever possess. But answer me one question. Have you ever before seen Sir Wm. Beaumont?”

“Oh yes! too, too often,” answered Caroline. “Good Heavens (exclaimed the Countess) is it possible, can he be the person for whose sake”——“Dear Madam, interrupted our Heroine, do not despise me, weak and absurd as I now appear, I am not the idle love-sick girl my present follies may lead you to suppose.” “No woman (replied the Countess) need be ashamed of an attachment to such a man as my brother. But if it will not fatigue you too much, will you favour me with a few particulars of what has passed between you?”

Caroline immediately informed her in what manner she first became acquainted with Sir William and that he was the unknown person whom she had heard Colonel Vincent mention her being with at Vauxhall to whom Mr. Craven gave so false and cruel

an account of her. She then related her meeting him again at Ashford Park, and the inconveniencies his declaration in her favour, had brought upon her; and lastly, her being seen by him in the chaise with Colonel Vincent at Paris, and again as she was alighting at the Hotel.

As soon as she had done speaking, the Countess exclaimed “I perfectly understand the whole affair! He loves you to distraction; of that I was convinced before I knew the cause of those struggles he so evidently endures. Good night, my sweet love, sleep and get well. I will take care that Sir William shall not close his eyes till he has received your pardon for daring to suspect what his heart has all along declared to be a falsehood.” Both ladies then kissed her in an affectionate manner, Mrs. Forester saying that she was made for her brother, and no other man could ever deserve her.

The moment the ladies quitted the chamber of their fair friend, they joined the company in the drawing room, whom they found reduced to their own family, the strangers having taken leave, fearing to intrude upon uneasiness they could not alleviate. Mr. Dunford likewise having staid to know how she found herself when they left her, followed their example; and little Mary being gone to bed, they drew their chairs in a circle round the fire, each expressing their fears for the safety of their general favourite.

The Countess entered into a warm eulogy upon her manners and character, saying she thought her, in every respect, the most perfectly amiable young person of whom she ever had knowledge.

During this panegyric, Sir William sat in a thoughtful posture, his arms folded, and his eyes fixed upon the fire, insensible of its glare and heat. “My brother is a stranger to this lovely girl (continued the Countess) I will therefore give him a short account of the many injuries she has received, and the uncomfortable vicissitudes through which she has passed.” She then related all the events of her life, in a clear and concise manner.

Sir William listened with the utmost attention when she gave an account of her quitting Broomfield, and the cause of it, so different from that he had received from Mr. Craven, the most lively emotion was visible in his countenance; and when she related Colonel Vincent’s account of the evening at Vaux-Hall, his apology to Caroline, and the proposal he made her by his sister’s mediation; the cause of her going with him to Paris, and her joining Mrs. Lane at the Hotel, he could no longer contain the satisfaction and pleasure he enjoyed, but rising and clasping his hands together, in an extacy “if so (exclaimed he) I am among the number of those who have most wronged her.” He then acknowledged himself to have been the person who saved her; that the first moment he beheld her, he admired her person to a degree of rapture; and that every hour of her company and conversation increased his attachment so much, that he had resolved to declare his passion, and, if possible, unite himself for ever to one so lovely, engaging, and amiable, when the circumstances with which they were already acquainted, interposed between him and happiness. He then told them what they already knew, his having seen her at Paris with Colonel Vincent, which, he said, he esteemed equal to a positive proof of her guilt; and that instead of paying a visit to the Count and his sister as was his

intention, he had immediately quitted France, and returned to England, fully resolved to drive her from his thoughts; an effort in which he had flattered himself with having in some degree succeeded, when fortune again threw her into his way, at a place in which he so little expected to meet her, and the first glance convinced him that all his labour had been in vain, and that he was, if possible, more in love than ever. "It was my design (continued the Baronet) to have left this dangerous house to-morrow morning, had not the account I have just heard, altered my resolution; but I am now fixed here, till the recovery of my angel shall impower me to receive the future colouring of my days at her hands."

Supper was scarce ended, when an eminent physician arrived, and, attended by all the ladies, who were too anxious for his opinion, to be left behind, visited the fair invalid, whom he pronounced to be in considerable danger.

As soon as he had written a prescription, the Countess presented his fee, requesting that he would call again early in the morning, and continue his visits at least twice a day till they should become unnecessary.

With anxious and disturbed looks, they returned to the supper-room, where they found Sir William walking backwards and forwards in extreme agitation. The moment they entered "What is the opinion of Dr. ——, (said he) is Miss Ashford in danger?"

"The Doctor gives us hope (replied Mrs. Lane) but at the same time he wishes to arm us against the worst." "The worst (exclaimed Sir William) good God! but how does she herself appear to be? Is her fever higher?" "It is higher (replied Mrs. Lane) than when she was put to bed." Sir William then began to walk about the room again with a quicker pace, his arms folded, and his countenance expressive of the deepest anguish.

As no one could enjoy conversation, they all retired early to bed, except Mrs. Forester, who sat up the whole night, declaring her beloved friend should not be left a single moment to the care only of a mercenary nurse. She sat the whole night by the side of her bed, gave her such diluted liquids as she was ordered to drink, and watched every look and motion with all the anxious care of a fond mother, who trembles for the life of an only child.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

### *The Female Physician.*

EARLY the following morning the Countess entered Caroline's chamber; she found Miss Dunford already there, who insisted upon Mrs. Forester's going to rest for a few hours and leaving her fair charge to her care, in which her sister strongly joining, she at last consented. They found the lovely object of their attention in a state the most dangerous and affecting. She was in a high fever and quite delirious. While they were standing round the bed Dr. —— entered, who with a look of apprehension begged she might be kept very quiet, and no one suffered to approach her whose presence was likely in any way to affect her; adding, that he feared something or other disturbed her mind, and that every thing depended upon her being kept quiet and easy. All, therefore, but Miss Dunford and the nurse, immediately retired; the Countess begged the Doctor would call again in a few hours and went back to her apartment, as did Mrs. Forester to hers. The Doctor was going down stairs to his chariot when he was met by Sir Wm. Beaumont, whose pale and disordered looks spoke a sleepless night and perturbed mind. They walked together into the breakfast parlour, where they conversed for some minutes; the Doctor then took his leave and Sir William returned to his apartment.

In about two hours they all met at breakfast, where each knowing how deeply the other was interested in the event of our Heroine's illness, suppressed a part of their own fears in compassion to those of their friends; yet unable to think of any other subject they remained almost silent; but the concern and anxiety of Sir William gave to theirs the appearance of mere coldness; they were excessive, and tore his mind with anguish, easier far to be imagined than described.

While they were still leaning over their tea a travelling coach stopped at the door, and they saw Mr. Dunford alight, followed by Mr. Henry Ashford and Dr. Seward. The moment they entered, Mr. Dunford, without attending to the civilities usual at meeting, enquired after the health of his dear Caroline, and upon being told that she was very ill, he exclaimed "She must be well! By heavens, this is no time for sickness! Tell her her uncle has left her fifty thousand pounds, with a full acknowledgment of the cruelty and injustice of which he was guilty in permitting her to be sent from his house when he was in his own breast convinced of the falshood of every accusation brought against her. Tell her her brother is here, and impatient to embrace and give her every testimony of his friendship. Tell her her old friend Dr. Seward is come to prescribe for her, both mind and body; and, lastly, Tell her that I have obtained a final decree in my favour, and that her friend, Harriot, will have as good a fortune as herself. Tell her all this and my life for it she is well and amongst us in four-and-twenty hours."

Every one expressed their satisfaction upon receiving each part of this intelligence, particularly the first and the last, which afforded them sincere pleasure. The Countess likewise expressed the greatest joy at sight of Doctor Seward, of whom she had heard her fair friend so often speak in terms of respect and gratitude.

Henry expressed great impatience to see his sister; he informed the Countess that he had in vain made enquiry after her, and began to be seriously alarmed for her safety, when Doctor Seward received a letter from her, by which he learned, to his great astonishment, that she was fallen into the hands of his good friend Mr. Dunford, with whose feigned name and place of abode he was well acquainted; that he lost not a moment in setting out to inform her in person of the happy change in her circumstances, in which journey the Doctor, from motives of friendly affection to his sister, resolved to accompany him: he added, that he could not express how great a disappointment her illness was to him, especially as he had a matrimonial scheme to propose to her which he had much set his heart upon, and which he hoped would prove agreeable to her.

Sir William, who had till then stood in a musing posture, at these words started, and looking steadily in his face, said he hoped, should Miss Ashford's wished for recovery afford them the happiness of seeing her make a choice, it would be uninfluenced by any thing but her own judgment and inclination, since no one who was acquainted with the one could doubt of its being strong enough to direct the other. The Countess observing Henry to look surprised, and as if doubtful whether he should answer him with civility or be offended by his interference, immediately made them known to each other in the usual form, a ceremony which in their present state of uneasiness had been omitted. This put all right again, and they exchanged every polite expression of esteem which a mutual knowledge of each other's characters inspired.

These civilities were interrupted by Dr. Seward, who requested that he might have permission to visit his fair friend, not, he said, in the character of a physician, except he should see a proper occasion to prescribe a mental dose. The Countess offered to attend him to her chamber; but by the way, begged he would indulge her with a moment's conversation in her dressing-room, previous to his seeing their dear Caroline. She there told him, that little as she was acquainted with the science he professed, reason informed her, that in order to prescribe with success, the physician must understand the disorder of his patient, and she believed it was in her power to give him some lights upon that head, which might be of use.

She then informed him of every thing that had passed between our Heroine and her brother, ending with a particular account of what happened the evening before.

The Doctor thanked her for such important information. They then proceeded to the chamber where Caroline lay, attended by her watchful friend. Upon opening the door, it was with the greatest pleasure that they heard her speak with perfect composure; and when the Countess came in sight, she stretched out her fair hand, and, with a faint smile, apologized for the trouble and disquiet she had given to such kind friends.

“You will more than make us all amends, my love (replied the Countess) by getting well as fast as possible. Every body is anxious for your happiness; and all our present comfort depends upon your recovery. But do you know what physician we have brought to visit you? What would you say if your friend Doctor Seward was arrived?”

A smile of pleasure illumined her countenance as she heard these words, and the Doctor appearing, she received him with more lively expressions of joy, than in so weak a state could have been expected.

As soon as the first salutations were over, the Countess proposed an airing to Miss Dunford, saying, Mrs. Forester and little Mary were going to take one, and she thought an hour of fresh air would be of use to her; adding, you must not look pale now; I must have no more of my friends sick, just when fortune is pouring her choicest treasures at their feet.

“But do you not rejoice to see our dear Caroline so much better (replied Miss Dunford) I believe let Doctor ——, or Doctor Seward either, think what they please, I have been her best physician.”

She then informed the Countess that she had taken the first opportunity which the abatement of the fever afforded, to relate to her lovely charge every circumstance that happened after she quitted the drawing-room the evening before, taking care to dwell particularly upon the concern Sir William expressed for her indisposition, and the excessive pleasure his sister’s account and explanation of the circumstances which had occasioned him so much pain, appeared to give him, together with his declaration that the future happiness of his life must wholly depend upon her. “I assure you, (continued Miss Dunford) my medicine had a wonderful effect, in ten minutes after it was administered, my patient was altered for the better, beyond what I could have supposed possible.”

While the Countess and her fair friend joined the company below, and related the happy change which they hoped had taken place in the person for whom they were all so deeply interested, Doctor Seward in the most judicious and cautious manner, informed her of all the agreeable circumstances which had lately taken place, and with which the reader is already acquainted. The acknowledgement her uncle had made of his own injustice, and her innocence and rectitude, appeared to afford her inexpressible satisfaction, far more than the large legacy he had annexed to it. He told her that lady Walton was now execrated by all who had lately approved her conduct, and that she quitted Broomfield, loaded with the curses of her inferiors, and the scorn of her equals. That the world did not scruple to say that since the death of Lord Walton, Mr. Craven was extremely dissatisfied with his marriage, being disappointed of a considerable fortune which Lady W. had persuaded him to believe her husband meant to bequeathe to Miss West; and likewise undeceived with regard to her conduct, which great pains had been taken to set before his eyes in the falsest and darkest colours. The good fortune which had attended her worthy and esteemed friend Mr. Dunford, likewise afforded her extreme pleasure; and the hope which the Doctor gave her of shortly seeing her brother, appeared to complete her satisfaction.

In about an hour the Doctor left her, fearing to fatigue her too much, even with the most agreeable subject; he had not mentioned Sir William, further than to observe that he was one of the finest looking men he had ever seen; and, he presumed, a very particular

friend of hers, if he might judge by the extreme anxiety he appeared to be under about her.

A faint glow which overspread her face, informed him that she was not displeased by that intelligence, but he feared to disturb her spirits, by giving the smallest alarm to her delicacy, and therefore left a further explanation to her female friends; or as he now hoped, very shortly to her lover himself.

On his return to the parlour, every enquiring eye was turned towards him, anxiously expecting a confirmation of their new raised hopes; the cheerfulness of his countenance was sufficiently intelligible; but when he assured them that there was every reason to look for a complete and speedy recovery, their joy was unbounded.

Sir William got up in a transport, shook him by the hand, called him his good angel, and expressed the most lively raptures.

A perfect understanding had taken place between Henry and the Baronet, in consequence of which the former, finding his sister had favoured him with expressions of approbation, from which he flattered himself with a more than common interest in her affections, readily promised to give up the proposals he had to make her, which were from his uncle Sir Marmaduke Ashton, in favour of his eldest son. He said they were such, as had her heart been free from prepossession, might have proved an agreeable means of uniting a family, which had too long been divided; but as that was not the case, he had neither power or inclination to oppose her choice, nor had it been left to his own, could he have wished a more honourable alliance.

The company had likewise been informed of another attachment, which none but the Countess in the least suspected, between Mr. Henry Ashford and Miss Dunford; it had commenced before his setting out upon his travels, he having accompanied Mr. Craven upon a visit to her father: when he first mentioned his admiration of her to Lord Walton, that nobleman appeared greatly to approve the alliance, but as soon as the rupture broke out between her father and Mr. Craven, and in consequence one half of Mr. Dunford's fortune became, according to the representation of the former, more than doubtful, he absolutely forbade his nephew to think of it.

He was, however, too generous to be influenced by motives so mean; a regular correspondence was kept up between them during her continuance in England, and their meeting again in France, confirmed their attachment beyond the power of accident to weaken.

Upon Henry's arrival in town with Doctor Seward, he had taken the first opportunity to inform Mr. Dunford that the moment his Harriot would consent to his happiness, he was ready to fulfil his engagements, and make her, who possessed his whole heart, a share in his fortune.

To which the old gentleman, who had a few hours before had a decree in his favour, answered, that he was ready to bestow her upon him, together with 40,000l. which he would pay upon the day of marriage. Adding, that he should have a good twenty remaining, which they must wait for, till death should make a better provision for him.

This circumstance was more pleasing to Mr. Dunford, than the lover of Harriot, who felt a pride in demonstrating his affection, by the disinterestedness of his conduct, and whose fortune was too ample to make that of his wife a matter of consideration. However, as Lady Walton had a large jointure upon his principal estate, and having 50,000l. to pay his sister, he found it no inconvenient addition.

Henry expressed the most impatient desire to see his sister, but Doctor Seward would by no means consent to it, at least till Doctor —— had seen her. That gentleman arrived soon afterwards, and appeared quite amazed at the happy change which had taken place in his patient since his last visit; he begged she might still be kept very quiet, and said, if no relapse happened, he had little doubt but she would be able to leave her room in less than a week. Her Brother, therefore, was not permitted to see her till the next morning, when the comfortable night she had passed appeared so greatly to have refreshed and strengthened her, that Doctor Seward was of opinion his visit would be of use rather than hurtful to her.

Their meeting was of the most tender kind; he lamented the pain his mistakes had given her, and she thanked him for the warmth of friendship his very anger (believing what he believed) expressed for her. In the course of conversation, he told her he had received a letter from Colonel Vincent, in which he had acknowledged himself the suppressor of one she wrote to him the day before his leaving Broomfield to make the tour, which had he received, it would not have been possible for him to have entertained a doubt of the propriety of her sentiments and conduct, and that he knew his mother had stopped another which she wrote soon after the death of her father, and sent to Lord Walton who was then at Bath, to be forwarded to him. Caroline no longer wondered at her brother's suspicions, or blamed his anger, since not having received these letters, he had reason to believe she neither feared his contempt, or valued his good opinion. This eclaireissement having taken place, and the hearts of each perfectly eased of the apprehension of having lost the friendship of the other, Henry informed her of the proposal which he had to make from Sir Marmaduke, in favour of Mr. Ashford. She instantly stopped him, begging he would not distress her by the further mention of what could only give her pain. "I esteem my cousin (said she) and would do any thing to contribute to his happiness, but destroy my own."

"I have done (said Henry) but married I must have you, and since this proposal is not agreeable to you, I hope another, which was made me this morning, will be more so."

Caroline blushed, and, looking at her brother with a kind of bashful apprehension, begged he would postpone all such kind of affairs till she was perfectly recovered, or rather till he had set her an example. "Well, well (replied he) I believe, if I am not greatly

mistaken, Sir William Beaumont may be trusted to plead his own cause; I will only say, that should your choice fall upon him, it will meet with my warmest approbation; his character is uncommonly excellent, and in his mind and person, the virtues and graces, so often at variance, are perfectly united.”

A smile of pleasure from Caroline was answer sufficient, and gave her brother to understand, as much as words are capable of expressing. In return he promised, the next day, to introduce to her the lady he designed for her future sister, a promise with which she appeared greatly pleased, telling him he would then have a right to talk to her upon the subject.

While he was still with her, Doctor —— entered, and congratulated them both upon the rapid recovery she had made. Before he took his leave, he told the Countess, who had attended him to Caroline’s apartment, that he would advise her to be well wrapped up, and take an airing the next day; and that he would not have her keep her room any longer, or seclude herself from her friends, but hoped she would be cautious how she ventured to publick places, or exposed herself, either to cold or fatigue, for some time to come, until she found herself in full possession of her natural strength.

“When Mr. Ashford returned to the parlour, and informed his friends in how short a time they might hope to have his sister once more among them, their joy was sincere as lively; but that of Sir William was mixed with impatience; he wished the night passed which divided him from what he then accounted happiness, the sight and conversation of her he loved. Henry was scarce less impatient, Miss Dunford having promised to give him her hand at the same time that Caroline became the wife of Sir William Beaumont; nor had he much less reason to complain of absence than the Baronet, almost every moment of his Harriot’s time being spent in the chamber of his sister.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

### *The Conclusion.*

THE next morning the whole family breakfasted together in Mrs. Lane's dressing-room, where they were joined by our Heroine, who was received by every one with the kindest and most joyful congratulations. Her countenance was pale, but speaking life was returned to her eyes which seemed to beam with content, and sometimes to sparkle with hope. Sweetness and sensibility were ever the characteristics of her countenance, both now appeared heightened, and united to a delicacy so exquisite, so truly feminine and interesting, as passes the power of pen or pencil to describe.

Sir William met and welcomed her, with a voice and look which at once spoke delight and apprehension. Fear is as constant an attendant upon true love as hope; both were lodged in his bosom; but the latter was predominant, and the smile and blush with which she received his congratulatory compliments, were sufficient in the opinion of any but a lover, to have put the matter out of all doubt. It was not indeed, her wish that it should, for a single moment, retain any. She felt a decided preference in his favour; she was assured he loved her; and her whole behaviour was such as, without the shadow of infringement upon the strictest real delicacy, informed him of her esteem and approbation. He had that evening an opportunity of declaring his sentiments without reserve, and was treated with an openness and delicate sincerity, which, while it insured his happiness, added to that love and esteem upon which it was founded.

They had conversed more than an hour in the drawing-room, when the door gently opened, and Henry entered, leading in the half reluctant Harriot.

“Nay, my dear Miss Dunford (said he, as they came in) you must permit me to perform my promise.” Then presenting her to Caroline, “I promised (continued he) to afford you an opportunity this afternoon of embracing the lady I hope to give you for a sister. Behold the dear girl who permits me to look forward to the felicity of calling her mine; and tell me if you approve my choice or not.”

“My dearest Harriot (exclaimed Caroline) is it possible! and shall I indeed have the pleasure of calling you sister? Surely my fate is uncommonly kind, and allies me to all those I most love.”

“You see, sister (said Henry) how happy I am likely to be, and know that it is in your power to make me so, as soon as you please; every day, therefore, that I remain in the uncomfortable state of batchelorism, I shall place to your account.”

He then told her the promise Miss Dunford had made him, of being married on the same day with her, which that lady confirming, our Heroine told him with a smile, that he must be a little merciful, and give her time to breathe, upon which condition she would ask for none to gratify affectation or caprice; adding, “I would not willingly

deprive you of happiness; and I am hard pressed by another, who, perhaps, I wish to oblige as much as you.”

Sir William kissed her hand in an extacy, and they soon afterwards joined their friends in the drawing-room, with looks that bespoke perfect satisfaction and pleasure.

In about a week, settlements being completed, and Caroline’s health perfectly restored, the whole party set out for Broomfield, where the marriage ceremony was performed, respectively uniting two of the happiest pairs that ever did honour to that sacred institution.

Having thus brought our Heroine to that state of which, if happy, little is ever to be recorded, we think it a duty we owe our readers, to give a short account of such persons as we have occasionally introduced in our history.

Lady Walton resided some time after the death of her Lord, in Cavenish Square, where Mr. and Mrs. Craven spent their winter with her; but her conduct, to the universally admired Lady Beaumont, being warmly censured by every one, and finding herself little noticed by the respectable part of the great world, with whom her vanity made her wish to mix, she returned to the South of France, where a good many years of her past life had been spent; but notwithstanding the fineness of the climate in which she breathed, her health began to decline, and she died in less than twelve months after her arrival there.

Mr. and Mrs. Craven lived together but moderately; his temper, naturally reserved, jealous, and obstinate, became still more soured by his disappointment in her expected fortune, and the loss of his suit with Mr. Dunford.

After the removal of Lady Walton, he refused to take a town house, gave up his seat in Parliament, and insisted upon her living the whole year in the country. As he had never been at all agreeable to her, this conduct, which disappointed all her matrimonial views, rendered him her aversion. She at first struggled hard, till finding resistance vain, she was at length obliged to submit; but takes every opportunity of railing at his sordid, unfeeling perverseness, which he returns, by reproaching her with artifice, deceit, folly, and a long train of defects and ill qualities.

Mrs. Sanders continued to live with her friends in the West; but Charlotte, at Lady Beaumont’s request, resided chiefly with her, and improved so much by her example and instruction, that she became an amiable and pleasing woman. About a year after her arrival at Beaumont Lodge, she was married to Colonel Vincent. They took a house in its neighbourhood, where they still live in a very happy and respectable manner.

Miss Mason, soon after our Heroine left her, was married to Lord Danby, who by the death of her father, shortly became possessed of his whole fortune. They live in the most splendid stile, each pursuing those pleasures, which most attract their inclinations, without thinking it necessary that they should be approved or participated by the other.

Mrs. Meadows resides chiefly with her Ladyship, whose way of living is exactly suited to her taste.

Sir Marmaduke Ashford died in a few months after the period which concludes this history; his lady removed immediately to her jointure house, the same in which the late Lady Ashford had resided, and prevailed upon Mrs. Ausburn, who had been companion to her mother-in-law, to live with her in the same capacity, her uncommon love of books being the strongest recommendation on both sides. Mrs. Ashford took a house in town, where her niece generally passes the greatest part of the year with her; she has had several lovers, but her excessive affectation and the evident motives of ambition and avarice by which both she and her aunt are actuated have disgusted those who were her equals in birth and fortune, and all others are driven away by the last mentioned lady with rage and disdain, who still hopes to see her favourite one of the first persons in the kingdom; but it is the general opinion that if both of them do not alter their conduct and manners it will be her fate to die in a state of celibacy.

Sir Wm. Ashford was some years before he could perfectly reconcile himself to his cousin's marriage; he made the tour of most part of Europe, and sometime after his return married a very valuable lady of high birth and large fortune.

The Countess returned to France soon after the marriage of her brother, taking Mrs. Forester and Mary along with her, but soon after their arrival there, having the misfortune to lose her husband, Sir William and his Lady went over and assisted her in settling her affairs; the Count having left her a large independant fortune, she immediately gave up part of it to his nephew, and with the rest came back with her brother and sisters to Beaumont-Lodge, where she still resides, a most agreeable addition to their family circle.

Mrs. Forester continued with them for some time, when a mutual esteem and affection being observed between her and Dr. Seward. The Baronet proposed a marriage between them, to which neither objecting, it was celebrated at the Lodge with great festivity, and he presented the Doctor with ten thousand pounds as her dower. Mary still continued such a favourite with her little mama that she spends more than half her time with her, though the Doctor having no family she is become very dear to him, and likely to inherit his whole fortune, as well as her mother's which he has already settled upon her.

Mr. Henry Ashford was soon after his marriage created Viscount Walton; he resides chiefly at Broomfield, living in the most noble and hospitable manner; his whole conduct and that of his Lady doing honour to their rank and title. They every summer visit Sir William and Lady Beaumont, or are visited by them, and each having a town residence, where they usually spend part of the winter, much of their time is passed in each other's society. Mr. Dunford has a house which he calls his home, but he almost constantly resides with one of his daughters, who are equally pleased with his company and desirous of contributing to his comfort, and his constant cheerfulness is to them the most agreeable assurance that their endeavours are successful.

As for Sir William and Lady Beaumont they live in all the elegance and cheerfulness of genteel life without plunging into its follies and dissipation; fortunate in their friendships and connections, pleased with their situations, and happy in each other; every day is marked by some virtuous act, and every hour winged with satisfaction and pleasure.

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