Title: Fanny's First Novel

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Release date: May 1, 2016 [EBook #51922]
Most recently updated: February 25, 2021

Language: English

Credits: Produced by David Widger from page images generously provided by the Internet Archive

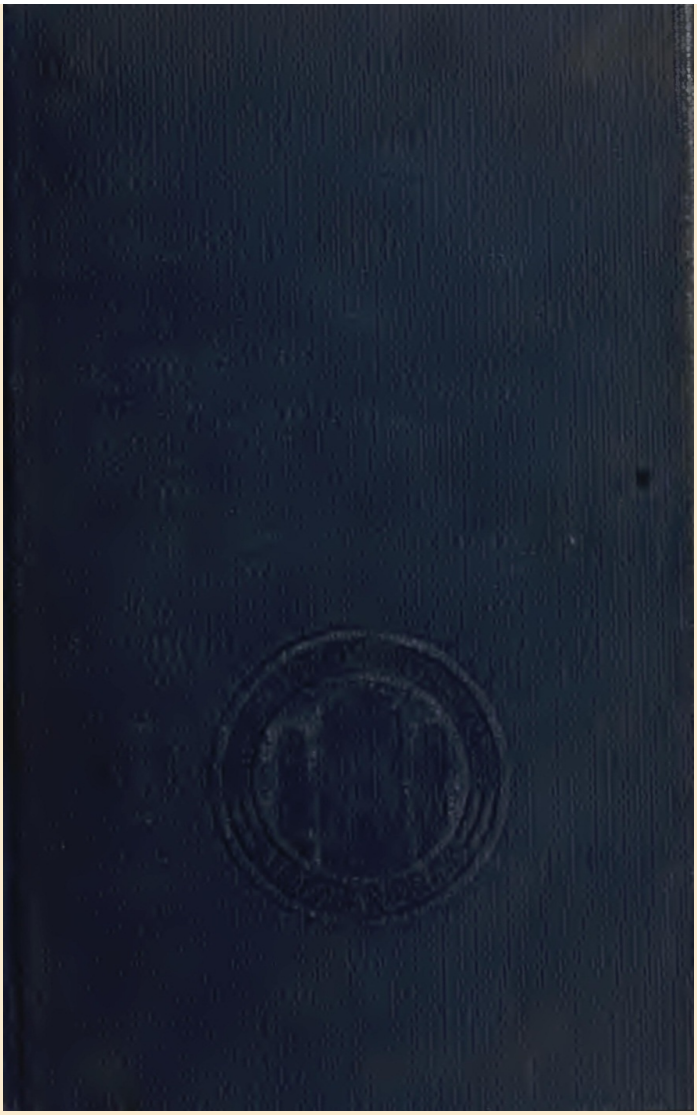
FANNY'S FIRST NOVEL

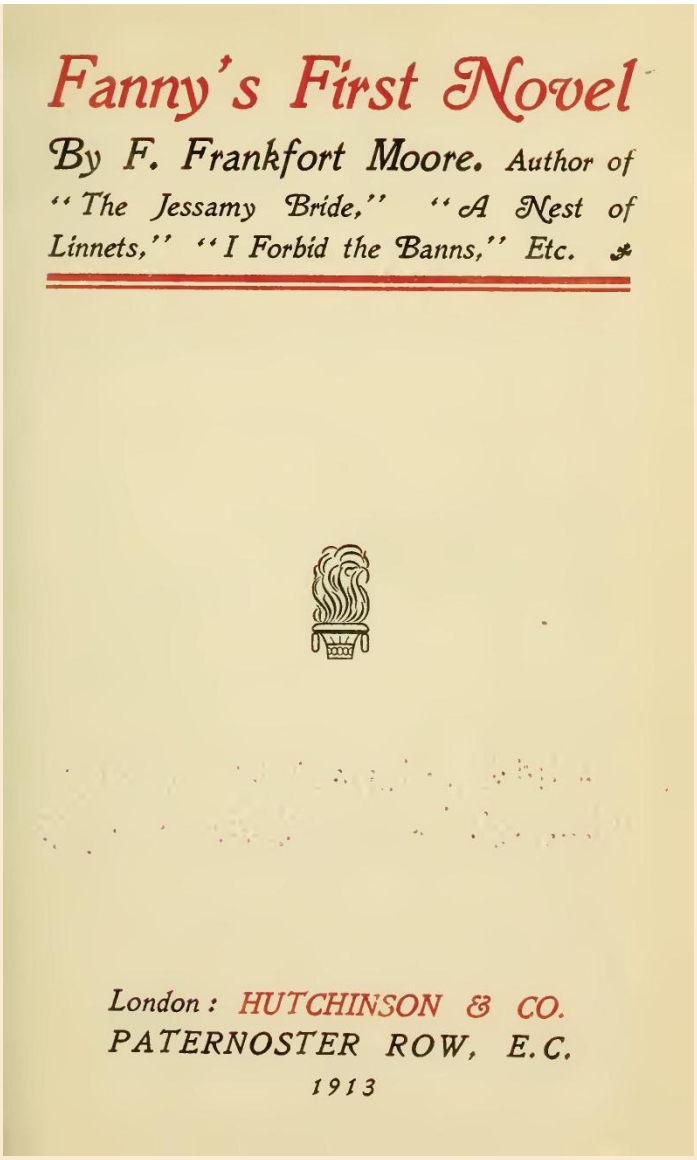
By Frank Frankfort Moore.

Author of "The Jessamy Bride," "A Nest of Linnets," "I Forbid the 'Banns," Etc.

London: Hutchinson & Co. Paternoster Row, E. C.

1913





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FANNY'S FIRST NOVEL

CHAPTER I

INDEED, I am not quite assured in my mind that the influence of Mr. Garrick upon such a family as ours is healthy," said Mrs. Burney, when the breakfast cups had been removed and the maid had left the room in the little house in St. Martin's Street, off Leicester Fields. Dr. Burney, the music-master, had not to hurry away this day: his first lesson did not begin until noon; it was to be given at the mansion of Mr. Thrale, the brewer, at Streatham, and the carriage was not to call for him for another hour. He was glancing at the *Advertiser* in unaccustomed indolence, but when his wife had spoken he glanced up from the paper and an expression of amused surprise was upon his face. His daughter Fanny glanced up from the work-basket which her mother had placed ready for her the moment that the breakfast-table had been cleared, and the expression upon little Miss Burney's face was one that had something of fright in it. She was too short-sighted to see the wink which her brother James, lieutenant in His Majesty's navy, gave her, for their stepmother had her back turned to him. But Mrs. Burney, without seeing him, knew that, as he himself would phrase it, he had tipped Fanny a wink. She turned quickly round upon him, and if she had previously any doubt on this point, it was at once dispelled by the solemnity of his face.

Dr. Burney gave a laugh.

"The influence of Mr. Garrick is like that of the air we breathe," said he. "It is not to be resisted by the age we live in, leaving family matters out of the question altogether: the Burney family must inhale as much of the spirit of Mr. Garrick as the rest of the town-they cannot help themselves, *ces pauvres Burneys!* they cannot live without Mr. Garrick."

Mrs. Burney shook her head solemnly; so did Lieutenant James Burney, for he had all his life been under the influence of Mr. Garrick, when the atmosphere brought by Mr. Garrick was one of comedy.

"My meaning is that Mr. Garrick is not content to allow simple people such as ourselves to live as simple

people," said Mrs. Burney. "I protest that I have felt it: the moment he enters our house we seem to be in a new world-whatsoever world it is his whim to carry us to."

"That is the truth, my dear-he can do what he pleases with us and with all the thousands who have flocked to his playhouse since his Goodman's Fields days—he has made a fortune as a courier; transporting people to another world for an hour or two every night—a world that is less humdrum than this in which four beats go to every bar and every crotchet goes to a beat! Dear soul! he has made our hearts beat at times beyond all computation of time and space."

"You will herring-bone the edges neatly, Fanny: I noticed some lack of neatness in the last of the napery that left your hand, my dear," said Mrs. Burney, bending over her stepdaughter at her work-basket; and, indeed, it seemed that the caution was not unnecessary, for Fanny's eyes were gleaming and she was handling her work with as great indifference (for the moment) as though she esteemed plain sewing something of drudgery rather than a delight. And now, having administered her timely caution, the good lady turned to her husband, saying:

"To my mind what you have claimed for Mr. Garrick but adds emphasis to my contention that his visits have a disturbing influence upon a homely family, taking them out of themselves, so to speak, and transporting them far beyond the useful work of their daily life. I have noticed with pain for some time past that Fanny's heart has not been in her work: her cross-stitch has been wellnigh slovenly, and her herring-boning has really been indifferent—I say it with sorrow; but dear Fanny is too good a girl to take offence at my strictures, which she knows are honest and meant for her good."

"Madam," said Lieutenant Burney, "I pray you to give me leave to bear you out; but at the same time to make excuses for Fan. I must do so in justice to her, for the blame rests with me so far as the herring-boning is concerned. I confess, with tears in my eyes, that 'twas I who provided her with the last models for her herring-boning; and 'twas surely some demon in my breast that prompted me to substitute the skeleton of one of the South Sea fishes which I hooked when becalmed with Captain Cook within sight of Otaheite, for the true herring whose backbone is a model of regularity to be followed by all workers with the needle, when deprived of the flesh, which is the staple fare of hundreds of honest families and, while nourishing them amply, prevents their thoughts from carrying them beyond the region pervaded by the smell of their cooking."

"That were a wide enough area upon occasions for the most ambitious of thinkers," said Dr. Burney, controlling his features, seeing that his wife took the ward-room humour of his son with dreadful seriousness. He made a sign to James to go no further—but James had gone round the world once, and he was not to be checked in a humbler excursion.

"Yes, madam, 'tis my duty to confess that Fanny's model was the flying-fish, and not the simple Channel herring, hence the failure to achieve the beautiful regularity of design which exists in the backbone of the latter from the figurehead to the stern, larboard sloping in one direction and starboard in the other. If anyone be culpable 'tis myself, not Fanny; but I throw myself on your mercy, and only implore that the herring-boning of my sister will not result in a whaling for me."

Mrs. Burney looked seriously from her brother to Fanny, and getting no cue from either, began:

"'Tis indeed honourable for you to endeavour by your confession to excuse the fault of your sister, James ——-"

"The traditions of the service, madam——" began the lieutenant, laying his hand on his heart; but he got no further, for Fanny could restrain herself no longer; she burst into a laugh and dropped her work, and her father rose, holding up his hand.

"The jest has gone far enough, James," he said. "We sleep in beds in this house and do not swing in hammocks. Keep your deep-sea jests until you are out of soundings, if it please you."

"I ask your pardon, sir," said James; "but i' faith there's many a true word said in jest; and it seems to me that there's a moral in the parable of the young woman who took the flying-fish of the South Seas for her model rather than the herring of the three-fathom coast-line of the Channel; and that moral touches close upon the complaint made by our good mother against Mr. Garrick."

"Let it be so," said Mrs. Burney, who was a clever enough woman to perceive that it would be unwise to make a grievance of the impudence of a young naval gentleman. "Let it be so; let it be that we are simple, homely, wholesome herrings, we are none the better for such a flying-fish as Mr. Garrick coming among us, giving us, it may be, the notion that our poor fins are wings, and so urging us to make fools of ourselves by emulating the eagle. The moral of your fable is that we should keep to our own element—is not that so, sir?"

"I' faith, madam, I am not sure but that 'tis so, and I haul down my colours to you, and feel no dishonour in the act," cried James. "Lord, where should we all be to-day if it were not for the good women who hold fast to the old traditions of the distaff and needle? They are the women who do more for the happiness of men than all who pass their time dipping quills in ink-horns or daubing paint upon good canvas that might with luck be hung from a stunsail boom and add another knot to the log of a frigate of seventy-two! Is there anyone who dines at the table of Sir Joshua Reynolds round the corner that does not wish with all his heart that his sister would sell her palette and buy a wine-glass or two with the proceeds? Why, when we went to dinner at Sir Joshua's yesterday there were not enough glasses to go round the table."

"There never are—that is well known," said Mrs. Burney.

"Nay, nay; let us take to ourselves the reproof of Dr. Johnson to Mr. Boswell when he complained, loud enough almost for Sir Joshua himself to hear him, about the scarcity of service. 'Sir,' said Dr. Johnson, 'some who have the privilege of sitting at this table, and you are one of them, sir, will be wiser if they keep their ears open and their mouths shut than they would if they had the means of drinking all that you are longing to drink.'"

"Mr. Boswell, in spite of the reproof, contrived to lurch from the table with more wine than wisdom 'tween decks," remarked James.

"He must have found a wine-glass," said Miss Susy Burney, who had been quite silent but quite attentive to

every word that had been spoken since breakfast-time.

“And so the honour of Mrs. Reynolds's housekeeping is saved,” said Dr. Burney.

“Nay, sir, is not Mr. Boswell a Scotsman?” cried the irrepressible James.

“That is his lifelong sorrow, since he fancies it to be an insuperable barrier between his idol, Dr. Johnson, and himself,” replied his father. “But how does his Scotsmanship bear upon the wine-glass question?”

“Ah, sir, without being versed in the subtleties of theology I make bold to think that Father Adam did not suffer hunger until knives and forks were invented,” said James. “Your drouthy Scot will drink straight from the bottle if no beaker be at hand. Oh, why was not Mr. Garrick at Sir Joshua's to rouse our spirits by his imitation of Mr. Boswell seeking for a wine-glass—and after?”

“Mr. Boswell is too trivial a subject for Davy: I have seen him take off Dr. Johnson mixing a bowl of punch until I was like to die of laughter. I protest that when he came to the squeezing of the imaginary lemon, while he cried out in the Doctor's broadest Lichfield, 'Who's for poonch?' I could smell the acid juice,” said Dr. Burney, and he laughed at the recollection of Garrick's fooling.

The naval man gave a resounding nautical smack to his thigh.

“That is what 'tis to be a sailor,” he cried. “I have had no chance of seeing Mr. Garrick at his best. I should dearly like to hear him take off Mr. Boswell when three sheets in the wind. Why was he not with us yesterday?”

“Mr. Garrick himself has had a drinking bout on. He has been at the Wells for the past fortnight,” said his father.

“*Ecce signum!*” came a doleful voice from the door, and a little man slowly put round the jamb a face bearing such an expression of piteous nausea as caused everyone in the room—not even excepting Mrs. Burney—to roar with laughter—uncontrollable laughter.

Then the expression on the little man's face changed to one of surprised indignation. He crept into the room and looked at every person therein with a different expression on his face for each—a variation of his original expression of disgust and disappointment mingled with doleful reproof. It seemed as if it was not a single person who had entered the room, but half a dozen persons—a whole doleful and disappointed family coming upon an unsympathetic crew convulsed with hilarity.

And then he shook his head sadly.

“And these are the people who have just heard that I have been taking the nauseous waters of Tunbridge Wells for a whole fortnight,” and there was a break in his voice. “Oh, Friendship, art thou but a name? Oh, Sympathy, art thou but a mask? Is the world of sentiment nothing more than a world of shadows? Have all the sweet springs of compassion dried up, leaving us nothing but the cataracts of chalybeate to nauseate the palate?”

He looked round once more, and putting the tips of his fingers together, glanced sadly up to the ceiling, then sighed and turned as if to leave the room.

“Nay, sir,” cried Dr. Burney, “I do not believe that the chalybeate cataracts still flow: 'tis my firm belief, from the expression of your face, that you have swallowed the whole spring—the Wells of Tunbridge must have been dried up by you before you left—your face betrays you. I vow that so chalybeate an expression could not be attained by lesser means.”

“Sir, you do me honour, and you have a larger faith in me than my own physician,” said the little man, brightening up somewhat. “Would you believe that he had the effrontery to accuse me of shirking the hourly pailful that he prescribed for me?”

“He had not seen you as we have, Mr. Garrick,” said Dr. Burney.

“He accused me of spending my days making matches and making mischief in the Assembly Rooms and only taking the waters by sips—me, sir, that have so vivid a memory of Mr. Pope's immortal lines:

> A little sipping is a dangerous tiling,
> Drink deep or taste not the chalybeate spring!”

“You were traduced, my friend—but tell us of the matches and the mischief and we shall be the more firmly convinced of your integrity.”

“Nay, sir; I give you my word that 'twas but the simplest of matches—not by any means of the sort that yonder desperado fresh from the South Seas applies to the touch-hole of one of his horrible ten-pounders when the enemy's frigate has to be sunk—nay, a simple little match with no more powder for it to burn than may be found on the wig of a gentleman of fifty-two and on the face of a lady of forty-five—the one a gay bachelor, t'other a ripe widow—' made for one another,' said I; and where was the mischief in that? And if I ventured to broach the subject of the appropriateness of the union of the twain, and to boast under the inspiring influence of the chalybeate spring that I could bring it about, is there anyone that will hint that I was not acting out of pure good nature and a desire to make two worthy folk happy—as happy as marriage can make any two——-”

“Give us their names, sir, and let us judge on that basis,” said Dr. Bumey.

“I have no desire to withhold them, my dear Doctor; for I want you to back me up, and I am sure that—oh, Lord! here comes the man himself. For the love of heaven, back me up, Doctor, and all will be well.”

“Nay, I will not be dragged by the hair of the head into any of your plots, my friend,” cried Burney. “Nay, not I. I have some reputation to maintain, good friend Garrick; you must play alone the part of Puck that you have chosen for yourself this many a year. Think not that you will induce me to study the character under you, and so thus——-”

The manservant threw open the door of the room, announcing:

“Mr. Kendal to wait upon you, sir.”

But by the time a small and rather rotund gentleman had been ushered into the room, Mr. Garrick was apparently engaged in an animated conversation with Miss Burney on the subject of the table-cover at which she was working.

CHAPTER II

THE visitor walked with the short strut of the man who at least does not underrate his own importance in the world. But he suggested just at the moment the man who is extremely nervous lest he may not appear perfectly selfpossessed. There was an air of bustle about him as he strutted into the room, saying:

“Dr. Burney, I am your servant, sir. I have done myself the honour to visit you on a rather important piece of business.”

“Sir, you have conferred honour upon me,” said Dr. Burney.

Then the gentleman seemed to become aware for the first time that there were other people in the room; but it was with an air of reluctance that he felt called on to greet the others.

“Mrs. Burney, I think,” he said, bowing to that lady, “and her estimable family, I doubt not. Have I not had the privilege of meeting Mrs. Burney at the house of—of my friend—my esteemed friend, Mrs. Barlowe? And this gentleman of the Fleet—ha, to be sure I have heard that there was a Lieutenant Burney of the Navy! And—gracious heavens! Mr. Garrick!”

Mr. Garrick had revealed himself from the recesses of Miss Burney's work-basket. He, at any rate, was sufficiently self-possessed to pretend to be vastly surprised. He raised both his hands, crying:

“Is it possible that this is Mr. Kendal? But surely I left you at the Wells no later than—now was it not the night before last? You were the cynosure of the Assembly Rooms, sir, if I may make bold to say so. But I could not look for you to pay attention to a poor actor when you were receiving the attentions of the young, and, may I add without offence, the fair? But no, sir; you will not find that I am the one to tell tales out of school, though I doubt not you have received the congratulations of——”

“There you go, sir, just the same as the rest of them!” cried the visitor. “Congratulations! felicitations! smiles of deep meaning from the ladies, digs in the ribs with suggestive winks from the gentlemen—people whose names I could not recall—whom I'll swear I had never spoken to in my life—that is why I left the Wells as hastily as if a tipstaff had been after me—that is why I am here this morning, after posting every inch of the way, to consult Dr. Burney as to my position.”

“I protest, sir, that I do not quite take you,” said Mr. Garrick, with the most puzzled expression on his face that ever man wore. “Surely, sir, your position as a man of honour is the most enviable one possible to imagine! Mrs. Nash——”

“There you blurt out the name, Mr. Garrick, and that is what I had no intention of doing, even when laying my case before Dr. Burney, who is a man of the world, and whom I trust to advise me what course I should pursue.”

“I ask your pardon, sir,” said Mr. Garrick humbly; “but if the course you mean to pursue has aught to do with the pursuit of so charming a lady, and a widow to boot——”

“How in the name of all that's reasonable did that gossip get about?” cried the visitor. “I give you my word that I have not been pursuing the lady—I met her at the Wells for the first time a fortnight ago—pursuit indeed!”

“Nay, sir, I did not suggest that the pursuit was on your part,” said Garrick in a tone of irresistible flattery. “But 'tis well known that as an object of pursuit of the fair ones, the name of Mr. Kendal has been for ten years past acknowledged without a peer.”

The gentleman held up a deprecating hand, but the smile that was on his face more than neutralized his suggestion.

“Nay, Mr. Garrick, I am but a simple country gentleman,” he cried. “To be sure, I have been singled out more than once for favours that might have turned the head of an ordinary mortal—one of them had a fortune and was the toast of the district; another——”

“If you will excuse me, gentlemen, the Miss Burneys and myself will take our leave of you: we have household matters in our hands,” said Mrs. Burney, making a sign to Fanny and her sister, and going toward the door.

“Have I said too much, madam? If so, I pray of you to keep my secret,” cried the visitor. “The truth is that I have confidence in the advice of Dr. Burney as a man of the world.”

“I fear that to be a man of the world is to be of the flesh and the devil as well,” said Dr. Burney.

“Augmented qualifications for giving advice on an affair of the Wells,” said Garrick slyly to the naval lieutenant.

“You will not forget, Doctor, that Mr. Thrale's carriage is appointed to call for you within the hour,” said Mrs. Burney over her shoulder as she left the room.

Fanny and her sister were able to restrain themselves for the few minutes necessary to fly up the narrow stairs, but the droll glance that Mr. Garrick had given them as they followed their mother, wellnigh made them disgrace themselves by bursting out within the hearing of their father's visitor. But when they reached

the parlour at the head of the stairs and had thrown themselves in a paroxysm of laughter on the sofa, Mrs. Burney reproved them with some gravity.

“This is an instance, if one were needed, of the unsettling influence of Mr. Garrick,” she said. “He has plainly been making a fool of that conceited gentleman, and it seems quite likely that he will persuade your father to back him up.”

“I do not think that Mr. Garrick could improve greatly upon Nature's handiwork in regard to that poor Mr. Kendal,” said Fanny. “But what would life be without Mr. Garrick?”

“It would be more real, I trust,” said her stepmother. “He would have us believe that life is a comedy, and that human beings are like the puppets which Mr. Foote put on his stage for the diversion of the town a few years ago.”

Fanny Burney became grave; the longer she was living in the world, the more impressed was she becoming with the idea that life was a puppet-show; only when the puppets began to dance on their wires in a draught of wind from another world the real comedy began. She felt that as an interpreter of life Mr. Garrick had no equal on the stage or off. On the stage he could do no more than interpret other people's notions of life, and these, except in the case of Shakespeare, were, she thought, mostly feeble; but when he was off the stage—well, Sir Joshua Reynolds had told her what that queer person, Dr. Goldsmith, had written about Garrick—the truest criticism Garrick had ever received: “'Twas only that when he was off he was acting.” She knew what she herself owed to Garrick from the time she was nine years old, when he had accustomed her and her sister to look for him at their house almost daily; she knew that whatever sense of comedy she possessed—and she looked on it as a precious possession—was to be attributed to the visits of Garrick. Every time she looked at her carefully locked desk in that room at the top of the house in St. Martin's Street, which had once been Sir Isaac Newton's observatory, she felt that without the tuition in comedy that she had received at the hands of Mr. Garrick, the contents of that desk would have been very different. Her stepmother, however, had no information on this point; she had lived all her life among the good tradespeople of Lynn, and had known nothing of Mr. Garrick until Dr. Burney had married her and brought her to look after his children, which Fanny knew she had done faithfully, according to her lights, in London.

Fanny kept silent on the subject of Mr. Garrick's fooling, while Mrs. Burney bent with great gravity over the cutting out of a pinafore for Fanny's little niece—also a Burney; and every now and again there came from the closed room downstairs the sound of the insisting voice of the visitor. She hoped that Mr. Garrick would re-enact the scene for her; she had confidence that it would lose nothing by its being re-enacted by Mr. Garrick.

CHAPTER III

I SUPPOSE that I must e'en follow in the wake of the womenkind,” said Lieutenant Burney, making an extremely slow move in the direction of the door, when the door had been closed upon his stepmother and his sisters.

“Is there any need?” asked Garrick. “It seems to me that in such a case as this which Mr. Kendal promises to propound to your father, His Majesty's Navy should be represented. In all matters bearing upon a delicate *affaire de cour* surely a naval man should be present to act as assessor.”

'Mr. Kendal looked puzzled.

“I fail to take your meaning, sir,” said he, after a pause; he was still rubbing his chin with a fore-finger, when Garrick cried:

“Oh, sir, surely the advantage of the counsel of an officer trained to navigate femininity in the shape of a ship, is apparent: a ship, even though a three-decker ready to fire a broadside of a hundred guns, is invariably alluded to as 'she,'” said he, airily.

“Such an one must surely be the most formidable piece of femininity in the world,” said Mr. Kendal.

“By no means,” said Garrick. “During my career as the manager of a playhouse I have had to face worse. Still, the training of a naval officer in dealing with feminine craft—at times off a lee shore, and often during a storm at sea—nothing to be compared to the tempests in our green-room—is certain to be of value. You will stay, Lieutenant Burney, if it please you.”

“I should be most unwilling to obtrude upon your council, sir,” said young Burney, “unless you are convinced that my humble services——”

“You have been among the savages of the South Seas, and you are acquainted with all the rules of chasing and capturing prizes, all of the feminine gender—I allude to your sloops and frigates and catamarans—I take it for granted that a catamaran is as feminine in its ways as any wherry that floats,” cried Garrick. Then he turned to their visitor, who was looking more puzzled than ever.

“You may reckon yourself fortunate in the presence of our young friend, sir,” he said. “So far as I can gather this is a case of chase, with a possible capture of a prize. I venture to think that in these days a gentleman of family and fortune, like yourself, is something of a prize, Mr. Kendal.” This was language that contained nothing to puzzle anyone, the visitor perceived. His face brightened, and he waved young Burney to a seat.

“I take it that Mr. Garrick knows what he is talking about,” he said. “And though it was truly your father to whom I came for counsel, I doubt not that you will take my part, should the worst come to the worst.”

“Which means, should the lady come to the gentleman, Mr. Burney,” said Garrick.

“Pay out your yarn, sir: I gather that you are still to the windward of your enemy, and that is the position which the books tell us we should manoeuvre for,” cried the nautical assessor.

Dr. Burney sat silently by, he had no mind to join in the fooling of the others. Dr. Burney had never in his life lost a sense of his own dignity. He had been a church organist for thirty years, and no man who has had such an experience of the control of an instrument of such superlative dignity could be otherwise than dignified. He had never once run off on a keyboard a single phrase of “The Beggar's Opera.” Even Handel's “Ruddier than the Cherry,” with Mr. Gay's ticklish rhymed line about “Kidlings blithe and merry,” he only played apologetically, allowing it to be clearly understood that Mr. Handel and Mr. Gay divided between them the responsibility for so frivolous a measure.

He remained dignified and silent while Garrick and James carried on their fooling. Only a short time before he had occasion to reprove the lack of dignity on the part of his important patroness, Mrs. Thrale, the wife of the wealthy brewer, in having put herself behind Signor Piozzi while he was singing a sentimental canzone and mimicked his southern fervour of expression. Mrs. Thrale had taken his reproof in good part at the time; but no one—least of all Mrs. Thrale herself—could have foreseen that her contrition should extend so far as to cause her to marry the singer on the death of Mr. Thrale.

“To be brief, sir,” said Mr. Kendal, addressing, not Dr. Burney, whom he had come to consult, but Mr. Garrick, who had shown himself to be much more sympathetic. “To be brief, I had gone to the Wells as my custom has been for the past twenty years. I went honestly to drink the waters, not making it an excuse, as so many do, for indulging in the gaieties, or, I may add, the intrigues, of the Assembly Rooms. I was civil, as I hoped, to everyone, but, I give you my word, no more so to Mrs. Nash than any other lady.”

“I do not doubt that you believe this, sir,” said Garrick, with an indulgent wave of the hand; “but when a lady has eyes only for one gentleman, she is apt to place a construction upon the simplest of his civilities beyond that assigned to it by ordinary people; but pray proceed, sir. I will only add that it was quite well known at the Wells that the lady regarded you with the tenderest of emotions. Had she not boldly said to Lady———— no; I dare not mention her name; but her ladyship is invariably what the Italians term *simpatica* in regard to the tender affairs of her sisters—and it was to her that Mrs. Nash confided her secret—referring to you as bearing a striking resemblance to the Apollo Belvedere, hoping that her doing so would not cause anyone to accuse her of Pagan leanings.”

“Is it possible! The poor lady! poor lady! But I was not to blame. I can justly acquit myself of all blame in this unhappy affair,” said Mr. Kendal.

“You are quite right, sir; is it a man's fault that he should bear a striking likeness to the Apollo—I doubt not that the resemblance has caused you some annoyance at various times of your life, Mr. Kendal,” said Garrick.

“Never, sir, never—at least——” he took a step to one side that allowed of his having a full-length view of his reflection in the narrow mirror that filled up the space between the windows; and the result of his scrutiny of the picture was certainly not displeasing to him. He boldly put forward a leg, and then quite unconscious, as anyone could see, struck an attitude, though not quite that of the Apollo Belvedere. Then he smirked.

“A leg like yours, Mr. Kendal, to say nothing of the poise of your head, is a great responsibility,” said Garrick seriously. “The poor lady!—poor ladies!—I confess that I have heard of others. And she acknowledged to you that—that—oh, that most delicate of secrets!”

“Never to me, sir—never in my hearing, I give you my word,” cried the man emphatically. “Nay, I did not so much as suspect it. The first intimation that I had of the matter was when, on Monday morning last—only three days ago—Captain Kelly—the boisterous Irishman—clapt me on the shoulder and almost shouted out his congratulations in my ear. When I forced him to mention the name of the lady, he ridiculed my denial—his forefinger in my ribs—painful as well as undignified. Who is Captain Kelly, that he should subject me to his familiarities? But if he was undignified, I flatter myself that I was not so. 'Sir, you presume,' I said, and walked on, leaving this vulgar fellow roaring with laughter.”

“Psha! Kelly is a nobody,” said Garrick. “You should not have allowed yourself to be discomposed by such as he.”

“Nor did I,” cried the other. “But what was I to think when I had advanced no more than a dozen paces, and found my hand grasped warmly by Sir John Dingle?—you know him, Mr. Garrick—I have seen him in your company—more congratulations—the same attitude, sir. And then up marches Mr. Sheridan—leaving his handsome wife—ah, I fear that I joined with all Bath in being in love with the lovely Miss Linley—and Mr. Sheridan was wellnigh affronted at my denial. But that was not all. Up comes Mrs. Cholmondeley in her chair and tapped for the men to set her down when she saw me—up went the roof and up went her head, with a shrill cry of 'Kendal, you rogue! to tell everyone at the Wells save only myself that Benedick is to be a married man!' And before she had finished her ridicule of my denial, up struts Mrs. Thrale, her footman behind her with her spaniel, and down she sinks in a curtsey, fitted only for a special night in the Rooms, and her 'Happy man!' came with a flick of her fan; and she, too, named Mrs. Nash! And that was not the last—I saw them hurrying up to me from all sides—ladies with smiles, and gentlemen with smirks—fingers twitching for my ribs—down they flowed upon me! I ask you, Lieutenant Burney, as a naval gentleman, and I am glad to have the opportunity of hearing your opinion—I ask you, if I was not justified in turning about and hastening away—what you nautical gentlemen term 'cutting my cable '?”

“Indeed, sir; if I could believe that you gave the lady no encouragement, I would say that—that—but no one will convince me that upon some occasion—it may be forgotten by you—such men of fashion as yourself soon forget these things, I have heard, though the unhappy lady treasures them as golden memories—I say upon some occasion you may have given the Widow Nash encouragement. You have your reputation as a sly rogue to maintain, Mr. Kendal,” said young Burney gravely, as though he were a lawyer being seriously consulted.

“Fore Gad, sir, I gave her no encouragement,” cried Mr. Kendal. “I have ever been most cautious, I swear.”

“Then the greater shame for you, sir,” said Garrick.

The man whom he addressed looked in amazement first at Garrick, then at Lieutenant Burney—Dr. Burney,

whom he had come to consult, was smiling quite unnoticed in a corner. His part, apparently, was no more than that of the looker-on at a comedy. His presence was ignored by the others.

“The more shame—the more——” began the visitor. “I protest that I scarcely take your meaning, Mr. Garrick.”

“My meaning is plain, sir,” said Garrick firmly, almost sternly. “I affirm that it lay with you, when you perceived that the lady was so deeply enamoured of you——”

“But I did not perceive it—you have my word for it.”

“Ah, sir,” said Garrick, with the shrug of a Frenchman, which he had studied for some months in Paris—Mr. Garrick and Lord Chesterfield had alone mastered the art. “Ah, sir, we are all men of the world here. 'Twere idle for you to pretend that a gentleman with the figure of the Belvedere Apollo and the leg of—of——” he turned to young Burney— “You have seen the proud-stepping figure-heads of many ships of the line, Mr. Burney,” he said; “prithee help me out in my search for—for—the name I am in search of.”

“H'm, let me see—something wooden with a leg to be proud of?” said the naval gentleman, considering the matter very earnestly.

“Zounds, sir, I did not make it a condition that it should be a wooden leg,” cried Garrick.

“I have seen more than one Admiral of the Fleet mighty proud of a wooden leg, sir,” said Burney. “But this is beside the question, which I take to be the responsibility of our good friend here—I hope I don't presume, Mr. Kendal—for kindling, albeit unconsciously, so far as he was concerned—that sacred flame in the breast of—to name only one out of a score—the lady whose name he mentioned.”

“You are with me heart and soul, as I felt sure you would be, Mr. Burney; as a naval officer of judgment and experience,” cried Garrick, “and so, sir—” he turned to their visitor— “I cannot doubt that you will comport yourself as a gentleman of honour in this affair. Do not allow your yielding to the natural impulse to run away to weigh too heavily upon you. If your act should cause you to be referred to with reprobation, not to say scorn, by the ladies or gentlemen of fashion who are certain to espouse the cause of the lady, your subsequent conduct will show them that they mistook your character. And I promise you that should you receive a challenge from any of the lady's admirers—those whose prayers she rejected because her heart was set on a gentleman who was worthy of her choice—I think you can afford to ignore them, having won the prize. Ah, sir, is there not a poet who says that every man that lives has a good angel and a bad one contending for dominion over him? That is the truth, Mr. Kendal, and I see that your good angel is none other than the lady whose name I reckon too sacred to pass our lips at such a time as this. Ah, sir, think of her, and let your mind go back to the days of your happy boyhood, and say if the mother at whose knees you knelt did not resemble her. The affection of a son for his mother—let that plead for the lady who esteems you with more than a mother's love.”

He had laid his hand on the poor gentleman's shoulder, and was looking into his face, while the tears stood in his eyes, and his voice broke more than once.

And there sat Dr. Burney wiping his eyes, and Lieutenant Burney blubbering away like any child—the two accessories to the actor's farce could not avoid yielding to the-influence of his unparalleled art. Though they were in his secret, he made fools of them as easily as he made a fool of the poor gentleman who was presumably his victim. And they had no feeling of being ashamed of yielding to his powers. He could do anything that he pleased with them. He could do anything he pleased with the multitudes before whom he acted. He was the master of their emotions for the time being. He played upon their passions as though every passion was a puppet and the strings in his own hands.

CHAPTER IV

THE scene ended by Mr. Garrick's victim groping through his tears for Mr. Garrick's hand. He grasped it emotionally, and though for some moments he was too greatly overcome to be able to utter a word, yet at last he managed to blurt out with affecting incoherence a few phrases.

“Say no more—say no more, sir,” he muttered. “I have a heart—a heart! I give you my word, whether you believe me or not, that I had no notion—but you have shown me what 'tis to be a woman. Oh, sir, there is no sweeter sex in the world! Deception! how a man's own heart may deceive him—ay, up to a certain point—but then—ah, you have taught me—but are you sure that the lady—what—have we not been going ahead too fast? What—what; are you convinced?”

“You may take my word for it, sir,” replied Garrick. “There are signs that all who run may read. What, do you suppose that all those persons of quality whose names you mentioned just now as having offered you their felicitations—do you suppose that they could all be in error?”

“Of course not—they must have seen—well, more than I saw,” said the man. “Matrimony! Lud! if an angel had come down to tell me that I should be contemplating such a change of life—and at my time of life too!—I should have——”

“What an angel may fail to convince a man of, a woman may succeed in doing, Mr. Kendal,” said Garrick sententiously. “But do not talk of your time of life as if you were an old or even a middle-aged man, sir. To do so were to make Dr. Burney and myself feel patriarchs.”

The mention of Dr. Burney seemed to cause the man to recollect how it was he came to be in Dr. Burney's house. He turned to Burney, saying:

“Dear sir, I pray that you will look on my visit with lenient eyes. I admit that I came hitherto be advised by you—my friend, Mr. Fulke Greville, holds your opinion in the highest esteem, as do I, sir; and it was actually on my mind to ask you if you thought it would be wiser for me to go abroad for a year or two, or simply to seek some place of retirement at home—say, Cornwall or the Hebrides—I gather from the account of Dr. Johnson's tour thither that there are many places difficult of access in the Hebrides—that was on my mind, Doctor, I blush to acknowledge, so greatly overcome was I by what had happened at the Wells.”

“Ah, with what great ease a man may slam the door that shuts out happiness from his life for evermore!” remarked Garrick.

“Even now—even now I feel timid,” said Mr. Kendal thoughtfully, and, when he had found which pocket his handkerchief was in, wiping some dew from his brow. “The truth is, Doctor, that I have allowed some people to assume that I am but forty-seven years old, while as a matter of fact I have been forty-eight for some time.”

“For some years?” asked young Burney, who did not know when he should keep silence.

“For some months, sir—only for some months, I give you my word.”

“Your deception in this matter could only have added to your reputation for accuracy,” said Garrick coolly. “For I vow that were you to confess that you were forty-eight, you would find none to believe you.”

The gentleman's eyes twinkled, he pursed out his lips, and once again manoeuvred to get a full-length view of himself in the long mirror. He put out his right leg and assumed the attitude of a dancing master giving the *pas* for the *minuet de cour*.

“Well, well,” he cried, “if that be your opinion—and I happen to know that 'tis shared by others—it might not be unwise to allow the assumption, erroneous though it be, to continue. We will not undeceive the good folk. And you do not think that a bachelor of forty-eight—What is the name of that play of Mr. Sheridan's that took the town a year ago?—ah, *The School for Scandal*—you are sure that our friends will not call me—What was the gentleman's name?”

“No one who knows how excellent are your principles will think of you either as Charles or Joseph, Mr. Kendal,” said Garrick.

“No, no; but the one who was in my mind was neither of the brothers. I was thinking of—was it not Sir Peter Teazle?”

Garrick as well as Burney laughed heartily, for the man at that moment suggested by his attitude and expression the Sir Peter Teazle of Kina, the actor.

“Make your mind easy on that score, sir,” said Dr. Burney. “It is not your purpose to wed so skittish a young person as Lady Teazle. That was where Sir Peter showed his folly.”

“No, no; Mrs. Nash is more mature, certainly, than Mrs. Abington looked in the part,” said Mr. Kendal confidently, and Lieutenant Burney was about to agree with him boisterously, but Garrick did not give him a chance.

“There is none that will not commend your choice, Mr. Kendal—ay, sir, and look on you with envy as well,” he cried.

“There can be no doubt about it,” said Mr. Kendal doubtfully. “The widow Nash is a monstrous fine woman.”

“Monstrous, I doubt not,” put in young Burney, now that he had the chance.

“All that I am uneasy about is the interpretation that she may put upon your sudden flight,” said Garrick. “You have, you will readily allow, sir, placed her in a somewhat difficult position at the Wells. While everyone who is anyone has been offering you congratulations upon the match, and a double portion to the lady, strange inquiries may be made as to your disappearance from the Wells; and she may not be able to give a satisfactory explanation at a moment's notice.”

“Egad! I never thought of that, sir,” said Mr. Kendal, after a pause. “I fear that I have placed her in a very awkward position.”

“Ay, sir; and the consequences may be that she will be snapped up by some adventurous person before you can put your fate to the test,” said the naval man, raising a warning finger. “I have heard of ladies throwing themselves into the arms of the next comer out of sheer chagrin at being disappointed by the man on whom they had set their affections.”

“That is a possibility that should not be neglected,” said Garrick. “But it was only on Monday that you fled. By rapid posting you may yet prevent such a calamity.”

He was beginning to tire of his game now that he had succeeded so well in it and so easily. The fooling of the man who had so completely succumbed to his art had no further interest for him. He only wanted to get rid of him. He was as capricious and as fickle as a child over the toys of its nursery.

“I shall lose no moment, be assured,” said Mr. Kendal. “I may still be in time. My hope in this direction is increased when I remember that the lady has been a widow for some years—to be exact, without being uncomplimentary, nine years. I remember when Mr. Nash died. 'Twas of pleurisy.”

“Do not reckon too confidently on that, sir,” said young Burney. “Nine years have not passed since she faced the company at the Wells, every one of which was surely pointing at her and asking in mute eloquence, 'What has become of Mr. Kendal?' But by posting without delay you may yet retrieve your error. Still, I confess to you that I have known of a lady who, out of sheer impatience at the delay of a lover whom she had hoped to espouse, married his rival after the lapse of twenty-four hours—ay, and when the belated gentleman arrived just after the ceremony, he furnished the wedding party with a succulent feast. She was the Queen of one of the islands that we visited in the company of Captain Cook, and the cockswain of our galley kept the pickled hand of the belated lover for many a day—the very hand which he had designed to offer the lady.”

“This simple and affecting narrative proves more eloquently than any phrases of mine could possibly do how a man may miss the happiness of his life by a hair's breadth,” said Garrick. “And the lesson will not be lost upon you, I am certain, sir.”

“Lud, Mr. Garrick, you do not mean to suggest that——”

“That the lady may make a meal off you on your late return, sir? Nay, Mr. Kendal. The Wells are still the Wells, not the South Seas; but on the whole I am disposed to believe that the scheme of revenge of the woman scorned is fiercer, though perhaps not, at first sight, so primeval, in the region of Chalybeate Waters than in a cannibal island of the South Seas. Therefore—there is no time to be lost. Fly to your charmer, sir, and throw yourself at her feet. She may be thinking over some punishment for your having placed her in a false position for some days; but do not mind that. You can always console yourself with the reflection that a rod in pickle is much more satisfactory than a hand in pickle. Fly, my dear friend, fly; every moment is precious. Take my word for it, joy awaits you at the end of your journey.”

“'Journeys end in lovers meeting,'” remarked Dr. Burney, with a slight suggestion of the setting of the words of the lyric by his old master, Dr. Arne.

At this moment a servant entered the room.

“The Streatham carriage is at the door, sir,” he announced.

Dr. Burney rose from his chair.

“I am forced to leave you, sir,” he said to Mr. Kendal. “But really there is naught further to consult on at present, and I know that you are impatient—it is but natural—to fly to the side of your charmer.”

“I am all impatience, sir; but with what words can I express my obligation to you, Doctor, for the benefit of your counsel?” cried Mr. Kendal.

Dr. Burney smiled.

“Nay, dear sir, I am but the lessee of the theatre where the comedy has been played,” said he; and he had good reason for feeling that he had defined with accuracy the position that he occupied. But Mr. Kendal was thinking too much about himself and the position he occupied to appreciate such *nuances*.

“I knew that I was safe in coming to a friend of Mr. Greville,” he said. “I care not if, as you suggest, you have become Mr. Garrick's successor at Drury Lane, though I thought that Mr. Sheridan——”

“Zounds, sir, you are never going to wait to discuss theatre matters,” cried Garrick. “Dr. Burney has been exercising his powers of oratory in vain upon you for this half hour if you tarry even to thank him. Post, sir, post at once to Tunbridge Wells, and send Dr. Burney your thanks when you have put the momentous question to the lady. Go, sir, without the pause of a moment, and good luck attend you.”

“Good luck attend you! Keep up your heart, sir: the lady may refuse you after all,” said young Burney; but the poor gentleman who was being hurried away was too much flurried to be able to grasp the young man's innuendo, though one could see by the look that came to his face that he had an uneasy impression that Lieutenant Burney's good wishes had not been happily expressed. The great thing, however, was that he was at the other side of the door, calling out his obligations to everyone, and striving to shake hands with them all at once and yet preserve the security of his hat, which he had tucked under his arm. So excited was he that he was only restrained at the last moment from mounting the Thrales' carriage which was awaiting Dr. Burney, and even when his mistake was explained to him, he took off his hat to the splendid footman who had guarded the door of the vehicle.

In the room where the comedy had been played, Garrick and Lieutenant Burney had thrown themselves into chairs with roars of laughter, when Dr. Burney returned from the hall, carrying his hat and cane. He was scarcely smiling.

“You have played a pretty prank upon an inoffensive gentleman, the pair of you!” said he. “I am ashamed that my house has been used by you for so base a purpose! The poor gentleman!”

“Psha! my dear Doctor, make your mind easy; the lady will teach that coxcomb a lesson that will be of advantage to him for the rest of his life,” said Garrick. “He has been the laughingstock of the Wells for the past fortnight, and no one laughed louder than the Widow Nash. She will bundle him out of her presence before he has had time to rise from his marrow-bones—he does not find the process a rapid one, I assure you. Oh, he was her *bete noire* even when he was most civil to her.”

“And it was you who concocted that plot of getting all your friends—Mrs. Cholmondeley, Mrs. Thrale and the rest—to make a fool of him, driving him away from the Wells to encounter a more irresistible pair of mocking demons in this room!” said Burney. “You cannot deny it, my friend, I know your tricks but too well.”

“I swear to you that I had no hope of encountering him in this house, my dear Doctor,” said Garrick. “I give you my word that I had laid my plans quite differently. My plot was a far more elaborate one, and Polly Cholmondeley had agreed to take part in it, as well as Dick Sheridan. They will be disappointed to learn that it has miscarried. Who could guess that he should come to you of all men in the world, Doctor? He has never been one of your intimates.”

“Only when I was living with Mr. Greville had we more than a superficial acquaintance,” replied Burney. “But that does not make me the less ashamed of having lent myself to your nefarious project. And you, James, you threw yourself with gusto into the fooling of the unhappy man—and woman too—and woman too, I repeat.”

“Pray do not distress yourself on her account, Doctor. She will send him off with a flea in his ear by to-morrow night, and she will take care to pose as the insulted widow of Mr. Nash, whose memory is dear to her,” said Garrick.

“Will she, indeed?” said Burney. “David Garrick, you are the greatest actor that has ever lived in England—probably in the world—but you are a poor comedian compared with such as are at work upon our daily life: we call them Circumstance, and Accident, and Coincidence. You know the couplet, I doubt not:

> ' Men are the sport of circumstances when
> The circumstances seem the sport of men.'

You have sounded the depths of human impulses, so far as your plummet allows you, and womankind seems

to you an open book——”

“An illuminated missal, with the prayers done in gold and the Lessons for the day in the most roseate tint, Doctor.”

“And the Responses all of a kind—the same in one book as another? But I make bold to believe, my friend, that every woman is a separate volume, of which only one copy has been printed; and, moreover, that every separate volume of woman is sealed, so that anyone who fancies he knows all that is bound up between the covers, when he has only glanced at the binding, makes a mistake.”

“Admirably put, sir, and, I vow, with fine philosophy,” said Garrick. “But what imports this nomination of a woman at the present moment, Doctor?”

“Its import is that you are over sanguine in your assurance that Mrs. Nash, widow, will reject Mr. Kendal, bachelor, when he offers her his hand after a dusty journey; and so good day to you, David Garrick, and I pray you to spend the rest of the day in the study of the history of those women who have opened the leaves of their lives a little way before the eyes of mankind.”

He had left the room and was within the waiting carriage and driving away before his son remarked:

“Mr. Garrick, it seems to me that my good father has spoken the wisest words that you or I have heard to-day or for many a day.”

“And i' faith, James, it seems to me that that remark of yours is the second wisest that has been uttered in this room,” said Garrick.

He went away without a further word—without even taking his leave of the two young women and their stepmother, who herself had been a widow before she had married Dr. Burney. He had once believed that nothing a woman—young or old—could do would surprise him; for some reason or other he was not now quite so confident as he had been. But he certainly did not think that one of the greatest surprises of the century should be due to the demure young woman who seemed the commonplace daughter of a very ordinary household, and who at the moment of his departure was darning a small hole in a kitchen table-cloth, under the superintendence of her admirable stepmother.

CHAPTER V

IN the course of the morning Esther, the married daughter of the Bumey family, called at the house in St. Martin's Street. Esther, or as she was usually alluded to by her sisters, Hetty or Hettina, was handsome and accomplished. She had been married for some years to her cousin, Charles Rousseau Burney, who was a musician, and they lived and enjoyed living in an atmosphere of music. Her father took care that she was never likely to be asphyxiated; their atmosphere would never become attenuated so long as they lived, as they did, close to St. Martin's Street. He was well aware of the fact that his Hetty's duets with her husband —“matrimonial duets” they were called by Fanny in some of her letters—and also with her sister Charlotte, served to attract many distinguished visitors and profitable patrons to his house; he never forgot that profitable patrons and patronesses are always attracted by distinguished visitors. When one finds oneself in the company of distinguished people, one naturally feels a distinguished person also.

Moreover, Dr. Burney knew perfectly well that when ambitious patrons and patronesses were made aware of the success which he had achieved in respect of his daughters, they were all ready to implore of him to spare some of his valuable time to give lessons to themselves, seeing no reason why, with his assistance, they should not reach the level of his two musical daughters. He conducted his teaching on the principle which brings fortunes to the Parisian modiste, who takes good care that her mannequins are good-looking and of a fine figure, knowing that the visitors to the showrooms have no doubt, no matter how little Nature has done for their own features or figures, that in the robes of the mannequins they will appear equally fascinating.

The adoption of this system in the Burney household operated extremely well, and Dr. Burney had for several years enjoyed the proceeds of his cultivation of the musical tastes of the most influential clientèle in London. In addition, the greatest singers in Europe, knowing that there was always an influential *assistance* to be found at Dr. Burney's little concerts in St. Martin's Street, were greatly pleased to contribute to the entertainment, for love, what they were in the habit of receiving large sums for from an impresario. Those Italian operatic artists most notorious for the extravagance of their demands when appearing in public, were pushing each other aside, so to speak, to be allowed to sing at Dr. Burney's, and really upon more than one occasion the contest between the generosity of a pair of the most distinguished of these singers must have been somewhat embarrassing to Dr. Burney. They were clearly singing against each other; and one of them, who invariably received fifty guineas for every contribution she made to a programme in public, insisted on singing no fewer than five songs, “all for love” (and to prove her superiority to her rival), upon a certain occasion at the Burneys'; so that really the little company ran a chance of being suffocated beneath the burden of flowers, as it were—the never-ending *fioriture* of these generous artists—and Dr. Burney found himself in the position of the lion-tamer who runs a chance of being overwhelmed by the caresses of the carnivora who rush to lick his hands.

The result of all this was extremely gratifying, and eminently profitable. Had Dr. Burney not been a great musician and shown by the publication of the first volume of the greatest History of Music the world had yet received, that he was worthy of being placed in the foremost ranks of scientific musicians, he would have run a chance of being placed only a little higher than the musical Cornelys of Soho Square, who gave their concerts, and entertained their friends, and made quite a reputation for some years before bankruptcy

overtook them and the precincts of the Fleet became their headquarters.

And now the beautiful Esther Burney was toying with the contents of her sister Fanny's work-basket, talking about her husband and his prospects, and inquiring what Mr. Garrick and James had to talk about in the room downstairs.

“Pray speak in French to Fanny,” said Mrs. Burney. “I cannot get Lottie and Susan to do so as frequently as I could wish. You must remember that poor Fanny has had none of your advantages, and I do not want her to be talked of as the dunce of the family. She really is not a dunce, you know; in spite of her bad sight she really has done some very pretty sewing.”

“I have seen it,” said Esther. “She works very neatly—more neatly than any of us.”

Fanny blushed and smiled her thanks to her sister for the compliment.

“What else is there left for me to do but to give all my attention to my needle?” she said. “I constantly feel that I am the dunce of the family—you are all so clever.”

“It is well for many families that they include one useful member,” said her stepmother in a way that suggested her complete agreement with the girl's confession that she was the dunce of the family. A mother's acknowledgment that a girl is either useful or good-natured is practically an announcement that she is neither pretty nor accomplished.

“And Fanny has many friends,” continued Mrs. Burney indulgently.

“Which shows how kind people are, even to a dunce,” said Fanny, not bitterly, but quite good-humouredly.

“But I am not sure that she should spend so much of her time writing to Mr. Crisp,” said the elder Mrs. Burney to the younger.

“Oh, poor Daddy Crisp!” cried Fanny. “Pray, mother, do not cut him off from his weekly budget of news. If I fail to send him a letter he is really disconsolate. 'Tis my letters that keep him still in touch with the life of the town.”

“Well, well, my dear Fanny, I shall not deprive you of your Daddy Crisp,” said her stepmother. “Poor Mr. Crisp must not be left to the tender mercies of Susan or Lottie. He is most hospitable, and his house at Chessington makes a pleasant change for us now and again, and he took a great fancy to you from the first.”

“Daddy Crisp was always Fanny's special friend,” said Esther. “And I am sure that it is good practice for Fanny to write to him.”

“Oh, she has long ago given up that childish nonsense,” cried the mother. “Poor Fanny made a pretty bonfire of her scribblings, and she has shown no weakness in that way since she took my advice in regard to them.”

Fanny was blushing furiously and giving all her attention to her work.

“She has still a sense of the guilt that attaches to the writing of stories, though I am sure that no one in this house remembers it against her,” said Esther with a laugh, as Fanny's blushes increased. “But indeed I had not in my mind Mr. Crisp's advantage to her in this way, but only in regard to her correspondence. She has become quite an expert letter-writer since he induced her to send him her budget, and indeed I think that good letter-writing is as much of an accomplishment in these careless days as good singing—that is ordinary good singing—the good singing that we hear from some of father's pupils—Queenie Thrale, *par exemple!*”

“Your father is a good teacher, but the best teacher in the world cannot endow with a good singing-voice anyone who has not been so gifted by Nature,” said the elder lady. “'Tis somewhat different, to be sure, in regard to correspondence, and I do not doubt that Fanny's practice in writing to good Mr. Crisp will one day cause her to be regarded as one of the best letter-writers in the family, and that is something. It is a ladylike accomplishment, and one that is worth excelling in; it gives innocent pleasure to so many of her friends who live at a distance; and your father can always obtain plenty of franks, Mr. Charmier and Mr. Thrale are very obliging.”

Fanny was a little fidgety while her eldest sister and her stepmother were discussing her in a tone of indulgence which was more humiliating than open reprobation would have been. But she knew that the truth was, that from her earliest years she was looked on as the dunce of the family, and she was so morbidly self-conscious that she was quite ready to accept their estimate of her. The silent member of a musical family soon finds out how she is looked on by the others; not with unkindness—quite the contrary—but only as if she were to be slightly pitied for her deficiency. But she had a secret or two, the treasuring of which in her heart prevented her from having any feeling of humiliation in the presence of her splendid sister, whom all the world sought to attract to their houses, especially when there were guests anxious to be entertained by the sweet singing of a handsome young woman with a very presentable young husband. Fanny had her secrets and cherished them with a fearful joy, for she knew that any day might remove either or both of them, and then there would be nothing left for her in the household but to put her heart into her needlework. But one cannot do needlework without needles, and if she were to put her heart into her work, and if every needle had a point, the result would, she knew, be a good many prickings.

She trusted that she might never be condemned to put her heart into her needlework.

CHAPTER VI

THEN Lieutenant Burney sauntered into the room and greeted Esther; but when Fanny inquired with some eagerness what had been the result of Mr. Garrick's fooling of poor Mr. Kendal, James was by no means so glib or amusing as Fanny expected him to be.

“Psha!” he cried; “that Mr. Kendal is not worth powder and shot—at least not the weight of metal that Mr. Garrick can discharge—not in a broadside—Mr. Garrick is not given to broadsides—they are too clumsy for him—he is like Luke Boscawen, our chief gunner; he had a contempt for what he was used to term a blustering broadside, having a liking only for the working of his little brass swivel. He could do anything that he pleased with his little swivel. 'Ping!' it would go, when he had squinted along the sights, and the object he aimed at half a mile away—sometimes so small that we could scarce see it from our foretop—down it went. Boscawen could do what he pleased with it—the blunt nose of a whale rising to spout a mile away—the stem of a cocoa-nut palm on one of the islands when we were not sure of the natives and there was no time to climb the tree—that is the marksmanship of Mr. Garrick, and your Mr. Kendal was not worthy of an exercise of so much skill.”

“Nobody seems too insignificant to be made a fool of by Mr. Garrick,” said Mrs. Burney. “He is as happy when he has made a gruesome face and frightened a maid with a mop at the doorstep, as when he has stricken us with awe when the ghost enters in *Hamlet*, or when Macbeth declaims of the horror of the curse of sleeplessness that has been cast on him. That is why I said before he arrived that I was not sure that his influence upon you all is for good. He makes one lose one's sense of the right proportions and realities of life. Now is not that so, Hetty? I make no appeal to Fanny, for I know that she has ever been devoted to Mr. Garrick. Is it not true that she was used to frighten poor Lottie before she was ten by showing how Mr. Garrick frowned as the Duke of Gloster?”

“I know that Fanny murdered us all in turn in our beds, assuring us that we were the Princes in the Tower, or some less real characters invented by herself,” said Esther. “But indeed if James tells us that Mr. Garrick's gun practice smashed the cocoa-nut that serves Mr. Kendal as a head, I should not grieve. Tell us what happened, James.”

“Oh, 'twas naught worth words to describe,” said James. “The man came to take counsel of Daddy in regard to a jest that Mr. Garrick had, unknown to his victim, played off upon him, and Mr. Garrick so worked upon him that Daddy had no chance to speak. But Mr. Garrick made fools of us as well, for I give you my word, though we were in with him in his jest, he had us blubbering like boobies when he laid his hand on the fellow's shoulder and spoke nonsense in a voice quivering and quavering as though he were at the point of breaking down.”

Mrs. Burney the elder shook her head.

“That is what I do not like—that trifling with sacred things,” she said. “'Tis not decent in a private house—I would not tolerate it even in a playhouse, and I see that you are of my opinion, James, though you may have been dragged into the abetting of Mr. Garrick in whatever mad scheme he had set himself upon perfecting.”

“Oh, for that matter we are all sorry when we have been merry at the expense of another, even though he be an elderly coxcomb such as that Mr. Kendal,” said James. “But enough—more than enough—of coxcomb Kendal! Tell us of the Duchess's concert, Hetty. Were the matrimonial duets as successful as usual?”

Esther, who had been disappointed that her stepmother had not yet said a word about the concert of the previous night given by the Dowager Duchess of Portland, at which she and her husband had performed, brightened up at her brother's question.

“The concert was well enough,” she replied with an affectation of carelessness. “'Twas no better than many that have taken place under this roof. Her Grace and her grandees were very kind to us—we had enough plaudits to turn the head of Gabrielli herself.”

“Oh, the Gabrielli's head has been turned so frequently that one can never tell when it sits straight on her shoulders,” said James.

“She was *very* civil to us last evening,” said Esther. “Indeed, she was civil to everyone until the enchanter Rauzzini sang the solo from *Piramo e Tisbe* and swept the company off their feet. The poor Gabrielli had no chance against Rauzzini.”

“Especially in a company that numbered many ladies,” said James, with a laugh. “You remember what Sir Joshua told us that Dr. Goldsmith had once said of Johnson?—that in his argument he was like the highwayman: when his pistol missed fire he knocked one down with the butt.”

“I heard that upon one occasion Dr. Johnson knocked a man down with a heavy book, but I cannot imagine his ever firing a pistol,” remarked Mrs. Burney, who had been used, when the wife of a straightforward merchant of Lynn, to take every statement literally, and had not yet become accustomed to the involved mode of speaking of the brilliant young Burneys.

“You mean that Rauzzini—I don't quite perceive what you do mean by your reference to Dr. Goldsmith's apt humour,” said Esther.

“I only mean that among such a company as assembled at the Duchess's, if he missed fire with his singing, he glanced around with those dark eyes of his and the ladies went down before him by the score,” replied James. “Do not I speak the truth, Fanny?” he added, turning quickly to where Fanny was searching with her short-sighted eyes close to her work-basket for some material that seemed to be missing.

But she had clearly heard her brother's question, for she did not need to raise her head or to ask him to repeat it.

“Oh, we are all the slaves of the nobil' signor,” she said, and continued her search in the basket.

“From the way he talked to us last night it might be fancied that it was he who was the captive,” said Esther.

“And I do not doubt that he is living in a state of constant captivity,” laughed James. “Ay, or I should rather term it inconstant captivity, for I dare swear that those black eyes of his do a deal of roving in the course of a year—nay, in the course of a day. These singer fellows feel that 'tis due to their art, this moving the hearts of

their hearers, by moving their own affections from heart to heart. The Rauzzini is, I fancy, like one of the splendid butterflies we came upon in the Straits, fluttering from flower to flower."

"I have heard no stories of his inconstancy, even from the Gabrielli when she was most envious of his plaudits," said Esther, and she glanced at her sister, who was earnestly threading a needle.

"You goose!" cried James to Esther. "Do you suppose that Gabrielli would tell you anything so greatly complimentary to him? In these days you cannot pay a man a greater compliment than to compare him to the fickle butterfly. You see that suggests a welcome from every flower."

"I protest that it is to sailors I have heard most compliments of that sort paid," laughed Esther, and then, putting herself in a singing attitude before him, she lilted most delightfully:

"Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more!
Men were deceivers ever,
One foot on sea-

"ha, ha, brother James!

and one on shore,
To one thing constant never.

"Now be advised by me, dear James, and do not attribute even in a cynical way, the vice of inconstancy to a singer, until you have left the Navy."

"I did not allude to it as a vice—rather as a virtue," said James. "Just think of the hard fate of any girl to have such a person as a singer ever by her side!"

He easily evaded the rush down upon him made by Hetty, and used his nautical skill to sail to the windward of her, as it were, until he had reached the door, whence he sent a parting shot at her.

"You surely don't think that I hinted that your spouse was a singer," he cried. "A singer! Oh, lud! I should be swaying away on all top ropes if I were to call the matrimonial duets singing."

He gave a shout of laughter as he caught the ball of wool which Esther threw at him, having picked it up from her stepmother's work-table. He returned it with a better aim, and before his sister could get a hand on it, he had shut the door, only opening it a little space a few seconds later to put in his head with a mocking word, withdrawing it at once, and then his foot was heard upon the stair, while he gave a sailor's version of Mr. Garrick's patriotic naval song:

Come, cheer up, my lads, 'tis to glory we steer.

"He has gone before I had a chance of asking him to take a message to the cheesemonger," said Mrs. Burney, calling out to him while she hurried after him out of the room.

CHAPTER VII

THE moment the two sisters were alone, the elder said quickly in a low voice, leaning across the table:

"We had a long talk with Signor Rauzzini, my dearest Fanny. I could not, of course, tell you before mother."

"You mentioned his name; but were you discreet?" said Fanny. "I think mother felt that you were going too far when you referred to his eyes. Mother most surely believes that the dark eyes of an Italian form a topic that should not be discussed except by our elders, and then only with bated breath and a fearful glance around lest a word should be overheard."

"His eyes—you know his eyes, Fanny?"

"Oh!" said Fanny, with an inflection that was between a sigh and a moan.

"You should have seen them while he spoke of you," said Esther. "Talk of flashes of lightning!—Dear child, it seemed so singular to us that a mite like you should inspire a grand passion in such a man. You are not angry with us, I know, but it was so indeed."

"Why should I feel angry with you for feeling just what I do myself, only more intensely," said Fanny. "Tis one of the greatest mysteries of life—the only mystery of life that I have yet faced—why a man who is as handsome as an archangel, and who possesses a voice that an archangel might envy, should so much as glance at an insignificant young woman like myself! Oh! 'tis no wonder that the notion amused you, dear Hetty."

"It only diverted us for a time, I assure you, my Fanny; it did not take us very long to perceive how it was no laughing matter, but, on the contrary, a very serious matter. Signor Rauzzini is, as I said, an enchanter, but do you not think that 'tis somewhat dangerous to—to——"

"To play with fire? That is what is on your mind, dear—to allow the fire of his Roman eyes to play about me?

Dangerous? I admit that wherever there is fire there is danger, especially when it flashes from such eyes."

"I am glad that you need no warning, child. As your elder sister I am pleased that—that—but no one in the house seems to think for a moment that the favour he has so distinctly shown to you can mean anything. Indeed, until last night, neither Charles nor I could believe——"

Fanny laughed, half closing her short-sighted eyes with a curious expression as she looked at her sister.

"It is only natural, my dear Hettina," she said.

"Have I ever ventured to suggest that I am other than the dunce of the family?"

"You have always been absurdly humble, Fanny, and I have never hesitated to say so," cried Esther. "I am sure that none of us could have made up such clever little pieces to act as you did when we were children. And as for writing, could any of us have so neatly copied out the padre's History as you did last year? Mr. Crisp, too—he never takes pleasure in any letters of the family except what you write for him."

"All perfectly true, my Hettina," replied Fanny. "But where am I when the house is filled with visitors? You know that I am nobody—that all I pray for with all my heart is that no one will take any notice of me, and I think I can say that my prayer is nearly always granted."

"That is because you are so dreadfully—so absurdly shy," said Esther. "You are the little mouse that is evermore on the look out for a hole into which you can creep and be safe from the observation of all eyes. You are ever trying to escape, unless when Mr. Garrick is here."

"Dear Hettina, I know my place—that is all. I have weak eyes, but quick ears, and I have heard strangers ask, when they have heard you sing and Susan play, who the little short-sighted girl in the corner is and what she means to do for the entertainment of the company. When they are assured that I am one of the clever Burney family they whisper an incredulous 'No?' They cannot believe that so insignificant a person as myself can be one of you."

"Tis your morbid self-consciousness, Fanny, that suggests so much to you."

"Oh, no; I was the dunce from the first. You know that while you could read any book with ease when you were six, I did not even know my letters when I was eight. Don't you remember how James made a jest of my thirst for knowledge by pretending to teach me the alphabet with the page turned upside down? And when you had gone to school at Paris and it was my turn as the next eldest, the wise padre perceived in a moment that the money would be much better spent upon Susan and Lottie, and they went to be educated while I remained at home in ignorance? The dear padre was right: he knew that I should have been miserable among bright girls away from home."

There was a pause before the elder sister said quite pathetically:

"My poor Fanny! I wonder if you have not been treated shabbily among us."

"Not. I, my Hettina. I have always been treated fairly. I have had as many treats as any of you; when you were learning so much in Paris I have been learning quite a number of things at home. And one of the most important things I learned was that so brilliant a person as Signor Rauzzini could never be happy if married to so insignificant a person as Fanny Burney."

Esther gave a little sigh of relief.

"Indeed I think that your conclusion is a right one, dear," she said. "We both came to the conclusion—Charles and I—that it would be a huge misfortune if you should allow yourself to be attracted by the glamour that attaches to the appearance of such a man as the Rauzzini, though, mind you, I believe that he honestly fancies himself in love with you—oh, he made no disguise of it in talking with us last night. But I hoped that you would be sensible."

"Oh, in the matter of sense I am the equal of anyone in the family," said Fanny, laughing. "That I mean to make my one accomplishment—good sense. That is the precious endowment of the dunce of the clever family—good sense; the one who stands next to the dunce in the lack of accomplishments should be endowed with good nature. Good sense and good nature go hand in hand in plain grey taffeta, not down the primrose paths of life, but along the King's highway of every day, where they run no chance of jostling the simple foot-passengers or exciting the envy of any by the flaunting of feathers in their face. Good sense and good nature are best satisfied when they attract no attention, but pass on to obscurity, smiling at the struggle of others to be accounted persons of importance."

"Then you have indeed made up your mind to marry Mr. Barlowe?" cried Esther.

Fanny laughed enigmatically.

"Does it not mean rather that I have made up my mind not to marry Mr. Barlowe?" she cried.

Esther looked puzzled: she was puzzled, and that was just what Fanny meant her to be.

But then she looked piqued, as elder sisters do when puzzled by the words or the acts of the younger. What business have younger sisters puzzling their elders? Their doing so suggests pertness when the elders are unmarried, but sheer insubordination when they are married; and Esther was by no means willing at any time to abrogate the privileges of her position as a married woman.

"I protest that I do not understand your meaning, Fanny," she said, raising her chin in a way that gave her head a dignified poise. There was also a chill dignity in the tone of her voice.

"Dear Hettina, I ask your pardon," cried Fanny quickly. "I fear that I replied to you with a shameful unreasonableness. But indeed I am not sure that you had reason on your side when you assumed that because I was ready to acknowledge that it would not mean happiness to our dear Signor Rauzzini to marry an insignificant person like myself, I was therefore prepared to throw myself into the arms of Mr. Barlowe."

"I fancied that—that—but you may have another suitor in your mind whose name you have not mentioned to anyone."

"Why should it be necessary for me to have a suitor of any kind? Is it not possible to conceive of the existence of a young woman without a row of suitors in the background? I admit that the 'Odyssey' of Homer—you remember how I used to listen to your reading of Mr. Broome's translation to mother—would be shorn

of much of its interest but for that background of suitors in one of the last books, but—well, my dear sister, I hold that the alternative song of life to the matrimonial duet is the spinster's solo, and it does not seem to me to be quite devoid of interest."

"Oh, I took it for granted——" began Esther, when Fanny broke in upon her.

"Yes, I know what all the happily wedded ones take for granted," she cried. "You assume that the wedded life is the only one worth living; but as we are told in the Bible that there is one glory of the sun and another of the moon, so I hold that I am justified in believing that if matrimony be celestial, spinsterhood is terrestrial, but a glory all the same, and not unattractive to me. I may be wise enough to content myself with the subdued charm of moonlight if it so be that I am shut off from the midday splendour of matrimony."

Esther did not laugh in the least as did her sister when she had spoken with an air of finality. She only made a little motion with her shoulders suggesting a shrug, while she said:

"I hope you will succeed in convincing mother that your views are the best for the household; but I think you will have some difficulty in doing so, considering what a family of girls we are."

"I do not doubt that mother will be on the side of immediate matrimony and poor Mr. Barlowe," said Fanny.

"Why poor Mr. Barlowe?" cried Esther. "He is a young man of excellent principles, and he has never given his parents a day's trouble. It is understood that if he marries sensibly he will be admitted to a partnership in the business, so that——"

"Principles and a partnership make for matrimonial happiness, I doubt not," said Fanny. "And I doubt not that Dr. Fell had both excellent principles and an excellent practice; still someone has recorded in deathless verse that she—I assume the sex—did not like that excellent man."

"And you do not like Mr. Barlowe on the same mysterious grounds?" said Hetty.

"Nay, I am not so unreasonable, I hope," replied Fanny. "But—but—dear sister, I remember how I thought that the song of the linnet which was in our little garden at Lynn was the loveliest strain of the grove, and such was my belief until I awoke one night at Chessington and heard the nightingale."

"You are puzzling—singularly puzzling today," said Esther frowning. "You have started two or three mystifying parables already. You told me some time ago as a great secret that you had been renewing your story-writing, in spite of your having burnt all that you had written for our edification—all that story—what was its name? The heroine was one Caroline Evelyn. You were ever an obedient child, or you would not have sacrificed your offspring at the bidding of our new mother, though the advice that she gave you was good, if you have not quite adhered to it. Novel writing is not for young ladies any more than novel reading, and certainly talking in parables is worse still. Well, I have no more time to spend over your puzzles."

"You would not find their solution to repay you, my dear," said Fanny.

"Still, I am pleased to learn that you take a sensible view of Signor Rauzzini and his heroics—but, indeed, I cannot see that Mr. Barlowe should not be considered, with his prospects—his father is a mercer in gold and silver lace, as you know——"

"I have heard so—it is a profitable trade, I believe."

"None more so. It is impossible to believe that a time will ever come when gold and silver lace will cease to be worn by gentlemen."

"That would be an evil day for England as well as for Messieurs Barlowe, *père et fils*. But thank heaven it is not yet in sight. Good morning, dear sister; and be assured you have my thanks for your advice. But mind you keep my little secret about the writing. Good-bye. You can face mother boldly, knowing that you have carried out her commission to the letter, and very neatly and discreetly into the bargain."

"I would not have done so if her views had not been mine also; as for your writing—you may depend on my keeping your secret. But you will have to get the padre's permission to have it printed—that's something still in the far future, I suppose;"—and the elder sister stooped to kiss the younger—Fanny was not up to the shoulder of the beautiful and stately Esther.

And so they parted.

CHAPTER VIII

FANNY BURNEY had been forced, for the first time, to make her sister aware of the fact that she knew she was looked on as the dunce of the brilliant Burney family. She could see that her doing so had startled her sister, for neither Esther nor any of the other girls had ever suggested to her that they thought of her as being on a different level from themselves, though it was tacitly allowed that it was a great pity that Fanny did not emulate them in taking pains to shine as it was expected the children of that estimable master of music, Dr. Burney, should shine, so as to make the house in that narrow little street off Leicester Fields attractive to its many distinguished visitors.

Fanny had truly defined her place in the household. She had recognized her place for several years; but there was not the least suggestion of rancour in her tone when talking to her brilliant elder sister, for the simple reason that there was no bitterness in her heart against any member of the family for being cleverer than herself. Fanny took pride in the accomplishments of her sisters, and was quite content with her position in relation to them. She got on well with all of them, because she was fond of them all, and they were all fond of her. She had not rebelled when her father had sent her younger sisters to be educated in Paris, and had allowed her to pick up her own education as best she might in his own library; and it had been a great

happiness to her to be allowed the privilege of copying out for the press the first volume of her father's “History of Music.” It was her stepmother who, finding out that Fanny had what Mrs. Burney called “a taste for writing,” had suggested that that was the legitimate channel in which such a taste should flow; and it was her stepmother who had induced her to make a bonfire of all her own writings—the scribblings of her girlhood that represented the foolish errant flow of her “taste for writing “: and now and again she had a consciousness of her own duplicity in failing to resist the impulse that had come upon her to do some more of what her mother termed her “girlish scribbling.”

One of the guilty secrets that Fanny cherished was that when it was believed she was writing her long letters to her old friend Mr. Crisp, she had been composing a novel which was now about to be given to the world; the second was that Signor Rauzzini, the handsome young Roman singer with whom half the fashionable ladies of the town were in love, was in love with her.

These were two secrets worth the cherishing, she knew; and the thought of them more than compensated her for the reflection that she was the dunce of the family, and that the unconscious tone of patronage adopted toward her by her elder sister and the dreadful compliments paid to her plain sewing, as though plain sewing represented the highest hopes that could reasonably be entertained in regard to her, were only to be looked for in the circumstances.

The two secrets were closely bound up together, she knew. She had the deepest affection for Signor Rauzzini. How could she fail to return the feeling which the whisper of his musical voice had told her he had conceived for her? He loved her in spite of the fact that she was the least attractive member of the family—in spite of the fact that half the town was at his feet, and that he might have made his choice from among the best. He had chosen her whom no one else had ever noticed, with the exception of her father's old friend, Mr. Crisp, and—oh, yes (she laughed now, perceiving that she had done an injustice to the other person who had been attracted to her—mainly, she thought, on account of her reputation for plain sewing)—a young man named Thomas Barlowe, the excellent son of the well-known mercer of gold and silver lace, in the Poultry!

Thinking of young Mr. Barlowe by the side of Signor Rauzzini, Fanny laughed again. She had so restricted an opinion of her own attractiveness that the tears actually came into her eyes for having given that derisive laugh as she compared the two young men; and she felt that she had been grossly ungrateful to young Mr. Barlowe; for even young Mr. Barlowe had a right to look above her level for a wife. As the daughter of a simple music master with a large family she could have no endowment so far as worldly goods were concerned; and she knew that the practical parents of young business men, as a rule, looked for their sons to marry, if not great fortunes, at least young women with a few thousands to their names.

She felt that she had treated the condescending young Mr. Barlowe very badly in laughing at the poor figure he cut by the side of the angelic Roman singer—she had failed to resist the temptation to call Signor Rauzzini angelic in one of her letters to Mr. Crisp—and now, in thinking of Mr. Barlowe as a very worthy young man, she was unconsciously relegating him to a hopeless position as a lover. It is not the very worthy young men who are beloved by young women of a romantic temperament: if it were there would be very few romances left. But little Miss Burney desired only to ease the twinges of her conscience for having laughed at the thought of young Tommy Barlowe; and she thought that she had done the right thing in assuring herself that he was a very worthy person.

And then she thought no more about him. She had a feeling that to give another thought to him when she had such a man as Signor Rauzzini to think about, would be a constructive act of treason in regard to Rauzzini. She had received many hints from her stepmother to the effect that all the family considered her to be a very fortunate young woman (all things taken into account) in having a chance of marrying the Thomas who seemed ready to pay his addresses to her; but though quite submissive to her stepmother in household matters, she was ready to face her with the “Never!” of the avowed rebel in the matter of consenting to wed the highly approved Thomas, and so she dismissed him from her thoughts, in favour of the man whom she loved.

But thinking of the man whom she loved was by no means equivalent to passing into a region of unalloyed happiness. She had mystified her sister by the way in which she had spoken about Signor Rauzzini, and the seal had been put upon the mystery by her frank acknowledgment that she did not think a union between so distinguished a man as Rauzzini and so insignificant a person as herself was likely to be satisfactory.

She had certainly allowed Hetty to go away believing that this was in her mind; and that was just what was in her mind when her thoughts turned from Thomas, whom she considered so estimable, to Rauzzini, whom she loved. She loved the Roman singer so truly that she had made a resolution never to consent to his marrying anyone so insignificant as she believed herself to be.

She had no illusions regarding herself. She knew just how good-looking she was; she knew that by the side of any of her sisters she was almost plain; but that she had a pleasing, simple face of a very ordinary type. She knew that she could love with the truest devotion and she could trust herself not to change with time. But she felt that these were not beyond the traits of the ordinary young woman, and that they did not lift her from the level of insignificance to the level of Signor Rauzzini.

She knew that she was at that moment an insignificant person; and she made no attempt to think of herself as otherwise.

Yes; but she had heard of people—even young women—being insignificant one day, and the next springing to a pinnacle of fame to which all eyes looked up. How would it be if she were destined to reach in a moment a position that would place her on a level with the man of her thoughts—the man whose fame as a singer had caused him to be the centre round which every conversation in the most notable circles turned? Everyone was talking in praise of Rauzzini; and she herself thought of him as occupying a place on a height as far above her as King Cophetua's throne was above the marble steps at the foot of which the beggar maid had crouched; but in her mind there was the possibility that her name might one day be spoken by the world in connection with an achievement that would raise her from the insignificance of Fanny Burney to the importance of Signor Rauzzini, and prevent people from asking what on earth had induced so glorious a person as he to make her his wife!

That was the secret dream which filled the imagination of this imaginative young woman—the same dream as comes to so many young women who have written the last chapter of a book and sent it forth for the world to receive with acclaim—the dream of fame—of immortality! She had written a novel and it was about to be given to the world, if the world would have it, and upon its success her happiness depended. If it brought her fame, it would place her by the side of the man whom she loved; but if it failed, then she would remain a person of no significance, and quite unworthy of sharing the honours which were showered upon her lover. She had imagination, and this faculty it was that made her more than doubtful of the success of King Cophetua's rash experiment. She felt sure that King Cophetua had now and again, turning suddenly round, caught one of his courtiers with his tongue in his cheek when his Majesty was entering the throne-room with his shy and insignificant Queen by his side, and that the Queen had occasionally overheard the whispers of her maids of honour, when they did not know she was at hand, asking one another what on earth the King had seen in her that induced him to make her his consort. Little Miss Burney had long ago made up her mind that the union of King Cophetua and his beggar maid was far from being a happy one—that the King looked around him and saw several princesses of great beauty and quite devoid of shyness who were fully acquainted with the convenances of his court and would not, if he had married any one of them, have made the mistakes which she was sure the young person whom he had elevated had fallen into, causing him constant irritation.

Little Miss Burney had resolved that she would never play the part of a crowned beggar maid. The man whom she loved had won fame for himself, and she would not go to him unless she, too, had at least made such a name for herself as should prevent her from feeling herself in the position of the beggar maid whom King Cophetua had raised to his side. Little Miss Burney resolved that although she could scarcely expect to go to her lover wearing purple robes embroidered with gold, she could, at any rate, refrain from wearing beggars' rags. She had her ambitions, and she felt that they were not ignoble, but that they made for the happiness of the man she loved, and who had been gracious enough to love her—the least attractive member of the family.

But after she had sat for some time with her hands lying idle on the sempstress' work at which she had been engaged on the departure of her sister—after her imagination had carried her much farther away than she intended it should, she was sensible of a return to the cold world from which she had soared. Her heart, which had begun to beat quickly when Hetty had told her how the divine Rauzzini had spoken of her, sank within her as she seemed to hear a voice asking who was she that she should hope to reach by the publication of that story which she had been writing by stealth and at odd times during the past three years, even the smallest measure of fame that would compare with that of Signor Rauzzini? What fame attached to the writing of a novel in comparison with that achieved by the enchantment of a singer who had power to move the hearts of men and women as it pleased him? Orpheus—ah, what fame could compare with the fame of Orpheus, the singer? His was a heaven-sent gift. What was her little talent compared with such a gift? If she had the ability even to make music such as one of her sisters could bring forth from the keys of the piano, she would have a better chance of being accounted worthy of a place beside Signor Rauzzini than if her novel found its way to the shelves of many readers. The writing of a novel was a poor achievement—nay, in the opinion of a good many people, including her own stepmother—a most practical woman—it was something to be ashamed of; and Fanny herself, thinking over all the novels written by women which she herself had read—most of them surreptitiously—was disposed to agree with her. That was why she had kept as a secret for more than three years the fact that she was trying to write a novel. Her father knew nothing of it, and her stepmother was equally uninformed. Even her old friend Mr. Crisp, to whom she wrote voluminous letters week after week, and to whom she gave her confidence on many matters, had no suspicion that she had written her novel.

She had thought it prudent to keep this matter hidden from them, for she did not doubt that if she had told any one of them of her project, she would never have a chance of realizing it. They would certainly have pronounced against such a proceeding even before a page of her novel came to be written.

And yet it was the thought that this novel was shortly to be published that had caused her to feel that she was drawing nearer to her lover.

As she reflected upon this, sitting idly over her work when her sister had left the house, her tears began to fall, not in a torrent, but slowly dropping at intervals upon the fabric which she had been sewing. She felt very sad, very hopeless, very lonely.

Nor could it be said that the sudden return of Mrs. Burney meant a return of happiness to the girl.

Mrs. Burney did not consider that Fanny had made satisfactory progress with her work, and did not hesitate to express her opinion to this effect. But she was not imprudently unkind; for young Mr. Barlowe had just written to her, begging permission to pay his respects to Mrs. Burney and her daughter that evening, and she meant that Fanny should be in a good humour to entertain him.

Mrs. Burney had great hopes that the question of Fanny's future—a constant topic of conversation and consultation between her and her husband—might be settled by a series of visits of young Mr. Barlowe.

CHAPTER IX

YOUNG Mr. Barlowe took himself very seriously, and he had every right to do so; for a more serious young man was not to be found in business in London. He had been brought up to look upon everything in the world as having an intimate connection with business, and it had always been impressed upon him that business meant the increase of money, and that there was hardly anything in the world worth giving a thought to apart from the increase of money. It never occurred to any of his preceptors to suggest that the advantage of increasing one's money lay in the splendid possibilities of spending it. The art of making money forms the whole curriculum of a business man's education; he is supposed to require no instruction in the art of spending it. Thus it is that, by attending only to one side of the question, so many business men lead much less interesting lives than they might, if they had it in their power to place themselves under the guidance of a trustworthy professor of the Art of Spending. But no Chair of Spending has yet been provided at any University, nor is there any instructor on this important branch of business education at any of the City schools, hence it is that the sons of so many money-making men turn out spendthrifts. They have been taught only one side of the great money question, and that the less important side into the bargain. In making an honest endeavour to master the other side, usually on the death of a father or a bachelor uncle, both looked on as close-fisted curmudgeons, a good many young men find themselves in difficulties.

Young Mr. Barlowe, on being introduced to the Burney family, through the circumstance of Mrs. Burney's first husband having done business with Mr. Barlowe the elder, found himself in a strange atmosphere. He had never before imagined the existence of a household where music and plays and books were talked about as if these were the profitable topics of life. Previously he had lived in a house where the only profitable topic was thought to be the Profits. At his father's table in the Poultry the conversation never travelled beyond the Profits. The likelihood of a rise in the price of gold or silver sometimes induced the father to increase his stock of bullion without delay, and then if the price rose, he could conscientiously charge his customers for the lace at such a rate per ounce as gave him a clear five per cent, extra profit; and it was upon such possibilities that the conversation in the Poultry parlour invariably turned.

And here were these Burneys talking with extraordinary eagerness and vivacity upon such matters as the treatment by a singer named Gabrielli of one of the phrases in a song of Mr. Handel's, beginning: “Angels ever bright and fair”! For himself, young Mr. Barlowe thought that there was no need for so much repetition in any song. “Angels ever bright and fair, Take, oh take me to your care”—that was the whole thing, as it seemed to him; and when that request had been made once he thought it was quite enough; to repeat it half a dozen times was irritating and really tended to defeat its purpose. Only children in the nursery kept reiterating their requests. But he had heard Dr. Burney and his son-in-law, Esther's husband, discuss the Gabrielli's apparently unauthorized pause before the second violins suggested (as it appeared to the younger musician) a whisper of assent floating from the heaven; and all the members of the family except Fanny had taken sides in the controversy, as though a thing like that had any bearing upon the daily life of the City!

Thomas Barlowe was amazed at the childishness of the discussion, and he was particularly struck by the silence of Fanny on this occasion. She was silent, he was sure, because she agreed with him in thinking it ridiculous to waste words over a point that should be relegated to the nursery for settlement.

“They seem pleasant enough people in their way,” he told his mother after his first visit. “But they know nothing of what is going on in the world—the real world, of which the Poultry is the centre. It might be expected that the young man who is a naval officer and has seen the world would know something of the import of the question when I asked him what direction he thought gold would move in; but he only winked and replied, 'Not across my hawse, I dare swear,' and the others laughed as if he had said something humorous.”

“Mayhap it was humorous,” suggested his mother gravely.

“It would be sheer ribaldry for anyone to jest upon such a subject as the fluctuations in the price of silver,” said Thomas slowly. “Lieutenant Burney must surely know how serious a matter would be a fall of a fraction of a crown when we have bought heavily in prospect of a rise. But Miss Burney looks to be different from the others of the family. I have told you that while her father, and indeed all the rest, were talking excitedly on that ridiculous point in Mr. Handel's music, she sat in silence. She is short-sighted, but I noticed more than once that she had her eyes fixed on me, as if she had found something to study in me. She is, I think, a steady, observant young lady. When Mrs. Burney said she hoped that I would visit them again, I think I perceived a sort of interest on Miss Burney's face as she awaited my answer.”

Thomas had resolved not to frustrate the hopes that Mrs. Burney had expressed as to his paying another visit—as a matter of fact he had come three times, and on every occasion he had devoted himself to Fanny—to be more exact than Mrs. Burney, who had described his attentions in this phrase, he had passed his time subjecting her to a sort of catechism with a view to discover if she would make him the sort of wife that would suit him. It appeared that the result of his inquisition was satisfactory, and that his attentions were gradually becoming intentions; but Mrs. Burney had never gone farther than to comment favourably to Fanny upon the young man's steadiness, and to suggest that the young woman whom he might choose to be his wife would be fortunate, steady young men with good prospects in the City being far from abundant. She had never gone so far as to ask Fanny if she would accept good fortune coming to her in such a form; though Fanny knew very well that she had asked Esther to sound her on this point.

How far Esther's mission was accounted successful by their stepmother, Fanny, of course, could not guess; but at any rate Thomas was to pay a visit after dinner, and Fanny felt that it was necessary for her to be discreet. It had been very interesting for her to study Thomas, with the possibility before her of writing a second novel, in which some of his traits of character might be introduced with advantage; but she perceived how there was a likelihood of her course of study being paid for at too high a rate; so she resolved—to be discreet beyond her ordinary exercise of a virtue which she displayed at all times of her life.

So Thomas came to the house in St. Martin's Street while tea was being served in the drawingroom, to the accompaniment of a duet on the piano—Dr. Burney had quickly perceived the merits of this new instrument over that of the harpsichord—between Susan and her father. Very close to the instrument, pressing the receiver of his ear-trumpet to the woodwork of the case, sat Sir Joshua Reynolds, while his sister—a lady of

middle age who was gradually relinquishing the idea that she, too, could paint portraits—was suffering Mrs. Burney to explain to her the advantages of Lynn over London as a place of residence for people anxious to economize.

Fanny was at the table where the teapot and urn were being drawn on, and close to her sat her brother James, with a volume like an account-book lying face down on the table while he drank his tea.

The progress of the duet was not arrested by the entrance of young Mr. Barlowe, but he looked in the direction of the instrument when he had shaken hands with Mrs. Burney and bowed to Miss Reynolds. It was obvious that he was mystified by seeing Sir Joshua's ear-trumpet pressed against the sound-conducting case of the piano. He was still looking at it with curious eyes while he greeted Fanny with the concentrated politeness of the Poultry.

Lieutenant Burney roused himself from his lolling attitude when he saw the puzzled look on the young man's face, and he obligingly endeavoured to explain away the mystery.

"'Tis no wonder that you are amazed, Mr. Barlowe," he said in a whisper. "I own that when it was first brought to my notice I thought it extraordinary. A marvellous instrument, is it not, that is played by the ear instead of by the mouth? And yet you must own that some of the notes it produces are very fine—much more delicate than could be produced by any other means."

"I do not profess to be a judge of music, sir," said Thomas; "but I know what pleases me." Fanny wondered how often she had heard that same boast—the attempt of complete ignorance to be accredited with the virtue of frankness. "Yes, I own that I consider the music monstrous pretty; but with the ear—that is what puzzles me: it seems a simple trumpet, such as is blown by the mouth."

"Pray do not let my father hear you say that, Mr. Barlowe," whispered James. "That instrument is his fondest. You know that he has written a 'History of Music'?"

"All the world knows that, sir," replied Thomas gallantly. "I have not yet found time to read it myself, but ——"

"Neither have I, sir; but I understand that that instrument which seems new to such simpletons as you and I is really as ancient as the pyramids of Egypt—nay, more so, for my father discovered in his researches that this was the identical form of the first instrument made by Tubal Cain himself."

"Is't possible? In our Family Bible there is a picture of Tubal Cain, but he is depicted blowing through a conch shell."

"A shell! Ah! such was the ignorance of the world on these matters before my father wrote his History. But he has managed to clear up many points upon which complete ignorance or very erroneous opinions prevailed. It is not generally known, for instance, that Tubal had his second name given to him by reason of his habitually murdering every musical piece that he attempted to play."

"But he was the inventor, was he not?"

"Quite true, Mr. Barlowe. But that fact, you must admit, only made his offence the more flagrant. So the inscriptions on the rocks assert; and there are some sensible people nowadays who believe that Tubal's second and very suggestive name should be coupled with the names of many more recent performers on musical instruments."

"You do not allude to the gentleman who is playing that new instrument—I mean that very ancient instrument—by the side of Dr. Burney?"

"Oh, surely not. That gentleman is one of the most notable performers of our age, Mr. Barlowe. I ask you plainly, sir, have you ever seen, even at a raree show, a musician who could play an instrument with his ear and produce such a good effect? You can easily believe that a vast amount of ingenuity is needed to produce even the simplest sound in that way."

"If I had not it demonstrated before my eyes I should not believe it possible. I protest, sir, that the effect is very pretty. Is't not so, Miss Burney?"

The young man turned to Fanny, who was doing her best to refrain from an outburst of laughter; she could not trust herself to put her cup of tea to her lips while her brother was continuing his fooling. She thought that it was scarcely good manners of him to play such a jest upon a visitor, though she knew the ward-room code of manners which her naval brother had acquired was very liberal on such points. She was about to give Mr. Barlowe a hint of the truth of Sir Joshua's ear-trumpet, but James, perceiving her intention, defeated it by saying in a tone above a whisper:

"Cain—we mentioned Cain, did we not, Mr. Barlowe? Oh, yes; and it must have occurred to you how strangely customs have altered during the past ten years—how strongly opposed people are to-day to principles that were accepted without demur so recently as in our own boyhood. You take my meaning, sir?"

Mr. Barlowe did not look as if he quite grasped Lieutenant Burney's drift, and Fanny felt it incumbent on her to prevent further fooling (as he thought she would) by remarking:

"My brother means, Mr. Barlowe, that 'tis remarkable how many changes are being made in many ways—but what he had in his mind was, of course, in respect to the forte-piano—on which my father and sister are playing a duet: only a few years ago no one thought to improve upon the harpsichord; and yet my father asserts that in a short time the harpsichord will be no more than a curiosity—that the forte-piano—or as we simply call it now, the piano, will take its place in every household. That is what you meant, was it not, James?"

"I was thinking of Cain and his profession—Cain, the good old murderer, rather than of Tubal Cain, who was perhaps equally criminal in inventing the liveliest source of human torture," replied James gravely. "Yes, I was thinking—suggested by the mention of Cain—how strange people nowadays would regard my father's intentions regarding my future when he assumed that I should have the best chance for cultivating my bent, which he had early recognized in me, by sending me, before it became too late, to be educated for the profession to an accomplished murderer."

CHAPTER X

YOUNG Mr. Barlowe started so violently that he spilt his tea over his knees; for just before James had uttered his last sentence the music stopped, but as it had been somewhat loud in the final bars, and James had raised his voice in the same proportion, the inertia of his tone defied any attempt to modulate it, so that it was almost with a shout that he had declared that he had been sent to be educated in his profession to a murderer.

Fanny was too much overcome by the ludicrous aspect of the contretemps to be able to laugh. Her brother, who had had no intention of startling anyone in the room except young Mr. Barlowe, hung his head and was blushing under the South Sea tan of his skin; Sir Joshua Reynolds had heard nothing after the crashing chords that concluded the duet; but poor Miss Reynolds almost sprang from her chair in horror.

Mrs. Burney was very angry.

“You have been making a fool of yourself as usual, James,” she cried. “Pray give Mr. Barlowe another cup of tea, Fanny. I vow that 'tis a shame for you, James Burney, to treat such a company as though you were on the deck of the *Adventure* facing your South Sea savages.”

But Dr. Burney, with his customary tact, raised a hand half reprovingly toward his wife.

“Give Mr. Barlowe his cup, and then pass one to me, Fanny,” he said, rising from the piano. “You know that James has spoken no more than the truth, my dear,” he added, smiling at his wife. “I can see that the rascal has been fooling while our backs were turned to him; but we know that he spoke no more than the truth—at least in that one sentence which he bawled out for us. He was, indeed, sent to a school where he was placed under an accomplished usher who was some time after hanged as a murderer. You see, madam——” he had turned, still smiling, to Miss Reynolds, thereby doing much to restore her confidence in the sanity of the family—“You see that James was from the first so desperate a young rascal that, just as a boy who is an adept at figures is educated for the counting-house, and one who spends all the day before he is six picking out tunes on the harpsichord should be apprenticed, as I was, to a musician, so we thought our James should be sent whither he could be properly grounded in the only profession at which he was likely to excel. But, alas! the poor usher was carried off by the police, tried at the next assizes and duly hanged before James had made much progress in his studies; but I believe that a few years in the navy does as much for a youth who has made up his mind to succeed, as a protracted course under a fully qualified criminal.”

Miss Reynolds looked as if she were not quite certain that, in spite of his smiles, Dr. Burney was jesting; but when Mrs. Burney, seeing how her husband's mock seriousness was likely to produce a wrong impression upon plain people, said:

“You must recall hearing about Mr. Eugene Aram some years back, Mrs. Reynolds,” that lady showed that her mind was greatly relieved.

“I recall the matter without difficulty,” she said. “The man was usher at the grammar school at Lynn.”

“And no school had a more learned teacher than that unfortunate man,” said Sir Joshua. Young Mr. Barlowe had been divided in his amazement at what Dr. Burney had said, and at the sight of Sir Joshua holding the trumpet to his ear, though the instrument remained mute. He had never found himself within the circle of so startling a society. He wished himself safe at home in the Poultry, where people talked sense and made no attempt to blow a trumpet with their ears.

“James had acquired quite a liking for poor Aram,” said Dr. Burney, “and, indeed, I own to having had a high opinion of the man's ability myself. It was to enable him to purchase books necessary for his studies in philology that he killed his victim—a contemptible curmudgeon named Johnstone. I fear that all our sympathy was on the side of the usher.”

“I was greatly interested in Mr. Aram, and read a full account of his trial,” said Sir Joshua.

“I wonder that a man of so sensitive a mind as his did not so brood over his crime as to cause suspicion to fall on him earlier than it did.”

“Only upon one occasion it seemed that he was affected by an incident which might possibly have awakened some suspicion in the mind of a person given to suspicion,” said Dr. Burney.

“James had been presented with a copy of the translation of Gessner's 'Death of Abel'—everyone was going mad about the book that year—more copies were sold of it than of any translation since Pope's 'Homer,' but I fancy James found it dull enough reading. He had it on his knee trying to get through a page or two in case the kind donor might question him upon it, when the usher came up. He took the volume in his hand and glanced at the title. Down the book fell from his grasp and he hurried away without a word—'as if he had been stung,' James said, in telling us about it, to excuse the broken cover. Of course, I never gave a thought to the matter at the time; but when I heard of the arrest of Eugene Aram the following year, I recalled the incident.”

“I should like to make a picture of the scene, and name it 'Remorse,'” said Reynolds.

(*He never did make such a picture; many years had passed, and Lieutenant Burney had become an Admiral before his narration of the incident touched the imagination of a poet who dealt with it in verse that has thrilled a good many readers.*)

Thomas Barlowe was not greatly thrilled by the story as told by Dr. Burney. He seemed rather shocked to find himself at the table with someone who had been taught by a murderer. He glanced furtively at James Burney, who had remained silent since the contretemps that had prevented him from perfecting his fooling of

Thomas; and the result of Thomas's scrutiny at that moment was to cause Thomas a tremor; for who could say what fearful knowledge Lieutenant Burney might have acquired during his intercourse with the murderer—knowledge which might jeopardize the safety of a simple visitor like himself? Thomas felt that no ordinary person could be accounted absolutely safe in a company that included a tall, able-bodied young naval man who had begun his education under a murderer and had gone to complete it among the cannibals of the South Seas; and, in addition, an elderly gentleman who fancied that he could bring any sound out of a trumpet by pressing it to his ear instead of his lips, and had shown himself ready to extol the scholarship of any man who had been hanged.

But then Thomas looked at Fanny, and she pleased him more than ever. She was so demure, so modest, so shy. She had a very pretty blush, and she did not play on the piano. It was a thousand pities, he felt, that such a girl should be compelled to remain in such uncongenial companionship. All the time that Dr. Burney and his other daughter were playing a second duet, and the silly gentleman holding the bell of his trumpet to the case of the piano, still fondly believing that he was also a performer with the mouth-piece in his ear, Thomas Barlowe was feeling wave after wave of pity passing over him for the unhappy position of the shy girl in the midst of so doubtful a household. Before long his compassion for her so stimulated his imagination that he began to think of the possibility of his rescuing her—he began to think of himself in the character of a hero—he did not remember the name of any particular hero who had carried off a young woman who was placed in a similar situation to that occupied by Miss Burney; but he had no doubt that more than one romance was founded upon the doings of such a man as he felt himself fully qualified to be, if he made up his mind to assume such a rôle.

As the music continued—it was an arrangement of Bach's *Orfèo*—Thomas Barlowe became more and more resolute. He would be the heroic person who should appear at the right moment and achieve the emancipation of that sweet and shy girl, who by no fault of hers was forced to live in that house and remain, if she could, on friendly terms with her father and sisters, who kept strumming on the piano, and with her brother, who was ready to boast of having received the rudiments of his education from a murderer. All that he needed was the opportunity to show his heroism, and he did not doubt that when he set his mind to work on the matter, he would have such an opportunity.

If anyone had whispered in his ear that his inward consciousness of being equal to the doing of great deeds was solely due to the music which was being played, and to which he was unwillingly listening, he would have been indignant. He would have thought it preposterous had it been suggested to him that the effect of that strumming was to make him feel more like a god than a man—to be ready to face hell for the love of a woman, as Jean Sebastian Bach imagined Orpheus doing for Eurydice. But Jean Sebastian Bach knew what he was about when he had composed his *Orfèo*, and Dr. Burney was quite equal to the business of interpreting his aims, and of urging his daughter Susan to join with him in impressing them upon even so unimpressionable a nature as that of Thomas Barlowe; so that while Thomas Barlowe believed that this music was one of the most petty of all human interests, it was making him think such thoughts as had never before entered his mind—it was giving him aspirations from which in ordinary circumstances he would have shrunk.

The master musician and his interpreters were making sport of him, leading him if not quite into the region of the heroic, at least to the boundary of that region, and supplying him with a perspective glass, as the Interpreter did to the Pilgrims, by the aid of which he might see the wonderful things that had been beyond his natural scope.

And that was how it came about that he gazed into Miss Burney's eyes and pressed her hand at parting with a tenderness he had never previously associated with his leave-taking. He felt sure that Miss Burney would understand what he meant, though he knew that he would have difficulty in expressing it all to her in words; for the effect of the music was to make him feel that he could put so much feeling into a look, into a squeeze of the hand, as would touch the heart of any young woman and cause her to be certain that she might trust him though all other help might fail her.

That was the effect which the heroic music had upon him, though he did not know it; it made him feel willing to face hell for her sake at that moment, and even until he had walked through more than a mile of the network of streets that lay between Leicester Fields and the Poultry.

But the effect of such an intoxicant as music upon such a nature as his is not lasting. Before he had reached Cheapside his own individuality was beginning to assert itself; and he wondered if he had not gone too far for discretion—discretion being, according to his reckoning, the power to withdraw from a position that might compromise him. And before he reached his home he had got the length of wondering how he had so far forgotten himself as to yield to that compromising impulse represented by the gaze and the squeeze. He could not for the life of him understand what had come over him at that moment; for he had by no means satisfied himself that Miss Burney was the young woman who would make him comfortable as his wife. He still thought highly of her on account of her modesty and her dainty shyness, but marriage was a serious matter, and he was not sure that he should take her for his wife.

On the whole, he felt that he had had a very trying evening—between the Lieutenant who had so nearly qualified to practise as a murderer, and the father and daughter who seemed ready to strum their duets until midnight, to say nothing of the foolish gentleman who tried to play the trumpet with his ear; and Thomas made up his mind that he would not trust himself into the midst of so unusual a circle until he was certain that he wanted to marry the young woman whose hand he had, for some reason or other, pressed at parting.

But Mrs. Burney had noticed much more clearly than Fanny had done the expression that the face of Thomas Barlowe had worn when he had looked into the girl's eyes; she had measured to the fraction of a second the duration of his holding of her hand beyond the time essential for the discharge of the ordinary courtesy of a hand-shake; and she was satisfied that Thomas was progressing in his wooing of the least attractive and certainly the least accomplished member of the family. The good woman thought, however, that it was rather a pity that her husband and Susan had persisted in the practice of their duets; for by doing so they had not given a chance to Thomas and Fanny of being alone together.

But, looking back upon the incidents of the evening, she came to the conclusion that, on the whole, she had

no reason to complain of the progress that was being made in the young man's wooing. She was no believer in undue haste in this respect; and had not Thomas looked into Fanny's eyes at the close of the evening? Yes, at the close; and that proved to her satisfaction that he had not suffered discouragement by the maladroit conversation about Mr. Eugene Aram. The unhappy episode upon which her husband had dwelt with far too great attention to its details, was one to which she herself had never alluded; for at Lynn, where she had lived all her life previous to being married to Dr. Burney, the Eugene Aram episode was regarded as a scandal to be ignored by those of the inhabitants whose children had attended the school where he had been usher. It was a distinctly favourable sign of the impression made upon young Mr. Barlowe by Fanny, that he had gazed into her eyes in spite of his having been made aware of the connection of the family with the tragedy of that wretched schoolmaster. Mrs. Burney took no account of the effect of Bach's marvellous music upon a young man who was a lover in the rough. In this respect, as has been indicated, she did not differ from the young man himself.

CHAPTER XI

IT was at the Pantheon in the Oxford Road a fortnight later, that Mrs. Thrale, the brewer's lively wife, had an opportunity of shining, by a display of that *esprit* which caused Mr. Garrick to affirm solemnly that if she had gone upon the stage she would have been a dangerous rival to Mistress Clive; and Fanny Burney, with her father and Mr. Linley, the father of the beautiful Mrs. Sheridan, was a witness of the ease with which the lady sparkled as she described for the benefit of the circle how Mr. Garrick's jest at the expense of poor Mr. Kendal and the Widow Nash had set all the Wells laughing. She imitated Mr. Garrick to his face, in offering his congratulations to Mr. Kendal and so setting the ball a-rolling until within an hour the poor, silly gentleman had been offered the felicitations of half the Wells upon his engagement to Widow Nash. Mrs. Thrale re-enacted with great gravity the part she had played in Mr. Garrick's plot, and then she hastened to imitate Mrs. Cholmondeley's part, and even Mr. Sheridan's, upon that lively morning at Tunbridge Wells.

But there was much more to tell, and Mrs. Thrale took very good care to abate nothing of her narrative; it gave her so good a chance of acting, and it gave Mr. Garrick so good a chance of complimenting her before all the company.

“Oh, I vow that we played our parts to perfection,” she cried, “and without any rehearsal either. But then what happened? You will scarce believe it, Mr. Garrick has always borne such a character for scrupulous honour in his dealings with his companies, but indeed 'tis a fact that our manager decamped as soon as he found that the poor man had been teased to the verge of madness by the fooling he had started—off he went, we knew not whither; leaving no message for any of us. He was not to be found by noon; and what happened by dinner-time? Why, the poor gentleman whom we had been fooling had also fled!”

“That was indeed too bad of Mr. Kendal,” said Dr. Burney.

“'Twas too inconsiderate of him truly,” cried Mrs. Thrale. “'Tis no great matter if the manager of the playhouse runs away when his play is produced—you remember that Mr. Colman hurried off to Bath to escape lampooners when the success of Dr. Goldsmith's comedy *She Stoops to Conquer* had proved to all the town that he was no judge of a play; but for the one who has been made the object of such a jest as ours to escape without giving us a chance of bringing our teasing to a fitting climax is surely little short of infamous.”

“And when did you design the fitting climax to arrive, madam?” asked one of the circle.

“Why, when the gentleman and lady should come face to face in the Assembly Rooms, to be sure,” replied Mrs. Thrale. “We were all there to await the scene of their meeting; and you can judge of our chagrin when only the lady appeared.”

“We can do so, indeed,” said Mrs. Darner, who was also in the circle. “I can well believe that you were furious. When one has arranged a burletta for two characters 'tis infamous when only one of the actors appears on the stage.”

Mrs. Thrale smiled the smile of the lady who knows that she is harbouring a surprise for her friends and only awaits the right moment to spring it upon them—a cat to be let out of the bag at the pulling of a string.

“I knew that we should have your sympathy, Mrs. Darner,” she said demurely. “You have, I doubt not, more than once experienced all the chagrin that follows the miscarrying of a well-planned scheme. But as it so happened, we were more than compensated for our ill-usage at that time by the unlooked-for appearance of the missing actor two nights later.”

“Oh, lud!” cried Mrs. Darner, holding up both her hands in a very dainty way.

Mr. Garrick also lifted up his hands in amazement, but he did not need to exclaim anything to emphasize the effect of his gesture.

Dr. Burney smiled, trying to catch the eye of Mr. Garrick, but Mr. Garrick took very good care that he should not succeed in doing so.

“You may well cry, 'oh, lud!'” said Mrs. Thrale. “But if you had been in the Rooms when the man entered you would not have been able to say a word for surprise, I promise you. The poor gentleman had posted all the way from town to Tunbridge, apparently for our diversion only, and what a sight he was! It seems that he had got over his fright at the coupling of his name with the lady's, while flying to London, but from this point a reaction set in, and he spent all the time that he was posting back to the Wells adding fuel to the fire of his resolution to throw himself at the feet of the lady at the earliest possible moment. Was there ever such a comedy played, Mr. Garrick?”

“'Twould be too extravagant for the theatre, madam, but not for Nature's playhouse,” replied Garrick. “I have more than once been told the story of soldiers having fled in a panic from the field of battle, but on finding themselves in a place of safety they returned to the fight and fought like demons. Was there aught that could be termed demoniacal in the gentleman's conduct on finding himself face to face with the enemy—I mean the lady?”

“Aught demoniacal, do you ask me?” cried Mrs. Thrale. “Oh, sir, have you not heard the parable of the demon that was cast out of a man, but finding its homeless condition unsupportable, sought out seven of its friends and returned with them to its former habitation, so that the last state of the man was more demoniacal than the first?”

“I fancy I have heard the parable, madam, but its application——” began Garrick, when Mrs.

Darner broke in upon him, crying:

“Do not ever attempt to point out the aptness of the application of a parable, Mrs. Thrale. Do not, if you are wise. Would you lead us to believe that the unhappy wretch found it necessary to post up to town to obtain his relay of demons for his own discomfiture when so much rank and fashion was at the Wells, though at the fag end of the season?”

“Leaving parables aside, demons and all, I can bear witness to the condition of the man when he entered the Rooms and strode with determination on his face up to where the Widow Nash was fanning herself—not without need,” said Mrs. Thrale. “It so happened that she was seated under the gallery at the furthest end of the Rooms, but our gentleman did not pause on entering to look round for her—I tell you that it seemed as if he went by instinct straight up to her, and bowing before her, said: 'Madam, may I beg the honour of a word or two with you in private?'—I was close by and so were several other equally credible witnesses, and we heard every word. The widow looked at him coolly——”

“Yes, you said she had been fanning herself,” remarked Mrs. Darner, but without interrupting the flow of the narrative.

“There was no need of a fan for her voice, I can assure you, when she had completed her survey of the dusty gentleman and thought fit to reply to him,” continued Mrs. Thrale. “'I vow, sir,' said she, 'that I consider this room sufficiently private for anything you have to say to me.' She had plainly got wind of Mr. Garrick's plot and so was fully prepared for the worst—though some people might call it the best—that could happen. 'Madam,' said Mr. Kendal, 'what I have to say is meant for your ear alone,' and I am bound to admit that he spoke with suavity and dignity. 'Pray let my friends here be the judges of that,' said the widow. That was a pretty rebuff for any gentleman with a sense of his own dignity, you will say; but he did not seem to accept it in such a spirit. He hesitated, but only for a few moments, then he looked around him to see who were within hearing, and with hardly a pause, he said in the clearest of tones, 'I perceive that we are surrounded just now with some ladies who, two days ago, offered me congratulations upon my good fortune in winning your promise, madam; and I venture now to come before you to implore of you to give me permission to assume that their congratulations were well founded'—those were his words; we did not think that he had it in him to express himself so well.”

“And what was the lady's reply?” asked Dr. Burney, recalling the prophecy in which he had indulged when parting from Garrick at his own door.

“The lady's reply was disappointing, though dignified,” replied Mrs. Thrale. “'Sir,' she said, 'I have oft heard that the credulity of a man has no limits, but I have never before had so conspicuous an instance of the truth of this. Surely the merest schoolboy would have been able to inform you that you were being made the victim of one of Mr. Garrick's silly jests—that these ladies here lent themselves to the transaction, hoping to make a fool of me as well as of you; but I trust that they are now aware of the fact that I, at least, perceived the truth from the first, so that whoever has been fooled I am not that person; and so I have the honour to wish you and them a very good evening.' Then she treated us to a very elaborate curtsey and stalked away to the door, leaving us all amazed at her display of dignity—real dignity, not the stage imitation, Mr. Garrick.”

“You should have been there, if only to receive a lesson, Mr. Garrick,” said Mrs. Damer.

“I hope those who had the good fortune to be present were taught a lesson,” said another lady in the circle.

“If you mean me, madam,” said Mrs. Thrale, with tactful good humour, “I frankly allow that I profited greatly by observing the scene. 'Tis a dangerous game to play—that of trying to show others in a ridiculous light, and in future I vow that all my attention shall be given to the duty of avoiding making a fool of myself. Your jest miscarried, Mr. Garrick; though how that gentleman who fled from the Wells in that headlong fashion was induced to return, is beyond my knowledge.”

“Psha! madam, the fellow is a coxcomb and not worth discussing,” cried Garrick. “He got no more than his deserts when the lady left him to be the laughing-stock of the Assembly. I knew that that would be his fate if he ever succeeded in summing up sufficient courage to face her.”

“But strange to say, we did not laugh at him then,” said Mrs. Thrale. “He seemed to be quite a different man from the one whom we had tried to fool two days earlier. There was a certain dignity about him that disarmed us. You must allow, Mr. Garrick, that only the bravest of men would have had the courage to march up the Assembly Rooms and make his proposal to the lady in public.”

“That is the courage of the coxcomb who believes himself to be irresistible to the other sex, madam,” said Garrick; “and I affirm that 'twas most reprehensible to refrain from laughing at him.” Then, putting his arm through that of Burney as if to stroll on with him, and so give the others to understand that he had had enough of Mr. Kendal as a topic, he whispered:

“Ha, my friend, did not I prophesy aright what would be the fellow's fate? I know men, and women, too—ay, in some measure, though they are sealed books, eh, friend Burney? And you tried to persuade me that she would not snub him? I knew better—I knew that she—eh, what—what are they staring at?”

“They are staring at the appearance of Mr. Kendal with the Widow Nash on his arm—there they are, David, and you are staring at them too,” said Burney with a smile.

“Angels and Ministers of Grace! 'Tis a man and his wife we are staring at! The woman has married him

after all!” cried David, his hand dropping limply from Burney's shoulder. “A man and his wife: I know the look in their faces!”

CHAPTER XII

IT was, indeed, the same man who had come to consult Dr. Burney, but had not been allowed the chance of doing so by Garrick, a fortnight before—the same man, but with a marked difference, who was now walking across the pillared room in the Pantheon, with a smiling, well-favoured lady by his side; and toward the pair the eyes of all the circle whom Mrs. Thrale had been addressing were directed.

Mrs. Thrale and her friends were too much amazed to be able to speak, but the lips of every one of them were holding back some exclamation of surprise: an acute observer would have been able easily to set down the various unuttered exclamations of the party, from the simple “Oh, Lud!” of Mrs. Thrale to the more emphatic “Merciful Powers!” of Mrs. Cholmondeley, though not a word was spoken between them, while Mr. Kendal and the lady walked, straight through the room to where they were standing.

“Slip behind the pillar: I will cover you, my friend,” whispered Dr. Burney to Garrick.

But Garrick had no intention of doing anything so ignominious—more especially as he perceived that Mr. Kendal had caught sight of him; and it was really Garrick who advanced to meet the couple, with the air of a host about to welcome two long-expected guests—it was really Garrick who received them with one of his finest bows, and who—to add to the amazement of the group behind him—was greeted by Mr. Kendal and the lady with the friendliest of smiles (the lady was blushing, not Mr. Garrick).

And then it was to Dr. Burney the gentleman turned.

“Dear sir,” he cried, “with what words should I approach you? It is to your counsel and Mr. Garrick's that I owe my happiness.” Then he made his bow to the others of the group.

“Mrs. Thrale,” he said, when he had recovered himself, “we hoped to find you here with your friends, so that we might lose no moment in offering you our thanks for the tactful way in which you brought us together. Only such genius as yours, madam, could have perceived—well, all that you did perceive. I protest that neither Mrs. Kendal nor myself apprehended the too flattering truth. But the heart of a woman who has herself loved—ah, that is the source of such genius as you displayed with such subtlety. She is mine, madam; we have been married a whole week, and I, at least, know what a treasure—but I cannot trust myself to talk of my happiness just now. Perhaps at some future time I shall be able to tell you coherently how I felt within me that my Diana—Mrs. Nash, as she was then—did not mean her rebuff as a final dismissal, and thus I was led to her side—to implore an audience of her, in the course of which she confessed to me that——”

But his bride prevented the flow of his eloquence by tapping him under the chin in exquisite playfulness with her fan, smiling roguishly at him first, and then looking round the group with an air of chastened triumph while she said:

“Foolish man! Prithee remember, Ferdinand, that you are in a public place, and that the secrets of the confessional are sacred. I protest that you are exceeding a husband's privilege in revealing aught that I confessed when taken aback at your sudden appearance before me!”

“I ask your pardon, my angel,” he cried. “I had no right to say even the little that I have said. I suppose I shall learn discretion in time and with practice. But when I think of the kindly interest that some of our friends here showed in bringing us together, I feel that they should be rewarded by a repetition of the whole story.”

“Nay, nay, sir, you may take my word for it that we look not for such a reward,” cried Garrick. “Such philanthropists as Mrs. Thrale and myself feel more than rewarded when we succeed in bringing together a lady and gentleman who were so plainly intended by Providence for each other's happiness.”

“It was Mr. Garrick who looked with the eyes of Providence into your case as associated with Mr. Kendal, madam. That is, if Puck may ever be thought of as assuming the rôle of Providence,” said Mrs. Thrale. “For myself, I believe that Puck has more to do with the making of matches than heaven; and assuredly in this particular case the mischievous fairy had more than a finger. But however that may be, we can still wish you every happiness in life, and offer you an apology for——”

“H'sh!” whispered Garrick, raising a hand. “Rauzzini is beginning to sing. I am sure, Mrs. Kendal, that you will willingly accept Signor Rauzzini's song in lieu of Mrs. Thrale's apology, however admirably worded the latter were sure to be.”

The bride smiled benignly at Mrs. Thrale, and there was more than a trace of triumph in her smile.

Dr. Burney smiled also at the adroitness of the actor, who, he could perceive, had no intention of allowing himself to be incriminated by any confession, assuming the form of an apology, that Mrs. Thrale might make in a moment of contrition for having been a partner with him in a piece of fooling that had had a very different result from the one he (and she) had looked for.

Garrick, still holding up a warning finger as if he had at heart the best interests of the composer as well as the singer of “Waft her, Angels,” prevented another word from being spoken, though more than a full minute had passed before Rauzzini had breathed the first notes of the recitativo.

But incautiously lowering his finger when the handsome Roman had begun, Mrs. Thrale took advantage of her release from the thraldom imposed upon her, to say in a low tone, looking toward the gallery in front of which the singer stood:

“It is one angel talking to the others! Was there ever so angelic a man?”

And little Miss Burney, who had also her eyes fixed upon the singer, felt that little Mrs. Thrale was not merely an angel, but a goddess. She expressed her opinion to this effect in her next letter to Mr. Crisp.

She listened in a dream to the singing that no one could hear and remain unmoved, even though one had not the advantage of looking at the singer at the same time. Fanny Burney was too shortsighted to be able to distinguish one face from another at such a distance; but this made no difference to her; she had the face of the sweet singer ever before her—most clearly when she closed her eyes, as she did now, and listened to him.

“Waft her, angels, to the skies—Waft her, angels, waft her, angels, waft her to the skies,” rang out his fervent imploration, and she felt that there were no powers that could withstand the force of such an appeal. For herself she felt carried away on the wings of song into the highest heaven. She felt that harps of heaven alone could provide an adequate accompaniment to such a voice as his; and she gave herself up to it as unreservedly as a bride gives herself to the arms of her lover. She had that sensation of a sweet yielding to the divine influence of the music until she could feel it enfolding her and bearing her into the infinite azure of a realm more beautiful than any that her dreams had borne her to in the past. She wanted nothing better than this in any world. All that she wanted was an assurance that it would continue for ever and ever....

With the cessation of the singing she seemed to awaken from a dream of divine delight, and in her awaking to retain the last thought that had been hers—the longing for an assurance that the delight which she was feeling would endure. She was awake now, and she knew that love had been all her dream, and that what she longed for was the assurance that that love would continue. And now she remembered that it was this same longing that had brought about her resolution that she would never go to her King as the beggar maid had gone to King Cophetua. There would be no assurance of the continuing of love between them if she had the humiliating feeling that he had stooped to raise her to his level.

That was the thought which took possession of her mind when she had returned from the sublimities to which she had been borne by her lover's singing, and in another minute the reaction had come. She had been soaring high, but now she was conscious of a sinking at heart; for the whole building was resounding with acclamations of the singer. There did not seem to be anyone silent, save only herself, throughout the hall. Everyone seemed calling the name of Rauzzini—all seemed ready to throw themselves at his feet; and when he stood up to acknowledge their tribute of enthusiasm to his marvellous powers, there was something of frenzy in the way his name was flung from hundreds of voices—it was not enough for the people whom he had stirred to shout his name, they surrounded him with the banners of a great conqueror—the air was quivering with the lace and the silk that were being waved on all sides to do him honour—handkerchiefs, scarves, fans—the air was full of them.

And there he stood high above them, smiling calmly and bending his head gravely to right and left in acknowledgment of all....

That was his position before the world. Her heart sank within her as she asked herself what was hers. How could she ever hope to attain to such a place as should win from the world such applause as this? How could she ever be so vain as to think that the giving of a little book to the world should have an effect worthy of being compared with this demonstration which was shaking the Pantheon?

Her heart sank to a deeper depth still when the thunders had passed away—reluctantly as the reverberations of a great storm—and there was a buzz of voices all about her—exclamations of delight—whispers of admiration—ladies with clasped hands, fervent in their words about the marvellous face of the young Roman—and her father and his friend, Mr. Fulke Greville, exchanging recollections of the singing of the same air by other vocalists, and coming gradually to the conclusion that none had put such feeling into it as had Rauzzini.

The buzz of voices did not cease when the singer had come down from his gallery and was greeting some of his friends on the floor of the great hall. He had trouble in making his way as far as the group which he meant to reach. The most distinguished ladies of high quality had pressed round him with uncritical expressions of appreciation of his singing, and there was no lack of gentlemen of fashion to follow their example, though wondering greatly that the ladies of quality should allow themselves to show such transports respecting a man with no trait of a true-born Englishman about him. Signor Rauzzini might have indulged in a score of pinches of snuff out of the gold and enamelled boxes that were thrust forward for his acceptance with the finest artificial grace of a period when it was not thought effeminate to be graceful over small things.

He bowed low to the ladies of quality, and smiled his polite rejection of the snuff of the gentlemen of fashion. But such convenances made it impossible for him to keep his eyes upon the group toward which he was making a necessarily slow way, and he only reached the side of Dr. Burney to find that Dr. Burney's daughter had disappeared. He had no chance of seeing how Miss Burney at his approach had slipped behind a pillar and suffered herself to be conducted thence to a seat by her cousin Edward: the fact that Edward was learning to be a painter was a sufficient excuse for his paying an occasional visit to such scenes of colour as were unfolded before the eyes of a frequenter of the fashionable Pantheon every night.

Fanny felt that if Signor Rauzzini had come to her side after passing through the ranks of lace and velvet and brocade, she would have sunk through the floor of the hall. But she knew that it was to her side he was coming, and she took the opportunity of flying when he was compelled to make a pause in front of the flattery of the Duchess of Ancaster.

She was painfully shy at all times, but overwhelmingly so at that moment, though she knew that she was the only woman in the place who would make the attempt to evade the distinction which threatened her. How could she remain where she had been with all eyes in the room upon her? She felt that it would be impossible.

Her heart was beating quickly as she thought:

“Not yet—not yet.”

After all there is no more womanly trait than that of fleeing from a lover; but Fanny Burney was yielding to its impulse without an attempt to analyse it, and without being consoled by the reflection of the woman of the

younger world, that if it is woman's instinct to fly from a lover, it is a lover's instinct to pursue.

She had scarcely finished the cup of ice which her cousin had brought her, before the man had found her.

But now the Gabrielli was beginning to sing, and all eyes were directed upon the Gabrielli, so that no one but Rauzzini saw how Dr. Burney's over-shy daughter was flushing.

CHAPTER XIII

THEY spoke in French, with an occasional phrase in Italian when they found the other tongue lacking in melody or in the exact shade of meaning that they sought to express. Edward Burney thought that the moment was one that favoured his ambition to study the pose of Madame Gabrielli, with a view to starting on a portrait that should make him famous. He asked Fanny's permission to allow him to take up a place a few yards beyond the pillar. He promised not to be long absent, and Fanny had not the heart to detain him.

“You fled from me—was that kind?” asked Rauzzini when the cousin had moved away, but was still in view.

“Ah,” said she, “one who has my odious selfconsciousness does not ask what is kind or unkind, she simply flies.”

“But you knew that I was coming to your side?” said he.

“I know that you are wise enough to value the criticism of a musician like my father above the vapid phrases of the people of fashion,” replied Fanny.

“That is true indeed,” said he. “I value a word of praise or blame from Dr. Burney as precious. But Dr. Burney has a daughter whose words are to me as precious.”

“She is not here to-night,” said Fanny. “My sister Esther, to whom you refer, is indeed a discriminating critic. She told me how exquisitely you sang at the concert where you met her—it is scarcely a fortnight ago.”

“Dr. Burney has more daughters than that one,” said he.

Fanny laughed.

“He has indeed more daughters than one,” she said. “We were a household of daughters before Esther married and when my brother was in the South Seas. But only Esther is critical as a musician.”

“In the name of heaven, do you think that it is only possible for me to value words that refer to my singing?” he asked. “Do you not know that I would rather listen to your voice than——”

“Than Madame Gabrielli's?” said Fanny; he had spoken his last sentence in too loud a tone, even though the Gabrielli's brilliant vocalism usually admitted of a conversation being carried on with some vehemence in the great room of the Pantheon without causing remark.

He smiled at her warning, and it was in a subdued voice that he said:

“I am tired of hearing the Gabrielli; but what of your voice? How often have you given me the chance of hearing it? Even now you fled from me as though I carried the plague about with me! Was that kind or unkind?”

“You do not entertain the thought that perhaps I have not yet tired of Madame Gabrielli's vocalism: I knew that she was at the point of beginning her aria.”

“You would sacrifice me on the altar of your favourite? Well, perhaps you would be justified in doing so. Hold up your finger now and I shall be mute as a fish until Gabrielli has had her last shriek. I can still look at you—it will not spoil your appreciation of the aria if I merely look at you.”

“I think I would rather that you talked to me than merely looked at me. I do not invite people to look at me, and happily few people do. I am not conspicuous. I am the insignificant one. There is Mrs. Thrale, for instance; she has been several times at our house, and every time she comes she inquires who is the little one.”

He smiled and held up his finger in imitation of the way she had rebuked him for talking too loud.

“H'sh; I am anxious to hear the Signora Gabrielli,” he said, and the express on that he made his face assume at that moment would have convinced anyone that he was giving all his attention to the singing—drinking in every note with the earnestness of an enthusiast. There was a certain boyish exaggeration in his expression that was very amusing to Fanny, though less observing persons would have been ready to accept it as evidence of the generous appreciation on the part of one great singer of the success of another.

So he remained until the *cavatina* had come to an end; and then he was loudest in his cry of “Brava!”

“It is a treat—a great—a sacred treat,” said he, turning to Fanny. “I do not think I ever heard that song before. Has it a name, I wonder?”

“If I mistake not it is from an opera in which a certain Roman tenore made a name for himself last year, in happy conjunction with Madame Gabrielli,” said Fanny.

“Is it possible? I had not heard of that circumstance,” said he, with a look of the most charming innocence in his large eyes. It was his hands that were most expressive, however, as he added:

“But it was last year, you say, mademoiselle? Ah, who is it that remembers an opera from one year to another? No one, except the *impresario* who has lost his good money, or somebody's else's money, over its production. Enough, the *cantatrice* has given us of her best, and is there now any reason why we should remain dumb? The great charm of the singing of these brilliant artistes of last year's operas is that when they

have sung, they have sung—they leave one nothing to think about afterward. Is not that so, mademoiselle?”

“They leave one nothing to think about—except their singing,” said Fanny. “For myself, I am still thinking of 'Waft her, angels,' although nearly half an hour must have passed since I heard the last notes. And it seems to me that when half a century will have passed I shall still be thinking of it.”

He did not offer her the conventional acknowledgement of a bow. He only looked at her with those large eyes of his; they were capable of expressing in a single glance all the tenderness of feeling of a poem.

“I have not sung in vain,” he said in a low tone. “My old *maestro* gave me the advice one day when I was proving to him my success in reaching the high note which I had been striving for years to bring into my compass: 'That is all very well,' he said. 'You have aimed at touching that rare note, now your aim must be to touch the heart of everyone who hears you sing.' I sometimes think that he set for me too difficult a task.”

“Not too difficult—for you,” said she.

“There are dangers,” he said thoughtfully. “I have known singers who tried to reach the hearts of their hearers by tricks—yes, and they succeeded through these illegitimate means in making themselves popular, while far better singers who had a scorn of such tricks and gave their best to all who listened to them, failed to please anyone who had not a knowledge of the true boundary of music.”

“I have seen these tricksters, too,” said Fanny. “I have witnessed their sentimental grimaces—their head shakings—their appeal to the feelings with pathetic eyes turned heavenward. They made me ashamed of them—ashamed of myself for listening to them, though people about me had been moved to tears. But I think that the people who are easily moved to tears are those who retain an impression the shortest space of time.”

“You give me confidence—encouragement,” he cried. “I have made up my mind that if I cannot reach a heart by the straight King's highway, I will not try to do so by any bypath. Bypaths are, we know, the resorts of brigands: they may captivate a heart or two, but only to leave them empty afterwards.”

So they talked together for many minutes. Faney Burney had a sufficient acquaintance among musicians, vocal as well as instrumental, to have learned, long ago, that they can easily be prevented from talking on any other subject than music, and the same reflection that had caused her to say that “Not yet—not yet,” had impelled her to lead Rauzzini in another direction than that in which he had shown so strong a tendency to go. He had been trying to make her understand that he had travelled through the obstructions of the hall not in order that he might obtain the criticism of so accomplished a *maestro* as Dr. Burney upon his singing, but in order that he should have a chance of talking to Dr. Burney's unaccomplished daughter; he had shown her that his wish was to converse on the topic of this unaccomplished daughter; but she had no mind to acquiesce in his aims for the present. She still felt herself to be the beggar maid, and she would not allow her king to get any nearer to her.

It was not until her cousin had returned to where she was seated, that the young Italian found that he had not made much progress with his suit. He had intended that this *tête-à-tête* with her should make her aware of how he felt in regard to her, but he had allowed his opportunity to pass, and in place of talking about her he had been led to talk of himself.

That was how he expressed himself to her when he found that their *tête-à-tête* was at an end.

“How has this come about?” he cried in surprise. “How is it that I have shown myself to be so vain as to make speeches about my singing when I meant to talk to you of yourself?”

“'Twas I who found a more profitable topic for you, *signore mio*,” she replied, feeling her way through the words of his native tongue, for he had spoken out his surprise in Italian.

He shook his head and made a gesture with his hands.

“But it is a mystery!” he said in French. “I had no desire to talk about myself or my singing. I meant to tell you what was in my mind when I saw you entering this place with your father. Shall we retrace our steps in our conversation until I find how it was that I took a wrong turning? Alas! I fear that it would not be possible!”

“It would not be possible, indeed,” she replied. “Did you not say something about the bypaths being dangerous with banditti? We kept our feet upon the King's highway, which is safe. I was swept off my feet—carried away—away—by your singing of the aria; I had scarce touched the earth once more when you came to my side, and now we are parting happily, you to realize your aspirations, I to—to—well, to retain for ever the memory of your singing—the memory of those celestial harmonies into the midst of which I was wafted by the angels of your imploration. That is enough for one evening of my life. Nay, you must not speak another word lest the charm of all should fade away. I shall go home to dream of angels.”

“And I shall go to dream of you,” he said in a low tone.

He did not hold her hand so long as Thomas Barlowe had done when parting from her, but she felt that somehow he had accomplished more by his reserve than Thomas had achieved by his impetuosity. She hoped that she might never see Thomas again; but for Signor Rauzzini——

They parted.

CHAPTER XIV

THESE foreigners!” exclaimed young Edward Burney when Rauzzini had left them, and Fanny was asking her cousin if her father was not looking for her. “These foreigners! Your father is talking with another of them—an Italian too, as I live—I have seen him in St. Martin's Street—Signor Piozzi. But I suppose Uncle Burney likes to keep in touch with them. The town is swarming with them: they are even to be found about Leicester Fields. Why do some people fancy that we must have Italians to sing for us? There are plenty of good singers in England, without a drop of foreign blood in their veins. A good sea song with a chorus that is easy to get into the swing of—that's English and honest.”

“Honest down to the hoarsest note,” said Fanny. “You and James are at one in the matter of songs.”

“Cousin Jim hates foreigners, as is quite proper that an officer in a King's ship should,” said Edward stoutly.

“Not all foreigners,” said Fanny smiling. “You forget how kindly he took to Prince Omai.”

“Oh, a South Sea Islander is different,” cried her cousin. “I expect that the South Seas will soon become as English as ourselves if Captain Cook goes on discovering islands.”

“Edward,” said Fanny, after a pause sufficient to allow of the introduction of a new topic; “Edward, could you make it convenient to call at the Orange Coffee House some day soon to inquire if there is another letter for Mr. Grafton?”

“I'll not omit it on any account,” he replied. “Oh, yes, Mr. Grafton, I'll collect your correspondence for you, never fear. You have not let anyone else into the secret, I hope?”

“No one knows it except Susy and Lottie and Charles and Hetty; but Hetty only knows that I wrote the book, not that it is to be printed—Charles is still away from us, or I would not trouble you, Edward.”

“Poor Charlie grew tired of the Orange Coffee House, did he not? He told me how you made him your messenger at first, disguising him in a cloak and a gentleman's hat, so that he might not seem quite the boy that he was. But how the secret has been kept so well is a wonder to me—kept from the powers that be, I mean—uncle and aunt. I wonder if your mother never had a suspicion of what was going on, especially as she knew all about your writing long ago.”

“I think that it was the copying out of the padre's History that saved me,” said Fanny. “Many a page of my novel I wrote when she believed that I was copying the notes for the History—yes, that, and the letters which Mr. Crisp insists on my sending him every week. But even with these excuses I could sometimes not get through more than three or four pages of my own book during a whole week.”

“How will you look when the secret is let out—it must be let out some day, you know? If the writing a novel is thought shocking, how will Uncle Burney receive the news, think you? He has not yet given you leave to publish it.”

There was a troubled look on poor Fanny's face as she replied, after a pause:

“I have often meant to ask father's permission, but I was not able to summon up courage enough to face him with the whole truth. But it cannot be delayed much longer. Perhaps I might write him a letter about it some time when I am at Chessington.”

“I don't envy you the duty, my dear Fanny,” said lie. “But I think that the sooner you get it over the easier you will feel. I suppose that writing a novel is worse than writing a 'History of Music.' I wonder why you took so much trouble over the business.”

“I could not help it,” she cried. “I have often wondered myself why I was sitting up in that cold room at the top of the house, writing until my fingers were benumbed, when I might have been at my comfortable sewing in front of a fire downstairs; but I could not help it—I could not help doing it, Eddy.”

Eddy never reached that point in his career as a painter when he found the artist's impulse to create too great to be resisted. He could not appreciate her explanation.

“'I couldn't help it,' that's what we were used to say long ago, when we got into mischief; I hope that Uncle Burney and Aunt Burney—don't forget her in this matter—I hope that they will accept your excuse. Anyhow, you may trust me to act as your 'Mr. Grafton' at the Orange Coffee House some day this week.”

He caught a glimpse of his uncle, Dr. Burney, sitting with Mr. Greville, so that he had no trouble in placing Fanny once more in charge of her father. He could see that the girl was a little downcast, and tried to cheer her up a bit by whispering in a sly way into her ear:

“Good-night, Mr. Grafton; my best respects to Mrs. Grafton and the children—especially Evelina.”

The smile that Fanny gave in acknowledgment of his pleasantry did not quite carry conviction that his well-meant effort had been successful. He went away feeling as much sympathy for her as was possible for him to have in common with the reflection that if she was in a difficult position, it was wholly one of her own seeking. What could have induced a girl who had been carefully brought up, and provided with an excellent stepmother, to write a novel, placing herself thereby on a level with those dreadful ladies whose productions were prohibited in every self-respecting household and only read by stealth when obtained at a cost of twopence—more than the best of them were worth—at the circulating library?

Yes, poor Fanny was undoubtedly to be pitied; but she had really only herself to blame for the trouble that was looming in front of her when the secret of her authorship should be revealed to her father and her excellent stepmother—one of the best judges to be found anywhere of all sorts of needlework—not merely plain sewing and buttonholing, but satin stitch, herring-boning and running and felling.

The very next day Cousin Edward called at St. Martin's Street, carrying with him a small parcel neatly done up in white paper. He was lucky enough to find Fanny and Susan alone in the work-room; and after asking mysteriously if there was any chance of his uncle or aunt coming upon them, and being assured that they were both away for the day, he carefully locked the door of the room, saying in the whisper of a man of plots and mysteries:

“'Tis better to be sure than sorry. In matters of this nature 'tis impossible to be too cautious.”

He then handed the parcel to Fanny, who gave an exclamation when she saw that it was addressed:

“*To Mr. Grafton, at the Orange Coffee House, Orange Street.*”

She opened the parcel, and found it to contain a printer's unbound copy of a book, the title page of which stared up at her: "*Evelina; or, A Young Lady's Entrance into the World*," and with it was a letter from Mr. Lowndes, the bookseller, presenting his compliments to Mr. Grafton, with the request that Mr. Grafton would read the book and prove it as soon as possible, returning the list of errata to Mr. Lowndes, so that the edition might go to press for early publication.

There it lay on the table in front of her. She read the letter standing, and remained on her feet, looking down at the unbound book. It had a queer, half-dressed appearance, lacking covers; and when, after some minutes of silence, Susy took a step or two closer to it, and, with her hand on Fanny's arm, looked down on it also, the picture that they made suggested two sisters looking into the cradle where the first baby of one of them lay. The expression on Susy's face—a mingling of wonder and curiosity, with delight not far off—was exactly that which the younger sister of the picture might be expected to wear, catching a glimpse of the undressed morsel of humanity in its first cot.

Susy put her hand down to it, and moved the printed sheets about. She read the title page down to the last name on the imprint, and then she flung up her hands, crying:

"How lovely! how lovely! But it seems wonderful! How did it come into being? It looks like a real thing now that we see it printed. The copy that you wrote out in that disguised hand seemed somehow quite different from this. There is life in this. It feels warm, actually warm, Fanny. Oh, don't you love it, dear?"

Fanny, the young mother, shook her head, but with no significance, so far as Susy could see.

"'Tis too late now," said Edward gloomily, taking on himself the burden of interpreting that head-shake. "You are bound down to go on with it now. You should have thought of all this before."

"What nonsense is this you are talking?" cried Susy, turning upon him almost indignantly; for his tone suggested an aspersion upon the offspring. "What do you say is too late now? Do you mean to say that there's anything to be ashamed of in this? Cannot you see that she did not put her name to it? Who is there to know that it came from this house? The name of Burney nowhere appears on it."

"That's so much, at any rate," said he.

"Do you mean to say that you don't think it quite wonderful, Eddy?" cried Susy. "And getting twenty pounds for it—twenty pounds! And you say something about it being too late!"

"I only judged from the way Fanny shook her head," said he.

"Oh, that was not what Fanny was thinking at all—now was it, Fanny?" said Susy encouragingly to her sister.

"I don't know quite what I meant or what I mean even now," replied Fanny. "It made me feel for the moment somehow as if I had appeared in a street full of people before I had quite finished dressing!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Edward.

"But that is nonsense, dear," said Susy, still consolatory. "The book is not yourself."

"Not all myself, but part of myself—that is what I feel," said Fanny.

"I cannot see that that is so. You are you—you yourself quite apart from the book. Whatever the book may be, you will still remain Fanny Burney, the best daughter and the best sister in the world. What does it matter if people—foolish people who know nothing about it—laugh at it or say nasty things about it? Do you think that that will make any of us like you the less?"

She put her arm about Fanny and kissed her on the cheek, and Fanny's tears began to fall. The young man standing by felt more uneasy than he had ever felt in his life. He crossed the room and looked out of the window, turning his back upon the scene of the sisters. He did not know what to say to a girl when once she allowed herself to weep. He wished with all his heart that he had not been dragged into this business. But Fanny's tears convinced him that his first impression of her reception of her book was the correct one: she was, like other young mothers he had heard of, bitterly repentant when it was too late.

The next sound of which he became aware was of the crinkling of the stiff paper of the wrapper. One of the girls was folding up the parcel. He glanced round and saw that it was Fanny herself who was so engaged. She had dried her tears; the expression on her face was one of resignation—one of determination to make the best of a bad matter.

"Ah, that's better," said he, going to her and picking up the string from the floor. "There's no use crying over spilt milk, is there, Fanny? We have all kept your secret loyally, and no one need ever know that you so far forgot yourself. Certainly the revelation will never come from my lips."

Fanny burst out laughing.

"Oh, dear Eddy, you are the best cousin that any poor girl could have," she said. "Your words have helped me greatly. They have helped to make me feel what is the aspect of the world in regard to my poor little story. It has been my constant companion night and day for three years and more. I worked at it in the cold and I tried how I could improve pages of it, copying it and recopying it; I practised a duplicity which was foreign to my nature in writing it—I have deceived my father and my mother about it—I wasted my eyesight over it—I robbed myself of sleep so that I might complete it, and when it was completed I lay awake in anxiety lest no bookseller would look at it, all this trouble I had with it, so that the world might have of my best, and what is the verdict of the world after all this? You have pronounced it, dear Eddy—you said thoughtfully and consolingly—'There's no use crying over spilt milk.' You are quite right. Not another tear will I shed over this poor little bantling of mine. 'A Young Lady's Entrance into the World'? Nay, call it rather a rickety brat that should never have made its entrance into the world at all."

"I should be ashamed of myself if I ever spoke of it in such terms," cried Susy, looking indignantly at her cousin as though he had abused it in that phrase. "'Rickety brat,' indeed! Oh, I should be ashamed. It looked so much alive—more alive, I think, than if it was in its covers. Let us sit down and read it together, Fanny."

Cousin Edward felt that he was being badly treated between these sisters. That last remark of Susy was rather more than a suggestion that he might go as soon as it pleased him. He had not any previous experience of young women and their offspring. He could not know that their attitude in such circumstances

is one of hostility to the male—that they resent his appearance as an intrusion.

“I am glad that you are so pleased,” said he, with only a trace of irritability in his voice. “And I am glad that I have been of any use to you, Cousin Fanny. After all, the thing is yours, not Susy's.”

“That is true, indeed,” cried Fanny. “And it is I who offer you my gratitude for your help. Believe me, Eddy, I am sensible of the adroitness you have shown in this matter ever since we let you into our secret; and if any trouble comes from what we have done you may be quite sure that I will accept the entire responsibility for it.”

“Oh, so far as that goes, I do not shrink from taking my share,” said he magnanimously. “I do not feel quite without blame—I am a man and I should have warned you at the outset. But you had nearly finished it before I heard anything of it—you must not forget that.”

“That is true indeed,” said Fanny. “I was self-willed. I wonder was it vanity that impelled me. Never mind! It cannot be helped now. It may never be heard of again.”

“There's always that to remember,” said he, with the eagerness of a drowning man grasping at a straw.

“And I believe that the chances are greatly in favour of that hope being realized. Thank you again for your encouragement, dear Eddy,” said she.

“Oh, that's nothing—nothing worth talking about,” said he, picking up his gloves. “You can command me always, Cousin Fanny. And you have seen that I can keep a secret. Now mind you don't leave that lying about”—he pointed to the parcel, the string of which Susy was knotting—“and, be advised by me, turn the key in the lock when you are working at it.”

“Yes,” said Susy, “we'll be sure to do our best to prevent anyone from suspecting that we have a secret, by locking ourselves in.”

“Caution—nothing like caution,” said he in a whisper, unfastening the door and putting his head out to glance to right and left of the short corridor. He held up his finger. “All safe so far,” he whispered; “no one is in sight.”

CHAPTER XV

THE moment he disappeared, Susy slipped the knot which she had just made on the parcel and flung the paper away.

“Now we can settle down to it properly, Fanny,” she cried, catching up the bundle of unstitched sheets and throwing herself back upon the little sofa. “Come beside me, dear, and we shall go through every word together. Never mind what Eddy said; I think it looks quite lovely, and how easily it reads—just like poetry—'Evelina'!—how did you think of that sweet name?—'*or, A Young Lady's Entrance into the World*.' Not a mistake so far. The printers must surely be careful men! And now that you come to think of it, this is really the entrance of the Young Lady into the world. Here she is, smiling, but a little shy—just like her mamma—your Evelina takes after you, dear—now, confess that there is something agreeably shy in the italics printing of that line beginning with '*A Young Lady's Entrance*,' Fanny; it may be wrong to write a novel, but don't you think that this is worth it? Edward is a goose to talk as he did about crying over spilt milk. I wonder that you had patience to listen to him.”

“Eddy is a dear boy, and he only said what he knew nearly everybody else would be disposed to say about this business. I started the story, as you know, half in fun—by way of exercising my hand—but then it got hold of me, and it became deadly earnest, and now—oh, Susy, what I feel now about it is just what I said to Edward: it seems as if it were the best part of myself that I am giving to the world. I wonder if it is right for anyone who has written a book, if it be only a novel, to look upon it in that light.”

“Why should it not be right? Didn't you put all your thoughts into it, and are not one's thoughts part of oneself?” said Susy. “And although so many people look down upon novels—all the novels that have been written since Mr. Richardson died—still—oh, did not Dr. Johnson once write a novel? Yes, 'Rasselas' was what he called it. I tried to read it but——”

“H'sh, Susy. Dr. Johnson might write anything that he pleased. Though Dr. Johnson wrote a novel, that should be no excuse for such as I having the audacity to do the like.”

“I suppose that's what some people will say. But I can't see that if a good man does an evil thing, it becomes a good thing simply because he does it.”

“Stop, Susy: I remember that he confessed to someone, who told it to Mr. Crisp, that he had written 'Rasselas' in order to get money enough to pay for his mother's funeral.”

“Oh, in that case—might he not have written something a good deal better, Fanny? Oh, I see that you are stricken with horror at my thinking anything that came from Dr. Johnson to be dull. I daresay I began reading it too soon: I should have waited until I had learned that if a great man writes a book it is a great book, but that if a simple girl writes a novel—well, there's no use crying over spilt milk. Now that's the last word that I have to say, for I mean to read every word that's printed here—here—here!” She brought down her open hand on the topmost sheets of “Evelina” in three crescendo slaps, and then tucked her feet under her and buried herself in the book.

Fanny sat laughing beside her; and when Susy paid no attention to her laughter, she continued sitting there in silence, while Susy read page after page.

Several minutes had passed before the authoress asked:

“How does the thing read, dear?”

Susy gave a start at the sound of her voice and looked around her as if she had just been awakened. This should have been enough for Fanny. She should not have repeated her question: it was already answered.

“How does the thing read, Susy?”

“How does it read?” cried Susy. “Oh, Fanny, it reads exactly like a book—exactly. There is no difference between this and a real book. Oh, 'tis a thousand times nicer to read in print than it was as you wrote it. It is so good, too!—the best story I ever read! I can't understand how you ever came to write it. You who have seen nothing of life—how did such a story ever come to you?”

“I wish I knew,” replied Fanny. “And do you think that anyone else will read it now that it is printed?” she asked (she was rapidly acquiring the most prominent traits of the complete novel writer).

“Anyone else? Nay, everyone—everyone will read it, and everyone will love it. How could anyone help—even daddy and mamma? Now please don't interrupt me again.”

Down went Susy's face once more among the printed sheets, and Fanny watched her with delight. She had been quite ready a short time before to accept the verdict of Cousin Edward as equivalent to that of the public upon her book; and now she was prepared to accept Susy as the representative of all readers of taste and discrimination.

“Edward—psha! What could he know about it?” she was ready to exclaim: every moment was bringing her nearer to the complete novelist.

“Surely,” she thought, “there can be no dearer pleasure in life than to watch the effect of one's own book upon an appreciative reader!”

(The appreciative reader is always the one who is favourably impressed; the other sort knows nothing about what constitutes an interesting book.)

It was the first draught of which she had ever partaken of this particular cup of happiness, and it was a bombard. She was draining it to the very dregs: it was making her intoxicated, even though it was only offered to her by her younger sister, who had never read half a dozen novels in all her life, and these surreptitiously. She could know by the varying changes in expression on Susy's face what place she had come to in the book: the turning over of the pages was no guide to her, for she had no idea of the quantity of her writing the printers had put into a page, but she had no trouble in finding Susy's place, so exquisitely reflective was the girl's face of the incidents among which she was wandering. Surely little Susy had always been her favourite sister (she was smiling at one of the drolleries of characterization upon which she had come); oh, there could be no doubt that she had never loved any of her sisters as she loved Susy (Susy's eyes were now becoming watery, and Fanny knew that she had-reached the first of Evelina's troubles).

It was the happiest hour of Fanny's life, and she gave herself up to it. She did not feel any irresistible desire to judge for herself if the opinion expressed by Susy respecting the story was correct or otherwise. She had no impulse to see how her ideas “looked in print.” She was content to observe the impression they were making upon her first lay reader. She had a vague suspicion that her own pleasure in reading the book would be infinitely less than the pleasure she derived from following the course of the story in her sister's face.

Half an hour had actually passed before Susy seemed to awaken to the realities of life. She jumped up from the sofa with an exclamation of surprise, and then glanced down at Fanny with an inquiring look on her face—a puzzled look that gave the seal to Fanny's happiness.

“You are wondering how I come to be here, Susy,” said she smiling. “You are wondering how I come to be mixed up with the Branghtons and the Mervains and the rest of them. You would make me out to be an enchantress carrying you into the midst of a strange society; and I don't want any more delightful compliments, dear.”

“Oh, Fanny, 'tis so wonderful—so——”

“I don't want to hear anything about it beyond what you have already told me, my dear Susy. I watched your face and it told me all. Give me a kiss, Susy. You have given me a sensation of pleasure such as I never knew before, and such as, I fear, I shall never know again.”

In an instant the two girls were in each other's arms, mingling their tears and then their laughter, but exchanging no word until they had exhausted every other means of expressing what they felt.

It was Susy who spoke first.

“Take it away, Fanny,” she said. “Take the book away, for I know that if I read any more of it I shall betray your secret to all the house. They will read it on my face every time I look at you.”

“I think that the hour has come for me to relieve you of the precious book,” said Fanny. “There is the letter from Mr. Lowndes asking me to make out the list of errata as quickly as possible, and I do believe that I shall have to read the book before I can oblige him.”

“'Twas thoughtless for me to jump into the middle as I did, when you had to read it,” cried Susy. “But there is really no mistake on any page, so far as I could see.”

“Unless the whole is a mistake,” said Fanny. “But I will not suggest that now, having seen your face while you were devouring it. Dear Susy, if I find many such readers I shall be happy.”

She gathered together the loose sheets and carried them off to the little room at the top of the house where it was understood she wrote her long weekly letter to Mr. Crisp, who had made himself a hermit at Chessington, but who, like some other hermits, looked forward with impatience to the delightful glimpses of the world which he had forsaken, afforded to him on every page written by her.

Susy did not see her again until dinner-time, and by that time the younger girl felt that she had herself under such complete control that she could preserve inviolate the secret of the authorship until it should cease to be a secret. The result of her rigid control of herself was that her brother James said to her when they were having tea in the drawing-room:

“What was the matter with you at dinner, Sue? You looked as if you were aware that something had happened and you were fearful lest it might be found out. Have you broken a china ornament, or has the cat

been turning over the leaves of the 'History of Music' with her claws, and left her signature on the morocco of the cover?”

“What nonsense!” cried Susan. “Nothing has happened. What was there to happen, prithee tell me?”

“Ah, that is beyond my power,” he replied. “I suppose you girls will have your secrets—ay, ay; until some day you reveal them to another girl with the strictest of cautions never to let the matter go beyond her—and so forth—and so forth. Never mind, I'll not be the one to tempt you to blab. I never yet had a secret told to me that was worth wasting words over.”

“If I had a secret of importance I think that you would be a safe person to tell it to,” said Susy.

“You are right there,” he assented with a nautical wink. “You could find in me the safest depository you could wish for; you might safely depend upon my forgetting all about it within the hour.”

He did not trouble her any further, but she felt somewhat humiliated to think that she had had so little control of herself as to cause her brother's suspicions to be aroused. She thought that it would only be a matter of minutes when her father or her stepmother would approach her with further questions. Happily, however, it seemed that James was the keenest observer in the household, for no one put a question to her respecting her tell-tale face.

Still she was glad when she found herself safely and snugly in bed and so in a position to whisper across the room to her sister Charlotte the news that Fanny's novel had been printed and that a copy was safely locked up in Fanny's desk, and that it looked lovely in its new form.

Charlotte was greatly excited, but thought that Fanny might have told her the news before dinner.

“Poor Fanny! she will have to tell the Padre to-morrow and ask his leave to—to do what she has already done without it. Poor Fanny!”

CHAPTER XVI

A FEW days later Dr. Burney was at the point of setting out for Chessington to share Mr. Crisp's hermitage until the end of the week. He had already said good-bye to the household; but Fanny accompanied him to the door. It was her last chance, she knew. She had long ago made up her mind that one of her secrets must be told to him, and she had more than once, since the printed sheets had been brought to her, tried to screw up her courage to the point of telling him, but she had not yet succeeded. And now he was going to Chessington for four days, and in the meantime the book should be returned to the printer. It was the last chance she would have of discharging the duty which was incumbent on her. She had been hovering around him in the hall, shaking out his gloves for him, polishing the gold knob of his cane, picking a scrap of dust from the collar of his travelling-cloak. In another minute he would be gone—her opportunity would be gone.

And then came the relieving thought of further procrastination:

“I shall write to him at Chessington and confess all.”

It seemed as though she had uttered her thought aloud, for he turned to her with his hand on the latch of the hall door, saying:

“You will write to Chessington to-morrow or the day after, my dear. It is no trouble to you to write. You enjoy it, do you not?”

“Oh, it is my chief enjoyment. That is why I have been practising it so much, just as the others have been practising their music. I have no music in my soul, so I—I have been writing. Of course, it is not to be expected that I could do more than write some nonsense—my equivalent to the strumming of the scales.”

“It pleases me greatly to hear that,” said he. “But you do yourself an injustice; Mr. Crisp never ceases to praise your letters.”

“He is praising his own pupil then,” said she, “for 'twas he who first taught me how to write, and now I have been putting together some imaginary letters, and I thought that if he could see them printed in front of him he would be amused.”

“Imaginary letters? Why not continue your real ones, my dear? It would cost a great deal to have your imaginary ones printed.”

“My dear father,” she cried, “you surely do not think that I would ask you for money to pay for my whim? But if I could prevail on someone—a bookseller—to print what I write, I hope you will consent to my doing so—not putting my name to the thing, of course?”

“And does my Fanny believe that 'tis all so easy to persuade a bookseller to pay her printer's bill?” he said, pinching her ear. “Booksellers are shrewd men of business.”

“But even men of business have their weak moments,” said she. “And so if—if—you would not think it too bold of me to let James take my parcel to a bookseller? You would not forbid me to try to realize my ambition?”

“You may be sure that the one to frustrate your aims will not be your father,” said he, smiling shrewdly. “I will consent if—ah, there is the fatal if—if your bookseller consents. Now goodbye, my dear child. I will take your love to your Daddy Crisp, and tell him to await a real letter from you—not an imaginary one.”

She stood on tiptoe to kiss him—but even then he had to stoop before his lips were on her forehead.

He was gone in another moment. She stood at the inner side of the closed door and listened to the rattling

of the wheels of the chaise over the cobble-stones.

So the ordeal that she dreaded had been faced, and how simple a thing it had turned out after all! Her father had treated the idea which she had submitted to him as if it were nothing beyond the thought of a simpleton—a foolish, simple girl who knew nothing of the world of business and booksellers, and who fancied that a bookseller would print everything that was sent to him.

He had delivered that contingent "if" with the shake of the head and the shrewd smile of one who is acquainted with the seamy side of business, in the presence of a child who fancies that printing follows automatically upon the writing of a book and that there are thousands of buyers eagerly awaiting the chance of securing everything that passes through a printing-press. She had perceived just what was in his mind; and his consent, followed by that contingent "if," to her publishing what she had written, was given to her with the same freedom that would have accompanied his permission to appropriate all the gold used in paving the streets of the City. She could see from the way he smiled that he felt that she knew as little about the conditions under which books are printed as a child does about the paving of the streets of the City.

She knew that he would never again refer to the subject of those imaginary letters of hers—he would be too considerate of her feelings to do so; he would have no desire to humiliate her. He would not even rally her in a playful way about her literary work, asking her how the printing was progressing, and if she had made up her mind to start a coach as grand as that magnificent piece of carved and gilded furniture which Sir Joshua had just had built for himself—oh, no: her father had always respected her sensibility. Years ago, when her brothers and sisters were making their light jests upon her backwardness, he had stopped them and said that he had no fears for the future of Fanny; and she was certain that in referring to her, as he so frequently did, as "poor Fanny," he meant nothing but kindness to her. To be sure, at first it grated upon her sensitiveness to be referred to in that kindly pitying way, but she did not resent it—indeed, she usually thought of herself as "poor Fanny." In a household where proficiency in music was the standard from which every member was judged, it was inevitable that her incompetence should be impressed upon her; but no one was hard upon her—the kindly "poor Fanny" of her father represented the attitude of the household toward her, even when she had confided to some of the members the fact that she was writing a novel. They had been startled; but, then, a novel was not a musical composition, and such an achievement could not be received with the warmth that Esther's playing received. It was really not until the printed sheets of the book lay before Susy that she felt that Fanny had, in one leap, brought herself well-nigh to the level of Esther; and by the time Susy had read the story to the end she had made up her mind that if it might be possible to compare the interest of a literary work with that of the playing of a piece of music, Fanny's work could claim precedence over the best that Esther had done—she had confessed as much to Fanny in secret, and Fanny had called her a foolish child.

Fanny had seated herself in the parlour opening off the little hall, on the departure of her father, and her memory took her back to the days she had passed in the house at Poland Street, when she had written her story of Caroline Evelyn, and had been induced by her stepmother to burn it, with sundry dramas and literary moralizings after the manner of the *Tatler*—all the work of her early youth. She recalled her resolution never again to engage in any such unprofitable practices as were represented by the smoke which was ascending from the funeral pyre of her "Caroline Evelyn" and the rest.

How long had she kept to her resolution? She could not remember. She could not recall having any sense of guilt when she had begun her "Evelina"—it seemed to have sprung from the ashes of "Caroline Evelyn"—nor could she recollect what had been on her mind when she was spending those long chilly hours of her restricted leisure toiling over the book. All that she could remember now was her feeling that it had to be written—that it seemed as if someone in authority had laid on her the injunction to write it, and she had no choice but to obey.

Well, she had obeyed—the book had been written and printed and she meant to send the corrected sheets back to Mr. Lowndes in the course of the day. Her father's consent to its publication had been obtained and it would be advertised for sale within some months, and then——

Her imagination was not equal to the pursuit of the question of its future. Sometimes she felt that she never wished to hear of the book again. She could almost hope that sending the sheets back to Mr. Lowndes would be the same as dropping them, with a heavy stone in the parcel, into the deep sea.

But that was when the trouble of getting her father's permission to publish it was looming before her. Now that this cloud had been dispelled she felt less gloomy. She had a roseate dream of hearing people talk about the book and even wishing to know the name of the author. She had a dream of Fame herself carrying her away to sublime heights—to such heights as she had been borne by the singing of "Waft her, Angels." Her dream was of sitting on these heights of Fame by the side of the singer—on the same level—not inferior in the eyes of the world—not as the beggar maid uplifted in her rags to the side of the King.

That had been her dream when listening to the singing, and it returned to her now, as she sat alone in the little parlour, having just taken the last step that was necessary before giving to the world the book which was to do so much for her. Her visions of success showed her no more entrancing a prospect than that of being by his side with her fame as a dowry worthy of his acceptance at her hands; so that people might not say that he had chosen unworthily—he, who had all the world to choose from.

And quite naturally there came to her in due sequence the marvellous thought that he had already chosen her out of all the world—he had chosen her, believing her to be the dowerless daughter of a music-teacher—the one uninteresting member of a popular family!

This was the most delightful thought of the whole train that came to her. It was worth cherishing above all the rest—close to her heart—close to her heart. She hugged that thought so close to her that it became warm with the warmth of her heart. Even though her book should never be heard of again, even though the world might treat it with contempt, she would still be consoled by the reflection that he had chosen her.

“Why on earth should you be sitting here in the cold, Fanny?” came the voice from the opened door—the voice of firm domestic virtue.

“Cold? cold? Surely 'Tis not cold, mamma,” she said.

“Not so very cold; but when there is a fire in the work-room it should not be wasted,” said Mrs. Burney. “But to say the truth you do not look as if you were cold; your face is quite flushed, child. I hope you do not feel that you are on the brink of a sickness, my dear.”

“Dear mamma, I never felt stronger in my life,” cried Fanny with a laugh.

“I am glad to hear that. I was saying to Lottie just now that for some days past you have had alternately a worried look and the look of one whose brain is over-excited. Is anything the matter, my child?”

“Nothing—nothing—indeed nothing! I never felt more at ease in all my life.”

“Well, well, a little exercise will do you no harm, I am sure; so put on your hat and accompany me to the fishmonger's. He has not been treating us at all fairly of late. It is not that I mind the remark made quite respectfully by James at dinner yesterday—it would be ridiculous to expect to find fish as fresh in the centre of London as he and his shipmates were accustomed to in the middle of the Pacific Ocean; but it would not be unreasonable for us to look for turbot with less of a taint than that we had yesterday. You will hear the man excuse himself by asserting that I chose the fish at his stall; but my answer to that—well, come with me and you shall hear what is my answer.”

Fanny went with her and heard.

CHAPTER XVII

THE faithful Cousin Edward had carried the sheets of “Evelina” to Mr. Lowndes's shop, with her list of errata, sisters Lottie and Susy giving him ample instructions as to the disguise he should assume in discharging that duty; it would be terrible, they thought, if the secret which they had so carefully guarded for so long should be revealed just when it was most important that it should be kept. Their imagination was keen enough to suggest to them the possibility of good Mr. Lowdnes setting a watch upon the people entering his shop, and giving instructions that the bearer of the parcel of “Evelina” should be detained and brought into his presence to be questioned.

They advised that Edward should muffle up his face well before going into the shop, and then lay down his parcel and fly like the wind—that would be the best way of defeating the curiosity of the bookseller.

But Edward was of the opinion that such a course of action might possibly only stimulate the man's curiosity as well as that of the people in the street, and the cry of “Stop thief!” might bring his frantic flight to a standstill. He thought that the most artful course to adopt would be to hang around the shop until he found that several customers were within; then he would enter quite casually and wait until Mr. Lowndes had served one customer and was about to attend to another. If the parcel were thrust into his hands during this interval, he, Edward, would have a good chance of getting safely away before Mr. Lowndes should have time to examine its contents.

They were rather struck with his idea, and he got permission to put it into practice; but in any case he must take the greatest care of the parcel; valuable parcels were snatched out of people's hands every day.

He smiled.

In another hour he was back at the house in St. Martin's Street to report to them the safe delivery of the precious parcel. After all, he had had nothing more exciting to do than to place it on a counter—the elderly gentleman with a pen behind his ear had not even taken the trouble to rise from his stool to receive it.

“Parcel for Mr. Lowndes? All right. Leave it there”—those were the exact words with which the parcel was received, Edward reported—the clerk was buried in his ledger before he had left the shop.

The girls were not a little disappointed at this very tame conclusion of what they expected would have been an exciting episode; and to say the truth, their chagrin was shared by Cousin Edward.

He had looked for his resources of artfulness to be drawn on in the transaction—perhaps even his physical qualifications for the defence of the sacred secret as well. He felt as a strong man might feel on going forth to meet a giant, to find himself confronted by a dwarf. The mission was unworthy of his powers. Fanny's thanks heartily given to him, with the repeated assurance that, but for him, the affair could never have been carried out, scarcely compensated him for the tameness of the affair.

For the next month or two it was a busy household in St. Martin's Street. Lieutenant Burney was joining his ship for another long voyage, and he had to be provided with a fresh outfit. The stitching that went on in the work-room surpassed even that maintained during the months preceding Esther's marriage; but the labour was lightened upon more than one occasion by the appearance of Mr. Garrick. Mr. Garrick had the freedom of the house in St. Martin's Street, as he had had that of the Poland Street domicile, where he had so often spent hours amusing the children with his inimitable drolleries.

But Mrs. Burney thought he went a little too far in taking off their friends, and even their own father, though his malicious touches were as light as the pinches of Puck. He had been paying a visit to Mr. and Mrs. Kendal, and he convulsed even Mrs. Burney by his acting of the scene of his reception by them, the lady much more coy than she had ever been at the Wells, and the gentleman overflowing in his attentions to her; but both of them esteeming him as their benefactor.

And they were so well satisfied with the honourable estate to which he had called them, that they appeared to be spending all their time trying to bring about matches among their acquaintance. No matter how unsuitable some of the projected unions seemed, no matter how unlikely some of the people were to do credit to their discrimination, they seemed determined that none should escape “the blissful bondage”—that was Mr. Kendal's neat phrase. Mr. Garrick repeated it with a smile that made his audience fancy that Mr. Kendal was before them.

“'The blissful bondage—that's what I term it, sir,'” said Mr. Kendal, through Mr. Garrick. “'But the worst of the matter is, Mr. Garrick, that we have nearly exhausted our own circle of friends'—'I can easily believe that, sir,' interposed Mr. Garrick—' and so we feel it our duty to fall back upon you.' 'Lud, sir,' cried Mr. Garrick, jumping a step or two back as if to avoid a heavy impact—'Lud, sir! a little man like me! I should be crushed as flat as a black beetle.' 'Nay, sir, I mean that we are compelled to ask you for a list of a few of your friends who, you think, should be brought together—half a dozen of each sex would be sufficient to begin with.'”

“Of course I demurred,” said Garrick, telling his story, “but before 'the blissful bondage' had been repeated more than a score of times I began to think of all against whom I bore a grudge—here was clearly the means of getting level with them; the only trouble with me was that I found myself confounding the people who bore me a grudge with those against whom I bore a grudge—the former are plentiful, the latter very meagre in number. With the exception of a few very dear animosities which I was hoarding up to make old age endurable, I have killed off all my enemies, and was forced, like Mr. Kendal, to fall back on my friends; but even among these I could find few that I could honestly say were deserving of such a fate as I was asked to nominate them for. I ventured, however, to mention the name of Lieutenant Burney, of His Majesty's Fleet, coupling it with—I could not at first think of an appropriate partner for James, but at last I hit upon exactly the right lady.”

“What! a splice before I set sail next week?” cried Jim. “That's good news, sir. And the lady's name, if you please, and her address. Give me my hat, Susy; there is no time to be lost. A splice in a trice. Come, Mr. Garrick, her name? Cannot you see that I am hanging in stays until you tell me who she is?”

“She is a very pleasant lady, sir. I can assure you of that,” said Garrick. “Not too tall even with her hair built *à la mode*; a pleasant smile, and a happy way of conversing. In short, Lieutenant Burney, I can strongly recommend the lady, for I have known her for the past twenty years and more, and from the first she was a staid, sensible person—the very partner for a sailor, sir, being so contrary to him in every point.”

“Hark'ee, Mr. Garrick; though I don't quite see myself in tow of such a state barge, I'll trouble you to relieve my suspense by telling me her name.”

“I have more than once thought when I was young that she would make me an excellent wife,” said Garrick; “but I soon perceived that I was not good enough for her. She has always been an exemplary sister, and I saw that, try as I might, I could never become her equal in that respect; and for married happiness, my boy, there is nothing like——”

“Her name—her name?” shrieked the girls.

The actor looked at them with pained surprise on every feature.

“Her name?” he said. “Surely I have described her very badly if you have not recognized the portrait. But, for that matter, I have often felt how inadequate are words to describe character combined with grace—a nature inclined to seriousness in conjunction with a desire to attract—loftiness of purpose linked with a certain daintiness——”

He made a few gestures with his hands, keeping his elbows close to his side, and then imitated the spreading of a capacious skirt preparatory to sinking in a curtsey, and in a moment there was a cry from every part of the room of “Miss Reynolds—Miss Reynolds!”

“And who has a word to say against Miss Reynolds?” cried the actor.

“No one—no one,” said Fanny. “Character combined with grace—Miss Reynolds linked with Lieutenant Burney.”

“She would make a fine sheet anchor for an Admiral of the Blue,” laughed Jim. “And with your permission, sir, I will postpone my offer until I have attained that rank.”

“I have advised Mr. Kendal to hurry things on,” said Garrick gravely. “For if you have time to spare before making up your mind, the lady cannot reasonably be thought equally fortunate. 'Lieutenant Burney, your attitude is not complimentary to the blissful bondage'”—once more it was Mr. Kendal who was in the room.

“Call the roll,” said Jim. “Who comes next on your list, Mr. Garrick?”

“Well, I was thinking of Dr. Johnson with Mrs. Abington,” said Garrick; “but perhaps you may quibble even at that.”

The room rang with laughter, for everyone had seen the beautiful actress whose lead in dress was followed by all the ladies in the fashionable world who could afford to do so, and a greater number who could not; and the worsted hose and scorched wig, two sizes too small, of Dr. Johnson had been gazed at with awe by the Burney family when he visited the house in St. Martin's Street.

“Let the banns be published without delay,” cried Jim. “Next pair, please.”

“Well, I was thinking of Signor Rauzzini and Mrs. Montagu,” said Garrick, “but perhaps that would not be approved of by you any more than the others.”

“Nay, Mr. Garrick, I will not have our friends made any longer the subject of your fooling,” said Mrs. Burney.

Garrick and Jim had the laugh between them, but it seemed that they alone saw the jest of coupling the lively Roman with the mature leader of the bluestockings: the girls bent silently over their work.

“Madam,” said Garrick apologetically, “I ask your pardon for my imprudence. May I ask which name I am to withdraw? Was my offence the introduction of the lady's name or the gentleman's? Oh, I can guess. Those rosy-tinted faces before me—I vow that you will find yourself going to sea with a chestful of pink shirts, Lieutenant—those sweet blushing faces reveal the secret more eloquently than any words could do.”

Undoubtedly the three girls were blushing very prettily; but at the mention of the word “secret” two of them gave a little start, but without looking up.

“The secret—oh, I have been feeling for some time that I was well to the leeward of a secret,” cried Jim, “and I'll not start tack or sheet until I learn what it is.”

“What, sir; you a sailor and not able to penetrate the secret of a pretty girl's blushes!” cried Garrick.

The brother looked at each of his sisters in turn. They continued stitching away demurely at his shirts.

“Helm's a-lee,” he said. “Ready about, and off we go on another tack, for hang me if I see anything of guilt on their faces, bless 'em! Come, Mr. Garrick, you shall interpret them for me. Let me into the secret which you say you have read as if it was a book.”

Susy gave a sharp cry.

“The needle!” she said. “That is the third time it has pricked me since morning.”

“Pay no attention to her, sir,” cried Garrick. “It was a feint on her part to put us off the scent of the secret.”

“In heaven's name, then, let us have it,” cried Jim.

“If you will have it, here it is,” said Garrick. “Your three sisters, Mr. Burney, are contemplating applying to Mrs. Montagu to be admitted to the freedom and the livery of the Society of Bluestockings. That is why they thought it akin to sacrilege for me to introduce the lady's name into a jest. Their blush was but a reflex of their guilty intention.”

“Indeed, Mr. Garrick, you go too far sometimes,” said Mrs. Burney. “Mrs. Montagu is a worthy lady, and our girls respect her too highly to fancy that they have any qualification to be received into her literary set.”

“Faith, Madam, I know my duty too well, I hope, to accuse any of the Miss Burneys of possessing literary qualities,” said Garrick. “But what I do say is that if such qualities as they possess were to be introduced into Mrs. Montagu's set, it would quickly become the most popular drawing-room in town. The idea of thinking that any young woman would go to the trouble of writing a book when she can reach the heart of mankind so much more easily by blushing over the breast of a shirt! Continue stitching and doing your own blushing, dear children, and you will never give anyone cause to blush for you.”

He bowed elaborately to each of them in turn and afterward to Mrs. Burney, and made a most effective exit. He always knew when he should go, and never failed to leave a few fragrant phrases behind him, as though he had dropped a bunch of roses for the girls to cherish.

“Where should we be without Mr. Garrick?” said James, when he had seen the actor to the door and returned to the work-room.

“If only he would not go too far in his jesting,” remarked Mrs. Burney, shaking her head. “Mr. Garrick sometimes forgets himself.”

“That is how it comes that he is the greatest actor in the world,” said James. “It is only when a man has learned to forget himself completely that he causes everyone else to remember him. Now there's the text for a homily that you can write to your Daddy Crisp, Fanny.”

“I'll note it, Jim, and if Mr. Crisp breaks off correspondence with me you shall bear the blame,” said Fanny.

“Mercy on us!” whispered Susy when she was alone with her sister a little later. “I never got such a fright as when Mr. Garrick pretended to read your secret. Thank goodness! he failed to get the least inkling of it.”

“Thank goodness, indeed!” whispered Fanny. But she was thinking of quite a different secret when she spoke.

CHAPTER XVIII

HE was beside her before she was aware of it, in the great music-room at Lady Hales's house. She had not seen him approach her—she could not have done so without turning round, for he had approached her from behind, and slipped into the chair that Esther had vacated in order to play to the company. Esther's husband, who had been in the seat beyond her, had been led away some time earlier by Mr. Linley's clever son in order that he might give an opinion respecting one of the songs in a piece named *The Duenna*, which was about to be produced at Drury Lane.

He was beside her and whispering in her ear, though she had not even known that he was to be present.

Of course he went through the pantomimic form of inquiring how it was that she was alone—this was, she knew, for the benefit of anyone who might be watching them and suspect an assignation. The idea of anyone seriously fancying that Dr. Burney's daughter would have an assignation with Signor Rauzzini in such a place and in the midst of such a company! But Signor Rauzzini came from a land of intrigue, and his experience of England led him to believe that he had come to another; and so he made those gestures of inquiry, and she gave him a few words of explanation, so that no one might suspect! But, for that matter, their chairs were in the least conspicuous place in the room, and the shadow of the heavy hangings of a window fell half across them both.

“And we have not met for months,” said he in French.

“Nay, have you forgotten our evening at the Pantheon?” she asked.

“Forgotten it? But that is months ago—ages. And it was all unfinished—broken off when at its best—mutilated. That hour we had! Oh, was it a melody suddenly interrupted when it was approaching its best? Was it a poem snatched away by some ruthless hand just when we had begun a deathless line?”

“What I remember best is your singing of 'Waft her.' I am not quite sure that I have yet returned to the earth from those regions whither I felt myself wafted. Are you conscious of having any part in *Dido* into which you can throw yourself with the same spirit?”

“*Dido!* pah! *Dido* is a paltry playhouse—Maestro Handel's work is a Sistine Chapel—ah, more—more—a noble cathedral. When other composers built their garden houses in imitation of Greek temples, he spent all his time raising cathedrals. His genius is his own—mighty—overpowering! Every time I approach the great *maestro* I feel that I should put off my shoes from my feet. It is holy ground—it is—ah, mademoiselle, it was you who led me to chatter of myself and my music when we were last together, and I had no wish to do so; I meant to talk of yourself alone, but we had parted before I had the chance again. I have been wondering ever since if such a chance would return—if I had not thrown it away; and now you have lured me once more toward the golden net of music; but I have seen it spread: I will not step into it. I want to talk to you of love—love and you—and—me.”

He had restrained his voice so that it was no more than a whisper, and he had chastened his gestures until he seemed rigid. Fanny knew that even if their chairs had not been far away from the next that were occupied, his words could reach no ears but her own; but the effort that he was making to restrain his gestures—oh, was it not more significant to any observant eye than his most florid action would have been? With bent head she was conscious of the quivering of the muscles of his clenched hands—of the tremulous earnestness of his expressive face. Surely everyone who so much as glanced at him would know what was the subject of his discourse—and hers—hers—but what should hers be? What answer was she to make to such a man whispering such a word as love?

“I am afraid,” she said. “You make me afraid. Is this the place? Is this the time? Am I the one?”

“Every place is the place—every time is the time—and you—you are the only one,” said he, becoming more fervent every moment. “If you and I were alone—but we are alone—our love isolates us—we are alone in the splendid isolation of our love. What are these people who are about us? They are nothing to us—less than nothing, What are the people in a church to the devout one who enters and keeps his eyes fixed upon the lovely face of the saint to whom he prays. The saint and he are in communion together, and their communion isolates them though the church is crowded? I keep my eyes of devotion upon your face, my beautiful saint, and I am rapt with the glory of this hour—we are carried away on the wings of our love until the world is too far beneath us to be seen—only the heaven is revealed to us—to me—I look into your face and I have a glimpse of heaven itself! Ah, gentle saint, you will not deny me a response—one word—only lift up your eyes—let our eyes meet and it will be as if our lips had met. I am but a mortal, but I feel, gazing into the face of my saint, as if I were immortal—immortal and crossing the threshold of the heaven that is hers—I feel that we are equal——”

She drew in her breath—the sound was something like a gasp—the gasp of one who has been swept away into the midst of a swirling sea and made breathless. She had been swept away on the amazing flood of his words; it was not until he had said that word “equal” that she felt herself swirled into the air once more, so to speak, and gave that gasp for breath: he, too, was breathless after his long and fervid outburst, repressed as to tone, but sounding therefore all the more passionate. Her gasp sounded like a sigh; his like a sob.

“Not yet—not yet,” she said in a whisper—disjointed and staccato. “I cannot listen to you yet. I dare not—I have my pride.”

“Pride? What is pride? How have I wounded your pride?” he said. “Ah, my God! you cannot think that I would propose anything that is not honourable? You do not look on me as such a wretch? Ah, you cannot.”

“Oh, no, no,” she said quickly. “I would trust you. I have looked into your face. I have heard you sing.”

“You place your faith in me? But you cannot do that unless you love me. And if you love me—have I been too headlong? Have I startled you? But surely you must have seen that on the very first day we met, before I had been an hour in your presence, my life was yours. I tell you that I knew it—not an hour—one glance was enough to tell me that I was all yours, and that for me no other one lived or would ever live in the world. What have you to say? Do not you believe me? What did you mean by that word 'pride'? It does not seem to me that it had any connection with you or me.”

“Do not ask me to explain anything just now,” she said. “You would not like to be asked to explain how you came to—to—think of me—to feel in regard to me as you have said you do——”

“Why should I shrink from it?” he asked. “But no one who has seen you would put such a question to me. I loved you because you were—*you*. Is not that enough? It would be sufficient for anyone who knew you. I saw you sitting there—so sweetly timid—a little flower that is so startled to find itself awakened into life in the spring, that it would fain ask the earth to hide it again. I thought of you as that modest little flower—a violet trying to obscure its own charm by the leaves that surround it; but all in vain—in vain, for its presence has given a subtle perfume to the air, and all who breathe of its delicate sweetness take the spirit of the spring into their souls and know that a violet is there, though hidden from their view. That is how I saw you. I have always loved the violet, and felt that shyness and sweetness were ever one; and am I to be reproached if I have a longing to pluck my violet and have her ever with me?”

“This is madness—the poetry of madness,” she cried, and there was really a piteous note in her voice. “But if I did not believe that you feel every word that you have spoken, I would let you continue, and drink in the sweetness of every word that falls from your lips. It is because I know that you are speaking from your heart and because I also know my own unworthiness that I pray of you to say no more—yet.”

“Why should I not tell you the truth, if you confess that you believe I am speaking sincerely?”

“Sincerely, but in a dream.”

“Is all love a dream, then?—is that what is in your thought?”

“I do not want it to be a dream. I wish the love to continue with your eyes open, and therefore I say—not yet.”

“You wish my love to continue? Oh, never doubt that your wish shall be granted. But why that 'not yet '? I am weary of this mystery.”

She was perplexed. Why should she hold out any longer against this impetuous Prince of the land of King Cophetua? Why should she not be as other girls who allow themselves to be lifted out of insignificance by the man who loves them. Why should that gift of being able to see more closely into the truth of things that most others accept without a question, be laid upon her as a burden?

She had a strong impulse to let her resolution go down the wind, and to put her hand in his, no matter who might be looking on, and say the word to him that would give him happiness. Who was she to suggest that his happiness would not endure—that her happiness would not endure?

She was perplexed. She had more than once been called prim; but that only meant that it was her nature to weigh everything in a mental balance, as it were, and her imagination was equal (she thought) to the task of assigning their relative value to the many constituents of human happiness. If she had been told that this meant that she had not yet been in love, and that she was not now in love, she would not have felt uneasy in her mind. She did not mistrust the feeling she had for the man who was beside her. Surely this was the very spirit of truth in loving, to be ready to sacrifice everything, so that unhappiness should not overtake him; and she had long ago felt that unhappiness only could result from his linking his life with one who was rather less than a mere nobody. The thought never once left her mind of what would be said when it was known that she had married him. A dunce's triumph, the incident would be styled by the wits, and (assuming that the wits were masculine) how would it be styled by the opposite sex? She could see uplifted hands—incredulous eyebrows raised, while they discussed it, and she knew that the conclusion that everyone would come to was that to be the most divine singer in the world did not save a man from being the greatest fool in the world.

Was her love the less true because her intelligence insisted on her perceiving that such a man as Signor Rauzzini would not be happy if married to a nonentity like herself? “Surely not,” she would have cried. “Surely it is only the truest of all loves that would be ready to relinquish its object rather than bring unhappiness upon him! Is intelligence never to be found in association with true love? Must true love and folly ever be regarded as allies?”

Her intellect was quick in apprehending the strength of the position taken up by two combatants in an argument; but the juxtaposition of the Prim and the Passionate was too much for her. She was all intellect; he was all passion. Her mental outlook on the situation was acute; but his was non-existent. His passion blinded him; her intellect had a thousand eyes.

And there he was by her side; she could almost hear the strong beating of his heart in the pause that followed his question.

“What is this mystery?”

It was her feeling of this tumultuous beating of his heart that all but made her lose her intellectual foothold. His heart beating close to hers swayed her as the moon sways the tides, until for some moments she could not have told whether it was her heart or his that was beating so wildly—only for some moments, however; only long enough for that madness to suggest itself to her—to let her resolution fly to the winds—what did anything matter so long as she could lay her hand in his, and feel his fingers warm over hers? It was her first acquaintance with the tyranny of a heart aflame, and for a moment she bent her head before it. He thought that he had got the better of her scruples, whatever they were, by the way her voice broke as she said:

“Madness—it would be madness!”

He was not acute enough to perceive that she was talking to herself—trying to bring her reason to help her to hold out against the throbbing of her heart—*his* heart.

“It would indeed be madness for us to turn our backs upon happiness when it is within our reach,” said he. “That is what you would say, sweet saint?”

But she had now recovered herself.

“Indeed it is because I have no thought except for your happiness that I entreat of you to listen to me,” said Fanny.

“I will listen to you if you tell me in one word that you love me,” said he.

There was no pause before she turned her eyes upon him saying:

“You know it. You have never doubted it. It is because I love you so truly I wish to save you from unhappiness. I want to hold your love for ever and ever.”

“My sweet saint! You have heard my prayers. You are to make me happy.”

“All that I can promise as yet is to save you from supreme unhappiness. I am strong enough to do so, I think.”

“You can save me from every unhappiness if you will come to me—and you are coming, I know.”

“I hope that if you ask me three months hence I shall be able to say 'yes'; but now—at this moment—I dare not. It is not so long to ask you to wait, seeing that I have let you have a glimpse of my heart, and told you that as you feel for me, so I feel for you.”

“Three months is an eternity! Why should it be in three months? Why not now?”

She shook her head.

“I cannot tell you. It is my little secret,” she said. “Ah, is it not enough that I have told you I love you? I shall never cease to love you.”

“Oh, this accursed place! These accursed people!” he murmured. “Why are we fated to meet only surrounded by these wretches? Why cannot we meet where I can have you in *my* arms, and kiss your lips that were made for kissing?”

There was something terrifying to her in that low whisper of his. He had put his head down to her until his lips were close to her ear. She felt the warmth of his face; it made her own burn. But she could not move her face away to the extent of an inch. Her feminine instinct of flight was succeeded by the equally feminine instinct of surrender. If it had been his intention—and it certainly seemed that it was—to kiss her in the presence of all the company, she would still have been incapable of avoiding such a caress.

He swore again in her ear, and Fanny, for all her primness, felt a regret deep down in her heart that her training would not allow of her expressing herself through the same medium.

But he did not come any nearer to her than that. He changed his phrases of abuse of their entourage to words of delight at her presence so close to him—alternately passionate and tender. His voice became a song in her ears, containing all such variations. His vocalism was equal to the demand put upon it. It was his *métier* to interpret such emotions, and now he did justice to his training, even if he fell short—and he was conscious of doing so—of dealing adequately with his own feelings. He called her once again his sweet saint who had heard his prayer; his cherished flower, whose fragrance was more grateful to him than all the incense burned in all the temples of the world was to the Powers above.

It was, he repeated, her violet modesty that had first made him adore her. Her humility brought before his eyes the picture painted by Guido Reni—the Madonna saying: *Ecce ancilla Domini*.

Ah, her humility was divine. And she was so like his mother—his dear mother who had died when he was a boy and who had taught him to sing. Ah, she was herself now singing in Paradise, and she would look down and approve his choice. She, too, had been as meek as a flower, and had never been so happy as when they had been together at a little farm in Tuscany with him by her side among the olives. Oh, she would approve his choice. And quite simply he addressed his dead mother, as though she were beside him, asking her if she could desire to have a daughter sweeter or more gentle. He had lapsed into his native Italian in this; but Fanny could follow his slow, devout words, and her eyes were full of tears, her heart of love.

She now perceived how simple and gentle a nature was that of the young Roman. He remained unspoilt by the adulation which he had received both in his own country and in England. Seeing him thus revealing a simplicity which she had not associated with him before, she was led to ask herself if there was, after all, so great a difference between them as she had believed to exist. She had forgotten all about his singing, and he was now in her eyes nothing more than a man—the man who loved her. Ah, that was enough. He loved her, and therefore she was bound to save him from the mortification of hearing the whispers of the people around them asking how he could ever have been stupid enough to marry a girl like herself, who was a nobody and without a fortune, when he might have chosen any girl in the world.

Her resolution came back to her with greater force than ever. Since he had made his nature plain to her, it would, she felt, be taking advantage of his simplicity to engage herself to him just as she was. She knew more of the world than he did. She knew how the world talked, and how it would talk regarding herself as well as regarding him in such a matter. He was simple and generous; it was necessary for her to take thought for both of them.

“Have you heard me?” he asked of her in a whisper.

“The tears are still in my eyes,” she replied. “Oh, my dear friend, cannot you see how bitter it is for me to be compelled to ask you to wait for these months that I spoke of? Cannot you see that it is a matter of conscience and honour? Ah, I should never forgive myself if I were to do other than I have done! If you——”

“Dear one,” said he, “I ask for nothing more than to hear you tell me that you love me. Who am I, that I should demand your secret? So long as you do not conceal your love from me, I do not mind if you have a score of secrets locked away in your white bosom. Tell me again that you love me and all must be well.”

She looked at him, but he knew that she could not see a feature of his face by reason of the tears that were still in her eyes.

CHAPTER XIX

IT was on one of the last mornings in January that Mrs. Burney was reading out of the newly-arrived *London Chronicle* such paragraphs as she thought would appeal to the varied interests of the breakfast-table. There were a few announcements of marriages about to take place between people whose names they knew, the amount of the bride's dowry being stated in each in plain figures, though Mrs. Burney took it upon her to affirm in one or two cases that the sum was exaggerated, or to suggest that if the father of the bride were just enough to pay his debts first, the portion of his daughter would be considerably reduced. In the case of one of the gentlemen, who was marrying thirty thousand pounds, she ventured to express the hope that he would now pay at least some of his creditors.

These were, of course, the most interesting items of news, though their attractiveness was not greatly superior to that of the gossip respecting Mr. F———, who had been noticed in high dudgeon because of Lady P———'s dancing three times with Sir Julian Y———; or that which suggested that a reconcilement must have taken place between the beautiful Mrs. G——— and her husband, for they had been seen taking the air together in the Park.

It was also pleasant to learn that His Majesty had given great encouragement to Mrs. Delany in the production of her ingenious mosaic flowers, in which she was so skilled as to excite the wonder of several criticks in the Royal circle; and also that His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales had been graciously pleased to say in publick that he had always admired the Perdita of the beautiful Mrs. Robinson, though he considered Mrs. Abington, on the whole, the most tasteful dresser in the Drury Lane company.

It was only when Mrs. Burney had folded the newspaper and was about to put it away, that a few lines of an advertisement caught her eye—she commented before she read, as though she had been a fully qualified critic:

“More novels! More stuff for the circulating libraries! Enough to make poor Mr. Richardson feel

uncomfortable in his grave! Could he but have known that he was turning all England into novel readers he would never have put pen to paper. Here is another imitator in the field. 'Evelina; or, a Young Lady's Entrance into the World,' published to-day by Mr. Lowndes—three volumes, seven and sixpence sewed, nine shillings in covers. 'Evelina,' a distant cousin to 'Clarissa' and 'Pamela' I doubt not. I hope your father will not bring anyone here to dinner to-day. Hashed mutton is a wholesome dish, to be sure, but some visitors are fastidious. He may bring as many as he pleases to-morrow, for Mr. Greville's gift of pheasants will be on the table. Why are you staring so at your sister, Lottie?"

Lottie was becoming a hardened dissembler: she scarcely started when asked to interpret certain furtive glances she cast at Fanny.

"I was wondering if Fanny would make a face: she never was fond of hashed mutton," said Lottie glibly. "If she had gone to school in France she would soon have got a liking for it, cooked as it is there."

"I am not partial to French kickshaws," said Mrs. Burney. "There's nothing like good English fare. To my thinking, the principle of making food tasty when in ordinary circumstances it should not be so, is a bad one. Hash of mutton is wholesome food, and it should be eaten as such without further question. If Providence had meant it to be tasty as well, He would have made His intentions as plain as in the case of roast pheasant."

"Lottie will tell you that I made no face at the mention of hash of mutton," said Fanny. "What does it signify whether one sits down to a simple platter of mutton hash or a great dinner such as father gets at Mr. Thrale's? A pair of geese, a leg of mutton, a tongue, a rib of roast beef and a brace of pheasants, with two or three dishes of fish, and for Dr. Johnson a veal pie or a piece of pork—those were on the table at one time. What is the benefit of such abundance, when all that one can eat is a single slice of beef?"

She spoke rapidly, for she, too, had been a great dissembler. She meant to take away her stepmother's attention from those questionable glances which she had exchanged with Lottie; and she succeeded very well.

"It would make no difference to us whether we had one dish or ten; but it makes all the difference in the world to Mr. Thrale. They say he has a prodigious appetite, and eats of at least six heavy dishes of meat at dinner."

"Mr. Baretti affirms that some day he will not awake from the stupor into which he falls after one of his heavy meals," said Susy.

"And all the time Mrs. Thrale is entreating him to be more moderate," cried Lottie.

"A humiliating duty for such as Mrs. Thrale," said her mother. "That shows how true is all that Fanny has remarked: a simple dish should be enough for any reasonable person. I have often wondered how the converse at the Streatham table could be so wise and witty if the master of the house eats like a hog, and Dr. Johnson, suffering from ill-health, expends so much energy over his pork that the veins stand out on his forehead and his face is bathed in perspiration."

"I am sure that Mrs. Thrale has wit and liveliness enough to serve for the whole company," said Fanny.

"She is chatty enough, I doubt not," replied Mrs. Burney. "There are those who think she talks over-much for a woman."

"Not for a woman of fashion," suggested Lottie with some pertness, when their stepmother had left the room. "It is long since Mrs. Thrale has invited mother to one of the Streatham dinners," she added under her breath.

And then the three fell upon the *Chronicle* for the announcement of the book.

They read it in whispers, each following the other, as though it were the *piano* part of a catch or a glee, and glancing fearfully toward the door now and again, lest it should open and Mrs. Burney reappear.

"How amazing it is!" said Susy. "This is the announcement of the birth of a baby—and such a baby!"

"The birth and the christening and all," said Lottie. "Oh, Fanny, I had no idea that it would be in the papers—I forgot that it would be advertised; and when mamma read this out I thought I should sink through the floor. So did you, I know."

"I only wish that it had been possible," said Fanny. "I could feel myself getting hot all over my body. And then you gave me that look, Lottie!"

"Could I help it?" asked Lottie. "You cannot blame me. I really thought that it was you who gave me a look, as much as to say: 'If you let the cat out of the bag I will never forgive you—no, never! '"

"Never mind! Among us we managed to get out of the difficulty very well, I think. Were we not clever, guiding the conversation away from Mr. Lowndes's shop on to the high road to Streatham?" cried Susy.

"'Twas the hash that saved us," said Lottie. "Have you not heard dear Jim applying the sailors' expression, to make a hash of something? But we didn't make a hash of our matter, did we, Fanny?" said Susan.

"We have become adroit dissemblers, and I am growing more ashamed of it every day," cried Fanny. "I have reached the condition of a man of whom I read in a volume of history: he had committed a crime, and the effort that it cost him to keep it hidden so preyed upon his mind that he could stand the strain no longer, so he confessed it and was relieved."

"But he could not have been really happy until they hanged him," said Susy. "And do you intend to confess and be hanged, Fanny? Please do not. I think it is the most exciting thing in the world to share a secret like this. I would not have missed the enjoyment for anything. Think, Fan, if you were to confess, you would draw us into it too—you would make us out to be as guilty as yourself."

"I will not confess," said Fanny. "No; it would not be honourable of me. But I do feel that the secret is having a bad effect upon us all. It has made us all such—such—dissemblers."

"Psha!" said Lottie with a sniff. "That's only another way of saying that we are ladies of quality at an early age."

Fanny shook her head. She thought that if any proof were needed of the ill effects of their treasuring their secret from their parents, this cynical pertness of Lottie supplied it. She shook her head.

“I should like 'Evelina' to come into mamma's hands,” continued Lottie. “She will go through the three volumes at a hand gallop, even though she did take it upon her to condemn it as being on a level with the odious stuff that comes to us nowadays.”

“And if she condemns it so heartily before she has read it, what will she say about it when she has finished the last chapter?” asked Fanny.

“She will say that it is the prettiest story that has been written since her dear Mr. Richardson died,” said Susy.

“I doubt it, my dear,” said Fanny.

“Well, let the worst come, she will never guess that you wrote it,” laughed Lottie.

“It is the padre whom I fear,” said Fanny. “Surely he will not need to go beyond the Ode on the first leaf to know that it is he himself whom I address.”

“And if he should—smoke it?” asked Susy, lapsing into slang which she had acquired from her sailor brother, who was in no sense a purist.

“If he should—well, either of two things will happen,” replied the authoress. “He will either think me the most double-dealing wretch in the world or the most dutiful of daughters.”

“And which will be right?” asked Lottie.

“Both views will be right,” said Fanny. “Although I meant every word of the Ode, I really think now that the idea of writing it before the dedication came to me only when I felt that I had behaved badly in sending the book to the printer without his consent.”

“You wished the Ode to be a sort of peace-offering?” said Susy. “You hoped that when he read it he would forget to be angry? Well, that was cunning of you, Fanny!”

“I tell you that the whole affair has had a bad effect upon us all,” said Fanny gently.

Once again she was conscious of someone telling her that there was no use crying over spilt milk, and this impression was followed by one that took the form of a resolution to be more careful in future. If she had spilt some milk once, that was no reason why she should not, by exercising proper forethought, refrain from doing so again.

But the book was now given to the world, if the world would have it, but as yet a copy had not come into her hand. She wondered if she would have to spend seven and sixpence in buying a copy. Seven shillings and sixpence, sewed. It was a great deal of money. Was it possible that there were five hundred people in the world ready to pay seven and sixpence for a novel with the name of no author on the title page? (She thought it best to leave out of her consideration altogether the possible purchasers of the nine shilling set of bound volumes.)

Who were the people that ever laid out so much money upon books which could be read through between the rising and the setting of the sun? She had never met such liberal enthusiasts. Of course, it was only reasonable that so splendid a work as the “History of Music” should be in the library of every house wherein people of taste resided, but that was not a book to be galloped through; some people might not be able to read it within a month. Besides, it bore the honoured name of Dr. Burney on the title page, and the fame of Dr. Burney was great. But as for that poor little seven-and-sixpenny sewed “Evelina,” how should anyone take an interest in her without reading her story? How would anyone read her story without feeling afterwards that seven-and-sixpence (leaving the nine shilling expenditure out of the question) was a ridiculous price to pay for such an entertainment?

She felt that people would come to look on her as the instigator of a fraud if they paid their money and read the book and then found out that she had written it. The wisdom of concealing her name even from the bookseller was now more apparent to her than it had ever been. She had visions of indignant purchasers railing against Mr. Lowndes, and Mr. Lowndes searching for her, so that he might rail against her; and so her speculations ended in laughter; but even her laughter grated upon her sensitive ears: she felt that it was the malicious jeering of a clever cheat at the thought of having got the better of a worthy man.

Her precious “Evelina” was leading her a pretty dance. If it had not been able to do so it would have been a paltry sort of book and she would have been a paltry sort of author.

CHAPTER XX

TWO or three weeks passed without her hearing anything of the book, and it seemed as if it had fallen, as she had at some moments hoped it would fall, like a dull stone into the depths of the sea. She heard nothing of it, and soon she perceived that her sisters felt grievously disappointed at its failure to produce any impression upon the town. Even a dull stone, if dropped into the deep, creates a little fuss on the surface before it sinks out of sight; but Fanny's book did not, so far as they could see, produce even so superficial an impression. What they expected of it they might have had some trouble explaining; but as it was, they could not conceal their disappointment from Fanny; and they showed it after a short time in a very delicate way: they never alluded to the book in her presence. She perceived that what was in their minds was that it would show very bad taste on their part to refer to it in any way. She was grateful for their consideration; and she resolved to accept their decision on this point as final; she would never allude to the horrid thing in their hearing.

It so happened, however, that she was left alone with Susy in the house one evening. Dr. Burney and his

wife had gone to a concert at Esther's, and Lottie was staying for a day or two in the country. Susy was practising her part of a new duet on the piano, and Fanny was at her sewing. So far as conversation between the two sisters was concerned, the evening had been a very silent one. Indeed, during the whole week a constrained silence had marked the intercourse of the three girls.

Susy hammered away at the music for half an hour; then her playing became more fitful, and at last it ceased altogether.

There was a long silence before Fanny heard a little sound that caused her to raise her head. It was the sound of a sob, and when she looked up she saw that Susy was leaning her forehead upon the bottom of the music rest, weeping bitterly.

Fanny was by her side in a moment.

“Dearest Susy, what is the matter?” she said soothingly. “Tell me, dear; has anything happened? Has anyone been unkind to you? Have I unwittingly done or said anything that seemed to you unkind? Tell me all, Susy.”

But Susy continued crying with her face hidden, though she yielded one of her hands to Fanny.

“Come, my dear, I have helped you before now, and I may be able to help you now. Prithee, what is your trouble?” said Fanny, putting her arm round the girl's shoulders.

Still Susy remained silent, except for her sobs.

“Tell me,” said Fanny, in a whisper. “Is it that you think that I am chagrined about—about—the book?”

In an instant Susy had whirled round on her seat and flung her arms round her sister's neck, laying her head on her shoulder.

“Oh, Fanny, Fanny, 'tis too cruel!” she sobbed. “We were sure that so much would come of it—it seemed so splendid to read, even before it was printed—so much better than any other story that ever came into our hands—and you worked so hard at it—every spare moment when you might have been enjoying yourself—in the cold of last winter up in that room—and at Lynn too—and Chessington—and now, when we think that your cleverness, your patience, your genius, is to be rewarded, nothing comes of it—all your trouble has gone for nothing—all our secrecy! Oh, it is too cruel!”

“You dear child,” said Fanny. “It is only cruel if it sets you crying in this way. What does it matter to anyone if the book has gone and nothing has come of it? I have been thinking that writing a book and publishing it is like throwing a stone into the sea. It may fall so that it sinks down plumb, or it may fall so that it makes a splash for a while, but it sinks to the bottom all the same. Success or failure is only the difference between a splash and a ripple. We were fools to fancy that our little stone would float.”

“But it was not a stone, it was full of life and it should have—it should have—swum! Oh, the people who buy books are so stupid!”

“They are—that was the hope that I builded on. They are stupid, but not stupid enough to buy my book.”

“Oh, Fanny!”

“That is really the frame of mind that I find myself in to-day. I tell you truly, Susy, that after the first week, I schooled myself to think of the business in this way; and I am certain that in another month I shall even feel delighted that my little pebble made no splash. Look at the matter philosophically, Susy.”

“Oh, philosophically!”

“Well, reasonably. Are we in a different position to-day from that we were in before the book was published? We are not. We are just the same as we were before. It has not injured us in any way. Nay, if you think of it, we are—I, at least, am—all the better for having failed, for I have learned my lesson. I was beginning to feel cleverer than I had any right to think myself, and this has come as a chastening—to make me know my right place. These rebukes do not come by chance, Susy. I know now that I was inclined to hold my head too high. I don't think that I will do so again.”

“You never held your head too high—just the opposite. And I think it very cruel that you should be rebuked for nothing. But I do not blame *anyone* except the wretched people who refused to buy your nice book, but spent their seven and sixpence at Vauxhall or Ranelagh—perhaps watching Mr. Foote and his puppets at the Haymarket. Oh, I have no patience with them! Why, it only needed a thousand people to buy the book and it would have been accounted a success!”

“Then we shall put the blame on the shoulders of that thousand, wheresoever they may be found, and for my part I shall not hold a second thousand altogether blameless—my indignation may even extend to a third. Now, that's the last word I mean to speak about the book. It has by this time reached the bottom of the sea on which I threw it; and there let it lie!”

“You are an angel—I see that plainly now.”

“Ah, there you see, what I said was true: I am much better for the rebuke I talked about; you never perceived before that I was an angel. Now let that be the last word between us on the subject of my poor little 'Evelina.' Her entrance into the world has proved fatal. Oh, Susy, she was stillborn, but her parent is making a rapid recovery.”

“That may be; but cannot you join with me in——”

“I will join with you in maintaining silence on the subject of the little one. I cannot bear to hear her name mentioned. I refuse to say another word about her or her fate. She must have been greatly beloved of the gods to die so young. Let that be 'Evelina's' epitaph. I will say nothing more about her.”

It so happened, however, that she was compelled to say a good deal more on the subject, for within half an hour Cousin Edward had called, and he began to talk of “Evelina” at once.

“I went to Hill's library in the Strand yesterday, to get a book for mother, and there, sure enough, I saw your 'Evelina,'” said he. “I asked the man in charge what it was about, and he replied that he didn't know; it was bad enough, he thought, to be compelled to hand out books all day to readers without being forced to read them for himself; but he supposed that 'Evelina' was a novel of the usual sort.”

“That was not extravagant praise,” remarked Susy.

“He didn't mean to praise it,” said Edward. “But when I asked him if anyone who had read it had recommended it, he admitted that every one of the five ladies who had read it was ready to speak well of it—one of them had taken it away a second time; and—would you believe it?—while I was standing at the counter a footman entered the shop with a demand for 'Eveliena,' as he called it; and he carried off the copy that was already on the desk.”

“For the delectation of the servants' hall?” suggested Fanny.

“Not at all—it had been recommended to her ladyship, he said, and he had been commanded on no account to return without it; her ladyship was liberal; she would not mind paying sixpence for it, instead of the ordinary fourpence.”

“That was more than liberal, it was generous to a degree,” said Fanny.

“Don't interrupt him,” cried Susy. “Continue your narrative, Eddy. I am dying to hear the rest.”

“I asked the library man if he knew who wrote the book, and he replied that he had heard the name, but had forgotten it; so far as he remembered the author was a peer of high rank but eccentric habits,” said Edward.

“The book represented his eccentric habits, I suppose,” remarked Fanny.

“I ran out of the place roaring,” said Edward. “'A peer of high rank but eccentric habits'—describes you to a T, doesn't it, Cousin Fanny? Pray what is your lordship's next work to be, and when will it be given to an eager world?”

“Is that all you have to tell?” asked Susy.

“By no means. When I heard that the book was thought well of in the Strand, I thought I would try to get at the opinion of Stanhope Street—you know Masterman's circulating library there? Well, I boldly entered, and there, sure enough, was a well-thumbed 'Evelina' in front of the librarian. I asked for some book that no one had ever heard of, and when the librarian had told me that he had never been asked for that book before, I pointed to 'Evelina,' inquiring if it was any good. 'I'm dead tired on account of its goodness, for I was fool enough to take it to bed with me last night, and I never closed my eyes in sleep,' he replied. 'I had it praised to me by a lady of quality, and so too hastily concluded that it would either send me asleep with its dullness, or shock me with its ribaldry; but it did neither, unhappily.' Just then a chariot stopped at the door and another footman entered with the name 'Evelina' written on a sheet of paper, and off he popped with the full three volumes under his arm. I waited no longer; but hurried hither to give you my news. I did not get so far, however, for I was unlucky enough to be overtaken by that vile downpour of rain, and it did not blow over until your dinner hour was at hand.”

“You are my good angel,” cried Fanny, her cheeks glowing. “We have heard nothing of all this respecting the book, and, hearing nothing, we took it for granted that it was dead—dead before it was ever alive. Oh, this is good news you have brought us, Eddy!”

“The best news that has come to us for months!” said Susy. She had turned her head away and was furtively wiping her eyes. The good news affected the sympathetic Susy almost as deeply as her disappointment had done.

“But I have only told you of my adventures of yesterday,” said Edward. “To-day I tried the booksellers, beginning with Mr. Davies and working-round to the Dillys in the Poultry—it cost me three shillings, for I had to buy something that I did not particularly want in every shop to excuse my inquiries—and I found 'Evelina' on every counter. I cannot say that any customer came in to buy it while I was in any shop, but you may be sure that the book would not be on the counter unless it was highly thought of. Of course I had need to be very discreet among the booksellers; I dared not ask who was the author, but I longed to do so, if only to hear what new story had been made up about it.”

“You heard quite enough to make us glad,” cried Susy. “Oh, how foolish we were to take it for granted that because we had no news of the book, it was dead! It is alive—greatly alive, it would appear! How could any news of it have come to us here? We should have gone forth in search of it.”

“I knew that we could depend on your discretion,” said Fanny, laying a hand on each of his shoulders. “I do not think that I ever thanked you as I should for the wise way in which you managed the business with Mr. Lowndes, and now I must not neglect to do so for having acted the part of a benevolent agent in bringing us such good news about the book.”

“Psha! there should be no talk of gratitude and the like between us,” said he. “There are family ties—I think of the honour of our family. People already talk of the clever Burneys, but they left you out of the question, Cousin Fanny, since they only thought of music. But now that you have shown what you can do in another direction, you must be reckoned with alongside the others.”

“And what about the other branch of the clever Burneys?” said Fanny. “Don't you think that people will some of these days begin to ask if Edward Burney, the great painter, is really a brother of the musical Burneys? I hope they will, dear Edward; I hope that the fame of Edward Burney, the painter, will go far beyond that of the musical Burneys, as well as poor Fanny Burney who once wrote a novel.”

The young man blushed as Fanny herself would certainly have done if confronted with the least little compliment. But there was no false shame about his acceptance of her suggestion.

“I mean to become as good a painter as I can, in order to be worthy of the name of Burney,” said he. “I feel proud of being a Burney—more so to-day than ever before, and I hope that the rest of the Burney's will some day look on me as doing credit to our name.”

“I am sure that they will have every reason to do so,” said Fanny.

When he had gone, Susy gave way to her delight at the news which he had brought. She was a good deal taller than Fanny, and catching her round the waist after the manner of the Elizabethan dancer with his partner, she danced round the table with her, lilting a somewhat breathless pæan. Fanny herself needed no coaxing to be her partner in this revel. In her jubilant moments she got rid of the primness which most people

associated with her. She had a wild jig known as “Nancy Dawson,” and she had more than once found it necessary to get rid of her superfluous spirits through this medium. She joined in her sister's little whoop at the completion of the third “lap” of the table, and they both threw themselves breathless on the sofa.

“I knew it,” said Susy between her gasps. “I knew that I could not be mistaken in believing 'Evelina' to be good—I knew that she would make her way in the affections of her readers, and I was right—you see I was right.”

“You were right, dear Susy—quite right,” said Fanny. “I do not like to be too sanguine, but I do believe, from the reports Eddy brought us, that the book will find plenty of readers. Now that we can think over the matter in a reasonable way, we must see how foolish we were to expect that the very day after the book was published people would crowd to buy it; but now, after six weeks, when Eddy goes in search of news about it, he brings back a report which is—we had best say for the present no more than 'quite satisfactory'—that was the bookseller's report about the sales of the first volume of the padre's 'History'—'quite satisfactory'—that should be quite satisfactory for the author of 'Evelina' and her sisters. There is nothing in the book to stir people as it would if written by Mr. Wilkes, but in its humble way it will, I am now persuaded, be pronounced 'quite satisfactory.' At any rate, there goes my sewing for the evening.”

She rolled up the strip of linen into a ball and used her hand, after two false starts, as a battledore, to send it flying across the room within reach of Susy, who, being more adroit, was able at the first attempt to return it with both force and precision. Once more Fanny struck it, and her sister sent it back, but by this time the unequal ball had opened out, so that it was only by her foot that Fanny could deal with it effectively. Then, daintily holding up their petticoats, the author of “Evelina” and Susy Burney played with the thing until once more they were panting and laughing joyously.

Perhaps Fanny had a faint inkling of the symbolism implied by this treatment of the discarded needlework.

CHAPTER XXI

BUT little Miss Burney had recovered all her primness on the evening when, a week later, she accompanied her stepmother to partake of tea at the home of the Barlowes in the Poultry.

Young Mr. Barlowe had, for some time after his visit to St. Martin's Street, brooded over his indiscretion in allowing his impulse at the moment of saying good night to carry him away so that he pressed Miss Burney's hand, looking into her eyes with an expression in his own of the deepest sympathy—rather more than sympathy. He felt that he had been unduly and indiscreetly hasty in his action. It had been purely impulsive. He had by no means made up his mind that Miss Burney would make him a satisfactory wife. His father and mother had, for a long time, thought very highly of Mrs. Burney, looking on her as a most thrifty and excellent manager of a household. She had shown herself to be all this and more when her first husband was alive and they had visited her at Lynn; and she had proved her capabilities in the same direction since she had married Dr. Burney. Unfortunately, however, the virtues of a stepmother could not be depended on to descend to the children of her husband's family, and it was by no means certain that Miss Burney had made full use of her opportunities of modelling herself upon her father's second wife.

No, he had not quite made up his mind on this subject—the gravest that had ever occupied his attention, and he remained sleepless for hours, fearful that he had gone too far in that look and that squeeze. He had heard of fathers and even brothers waiting upon young men who had acted toward a daughter or a sister pretty much as he had in regard to Miss Burney. He had rather a dread of being visited by Miss Burney's brother, that young naval officer who had boasted of having been educated by a murderer. Mr. Barlowe thought that a visit from such a young man would be most undesirable, and for several days he went about his business with great uneasiness.

But when a week had gone by and neither father nor brother had waited upon him, he began to review his position more indulgently than when he had previously given it his consideration. He thought more hopefully of Miss Burney as a wife. Perhaps she might have profited more largely than he had thought by her daily intercourse with so capable a woman as Mrs. Burney. At any rate, she was not musical, and that was something in her favour. Then her stepmother had praised her needlework, and everyone knows that to be a good sempstress is next to being a good housekeeper.

He thought that on the whole she would do. Her brother, Lieutenant Burney, would naturally spend most of his time at sea. That was a good thing. Thomas felt that he should hesitate to make any change in his life that involved a liability of frequent visits from a young man who had been taught by a murderer. Who could tell what might happen in the case of such a young man? As for Miss Burney herself, she was, quite apart from her housewifely qualities, a most estimable young lady—modest and retiring, as a young woman should be, and very beautiful. To be sure, he had often heard that beauty was only skin deep, but even assuming that it did not go any deeper, it had always been highly esteemed by men—none of them seemed to wish it to be of any greater depth; and it was certain that a man with a handsome wife was greatly envied—more so even than a man who was married to a plain woman but a good housewife. Oh, undoubtedly her beauty commended her to his most indulgent consideration. He had no objection in the world to be widely envied, if only on account of his wife's good looks. It never occurred to him that it might be that some people would think very ordinary a face that seemed to one who was in love with it extremely lovely. He preserved the precious privilege of a man to raise up his own standard of beauty and expect all the rest of the world to acknowledge its supremacy.

Yes, he thought that Miss Burney, beauty and all, would suit him, but still he hesitated in making another

call.

This was when Mr. Kendal had the honour of waiting upon Mrs. Burney, and his visit only preceded by a day or two Mrs. Burney's call upon her old friend, Mrs. Barlowe, in the Poultry; this interchange of courtesies being speedily followed by an invitation for Mrs. Burney and a stepdaughter to drink tea with the Barlowe family.

“I am taking you with me, Fanny, because you are the eldest and, as should be, the most sensible of the household,” said Mrs. Burney, explaining—so far as she thought wise—the invitation on the morning it was received. “There will be no music at Mrs. Barlowe's, I think, and so you will have no distracting influence to prevent your forming a just opinion of my old friends.”

“I do not mind in the least the absence of music for one night,” said Fanny.

“I am sure of that,” said Mrs. Burney. “Goodness knows we have music enough here during any day to last us over a whole week. The others could not live without it, even if it were not your father's profession.”

“Without which none of us could live,” remarked Fanny, who had no wish to be forced into the position of the opponent of music in the household.

“Quite right, my dear,” acquiesced the elder lady. “It is a precarious way of making a living. To my mind there is nothing so satisfactory as a good commercial business—a merchant with a shop at his back can afford to laugh at all the world.”

“But he usually refrains,” said Fanny.

“True; he looks at life with proper seriousness, and without levity. Great fortunes are the result of serious attention to business. Levity leads to poverty.”

“Except in the case of Mr. Garrick and a few others.”

“Mr. Garrick is certainly an exception. But, then, you must remember that he was a merchant before he became an actor, and his business habits never left him. I have heard it said that he got more out of his company for the salaries he paid than any theatre manager in Europe. But I did not come to you to talk about Mr. Garrick. I only meant to say that I know you are an observant girl. You do not merely glance at the surface of things, so I am sure that you will perceive much to respect in all the members of Mrs. Barlowe's family.”

“I am sure they are eminently—respectable, mamma; and I am glad that you have chosen me to be your companion this evening. I like going among such people—it is useful.”

She stopped short in a way that should have aroused the suspicions of Mrs. Burney, but that lady was unsuspecting, she was only puzzled.

“Useful?” she said interrogatively.

Fanny had no mind to explain that she thought herself rather good at describing people of the Barlowe type, and was ready to submit herself to more experience of them in case she might be encouraged to write another novel. But she knew that she would have some difficulty in explaining this to her stepmother, who herself was an excellent type.

“Useful—perhaps I should rather have said 'instructive,'” she replied, after a little pause.

“Instructive, yes; I am glad that you look at our visit so sensibly—I knew you would do so. Yes, you should learn much of the excellence of these people even in the short time that we shall be with them. And it is well that you should remember, my dear Fanny, that you are now quite old enough to have a house of your own to look after.”

It was now Fanny's turn to seem puzzled.

“I do not quite see how—I mean why—why—that is, the connection—is there any connection between——?”

“What I mean to say is that if at some time a suitor for your hand should appear, belonging to a respectable mercantile family, you will know, without the need of any telling, that your chances of happiness with such a man are far greater than they would be were you to wed someone whose means of getting a living were solely the practice of some of the arts, as they are called—music or painting or the rest.”

“I do not doubt that, mamma,” said Fanny demurely. She was beginning to think that her stepmother was a far better type than she had fancied.

And her stepmother was beginning to think that she had never given Fanny credit for all the good sense she possessed.

The six o'clock tea-party in the Poultry was a function that Fanny Burney's quick pen only could describe as it deserved to be described. All the time that it was proceeding her fingers were itching to start on it. She could see Mr. Crisp smiling in that appreciative way that he had, as he read her smart sentences, every one of them with its little acid flavour, that remained on the palate of his memory. She was an artist in character drawing, and she was one of the first to perceive how excellent was the material for artistic treatment that might be found in the house of the English tradesman—the superior tradesman who aspired to be called a merchant. She neglected no opportunity of observing such houses; it was only when she was daily consorting with people of the highest rank that she became alarmed lest her descriptions should be accepted as proof that she was in the habit of meeting on terms of intimacy the types of English bourgeois which she had drawn.

The ground-floor of Mr. Barlowe's house in the Poultry was given over to his business, which, as has already been mentioned, was that of a vendor of gold and silver lace. The walls carried shelves from floor to ceiling, and every shelf had its line of boxes enclosing samples of an abundant and valuable stock. The large room at the back was a sort of counting-house parlour, where Mr. Barlowe sat during the day with his son and an elderly clerk, ready for the customers, whose arrival was announced by the ringing of a spring.-bell. The scales for the weighing of the bullion and the worked gold and silver wire were suspended above, the broad counter in the shop, and from a hook between the shelves there hung a number of ruled forms with spaces for oz., dwt. and grs. On these were entered the particulars of the material supplied to the workmen who made up the lace as required. The upper part of the house was the home of the family, the spacious

dining-room being in the front, its convex windows overhanging the busy thoroughfare. Opening off this apartment was an equally large drawingroom, and the furniture of both was of walnut made in the reign of Queen Anne, with an occasional piece of Dutch marqueterie of the heavier character favoured by the craftsmen of the previous sovereigns. The rooms themselves were panelled with oak and lighted by candles in brass sconces.

It seemed to Fanny, on entering the diningroom, that every seat was occupied. But she soon saw that there were several vacant chairs. It was the imposing row of figures confronting her that made the room seem full, although only six persons were present besides young Mr. Barlowe and his parents, who met Mrs. Burney and her stepdaughter at the door. Fanny greeted Thomas at once, and she could see that his eyes were beaming, but with a rather more subdued light than shone in them on that night when he had pressed her hand.

She was conscious, at the same time, of the approach of a big elderly gentleman, wearing a well-ordered wig, evidently newly curled, with a small lady clad in expensive and expansive black silk by his side. He was holding the tips of her fingers and they advanced in step as though they were starting to dance a minuet.

They stood in front of her and her mother, while Thomas, moving to one side, said, making a low bow:

“Miss Burney, I have the honour to present to you my father, Mr. Barlowe, and my mother, Mrs. Barlowe. Mrs. Burney, madam, you are, I know, already acquainted with my parents.”

The little lady curtsied and her husband made a fine shopkeeper's bow, first to Fanny, then to Mrs. Burney.

The formality of the presentation was overwhelming to poor Fanny. She could feel herself blushing, and she certainly was more overcome than she had been when Count Orloff, the Russian, visited the house in St. Martin's Street and she gazed with awe upon the thumb that had, it was rumoured, pressed too rigidly the wind-pipe of the unfortunate Peter. All that she could do was to try to hide her confusion by the deepest of curtsies.

“We are sensible of the honour you have done us, madam,” said Mr. Barlowe when he had recovered himself—he was addressing Fanny, ignoring for the moment the presence of Mrs. Burney.

“Our son has spoken to us of you with great admiration, Miss Burney,” said the little lady. “But I protest that when I look at you I feel as King Solomon did when he saw the Queen of Sheba, the half has not been told.”

“Oh, madam, you flatter me,” said Fanny, trying to put some force into a voice that her shyness had rendered scarcely audible.

Her stepmother, perceiving how she was suffering, hastened to greet in a much less formal way their host and hostess; but she had considerable difficulty in bringing them down to her level. It seemed that they had prepared some high phrases of welcome for their younger visitor only, and they had no mind that they should be wasted.

“My stepdaughter is of a retiring nature,” said Mrs. Burney. “She is quite unused to such ceremony as you honour her with. Well, Martha, how is the rheumatism?”

CHAPTER XXII

MRS. BARLOWE did not seem half pleased to be brought down so from the high parallels of etiquette among which she had been soaring. But she had lost her place, and before she could recover herself, Fanny had slipped behind her stepmother.

“Ask me all about her rheumatism, madam, for 'tis me that knows more about it than her,” said Mr. Barlowe, with a jerk of his thumb and a wink in the direction of his wife. The homely enquiry of Mrs. Burney had clearly forced him to throw off all ceremony and treat the visit of Miss Burney as an ordinary domestic incident.

His wife would have none of this, however; she said in tones of stiff reproof:

“Mr. Barlowe, you forget that the young lady has not been presented to Brother Jonathan or the Alderman. Thomas, it is for you to usher the lady into the presence of your uncles and aunts. Pray be not remiss, Thomas. There is no excuse for such an omission.”

“I was only waiting until you had finished, ma'am,” said Thomas.

“I have finished,” she replied, with a stiff nod. “To be sure, 'twas my intention to express, in what I trust would be appropriate terms, our happiness in welcoming Miss Burney to our humble home; a few phrases of this sort were not thought out of place when I was young; but it appears that your father knows better what is *comme il faut* and *haut ton* than me. Bring the young lady forward, Thomas.”

The younger Thomas looked dubiously from his mother to his father. He was uncommonly like an actor who had forgotten his part, Fanny thought—he had no initiative. Fanny herself was more at home than any of the household. While the young man hesitated, she walked up the room as if she meant to present herself to the six figures that sat in a row at the farther end.

Thomas was beside her in a moment.

“I ask your pardon, Miss Burney,” he said. “But I knew that mamma had at least two more welcomes for your ear, and I feared that she had forgot them. Do not you think that mamma speaks well? Perhaps it would be unjust to judge her by what she said—she only made a beginning. You will be delighted when you are

going away.”

Fanny felt that this prediction was certain to be realized.

“Yes, mamma's good-byes are as well worded as her greetings,” he continued; “a clergyman could scarcely better them; and I hope——”

But now they were face to face with the six figures sitting in a row, and as his conversation was only designed as an accompaniment to the march of Fanny to this position, there was no reason to continue it.

The figures were of two men and four ladies. The former were middle-aged and bore an expression of gravity that a judge might have envied. Their dress was sombre, but of the finest material possible to buy, and each of them was painfully conscious of being in unusual garments. Of course, Fanny saw in a moment that they were merchants wearing the garments in which they attended church.

Of the four ladies, three were elderly and the fourth much younger. They wore their hair built up in a way that suggested that they desired to follow the fashion but had not the courage to complete the scheme with which they had started. The long and thin and highly-coloured feathers which crowned the stunted structures on their heads gave them the appearance of a picture of unfamiliar birds. Their dresses were extremely glossy and of an expensive material, but there was an eccentric note about all that made them seem not impressive as they should have been, but almost ludicrous. The youngest lady in the row showed unmistakable signs of being given to simpering. She had gone much further than the others of the party in the architecture of her hair, but that was possibly because the material at her command was more abundant. The dressing of her hair, however, was by no means in sympathy with the style of her garments, the latter being simple and indeed rather too girlish for the wearer, who looked between twenty-five and thirty.

It was an extraordinary ordeal that confronted Miss Burney, for young Mr. Barlowe began presenting her to the group, starting from his left and working slowly to the last of the row on the right. There was she with the young man standing close to her, but sideways, doing the formalities of presenting her, while his father and mother stood behind to see that he omitted nothing. Mrs. Burney, a little way apart, was alternately smiling and frowning at the ceremonial. She could see, from observing the effect that the whole business was producing upon Fanny, that the Barlowes were defeating their own ends, assuming that they desired Fanny to become a member of their family. These absurd formalities were, Mrs. Burney knew, quite out of place in a private house. But what could she do to cut them short? She had made an attempt before, and it was received in anything but a friendly spirit by their hostess, so that she did not feel inclined to interfere again: the thing must run its course, she felt, reflecting upon it as though it were a malady. There was no means of curtailing it.

And its course was a slow one for the unhappy victim.

“Miss Burney, I have the honour to present my aunt on my mother's side—Mrs. Alderman Kensit,” droned Thomas, and the lady on the extreme left rose at the mention of her name and made a carefully prepared curtsey, while the sky-blue feather in her hair jerked awkwardly forward until the end almost touched her nose.

“Proud to meet Miss Burney, I vow,” said she as she rose; and anyone could see from the expression on her face that she was satisfied that she had gone far in proving her claim to be looked on as a lady of fashion. She had never said “I vow” before, and she knew that it had startled her relations. She felt that she could not help that. Miss Burney would understand that she was face to face with someone who had mingled with the best.

“And this is Aunt Maria, father's sister, Mrs. Hutchings,” came the voice of Thomas, and the second lady bobbed up with quivering feathers and made a well-practised curtsey. She did not trust herself to speak. Having heard her neighbour's “I vow,” she knew that she could not go farther. She would not compete with such an exponent of the mysteries of *haut ton*.

“And this is Alderman Kensit of the Common Council; he is my uncle on my mother's side—mother is a Kensit, you know,” resumed Thomas. “And this is Aunt Jelicoe. My mother's sister married Mr. Jelicoe, of Tooley Street. And this is my cousin, Miss Jelicoe. I am sure that you will like Miss Jelicoe, Miss Burney, she is so young.”

The youngest lady of the group simpered with great shyness, concealing half her face with her fan and holding her head to one side, and then pretending to be terribly fluttered. Her curtsey was made in a flurry, and with a little exclamation of “Oh, la!”

Another uncle only remained to be presented; he turned out to be Mr. Jonathan Barlowe, and he was, Thomas whispered half audibly to Fanny, in trade in the Indies.

It was all over, curtsies and bows and exclamations—echoes of the world of fashion and elsewhere—she had been presented to every member of the row and they had resumed their seats, while she hastened to the side of her stepmother, hot and breathless. She had never before been subjected to such an ordeal. She had gladly agreed to accompany her stepmother to this house, for she hoped thereby to increase her observation of a class of people who repaid her study of them; but she had no notion that she should have to vacate her place as an Observer and take up that of a Participator. She was to pay dearly for her experience.

She was burning, her stepmother could see; and she believed that this was due to her mortification on noticing that the dress of the ladies was infinitely more expensive than hers. That would be enough to make any young woman with ordinary susceptibilities indignant, she felt; and she herself, having had an opportunity of giving some attention to the expensive silks—she could appraise their value to a penny—was conscious of some chagrin on this account. She was almost out of patience with her old friend, Martha Barlowe, for making all this parade. The foolish woman had done so, she knew, in order to impress Miss Burney and to give her to understand that she was becoming associated with no ordinary family. But Mrs. Burney had seen enough since she had left Lynn for London to know that Fanny would not be the least impressed except in the direction of boredom by such an excess of ceremony in the house of a tradesman. She had heard Fanny's comment upon the gorgeous chariot which Sir Joshua Reynolds had set up, and she could not doubt what Fanny's opinion would be regarding this simple tea to which she had consented to go at the Barlowes' house.

Fanny had hurried to her side as soon as she had passed the row of uncles and aunts. She thought that the girl seemed overcome by the tedium of the formalities; but in a few minutes she saw that Fanny was on the verge of laughter.

Mrs. Burney could not say whether she would rather that her charge became moody or hilarious.

“Eight separate curtsies,” murmured Fanny. “If there are to be the same number going away we should begin at once.”

Mrs. Burney thought it better not to reprove her for her flippancy just at that moment. She condoned it with a smile.

Only a minute were the Burneys left to themselves. Mr. Barlowe, the elder, walked solemnly up to them.

“Going on nicely, eh?” he said in a confidential way to Mrs. Burney. “Everything being done decently and in order, madam. There has been no cause of offence up to the present, though there are three persons in that row who are as ready to see an offence where none is meant as a bunch of flax to break into flame when a spark falls on it. The young lady is discreet; if she had spoken to any one of them and not to the others, there would have been a flare-up. The touchy ones belong to my wife's family. She was a Kensit, you know.”

He made this explanation behind his hand and in a whisper; he saw that his wife and son had been in earnest consultation together over some vexed question, and now they were hovering about, waiting to catch his eye.

“I spoke too soon,” he said. “Something has gone astray, and the blame will fall on me.”

They hovered still nearer, and when he caught his eye, Thomas, the younger, stepped up to his father, saying something in his ear. Mrs. Barlowe went on hovering a yard or two away.

“That would never do,” said her husband, evidently in reply to some remonstrance offered by young Thomas. “Never. The whole of the Kensits would take offence.” Then he turned again to Mrs. Burney, saying:

“Mrs. Burney, madam, my son has just reminded me that I have been remiss in doing my duty. It was left to me to present you to our relations at the head of the room, but I failed to do so, my mind being too full of the pretty curtsies of Miss. But I am ready to make amends now.”

But Mrs. Burney had observed a little twinkle in Fanny's eye; she had no notion of going through the ordeal to which Fanny had been subjected, though the spectacle would doubtless have diverted Fanny hugely.

“Nay, sir,” she said quickly to the waiting gentleman, “Nay, sir; you have forgotten that the presentation of a lady's daughter is equivalent to the presentation of the lady herself.”

“What, is that so?” said he.

“Rest assured that it is,” said she, “and an excellent rule it is. It saves a repetition of a formality that is now frequently omitted in the private houses of simple folk like ourselves. Lend me your arm, sir. I shall soon make myself at home with Martha's relations.”

She did not give him a chance of discussing the point with her; she saw that he was about to state his objections to the rule she had invented for her own saving, and she was already in advance of him in approaching the row of figures on the chairs against the wall. Fanny heard her greeting them in turn without any formality, and once again Thomas, the younger, was by her side.

His mother was still hovering, glancing suspiciously, first at the young couple, and then at the hasty proceedings of her friend, Mrs. Burney.

“It was unlike father to make so grave an omission, Miss Burney,” he said, apologetically.

“I hope that no harm will come of it,” said Fanny. “I am afraid that you found us very homely folk at our little house when you did us the honour of visiting us,” she added.

He waved his hand indulgently, smiling over her head.

“I am always ready to take my place in such a circle,” said he, “though all the time I have a pretty full knowledge of the exchange of courtesies which should mark the introduction of a stranger. Oh, yes, I do not mind meeting some people as an equal, if they do not presume upon me afterwards. Your brother has gone back to sea, I hear?” he added.

“Yes, we shall not see him again for two years,” she replied. “Did he presume upon you, sir? If so, I will take it upon me to offer you a humble apology.”

“I was considering if it might be possible that he was himself mistaken in regard to the ear-trumpet,” said Thomas.

“Sir Joshua's ear-trumpet? What of that?”

“Lieutenant Burney told me that it was a newly invented musical instrument, blown by the ear instead of the mouth. It was not until I had spoken of it to my father that I learned that the instrument was an ear-trumpet used by the deaf. I had never seen one before. I wonder if your brother intentionally deceived me.”

“My brother is an officer in His Majesty's Fleet, sir.”

“What does that mean, miss?”

“It means that he would resent an accusation of falsehood, sir.”

“Pray do not misunderstand me; I would shrink from accusing him of any conduct unworthy of an officer and a gentleman. But I was certainly deceived in fancying that the ear-trumpet was a musical instrument.”

Fanny made no reply. Her attention was directed to the entrance of two servants, one bearing a large urn, the other a dish on which lay an immense ham.

“I hope you have an appetite, Miss Burney,” said young Thomas. “If so, you will be able to stay it at that table, I'll warrant. Tea and cake may be well enough for such as dine at four, but for us, who are three hours earlier, something more substantial is needed. You will find that there is no stint in this house.”

Fanny had an idea that the young man meant to suggest that she would find the tea-table at the Poultry to make a striking contrast to that of St. Martin's Street; and she was not mistaken.

Neither was he. A greater contrast could scarcely be imagined. When Fanny was formally conducted to a

seat at the table by the side of young Mr. Barlowe, she found herself confronting such a variety of eatables as was absolutely bewildering. The first glance that she had at the dishes had a stunning effect upon her. Her impression was one of repletion; she felt that that glance was by itself equivalent to a hearty meal—a heavy meal. She felt inclined to turn her head away.

But a moment afterwards she became alert. Here was food—ample food for an amusing letter to Mr. Crisp, and, later, for a chapter in a possible novel. She would let nothing escape her notice.

She settled down to observe everything; and her stepmother, sitting opposite to her, knew from the twinkle in her eyes, that Thomas's suit was hopeless. She had heard that music is the food of love. She was not sure of this; but she was convinced that butcher's meat was not. That was where she saw that Thomas had made his mistake. He had placed too much dependence upon that great ham. He carved that ham with all the solemnity that should accompany such a rite, not knowing that he was slicing away all his chances of commending himself to Fanny.

CHAPTER XXIII

IT was an interesting experience for Miss Burney, the writer of novels and the writer of letters. She had never sat down with such a company. They all had their table peculiarities. One uncle took ale for his tea, and drained a tankard before eating anything. The other claimed a particular cup on account of its capacity, and he held it to his mouth with one hand, while he passed a second down the table to Miss Burney, only spilling a spoonful or two in effecting the transit. One of the aunts refused to eat anything except cake, explaining, in order to relieve the anxiety of the company, the details of an acute attack of spleen from which she had recently suffered. The spleen and its humours formed the subject of a fitful conversation at her end of the table.

But it was plain that everyone understood that the company had not come to the table for conversation, but for food. They did not converse, but that was not the same as saying the room was silent. There was a constant clanging of cups, a constant clatter of platters, a loud and insistent demand on the part of Thomas, the elder, and Thomas, the younger, for their guests to say what they would like to eat. This was followed by the handing of plates up and down the table, the sound of steel knives being sharpened, and the jingle of spoons in saucers. The Alderman, who was, of course, an authority on the etiquette of banquets, was formulating an elaborate explanation of the mistake that had been made in the service of the cold sirloin in advance of the venison pasty; and all the time his neighbour was striking the haft of his knife upon the table with a request for someone to pass him the pickles.

All the ceremonial veneer had plainly left the company the moment they seated themselves, and they addressed themselves to the business of feeding. They had healthy appetites—even the lady who had had a recent attack of the spleen. She would eat nothing but cake, but she did eat cake with confidence. There was no sort of cake that she did not try, and her cup was kept in constant circulation from the tea-maker to herself—four times she had it refilled, Fanny could not help noticing, and she wondered what effect such a diet would have upon her capricious spleen. Fanny had an inward hint or two that she had observed quite enough of the party to serve her purpose, and she began to count the moments until she might be able to steal away without offending the susceptibilities of her over-hospitable host and hostess. She hoped that her stepmother would listen to her plea of weariness and take her back to St. Martin's Street—to the music of St. Martin's Street—to the quiet of St. Martin's Street.

The most solid hour of her life had, however, to elapse before her fellow-guests pushed their plates (empty) away from them, and Mrs. Barlowe said:

“I am afraid you have made a poor tea, Miss Burney; but if you cannot be persuaded to have a slice of ham—my son's ham, I call it, for 'tis he who picks it out of the curer's stock whenever we have a party—if you still refuse it, we might go to the drawing-room.”

Fanny was on her feet in an instant. But not sooner than Alderman Kensit. That gentleman, rapping with the haft of his knife on the table, stood with a sheaf of notes in his hand and clearing his throat with great deliberation, started upon a speech in eulogy of Mr. Barlowe's merits as a host and as a merchant, and droned away for a good half-hour in praise of the virtue of hospitality, his text being on the possibility of entertaining angels unawares. Of course, it was only natural that, having got upon this track and with the word “angels” in his mind, he should go on to say that it was quite possible for a hospitably-inclined person to entertain an angel and be fully cognizant of the fact, and so forth: in a speech of well-worn platitudes such a suggestion seemed inevitable; and all eyes were directed to poor Fanny when it seemed impending. It was a great disappointment to everybody—except Fanny and her stepmother—when the orator skipped the expected phrases, and went on to describe a business visit which he had once made to Spain, apropos of nothing in particular. His account of this feat was familiar to all his relations, but they listened to him without a murmur, only wondering when he would come to the angel and Miss Burney.

He never came to the angel and Miss Burney, for it so happened that he had turned over two pages of his notes when he should have only turned over one. The omitted platitude was on the first, and he failed to notice the absence of a platitudinal sequence in the heads of his discourse which he had jotted down during the day.

When he had seated himself, Mr. Barlowe, the elder, got upon his feet, but he had no notes, and not being a member of the Common Council, he was not a past-master of commonplaces. He was only dull for about five minutes instead of half an hour. He had risen with a view to repair his relative's omission of that obvious

point about entertaining an angel by appointment in the shape of Miss Burney, but he lost himself before he managed to deliver it; it swam out of his ken with several other points the moment he got upon his legs.

Fully recognizing how narrow was the escape she had had, Fanny was resolved not to run any further chances. She was looking imploringly toward Mrs. Burney, trying to catch that lady's eye, but without success, and she was about to walk round the table to her side and to beg her to come away, when Mrs. Barlowe moved up to her.

“Miss Burney,” she said, “I am afraid you did not get anything you liked at the table: I saw that you scarce ate more than a morsel of cake.”

“I assure you, madam, I had enough,” said Fanny. “Your cake was so tasty I had no mind to go away from it in search of other delicacies.”

“I am glad you liked it. I made it with my own hands,” said the hostess. “That cake was ever a favourite with Mr. Barlowe and my son. It pleases me to know that you and my son have tastes in common. He is a good son, is Thomas, though I say it that shouldn't; and he is making his way to the front by treading in his father's footsteps. Mr. Barlowe is not a Common Councilman, but his father, Thomas's grandfather, was for a year Deputy-Master of the Wyre Drawers' Company—his certificate still hangs on the wall of the drawing-room. You must see it. Thomas, you will show Miss Burney your grandfather's certificate as Deputy-Master.”

“I should like very much to see it,” said Fanny quickly, “but I fear that mamma will wish me to accompany her home at once. My sisters are alone to-night and they will feel lonely: we promised to return early.”

“I will get Mrs. Burney's permission for you—so good an opportunity should not be thrown away,” said Mrs. Barlowe, giving the latter part of her sentence an unmistakable inflection as she looked toward her son and smiled.

She had gone round the table before Fanny could think of another excuse for evading the visit to the drawing-room in the company of Mr. Barlowe, the younger.

And Mr. Barlowe, the younger, was still by her side.

“Doesn't Uncle Kensit make a fine speech?” he inquired. “He is always ready. I have heard it said that he speaks longer than any Alderman in the Council.”

“I can quite believe it,” replied Fanny.

“Tis a wonderful gift,” said he—“to be always ready to say what one is expected to say. Though I did think that when he referred to the angels he meant to—to—go farther—I mean nearer-nearer home.”

Thomas might himself have gone farther had his mother not returned at that moment from her diplomatic errand.

“I have prevailed upon Mrs. Burney to let you stay to see the certificate,” said she. “Thomas, you will conduct Miss Burney to the drawing-room.”

“I am sure that mamma would wish to see the certificate also,” said Fanny. “I will ask her.”

“There is no need, Miss Burney: we shall all join you later,” said Mrs. Barlowe.

Poor Fanny saw that there was no use trying to evade the attentions of Thomas, and as she walked toward the folding doors by his side she was conscious of a silence in the room and of all eyes being turned upon her—smiles—such knowing smiles—and a smirk from the young lady. Fanny was aware of all, and what she was too short-sighted to see she was able to imagine. She was burning at the thought of all those people gazing at her in silence. It was the most trying moment of her life.

She passed through the door which Thomas opened for her and closed behind her.

“I am glad to have this opportunity, Miss Burney,” said he, when they were alone in the big half-lighted room.

“You must hold your grandfather's certificate in high esteem, sir,” said she. “I suppose so high a place as he reached is but rarely attained by mortals. You will have to guide me to the document: I have very poor eyesight, as you must have noticed.”

“It is a great drawback,” said he. “But we will not talk about grandfather's certificate just yet, if you please: I have something to say to you that will, I hope, interest you even more than that.”

“You surprise me, sir,” said Fanny icily.

“Nay, I hope that you know me well enough not to be surprised by all that I have to reveal to you now that the opportunity has been given to me. Have you no inkling of what I am about to say, Miss Burney?”

“Not the least, sir. I expected only to see that relic of your grandfather's honourable career.”

“What, after meeting Uncle Kensit and Aunt Jelicoe, you do not feel interested in their families?” said he, in a tone of genuine surprise.

Fanny looked at him before she spoke, and there certainly was more than a note of casual interest in her voice as she said:

“Their families? Oh, I should like above all things to hear about their families.”

“I knew that you would,” said he, apparently much relieved. (She wondered if the relief that she felt was as apparent as his.) “Yes, I felt certain that you would welcome this opportunity of learning something about the Kensits and the Jelicoes. They are remarkable people, as you cannot have failed to perceive.”

He made a pause—-a pause that somehow had an interrogative tendency. She felt that he meant it to be filled up by her.

“They are remarkable people—very remarkable,” said she.

“We are very fortunate in all our relations, Miss Burney,” said he with great solemnity. “But, of course, Uncle Kensit stands high above them all in force of character. A great man indeed is Alderman Kensit—a member of the Haberdashers' and Grocers' Companies as well as the City Council, and yet quite ready to meet ordinary persons as fellow-men. He had heard the name of your friend, Sir Joshua Reynolds, though not the name of Dr. Burney, and he was kind enough to say that he would have no objection in the world to meet

either of these gentlemen. That shows you what sort of man he is—his fine, simple nature. 'If Dr. Burney or Sir Joshua Reynolds were duly presented to me, I should feel it my duty to be civil to him '—those were his exact words."

Once more there was an interrogative pause.

"Perhaps they may be fortunate enough to meet him some day," was all Fanny could trust herself to say.

"I would not say so much to them—he is very busy just now," said Thomas hastily. "It would have to be arranged with care and thought—I would not like them to be disappointed. But if it would please you, I daresay a meeting could be brought about; meantime, I would not raise up any false hopes on the matter, if I were you."

"You may depend on my preserving the strictest secrecy, Mr. Barlowe," said Fanny. "I should think that I might even discipline myself to forget that such a person as Alderman Kensit existed."

"That would perhaps be the safest course to pursue," said he thoughtfully, and with an air of prudence that made him for the moment the subject of a description after Fanny's own heart. She felt that she could fool this young man as easily as her brother had fooled him. Surely he was made to be fooled, with his solemn airs and his incapacity to distinguish what is worthy from what is pompous.

"Yes," she continued, "Dr. Burney has had it intimated to him since the publication of his 'History' that the King was desirous of talking to him at Windsor, and I know that Sir Joshua is being visited daily by the Duchess of Devonshire and the Duchess of Ancaster, and it would be a great pity if my father were forced to write excusing himself to His Majesty on account of having to meet Alderman—Alderman—I protest that I have already forgotten the gentleman's name—nay, do not tell it to me; I might be tempted to boast of having met him, and if I did so in Sir Joshua's presence, his beautiful Duchesses would be forlorn when they found that he had hurried away on the chance of meeting the Alderman. And now, sir, I think that I shall return to Mrs. Burney."

"But I have not told you half of what I can tell about our family," he cried. "I have said nothing about my aunts—I have four aunts and eleven cousins. You would surely like to hear of my cousins. They do not all live in London. I have three as far away as Lewes; their name is Johnson. My mother's youngest sister married a Johnson, as you may have heard. I believe that some objection was raised to the match at first, but it turned out quite satisfactory."

"It is pleasant to know that; and so, sir, as we have come to this point, don't you think that we had better adjourn our conference?" said Fanny. "It would be doing the Johnson family a grave injustice were you to attempt to describe their virtues within the time that is left to us, and that would be the greatest catastrophe of all. Besides, I came hither all unprepared for these revelations. If you had hinted at what was in store for me I would, of course, have disciplined myself—forewarned is forearmed, you know."

Miss Burney had received many a lesson from Mr. Garrick, from the days when he had come to entertain her in the nursery, in the art of fooling, and she was now quite capable of holding her own when she found herself in the presence of so foolable a person as this egregious young man. But the game was apt to become wearisome at the close of an evening when she had suffered much, and when the subject of her raillery had shown himself to be incapable even of suspecting her of practising on him.

"But there is Aunt Jelicoe; I should like to tell you something of Aunt Jelicoe," pleaded Thomas. "Without any of the advantages of her parents, Aunt Jelicoe—and—oh, I have something more to say to you—not about them—about ourselves—you and me—I was nearly forgetting—you will stay——"

"One cannot remember everything, Mr. Barlowe," said Fanny, with her hand on the knob of the door. "You have done very well, I think, in remembering so much as you have told me. As for ourselves—you have quite convinced me of my own insignificance—and yours also, sir. You would be doing us a grave injustice were you to speak of us so soon after your estimable relations."

"Perhaps you are right," said he, after a few moments of frowning thought. "Yes. I see now that it might have been wiser if I had begun with ourselves and then——"

Fanny had turned the handle. She re-entered the dining-room, and the moment that she appeared silence fell upon the company, and once again she was conscious of many eyes gazing at her and of horrid smiles and a smirk. That was another ordeal for the shy little Miss Burney—it was an evening of ordeals.

She walked straight across the room to her stepmother.

"I am ready to go away now," she said. "We have never stayed at any house so long when we only came for tea. I am tired to death."

She took care, of course, that Mrs. Burney only should hear her; and Mrs. Burney, being well aware that Fanny was not one to complain unless with ample cause, charitably interposed between her and Mrs. Barlowe, whom she saw bearing down upon her from the other side of the room.

"Fanny and I will say our good-night to you now, my dear Martha," she said. "You have treated us far too kindly. That must be our excuse for staying so long. When people drop in to tea they do not, as a rule, stop longer than an hour, as you know. But you overwhelmed us."

"I was hoping—" began Mrs. Barlowe, trying to get on to Fanny, but by the adroitness of Mrs. Burney, not succeeding. "I was hoping—you know what I was hoping—we were all hoping—expecting—they were in the drawing-room long enough."

Mrs. Burney gave her a confidential look, which she seemed to interpret easily enough. She replied by a confidential nod—the nod of one who understands a signal.

"Mum it shall be, then," she whispered. "Not a word will come from me, simply good-night; but we could all have wished—never mind, Thomas will tell us all."

Mrs. Burney allowed her to pass on to Fanny, having obtained her promise not to bother the girl—that was how Mrs. Burney framed the promise in her own mind—and Mrs. Barlowe kept faith with her, and even persuaded Alderman Kensit, who was approaching them slowly with a sheaf of notes in his hand, to defer their delivery in the form of a speech until the young woman had gone.

And thus the visitors from St. Martin's Street were able to escape going through the formality of taking leave of all the party. They shook hands only with their host and hostess and their son, curtseying very politely to the company of relations.

“They are warm-hearted people, but their weakness for ceremony and the like is foolish enough,” said Mrs. Burney to Fanny, when they were safe within the hackney carriage.

Fanny laughed.

“Oh, indeed, there is no harm in any of them,” she said. “They may be a little foolish in thinking that the Poultry is St. James's Palace or Buckingham House. The only one among them who is an arrant fool is the son. You saw how his mother made it up that he should lead me into the other room?”

“It was maladroitly done indeed. What had he to say to you when he got you there, I wonder?”

“He had nothing to say to me except that his uncles were second in all the virtues and all the talents to no man in town, and that his aunts and cousins—but he did not get so far in his praise of his aunts and cousins; I fled. Oh, did you see him cut slices off the ham?”

Fanny laughed quite pleasantly, with a consciousness of having at her command the material on which to found a scene that would set her sisters shrieking.

“Oh, if Mr. Garrick had but seen him carve that ham!” she cried.

“I wish that Mr. Garrick would give all his attention to his own affairs and leave us to manage ours in our own way,” said Mrs. Burney.

“What? Why, what had Mr. Garrick to do with our visit to——”

“'Twas Mr. Garrick who continued his fooling of Mr. Kendal, sending him all over the town trying to make matches. He believes that he is under a debt of gratitude to Mr. Garrick and your father for the happiness he enjoys with his bride.”

“And he suggested that a match might be made between someone in St. Martins Street and someone in the Poultry? But how does Mr. Kendal come to be acquainted with the Barlowes?”

“His wife was a Johnson before she married her first husband, and the Johnsons are closely connected with the Barlowes.”

“Young Mr. Barlowe was just coming to the family history of the Johnsons when I interrupted him.”

“Was he coming to any other matter that concerned you more closely, think you?”

Fanny laughed again, only much longer this time than before. She had to wipe her eyes before she could answer.

“Dear mamma,” she said, “you would laugh as heartily if you had seen him when he suddenly recollected that in his eagerness to make me acquainted with the glories of the Kensits and the abilities of the Johnsons, he had neglected the object of his excursion to that room with my poor self, until it was too late.”

“I doubt it,” said Mrs. Burney. “I do not laugh at incidents of that sort. I lose patience when I hear of a young man neglecting his chances when they are offered to him. But had he ever a chance with you, Fanny?”

“Not the remotest, dear mamma. If he had remembered to speak in time, and if he had spoken with all the eloquence of his admirable uncle, the Alderman, he would not have succeeded. If Thomas Barlowe were the last man in the world I should e'en die an old maid.”

“That is a foolish thing for you to say. You may die an old maid for that. But indeed when I saw young Mr. Barlowe in his home, I perceived that he was not for you. I could not see you a member of that family, worthy though they may be.”

“I think if a girl loves a young man with all her heart she will agree to marry him, however worthy may be his family,” said Fanny. “But I am not that girl, and young Mr. Barlowe is not that man.”

“I daresay that is how you feel,” said the elder lady. “But you must not forget, Fanny, that you are no longer a girl; it is quite time that you had a house of your own.”

“That is true, dear mamma, but for the present I am happy in living in your house, and I ask for nothing better than to be allowed to stay in your service.”

“That is all very well, but——”

“Ah, do not introduce that 'but'—life would be thoroughly happy if it were not for its 'buts.' Here we are in Leicester Fields. I feel as if I should like a roast apple for supper, to put a pleasant taste in my mouth at the close of the longest day I can remember.”

They entered the parlour on the ground floor, and found Lottie and Susy roasting apples on the hearth, while Dr. Burney sat in his chair reading.

“I did not expect you back so soon,” said Mrs. Burney to her husband.

“I did not mean to return for another hour,” said he, “but Sir Joshua left early and brought me with him in his coach. He cut his evening short in order to get back to a book which he affirms is the best he has read since Fielding.”

“It would have to be a good book to take the attention of Sir Joshua,” said Mrs. Burney. “Did you hear what was its name?”

“It is called 'Evelina,' I believe,” replied Dr. Burney.

“A novel, of course. I remember hearing the name some time ago,” said his wife. “'Evelina'; yes, it has a familiar sound. I cannot recollect at this moment who it was that mentioned it to me. I believe I told you of it at the time, Fanny.”

“I do not remember your telling me that anyone had mentioned it to you; but I am nearly sure that that was the name of the novel advertised in the *Chronicle*—you read out all about it after breakfast one morning,” said Fanny.

“You are quite right—that was how I got the name in my mind. Now you can have your roasted apple, child. But if you are hungry you have only yourself to thank for it. Don't bend so over the fire, Susy; your face is

frightfully fed—so, for that matter, is Lottie's. No, thanks, you need not roast one for me.”

CHAPTER XXIV

SOME weeks had passed since Cousin Edward had brought his exhilarating news that the book was being asked for at the libraries, and during this interval, Fanny had heard nothing of its progress. She had applied in the name of Mr. Grafton for a copy to be addressed to the Orange Coffee House, but Mr. Lowndes had paid no attention to her request, Edward found out on going to the Coffee House, so it seemed plain to Fanny that the book was not making the stir in the world that her cousin's report from the libraries had attributed to it. But here was a distinct proof that it had at last reached their own circle, and somehow Fanny and her sisters felt that this meant fame. Somehow they had come to think of the readers of the book as being very remote from them—people whom they were never likely to meet; they had never thought of the possibility of its being named under their own roof by anyone not in the secret of its authorship. But now the strange thing had come to pass: it was not only named by their father, but named with the most extraordinary recommendation that it could receive!

What! Sir Joshua was not only reading it, but he had curtailed his stay at the club in order to get home to continue it! Sir Joshua had actually been content to forsake the society of his brilliant friends, every one of them more or less notable in the world, in order that he might read the story which Fanny Burney had written all out of her own head!

The idea was simply astounding to the girls and to Fanny herself as well. It meant fame, they were assured, and they were right. It took such a hold upon Susy and Lottie as prevented them from giving any attention to Fanny's amusing account of the evening at the Barlowes'; and the fun she made—modelled on Mr. Garrick's best nursery style—of the Alderman and Mrs. Alderman, with the speeches of the one and the St. Giles's curtsies of the other, went for quite as little as did her imitation of the bobbing of the crown feathers of the aunts and the rustling of their dresses, the material of which was too expensive to be manageable: the thick silk was, Fanny said, like a valuable horse, impatient of control. She showed how it stood round them in massive folds when they curtsied, refusing to respond to the many kicks they dealt it to keep it in its place.

From the recalcitrant silks—with illustrations—Fanny had gone to the slicing of the ham, the hacking at the great sirloin, the clatter of the teacups, and the never-ending passing of plates and pickles, of mustard and pepper and salt—the things were moving round the table as the planets were shown circling round the sun in the clever invention called the Orrery, after one of the titles of the Earl of Cork—only the noise made by the perpetual handing on of the things did not suggest the music of the spheres, Fanny said.

Her descriptions, bright though they were and full of apt metaphors, went for nothing. Her sisters were too full of that wonderful thing which had happened—the great Sir Joshua Reynolds, President of the Royal Academy, the painter of all the most beautiful duchesses that were in the world, to say nothing of beautiful ladies of less exalted rank—this great man, who was so busy conferring immortality upon duchesses that he was compelled to keep in his painting-room on Sundays as well as every other day, and who had never been known to suspend his work except upon the occasion of the death of his dear friend Dr. Goldsmith—this man was actually at that very moment sitting in his arm-chair eagerly reading the words which their sister Fanny had written!

The thought was too wonderful for them. The effect that it had on them was to make them feel that they had two sisters in Fanny, the one a pleasant, homely, hem-stitching girl, who could dance the Nancy Dawson jig for them and take off all the people whom she met and thought worth taking off; the other a grave authoress, capable of writing books that great men forsook the society of other great men to read!

They looked on her now with something of awe in their eyes, and it was this lens of awe which, while magnifying her work as a writer where it came into their focus, made them fail to appreciate her fun, for they saw it, as it were, through the edges of the lens and not through the centre.

She quickly perceived the lack of sympathy of her audience.

“What is the matter with you both to-night?” she cried—they were now upstairs in her room, and she knew that at the same moment Mrs. Burney was giving her husband an account of the party. “What is the matter with you both? Has anything happened when I was away to put you out? Why don't you laugh as usual? I am sure I never told you anything half so funny as this, and I was thinking all the way coming home that it would make you roar, and now you sit gravely looking at me and not taking in half I say. Pray, what is the matter?”

“Nothing is the matter, dear,” said Lottie. “Nothing—only I can't help thinking that Sir Joshua is at this moment sitting eagerly reading the book that you wrote—you, sister Fanny, that no one who comes to us notices particularly. I can hardly bring myself to believe that there is only one Fanny.”

Fanny looked at her strangely for some moments, and then said:

“I do not blame you, dear; for I am myself of the same way of thinking: I cannot realize what the padre told us. I cannot think of myself as the Fanny Burney whose book is keeping Sir Joshua out of his bed. That is why I kept on harping like a fool on the single string of that odious party. I feel that I must keep on talking, lest my poor brain should give way when I sit down to think if I am really Fanny Burney, who was ever happiest sitting unnoticed in a corner when people came to this house, or laughing with you all up here. I cannot think how it would be possible for me to write a book that could be read by such as Sir Joshua.”

“Better think nothing more about it,” said Susy, who fancied she saw a strange look in Fanny's eyes. “What's the good of brooding over the matter? There's nothing strange about Sir Joshua's reading the book: I

read it and I told you that it was so lovely everybody would want to read it. Besides, Sir Joshua may only have mentioned it for want of a better excuse to leave the club early; so you may not be so famous after all, Fanny."

Susy's well-meant attempt to restore her threatened equilibrium was too much for Fanny. But there was a considerable interval before her laughter came. She put an arm about Susy, saying:

"You have spoken the truth, my dear sister. I have no right to give myself airs until we find out exactly how we stand. But if Fanny Burney, the dunce, should find out to-morrow that Sir Joshua has not really been kept out of his bed in order to read 'Evelina' by Fanny Burney, the writer, the first Fanny will feel dreadfully mortified."

"One thing I can promise you," said Susy, "and this is that Susannah Burney will not be kept out of her bed any longer talking to Fanny Burney about Fanny Burney's novel, whether Fanny Burney be mortified or not. We shall know all about the matter when we go to the Reynolds's to-morrow. In the meantime, I hope to have some hours of sleep, though I daresay that Fanny Burney will lie awake as a proper authoress should do, thinking over the exciting party in the Poultry and wondering how she will work in a description of it in her next novel. Good-night, and pleasant dreams! Come along, Lottie."

And Fanny Burney did just what her sister had predicted she would do. She recalled some of the incidents of the tea-party in the Poultry, having before her, not as she had in the hackney coach, the possibility of describing them in a letter to Mr. Crisp, but of introducing them into a new book.

Before she slept she had made up her mind to begin a new book; for she now found it comparatively easy to believe that Sir Joshua was reading "Evelina" with great interest. At any rate, she would hear the next day when she should go to the Reynolds's, whether Sir Joshua had read it, or whether he had only made it an excuse for getting home early in the night, so that he might arise early and refreshed to resume his painting of the duchesses.

But the next evening, when, with her sisters and their stepmother she tripped along the hundred yards or so of Leicester Fields that lay between their house and that of Sir Joshua Reynolds, all thoughts of the book which she had written and of the book which she meant to write, vanished the moment that she was close enough to Sir Joshua's to hear, with any measure of clearness, the nature of the singing, the sound of which fell gently upon her ears.

"H'sh!" said Mrs. Burney, stopping a few feet from the door. "H'sh! some one is singing. I did not know that it was to be a musical party."

"It is Signor Rauzzini," said Lottie. "I would know his voice anywhere. We are lucky. There is no one who can sing like Signor Rauzzini."

"We should have come earlier," said Mrs. Burney. "But when Miss Reynolds asked us she did not say a word about Rauzzini. And now we cannot ring the bell, lest we should interrupt his song."

She stood there with the three girls, under the lighted windows of the house, listening to the silvery notes of the young Roman that floated over their heads, as if an angel were hovering there, filling their ears with celestial music. (The simile was Susy's.) The music sounded celestial to the ears of at least another of the group besides Susy; and that one thought:

"How can anyone trouble oneself with such insignificant matters as the writing of books or the reading of books, when such a voice as that is within hearing?"

And then, all at once, she was conscious of the merging of the two Fanny Burneys into one, and of the existence of a new Fanny Burney altogether—the Fanny Burney who was beloved by the celestial singer, and this was certainly the most wonderful of the three.

The thought thrilled her, and she knew that with it the truth of life had come to her: there was nothing worth anything in the world save only loving and being loved.

And this truth remained with her when the song had come to an end, soaring to a high note and dwelling on it for an enraptured space and then dying away, so gradually that a listener scarcely knew when it had ceased.

Fanny's imagination enabled her to hear, at the close, the drawing-in of the breath of the people in the room where the song had been sung: she knew that up to this point they had been listening breathlessly to every note. She could hear the same soft inspiration—it sounded like a sigh—by her sisters and their stepmother. A dozen wayfarers through Leicester Fields had been attracted to-the house by the sound of the singing, and now stood timidly about the doorway. They also had been breathless. One woman murmured "Beautiful!" Fanny could understand how the word had sprung to her lips, but what could the man mean, who, almost at the same moment, said:

"Oh, my God! how could I have been so great a fool?"

She was startled, and glanced at him. He was a young man, shabbily dressed, and on his face there were signs of dissipation. He was unconscious of her glance for some moments, then with a slight start he seemed to recover himself. He took off his hat with a respectful bow, and then hurried away. But Fanny saw him turn when he had gone about a dozen yards into the roadway, and take off his hat once more, with his eyes looking up to the lighted windows of the house. He was saluting the singer whom he had not seen, and to Fanny the act, following the words which he had unwittingly uttered, was infinitely pathetic.

It appeared that Mrs. Burney herself received the same impression. Fanny was surprised to hear her say:

"Poor fellow! he was once a gentleman!"

Then they entered Sir Joshua's house and were shown upstairs to the great painting-room, where Sir Joshua and his sister Frances were receiving their guests.

It was quite a small party—not more than a score of people altogether, and all seemed to be acquainted with one another. Fanny knew several of them; one girl, however, she had never seen before, but she knew who she was in a moment. She was standing at one end of the room chatting to Mrs. Sheridan, and on the wall just above her there hung the picture of a girl in oriental costume and wearing a turban. Fanny Burney

had often looked at it in admiration, and Sir Joshua had encouraged her, affirming that it was the best picture he had ever painted and that it would remain in his painting-room until the day of his death. She looked at it now with renewed interest, for the original was the girl standing beneath it—the beautiful Miss Homeck whom Oliver Goldsmith had called the Jessamy Bride. Several years had passed since Sir Joshua had painted that portrait, from which Miss Burney had recognized the original; and fifty years later another lady recognized the same face, still beautiful in old age, from having seen merely a print of the same picture.

When Fanny turned her eyes from the portrait it was to admire the features of Mrs. Sheridan. Mrs. Sheridan was gazing somewhat pensively at the picture of St. Cecilia which was hanging a little way from that of Miss Horneck, and Fanny was near enough to her to perceive how her expression grew into that of the face in the picture. At first sight, it did not appear to Fanny that the two faces were the same, and it seemed as if Mrs. Sheridan perceived this, and determined to vindicate Sir Joshua's skill by assuming the pose of the picture. But Miss Burney knew that the beautiful lady had done it unconsciously—that it was simply because she was recalling the days when she had sat for the painter, and had obeyed his injunction to lose herself among the simple chords of the aria that was sacred to her since her sister died with the strain upon her lips —“I know that my Redeemer liveth.”

Fanny gazed at the exquisite face, illuminated with what seemed to her to be a divine light, and for the first time she knew something of what it was to be a great painter. After “St. Cecilia” the other portraits on the walls seemed paltry. There was no divine light in the faces of the duchesses. There was life in them; they breathed and smiled and posed and looked gracious, but looking at them one remained on earth and among mortals. But St. Cecilia carried one into the glorious company of the immortals. “She drew an angel down,” was the line that flashed through Miss Burney's mind at that moment. An angel? A whole celestial company.

CHAPTER XXV

YOU are looking at her—I, too, have been looking at her; she is divine,” came a voice beside her. She did not need to turn to see the speaker. She had been longing for the sound of his voice for many days. She had not even a chance of hearing him sing before this evening.

“She is St. Cecilia herself,” said she. “You have seen Sir Joshua's picture?”

“My countryman, Piozzi, pointed it out to me,” he replied. “I was enraptured with the picture. But when the living St. Cecilia entered the room and I heard her story, I felt ready to throw myself at her feet and implore her as the guardian of poor singers to take me to her care. Her face has on it the bloom of a flower dropped fresh from the garden of God—angelic beyond the voice of man to describe.”

He spoke, as usual, in French to Fanny, but he had greeted Mrs. Burney in English, and he tried to translate his last phrase to her into the same language. He failed after the first word or two, and begged Miss Burney to complete his task for him. She did so, and her stepmother smiled and nodded in appreciation of his comment.

“She is indeed a beautiful creature,” said Mrs. Burney. “I heard her sing more than once at Bath. People went mad about her beauty and her singing, and truly I never heard any singing that so affected me. It was said that she hated to let her voice be heard in public. Her father, Mr. Linley, made her sing: she was a gold mine to Mr. Linley and he knew it.”

Signor Rauzzini had listened attentively and picked up all that she had said without the aid of a word from Fanny.

“But now she will never be heard again no more,” said he in English. “And she is right in making such a resolution, and her husband is a noble man to agree with her in this,” he continued, but in French to Fanny. “Picture that lovely creature placing herself on the level of such a one as the Agujari! sordid—vulgar—worldly! quarrelling daily with the *impresario* on some miserable question of precedence—-holding out for the largest salary—turning a gift which should be divine into gold! Oh; she was right.”

“Signor Rauzzini no doubt thinks it a pity that such a voice should cease to give pleasure to the thousands it enchanted,” said Mrs. Burney, not being able to follow him in French.

“Oh, no, no; just the opposite,” cried Fanny. “He says he admires her the more for her resolution.”

“I am so glad. Pray tell him that I agree with him,” said Mrs. Burney. “A good woman will avoid publicity. Her home should be sufficient for her.”

Fanny did not need to translate the words, he grasped their meaning at once.

“I agree with all of my heart, madame,” he cried. “I would not wish my mother or my sister to have their names spoken with freedom by everyone who paid a coin to hear them sing. I should think it—*come si chiamo?*—Ah! forgive my poor English.” He went off into French once more—“Pray tell madame that I think it would be odious to hear the name of my mother or my sister tossed from man to man as they toss the name of a woman who comes before the public. I think the woman who would hide herself from all eyes as a violet hides itself under a leaf is the true woman. The shy, timid, retiring one—I know her—I esteem her. I could love no other. I have a deep respect for the woman of the Orient who would die sooner than let her face be seen by a man.”

“What does he say—I like his eagerness?” asked Mrs. Burney.

Fanny translated some of his phrases, and Mrs. Burney nodded and smiled her approval.

“The bloom on the wing of a butterfly is a very tender thing,” resumed the Roman; “the breath of a man is

sufficient to remove it—a single breath—and when the bloom has gone the charm of the beautiful creature has gone also."

"I am not sure that I like the comparison to the butterfly," said Fanny, smiling. "The butterfly is the emblem of all that is fickle—all that is idle except for its yielding to its fickleness. It is beautiful, but nothing else."

He laughed.

"I am rebuked," he said. "But with us the butterfly is the symbol of the life—of the soul. Assume that and you will, I think, see that I meant not to hint at the beauty of the frivolity, but at the beauty of the soul. I feel that a woman's life has on it the bloom of a butterfly's wing, and if that is once breathed on, its beauty is gone for ever—the woman's life is never again what it was—what it was meant to be. But if you wish, I will not go beyond the violet as my emblem of the best woman—my woman."

"I thank heaven that I have no voice," said Fanny gently, after a pause. Young Mr. North-cote, Sir Joshua's pupil, had approached Mrs. Burney—his eye was on Susy—in order to tell her that tea was being served in the drawing-room.

Mrs. Burney thanked him and took the arm that he offered.

"We shall all go in together," said Mrs. Burney, with a sign to Fanny.

But Rauzzini contrived to evade her eye by renewing his admiration of the "St. Cecilia."

"If I could but reproduce in song the effect that flows from her face I should be the greatest singer in the world," said he.

"You need not envy her," said Fanny. "Do you remember Mr. Handel's setting of 'Alexander's Feast '?"

"Only an aria or two."

"One of the lines came into my mind just now when I looked at that picture. 'She drew an angel down.'"

"And it was very apt. She would draw an angel down."

"Yes; but the poet has another line before that one—it refers to a singer—'He raised a mortal to the skies.' That was the line which came to my mind when I heard you sing. You raise mortals to the skies. Your power is equal to that of St. Cecilia."

"Nay, nay; that is what you have done. I have been uplifted to the highest heaven by you. When you are near me I cannot see anything of the world. Why have we not met more frequently? Ah, I forget—I am always forgetting that the months you spoke of have not yet run out. But I am not impatient, knowing that the prize will come to me in good time. I have been away at the Bath and Salisbury and Bristol and I know not where, singing, singing, singing, and now I go to Paris and Lyon for a few months, but you may be certain that I shall return to England—then the separating months shall have passed and you will welcome me—is not that so?"

"I think I can promise you—every day seems to make it more certain that I shall welcome you."

"My angel—my dream!——"

He said the words—both long-drawn monosyllables in French—in a whisper that gave them the full force of passionate expression. He had need to whisper, for several people were in the room, and Mr. Boswell was among the number, and everyone knew that Mr. Boswell, as a gossip-monger, had no equal in town. He was always pimping and prying—nosing out germs of scandal—ever ready to make mischief by telling people all the nasty things other people had said of them. Mr. Boswell had his eye on them—and his ear. In addition, Mrs. Thrale, who had arrived late, had no idea of allowing the handsome Roman singer to waste himself with a nonentity like Miss Burney, and she was now perilously close to him whom she came to rescue.

But the whisper and the expression imparted to it were enough for Fanny Burney. He might have talked for hours in his impassioned way without achieving the effect of his whispered exclamations.

Then Mrs. Thrale hastened up to his side full of her resolution to rescue him from the conversation with the insignificant person whom his good nature suffered to engage his attention.

"Why, what is this?" cried the little lady who regarded herself with complacency as the soul of tact. "Have you explained to Signor Rauzzini that you are the unmusical member of the family, Miss Burney?"

"I believe that he is aware of that fact already, madam," replied Fanny.

"And yet he is in close converse with you? He is the most good-natured man in town," said Mrs. Thrale. "Does he hope to interest you when your father failed?"

"He has never ceased, to interest me, madam," said Fanny.

"Then he did not talk about music?"

"Oh, yes; I think he said something about music."

"Yes, touching a note here and there, as one might in passing a harpsichord. Of course you could not have lived in Dr. Burney's house without being able to understand something of music. But we must not trespass upon Signor Rauzzin's courtesy, Miss Burney. Everyone is talking of him in the drawing-room—he must gratify the company by mingling with them."

Then she addressed Rauzzini in French.

"I promised to go in search of you, signor," she said. "Madame Reynolds is distracted. I came on my mission famished—I had vowed, as the crusaders did, not to taste food or drink until I had succeeded in my emprise. May I ask you to have pity on me now and lead me to the tea-table?"

He turned to ask Fanny to accompany them, but he found that she had slipped quietly away. She was already at the door.

"My duty was to Miss Burney, madame, but she has been frightened away," said he.

"Oh, she is the shy one of the family, I believe," said Mrs. Thrale. "I am sure that all the time you were so good-natured as to talk to her she was wishing that the floor would open and allow her to sink out of sight. She would have thought it much more good-natured on your part if you had taken no notice of her. I have scarcely spoken to her half a dozen times myself, though I have frequently been to her father's house. I cannot rack my brain to discover a congenial topic with such young people. Were you successful, do you

think?”

He made a gesture with his hands that might mean anything. Mrs. Thrale assumed that it meant nothing—that he felt he was not greatly concerned whether he had been successful in finding a congenial topic of converse with Miss Burney or not.

She laughed.

“Poor girl!” she said. “She may have her dreams like other girls.”

“I believe she has—poor girl!” said he. “But I know that in her knowledge of music she goes deeper—soars higher than most young ladies who have submitted to lessons from a *maestro*—nay, higher than the *maestro* himself.”

Mrs. Thrale looked doubtfully at him.

“Is it possible that we are talking of two different people?” said she.

“Ah, that is quite possible,” said he.

“I was referring to Miss Burney, the one of the family who does nothing except sew—her mother commends her sewing very highly. I fear that you actually believed that you were in converse with one of her sisters.”

“Madame,” said he, “it is my belief that the one who sews in a family is far more interesting than the one who sings. But Miss Burney need not, in my eyes, be any more than Miss Burney to be interesting, though she has taught me more of music than I ever learned before.”

“Is't possible? Oh, yes: I should remember that her father told me that she was his amanuensis—she made a neat copy of all his notes for the 'History of Music.' It is no wonder that she knows something about it. Such a good daughter! And the father took no trouble about her education. She did not know her letters till she was eight or nine, I believe—perhaps twelve. I don't believe that I ever exchanged half a dozen words with her before this evening; and as for men—you are the first man I ever saw taking any notice of her.”

His face lit up strangely, Mrs. Thrale thought, at this revelation. He gave a laugh.

“So much the better for her—so much the worse for the men,” said he. “And now, madame, if the tea has not become too strong, and if your hunger has not made you too weak to walk to the table, I should esteem it an honour to conduct you thither.”

Mrs. Thrale smiled her acquiescence, and she entered the drawing-room on the arm of the singer. Nothing could have convinced her that he did not feel grateful to her for rescuing him from the position in which his good nature had placed him—by the side of the most insignificant young woman among all Sir Joshua's guests.

She believed that she was increasing his debt of gratitude to her by keeping him with her for the next half-hour. Her sense of protecting him gave her naturally a sense of patronage, which was quite pleasant for her to experience, especially when she glanced round the room and saw several ladies of higher rank than she could pretend to, frowning in her direction. She knew how Signor Rauzzini was pestered by the attentions of such as these, and she could almost hear the well-bred sneers of her friends as they glanced at her and wondered if she never meant to release the unfortunate young man—she knew just what they would say, and she accepted their imaginary words as a real compliment to her protective powers. Her smile down the table was one of great complacency.

She also noticed that the insignificant Miss Burney was glowing as she had never seen her glow before. Her face was rosy and her eyes were actually sparkling. Mrs. Thrale had never imagined that such eyes as Miss Burney's could sparkle, no matter what their provocation might be.

“Poor girl! Poor child! Her head is turned, as I feared it would be when I saw the Rauzzini with her. She is the unhappy victim of his good nature.”

This was the conclusion come to by the little lady whose ability to pronounce an opinion on such a matter was widely acknowledged; and coming to such a conclusion, she naturally commended all the more heartily the step which she had taken for separating the foolish girl and the fascinating young man.

She would have waved aside any suggestion that might be made to her to the effect that the increase in Miss Burney's colouring and the light in her eyes was due to Miss Burney's overhearing the conversation between her mother and Sir Joshua respecting a book which he had stayed up all night to read and which he had just finished in time to receive his guests.

The name of the book was “Evelina; or, a Young Lady's Entrance into the World,” he said, and he was urging Mrs. Burney to follow his example and read it without further delay.

CHAPTER XXVI

FANNY was at her stepmother's elbow while Sir Joshua gave her a full account of how he had been induced to send to Lowndes for this wonderful book on the recommendation of Mrs. Darner, whose portrait he was painting. Mrs. Darner had excused her unpunctuality at one of her sittings on the ground that she had become so interested in the fortunes of “Evelina” that she could not put the book down.

“Get it for yourself, sir,” she had said, “and you will quickly acknowledge that my excuse is valid.”

“Of course I did not get it then,” said Sir Joshua. “I find it impossible to keep pace with the useful books that are printed in these days, and I have long ago given up novels. But when, the next day, Mrs. Darner came to sit to me with a woebegone countenance and the traces of tears on her cheeks, so that I could only

paint her draping, and that, too, had a woeful droop in its folds—for let me tell you, madam, that a woman's dress is usually in sympathy with the mood of the wearer—when, I say, the lady entered my painting-room in this guise, I ventured to inquire if she was serious in her wish that I should depict her in the character of Niobe. 'Oh, sir,' she cried, ''tis all due to that horrid Branghton—he it is that has brought me to this.' 'The wretch!' said I. 'Have you no friend who will run him through the vitals? Where is he to be found, that I may arrange for his destruction?' 'He is the persecutor of my beloved Evelina,' she replied, 'and heaven only knows what is to become of the poor girl.'

"Now, madam, when I had thus brought before me the effect that the book had produced upon so natural a lady as Mrs. Darner, what was left for me but to buy it? And now you see the effect that it has had upon me," continued Sir Joshua, "so you must e'en buy it also."

"Nay, Sir Joshua," said Mrs. Burney, "your case has furnished me with the strongest of reasons for not buying it. I would not allow a book into my house that would so turn me aside from my ordinary life and my daily business. What, sir, would you have me stay out of my comfortable bed for hours, in order that I might make myself more uncomfortable still by reading of the imaginary woes of a young woman who is nothing to me but a shadow?"

"Oh, I promise you that you will find Evelina far from being a shadow," said Sir Joshua. "She is a creature of flesh and blood, with a heart that beats so that you find your own heart keeping time with it, whether it pulsates slowly or fast. In short, Evelina lives. I have no patience with those attenuated figures that dance on the stage of so many of our new novel writers; I can see the stuffing of straw when their constant gyrating has worked a rip in their seamy side; creatures of rag and wire—they never deceive one for a moment—why, their very gyrations are not true to life. But Evelina lives. Some of the characters in the book are distasteful—some of them are vulgar, but the world is made up of distasteful and vulgar people, and a novel should be true to the world in which the characters are placed. Oh, that was where the greatness of poor Dr. Goldsmith was to be found. He would abate nothing of the vulgarity of the vulgar characters in his plays, because he meant them to live. The people hissed his vulgar bailiffs in his *Good-Natured Man*, and when Colman cut them out he himself restored them when Shuter played the piece for his benefit the following year, and everyone saw that they were true to life. The vulgarity of Tony Lumpkin and the Three Pigeons made Walpole shudder, but there they remain in the best comedy of our time, and there they will remain for ever. Oh, yes; the author of 'Evelina' knows what life is, and so his book will live."

"And who is the author of this surprising book?" asked Mrs. Burney.

"That is a mystery," replied Reynolds. "I sent to Lowndes, the bookseller, to inquire, and he pretended that he did not know. He could only say that he was a gentleman of note living in Westminster."

"Ah, that is one of the booksellers' tricks to make their wares seem more attractive," said she. "They know that a man in a mask awakens curiosity."

"That is so; but 'Evelina' stands in need of no advertisement of such a nature. It would attract attention even though the name of Mr. Kenrick were attached to it. But everyone is dying to find out the name of the author; Mrs. Darner believes it to have been written by Horace Walpole, but only because 'The Castle of Otranto' was published without his name being on the title page."

"Not a very cogent line of argument, it seems to me," said Mrs. Burney. "Well, Sir Joshua, I hope you will enjoy a comfortable sleep to-night, now that you have the fortunes of that young lady off your mind."

"Oh, my dear madam, I do assure you that my mind is not yet free from the effects of reading that book," cried Reynolds. "I am more faithful to my friends in some books than to forget all about them when I lay them on the shelf. If they live, be assured that I live with them, and the thought of them is to me at times as pleasant as the thought of the best friends I have met in my daily life. I have laid 'Evelina' on a shelf in my memory—not one of the back shelves, but one that is near to me, so that I can console myself with her companionship when I am lonely."

"I have never heard you praise a book so heartily, sir," said Mrs. Burney. "But I will beg of you not to mention it to any of my family, for if it has so unhinged you, what would it not do to those poor girls?"

He did not catch all she had said, for she spoke in a voice which she did not mean to travel to Fanny or Susy, who were chatting to Miss Theophila Palmer, Sir Joshua's niece.

"You may depend on my telling them all I find out in regard to the author," said he in a tone of assent.

"No, no," she cried, getting nearer to the bell of his trumpet. "No, no; I want you to refrain from mentioning the book to them. I discourage all novel reading, excepting, of course, the works of Mr. Richardson, and perhaps one or two of Fielding, with some of the pages gummed together to prevent them from being read."

"Nay, to tempt people to read them," said Reynolds. "What were we saying about the attractions of a mask? Well, my word for it, the attractions of a book without a name are as nothing compared with the attraction of gummed pages. But you will let them read 'Evelina,' and you will, moreover, read it yourself—yes, and you will all be the better and not the worse for doing so."

Mrs. Burney shook her head.

It was no wonder that Mrs. Thrale thought that Miss Burney looked flushed at this time, or that there was an unwonted sparkle in her eyes; for she had heard nearly every word that Sir Joshua had said, and she could scarcely contain herself for delight. For all her primness, she was at heart a merry schoolgirl, ready to break into a dance at good news, and to shout for joy when things had advanced as she had hoped they would. She felt that it was very hard on her that she could not throw her hat up to the ceiling of the room, as she had heard of Dr. Goldsmith's doing with his wig in the exuberance of his spirits in this same room—when Miss Reynolds was in her bed upstairs. It was very hard on her to be compelled to restrain her feelings; she was unconscious of the sparkle in her eyes, or of the pæony flush of her cheeks that Mrs. Thrale had noticed and was still noticing.

She had never felt so happy in all her life. A short time before she had felt that everything in the world was insignificant in comparison with love; but now she realized that there was another joy worthy of recognition. She was not wise enough to perceive that the two emotions sprang from the same source—that the

foundation of love is the impulse to create, and that the foundation of an artist's joy in fame is the knowledge that what he has created is recognized by the world. She was (fortunately) not wise enough to be able to analyse her feelings—to be wise enough to analyse one's feelings is to be incapable of feeling. All that she was conscious of at that moment was that all worth having in the world was hers—the instinct to create, which men call Love, the joy of obtaining recognition for the thing created, which men call Fame.

It was no wonder that Mrs. Thrale saw that light in her face and in her eyes; nor was it strange that the same observant lady should attribute that illumination to the touch of the fire of the sacred torch. She looked at the handsome face of the Roman youth, with its expression of frankness, and at his eyes, full of the generous warmth of the South, and once more she glanced at Miss Burney, and saw in her face the reflection of the southern sunny glow.

“Poor girl—poor girl!” were the words that sprung to her lips. “Only a moment's attention from him—only a word—nay, a glance from those eyes would have been enough—and she is at his feet. Poor girl! Knowing nothing of the world—incapable of understanding anything of life—having no gift to attract attention—-”

“Dear Mrs. Thrale, I have come to you for help. You are sure to have read this book that everyone is talking about—this 'Evelina'—and you can, I am certain, tell us who is the author. Pray let us know if your friend Dr. Johnson had a finger in it—I have heard that some of the writing is in the style of Dr. Johnson—or was it Mr. Anstey—they say that some chapters could only have come from the author of 'The Bath Guide.'”

It was Lady Hales who had hurried up with her inquiries. She seemed to be the representative of a group with whom she had been standing, several ladies and two or three men.

It so happened, however, that Mrs. Thrale had not yet read the book around which discussion had been buzzing; but she had no intention of acknowledging that, with her literary tastes and with her friendship for Dr. Johnson, she was behind the times. Two or three people had within the week made remarks about “Evelina” in her presence, but she had no idea that it was to become a topic of society.

She smiled enigmatically, to give herself time to make up her mind what her reply should be—whatever it might be, it certainly would not be a confession of ignorance. She came to the conclusion that on the whole she could not do better than mould her answer so as to heighten the mystery of the authorship.

“Is it possible that none of our friends have discovered the author?” she asked, still smiling shrewdly, so as to suggest that she herself had long ago been let into the secret.

“We have had many conjectures,” said Lady Hales. “And let me whisper in your ear—there is one among us who is ready to affirm that the address of the author is Thrale Hall, Streatham.”

“I vow that I am overwhelmed,” cried the little lady. “The compliment is one that any writer might envy. Pray how could it enter the mind of any of our friends to connect me with the authorship of such a book?”

“There are some touches of your style in many of the letters of Evelina,” replied Lady Hales. “And some have said that only you could have had the varied experiences described so vividly.”

“A marvellous book, truly, this 'Evelina,'” cried Mrs. Thrale. “Some people, you say, recognize the hand of Dr. Johnson in its pages, others the pen that wrote 'The Bath Guide,' and now it is suggested that the whole was the work of a humble scribbler named Mrs. Thrale—a person who has surely little in common with the two writers you have named.”

She took care that her affectation of surprise had an artificial note about it. There was no knowing how things might turn out. Mrs. Thrale had no objection in the world to have her name associated with the authorship of a book about which it was clear a good many people would be talking for some months to come.

“May I not be entrusted with something more definite?” asked Lady Hales in a low voice. “If it is a secret for the present—well, you know that I am one to be trusted.”

“I can assure you definitely that the book was not written by Dr. Johnson,” replied Mrs. Thrale, with a smile. “He has not for a single week during the past year failed to visit us at Streatham for at least four days at a time. He reads to me all that he writes—it is not much—and I can give you an assurance that the name of Evelina has not once appeared in his manuscript. I may also say that if you take my advice you will not be in too great haste to attribute the book to Mr. Anstey.”

This was not mystification, it sounded much more like revelation, Lady Hales thought.

“I dare not press you further, madam,” she said.

“Believe me, I can appreciate your reticence, if——”

“Nay, now you suggest that I have told you a secret that I have concealed from everyone else, and that is going too far,” cried Mrs. Thrale. “Now, dear madam, cannot you see that even if I were in the secret of the authorship, I should be guilty of a great breach of courtesy were I to reveal it to anyone? If an author choose to remain anonymous, is it not discourteous to try to snatch away his—or her—veil of anonymity?”

“I can but assent,” said Lady Hales. “I do not doubt that this view of the matter is the correct one. At any rate, you may depend on my acting in accordance with it. I shall make no further attempt to pry into the secret, and I shall think it right to dissuade my friends from the quest.”

“In that I am sure you will be acting in accordance with the author's wishes,” said Mrs. Thrale, smiling knowingly.

CHAPTER XXVII

SO they parted; and Lady Hales hastened back to her friends to whisper in their ears that the mystery was as good as solved: Mrs. Thrale had as much as acknowledged that she was the author of “Evelina,” but she hoped that, as she had written the book without the knowledge of her husband, her friends would respect her desire to remain anonymous.

“Mr. Thrale, being a Member of Parliament, would not like to have the name of his wife bandied about among ordinary people as that of the writer of a novel,” Lady Hales explained, though really no explanation was needed of a fact that could be appreciated by every sensible person aware of the contemptible character of the novels of the day. “Only Dr. Johnson is in the secret,” she continued. “Dr. Johnson, as we all know, lives at Thrale Hall for five days out of every week, finding the table provided by Mrs. Thrale to suit his palate very much better than that controlled by poor blind Mrs. Williams at Bolt Court.”

“That may account for some of the touches in the book in the style of Dr. Johnson,” said one of the ladies. “You may be sure that no book could be written under the same roof as Dr. Johnson without his having something to say to it.”

“I never could understand how so fastidious a lady as Mrs. Thrale could tolerate the company of Dr. Johnson at her table, but now the secret is out—this secret and t'other,” said one of the gentlemen. “Dr. Johnson is not seen at his best at the dinner-table.”

“So far as that goes, neither is Mr. Thrale himself,” said another. “He has a huge appetite.”

“I had an inkling all along that Mrs. Thrale wrote the book,” said a lady with a huge hat. “I actually remarked to my sister, while I was reading it, 'if this story is not written by Mrs. Thrale, Mrs. Thrale is the one who would like to have written it.'”

“But mind, not a word must be breathed that would hint that she acknowledged it to me by direct word of mouth,” cried Lady Hales, beginning to have some qualms. “No; you must understand clearly that she did not say in so many words that she wrote it. Indeed, her last words to me were, that anyone who should name in public the author of a book published anonymously would be guilty of a great discourtesy.”

“She is perfectly right: to do so would be to exhibit very bad taste truly,” came more than one acquiescent voice.

And the result of their complete agreement on this point was the immediate dissemination of the report that Mrs. Thrale was indeed the writer of “Evelina.”

But that clever little lady, on getting rid of the questioner, found that Signor Rauzzini had slipped away from her side and was now making his adieux to Mrs. Burney and her stepdaughters. She noticed that the light had gone out of Fanny Burney's eyes as the young singer bent over her hand, and once again she shook her head. She had given more attention to Miss Burney during the previous hour than during all the years she had visited at St. Martin's Street. She thought that it might be her duty to say a word of warning to the young woman, who could not possibly know anything about the world or the deceitfulness of Italian vocalists.

Meantime, however, she ordered one of her three footmen to tell the coachman to drive to the shop of Lowndes, the bookseller, and there she purchased a bound copy of “Evelina,” at nine shillings.

Mrs. Thrale was, of course, well known to Mr. Lowndes, and seeing her, through the window of his office, enter his shop, he put his quill behind his ear and emerged, bowing and smiling.

“How was it that you failed to apprise me that you had printed 'Evelina '?” she inquired.

“Is't possible that you did not receive my advertisement, madam?” he cried. “Why, I posted it to you with my own hands even before the book had left the press, the truth being that I was anxious to get your opinion respecting it.”

“I never had any advertisement from you about it,” she replied.

“Oh, I was to blame for not underlining the announcement, madam,” said he. “I ask your pardon. How were you to know that it was not one of the usual novels of the season?—I do not venture to recommend such to the attention of ladies of superior tastes like yourself, madam. I shall not forgive myself, rest assured. But I am punished, in that I have been unable to sell a second edition by telling my customers how highly it was esteemed by Mrs. Thrale.”

“You assume that it would be highly esteemed by me, Mr. Lowndes; but I am not quite sure that you do not flatter yourself in believing that my judgment would be the same as that of the public. The poor public! How can they possibly know whether a book is good or bad?”

“They cannot, madam; that is why we poor booksellers must only trust to sell our books on the recommendation of ladies of taste and judgment. May I beg, madam, that you will favour me with your opinion respecting the merits of 'Evelina'?”

“It has been so great a success that I fear I shall not think highly of it. Pray, who is your modest author?”

“Positively, madam, I am unable to tell you. The MS. was brought to me with a letter purporting to come from a Mr. Grafton at the Orange Coffee House, near the Haymarket, and he desired the secret of its authorship to be kept close.”

“Ah, yes; to be sure—kept close from the vulgar public; but he could never think that you were violating his confidence by telling me his name.”

“He could not be so unreasonable, madam—nay, rather would he kneel to you—for he could scarce fail to understand the value that we set on——”

“I am not convinced either that he would benefit from the exchange of confidence or that I should; but prithee, sir, what is his name?”

“'Fore heaven, madam, I have told you so much as is known by me respecting the gentleman. Never before have I been placed in so remarkable a position. My fault, Mrs. Thrale, no doubt: I should have taken precautions against being thus surprised into publishing a book without knowing the name of the author. But although my judgment enabled me to perceive that the work was out of the common, yet I never counted on its merits being recognized so speedily. May I beg of you to favour me with your opinion as to who the writer

may be, madam—that is, when you have read it, unless, indeed—" he glanced at her shrewdly with a little knowing smile— "unless, indeed, you could so favour me *instanter*."

"Nay, Mr. Lowndes, how would it be possible for me to give you an opinion as to the authorship of a book which I have not yet read? I am not one of those astute critics who, they say, can tell you all there is to be known about a book without cutting the leaves, or even—if you slip a guinea into their hand—without opening the covers."

"I thought that perhaps you might be one of those who have been let into the secret, madam. I trust that Dr. Johnson's health has not been so bad as to prevent him from doing any literary work. Ah, what does not that great man—nay, what does not the world owe to you, Mrs. Thrale?"

"If you would suggest, Mr. Lowndes, that the book about which we have been conversing was written, even in part, by Dr. Johnson, I can give you an assurance that such is not the case. He is in no way inclined to engage in any form of literary labour. He grudges his friends even a note."

"There are some gentlemen who come hither and honour me by conversing on the subject of letters, and more than one of them has pointed out passages in 'Evelina' that show signs of the great Doctor's pen; but for that matter——"

"I agree with you, sir; every scribbler in Grub Street apes the style of Dr. Johnson, but only to reveal the ape in himself. Now, Mr. Lowndes, if you really are in earnest in saying that you are unaware who is the author of your book, I have done you some service in curtailing by one the list of authors to whom it might possibly be attributed. You may strike out the name of Johnson, sir, on my authority."

"I shall certainly do so, madam—not that I, for my own part, was ever foolish enough to fancy that he had written more of it than a page or two. I am indebted to you, Mrs. Thrale."

"Then if you would wish to pay off the debt, you can do so by informing me of your success in discovering the writer. 'Tis quite impossible to conceive of the man's remaining unrevealed for any length of time, and I confess that I am anxious to know if he is among my acquaintance."

"You assume the sex, madam."

"What, have you a doubt of it?"

"There are so many literary ladies nowadays, Mrs. Thrale."

"But you surely saw the handwriting of the script?"

"That is just the point. My printers have examined it and say that it is a lady's caligraphy only disguised to look like a man's. In my own judgment they are right. It is an upright hand, neat and clear—not in the least like that of an author. Still, that counts but little, seeing that the writer of the book would be pretty certain to have a clear copy made of his script by someone else. I have had a suspicion, from the mystery insisted on by this Mr. Grafton, that he is none other than the author of the 'Castle of Otranto.'"

"What, Mr. Walpole?"

"Even so. You recollect how delighted he was to conceal the hand he had in that book—going much farther than I thought any gentleman would in honour go, to make people believe it was what it pretended to be?"

"Mr. Lowndes, I know not what your experience has been; but mine is that when a gentleman becomes an author he lays aside whatever sense of honour he possesses as a gentleman."

"I have had little to do with gentlemen authors, madam. Most of my writers are simply authors."

"And Mr. Walpole very properly put himself in line with them, and so had no hesitation in carrying out his fraud in 'Otranto.' Well, if it be so, you may count on his revealing himself now that the book has become a success. In any case, you will not forget to keep me informed, and I shall esteem it a favour, Mr. Lowndes."

Mr. Lowndes renewed his promise and bowed the lady to the door. The three volumes of "Evelina" had been brought out to the chariot by one of the footmen, a second following in his footsteps to see that he deposited them fairly upon one of the cushions, and a third standing by the open door in case of the breakdown of either of the others.

Mrs. Thrale got into the splendid machine, the three lackeys swung themselves up on their platform behind, and clung on to the heavy straps, looking, in their brilliant livery, as the chariot lurched away over the uneven cobble-stones, like mighty butterflies of a tropical forest swaying together on the rim of a gigantic flower.

CHAPTER XXVIII

NO chance had Rauzzini of saying more than the most conventional words of farewell to Fanny. Mrs. Burney was beside her and her two sisters also. He yielded to his impulse to pronounce a malediction on Mrs. Thrale, who had so interrupted his conversation with Fanny—the last he could possibly have until his return from France after fulfilling his engagements. But this was when he had seen the Burney family out of the door of the house in Leicester Fields and to the entrance to St. Martin's Street. He was then alone, and could give in some measure expression to his feelings in his own tongue.

His imagination was quite vivid enough to suggest to him all that the officiousness of Mrs. Thrale had interrupted—the exchange of vows—the whispered assurances of fidelity—perhaps a passionate kiss—a heaven-sent chance during a marvellous minute when the painting-room should be emptied of all but herself and him! It was distracting to think of all that had been cut out of his life by that busybody. While he had been talking alone with Fanny his eyes had taken in the splendid possibilities of the painting-room. There

were three immense easels on different parts of the floor, and each carried a glorious canvas for a life-size portrait. Two of them were already finished, and the third contained a portion of the Greek altar at which a fair lady was to be depicted making her oblation to Aphrodite, or perhaps Artemis. The young man, however, did not give a thought to the glowing work of the great painter on the canvases, he thought only of the possibilities of a moment or two spent in the protecting shadow of one of them with that gentle, loving girl yielding herself to his clasp—only for a moment—he could not reasonably hope that it should be for longer than a single moment, but what raptures might not be embraced even within that brief space! A moment—one immortal moment worth years of life! That was what he saw awaiting him in the friendly shade of one of Sir Joshua's portraits—that was all that the sublime picture meant to the ardent lover—it was not the immortal picture, but the immortal moment that was before his eyes—but just when, by a little manoeuvring on his part, the joy that should change all his life and console him for being deprived of the society of his beloved for three months, was within his reach, that foolish woman had come bustling up with her chatter and had separated them!

For which he now implored heaven and a heathen deity or two that still linger in the language of malediction in their native Italy, to send her soul to the region where Orpheus had sought his Eurydice. Down—down with her to the lowest depths of the Inferno he implored his patrons to bear her and to keep her there for ever.

His imploration was quite as lyrical as his “Waft her, Angels, to the Skies,” only its bearing was upon the fate of the lady in just the opposite direction, and he was even more fervent in its delivery. But having delivered it, he felt some of that relief which is experienced by a true artist who has a consciousness of having done some measure of justice to his theme. He felt that if beatitude had been denied to him, the one who had separated him from it would not escape scathless, if the intensity of an appeal to the high gods of his native land counted for anything in their estimation.

And then he went more or less contentedly to his lodgings to prepare for his appearance in the opera of the night.

He sang divinely as an angel, and again if any of his audience remained unmoved by the enchantment of his voice, they certainly could not but have yielded to the charm of his presence. Some women might be incapable of appreciating the exquisite character of his vocalism, but none could remain impervious to the appeal of his smile.

As for the girl who alone had appealed to his heart, she went home with her mother and sisters without a word, for she had not perceived the glorious possibilities lurking behind the grand canvases in Sir Joshua's painting-room. She could even bring herself to believe that the coming of Mrs. Thrale had been rather opportune than otherwise; for if she had not joined her stepmother at that time she would not have heard all that Sir Joshua had said about “Evelina.”

All that she had heard had made her supremely happy, not, she thought, because she was greedy for fame, but because it meant to her that she was a step nearer to the arms of the man she loved. The fame which Sir Joshua's words implied was dear to her because she knew that she need not now hesitate to seat herself by the side of this king of men, as his equal—no, not quite as his equal, but certainly not as a beggar maid. She knew that when it was announced that she was the writer of a great book, or, what was better still, a book that everybody was talking about, people would not shrug their shoulders when they heard that Rauzzini> the Roman singer, whose name was in everybody's mouth, was about to marry her. The event that she scarcely dared hope for had actually happened: she was no longer the nobody which she had been, she was a woman the product of whose brain had been acclaimed by the best judges, and so the barrier that she had seen separating her lover from herself had been thrown down. The same voices that had acclaimed her Rauzzini as a singer had acclaimed her as a writer; for though she had hesitated to receive her cousin Edward's reports from the libraries as conclusive of the mark that the book was making, she could not now have any doubt on the subject: a book that was spoken of by Sir Joshua Reynolds as he had spoken of “Evelina” must be granted a place high above the usual volumes to be found on the shelves of a circulating library. She was convinced that in a short time everyone would be talking about it in the same strain, and though people might be incredible on the subject of its authorship, the fact would remain the same—she had written the book, and the fame that attached to the writer would assuredly be hers. There would now be no sneering references to King Cophetua. Everyone within their circle would admit that there was no disparity between her position as the writer of the book that everyone was talking about and that of the singer whom people crowded to hear.

She felt supremely happy. Though Mrs. Burney had not shown any particular wish to repeat what Reynolds had said to her about the book, she knew perfectly well that this was only because of her general distrust of anything in the form of a novel, and her fear lest something unreadable should get into the hands of the girls. But Fanny also knew that the fact of Mrs. Burney's shunning the novels of the circulating libraries would not interfere with the reputation that must accrue to the author of “Evelina”; so she was not affected by the indifference shown by her stepmother to all that Reynolds had said. She awaited without impatience the day when her father should take up the book and read the Ode at the beginning. She felt that, although his name was not at the head, he would know that the verses were addressed to him, and that it was his daughter Fanny who had written them. She knew that however firmly he might assert himself on the side of his wife in preventing the entrance to the house of all novels excepting those of Richardson—Fanny herself had never had a chance of reading even “The Vicar of Wakefield”—he would be proud of her as the writer of “Evelina.” She was not quite sure if he would be as proud of her as if she had developed a wonderful musical capacity; but she never doubted that his affection for her—assisted by his knowledge of the impression the book had made upon the most important of his own associates—would cause him to take her into his arms with delight and to forgive her for running the chance of being classed among the Miss Minifies of the period—the female writers whose ridiculous productions were hidden beneath the sofa cushions in so many households. Fanny Burney was a dutiful daughter and she had nothing of the cynic about her, but she was well aware of the fact that success would be regarded by her father as justifying an experiment that failure would have made discreditable.

Once more, then, the three sisters met that night in Fanny's bedroom. The two younger could now look on her without their feeling of awe. They were on the verge of being indignant with Mrs. Burney for having made no reference whatever since returning from the Reynoldses to the subject of Sir Joshua's eulogy.

“Not once did she mention the name of 'Evelina' to the padre; Sir Joshua might just as well have talked of Miss Herschel's comet to her,” said Susy.

“And after our schooling ourselves so rigidly to give no sign that we were in any measure connected with the book too—it was cruel!” said Lottie.

“It was not as if the padre did not give her a good chance more than once,” continued Susy. “Did he not ask if anyone had given her any news? And what did she answer?—Why, only that someone had said that Mr. Fox had lost a fortune a few nights ago at faro! As if anybody cares about Mr. Fox! I was prepared for her opening out at once to him about the book—maybe begging him to send Williams to buy it at Mr. Lowndes'.”

“What, at seven-and-sixpence!” cried Fanny. “My dear child, do you know mamma no better than to fancy that?”

“What I don't know is how she resisted it,” said Lottie. “Oh, you heard how Sir Joshua talked about it; and Miss Reynolds too—she praised it up to the skies.”

“Other people in the painting-room as well as in the drawing-room were talking of it,” said Susy. “I heard the beautiful Miss Horneck speak of it to the lady with the big muff and the rose taffeta with the forget-me-not embroidery.”

“I am sure that everybody was speaking of it—I could hear the name 'Evelina' buzzing round the rooms,” cried Lottie.

“Yes; everyone was talking about it, and only mamma was silent—*is* silent. I don't think that at all fair,” continued Susy.

Fanny laughed.

“You are silly little geese,” she cried. “Could you not see that she would not mention it lest it should reach our ears and we should be filled with an *irresistible* desire to possess it—*it*—a modern novel! Think of it! Oh, my dears, you are too unreasonable, Mamma knows her duty too well to allow even the name of a novel to pass her lips and maybe reach the ears of such a group of fly-away young things as ourselves! She understands the extent of her responsibilities. Go to your beds and be thankful that you have so excellent a guardian.”

“But when we were prepared——” began one of them, when Fanny interrupted her.

“You may conserve your preparations—you will hear her say the name soon enough—you may depend upon that,” she said. “You may prepare to hear yourselves summoned into her presence to give a full and true account of your complicity in the thing which was perpetrated under this sacred roof—nay, in the very room where the great philosopher Newton wrote his thesis! A novel written in the room in which the divine 'Principia' was produced! Why, 'twere as bad in mamma's eyes as acting one of Mr. Foote's farces in St. Paul's Cathedral. Oh, yes, you'll have to face her soon enough, and after that you'll never wish to hear the name Evelina again. Now, good-night, and thank heaven for your respite.”

They left her, glum and dissatisfied. It was plain to her that they were disappointed at not being given the opportunity of showing how admirably they had themselves under control in regard to the secret—of showing Fanny how they could hear Mrs. Burney talk at length about “Evelina,” while neither of them gave the least sign of ever having heard the name before. It was indeed disappointing that all their studied immobility should go for nothing.

But Fanny knew that their secret could not possibly remain hidden for many more days. If the book was going into everybody's hands, her father would be certain to have it, and then—would he not know? Would not she be summoned into his presence and that of his wife—the lady of many responsibilities—and required to defend herself?...

She fell asleep before she had come to any conclusion as to the line of defence that she should adopt.

And in spite of the readiness of her sisters for any inquisition to which they might be summoned, they were startled—as was also Fanny herself—when, immediately after a rather silent and portentous breakfast, Mrs. Burney said:

“Susy and Lottie, you may go to your duties. You, Fanny, will remain, as your father wishes to speak to you on a matter of some gravity.”

So the long-expected hour had come, the three girls thought. By some accident unknown to them their secret was exposed, and Fanny was about to be called upon to explain, if she could, to the satisfaction of her father and her stepmother, how it came that she so far forgot the precepts of her upbringing as to write a novel quite in the modern spirit, though adopting a form which the master-touch of Mr. Samuel Richardson had hallowed.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE two girls left the room slowly, after sending in the direction of Fanny a glance which they meant should encourage her—a glance which should let her know that they were quite ready to share her punishment, should the worst come to the worst.

Fanny replied to them with her eyes; and then prepared for the worst.

It quickly came.

“My dear daughter,” said Dr. Burney, when they were alone, Mrs. Burney in her chair at the head of the table. “My dear Fanny, I am no believer in leading by degrees up to such a communication as I have to make to you. I think that the sooner it is got over the better it will be for all whom it may concern. Well, this is it: Mr. Thomas Barlowe has written to me asking my permission for him to address you with a view to marriage.”

He made a pause, looking at her to observe the effect of this revelation.

And what he saw at first was a girl with a pale face and downcast eyes, awaiting, almost breathlessly, an accusation from which she shrank; but when he had spoken he saw a great change come over her. Not immediately, but gradually. It seemed to him that she had not fully realized the meaning of his words—that she was puzzled—trying to recall what he had said. Then the light seemed to dawn upon her. She flushed, and, after a few moments, threw back her head and went into a peal of laughter—a real schoolgirl's fit of laughter at something amazingly comic—the tumbling of a clown into a pool of water with a splash, or, perhaps, the slipping of a dignified beadle upon a butter slide. Her laughter went on for a long time, but without in the least suggesting hysteria—it was simply a girl's natural laughter on realizing the comic side of a situation which grown-up people would regard as extremely serious.

Neither her father nor his wife could understand why she should receive in such a spirit an essentially serious communication—the most serious that any young woman could receive. They had not before them the ludicrous picture that presented itself to her imagination—a picture of the Roman Rauzzini on the one side and the Poultry Barlowe on the other, asking her to choose between them. It was this presentment, coming in a flash the moment she realized that the publishing of the book was not the question which she had to face, that forced her to yield to that long fit of laughter.

Her father and stepmother sat stolidly by, but she knew that had she and her father been alone, he would at least have smiled with her.

In a few minutes she had recovered herself sufficiently to be able to apologize for her levity.

“I beg your pardon,” she said. “I am behaving like a goose, but I could not help it—something forced me—something that occurred to me—a funny thing. I am very sorry.”

“There is nothing funny that I can see in the honourable request made by an honest young man, my dear Fanny,” said Mrs. Burney.

“No, no; nothing whatever; only—well, funny ideas will occur to foolish people like myself at the most serious moments,” said Fanny.

“That is quite true, indeed,” said her father. “I have myself experienced what you say. Perhaps, after all, I should not have blurted out what I had to tell you—it came to you as a surprise, I doubt not.”

“A great surprise, indeed,” she replied. “I cannot understand how Mr. Barlowe could ever fancy that I—that he—that—oh, I should have known what that terrible entertainment was meant to lead to—but when, in that clumsily marked way I was sent into the drawing-room with him alone, he began to talk of his uncle, the Aider-man—he said that the Alderman was quite approachable even in regard to ordinary people like ourselves—and then came his cousins—all of them remarkable! But you should have seen him slice away at the ham—the biggest ham I ever saw—it needed to be—such eating!”

“The recollection of that no doubt made you laugh,” said Dr. Burney. “But, at the same time, you must remember that though the customs of the Poultry are not ours, still, they may be very reasonable customs—perhaps more reasonable than our own. It may suit us to dine as late as halfpast four and only to have a slice of cake with our tea; but business people find it more convenient to dine at one o'clock—it makes an equal division of their long working-day—so that a slice of ham——”

“I know that is quite true, and I was not so foolish as to give myself airs because I had dined at half-past four and had no appetite for ham,” said Fanny; “but—oh, mother, you saw how foolishly formal was the whole thing.”

“I said that I thought it quite unnecessarily formal,” replied Mrs. Burney, “and if I had had any notion that it was going to be like that I would certainly have given Mrs. Barlowe a hint. Still, Thomas is, I know, an excellent young man who has never given his parents an hour's uneasiness, and his intentions are honourable, and so should be honoured. If you have no tender regard for him at present that is no reason why, when you get accustomed to the thought of him as a suitor for your hand——”

“Oh, mother, that is quite impossible!” cried Fanny. “How could I ever get accustomed to such a thought?”

“I do not know why you should not,” replied Mrs. Burney. “He is a most worthy young man, and Mr. Barlowe's business is one of the best in the City. You must remember, my dear Fanny, that in these days a girl, unless she has a portion, runs a very great chance of becoming an old maid, so that no opportunity of settling down in a comfortable home should be neglected.”

“That is perfectly true,” said Dr. Burney. “You will understand that we have no desire to force this or any match upon you, my dear child: so long as I have a house over my head you shall share it. But I am sure that you must know that I am a poor man to-day, although I have worked as hard at my profession as any living man, and I cannot provide you or your sisters with any portion. Heaven knows that if I had a fortune I would gladly divide it among you; but as it is, I think it right to tell you that you need expect nothing.”

“Dearest father,” said Fanny, dissolving into tears, as she took his hand and kissed it, “I have never expected a fortune from you—not a penny piece. I know that I shall be portionless, and I daresay that Mr. Barlowe thinks himself generous in his proposal; but I could never bring myself to accept him—to look on him as a suitor. It would be quite impossible. If I thought it possible that I should ever have any affection for him, I might feel myself justified in encouraging him; but I know that it would be out of the question. I would prefer to go forth and beg my bread—nay, to starve.”

“Then we shall pursue the matter no farther for the present,” said her father, kissing her on the forehead as

she nestled close to him.

“Yes, that is best—for the present,” acquiesced his wife. “Still, if you will be advised by me, my dear Fanny, you will remember that Mr. Barlowe is ready to address you knowing that you will be portionless, and if you bear that in mind, perhaps you will be surprised to find some' day, not so far distant, that the thought of him is not so repugnant to you. You are no longer a girl, and when one is midway between twenty and thirty every extra year counts in reducing one's chances of being settled in life. I could cite dozens of instances that I have known of young women being glad to accept at twenty-eight the suitors they scorned at twenty or even twenty-five. Oh, yes, the years come upon one and bring with them a clearer vision of life and love; frequently they bring regret for opportunities neglected. But we will not press the matter any farther—just now. I dare say the young man will submit to be put off—for a time.”

“Nay, for ever,” said Fanny resolutely.

“Oh, well,” said her stepmother.

After a pause, during which Fanny seemed to be debating some matter in her mind, a little line showing itself along her forehead, she said slowly: “I do not think that I shall be a burden on you, dear father; I believe that one day I may be able to do something.”

“Do not fancy that I would ever think of you as a burden, my dear child,” said her father. “But what do you mean by saying that you may one day do something?—some work, do you suggest?”

“Something—I am fond of writing,” she murmured.

He laughed gently, saying:

“You are a very good girl, my love, and I know how much I am indebted to you for your admirable copying of my notes for the History; but do not let the idea take hold of you that such work is well paid. If you ever get in touch with a bookseller, he will tell you that the work of a copyist is very poorly paid.”

“I was not thinking of copying,” murmured Fanny.

“Of what then, pray?” he asked.

“If I could but write a book,” she replied, with her eyes on the floor.

“A book!” cried Mrs. Burney, who thought that she had been silent long enough. “A book!”

“To be sure—to be sure,” said her father, in the indulgent tone of a parent humouring a child. “You might write a book—so might anyone who could pay for a ream of paper, a bottle of ink and a box of quills. You should speak to Mr. Newbery about it: he has printed many nursery stories since 'Goody Two Shoes.' You might indeed do something that the children would take a fancy to. Well, Francis Newbery is as honest a man as his uncle, and we may talk to him about it. By the by, did not you once tell me that you had written something, or that you were going to write something? You thought it proper to get my leave. I had forgotten that. Well, if it be a moral nursery story, we might interest Mr. Newbery in it.”

“I do not think that it is quite wise to encourage a girl to neglect her useful household duties in order to compile some rubbish that no one would read,” said Mrs. Burney.

“Of course you will understand that you are not to neglect your household duties, Fanny,” said her father.

“If she performs her household duties and sticks to her needlework, she will have no time left for scribbling rubbish,” cried Mrs. Burney, hastily.

“She made a bonfire of all that childish nonsense long ago, and I hope that she will never be so foolish as to waste good paper and pens and, most precious of all, good time, over such exercises. That is all we have to say just now, I think—is it not, Doctor? I shall reply to Mr. Barlowe's letter—a most creditable letter—straightforward—honourable! I am only sorry that I cannot make the reply to it that it deserves.”

She had opened the door and called for William, their manservant, to remove the breakfast things. Fanny lingered for a few minutes after she had risen from her chair. She had assumed from the moment she had begun to speak of writing, that her opportunity had come; if her stepmother had not interposed so hastily and so emphatically, she would have made her confession as to “Evelina,”, let the consequences be what they might; but now that the servant had come with his tray and her stepmother jingled her key-basket, she perceived that her chance was gone. She had a sense of sneaking out of the room.

As she went slowly up the stairs she could hear the voice of her stepmother remonstrating with her father for having said something that she, Fanny, might regard as encouragement to waste her precious time in the pursuit of such folly as writing a book.

She heard her father's little laugh as he explained (she was sure) that of course he had not been speaking seriously; but that he had not the heart to be severe upon her and her harmless scribbling.

The author of “Evelina” went very slowly upstairs, and when she reached the work-room landing she found Susy and Lottie waiting for her, glowing with excitement. Susy was waving over her head what seemed to be a bulky pamphlet. Coming closer, Fanny saw that it was the chief of the literary reviews, which had apparently just arrived at the house.

“A splendid column about 'Evelina,'” she whispered. “Not so good as it should be, but still splendid. Here it is. But why are you so glum? Surely they did not scold you now that the book is so great a success.”

“They did not ask me to tarry in the room to charge me with double-dealing in regard to the book,” said Fanny. “They would not allow me to make my confession when I had the opportunity—the best that I shall ever have. 'Twas not my confession that was on the *tapis*, but quite another. That is why I look glum.”

“Another—another confession? But what had either of them to confess?” cried Lottie.

“Nothing. They didn't confess.”

“But whose confession was it, then, if not theirs?” asked Lottie.

“It was young Mr. Barlowe's,” said Fanny, with a lugubriousness that was quite comic. “Young Mr. Barlowe wrote to the padre to confess that he was passionately—madly—in love with me, and threatening to drown himself unless permission were given to him to address me—we all know how fervently young Mr. Barlowe would put his case—that was what I was summoned to listen to—the fiery letter—only it was too ardent for

my ears: I was only told its purport."

"But who would ever have thought that he had it in him?" cried Susy. "Such impudence! I never dreamt that he could rise to such a height of impudence or I should have thought better of him."

"'Tis not too late yet, my child," said Fanny. "You are at liberty to think as highly of Thomas as you please—or as it would please him. Please take over his blighted affections and it will be a weight off my mind. Now give me a chance of reading my splendid review—not that I care in the least what these foolish critics may say of me—I care nothing, I tell you, only if you do not let me see it at once I shall die at your feet."

"There it is," said Susy, "a full column! The idea of anyone written of in such terms being proposed to by Thomas Barlowe! Such impudence indeed!"

CHAPTER XXX

THE levity shown by Fanny Burney and the flippancy of her phrases did not wholly conceal from her sisters all that she was feeling on the subject of the proposal to which she had referred with such lightness. She knew that while her father and her stepmother would not treat her with any marked disfavour on account of her rejection of the worthy young man who was ready to offer her a home, still Mrs. Burney at least regarded with great disfavour the nature of the answer which she had to send to the Poultry, and Fanny was very well aware of the ease with which so conscientious a guardian as Mrs. Burney could make her feel every day of her life what was Mrs. Burney's opinion of her rejection of an eligible young man.

Fanny recognized the great merits of her stepmother, and she could look from her standpoint at most of the incidents of their daily life. In that household one mouth less to feed was worth consideration—the number of mouths to feed was a constant source of thought with Mrs. Burney, as was also the question of a provision for the future of all of them.

Mrs. Burney would be fully justified in feeling cross with her, not being aware of the fact that another young man, compared with whom Thomas Barlowe was as the dust of the ground, was burning, with an ardour of which Thomas was incapable, to take her to himself and provide for her in a style undreamt of in the Poultry.

But the worst of the matter was that she could not let her stepmother into this secret. She could not say that she was engaged to marry Signor Rauzzini, and she might leave herself open to the gravest rebuke for having listened to his protestations of devotion without obtaining the consent of either of her parents.

And through all this tangle of reflections there ran the silken thread of consciousness that she was no longer the Fanny Burney who was regarded by her stepmother as the dunce, but Fanny Burney the writer of "Evelina," to whom the most critical review had devoted a full column of adulation!

That was what made her position so anomalous; and it was because she took the happenings of the previous days to heart that she went to bed with a shocking headache, and after a sleepless night was found on the verge of a fever. She was suffering from suppressed secrets; but the doctor did not know this. He prescribed James's Powders; and when these should have done all that they were meant to do—a small part of all that Dr. James and Mr. Newbery affirmed they would do—a change into the country.

But several weeks had passed before she was strong enough to start on the latter and most essential portion of the prescription, and found herself in her own room in Mr. Crisp's isolated house at Chessington.

Meantime, of course, she had no further news of the book, and she remained unconfessed, so far as the secret of its publication was concerned. Her sisters did not so much as mention its name or the name of Thomas Barlowe, so cleverly had they diagnosed the nature of her malady and so tactfully did they try to hasten her recovery.

Her old friend Mr. Crisp had been her guide since her childhood. She always alluded to him as her second Daddy—so far as paternal influence was concerned she might have given him the foremost place. He it was who had led her on to embody in letters to him the daily incidents of her life, thus unconsciously setting the loom, as it were, in which "Evelina" was to be woven. He it was who became her teacher and her critic, and it was possibly because she feared his criticism of her work that she refrained from making a confidant of him from the first. She felt that she could face the public and the reviewers—it did not matter how they might receive the book, but she was too timid to submit it to the mature judgment of the man who had first put a pen in her hand. It was not on her own account that she refrained from giving him a chance of reading her book, but on his: she knew how hurt he would be if he found her book to be an indifferent one, and whether indifferent or not, how angry he would be if people did not buy it by the thousand.

Now, however, that she found herself alone with him, she made up her mind to tell him all about it. She would choose her own time for doing this; but it would certainly be done before she returned to St. Martin's Street.

But on the second day after her arrival at Ches-sington a parcel came for her, addressed by Susy. On opening it, she found it to contain two volumes of "Evelina." The letter that was enclosed told her that Cousin Edward had called at the Orange Coffee House and found that a set had been left there at the instance of Mr. Lowndes, addressed to Mr. Grafton. Of these, Lottie had read the first two, which were now sent on to the author, but the third she had not finished, and hoped that Fanny would not mind her detaining it for a few days longer.

This was really the first glimpse that the author had of her book in its binding. She had, in the name of Mr.

Grafton, requested Mr. Lowndes to send a set of the volumes to the Orange Coffee House. But that was nearly three months ago, and until now Mr. Lowndes appeared not to have thought it worth his while to comply with the request. Now, however, it seemed to have occurred to him that the author of a book that everyone was talking about might be worth conciliating, and so he had directed a set of volumes to the Coffee House.

At once Fanny made up her mind that she would pave the way, so to speak, for a full confession to Mr. Crisp.

“Susy has sent me on two volumes of a new novel, lest I should feel dull,” she said. “As if I am not much more likely to feel dull in the company of a new novel than of my old Daddy!”

“I thought that your stepmother prohibited the reading of novels, new or old, in your house,” said he.

“Perhaps mamma did not know anything about this particular one,” replied Fanny; “besides, it is to be read in your house, not ours.”

“So that the responsibility will be mine?” said he. “Mrs. Burney is only answerable to heaven for keeping your mind free from the baleful influence of novels, but I am in a worse case, for I am answerable to Mrs. Burney. And what is the name of the precious production?”

“Let me see,” said Fanny, artfully referring to the title page. “Oh, yes: 'Evelina; or, a Young Lady's Entrance into the World.' Do you call that an alluring title?”

“Too sentimental by half,” he replied. “But I have heard of the thing, and one of the reviews dealt with it some weeks ago.”

“Praise or blame?”

“Oh, foolish adulation for the great part; but not without a reasonable word here and there.”

“The reasonable part you are sure must be the censorious? That is not fair to the poor author.”

“Poor author? Yes, they are all poor authors nowadays. What's the name of this particular item of poverty?”

“There is no name on the title page; but I hear that the writer was Mr. Anstey himself.”

“What! another 'Bath Guide'!”

“Sir Joshua Reynolds told mamma that he had remained up all night reading it.”

“Poor Sir Joshua! His eyes are none too good at the best! And does Susy believe that the book which kept Sir Joshua awake is the best one to send you asleep? You came to Chessington, you know, to get as much as possible; 'Tired Nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep!' the truest words that Shakespeare ever writ.”

“What I propose to do is to try it upon you, my dear sir. I mean to give you a dose of it this evening, instead of gruel, and if it makes you sleep I will know that I may continue it for myself—it will be more wholesome than poppy or mandragora.”

“Good! But I dare swear that it will be bad enough to keep me awake. You know that extremes meet in the case of books, as well as other matters; one keeps awake reading a good book, in expectancy of its undeveloped goodness; and reading a bad one, wondering how far the author can actually go in point of dullness.”

“I have often thought that; but Susy has sent only two of the three volumes.”

“So that we shall not be able to fathom the full depth of the author's dullness? We should be grateful to Susy—so should the author. Well, you shall begin after tea, while there is yet daylight: *Le livre ne vaut pas la chandelle.*”

“*Nous verrons*,” cried Fanny.

And she started reading the book that same day, an hour before sunset. The room in which they sat was a small one with a window facing the west and overlooking a long stretch of billowy common. The spicy scent of the wallflowers in the little garden patch at the side of the house was wafted through the half-open lattice, and occasionally there came the sound of the ducks gabbling at the pool beyond the gate that shut off the house from the lane. It was a cloudless evening, and the sunset promised to be peach-like in its tender tints of pink and saffron with the curves of delicate green in the higher sky. Fanny sat at the window and the old man reclined at his ease upon the sofa.

“I am giving myself every chance,” he said. “All that I ask of you, my Fannikin, is that you do not glance at me every now and again to see if I am still awake. If you do so, I shall never yield to so much as a doze.”

“I promise faithfully to await your signal that you are alert,” said she.

And so began one of the most delightful hours of her life.

She was not a particularly good reader aloud when a book was casually put into her hands, but here she had before her a volume that she could almost have repeated verbatim, so that she soon found that she was just too fluent: she felt that if she went on at this rate his critical ear would tell him that she had every page by heart, and he would ask her for an explanation of so singular a thing as her being able to repeat so much of a book which she professed to have in her hands for the first time. She put a check upon her fluency, and though she did not go so far as to simulate stumbling over certain words, she neglected the punctuation now and again, and then went back upon some of the passages, causing him to give a little grumble and say:

“Be careful, my dear; there's no need for haste: the evening is still young.”

After that she was more careful—which is the same as saying she was more careless of adhering to the scheme she had adopted. She felt that as he had now been put off the scent, she might run along as she pleased without there being a chance of his suspecting anything through her showing herself familiar with passage after passage.

Before she had got through more than a dozen pages she heard a creaking of the sofa—she trusted herself to glance in that direction and found that he was no longer reclining: he was sitting up and listening attentively. She continued reading without making a remark for a full hour. The sun had set, but the twilight was clear enough to allow of her seeing the print on the page before her for some time still; then the darkness seemed to fall all at once, and she laid the book down when she had come to the close of one of the

letters.

“Candles,” he said. “Candles! Upon my word, the world is right for once: the stuff is good. We must have candles. Candles, I say!”

“Supper, say I,” cried Fanny. “I feel that I have need of bodily refreshment after such a task. Does it sound real to you, Daddy Crisp—all about the Young Lady who is about to enter the world?”

“Not merely does it sound real, it is real—it is reality,” he replied quickly. “The man who wrote what you have read has something of the genius of—of—now whom does he resemble, think you?—Richardson here and there, and in places, Fielding, it seems to me.”

“You suppose that 'tis written by a man?” she said.

“Why, of course, 'tis the work of a man,” he replied. “Where is the woman living that is capable of writing a single page of that book? What, have I gone to so much trouble in training you to understand what is bad and what is good in writing, to so little purpose, that you should have a doubt as to the sex of what you have just read?”

“The sex of a book—a novel?”

“Why not? There are masculine books and there is feminine—trash. There you have the difference.”

“And you do not consider this to be—trash?”

“Will you get the candles, Miss Burney? It seems that you are sorely in need of illumination if you put that question to me seriously. Trash? Madam, you perceive that I am all eagerness to hear the rest of the story, and yet you put that silly question to me! Look you here, you rogue, cannot you see that the very fact of your putting such a question to me shows that the book is the work of a man? When a carefully trained woman such as you cannot yet discriminate between the good and the trash that is written, how would it be possible for a woman to write what you have read?”

“You think there is nothing womanly in the book?”

“There is nothing effeminate in the writing, so much is sure. There is plenty that is womanly in the book, because the man who wrote it knows how to convey to a reader a sense of womanliness to be in keeping with the character of the letters—that is what is meant by genius. A woman trying to produce the same effect would show the frill of her petticoat on every page. She would make the men's parts in the book as feminine as the women's. Now, no more chatter an you please, but get the candles.”

“And Mrs. Hamilton will get our supper by their light.”

Fanny tripped away, and was behind the door of the larder before she allowed the laughter which was pent up very close to her eyes to have its freedom. It was a very hearty laugh that she had, for there was a constant buzzing in her ears of the question:

“What will he say when he learns the truth?”

She was ready to dance her Nancy Dawson in delight at seeing the effect of the book upon the old man whom she loved—the man who was directly responsible for its existence. If Mr. Crisp had not taken trouble with her, encouraging her to write her letters to him in a natural style, the correspondence in “Evelina” would, she knew, be very different from what it was. So, after all, she reflected, he was right in pronouncing the book the work of a man; but he had no idea that he was the man who was responsible for it. That reflection of hers was as fully imbued with the true spirit of comedy as her anticipation of the effect that would be produced upon him by the revelation of the authorship.

And that was why this young student of the human comedy was able to restrain herself from making the revelation to him at once: she had, as it were, a delicate palate for comedy, and it was a delight to her—the gratification of her natural vanity had nothing to do with it—to lead him on to commit himself more deeply every moment on the question of the sex of the writer. Oh, no; she had no idea of making any confession to him for the present. She would have many another chat with him before the moment for that *dénouement* in the comedy should arrive.

So she got the candles and the housekeeper laid the cold chicken and the plates on the supper-table, and Mr. Crisp set about mixing the salad in the manner he had acquired in Italy. And all the time they were engaged over the simple meal he was criticising what she had read, and he had scarcely a word to say about it that was not favourable. But he took care to protect himself in case he should be forced to retire from the position he had taken up.

“A man is a fool to pronounce an opinion on a book before he has had the last page read to him,” he said. “I have only been touching upon the part that I have heard, and I say that it seems to me to be as good as anything I have read for years; but that is not saying that the remainder, or some portions of the remainder, may not be so greatly inferior as to compel me to pronounce unfavourably of the book as a whole. I have had instances of such inequality shown by many writers, and it may be that the writer of 'Evelina' will be added to the list, although he shows no sign of falling off up to your last page. Do not be hurried by me, my dear, but if you have indeed made up your mind to eat no cheese, Mrs. Hamilton can remove the *débris*, and unless you are tired, you will read me a few pages more.”

She read until midnight. The only pauses that she made were when he trimmed the wicks of the candles. He commended her fluency. She had never read better in his hearing, he said. She showed that she understood what she was reading; and that, after all, was the greatest praise that could be given to anyone. He did not suggest the likelihood that she was tired.

There was the sound of the bleating of lambs occasionally borne from the meadows beyond the little stream—the sound of an owl that came nightly about the house from the barn of the farm a few hundred yards away—the sound of a large moth bumping against the glass of the casement through which the candle-light shone. There was nothing to interrupt her in her delightful task until the church clock struck the hour of midnight.

“Not another line,” she cried, jumping from her chair. “Poor Evelina! she will be the better for a sleep. When she awakens she may be able to see more clearly who are her true friends and who are not to be trusted. Good-night, dear Daddy; and receive my thanks for your attention.”

“Give me the volume,” he said. “I usually awake before six, and so shall have a couple of hours of it before rising.”

“You will not get it from me, sir,” she cried. “Captain Mervain knows the naval rule about drinking glass for glass, and let me tell you that the same rule holds in the matter of reading a book—chapter for chapter between us, sir; we shall finish as we have begun.”

She blew him a kiss and ran upstairs to escape his protests: he shouted them after her from the foot of the stairs.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE next morning was a lovely one, and Fanny was feeding the ducks in the brook before eight o'clock. When she came into the house to breakfast she found Mr. Crisp in the porch.

“You have given me a sleepless night,” he said. “I lay awake endeavouring to determine for my own satisfaction what would be the outcome of the girl's meeting that dreadful Branghton family. I worked out the story to its proper conclusion—so I thought—on my left side; but when I turned on my right I found that I had been grossly astray in all my fancies; and forthwith I set to work to put myself right. After an hour or two I thought I had succeeded, but, lo! a turn on my back and I saw that, as I planned it, the story would never come to an end. So I kept on until the dawn. Then I fell asleep, but only to find myself surrounded by demons, in the form of Branghtons, and a master devil wearing the epaulets of a naval officer, and he made for me with a horrid leer and a cry of Mervain! I awoke in a worse state than did the Duke of Clarence in the play, and I have not slept since. Oh, that little mischief, Susy! Wherefore did she send hither that magic book to be my undoing?”

“Ah, sir, never before did I perceive the evil of novel reading,” she said. “I could not understand my mother's banning all such books, but now I see the wisdom of it. I now see how they tend to unsettle one. But it may not yet be too late to save you from the evil influence of 'Evelina.' If I read no more of her story, you will soon forget her and all may be well.”

“You will read no more? Good! Carry out your threat and I will e'en take the coach to London and buy a full set at Mr. Newbery's.”

“At Mr. Newbery's? Ah, sir, that is a threat you could not carry out, however vindictive you might be.”

“And why not, prithee? Think you I would begrudge the seven or eight shillings it would cost?”

“Nay, sir; but if you went to Mr. Newbery you would probably find yourself treated badly by him if you accused him of publishing the book. 'Tis Mr. Lowndes who is the guilty person.”

“You will not put one to the humiliation of a journey to London all for a trumpery novel?”

“Nay, not for a trumpery novel; but we were talking of 'Evelina.'”

“I submit to the correction, my dear; and so now we are in perfect agreement, you will continue the story, if only to allay my sleepless speculations.”

“I wonder how it will sound when read in the morning? I fear that it will be as dull as a play would seem in the garish light of day.”

“Tell not that to me. There are novels of the morn as well as of the even, and I believe that the freshness of this one will be best appreciated in the brightness of such a morning as this. At any rate, we can but make a trial of it. If we find that it does not read well, you can lay it aside till the evening.”

Fanny was delighted to find that he was as interested in her book as Susy had been; and the noon came and found her beginning the second volume to him, sitting by his side in the sunlight that bathed the little garden, and his attention never flagged. Once or twice, however, he grumbled, but her ear assured her that his grumble was not a critical one; it was only meant to censure the behaviour of the rude Captain Mervain.

They were still in the garden when, shortly after noon, a chaise was heard in the lane: it appeared to be on its way to the house.

“What! as I live 'tis mamma and my sisters come to pay us a visit,” cried Fanny, seeing a handkerchief waved to her from the window.

“They shall be made welcome, for I cannot doubt that they have brought the third volume with them,” said Mr. Crisp, rising to receive his visitors.

In this way the reading was interrupted, and indeed Fanny was rather glad of a respite. She had not risen from her chair since nine o'clock. A chance of stretching her limbs was very acceptable.

Mrs. Burney and the girls had scarcely settled down to their cakes and sweet wine, after explaining that Dr. Burney had insisted on their taking this drive into the country, the day promised to be so fine, when Mr. Crisp turned to Susy, saying:

“You wicked girl! What did you mean by sending us the two volumes of that vile novel to upset us poor country folk? And I hope you have not neglected to bring with you the third.” Poor Susy reddened and glanced at Fanny without trying to make any reply.

“Eh, what is this?” cried the old man. “Do you mean to disclaim all responsibility for the act? Ah, 'tis too late for you to make such an attempt. The evil has been done. The poison has begun to work in our blood; and its effects can only be neutralized by the contents of the third volume. Say at once, I pray, if you have brought it.”

“Do not trouble poor Susy with your tropes, sir,” said Fanny. “She cannot grasp your meaning, and only trusts that we have not gone mad. I suppose the road was as usual—half of it muddy and the rest dusty?”

“I insist on hearing if the third volume is in the chaise,” said Mr. Crisp, firmly. “If it be not, then you may drive straight back to St. Martin's Street and return hither with it in time for Fannikin to read it to-night.”

“Pray what book is it that you refer to, Mr. Crisp?” inquired Mrs. Burney.

“What book, madam! As if there were more books than one printed this year! Why, Mrs. Burney, where have you been living all this time, that you have never heard of 'Evelina '?” cried he.

“I have heard of little else save this 'Evelina' for some time past; but I have no time for reading novels, nor has any member of my family,” replied the lady.

“I insisted on one member of your family finding the time yesterday and to-day, and the consequence is that she has gone through the first volume and part of the second since Susy was so obliging as to send them hither. I was in hopes that you had brought the third volume; but I perceive that we shall have to wait for it now.”

Susy was examining very closely the pattern on her plate when Mrs. Burney turned to her, saying:

“Does Mr. Crisp mean that you got that novel and sent it hither to Fanny?”

“Only part of it—no more than two volumes,” said Susy quickly, as though anxious to submit extenuating circumstances to the notice of her stepmother.

“Did you get it at Hill's library, or where?” inquired Mrs. Burney.

“I did not get it at a library,” replied Susy slowly, as a reluctant witness might answer an incriminating question.

“What, did you buy it? Did you spend your money on it?” cried Mrs. Burney, with a note of amazement not free from anxiety.

“Oh, no; I did not buy it,” said Susy.

“How did it come into your hands, then—tell me that?”

“Cousin Edward brought it for Fanny.”

“And you read the first two volumes and are now reading the third?”

“Nay, mamma, 'tis I that was led by my curiosity,” said Lottie hastily.

“Though you have often heard me protest against the vice of novel reading? I wonder at you, Lottie. I am shocked that you should so yield to a vulgar temptation,” said Mrs. Burney.

“Nay, my dear madam, you must not talk of our dear 'Evelina' as if she were an everyday person,” said Mr. Crisp. “On the contrary, she is a most interesting young lady, and if I do not soon learn what happens to her now that she has formed some very dubious intimacies, I shall be inconsolable. Have you read the book, Mrs. Burney?”

“Not I indeed,” replied Mrs. Burney, with more than a suggestion of indignation that such a charge should be brought against her. “I have heard enough about that book during the past month to prevent me from having any wish to read it, even if I were a novel reader, which I certainly deny. I am ashamed that any member of my household should so far forget her duty as to read such stuff.”

“Come, come, my dear lady, you must remember that there are novels and novels,” said Mr. Crisp. “I have heard you praise Mr. Richardson, have I not?”

“Mr. Richardson was a genius and a great moral writer, sir, as well.”

“The two are not invariably associated. But what if I tell you that this new book is worthy of being placed between 'Clarissa Harlowe' and 'Pamela'?”

“You will not do so gross an injustice to the memory of a great man, I am sure. But, if you please, we will discuss this no longer. No matter what this 'Evelina' may be, the fact remains that I gave a command that our home should be free from the taint of novel reading, and my wishes have been secretly ignored. I should not wonder if Fanny had encouraged Edward to procure the book for her.”

“I cannot deny it,” said Fanny in a low voice. “'Twas my doing altogether. All the blame should rest on my shoulders—yes, from the first—the very first—from the title page on to 'Finis.'”

“And your delinquency has given me greater pleasure than I have derived from other people's rectitude,” said Mr. Crisp. Then he turned to Mrs. Burney.

“Dear madam, you must forgive our Fannikin for her misdemeanour. If you had but read the book for yourself you would feel as I do on the subject. 'Tis the most fascinating story——”

“That is, I hold, the worst of the matter,” said Mrs. Burney. “The more fascinating the novel, the more dangerous it is, and the greater reason there is why it should be excluded from every honest home. A dull story may do but little harm. One might reasonably tolerate it even among a household of young girls, but a clever one—a fascinating one, as you call this 'Evelina,' should never be allowed to cross the threshold. But, by your leave, sir, we will talk no more upon a question on which I know we shall never agree.”

“That is the most satisfactory proposal that could be made,” said Mr. Crisp, bowing. “I will only add that since you are so fully sensible of the danger of a delightful book in your house, you will take prompt measures to prevent the baleful influence of 'Evelina' from pervading your home, by despatching the third volume to me without delay. The third volume of such a novel may in truth be likened to the match in the barrel of gunpowder: 'tis the most dangerous part of the whole. The first two volumes are like the gunpowder—comparatively innocent, but the moment the third volume is attached—phew! So you would do well not to delay in getting rid of such an inflammatory composition, Mrs. Burney.”

“I promise you that you shall have it at once, sir,” said Mrs. Burney. “And I trust that you will not allow the first and second to return to my house. A barrel of gunpowder may be as innocent as you say, so long as the match is withheld, but still I have no intention of turning our home into a powder magazine.”

That was the last reference made to “Evelina” while Mrs. Burney and the two girls remained at

Chessington. They went away so as to be back in St. Martin's Street in time for dinner; but the moment they were together in the chaise Mrs. Burney burst out once more in her denunciation of the vice of novel reading. From her general treatment of the theme she proceeded—as the girls feared she would—to the particular instance of its practice which had just come under her notice. She administered to poor Susy a sound scolding for having received the book from her cousin Edward in secret, and another to poor Lottie for having ventured to read it without asking leave. The girls were soon reduced to tears, but not a word did they say in reply. They were loyal to their sister and her secret with which they had been entrusted. Not a word did either of them utter.

The drive home on that lovely afternoon was a dreary one, especially after Mrs. Burney had said:

“I fear that this duplicity has been going on for a long time in our house. Yes, I have noticed more than once an exchange of meaning glances between you and Fanny, and sometimes, too, when your cousin Edward was in the room. It seemed to me that you had some secret in common which you were determined to keep from me. I said nothing at that time, for though my suspicions were awakened, yet I thought it best to take the most favourable view of the matter, and I assumed that the secret—if there was a secret—was an innocent one—such as girls in a family may share among themselves about some trifling thing; but now I have no doubt that your glances and your winks and your elbowings had to do with the smuggling of books into the house for your surreptitious reading. I am ashamed of you. It hurts me deeply to find that, after all the care I have taken to preserve you in innocence of the world and its wickedness, you have been behaving with such duplicity. I shall, of course, think it my duty to let your father know what I have found out, and he may be able to suggest some means of preventing a repetition of such conduct.”

The poor girls dared not even look at each other for mutual sympathy, lest such glances should be interpreted by their mother as a further attempt to pursue the scheme of duplicity with which she had charged them. They could only sit tearful and silent until they were once again in St. Martin's Street. They longed to rush upstairs together to their room and mingle their tears in a sisterly embrace before determining how they should meet their stepmother's charges in the presence of their father.

But Mrs. Burney was too astute a strategist to permit them to consult together.

“Is your master within?” she inquired of William, the man-servant, who opened the door for them.

“He is in the library, madam, with Mrs. Esther,” replied the man.

“So much the better,” said Mrs. Burney to the girls. “We shall go directly to him, and your sister Esther will be present.”

She made them precede her to the room that was called the library. Dr. Burney and Hetty were laughing together across the table—the sound of their merriment had been heard by the girls before the door was opened. But at the portentous gravity of the entrance of Mrs. Burney her husband became grave.

“You have returned early,” he said, “and—good heavens! you have been weeping—you do not bring bad news—Fanny has not had a relapse?”

“Fanny is quite well; but I bring you bad news,” replied Mrs. Burney. “You will, I am sure, regard it as the worst possible news when I tell you that she, as well as her sisters here, have been guilty of the grossest disobedience—a conspiracy of disobedience, I may call it.”

“I am amazed—and grieved,” said he. “But I can scarcely believe that, brought up as they have been——”

“They do not deny it,” said she. “I only discovered by chance that, in defiance of our rule against novel reading, they been have trafficking with their cousin Edward to procure novels for their secret reading, and the latest they smuggled into the house is that one called 'Evelina'—I actually found Fanny reading the book to Mr. Crisp, and her sisters admitted——”

“But what did Fanny admit?” he cried.

“She admitted that Edward had procured the book at her request,” replied his wife. “Was not that enough?”

“Not half enough—not a quarter enough, considering that it was Fanny who wrote 'Evelina' with her own hand and under our very noses without our suspecting it,” said Dr. Burney quietly.

Mrs. Burney looked at him dumbly for more than a whole minute. There was silence in the room.

Then she sat slowly down on the nearest chair, still keeping her eyes fixed upon him.

CHAPTER XXXII

DOCTOR BURNEY sat for a long time staring at a point high above his wife's head. The eldest daughter, Hetty, standing at the other side of the writing-table, was radiant; her eyes were dancing. The two others were standing together—huddled together, it might be said, for they suggested a pair of lambs recently frightened—doubtful of what is going to happen next and feeling that the closer they are to each other the safer they will be.

“Did you ever hear of anything so funny?” said Hetty, glancing around and still radiant.

Her father got upon his feet.

“And she was the only one that never had any attention,” said he, as if he had not heard Hetty's remark. “Fanny was left to make her own way as pleased her best—no one troubled about her education. She was left to pick up knowledge as best she could—the crumbs that fell from the others' table—that was how she picked up French when the others came back from school, and now she speaks it with the best of them... And so shy!

Tell me, if you can, how she got her knowledge of things—the things in that book—the pictures red with life—the real life-blood of men and women—love—emotion—pathos—all that make up life—and don't forget the characterization—that's what seems to me all but miraculous. Hogarth—we all know that Hogarth drew his characters and fitted them into his pictures because he made it a point to walk among them and look at them with observant eyes; but tell me, if you can, what chance that child had of seeing anything; and yet she has filled her canvas, and every bit is made up of firm, true drawing. That is the chief wonder."

He spoke evidently under the impulse of a great excitement at first, not looking at anyone in particular—just skimming them all with his eyes as he paced the room. But he seemed gradually to recover himself as he talked, and he appeared to address his last words to his wife. This assisted her to recover herself also—a minute or so in advance of him.

"You seem to be sure that Fanny wrote it," she said, when he had done. "Is it fair to condemn her before you make sure?"

Everyone looked at Mrs. Burney; but only her husband laughed.

"Condemn her—condemn her for having written the finest novel since Fielding?" he said, with the laugh still on his face. There was no laugh on hers; on the contrary, its expression was more serious than ever.

"A novel is a novel," she said. "I told Mr. Crisp—but that was only about the reading of novels—the cleverer they are the more mischievous—dangerous—even the reading—I never dreamt of her going so far as to write one, clever or otherwise. But a novel is still a novel—she must have neglected her duties in the house, though I failed to observe it... and sending it to a bookseller without saying a word to us! Who would have believed that a young woman with her training—"

"It flashed across me when I read the verses addressed to myself at the beginning that she had asked my permission some months ago, and that I had given it—I did so laughing at the poor child's credulousness in believing that any bookseller would print it for her and pay her for the privilege—the privilege of making a thousand pounds out of her book."

"What! are you serious?—a thousand pounds, did you say?"

"Mr. Lowndes will make more than a thousand pounds by the sale of the book—Hetty tells me that he only paid Fanny twenty for it."

"What is the world coming to—a fortune in a single book! And we talked about her being portionless, when all the time she was more richly endowed than all the rest of the family; for if she has written one book, she can certainly write another equally remunerative. 'Perhaps she has another ready for the printers."

Mrs. Burney was blessed with the capacity to look at matters, however artistic they might be, from the standpoint of the practical housekeeper. The mention of so sonorous a sum as a thousand pounds caused the scales of prejudice to fall from the eyes through which she had regarded the act of authorship, and at that instant she perceived that it should not be thought of as a delinquency but as a merit.

And, after all, it appeared that the girl had obtained the permission of her father to print it—that put quite a different complexion upon the transaction, did it not?

And a thousand pounds—that appealed to the good sense of a practical person and swept away the last cobweb of prejudice that she had had respecting novels and their writers.

"Has she another book written, think you?" she inquired in a tone full of interest. "Of course we shall see that she gets a better share of Mr. Lowndes' thousand pounds than she did for her first."

"She has not written a line since 'Evelina,'" said Esther. "To be sure, I have not been her *confidante* since I got married, but I know that she was so frightened at the thought of what she had done that she would not write another page."

"Frightened! What had she to be frightened about?" cried Mrs. Burney in a tone of actual amazement.

"Goodness knows," said Esther with a laugh.

The sound of the dinner-bell coming at that moment had about it also something of the quality of a long, loud, sonorous outburst of laughter with a cynical tinkle at the last.

The group in that room dissolved in all directions with exclamations of dismay at being overtaken by the dinner-hour so unprepared.

"It is all over now," said Susy to Lottie, when they were alone in their room. "I was afraid when she ushered us so formally into the library that we would be forced to tell our secret."

"I made up my mind that no torture of the rack or wild horses would unseal my lips," said Susy, earnestly. "Do you know, Lottie, I feel quite lonely without our secret."

"It is just the same with me, dear," said Lottie. "I feel as if I were suddenly cut off from some great interest in life—as if I had gone downstairs one morning and found that someone had stolen the piano. I wonder if it was Hetty who told the padre."

"Make haste and we shall soon learn all," said Susy.

Before they had finished dinner they learned from their father how he had got to the bottom of the secret that they had so cherished.

He had gone as usual to give a music lesson to Queenie Thrale, and when partaking of some refreshment before setting out for London, Mrs. Thrale had talked to him in terms of the highest praise of "Evelina." She had read the book twice over, she told him, and had lent it to Dr. Johnson, who could talk of nothing else. Then Mrs. Cholmondeley had arrived on a visit to Thrale Hall, and she, too, was full of praise of the book. She, too, had lent her copy to someone else—to no less important a person than Mr. Edmund Burke, and he had declared himself as greatly captivated by it as his friend Sir Joshua Reynolds had been. Everybody was talking about it, and the question of the authorship had been as widely discussed as before; Mrs. Cholmondeley had declared that she would give twenty guineas to find out for certain who it was that had written the book.

Mrs. Thrale had thereupon suggested that Dr. Burney was in a better position than most people for solving

the mystery, going about as he was from one part of the town to another and being in close touch with all manner of people.

“But I had not, as you know, so much as read the book for myself—I seemed to be the only one in town who had not done so—and on getting home I sent William post haste to Mr. Lowndes to purchase a set. This done, I sat down to peruse the first volume. The page opened on the Ode; it lay beneath my eyes, and I tell you truly that I did not seem to read it: I seemed to hear Fanny's voice reading the verses in my ear, and the truth came upon me in a flash—incredible though it appeared, I knew that it was she who had written the book. Hetty came in before my eyes were dry—she saw the volume in my hand, and she understood all. 'You know,' was all that she said. I think that the greatest marvel was the keeping of the secret of the book! To think of its being known to four girls and never becoming too great for them to bear!”

He was appealing to his wife, but she only nodded a cold acquiescence in his surprise. She remained silent, however, and this was something to be grateful for, the girls thought: they knew just what she was thinking, and they also knew that if they had some little trouble in keeping their secret, she had very much more in restraining herself from uttering some comment upon their reticence—their culpable reticence, she would think it. They could see that she was greatly displeased at having been excluded from their secret, since such an exclusion had forced her into a false position more than once—notably in the presence of Mr. Crisp, when she had become the assailant of novels and novel reading generally, and also when she had scolded them on their return in the chaise. But they were good girls, and they were ready to allow that they were in the wrong, even though they did not think so: that is what really good girls do in their desire for peace in their homes. And Lottie and Susy made up their minds that should their stepmother tax them with double-dealing and deceit, they would not try to defend themselves. The reflection that they had kept their sister's secret would more than compensate them for any possible humiliation they might suffer at Mrs. Burney's hands.

All that Mrs. Burney said at the conclusion of her husband's further rhapsody about the marvel of Fanny's achievement, considering how she had been generally thought the dunce of the family, was comprised in a few phrases uttered in a hurt tone:

“While no one is more pleased than myself to witness her success, I cannot but feel that she would have shown herself possessed of a higher sense of her duty as a daughter if she had consulted her father or his wife in the matter,” she said.

“That may be true enough,” said Dr. Burney; “but if she had done so, would she have achieved her purpose any more fully than she has, I ask you? No, my dear, I do not feel, with any measure of certainty, that I would have gone far in my encouragement of her efforts, nor do I think that you would have felt it consistent with your principles to do so.”

“I was only referring to the question of a simple girl's duty in regard to her parents,” said Mrs. Burney.

“And your judgment on that point is, I am certain, unassailable,” said he. “But here we have a girl who is no simple girl, but a genius; and I think that a good deal of latitude should be allowed to a genius—a little departure from the hard and fast line of the duties expected from a simple girl may be permitted in such a one as Fanny.”

“Well, she has succeeded in her aims—so much is plain,” said Mrs. Burney. “But I hope that should any of her sisters set about a similar enterprise——”

But the ringing laughter that came from the sisters, their father joining in with great heartiness, saved the need for her to complete her sentence. At first she felt hurt, but she quickly yielded to the exuberant spirit that pervaded the atmosphere of the room, and smiled indulgently, after the manner of a staid elderly lady who is compelled to take part in the romp of her girls and boys at Christmas time.

She continued smiling, and the others continued laughing, and this spirit of good humour was maintained until bedtime.

The girls knew that they would not be scolded for their participation in Fanny's secret; for Fanny by her success had justified any amount of double-dealing. If Fanny had made a fool of herself they would feel that they deserved to participate in her scolding; but success is easily pardoned, and so they rightly counted upon a general amnesty. What was it that their father had said about a thousand pounds?

They went to bed quite happy, in spite of being deprived of the fearful joy of having a secret to keep.

CHAPTER XXXIII

DR. BURNEY had given instructions that Fanny was not to be communicated with at Chessington until he had seen her; but that the third volume of the book was to be sent to Mr. Crisp without delay. He was to go to Streatham again in two days' time, and thence to Chessington, where he would make Mr. Crisp aware of the identity of the writer of “Evelina.”

He anticipated an interesting hour with Mr. Crisp, but a very much more interesting half-hour with Mrs. Thrale; for he meant, of course, to lose no time in letting that lady into the secret: he knew that she would make the most of the information he could impart to her; to be the first to learn what all her friends were striving to learn would at once place her above Mrs. Cholmondeley, who was willing to pay twenty guineas for the knowledge, and even Mrs. Montagu, who was inclined to patronize Mrs. Thrale and a good many other ladies, in spite of the fact that Dr. Johnson dined usually five days out of every week with Mrs. Thrale, but had only dined once with Mrs. Montagu since she had gone to her new house.

Dr. Burney was well aware how valuable the Thrale connection was to him; a teacher of music is apt to look with sparkling eyes at a houseful of girls whose father possesses the possibilities of such wealth as was defined by Dr. Johnson in this particular case as beyond the dreams of avarice. Dr. Burney had a very nice judgment on the subject of an influential connection, and so was delighted to have a chance of doing a signal good turn to so deserving a patroness as Mrs. Thrale. Yes, he felt sure that his half-hour at Streatham Hall would be the most interesting of the many half-hours he had spent under the same hospitable roof.

And he was not mistaken in his surmise.

Mrs. Thrale had, as usual, several friends coming to partake of an early repast with her; and Dr. Burney had pictured to himself the effect of his announcement to the company that his daughter had written the book upon which he was pretty sure the conversation would turn—indeed, he felt that he would be greatly surprised if the conversation did not immediately rush to the question of “Evelina” and remain there for the rest of the afternoon; for the enterprising ladies would doubtless bring with them some fresh suggestions or new cues to its authorship. He pictured himself allowing them to go on for some time until perhaps a statement would be made which he should have to contradict point-blank. They would all look at him in surprise. What did he know about the matter? Was he interested in the question? Had he found out anything?

How he would smile while saying quietly:

“Well, I am more or less interested in the matter, the fact being that 'Evelina' is the work of my daughter, Fanny Burney!”

That would be, he thought, a fitting moment in which to divulge the secret; he saw the whole scene clearly before him.

But before he had reached his destination that intuition of what would commend itself to a patron which had been so important an auxiliary to his ability in placing him above his rivals in his profession, overcame his desire to play the most important part in a dramatic scene; he perceived that such a rôle should be taken by an influential patroness, and not by himself. Thus it was that when Mrs. Thrale was giving him a cup of chocolate after his journey he smiled, saying:

“I was greatly interested in the conversation between Mrs. Cholmondeley and the other ladies when I was last here.”

“About 'Evelina'?” she inquired. “Ah, I wonder if Mrs. Cholmondeley has yet paid over her twenty guineas to the discoverer of the author. It seems that he has as arduous a task in regard to 'Evelina' as Raleigh had in regard to his El Dorado.”

“So it would appear,” said Dr. Burney. “Let us hope that his efforts will be more highly valued than those of poor Sir Walter. Have you yourself no suspicions on the subject, madam?”

“Oh, suspicions? There have been as many suspicions set going on this subject within the month as would be entertained only by the most imaginative Bow Street runner. For my own part, I maintain that the book could only have been writ by our friend Horace Walpole. He found that his 'Otranto' excited so much curiosity when published without a name, he came to the conclusion that he would produce another novel with the same amount of mystery attached to it. The only point against this assumption is that——”

“That the book was assuredly written by another person,” said Burney, smiling in a way that he designed to be somewhat enigmatical.

Mrs. Thrale tried to interpret his smile.

“What!” she exclaimed, “you have formed another theory—you—you have heard something since you were last here?”

“Not something, madam—not a mere something, but everything—everything that is to be known regarding the writer of that book.”

“Is't possible? Who is your informant?—the value of all that you have heard is dependent upon the accuracy of your informant.”

“The book was written by the person whom I fancied I knew best of all the people in the world, and yet the last person whom I would believe capable of such a feat. The author of the book—I am the author of her being—she is none other than my daughter Fanny.”

Mrs. Thrale sat staring at him, one arm resting upon the table, her lips parted as if about to utter an exclamation of surprise, but unable to do so by reason of her surprise.

More than a minute had passed before she was able to speak, and then she could do no more than repeat his words.

“Your daughter Fanny—your daughter—but is not Fanny the little shy one that goes into a corner when you have company?” she asked, in a tone that suggested that she had heard something too ridiculous to be believed.

“She is that one, madam,” he replied. “It would seem as if the corner of a room has its advantages in enabling one to observe life from a true standpoint. Two eyes looking out from a corner with a brain behind them—there you have the true writer of a novel of life and character. Poor Fanny! How often have not I talked of her as 'poor Fanny'? She had no education except what she contrived to pick up haphazard—a sweet child—a lovable daughter, but the last person in the world to be suspected of such a book as 'Evelina.'”

“You are sure, sir—you have seen—heard—you know?”

“Beyond any doubt. Her sisters were let into the secret, but neither of her parents. I know now why that was—no want of duty—no lack of respect—she began the book for her own amusement, and it grew under her hand; she sent it to a bookseller, more as a jest than in the belief that anything would come of it, and up to the last it was treated by her and her sisters as a schoolroom mystery—a nursery secret—and Mrs. Burney and I were kept out of it solely because we were not of the nursery or the schoolroom. And when it became a serious matter we were excluded because they were afraid to reveal it to us—Fanny herself, dear child!—feared that we would be concerned if it were stillborn. It was only when it was at the point of being published by Mr. Lowndes that she came to me saying that she had been writing something and wanted my leave to

send it forth, promising that no name would appear upon the title page. I gave my leave with a smile, and when I had my laugh at the innocence of the girl in fancying that any bookseller would pay for the printing of what she might scribble, I forgot all about the matter. It was only when I sent for the book and read the Ode addressed to myself that I seemed to hear Fanny's voice speaking the words in my ear—I told the others so when they returned from visiting her at Chessington. But meantime Esther had come to me, and she told me all that was known to her about the book and its secret."

"The most wonderful story ever known—more wonderful than the story of Evelina herself!" cried Mrs. Thrale. "How people—Mrs. Cholmondeley and the rest—will lift up their hands! Who among them will believe it all possible? List, my dear doctor, you must bring her to me in the first instance—all the others will be clamouring for her to visit them—I know them! You must bring her to me without delay—why not to-day? I can easily send a chaise for her—a coach if necessary. Well, if not to-day, to-morrow. I must have her here. We will understand each other—she and I; and Dr. Johnson will be with us—quite a little company—for dinner. You will promise me?"

"Be assured, dear madam, that there is no house apart from her home where I feel she would be happier than in this," said Dr. Burney. "She has often expressed the warmest admiration for you, and I know that her dearest wish is to be on terms of intimacy with you."

"The sweet girl! she shall have her dearest wish gratified to the fullest extent, sir. You will bring her as early to-morrow as it suits you. Good heavens! to think of that dear retiring child taking the town by storm! Dr. Johnson wrote to me no later than last evening, expressing once more his delight in reading the book, and Mr. Burke, too—but you heard about Mr. Burke. I will never forget your courtesy in telling me first of all your friends that she was the author, dear doctor."

"If not you, madam, whom would I have told?"

"I shall be ever grateful. You will give me leave to make the revelation to my friends who will be here to-day?"

"It is open for you to tell them all that I have told you, my dear madam; and you may truthfully add that if the writing of the book will bring her into closer intimacy with Mrs. Thrale, the author will feel that it has not been written in vain."

He made his lowest bow on rising from the table to receive his pupil, who entered the room at that moment.

He had confidence that he was right in his intuition that his patroness would act with good effect the rôle which he had relinquished in her favour, when her friends would arrive in another hour for their "collation;" and he was ready to allow that none could have played the part more neatly than she did when the time came to prove how much better-informed she was than the rest of the world. She might have been possessed of the knowledge that Miss Burney was the writer of "Evelina" from the first, from the easy and natural way in which she said:

"Pray do not trouble yourselves telling me what Mrs. Cholmondeley said to Mr. Lowndes, or what Mr. Lowndes said to someone else about the writer of the novel; for it happens that I know, and have known for—for some time the name of the author."

There were a few little exclamations of surprise, and a very pretty uplifting of several pairs of jewelled hands at this calm announcement.

"Oh, yes," she continued, "the writer is a friend of my own, and the daughter of one of my most valued friends, and if any people talk to you in future of 'Evelina' being the work of Mr. Walpole or Mr. Anstey or any man of letters, pay no attention to these astute investigators, but tell them that I said the book is the work of Miss Fanny Burney, one of the daughters of the celebrated Dr. Charles Burney, himself the author of a 'History of Music' that will live so long as the English language has a literature of its own."

Mrs. Thrale did it all with amazing neatness, Dr. Burney thought; and the attempt that she made to conceal the expression of triumph in the glance that she gave to her guests let him know that his tact had been exercised in the right direction. Mrs. Thrale was not the woman to forget that he had given her such a chance of proving to her friends how intimate was her association with the literary history of the day. She had been for several years the patroness of Dr. Johnson, who had written the best dictionary, and now she was about to take under her protection Miss Burney, who had written the best novel. He knew that Mrs. Thrale was almost as glad to be able to reveal the secret of "Evelina" as if she had written the book herself.

And everyone else at the table felt that Mrs. Thrale was indeed an amazingly clever woman; and wondered how Mrs. Cholmondeley would feel when she had learned that she had been forestalled in her quest after the information on which she had placed a value of twenty guineas.

CHAPTER XXXIV

IT had all come to her now. She had had her dreams from time to time when working at her novel—dreams of recognition—of being received on terms of equality by some of the lesser literary people who had visited the house in St. Martin's Street, and had gone away praising the musical talents of her sisters, but leaving her unnoticed. Her aspirations had been humble, but it seemed to her so stupid to be stupid in the midst of a brilliant household, that she longed to be able to do something that would, at least, cause their visitors of distinction to glance into her corner and recognize her name when it was spoken in their hearing. That was all she longed for at first—to be recognized as "the one who writes," as people recognized "the one who plays." But since Signor Rauzzini had come upon the scene her ambitions had widened. She dreamt not

merely of recognition, but of distinction, so that he might be proud of her, and that she might not merely be spoken of as the wife of the Roman singer. That dream of hers had invariably been followed by a feeling of depression as she reflected upon the improbability of its ever being realized, and if it should not be realized, all hope of happiness would pass from her life. Thus it was that for some months she had lived with the cold finger of despair constantly pressing upon her heart. She was so practical—so reasonable—that she could never yield herself up to the fascination of the Fool's Paradise of dreams; she was ready to estimate her chances of literary success, and the result of the operation was depressing. How could any young woman who had seen so little of life, and who had been so imperfectly educated, have any hope to be received as a writer of distinction? What claim to distinction could such a girl as she advance in the face of the competition that was going on around her in every branch of distinctive work?

For some months her good sense and her clear head were her greatest enemies; evermore bringing her back to the logic of a life in which everything is represented by figures, from a great artistic success to a butcher's bill—a life in which dreams play a part of no greater significance than the splendid colours clinging about the West in the unalterable routine of the setting sun.

Many times she had awakened in the night to weep as she felt the bitterness of defeat; for her book had been given to the world and the world had received it as the sea receives a stone that is flung upon its surface. That simile of the stone and the sea was constantly recurring to her, and every time she saw that it was weak—that it fell short of meeting her case, for her book had made no stir whatsoever in the world, whereas a stone, however small it might be, could not be given to the sea without creating some stir on the surface of the waters.

And then, quite unexpectedly, had come a whisper from the world to tell her that her book had not been submerged: the whisper had increased in volume until it had sounded in her ears like a shout of acclamation, telling her that the reality had far surpassed her most sanguine dreams, and that common-sense reasoning is sometimes farther astray in its operation than are the promptings of the most unreasonable ambition.

These were her rose-tinted reflections while driving with her father from Chessington to Streatham, a journey which represented to her the passing from obscurity to distinction, the crossing of the Jordan and the entering into the Land of Promise.

Fanny Burney has herself told the story of her father's coming to her at Chessington, and of her dear old friend's reception of the marvellous news that Dr. Burney brought to him—of the phrases which she overheard while the two men were in a room together—the incredulous exclamations—“Wonderful—it's wonderful!”—“Why, she has had very little education but what she has given herself—less than any of the others”—“The variety of characters—the variety of scenes, and the language”—“Wonderful!” And then Mr. Crisp's meeting her, catching her by the hands as she was going in to supper, and crying, “Why, you little hussy, ain't you ashamed to look me in the face you—you 'Evelina,' you! Why, what a dance you have led me about it!” Miss Burney has brought the scene vividly before our eyes in her Diary.

It was one of the happiest days of her life; she saw the pride with which her father regarded her, for Dr. Burney was a practical man who valued achievement as it deserved, and was, besides, the best of fathers, and the most anxious to advance the interests of his children. He looked with pride upon his daughter, and talked of her having made Mr. Lowndes a wealthy man. His estimate of her earning powers had increased: he now declared that even if Lowndes had paid a thousand pounds for the book, his profits off it would enable him to buy an estate!

It was the happiest evening of her life; and now she was in the chaise with her beloved father, driving to Streatham, where they were to dine, and Dr. Johnson was to be of the party. This meant more than recognition, it meant the Land of Promise of her ambitious dreams.

She had many matters to reflect upon at this time, but all her reflections led to the one point—her next meeting with Rauzzini. The truth that had been revealed to her among Sir Joshua Reynolds' superb canvases, that love was more than all else that the world could give her, remained before her, as a luminous fixed star, to be a guide to her life; and the happiness that she now felt was due to the thought that she could go to the man whom she loved, without a misgiving, without fearing that he would hear those dreaded voices of the world saying that he had been a fool to ally himself with a nonentity, or that she would hear the whispers of those who might suggest that she had done very well for herself. She had long before made her resolution only to go to him when she could do so on terms of equality. At that time her resolution seemed to shut her out from all chances of happiness; she knew this, but at the same time she believed that it would shut both of them out from every chance of unhappiness; and so she had allowed it to dominate her life.

That was where her common-sense and her reasonableness had their way, prevailing over that blind impulse which she now and again had, to trust to chance—and love—to overcome every other consideration, and to give her lover and herself happiness solely by being together. It was such impulses as this that caused love to be referred to as blind. But she was now ready to thank heaven for having given her strength to overcome it and so to give the victory to reason and good sense.

She made up her mind to write to him before she slept that very night, telling him what her resolution had been—he had called it a mystery, not knowing anything about it—and asking him to rejoice with her that she had been able to maintain it, so that the barrier which she had seen between them was now swept away.

“Come to me—come to me”—that would be the burden of her letter to him; she would send it to him and he would come.

The thought made her lean back among the cushions of the chaise and shut her eyes, the better to enclose the vision of happiness that came from her heart. He would come to her and her happiness would be complete.

So she arrived with her father at Thrale Hall and was welcomed by Mrs. Thrale in the porch. When she had made her toilet for dinner she was shown into the drawing-room. As she entered, she was conscious of the presence of several men, and the one nearest to her was, she saw, Signor Rauzzini.

All the men in the room were looking toward her except Rauzzini. He was standing by the side of a small table, presenting his profile to her, and his eyes were gazing across the room at a picture that hung between

the windows, a frown on his face.

She was startled, and the blood rushed to her cheeks. It would have done so on her entering the room, even if she had not been surprised to see her lover there when she believed him to be still in France.

She had stopped before reaching the middle of the room, and then she was hidden from the view of everybody by a huge mass of manhood in the person of Dr. Johnson. He seemed inclined to embrace her; and as he swung himself close to her, there was no one in the room that had not a moment of trepidation lest he should fall over her and crush her flat.

Mrs. Thrale tripped alongside Fanny, as if ready to die with her.

“Oh, come, Dr. Johnson,” she cried. “I have no intention of allowing you to monopolize Miss Burney, for that I perceive is your desire. The gentlemen must be presented to her in proper form.”

“Madam,” said he, “I understood clearly that Miss Burney was coming hither for myself alone, and I have no mind to share so precious a morsel with others. Miss Burney and I are old friends, give me leave to say; I have more than once been interested in a book in the room where she was sitting in her father's house. Come to my arms, Miss Burney, and we shall laugh together at the jealous glances the others cast at me.”

“Miss Burney will sit beside you at dinner, sir, and that must suffice you for the present,” said Mrs. Thrale, taking Fanny by the hand.

But Johnson had succeeded, after more than one ineffectual attempt, in grasping Miss Burney's left hand, and in his ponderous playfulness, he refused to relinquish it, so that she had to make her curtsies to the gentlemen with Mrs. Thrale on one side of her and Johnson on the other. There was Mr. Seward and Sir Joshua Reynolds, and two others besides Signor Rauzzini. Each of them had a compliment to offer her, and did so very pleasantly and with great tact.

“Now that is done, Miss Burney and I can sit together on the sofa, and she will tell me why she loves the Scotch and I will scold her for it,” said Johnson complacently.

“Nay, sir, Miss Burney has not yet greeted Signor Rauzzini,” said Mrs. Thrale. “You and Miss Burney are already acquainted, I know, Signor Rauzzini, though you did fancy that she was one of the musical girls of St. Martin's Street.”

Rauzzini took a single step away from the table at which he had remained immovable, and bowed low, without speaking a word.

Fanny responded. They were separated by at least three yards.

“Dinner is on the table, sir,” announced a servant from the door.

“I am not sorry,” said Johnson. “Mrs. Thrale gave me a solemn promise that Miss Burney should sit next to me. That was why I kept my eye on Miss Burney.”

“And hand too, sir,” remarked Mr. Seward.

“Why, yes, sir, and hand too, if you insist,” said Johnson. “And let me tell you, sir, that a Lichfield man will keep his hand on anything he wishes to retain when another Lichfield man is in the same room.”

His laughter set the ornaments on the mantelpiece a-jingling.

And they went in to dinner before the echoes had died away.

Mrs. Thrale kept her promise, and Fanny was placed next to Johnson. But even then he did not let go her hand. He held it in one of his own and patted it gently with the other. Fanny glanced down the table and saw that the eyes of the young Roman were looking in her direction, and that they were flaming. What could he mean, she wondered. She had been at first amazed at his bearing toward her in the drawing-room; but after a moment's thought, she had supposed that he had assumed that distant manner to prevent anyone from suspecting the intimacy there was between them. But what could that angry look in his eyes portend? Was it possible that he could be jealous of Dr. Johnson's awkward attention to her?

She was greatly troubled.

But if he had, indeed, resented Johnson's attention to her, such a plea was no longer valid after the first dish had been served, for in an instant Johnson's attention was transferred, with increased force, to the plate before him, and during the solid part of the meal, at least, it was never turned in any other direction. Poor Fanny had never seen him eat, nor had she the same privilege in respect of Mr. Thrale. But she needed all the encouragement that her hostess could afford her to enable her to make even the most moderate meal while such distractions were in her immediate neighbourhood; and she came to the conclusion that she had been ridiculously fastidious over the prodigious tea and its service at Mr. Barlowe's in the Poultry.

But Mrs. Thrale was as tactful and as chatty as ever, and Mr. Seward made pleasant conversation for her, sitting, as he did, on the other side from Johnson. When Johnson was eating, his fellow guests understood that their chance was come to express their views without a dread of being contradicted by him.

But from the feebleness of her contribution to the chat of the table, Mrs. Thrale as well as Mr. Seward perceived that all they had been told about the timidity of little Miss Burney was even less than the truth.

But for that matter, Signor Rauzzini, who had been placed between Mrs. Thrale and Dr. Burney, was found by both of them to be also singularly averse from joining in the conversation, whether in reply to Burney, who addressed him in Italian, or to his hostess, who spoke French to him.

As Mrs. Thrale talked a good deal herself, however, she rose with an impression that there had been no especial lack of brilliancy at the table.

She took Fanny away with her, her determination being that if she should fail to draw this shy young creature out of her shell, she would at any rate convince her that her hostess was deserving of the reputation which she enjoyed for learning, combined with vivacity, so that their companionship could not be otherwise than profitable after all.

CHAPTER XXXV

IT was not yet six o'clock and the sun was not due to set for more than another hour. The evening was a lovely one. From the shrubberies around the house came the liquid notes of countless blackbirds and thrushes, and above the trees of the park the cawing of the rooks as they wheeled above their nests and settled upon the branches.

“We shall sit on the terrace for half an hour, if you have a mind to,” said Mrs. Thrale, taking Fanny through the drawing-room into a smaller room that opened upon a long terrace above the beds of the flower-garden. Here were several seats and a small table bearing writing materials.

“Here I do most of my correspondence in the summer,” said Mrs. Thrale. “Sitting at that table in the open air, I have few distractions, unless I choose to accept the birds as such; and here I hope you will begin a new novel, or better still, a comedy that Mr. Sheridan will produce, with Mrs. Abington in her most charming gowns—you must give your namesake a chance of wearing a whole trunkful of gowns.” They seated themselves, and Mrs. Thrale continued:

“Now I have confided in you how I do my simple work, and I wish to hear from you by what means you found time to write your novel. That is the greatest secret of all associated with 'Evelina'—so your father thinks. Mrs. Burney I always knew as a model housekeeper—a model manager of a family, and how you could contrive to write a single page without her knowledge is what baffles me as well as your father.”

“To tell you all would, I fear, be to confess to a lifetime of duplicity,” said Fanny. “I am sometimes shocked now when I reflect upon my double-dealing.”

“Tell me how you first came to stray from the paths of virtue—such a story is invariably interesting,” said Mrs. Thrale.

“My story is like all the others,” replied Fanny. “I only meant to turn aside a little way, but soon I lost myself and I knew that there was no retracing my steps.”

“Alas, alas, the old story!” said Mrs. Thrale, with a long-drawn sigh. “Well, happily, you were not able to retrace your steps.”

“I had no idea that the story would grow upon me as it did,” said Fanny. “I really only meant it to be a diversion for our dear friend, Mr. Crisp, and an exercise for myself. I wrote a scrap now and again at odd moments—when I was supposed to be writing to Mr. Crisp, or copying out my father's notes for his History, at home as well as at Ches-sington, and when I was staying at Lynn; and so the thing grew and grew until I was afraid to look at what I had perpetrated.”

“You are paraphrasing *Macbeth*, my dear: 'I am afeared to think what I have done: Look on't again I dare not,'” said the elder lady. “But with all you were able to prepare your father's great work for the press—he told me as much; so that what your double-dealing comes to is that you did his writing as well as your own, and at the same time neglected none of your ordinary household duties—if you had done so Mrs. Burney would have informed you of it, I have no doubt. An excellent housewife, Mrs. Burney! And now you shall tell me how you contrived to bring together so marvellous a group of characters—you who have lived so short a time in the world, and had so small an amount of experience.”

“I should like someone to answer that question for me,” said Fanny. “It was not until I read the book in print that I began to be surprised at it, and to wonder how it came to be written and how those characters had found their way into it.”

But this question was too interesting a one not to be pursued by Mrs. Thrale; and for half an hour she put inquiry after inquiry to Fanny respecting the characters, the incidents and the language of “Evelina.” Mrs. Thrale was certainly determined to place herself in a position to prove to her friends that Miss Burney had made a *confidante* of her in all matters, down to the smallest detail of the book.

In ordinary circumstances Fanny would have been delighted to give her her confidence in regard to these particulars—she had always a childlike pleasure in talking about her books—but at this time she only did so with a great effort. For while Mrs. Thrale was plying her with questions about “Evelina,” there was ever before Fanny the unanswered question as to what Rauzzini meant by his coldness and formality both before dinner and during that meal. What did he mean by looking at her with that reproachful frown upon his face? What did he mean by averting his eyes from her when he had a chance of exchanging confidences with her, as he had often done before? What did he mean by sitting at the table without addressing a single word to her?

These were the questions which she was struggling in vain to answer to her own satisfaction all the time that Mrs. Thrale was putting inquiry after inquiry to her upon a matter that Fanny now regarded as insignificant compared with the one that she was trying to answer for herself.

Mrs. Thrale was just beginning a series of questions on the subject of the comedy which she meant Miss Burney to write, when a servant appeared with a message for the former.

“Tiresome!” exclaimed Fanny's hostess, rising. “Here is some insignificant household matter that can only be dealt with by the mistress—summer frocks for two girls: the carrier has brought some boxes—the summer has come upon us before spring has prepared us for its arrival, and there has been a despairing cry heard in the nursery. I need not excuse myself to you, Miss Burney. You will spare me for ten minutes.”

Miss Burney hoped that the feeling of relief of which she was conscious did not show itself on her face, when she expressed the hope that Mrs. Thrale would not think of her; she would be quite happy with the birds.

“And the comedy—do not forget the comedy.”

Miss Burney laughed, but before her hostess had reached the door leading off the terrace, she was once more immersed in that question:

“What does he mean by his change of attitude in regard to me?”

It was serious—so much she knew. He had heard something that had caused him to change. But what could he have heard? What manner of man was he that would allow himself to be so influenced by anything that he might hear against her, without first coming to her for an explanation?

Her mind went back to the evening when they had first met. It was in St. Martin's Street. He was there on the invitation of Dr. Burney: but it seemed that he had become conscious of a sympathy existing between her and himself, for he had remained by her side for a full hour while the others in the room were singing and playing on the piano, and he had held her hand at parting, expressing the hope, which his eyes confirmed, that they would soon meet again.

And they had met again and again until one evening they found themselves alone in an anteroom to the apartment where a musical programme was being performed at a great house. Then he had told her that his happiness depended on her returning the love which he bore her; and startled though she had been, yet when he took her hand all her shyness seemed to vanish and she confessed....

A sound behind her only served to make her memory seem more vivid, for it was his voice that reached her ear and it was singing the same aria that he had come from singing on that evening—the passionate “*Lascia ch'io pianga*” of Handel. Once more she was listening to the strains—they came from one of the rooms that opened upon the terrace—and now the chords of the accompaniment were struck with a vehemence that had been absent from her father's playing to Rauzzini's singing upon that occasion.

She listened as if in a dream while the noble, despairing strain went on to its close, and the melody sobbed itself into silence—a silence that the birds among the roses seemed unwilling to break, for only an occasional note of a thrush was in the air....

She heard the sound of the door opening a little way down the terrace—of a foot upon the flagged path. She did not raise her head, but she knew that he was there—only a few yards away from her.

Through the silence there came the cawing of rooks far away among the trees of the park.

Then all at once she heard his sudden exclamation of surprise. He had not seen her at first; he saw her now.

“*Dio mio! ella è qui!*”

Still she did not turn her head toward him. More than a minute had passed before she heard his slow steps as he approached her. He was beside her for quite as long before he spoke.

“I did not know that you were here,” he said in a low voice. “But I am glad. It is but right that I should say good-bye to you alone.”

Then she looked up.

“Why—why—why?” she cried almost piteously. “Why should you say good-bye? What has made the change in you?”

“It is not I who have changed: it is you,” said he. “I loved the sweet, modest, untarnished jewel of a girl—a pearl hidden away from the sight of men in a dim sea-cave—a violet—ah, I told you how I loved the violet that hides itself from every eye—that was what you were when I loved you, and I hoped to return to your side and find you the same. Well, I return and—ah, where is the exquisite shrinking one that I looked for? Gone—gone—gone for ever, and in her place I find one whose name is in every mouth—not a soft, gentle girl, but a woman who has put her heart into a book—*Dio mio!* A woman who puts her heart into a book is like a woman who disrobes in a public place—worse—worse—she exposes a heart that should be sacred—feelings that it would be a gross indelicacy to exhibit to the eyes of man!”

“And that is how you think of me on account of what I have done?” said she.

“How can I think anything else?” he cried. “I told you that I loved you because you were so unlike others—because you were like a child for timidity and innocence of the world. I told you on that last evening we were together how greatly I admired the act of Miss Linley in turning her back upon the platform where she had sung and vowing never to return to it—that was what I told you I loved—I who have seen how the nature—the womanly charm of every woman suffers by reason of her appealing to the public for money—for applause. That beautiful creature forsook the platform before it was too late—before the evil influence could work her ruin. But you—what do I hear the day I return to England?—you have put your heart—your soul, into a book that causes your name to be tossed about from mouth to mouth—Fanny Burney—Fanny Burney—Fanny Burney—I hear that name, which I regarded as sacred, spoken as freely as men speak the name of their Kitty Fisher—their Polly Kennedy—their Fanny Abington! These are public characters—so are you—oh, my God! so are you. You should have heard how you were discussed in that room behind us before you arrived to-day—that gross man Johnson—he called you by a dozen pet names as if he had a right—'Fan'—'Fannikin'—I know not what—' a shy rogue '—that was another! They laughed! They did not see the degradation of it. You were a toy of the public—the vulgar crowd! Ah, you saw how that gross man, who fed himself as a wolf, tucked you under his arm and the others only smiled! Oh, I was shocked—shocked!”

“And I felt proud—prouder than I have felt in my life,” said she. “But now I see what I have lost—forfeited. Listen to me and I will tell you what my dream was. I had written that book, but I had no hope of printing it until I met you and heard from your lips—all that I heard.”

“It was the truth—then: I loved you—then.”

“I knew that it was the truth. But who was I that I should be beloved by you? I felt that it would be unendurable to me to hear people refer to us—as I knew they would—the great singer who had stooped to a nonentity.”

“Ah! that was the charm!”

“Who except you would have said so? I knew what they would say, and I made up my mind that I would not go to you except as an equal. I wanted you to marry someone of whom you would feel proud, and I thought that I had a little gift which I would lay at your feet. I did my best to perfect it for your sake; but even when

the book was printed I would not give you my promise until I had assured myself that the gift would be pronounced worthy of your acceptance. That was why I put you off for so many months."

"Ah, that was your mystery—you called it a mystery."

"That was my secret—my mystery. Never mind; I thought that my hope was realized when everyone about me was talking of the book and when people whose opinion was valuable had said it was good—my one thought, God knows, was that I could go to you—that I could make you happy, since I should be thought by the world to be in some measure at least, worthy of you."

"My poor child! you have not made me happy, but miserable. No one can make me happy now. I do not love you now—you are a different person now, and you can never return to be what you were. That is the worst of all: you can never return to your former innocence."

"I can bear to hear you say even that; for now I perceive the mistake I made. I should not have thought of the difference between us: I should only have had one thought—that you had offered me your love and that I was ready to offer you my love. That should have been enough for me. You were right, I was wrong. Good-bye."

He looked at her for a few moments—tears were in his eyes and on his cheeks—then he turned away with a passionate gesture, crying in his native tongue:

"Mother—mother in heaven! I loved her because she was of a nature the same as yours—saint-like as a lily—shrinking from the world—in the world but having nothing in common with the world. I loved her because I thought that she was as you were. I will not be a traitor to your ideal—to your memory."

He returned to her.

"I am alone in the world; but I know that the spirit of that saint, my mother, looks down upon me from her heaven, and will comfort me. My heart is broken. *Addio! Addio!* I do not mean to be cruel—tell me that you do not accuse me of being cruel!"

"I do not accuse you. I think I understand you—that is all."

"*Addio—addio—addio!*"

The sound of his voice grew less with every word.

She was alone in the silence of the twilight.

Not for long, however. She heard the voice of Mrs. Thrale in the room behind her, followed by the protests of Dr. Johnson.

"Miss Burney and I want to have an undisturbed talk together about writing books," Mrs. Thrale was saying as she came out upon the terrace.

"Books, madam; any fool can talk of books, and a good many fools avail themselves of the licence," cried Johnson. "Miss Burney and I are going to talk about life. Books are not life, Miss Burney."

"No, sir," said Miss Burney slowly; "books are not life—books are not life."

THE END

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