

TO MARRY, OR NOT TO MARRY ;

A COMEDY,

IN FIVE ACTS ;

BY MRS. INCHBALD.

AS PERFORMED AT THE

THEATRE ROYAL COVENT GARDEN.

PRINTED UNDER THE AUTHORITY OF THE MANAGERS

FROM THE PROMPT BOOK.

WITH REMARKS

BY THE AUTHOR.

LONDON :

PRINTED FOR LONGMAN, HURST, REES, AND ORME,
PATERNOSTER ROW.

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REMARKS.

It appears as if the writer of this play had said, previous to the commencement of the task, "I will shun the faults imputed by the critics to modern dramatists; I will avoid farcical incidents, broad jests, the introduction of broken English, whether Hibernian or provincial; songs, processions, and whatever may be considered by my judges as a repetition of those faults of which they have so frequently complained."

Vain is the forecast of both man and woman!—Supposing all those evils escaped which the authoress dreaded, what is the event of her cautious plan?—Has she produced a good comedy?—No. She has passed from one extreme to another; and, attempting to soar above others, has fallen even beneath herself.

In the dearth of wit, an audience will gladly accept of humour: but the author who shall dare to exclude from his comedy the last, without being able to furnish the first, assuredly must incur the rigorous, though just sentence, of dulness.

There is a degree of interest in the fable of "To Marry, or not to Marry," which protected it on the stage, and may recommend it to the reader. The characters of Sir Oswin, Mrs. Sarah Mortland, Hester, and her father, are all justly drawn, but not with sufficient force for high dramatic effect. Their serious tendency wants relief from characters of more risible import, or from more comic materials contained in themselves. They are elegant and natural, but not powerful in any of their diversified attempts upon the heart.

Simplicity, the first design in the composition of this play, is perhaps, for the accomplishment of theatrical success, the most difficult of all attainments.

The stage delights the eye far oftener than the ear. Various personages of the drama, however disunited, amuse the looker on; whilst one little compact family presents a sameness to the view, like unity of place; and wearies the sight of a British auditor fully as much.

Incidents, too, must be numerous, however unconnected, to please a London audience: they seem, of late, to expect a certain number, whether good or bad. Quality they are judges of—but quantity they *must have*.

Still, perhaps, there wants but the pen of genius to give to a play of simple construction, all those attractive powers—which every complex drama is sure to possess.

The following remarkable observation extracted from a critique, on "To Marry, or not to Marry," in a popular Review, is worthy of insertion.

“It is singular that the authoress should, without any foresight, have dramatised the situation of Lord Melville and Mr. Whitbread; yet this she has done: or, at least, circumstances which directly bear on the political relation in which the latter gentleman stands with the former.”

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

LORD DANBERRY	<i>Mr. Munden.</i>
SIR OSWIN MORILAND	<i>Mr. Kemble.</i>
MR. WILLOWEAR	<i>Mr. Farley.</i>
MR. LAVENSFORTH	<i>Mr. Cooke.</i>
AMOS	<i>Mr. Brunton.</i>
SIR OSWIN'S SERVANTS	{ <i>Mr. Field.</i>
	{ <i>Mr. Jeffries.</i>
	{ <i>Mr. L. Bologna.</i>
	{ <i>Mr. Lewiss.</i>
LORD DANBERRY'S SERVANT	<i>Mr. Ratchford.</i>
LADY SUSAN COURILY	<i>Mrs. Glover.</i>
MRS. SARAH MORILAND	<i>Mrs. Davenport.</i>
HESTER	<i>Miss Shuttleworth.</i>

TO MARRY, OR NOT TO MARRY.

ACT THE FIRST.

SCENE I.

A Hall at the Country Seat of SIR OSWIN MORTLAND.

A loud Knocking at the Gate.

Enter MRS. SARAH MORTLAND, followed by a SERVANT.

MRS. M. Tell the coachman I shan't want the carriage this morning.—And observe, if my brother should ask for me, I am gone to take a walk in the beech grove.

SERV. Yes, ma'am.

[Exit SERVANT.]

Enter another SERVANT.

SERV. Ma'am, there's a young lady in a post chaise just stopt at the gate, and says she must see you.

MRS. M. A young lady!—Must see me!—Who is she?—What is her name?

SERV. I asked her name, ma'am, but she refused to tell it.

MRS. M. Refused to send me her name!—Then pray inform her that I am not at home—tell her I'm busy—I will be seen by no one.

SERV. I told her, ma'am, that you were busy, and that you had company, and that you were not at-home; but she says she has come post more than twenty miles on purpose to pay you a visit, and cannot return without seeing you.

MRS. M. What an impertinent!—Come post!—show her in—how extremely ridiculous and ill bred!

SERV. Here she is, ma'am.

[Exit SERVANT.]

Enter HESTER, in great agitation.

MRS. M. My dear Miss——! It is Miss ——, the young lady I met at Beverley—

is it not?—What in the name of wonder——

HESTER. Oh, Mrs. Sarah Mortland!—Oh, madam, pity and forgive me!—forgive this intrusion, and pity the cause of it.

MRS. M. My dear, I must forgive all you do.

[*Dissatisfiedly.*]

HESTER. I thought so, madam—I hoped you would forgive me, when I resolved to take this liberty. The kindness, the partiality you showed towards me, the very first time I was in your company——

MRS. M. And which was the last, I believe, my dear; for I think I never saw you but once in my life.

HESTER. No, madam; at Mrs. Brian's ball, when you were there at Beverley races. But that once you praised my dancing, my singing, my conversation!—You said, if you remember, that you wished you had just such a young companion as I was; you told me you should be glad to see me at any time—and so I am come.

MRS. M. [*Disconcerted.*] Well!—and I *am* glad, very glad to see you.—I don't say I'm not.—Only a little surprised, my dear, that you did not wait for a more formal invitation.

HESTER. What it wanted in form, you made up with earnestness.

MRS. M. And I then, at that time, felt all the ardour I expressed. But, my dear, are you come by yourself?

HESTER. Did you wish me to bring any body else?

MRS. M. No, no.

[*Hastily.*]

HESTER. I thought you would not—so I flew to you all alone, in my distress.

[*Weeps.*]

MRS. M. But what distress? And why are you in tears?—I hope you have not run away from your friends?

HESTER. I have no friend but you.

MRS. M. Hem! hem! [*Confounded.*] But, my dear, tell me what is all this about? And why [*Frightened, and angry.*] have I the pleasure of seeing you here?

HESTER. You know that I am an orphan!

MRS. M. Yes—that I was told—but I really forget your name.

HESTER. My christian name is Hester—and when I am called by any other, it is that of my guardian, with whom I have lived from my infancy—Mr. Ashdale.

Mrs. M. Hester Ashdale.

Hester. For my guardian never speaks of my own family but with reproach; has seldom permitted me to ask him any questions concerning them; and, indeed, has ever treated me with cruelty!

[Weeping.]

Mrs. M. We all have our trials, and we ought all to submit to them.

Hester. But mayn't we run away from them?

Mrs. M. Not always. Pray, when did you leave your guardian's house?

Hester. This very morning.—This very morning I was to have been married—and they are now all waiting for me at the church, or by this time gone home to a very uncomfortable dinner without me.

Mrs. M. Without the bride!—Was there ever—

Hester. But, if you knew the intended bridegroom, you would not wonder.—He is so odious to me, that I had rather stay with you by half, and be your companion or servant.—I'll read—I'll sing—I'll work—I'll do every thing to please you.

Mrs. M. But, my dear, this house I cannot call my own.—It is, in fact, my brother's, Sir Oswin Mortland's.—As I live entirely in the country, he suffers me to pass for the mistress of it, but at present, he's down here himself; and though much younger than I am, yet he is so much richer and wiser than I am, that he commands me in every thing. Indeed, such is his temper, he will always be lord and master of every place into which he condescends to enter; and he hates intruders—strangers—strange ladies in particular.

Hester. Then why did you invite me to come?

Mrs. M. I invited you—but I did not fix the time.

Hester. No, madam—but I thought I might.

Mrs. M. Then, your indiscretion in quitting your guardian's house, and your intended, husband!—Why did you give your consent to marry?

Hester. I was in such fear of my guardian's anger, and his wife's peevishness—I had no sense, no skill, no argument to answer all they said to prevail on me! It was, beside, so ill bred to tell a gentleman that I could not love him—that I could not bear to live with him—that he was disagreeable to me!

Mrs. M. So, then, you consented without any apparent reluctance!

Hester. I am sure I *looked* reluctantly: but I was obliged to say yes, to all they asked of me.

Mrs. M. Then you should have kept your word.

Hester. Indeed and so I intended, till it came to the very last—then I planned my escape. Did you never resolve on a thing, and think you would do it whatever it cost you: then, just on the point when it was to be done, find your heart sink, and all your resolutions turn to nothing?

Mrs. M. It must have been some very shocking husband they designed for you, to give you such an aversion!

Hester. Oh, he was not so very bad neither!—I dare say you would have had no objection to marry him: but I always said to myself—“I think a wedding is so pleasant;—the bells ring so sweetly; the bride and the bridesmaids look so nice; and every one so joyful—that I never will marry, unless I can be joyful too.”

Mrs. M. But when you return to your guardians, what do you think they will say to you for this conduct?

Hester. I never mean to return, madam; and by the time I have lived a week or two here, perhaps you may never wish me to go back.

Mrs. M. “A week or two!”—“never go back!”—I must instantly acquaint Sir Oswin with this visit, and obtain his permission, before I can venture to say you shall stay here even an hour or two.

Hester. Then dear, dear Mrs. Sarah Mortland, as this Sir Oswin is a cross, illnated man, don't say I ran away just as I was going to be married: it may make him think me to blame.

Mrs. M. Tell him *that!*—Not for the universe!—If I were, he would not merely turn *you* out of his house, but *me*, for suffering you to come into it.—Step into that room while I go to him.

Hester. Oh, madam! rash as I may seem in having ventured hither, my heart has beat with fear more than with hope. Pity me as a stranger, if not as an acquaintance, and reflect that on my reception here, depends all my future prospects.

[*Exit* *HESTER.*

Mrs. M. I vow she has put me in such a fright!—What can I say to Sir Oswin? I *did* ask her to come and see me, to be sure; and it would be uncharitable to turn her out; and yet it was equally uncharitable to come on such a slight invitation.

[*Exit.*

SCENE II.

A Library.

SIR OSWIN MORTLAND *discovered reading.*

LORD DANBERRY *raps at the Door twice.*

SIR OS. Who's there?

Enter LORD DANBERRY.

LORD D. Nephew! nephew!—I beg your pardon; I know you don't like to be interrupted in your studies.

SIR OS. Yet my friends generally break in upon me at those very times, my lord, and tell me.—“they know they are disobliging me,”—by way of apology.

LORD D. Well, but you will excuse *me*—you'll excuse *me*, I fear, sooner than my *errand*; for *that*, I know you'll be displeas'd with.

SIR OS. Another apology!

LORD D. Nephew, it does not signify, but I must ask you, again and again,—will you suffer my fine estate, and our old title, to go to a mere stranger? This, you know, must be the case, if you resolve to continue a bachelor.—The thought of it embitters my life. Consider, Sir Oswin, marriage, as I have often told you, is a duty every man in your situation owes to his family, to society, to——

SIR OS. Well, well, I grant it, my dear uncle; and as my temper cannot bear continual irritation, I shall comply with your request, to get rid of it for ever.—I *will marry*, to put an end to all your anxieties, though I had rather——

[*With vehemence.*]

LORD D. Thank you, my dear nephew, for this hearty promise: you have made me happy.

SIR OS. And myself miserable. I never thought of becoming a husband. I never intended to be a husband. Marriage will interfere with my pursuits, my studies, my

LORD D. [*Soothingly.*] You will like the marriage state better than you expect.

SIR OS. Why, my lord, I shall at least meet with no disappointments in it. For I do, with certainty, expect that it will progressively destroy every comfort of my life; and I shall fortify myself against their total extinction.

LORD D. I own the prospect for a married man is not very bright just at this

precise period. But, without dwelling on your character as a husband, consider the happiness you may enjoy as a parent. Reflect upon a son and heir!

SIR OS. I can feel no happiness in contemplating what does not exist.

LORD D. But I can. I can experience the highest gratification in foreseeing that now a son of yours will inherit my title and estates when I am laid low: for, by the course of years, I have but a short time to live.

SIR OS. So my marriage, which will inevitably rob me of every enjoyment I possess, is to accommodate two nonentities; one of whom will be gone out of the world, and the other not come into it!

LORD D. Still, there is a being in full existence, in the bloom of life, to whom your marriage will give high delight. The lady, with whom I mean you to marry—Lady Susan Courtly.

SIR OS. Lady Susan Courtly!

LORD D. Yes;—and who, I believe, is as much in love with you—

[*SIR OSWIN goes to him, and looks him stedfastly in the Face.*]

SIR OS. My lord—I am between thirty and forty years of age. I have lived in the world, at least half those years, an observer.

LORD D. I know you have.

SIR OS. And do you talk to me of being in love?

LORD D. Not you, but the lady. The lady, I say, is in love. Lady Susan.

[*SIR OSWIN turns away.*]

SIR OS. Psha! psha! psha!

LORD D. She fancies she is.

SIR OS. But she won't make me fancy she is.

LORD D. I know you don't believe there is such a thing, as what is usually meant by the word *love*. But don't you think there may be such a thing as a good wife?

SIR OS. [*After Consideration.*] Yes, 'faith, I think there may. I think, possibly, there may.

LORD D. And why shou'dn't such a one fall to your share?

SIR OS. O, my lord,—It would be unconscionable in me to expect it. I can't hope to monopolize rarity.

LORD D. Ay, you are jocose; you may make free with your old uncle. [*SIR OSWIN takes his Hand kindly, as if apologizing.*] And now I'll tell you how your old uncle

has made free with you. I have brought down Lady Susan Courtly to my house, here in the country—on this very spot—in the firm persuasion that you are smitten with her charms: but that you are too grave, too reserved, too consequential, think too much of your own importance and perfections, to ask a favour, even of a lady.

SIR OS. Why, my lord!—

LORD D. So, to save your dignity from the humiliation of sighing and kneeling, I have, in your name, solicited her hand in marriage.

SIR OS. My lord, I should be very sorry you appeared ridiculous in this affair.

LORD D. I knew you would—you always were careful of my reputation, and therefore I knew you would acknowledge, as yours, every syllable I have said in your name.

SIR OS. [*Walking about in agitation.*] Here's the beginning of matrimony! Always false foundations!

LORD D. But tell me: Don't you like Lady Susan, now, as well as you like any other woman?

SIR OS. Quite as well—she is the same to me as her whole sex. I have no partiality to any one, nor dislike to any one, except as a wife.

LORD D. Human foresight is truly exemplified in me! My pride has been to make you a learned man, a man of erudition. And what is my reward? You love nothing but books.

SIR OS. Yes, my lord, I love the whole human race—and I love my books, because they have taught me to do so.

LORD D. Can you boldly repeat that you love all mankind? There is one man whom I am sure you exclude from the rest.

SIR OS. You mean the state delinquent, Lavensforth—a man who has attempted my life?

LORD D. Not directly.

SIR OS. Pardon me, my lord;—his challenge was a direct attempt: and though the laws interfered, and disappointed that hope of his revenge; yet I have reason to believe he did not give up his designs against me, even when he left the kingdom.

LORD D. That is now full thirteen years ago; and if he be still living—

SIR OS. He is rancorous still: his rage was of no transient nature.—Yes, I own I do not love the man, who can bear malice for an act of justice; or could impute to my clear motives in his impeachment, any other end than the public good.

LORD D. But the public took such interest in the cause,—Your triumph was so popular, and his defeat so——

SIR OS. Ay, that defeat, as well as his consequent punishment, may have been too severe; for though his sentence reached only to a fine, yet ultimately it proved so heavy, that, in effect, it caused his exile.

LORD D. So much the better.

SIR OS. And, after all—though *one* may be ruined, and *another* raised to fame, by rigorous prosecution of the faults of office; yet, in the candid estimate of man's imperfections and man's virtues, the accuser is seldom entirely right, nor the accused totally wrong.

LORD D. Why, I never heard you talk thus before—nor would I have the world hear you now. You did not speak thus on Lavensforth's impeachment.

SIR OS. No!—Youthful ardour made me then pronounce with decision. Years of studious application, and more matured experience, have lessened my confidence in my own opinions.

LORD D. Ay, you are in an ill humour now, and so you'll contradict every thing I assert. I am glad, however, to hear you speak so diffidently of your own judgment, for then you can the better rely on mine, and keep the promise you have made me.

SIR OS. Yes—my lord—as I have said, I'll marry in obedience to your will—I'll keep my word.

LORD D. [*Taking hold of him kindly.*] But now when? When will you fix the happy day? When will you marry? [SIR OSWIN *considers.*] Why, as you have no great inclination for the business, don't delay—marry soon—as you don't like it, get it over at once.

SIR OS. "Get it over?" Why, it's to last for life.

LORD D. Not always. There is such a thing as benefit of survivorship.

[MRS. SARAH MORTLAND *raps at the Library Door.*

SIR OS. Come in.

LORD D. Then I'll go. And I'll go out at this door, that I mayn't meet your company. [*Going, returns.*] And much obliged to you, my dear nephew, I am for all you have promised—I'm sure Lady Susan will be——

[*Rapping again at the Library Door.*

SIR OS. Come in.

[*Calling very loud.*

[Exit LORD DANBERRY.]

Enter MRS. SARAH MORTLAND.

MRS. M. To tell you the truth, I am half afraid to come in.

SIR OS. Because I have told you a thousand times, you may command any part of my day but this.

Enter LORD DANBERRY.

LORD D. I beg pardon,—I'll tell her you'll call on her to-day, or to-morrow morning.

[Exit.]

SIR OS. [Impatiently.] My lord!—You need not be afraid, however, sister; for, at present, your intrusion is not unwelcome.

[Sits down.]

MRS. M. Nay, I am not so much alarmed at my intrusion, as at my errand: for I am come to tell you something you won't like.

SIR OS. More things I don't like, and more apologies! Why, then [Very cross.] you have chosen a bad time for your bad news, for I am in a very ill temper.

MRS. M. The reason I came now was—that you might not be more offended at dinner time, by meeting a stranger at table. It is hard I can't make you love strangers!

SIR OS. Why won't you be content with my loving you?—Why won't you be contented with my loving all my old, troublesome, tiresome friends? If I loved the company of every idle stranger, ten to one I could not endure yours.

MRS. M. That I would pardon, could I once see you enjoy society like other people. But, I believe, I shall soon begin to think you have taken two of the monastic vows; that of seclusion, and the other against marriage.

SIR OS. In the latter, I shall at least, boast of your example.

MRS. M. You are mistaken—I never made a vow against marriage. It was the men, I believe, who vowed never to ask me the question. Let me tell you, brother, there is a great deal of difference in sentiment, between a single man of a certain age, and a single woman of a certain age. The one does not marry, because he *won't*:—the other, because she *can't*.—But we'll not talk of these things now.—
[Approaching him with Insinuation.] It's only a pretty girl is to dine with us to-day.

SIR OS. [Rising, in Anger.] What have I to do with pretty girls?

MRS. M. I said so,—I thought so;—I knew you would not like of her coming.

SIR OS. Then why did you invite her?

MRS. M. I only invited her in the usual complimentary way; told her I should be glad to see her at any time; begged she would make this house her home, if she came into this part of the world. She lived twenty miles off, and I never imagined

SIR OS. Oh, that every ostentatious invitation was just so received!

MRS. M. I own that I did wrong; and therefore have taken her in for a few days.

SIR OS. “A few days!”—For yourself, you are justly repaid: for me, I will have no annoyance from your visitors. I shall set off for London to-morrow morning.

MRS. M. Nay, nay—why, she won’t be in your way—You will never see her, but at breakfast, dinner, and supper.

SIR OS. So,—she’s only to torment me from morning till night.

MRS. M. —One of the most beautiful young women!

SIR OS. What’s her beauty to me?

MRS. M. An orphan—without parents to protect her—without a single relation, that she knows, on earth—[*He pays Attention.*] Has been so cruelly used!—You won’t go to town, will you?

SIR OS. I don’t know.

MRS. M. —If you had seen how the poor creature wept when she arrived, and hung on me for pity!—You’ll dine with us to-day?

SIR OS. [*Sitting down.*] Perhaps I may.

MRS. M. —And you’ll behave civilly to this poor girl? I’ll tell you who she is.

SIR OS. No, no; I don’t want to know who she is.

MRS. M. —Her distress is so great!

SIR OS. Why, then I don’t care who she is.

[*He begins writing.*]

[*Pause between them.*]

MRS. M. Well, brother, now, I suppose, I have your leave to go?

SIR OS. How can you doubt it?

[*Exit MRS. MORILAND.—The Scene closes on SIR OSWIN writing.*]

ACT THE SECOND.

SCENE I.

The Library.

SIR OSWIN *discovered writing still.*

WILLOWEAR. [*Without.*] I tell you, I'm sure he *will* see me. Tell him, I come on very particular business.

Enter SERVANT.

SERV. Mr. Willowear.

SIR OS. Mr. Willowear, my old acquaintance and school-fellow!—Show him in. [*Exit* SERVANT.] I thought he was too fond of London, ever to come such a distance from it. [*Rises.*] What can be his particular business with me?

Enter WILLOWEAR.

WIL. Sir Oswin, I have taken this liberty——

SIR OS. Mr. Willowear, you tremble!—What causes this agitation?

WIL. The cause is, I am in a passion—and I can hardly tell my story for anger.

SIR OS. You are not angry with me, I hope?

WIL. No; Heaven forbid—But you will excuse me, if I say, I am offended with some part of your family.

SIR OS. Show me in what any of them have used you ill, and you shall have instant redress. Pray sit down.

[*They sit.*]

WIL. I am sorry to name a lady of your family—a lady, whom I have not the honour of knowing—your sister.

SIR OS. My sister!

WIL. Yes; and another lady has used me worse, and has flown to her for protection.

SIR OS. I have just been quarrelling with my sister, for taking a young woman into the house. Does she belong to you?

WIL. She was within.——To tell you the whole story, Sir Oswin: the other day I fell in love.

SIR OS. Ha! ha! ha!

WIL. A beautiful girl!—You might have done the same thing.

SIR OS. No, no;—Ha! ha! ha! I beg your pardon. Proceed with your story—Ha! ha! ha! you know I was never in love.

WIL. But can you pretend to say, you never shall!

SIR OS. [*Looking stedfastly at him.*] Yes, I can.—But proceed.

WIL. A little, friendless girl! hardly any body knew who! brought up by the apothecary of our village. She caught my eye—her simple manners won my heart. I admire simplicity, of all female qualities.

SIR OS. So do I.

WIL. I grew tired of leading a bachelor's life. I had seen you, Sir Oswin, for instance, often out of temper—crabbed and rugged. No other fault, you know, ever laid to your charge, than being a little sullen, morose, and rather imperious. But all this, the women said, was merely for want of a wife.

SIR OS. “The women said!”—My dear sir, pray go on with your story. Does this young lady, in my house, belong to you?

WIL. Yes—no—she was very near it, though—I won't say how *very, very near* it; for then you'll laugh again, and with some reason.

SIR OS. What! I suppose the ring bought.

WIL. The book opened—when she took it in her head to run away.

SIR OS. [*Rises.*] Monstrous! abominable! not to be borne! She has imposed on my sister with some piteous tale.—But she sha'n't remain here a moment longer.

WIL. I thought you would not suffer it.

SIR OS. Certainly not.

[*Rings the Bell.*]

WIL. How she contrived to have every thing ready to make her escape, no one can guess. But, instead of meeting me in the church, where I was waiting with a few friends, impatient for her coming, she slipped from her bridesmaids into a postchaise, and drove to your house, where I have traced her.

SIR OS. Who's there?

Enter SERVANT.

Tell my sister I desire to see her, and the lady (the young woman who came hither this morning) in the parlour by the saloon immediately. [*Exit SERVANT.*] Depend upon

it, she shall leave this house instantly, or give me the very best reasons why she should not.

WIL. She can give you none—after encouraging my addresses, accepting my presents—for I gave her trinkets in abundance, and a diamond ring of great value,—In a word, I myself, am the only gift she ever refused.

SIR OS. And, does she expect a refuge under my roof, thus charged with robbery?

WIL. The goods are upon her, I dare say. But, after all, I would rather have *her* back, than my property. She is more precious to me than my diamond.

SIR OS. “Precious! Have her back!” Wish to have such a woman for a wife!

WIL. Very true—I am wrong, I own—but, love! love!—Notwithstanding your sneer, Sir Oswin, love is every thing.

SIR OS. No, ’tis nothing—a whim—a fancy, conceived by the infirmity of youth, or of age. At seventeen or seventy, the infatuation is excusable; but, at your time of life, and mine, oh! it sinks the man into the boy, or dotard. But, come, I’ll show you to my plantations, where you may amuse yourself, while I talk to these women; and, depend on my settling this business with as much care and concern for your welfare, as if I had your faith in the omnipotence of love.

[*Exeunt.*

SCENE II.

A Parlour.

Enter MRS. SARAH MORTLAND *and* HESTER.

MRS. M. Come, come—don't tremble thus—don't cry thus—don't be thus alarmed.

HESTER. Is not Sir Oswin coming to talk to me? perhaps to put himself in a passion—to turn me out of the only place I have to shelter me.

MRS. M. He has merely sent word, he wishes to speak to us; and will most likely be as angry with me as with you.

HESTER. You are accustomed to his sternness.

MRS. M. Stern as he is, he has the best of hearts to those who deserve his kindness.

HESTER. But I know myself undeserving.

MRS. M. And your disappointed lover, who has certainly come to Sir Oswin on your account, has, no doubt, painted your conduct in the very worst colours.

HESTER. Dear madam, let me run away again;—suffer me to go before Sir Oswin comes, and save me the disgrace of being turned out.

MRS. M. No; I should be turned out myself, if I were to connive at your escape. There is one circumstance, however, relative to you, that I do wish concealed from my brother, because it increases the peril of your situation.

HESTER. Dear madam, what is it?

MRS. M. Your guardian has sent me a letter by this Mr. Willowear, in which he informs me, that your real name is Lavensforth, and that you are the daughter, the only child, of Sir Oswin's inveterate enemy. By this intelligence, your guardian conceives you will be immediately restored to him, as my brother, under such circumstances, would not suffer you to remain a moment longer here.

HESTER. Yes, madam, I am the child of an unfortunate man, whom I never heard mentioned without reproach. I knew he had many enemies, and for that reason I was denied my right to be called by his name: but I did not know that Sir Oswin was his particular foe.

MRS. M. Yes; and though, possibly, both of them good men, peculiar occurrences, in the earlier part of their lives, when Sir Oswin was very young indeed, made them the bitterest enemies.

HESTER. Oh, then, my dear, dear madam, do not tell Sir Oswin who I am, till I am gone away—Indeed, I'll go the moment he has seen me.—But, if you please, I had rather go now.

MRS. M. Do you think Mr. Willowear has told my brother who you are?

HESTER. No; I am sure Mr. Willowear does not know himself: for my guardian, fearing he might object to my father's misfortunes, always charged me to conceal my real name from him.

MRS. M. Then, I promise you, my brother shall never know it from me. Your guardian, indeed, enjoins me silence to all but Sir Oswin; of course, he can hear it no other way. And this secret of your birth, Mr. Ashdale adds in his letter, was in consequence of a promise your father extorted, when he left you to his care.

HESTER. My father made him promise also, he would treat me with kindness; but in that, he never kept his word.

MRS. M. You remember your father then?

HESTER. Yes, yes; I shall always remember him; though, I fear, he has forgot me.

MRS. M. You think, he is still living?

HESTER. I hope so! but, for these two last years, no letter—no—

MRS. M. Hush! hush! Sir Oswin!

[*HESTER hangs down her Head.*]

Enter SIR OSWIN—he passes his Sister, and stands between her and
HESTER.

SIR OS. [*After looking sternly at each.*] My business with you, madam, and with this young person, will be very shortly concluded. It is merely to express my displeasure, and to express it with warmth such as I feel, that I have been imposed upon by *you*. [*To his Sister.*] And that a worthy man has been imposed upon by *you*.

[*To HESTER.*]

MRS. M. Brother, we have both done wrong, and both hope for pardon.

SIR OS. Amendment must precede forgiveness. She must return with her future husband.

HESTER. Ah! Ah!

[*Screaming.*]

SIR OS. [*Roughly.*] What do you mean?

HESTER. Oh, sir! did you know what it was to have a horror of being married!

SIR OS. [*Shrinks and hesitates.*] Well,—well,—suppose I did know, what then?

HESTER. Then, you would pity me.

SIR OS. [*Aside.*] The poor girl has a repugnance to marriage, and I compassionate her.

MRS. M. For my part, brother, though I have taken this young lady in, yet I have lectured her.

SIR OS. You “lecture her!” And by what authority have you lectured her?

MRS. M. Ha! you think nobody is to give lectures but yourself.

SIR OS. [*Going near to HESTER.*] How old are you?

HESTER. I am near seventeen.

SIR OS. I should not have thought you so much!

HESTER. No; for not being used to fashionable company, I have nothing to say in conversation—except what I think.

SIR OS. ’Would to heaven all your sex had no more to utter. The family in which you lived, your guardian, I suppose, used his influence to persuade you to marry?

HESTER. Yes; and Mr. Willowear used his influence to persuade me too; but I had rather not.

SIR OS. I don’t blame your being nice, and cautious, in respect to marriage; but you should not have given your lover hopes.

HESTER. I could not tell him to his face, that I hated him.

SIR OS. But, you received his presents.

HESTER. It was the only favour I ever granted, and he asked a thousand.

SIR OS. Favours!

HESTER. He called them so. He said, he did not value the things he gave me, but for their being mine. Here is his great present of all—a diamond ring! Will you have it? I shall give it with as much pleasure to you, as he gave it to me, I dare say—and shall think it a greater favour.

SIR OS. [*To his Sister.*] This is a very singular girl you have introduced to me!

MRS. M. And I have introduced as singular a man to her—therefore, I trust, you will understand one another.

SIR OS. For my part, she has taken my understanding away.

MRS. M. And as, I believe, she herself never had any, you will agree better and

better.

SIR OS. [To *HESTER.*] I shall take this ring, and return it to its first possessor.—And, now, as you intend to abandon him, and your former home, what do you design to do? [*A Pause.*]—Whither do you intend to go?

HESTER. I did intend to stay here. But, I suppose, you won't suffer it; though Mrs. Sarah Mortland invited me, or I should not have made so free as to come.

MRS. M. Upon my word,—I only——

SIR OS. Hush! Hold your tongue.—I want to hear her talk, not you.—And would you be content to stay, and give up all your friends?

HESTER. I hope I should find friends here.

SIR OS. You have no parents? no relations, I am told?

HESTER. My mother died, when I was an infant.—My father went abroad,—perhaps is dead too: I never knew any other relations, and I hardly know my own surname; for I am always called Hester.

SIR OS. —A Mr. and Mrs. Ashdale brought you up?

HESTER. But were so unkind to me, that I durst not tell them I wouldn't marry;—and, I hope, you will not send me back with a man I cannot love.

SIR OS. Then, you never loved him?

HESTER. O! no, no.

SIR OS. Nor ever loved any other man?

HESTER. O, no, never, never.

SIR OS. Nor ever could, I suppose?

HESTER. [*After looking at him, unconsciously, from Head to Foot.*] Yes,—yes,—yes,—O, yes.—I think I could.

SIR OS. I thought you said, you had set your heart against marriage.

HESTER. No I have not.—No, no—but I should like to chuse my own husband.

SIR OS. How chuse? Women can't make love.

HESTER. But they can listen.—And I'll never listen, but where the sound is sweet.

SIR OS. [To *his SISTER.*] I don't know how I can turn this girl out of the house. Poor creature! [*Affecting a smile of contempt.*] She has lost her mother, and is not sure whether or no she has a father.

MRS. M. Then, do you be a father to her.

SIR OS. Is there such difference in our ages?—She's seventeen, and I am not

above——

MRS. M. No; but I have been so used to hear you call yourself an *old* man——

SIR OS. I beg your pardon, if I have—for that's making my elder sister a very old woman.

MRS. M. Well, and I shall have no objection to being an old woman, while it is a privilege of that state to be of service to the young ones.

HESTER. And you have been of great service to me—thank you—thank you.

SIR OS. Yes, sister—you are a very good woman, I believe; and if I do find fault with you, now and then, it is because I wish you to be my companion, and my companion to be as perfect as possible.—Yes indeed—I think you have done quite right in sheltering this poor orphan—and I recommend her to your further protection.

[*Passing* *MRS. MORTLAND* over to *HESTER*.]

MRS. M. [*Going, returns.*] You'll dine with us, Sir Oswin?

SIR OS. [*Considering.*] Why, yes; I don't know that I am going any where—yes—I'll dine with you. [*Exeunt* *MRS. MORTLAND* and *HESTER*, *the latter courtesying low* to *SIR OSWIN*.] Poor girl! I really feel for her—poor girl! [*He walks about, moves the Chairs and Table—at last he takes up a Book, sits down and reads—of a sudden he rises.*] Yes, I'll see what can be done for this poor destitute girl. My sister, I dare say, can employ her in her domestic concerns. [*He sits down, and reads again; then takes his Eye slowly from the Book.*] She can read to my sister, perhaps, and be of use that way.—But what have I to do with women's business! Here, in the country, my books are my sole occupation; [*Musing.*] books my sure solace, and refuge from frivolous cares.—Books, the calmers, as well as the instructors of the mind. [*Looks in the Book some time, then rises.*] 'Sdeath! I cannot read.—What is the reason I cannot read?

[*Going.*]

Enter *MR. WILLOWEAR.*

WIL. Well, Sir Oswin, have you seen her?

SIR OS. Yes,—I have seen her.

WIL. And what do you think of my choice?

SIR OS. I think it a most imprudent one.

WIL. Why so?

SIR OS. Because she does not chuse you.

WIL. Did she tell you so?

SIR OS. Has she not proved so?

WIL. I wish you would let me see her.

SIR OS. No, by no means. [*Hastily.*] I told you that if she could exculpate herself,—and in truth this has been the case.—Her promise to you, she avers, was given under the influence of fear.—She has flown to this house for protection; and I believe the laws of hospitality oblige me.—Here is your ring—But, as to the simple girl, without her own express desire, I cannot give up her.

WIL. Well, if you say so—But, I assure you, you are the only man to whom I would confide her.

SIR OS. You don't confide her.—She came hither of her own accord—and one cannot, upon reflection, turn from one's door a human creature of whatever sex, whatever age.

WIL. And hers, to be sure, is an interesting sex, as well as a tender age.

SIR OS. Which makes me the more concerned for her.

WIL. And yet you used to be so severe, so hard upon the women.

SIR OS. So I am still on women advanced in life; but one can't help having a sort of feeling for the young.

WIL. Did she part with this ring reluctantly?

SIR OS. No; with as much pleasure as if it had been yourself.

WIL. [*Sighing.*] So, then, I must resign all hopes of her, I find.

SIR OS. That's right—And do so like a man.

WIL. [*Sighing.*] I must seek for some other object to divert my thoughts.—What pretty women have you hereabouts, to banish Hester from my mind?

SIR OS. A number—a number.

[*Eagerly.*]

WIL. Who are they? What are their names?

[*With indifference.*]

SIR OS. I cannot exactly count them all over by name. [*Recollecting.*] Lady Susan Courtly, however, is among them, I know.

WIL. Is she here?

SIR OS. Yes.

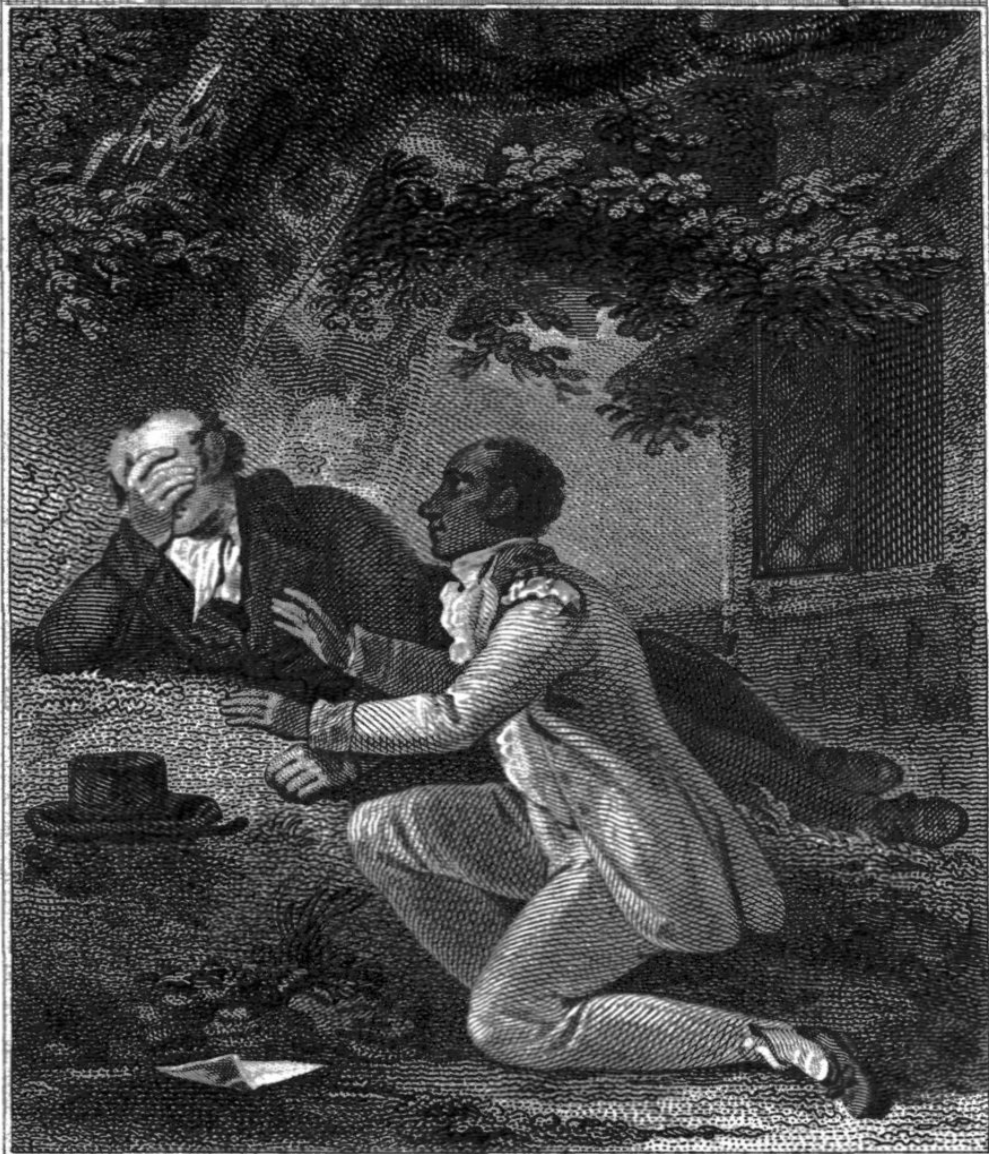
[*Eagerly.*]

WIL. I once paid my addresses to Lady Susan—I have a great mind to renew them.—If she consented just now, it would take from the foolish, ridiculous figure I make, to be seen without a wife after being so near possessing one.

SIR OS. She lives close by, at my uncle's.—She's on a visit there, and his house is but on the edge of my park. Come with me, and I'll show you a short cut through the grounds; And one of the pleasantest walks too—You can be there in a quarter of an hour.

[*Exeunt.*]

TO MARRY OR NOT TO MARRY



AMOS — DEAR MASTER, RAISE YOUR HEAD
AND SPEAK TO POOR BLACK.
ACT III. SCENE I.

ACT THE THIRD.

SCENE I.

A Forest, and a ruined Cottage.

LAVENSFORTH *discovered stretched on a Bank, under a Tree—his Black
SERVANT kneeling by him—an open Letter lying on the Ground.*

AMOS. Master, dear master, raise your head, and speak to poor servant, poor black, who has attend you from boy in his native country, followed you to your own, and is ready to follow you all the world over. Only tell him why you no eat—why you no sleep—and why big tear roll down from your eye? [*A Pause.*] Master, why you left lodgings in village, and taken this poor hut in wild forest? House not fit even for blacks—No one live near—none but the birds.—Ah, forget! This letter he threw down, brought the bad news, that breaks his heart.

[Takes the Letter from the Ground, and reads.

Unhappy man,—in all things unhappy—your daughter Hester, I fear is lost to you for ever. She eloped from my care on the very day your packet arrived; and under such circumstances, that, perhaps, I may never hear of her again. If I do, I will certainly send her the letter you enclosed for her in mine. Yours,

R. ASHDALE.

Hester, that is his daughter's name; often he talks of her when in my country. Hester—poor Hester!

LAV. [*Starting, and raising his Head.*] Who said "Poor Hester!" Ah! poor! for she lost her mother at her birth, and her father, when she first began to know and love him. Did any one speak her name, or was it my imagination?

[Rises.

AMOS. It was I said, Hester.

LAV. Wherefore?

AMOS. Because I know that name well; You so often spoke it in your sleep, while in hot countries I watched to fan you.

LAV. Ah! my dreams have been happier than my waking hours; for them I passed with her.

AMOS. No, master, no; Your dreams sometimes unhappy; sometimes you start.— You angry in your sleep; You call for gun, for sword—You speak another name, not kind, as you speak Hester.

LAV. I speak of Oswin, then, in my dreams.

AMOS. Ay, that's the name.

LAV. Of him, who has stripped me of every good I once possessed. Amos, I have a heart formed to love, and to hate, in the extremes—My daughter and this Oswin have, for thirteen years, shared it between them; to the one, the tenderest affection; to the other, deadly hatred. And now, that I have no longer a child, on whom to bestow my love, hate is the sole possessor of my bosom. But I will root it out.

AMOS. Do, master, do.

LAV. I have no daughter, for whose sake, now, I should retain my rage, and I will rid myself of it.

AMOS. You will forgive?

LAV. I will. There is, however, but one way left, by which I can forgive Sir Oswin, and I will avail myself of that one. I will fix my dagger in his heart, and bear him malice no longer.

AMOS. Have duel?

LAV. No; from that redress, years ago, I was restrained; and the only friends I ever had on earth, are bound in penalties so large, to insure my forbearance, that I must steal upon him. Amos, invention, plot, cunning, disguise, and secrecy must be employed, even to procure such a meeting. But then, Oswin, on my knees, I vow your destruction, as you have effected mine. [*Rises.*] But my revenge shall be mercy, compared to yours. I will not stab your fame:—I'll only sheathe my poniard in your breast.—I will not alienate your friends, as you have done mine; but they shall follow you with lamentation to the grave.

AMOS. Master, me commit that sin, not you. Me black, who been often wounded by white man, let me wound in return; then sail to my own country, and leave master still good man—no fear—no guilt.

LAV. You presume to complete my designs?—Avenge my wrongs? Know your distance! [*Then inattentive to him, as he has been through all the Scene, but where he particularly addressed him.*] Good fortune might have softened my mind, and driven out all impressions of revenge: But [*In Tears.*] the many ills which have succeeded his ambitious prosecution! my child! a female child, left without parents,

the heaviest ill of all.—His courting popularity at my expense! his art of eloquence, which, in a boy, had power to crush a man. Of the miseries produced by talents so perverted, he shall feel his share:—He shall find I am not less cruel now, than when I ruled in my government;—that exile has not softened me. The young enthusiast but accused me of acts of despotism; he shall prove, in his dying moments, there is not a crime too black for my accomplishment.

AMOS. Good master, no more grief, but return to lodgings in the village.

LAV. No house shall shelter me, but this ruined cottage; no bed shall rest my limbs, and rack my brain, till I have revenged my wrongs. [*Goes into the Cottage, returns, and speaks at the Door.*] My enemy, this Sir Oswin Mortland, has a seat, not more than ten miles distant; Mortland Abbey. Inquire of the peasants what road he frequents; whether he passes this way to the next town; whether he hunts, or shoots, or strolls in his park of an evening: Gain all the intelligence you can. Revenge is dear to men of your complexion, even more than to those of mine: Therefore, I depend, not alone on your fidelity and secrecy, but on your eager exertions.

AMOS. Oh, master! only kind master I ever had! I would die for your content.

LAV. Live, and execute my orders.

[*LAVENSFORTH retires into the Cottage, and AMOS into the Forest.*]

SCENE II.

A Saloon at LORD DANBERRY'S, with Folding Doors into a Garden.

Enter LORD DANBERRY.

LORD D. [*Looking towards the Garden.*] There they are! there they are! Now would I give a hundred pounds, to know what Lady Susan and Sir Oswin are saying to each other. They have been together exactly five minutes and a half by my stop-watch.—He has certainly begun the subject by this time; but I can't know any thing of their conversation unless I join them; and that would be a pity, for it would interrupt them. I found it difficult to drag him to my house, and more so to persuade him to wait on her in the garden. Then away I slipt, and now he is alone with her, he will be caught at once. He must speak now—here they come! here they come!—Yes, they are coming into this very room, as I live: Now he must break the matter without delay, and my wishes are completed.

[*Exit.*

Enter SIR OSWIN and LADY SUSAN COURTLY, from the Garden.—As he and LADY S. sit down,

SIR OS. Lady Susan, I am a peculiar man, but a plain man: my peculiarity consists in my plainness. I am under the greatest obligations to my uncle, who bestowed on me an education, and tutors, who made me reflect; reflect particularly on my own passions, inclinations, faults, and failings. In return for his care, I wish to obey him in all his commands; but serious, sober, I'm afraid I may say, sullen habits, have ever been predominant with me; and I never was, and, perhaps, never shall be, in love.

LADY S. Sir Oswin, your candour is so bewitching, it is impossible to resist its force. I have been accustomed to so much flattery, such adulation from men of the world, whose ardour, I am sure, meant nothing; that I cannot help believing,—your apathy means a great deal.

SIR OS. You may deceive yourself, Lady Susan.

LADY S. And so may you, Sir Oswin.

SIR OS. As I observed before, madam, self-examination has been my daily practice.

LADY S. Perhaps you examine so frequently, that you weary penetration; and a passer-by, knows you better, than you know yourself.

SIR OS. That observation, madam, might hold true of a lady and her looking-

glass; but not of a man and his faults.

LADY S. He must, however, be a very bad man, Sir Oswin, who sees his faults thus daily, yet does not amend them.

SIR OS. He will, at least, endeavour to shun all trials that he thinks beyond his strength; and, in that spirit, I fear a married life.

LADY S. Marriage may be productive of some faults; but, surely, 'tis a soil fit for the cultivation of every virtue.

SIR OS. Patience, I believe, may thrive there.

LADY S. But what do you say of the growth of conjugal love?

SIR OS. That conjugal hate too frequently chokes it.

LADY S. I long to convince you of your mistake.

SIR OS. [*Rising.*] Madam, to end the argument, and not to make my visit tedious;—If you think you can be happy with a man so much older than yourself, who reads all the day, and half the night—whose temper is not good—who is easily put out of humour——

LADY S. That I never am; therefore my good temper will make your fretful one, of no harm to either of us.

SIR OS. I'll say no more, madam; My uncle will tell you the rest of my imperfections.

LADY S. They must all appear trivial, Sir Oswin, when compared with that sincerity which discloses them. [*He bows.*] I am, you shall find, sir, as peculiar, as plain spoken for a woman, as you are for a man. I scorn, like you, to follow common modes and manners, which my own opinion, or my own convenience disapproves; And while you have the singular frankness to tell me to my face, that you had rather not have me for a wife, I will have the same simple candour, and confess—that, of all things, I should like you for a husband.

SIR OS. Good morning, Lady Susan.

LADY S. Good morning, Sir Oswin.

[*As SIR OSWIN is going,*

Enter LORD DANBERRY.

LORD D. Stay, my dear nephew, stay; Nothing on earth could give me greater joy than to be present at this interview: So, prolong it a little for my sake.

SIR OS. I am afraid of intruding.

LADY S. Not at all, Sir Oswin. The man who has honoured me with the offer of his hand—

LORD D. Then the offer is made, and you are his betrothed wife?

LADY S. As you have previously told me, my lord: but Sir Oswin has said very little.

LORD D. Talking is not his talent; that is, talking to you women; for he thinks that would be encroaching on your privileges: when he speaks, 'tis for nothing less than the good of the nation.

LADY S. If I may judge of his other virtues by his humility, he will make the best husband in the world; for he assures me he shall be the worst.

SIR OS. My uncle knows, madam—

LORD D. I know that you are a good man, and, therefore, will make a good husband. You were the most dutiful son—you are an affectionate nephew—a good brother—a staunch friend—a friend to the orphan; for that pretty girl, whom you have just taken into your house, how kindly I saw you look on her!

LADY S. What pretty girl?

SIR OS. A child, madam; a mere child.

LORD D. Nothing the worse for being young; nor the worse for her beauty.

LADY S. Is she so beautiful, Sir Oswin?

SIR OS. I was going to say, I had never looked at her; but I did—I did.

LADY S. Who is she? What's her name?

SIR OS. I never asked: she was friendless, I heard.

LORD D. And well she might; for she ran from all her friends, and the man to whom she was going to be married, at the church door.

LADY S. What a surprising occurrence!

SIR OS. And yet I can conceive it might happen.

LORD D. But the best of the story is, (as her guardian has written just now to Mr. Willowear,) she persuaded a second lover of her's to hire the post chaise for her escape from the first, on a promise she would go off with him; but, as they were stepping into the vehicle, she pretended to swoon, and, while the poor man ran for a smelling bottle, she drove away, and left both her lovers in the same deserted state.

SIR OS. Can this be fact?

LORD D. Mr. Willowear but now showed it under her guardian's hand; who adds, he believes she will, in the end, prefer this second lover.

SIR OS. Who is he? What's his name?

[*Anxiously.*]

LORD D. He did not say.

SIR OS. 'Tis fit, however, I should search into the truth of this story, before she remains longer in my house.

[*Going.*]

LORD D. Nay, don't put yourself in a passion with her; don't go home on purpose—don't leave Lady Susan.

SIR OS. If it be proper to order Hester away, the sooner she knows my will the better.

LORD D. Then send a message to your sister; my own man shall take it, and see her safe off, at once.

SIR OS. No; she shall not go till she has received from my own lips, the reproof she deserves, for having dared to come.

LORD D. Why, then Lady Susan and I will go with you. Lady Susan, we'll go with my nephew.

Enter SERVANT.

SERV. Mr. Willowear.

[*Exit* SERVANT.

Enter MR. WILLOWEAR.

SIR OS. Pray, Mr. Willowear,—But, no,—I'll talk to Hester herself.

[*Going.*]

LORD D. Nephew, nephew!—one word.

[*They talk together.*]

WIL. Lady Susan, I did myself the honour of waiting on your ladyship yesterday; but you were not within.

LADY S. O! yes—I think they told me so.

WIL. Hearing your ladyship was in this part of the world, I came to confess my shame. I knew it would be impossible to conceal it from you, and I wished to be the first to announce it. I have been slighted, in the most public manner, by one of your sex, to whom I paid my addresses, in consequence of their having been rejected by you.

LADY S. She used you rightly, if you only made your offer on my refusal.

WIL. But, then, are not you bound to take pity on me now, if my attachment to you has ruined me with every other woman?

LORD D. [*Impetuously.*] You don't mean this seriously, I hope, Mr. Willowear; because Sir Oswin——

LADY S. My lord, let Sir Oswin speak for himself.

SIR OS. I can't think of interrupting my uncle, madam.

LORD D. Why, then, Mr. Willowear, this lady is engaged to Sir Oswin, and will shortly be his wife; and let me tell you, sir——

[*In a positive and angry Tone.*]

SIR OS. My lord, how can you be so warm?

LORD D. Sir Oswin, how can you be so cold?

SIR OS. My lord——

LADY S. Don't interrupt your uncle, Sir Oswin.

WIL. I beg ten thousand pardons; but it was Sir Oswin, who first told me Lady Susan was here. And I understood——

LORD D. You can't misunderstand any longer now, sir.

WIL. Upon any honour, I think I do—for Sir Oswin's going to be united to Lady Susan, is the most surprising!——Sir Oswin!——who has always protested there was no such thing as love.

SIR OS. But I never denied there was matrimony.

[*Exit SIR OSWIN.*]

LADY S. What a prospect for me in the marriage state! But I'll be revenged for his chilling insolence; and nothing on earth shall make me resign him.

LORD D. That's right, my proud woman!

WIL. Lady Susan, I admire your spirit so much, that I have a great mind to say,—nothing on earth shall make *me* resign *you*.

LORD D. Would you supplant Sir Oswin, Mr. Willowear? Is it friendly?

WIL. 'Tis fashionable.

LADY S. Will you, my lord, insist on Sir Oswin's promise, given to you?

LORD D. I will;—I do insist upon it.

LADY S. Then I'll force him to marry me.

WIL. Do—and force him to love you too.

LADY S. So I will. For I'll bear his cruelty with so much good humour, that, unless

his heart be more frozen than his manners, it shall beat with warmth to me.

[*Exit.*]

WIL. [*Following her.*] Stay, Lady Susan—take pity on the only man who loves you—do not drive me to despair. [*Turns hastily.*] My lord, can you tell me of any other woman whom you think I could love?

LORD D. Why, upon my word, Mr. Willowear, it seems, as if you could love every woman you saw.

WIL. I own I am not difficult; but, I find they are so.

LORD D. My advice is, pursue Hester—try to redeem her; and, if you do not succeed——[*Considering.*] I have just thought of the very female, who will exactly suit you.

WIL. Of perfectly good character, I hope?

LORD D. The nicest.

WIL. Family?

LORD D. The very best in the country.

WIL. Fortune?

LORD D. Better than Lady Susan's.

WIL. When will you introduce me?

[*Eagerly.*]

LORD D. I'll mention the subject to her first, and settle every thing between you both, as I have settled between Sir Oswin and Lady Susan.

WIL. But that alliance does not appear to be quite settled yet—I hope you will be more successful for me.

LORD D. I'll be successful for you all. But, before I undertake *your* affairs, you must come with me to Sir Oswin's, and try to regain Hester.

WIL. My lord, I am of an easy, complying, satisfied disposition. I am willing to marry Hester; or Lady Susan; or the unknown female you propose; or, if she does not like me, some other. I am not one of those, who think "great care must be taken in the choice of a wife, that she may prove a blessing."

LORD D. No, say with me—great care must be taken how you treat a wife, and she will certainly be a blessing.

[*Exeunt.*]

ACT THE FOURTH.

SCENE I.

An Apartment at SIR OSWIN MORTLAND'S.

Enter ROBERTS, JAMES, HARRY, and JOHN, Servants to SIR OSWIN.

ROBERTS. Do you run to the terrace, and see for her. [*Exit JOHN.*] Go you, and see if she's in the drawing-room. [*Exit JAMES.*] And run you into the park.

[*Exit HARRY.*]

Enter MRS. SARAH MORTLAND.

MRS. M. What is the matter? What's all this confusion about?

ROBERTS. I thought Miss Hester was here, ma'am.

MRS. M. And what did you want with her?

ROBERTS. Sir Oswin is just returned from Lord Danberry's, and desires to see her directly. He seems not very well pleased at something.

MRS. M. You mean, he is in an ill humour.

ROBERTS. [*In a Whisper.*] He's coming, ma'am.

[*Exit.*]

Enter SIR OSWIN.

SIR OS. [*In Anger.*] Where is your protégée, your companion, your innocent girl? Where's Hester?

MRS. M. And now, give *me* leave to ask a question. Where is your elder sister? For one would suppose she was not within hearing.

SIR OS. She lost her consequence, when she listened to the tale of an impostor.

MRS. M. What has thus changed you on a sudden? We passed yesterday in comfort all together—and your attention to this poor girl, was remarkable.

SIR OS. Who remarked it?

MRS. M. Myself—Lord Danberry. However, do you want to see her?

SIR OS. I do.

MRS. M. Then I'll send her to you—[*Aside.*] and glad of the opportunity to get away.

[*Exit.*]

SIR OS. [*In Anger.*] Women!—women!—women!—[*Altering his Tone, but still angry.*] Woman! woman! woman!—[*In greater Anger still.*] Woman!

Enter HESTER.

[*His Voice softens as he beholds her, and he tenderly pronounces*]
woman!

[HESTER *courtesies, and appears timid.*]

SIR OS. [*With a subdued agitation.*] If they were slight faults that you had committed, you would see me in anger;—as it is——as your indiscreet conduct has been flagrant—you find me impressed only with concern, that I am compelled to turn from my habitation, a friendless young woman, who has implored my protection—and afflicted—deeply afflicted—to behold depravity in one, who gave no warning to the eye, no caution to the ear, nor even to the understanding, to beware of her arts.

HESTER. Am I artful? If you say so, I suppose I am; but, indeed, I did not know it.

SIR OS. Were not those arts, by which you deceived two lovers?

HESTER. O! lovers! Yes, I have made fools of two lovers. But I had a right to do so—for they wanted to make a fool of me.

SIR OS. How so?

HESTER. Why, Mrs. Ashdale, my guardian's wife, and all the elderly ladies, that visited her, constantly said to me, "Hester, never mind what the men say; they are deceitful, and always speak falsehood to young women." So, I put no trust in them, nor they, I hope, in me.

SIR OS. One honourable man was on the point of marrying you, when you ran away.

HESTER. I thought it was better to run away before marriage, than after.

SIR OS. But you broke your promise.

HESTER. Not my marriage promise—for that I am resolved to keep, marry when I will: which makes me so afraid of giving it.

SIR OS. [*Aside.*] That is from the heart.

HESTER. Have you any thing more to say against me?

SIR OS. Who was he that effected your escape?

HESTER. I did not know him for a lover; but trusted him only as a friend, to procure me a chaise; when, on a sudden, thinking me in his power, he wanted to come away with me. So, I feigned illness, to leave him behind, too.—Any more

reproaches?

SIR OS. Numberless. You have, in every instance, conducted yourself with so much imprudence, indecorum,—that I am offended you should have dared to come into this house.

HESTER. Ay, now I hope you are speaking falsehood, as all the men do to young women.

SIR OS. I speak falsehood!

HESTER. Only to women—don't be angry—I mean only to women.

SIR OS. I speak truth to every one; and it is true that you have forfeited my good opinion, and all that favourable impression, which your appearance first made on me.

HESTER. Did I make a favourable impression on you? Oh! I am so proud of it!

SIR OS. [*Confounded.*] I—I give you leave to conceive this as a falsehood.

HESTER. No;—you always “speak truth;” and I will believe this true, because I should be sorry to have it otherwise: for then, what would become of me? where should I go?

SIR OS. Return to those, who reared you from your infancy.

HESTER. No, no, never.

SIR OS. Marry, and you'll have a home.

HESTER. Why do you bid me marry? I am told that you don't like to marry any more than I do. But, sir,—is not this a fair proposal?—I'll marry, if you will.

SIR OS. [*Starting.*] Mr. Willowear, would you marry?

HESTER. No; I'll make my own choice.

SIR OS. [*Agitated.*] And whom would you choose?

HESTER. I'll tell you, if you'll promise I shall have him.

SIR OS. [*After a Pause.*] Hear me, Hester—I sent for you, to upbraid, to reproach you—to show my displeasure—my resentment; but, you talk so differently from all the world besides, that—that—I have no words to give in exchange for yours, but such as I feel disinclined to utter.

HESTER. Are they cruel, or kind words, that you suppress?

SIR OS. I hardly know their meaning.

HESTER. Speak them, and I'll explain them.

SIR OS. No, no;—no explanations.

[*He walks about in Disquietude.*]

HESTER. [*After a Pause.*] And now, if my examination is over, am I to stay or go?

SIR OS. I am not determined.

HESTER. Shall I determine for you?

SIR OS. [*After a Struggle.*] I confess, since the conversation which has just passed between us, I feel a reluctance to say those harsh things, I meant to do, before I saw you.

HESTER. We feel something alike; for, before we met, I intended to say a thousand kind things, to persuade you to let me remain here; but the moment I saw you, I felt reluctant to speak them.

SIR OS. It is not discreet in a woman, to speak with kindness to men.

HESTER. Not if they speak kindly to her: but when they are cross, like you, she may be kind with safety.

SIR OS. Hester, with all your faults, I feel an interest in your welfare. And when I say, I feel for another's happiness, I am not interested slightly. You have been imprudent, and I have censured you—but, in the hope my censure may have influence, I commence, from this hour, a friendship—a sincere friendship, for you. Remain in this house while it suits your convenience, and reveal to me all your heavy sorrows, all your anxious troubles—my power shall protect, my sympathy shall console you.

HESTER. [*After pausing a little Time, impressed with Surprise.*] Oh! this serious, this solemn profession of regard for me, has ruined all my hopes, all my expectations!

SIR OS. How so? How?

HESTER. Because it forces me to be serious and solemn with you. While you were proud, I could treat you lightly;—while you were angry, I did not regard you;—while you were severe, I could laugh at you. But now you are generous, humble, mild, I cannot impose on you—cannot deceive you longer.

SIR OS. Deceive me! In what? Don't I know all your faults?

HESTER. Not half of them.

SIR OS. Have a care! you may yet lose me as your friend.

HESTER. I may—Oh, I *must!*—I know I *must!*—I shall not make my confession unwarily; for I know, the moment you have heard it we shall part, never to meet again. Yet, I had rather it should be so, than live with you every day, and be ashamed to lift up my eyes in your presence.

SIR OS. [*Alarmed.*] Why ashamed? Why are you to be excluded from the right, which every one who is friendless has to my protection?

HESTER. [*Trembling.*] Because I am the unhappy child—of the unfortunate Lavensforth.

SIR OS. [*Starting with Horror.*] My enemy! my mortal enemy! The man, who has threatened, who has repeatedly sworn, to take my life! [*She falls gradually on her Knees, as he speaks thus to himself.*] The man, whom my rigour has irritated to this phrenzy! Ay, Oswin, reason for your foe, as well as for yourself.—Act, too, for him. [*To her.*] I do not discard you for your father's sake; and you shall be still nearer to me for your own. [*Raises her.*] Nay, why this trembling, this tremour?

HESTER. Wherefore am I thus impelled, thus forced, to love the man who was my father's enemy?

SIR OS. If I continued such, I would not offend you with the offer of my services. But time and reflection have made me doubt of his demerits, and my own justice in arraigning him.

HESTER. Ah! do you say so? Do I hear there is a doubt—a supposition—a hope, that my dear father has been unjustly accused?

SIR OS. From his open, his once professed enemy, his daughter shall receive his character; and before she blesses—honours—my abode with her future residence, shall know—that I respected the man whom I impeached: for esteem was not incompatible with that peculiar suit I preferred against him. And, now, while compassion suggests numerous excuses for his past deeds—and impartiality obliges me to reprove my own,—do you, his representative, accept all the retribution I can offer for measures too severe, perhaps, in the cause of political warfare.

[*He takes her Hand, and embraces her tenderly.*]

Enter LORD DANBERRY.

LORD D. Ah! what! my rigid, reserved nephew, with a fair maid in his arms! Oh! you can unbend, I find, serene and mighty potentate, when no one is by. [*To HESTER.*] Madam, Mr. Willowear is in the next room, come to claim you—you blush!—but never mind—I won't tell—mum!—For my part, Sir Oswin, I am rather glad to see that you can get a pretty girl in a corner; for if you do one, you soon may another; and Lady Susan, perhaps, has no cause to despair. Mum!—hush!—I won't say a word—only I must laugh—ha! ha! ha! Is this the lesson you came home to give the poor orphan? Ha! ha! ha!

SIR OS. My lord, you—

LORD D. No excuses—'tis all very well—only give a little of your kindness to Lady Susan.—I thought it would show itself at last!

HESTER. Sir——

LORD D. No excuses, my dear—I forgive—no excuses.

SIR OS. My lord, you put me in a rage!

LORD D. Ay, the cold fit has been gone some time.

HESTER. My lord, Sir Oswin was so kind——

LORD D. You need not tell me. I saw how kind he was!

SIR OS. Hold!—that lady must not be insulted—she is under my protection.

LORD D. Well, this is leaping from the “freezing point” to “fever heat” at once! One moment in Lapland, the next under the torrid zone! I wish you joy, young lady, of this your third lover; but, perhaps, I should not be so content, if a fourth was not behind.

SIR OS. A fourth lover!

LORD D. Yes; her guardian has just sent a postchaise (at least a messenger, who was to procure one, if he found her here) to take her to a fourth lover, who may, perhaps, extinguish your burning flame.

HESTER. Oh, Sir Oswin, save me from my guardian, and his tyranny!

SIR OS. But if your guardian possesses any power, any authority, I have no legal right to withhold you.

[Sighing.]

HESTER. But, you may have.

LORD D. There,—she speaks as plain English, as ever I heard a woman utter.

SIR OS. Plain English is what so few of the English do speak,——

Enter MRS. SARAH MORTLAND, *with two Letters in her Hand.*

MRS. M. Hester,—[*When* MRS. MORTLAND *calls out* “Hester,” LORD DANBERRY *passes by* SIR OSWIN *towards* HESTER.] Here is a letter for you, which came inclosed in this to me; and there’s a person from your guardian, who begs to see you instantly.

[MRS. MORTLAND *retires, reading her own Letter.*

HESTER. [*Looks at the Address of her Letter with surprise, and hissing it, exclaims apart*] My father’s hand! Oh, unexpected happiness!

[*Exit hastily.*

SIR OS. Her guardian! What can all this mean?

LORD D. [*Apart.*] I must have an eye upon this girl. She must not belong to my family; [*Looking suspiciously at* SIR OSWIN.] I must watch her.

[*Exit, following* HESTER.

MRS. M. [*Advancing to* SIR OSWIN.] You are absorbed in thought! May I ask what is the subject of your reflections?

SIR OS. A confused mass! I am living in this old world, and yet a new one seems to have broken upon me, to make me as a stranger to all around.

MRS. M. Shall I inform you, where you are?

SIR OS. It would be an act of charity.

MRS. M. But will you take it charitably?

SIR OS. Yes.

MRS. M. You are—in love.

SIR OS. [*Starts.*] What makes you think so?

MRS. M. Don't you feel so?

SIR OS. No,—no,—no,—let's hope not,—no—no.

MRS. M. You have all the symptoms.

SIR OS. No—no.—And who made you a judge?

MRS. M. That is a secret I shall keep to myself.

SIR OS. Women, to be sure, know every thing.

MRS. M. The reason is—women feel every thing. Men's perception lies only in the head; ours comes from the heart. Brother, the two sexes are thus contrasted—Sensibility gives us wisdom, but takes it away from you men. When man is governed by his heart, he's less than woman—and *we* are the lords of the creation.

SIR OS. In this case neither my heart nor head convicts me.

MRS. M. No; for they dupe you.

SIR OS. Do you speak in earnest?

[*Frightened.*

MRS. M. Most assuredly.

SIR OS. [*Trembling and reaching a Chair.*] Why, then, if I am in love,—if it must be so,—I may as well submit. [*Sits down.*] It is vain, I suppose, to contend with my passion, and I must give myself up to my fate? Hard fate? after all my studies, my researches, my meditations, my zeal for the public good!—And what am I to do in respect to Lady Susan?

MRS. M. You must tell her you prefer another.

SIR OS. [*In the same distressed tone.*] If I told her I was married to another, she would say she liked me the better for it. [*Recovering his spirits.*] Hester is different from her: she has a horror of the marriage state.

MRS. M. So, from the self-same antipathy arises this dangerous sympathy. But as I allured you into her power, it is in my duty to snatch you from it. This letter was just now brought me from her guardian.

SIR OS. [*Takes the Letter and reads.*] *Madam, do me the favour to give Hester the inclosed, the contents of which she is bound to keep secret. All I shall add is, that you can, upon no pretence whatever, detain her longer; when I assure you, that this inclosed letter comes to her from one, who (as I have acquainted him with her flight) must be in the deepest despair till he sees her; as there is between them a mutual and indissoluble affection.*

A mutual affection! [*Rising.*] Yes, I observed her delight on seeing the hand which directed her letter.—'Tis true, she has a secret lover, and I will search him out, or

MRS. M. Now this is jealousy.

SIR OS. [*Starting.*] Jealous; do you accuse me of love, and then dare to add jealousy?

MRS. M. They follow naturally.

SIR OS. Why, then, welcome all the tumultuous passions at once; for I find my heart is as unable to resist the one as the other.

[*Throws himself into a Chair.*]

MRS. M. Ah! I foresaw—

SIR OS. Why did you not caution me, then? why did you not tell me? I felt no fears—I despised all danger—[*Starts up.*] Why did you ever bring her to my house? Or, rather, why not long since? For, till I knew *her*, I never knew one rapturous sensation.

Enter HESTER, with a Letter in her Hand.

HESTER. I am come to take my leave of you for ever.

SIR OS. Why so?

[*MRS. MORTLAND goes round to HESTER.*]

HESTER. I must not tell you why.

SIR OS. And do you go by your own consent?

HESTER. I do.

SIR OS. Then wherefore do you weep?

HESTER. Half these tears are for joy, half for sorrow.

SIR OS. Explain.

HESTER. I dare not; but must follow my guardian's directions, and immediately set off in the carriage, which his servant, who brought this letter, is gone to procure me.

SIR OS. Alone?

HESTER. All alone.

SIR OS. Not an hour ago you solicited me to save you from your guardian's power.

HESTER. But I was not then acquainted with the cause, which—Oh! Sir Oswin, an impulse you know nothing of compels—and the same impulse (confident as I am in your nice honour) ties my tongue from saying what the occasion is, which calls me.—All my own actions—all my own thoughts, I confess boldly; but when I am entrusted with the thoughts and the concerns of others, I can be mute as death.

SIR OS. You are going to a lover.

HESTER. No more—than I am leaving one behind.

SIR OS. And if you thought, you were?—

HESTER. Have I any right to think so?

SIR OS. Do you ask me seriously?

HESTER. Yes.

SIR OS. Why, then, I——

Enter LORD DANBERRY.

LORD D. The chaise waits—the postillion's in a hurry.

HESTER. Oh dear! how could you interrupt what he was going to say?

LORD D. Hear what I have to say—The chaise is at the door—'twill be dark in half an hour—no moon—the heath you have to cross is dangerous, on account of robbers—and the rivulet, at the bottom of the hill, has, probably, overflowed.

Enter a MAID SERVANT.

Here's your hat and cloak.—[*He takes them of her, and gives them to* *HESTER.*] I sincerely wish you a good journey, and I'll hand you to the door.

[*Exit* MAID SERVANT.]

SIR OS. No, uncle, as the danger is so great, I'll order my horse and pistols, and ride by the side of the carriage. It would not be common hospitality to suffer a female to leave my house, unprotected, through such perils as you have described.

[*Taking her Hand, and going.*]

HESTER. [*In a low Voice.*] You must not go with me, for the world—not for the world, Sir Oswin.

SIR OS. This alarm is suspicious!—What does it mean?

HESTER. Dear Mrs. Sarah Mortland, persuade your brother—my lord do not suffer him to go with me.

SIR OS. These efforts to prevent me, fix my determination. [*Aside to MRS. MORTLAND.*] To see her meeting with her lover, will be my cure at once.

[*Leading her to the Door.*]

HESTER. I hope that, when I have passed the dangerous part of my journey, I shall have power to persuade you to return.

SIR OS. Perhaps, you may.

HESTER. [*Aside.*] If not, I must reveal to whom I am going.

LORD D. Nephew—nephew! [*SIR OSWIN returns.*] You had a fixed opinion there was no such passion as love.—What can you say now?

SIR OS. Like other theorists, say—I was mistaken.

[*Exeunt SIR OSWIN and HESTER.*]

LORD D. [*To MRS. MORTLAND.*] Did you ever see any thing like this?

MRS. M. Yes; for this is not the first time I have seen a man in love.

Enter MR. WILLOWEAR.

LORD D. My dear Willowear, did you not meet Sir Oswin, leading away in triumph your intended wife? Run after him, and take her from him; pray now do.

WIL. No—let Hester go—and let Lady Susan go.—I am curious and impatient to see the woman you have promised me.

LORD D. You shan't see her; nor will I reveal who she is, till you have followed Sir Oswin.

[*Walks about in anger.*]

WIL. Then I'll make inquiries elsewhere. [*BOWS to MRS. MORTLAND, and goes up to her.*] I beg pardon, madam; but, as I have the honour to meet you in the house of Sir Oswin, I imagine you know the name of Willowear? [*She bows assent.*] And know that he has met with a certain disappointment?

Mrs. M. I do sir.

Wil. I am that unfortunate lover.—Can you, madam, give me advice how to repair my loss? Do you know any woman of reputation who will marry a man in my forsaken state.

Mrs. M. Upon my word, I am so little acquainted with any, except the married women of our neighbourhood!—I assure you Mr. Willowear, I have hardly an acquaintance who is a single lady, although I am single myself.

Wil. Are you unmarried, madam? [*To LORD DANBERRY, aside.*] Who is this lady? I was never introduced to her.

Lord D. She is Sir Oswin's sister—my niece—and the very woman I mentioned for your wife.

[*Having viewed Mrs. MORTLAND earnestly.*] My wife! my wife!

Lord D. No fear of running away from the church door, there.

Wil. Marry her!—I should be the jest of all my acquaintance.

Lord D. That you will be, at any rate.

Wil. Mine is a desperate case.

Lord D. And, to tell you the truth, I don't believe that even *she* would accept you.

Wil. Now you pique me to make the offer. [*Goes to her.*] Madam, you are Mrs. Sarah Mortland, I find. [*She courtesies.*] If I thought you would pardon what I am inclined to utter——

Mrs. M. Pray speak out, sir.

Wil. Will *you* accept a man, slighted by all your sex?

Mrs. M. Would you marry a woman, who has been slighted by all yours?

Lord D. To be sure:—for then you can't laugh at each other.

Mrs. M. If you could, Mr. Willowear, marry such a woman, I give you in reply—that at my time of life, I feel for every man the same disregard, the men all felt for me in my younger days.

[*Exit.*

Wil. [*Confounded.*] What can I do now, my lord? Will you——

Lord D. No—I can do no more—After being refused by a maiden lady of fifty, all hope is over.

[*Exit LORD DANBERRY.*

Will. Nay, hear me, my lord.—Oh! that I had but Sir Oswin's aversion to matrimony.

[Exit.]

ACT THE FIFTH.

SCENE I.

The Forest and Cottage.

Moonlight.

Enter LAVENSFORTH.

LAV. How seldom do we taste the goods, which nature bestows, till we are deprived of those that are the work of art! To see the sun set, and the moon rise, is to me, robbed of every other pastime, sublime amusement! And were fortune now to shower on me all its wealth, and other hoarded blessings, still I should ever think—Hark! what noise?—Amos, returning from the village!—perhaps with letters.—The thought of news makes me shudder; for 'tis so many years since I have received welcome tidings!—Still I send, and long for letters.—But, now, what intelligence can they bring me, except the confirmation of my Hester's loss.—Hark! again;—That sound was like a groan!—No;—my own dark designs, my own black determinations, haunt me, and, in every whisper of the wind through these lofty oaks, I hear the cry of murder.

SIR OS. [*From the Wood.*] Ho! ho! Cottagers, lend assistance!

LAV. [*Calling out.*] Who's there in distress? Amos, is it you? Speak again, that I may know which way the sound——

Enter SIR OSWIN, *pale, and near fainting.*

SIR OS. Good friend, a villain on the road has fired at me.

LAV. [*Going towards him.*] Ha! who's that? Who are you? You are wounded, sir; lean on me—Come into this cottage. Let me bind your wounds. [*Tearing a Neckcloth from his own Neck.*] Then haste for other assistance, and raise the village in pursuit of the robber.

SIR OS. He is fled; I have rode a mile, at least, since I received my wound; for my horse took fright at the report of the piece, and I had no power over him, till he was stopped by this wood.

LAV. If you can walk into the cottage, it will be better than——

SIR OS. There is a lady in a carriage, with whom I was in company, whose safety is more important to me than my own.—She was under my protection.—Lead me

into the house; then, my good friend, go in search of her; silence her fears, and order the postboy to drive hither—he can take me home.

LAV. Here is, in this hut, a kind of couch, on which you may rest, when I have bound up your wound: I will then instantly do as you have directed. Lean on me; I can support you—Your blood flows fast. Do not talk, I charge you—it will exhaust you quite; But lean on me—lean on me—lean on me.

[*Exit, drawing SIR OSWIN gently into the Cottage.*

Enter AMOS, in Fright and Terror—A Firelock in his Hand.

AMOS. Master! master! Where is he? [*Looks slightly into the Cottage Window, and about.*] Cannot find him! away—is not to be found—I, left to feel joy— [*Reflecting.*]—and sorrow alone! Ah! cannot bear, alone.—Master—master.—Come; I happy with you—but what, what do, if ever left alone?

[*Trembling.*

Enter LAVENSFORTH, from the Cottage.

LAV. What's all this talking! Fly instantly for the village surgeon.—Here is a gentleman within, has been wounded by some villain, who fired at him on the road.

AMOS. [*Starting.*] Here? here?

LAV. Yes, here.

[*With expression of Joy, and savage Fury.*] It is Sir Oswin! [*LAVENSFORTH starts.*] It is Sir Oswin.

LAV. You speak falsehood.

AMOS. Master, it is he.

LAV. No; such joy, such triumph, was never meant for me. Yet the sound pleases me—repeat it—say again, it is he.

AMOS. I know it. As I, returning from the village—this gun in my hand, which had lately borrowed—heard carriage stop on road, and postillion inquire his way—I answered to him—on which—lady from chaise-window said to gentleman on horseback—“Now, Sir Oswin, you go no further.” I start at that name—went close to horses' side, and asked, if he was Sir Oswin Mortland, of Mortland Abbey. He answered, “Yes.” My hand, before my thought, caught trigger of my gun, and— [*Trembling.*] His horse ran away.—I came home.

LAV. Strike a light. [*Exit AMOS into the Cottage.*] I'll look at him as he reclines on his couch—I shall know him. [*A Light appears at the Cottage Window, AMOS re-enters.*] I have cause to know him.

[LAVENSFORTH *goes into the Cottage.*

AMOS. Ah! I again alone! Nobody to speak—all to think—thoughts bad company—good company once. Oh! I cannot, cannot live, if I am alone.

Enter LAVENSFORTH from the Cottage.

LAV. 'Tis he! 'tis he! the lineaments of his face are neither altered by time, nor the loss of blood. The man who has injured me bears the same features, thank Providence! as in the days of his malignant triumph. There can be no mistake; my eye, my heart, my very soul, recognizes the man. Ah! never more will I arraign just fate, who now has sent my worst enemy under my roof, [*Takes out a Dagger.*] and wounded to my hand! [*Starts.*] Under my roof, and wounded to my hand!—why then, I must not harm a hair of his head!—my limbs are chained, though my revenge is raging to burst forth. Oh! would he now start up in health and vigour, surrounded by his host of friends, how boldly would I defy, and stab him to the heart. But this good fortune, these secure means of vengeance, which every skulking coward would enjoy, I, bound by a tyrannical word, called honour, dare not use.

Enter SIR OSWIN from the Cottage.—Exit AMOS, drooping under Confusion and Remorse at his Presence.

SIR OS. My good host, you have bound my wound so effectually, that the bleeding is wholly stopped; and I find my strength so well recruited by this short repose, that I hope the injury I have sustained will prove but slight. As the chaise I mentioned is not come, if you can help me to my horse, which, probably, is still about this thicket, I shall thank you.—I am Sir Oswin Mortland, [LAVENSFORTH *shows great Emotion.*] and, if you'll call to-morrow at my house—[*Observes LAVENSFORTH'S Countenance, then his Dagger.*] Ah! an instrument of death in your hand! Have I been betrayed into this place? What mean you by that weapon?

LAV. I mean that it shall rest here, [*Putting it up.*] till you are safe at home.

SIR OS. Till I am safe at home! What then?

LAV. Then—it shall rest, till your health is restored.

SIR OS. You seem to imply some menace.—Man, who are you?

LAV. Your sworn, your mortal, your just enemy,—Lavensforth.

SIR OS. [*After a Pause of Amazement.*] You know the penalty under which the laws forbid my meeting you: that consideration, I am now compelled to wave, and to tell you—I have still strength and spirit to defy your threats. [*Takes Pistols from his Pockets.*] Choose one of these, and take your ground.

[*Takes a Pistol, then, seeming to make an Effort.*] No; mean as this habitation is, proud man, it is mine; and you shall feel the weight of my protection, [*Throws away the Pistol.*] while you are within its precincts.

AMOS. [*Without.*] A lady—a lady call for Sir Oswin.

SIR OS. [*To LAVENSFORTH.*] Your conduct towards me, is that of a generous foe, —[*Enter HESTER, leaning on AMOS—Exit AMOS into the Cottage.*] and merits a return like this, [*Goes to HESTER.*] to prove me worthy of it—Lavensforth, your daughter.

LAV. My daughter! my daughter in your care!

HESTER. [*Trembling.*] if you are Lavensforth, I am your child. [*Kneeling.*] Your once-loved Hester; most unkindly treated by those friends, with whom you trusted me, and sheltered from misfortune by——

[*Looking towards SIR OSWIN.*]

LAV. My enemy!

HESTER. No, my father; the defender of your fame, and his own accuser, in all the conversations he has had with me, when your misfortunes were the subject. Then do not rob him of the praise due to his pity for a hapless female—who owes to him her preservation to this blissful meeting.

[*Throws herself into her Father's Arms.*]

LAV. The tender joy I feel, in thus pressing you to my bosom, hushes every murmur of resentment. “My enemy!” no;—the man who has sheltered thee, to bless my age, to sooth the rancorous passions of my soul! The man, who could preserve you, my child, from sorrow, however he has dealt with me, shall, henceforth be my friend.

HESTER. Oh, then, my father, your daughter’s joy for your return is perfect.

[*They embrace, and show other Tokens of Affection.*]

SIR OS. [*Apart.*] How poor was my exultation, whilst I urged on the ruin of this man, compared to the delight the present moment gives me!

LAV. No forethought, no calm consideration, could restrain me from a first embrace;—but, before I indulge too far my parental love, clear your late conduct from your guardian’s accusation.

SIR OS. [*Proudly.*] Lavensforth, I would not have presented her to you, as a boon, had I not believed she was a blessing, such as I would, joyfully, receive from you.

LAV. My dear child! my dearest Hester! Oh! supreme must be my happiness, when I can feel it undisturbed, even by the presence of Sir Oswin.

SIR OS. Suffer me to participate in your happiness! Suffer me,—[*Faintly.*] Excess of interest, vehement emotions of the mind, have supplied me with strength to—— but now, again——

HESTER. Ah! you have been wounded! Where is the carriage? Instantly return home.

LAV. [*Calling to AMOS.*] Order the carriage here—to this very spot, and come back instantly. [*Exit AMOS.*] Sir Oswin, before you and I part, you must be told—Come hither.

Enter AMOS.

It was this man, my servant, from whom you received your wound; [*AMOS kneels, and hides his Head.*] instigated by my thirst, my plans of vengeance, but not encouraged by my most distant concurrence, or suspicion of his guilty design.

SIR OS. [*To AMOS.*] You have more cause to rejoice at the preservation of my life, than I have; you have escaped greater peril than myself. I'll pardon you when time shall have proved your repentance.

[*AMOS rises, and goes into the Cottage, overwhelmed with Shame; SIR OSWIN is between LAVENSFORTH and HESTER, holding the Hand of each. —In Gestures, he earnestly entreats them to accompany him Home.—They go off, apparently with this Design.*

SCENE II.

An Apartment at SIR OSWIN'S.

Enter MRS. MORILAND, meeting LADY SUSAN.

MRS. M. Dear Lady Susan, I sent for you, both to console me, and share my grief! My poor brother is, perhaps, this moment breathing his last.

LADY S. Oh, heavens!

MRS. M. He went out on horseback, and was attacked by robbers: The servant, who was following at a distance, and saw him wounded, returned home, supposing his master was come back also, as he perceived him ride down a bye-road leading this way; but Sir Oswin not having returned, I fear his wounds may be mortal, and he

LADY S. Is my lord yet informed?

MRS. M. No; and I have sent the servants all about, in vain, to seek him. Oh! my lord will die with grief when he hears the news—and I am so anxious to tell him!

[Exit in haste.]

Enter MR. WILLOWEAR, on the opposite Side—LADY SUSAN turns complaisantly to him.

LADY S. How do you do, Mr. Willowear?

WIL. To see Lady Susan smile upon me, is good fortune, so extraordinary! a smile, too, when, if report says true, her favoured lover is dying.

LADY S. The favourite lover of a woman of fashion, Mr. Willowear, has the same prerogative as a king; he never dies—there's always an immediate successor.

WIL. Could I be that happy man!

LADY S. Yes, I'll make you heir apparent to my hand; but while Sir Oswin lives, he is its lawful sovereign.

WIL. Nay, promise you will be mine, before you know his fate.

LADY S. No; I must delay plighting my faith, till I know whether poor Sir Oswin lives, or dies.

WIL. That will depreciate its value. Come, give me your promise now: You can break it, you know.

LADY S. Very true; I forgot that—Then I promise.

WIL. And thus, humbly, I take your word.

[*Kneels, and kisses her Hand.*]

Enter LORD DANBERRY.

LORD D. Heydey! What in the name of wonder is this? More couples in corners? What do you mean, Mr. Willowear? Why, where's my nephew?

WIL. Do you think, my lord, no man can be favoured by a lady, except your nephew?

LADY S. He is far off, my lord, and I fear, does not think of me.

LORD D. I am a very unfortunate person! I can take no step, turn myself no way, but I intrude upon somebody's private hours. Pray, is this a concerted plan?

WIL. How concerted? What do you mean?

LORD D. Why, it seems to me, as if you, Mr. Willowear, with my nephew's intended bride, and he with yours, were all going down a country dance, and that each had resolved to take the wrong partner.

WIL. I think myself happy to have any partner at all.

LADY S. And suppose we have changed partners, my lord, what then?

LORD D. Why then, I feel myself like a blind fiddler, whose instrument has put every one in motion, only to make them change sides.

Enter MRS. MORILAND.

MRS. M. Oh, my lord, I am so glad I have found you! Have not you heard that Sir Oswin has been attacked by robbers, and, perhaps, is dying?

Enter SIR OSWIN, LAVENSFORTH, HESTER,—SERVANTS *attending them.*

LORD D. My nephew—robbers—dying!

SIR OS. No, my lord, I am still living; but my life has been in danger, and was preserved by the hospitality of this stranger.

[*Showing* LAVENSFORTH.

LORD D. From henceforth, then, I am that stranger's friend.

SIR OS. And we have agreed that I shall be so too, and he mine; though his name once indicated my direst enemy.

LORD D. Enemy! You never had an enemy, except Lavensforth.

LAV. Now then, he has not one.

[*Every Person shows surprise.*]

LORD D. Is it possible this can be Lavensforth?

LAV. It is.

WIL. And is it possible that such a reconciliation has taken place!

SIR OS. Can you ask the question in a Christian country? To forgive, is the peculiar virtue, the supreme criterion of our sacred religion. We, once, were deadly foes;—This embrace [*Embraces LAVENSFORTH.*] is the confession, the bold confession of our faith.

LAV. We have hated as men, not reflecting on man's infirmities,—but presuming to expect divine perfections, clothed in human clay.

MRS. M. To speak in the same phrase, has not this little piece of earth helped to effect the wonderful change? Is she not of the same soil with him?

[*Pointing to HESTER and LAVENSFORTH.*]

LAV. She is my daughter, and was given to me by Sir Oswin, when I thought her lost.

LORD D. I have no notion how all this has been accomplished! But that I shall learn hereafter, I suppose. And now, Mr. Lavensforth, I verily believe, that the only recompense you can make my nephew for his gift, is to return her back again.

SIR OS. If you do, Lavensforth, and Hester comes willingly, I will endow her with my heart, and protect her with my life.

[*LAVENSFORTH gives HESTER to SIR OSWIN.*]

WIL. And will you go to church again, young lady?

HESTER. Yes; and shall remember, with more joy than ever, that I once ran away from it.

LAV. And now you possess all that is dear to me, Sir Oswin, what mighty compensation you have in your power, for my past afflictions!

LADY S. And will Sir Oswin stoop from his solemn, stately grandeur, to be married at last? Ha! ha! ha!

WIL. Not only to marry, but to marry for love—Ha! ha! ha!

LADY S. } Ha! ha! ha!

WIL. }

SIR OS. Mr. Willowear—Lady Susan—I should have apologies to make for some parts of my conduct to both of you; but I allow you the privilege of laughing at me; and I'm sure you'll think that a sufficient atonement.

WIL. Sir Oswin, you are perfectly welcome to that lady, as Lady Susan has given

me her promise to take me at last.

LADY S. But I can break it, you know, Mr. Willowear.

WIL. But you won't, you know, Lady Susan.

LORD D. As I said just now, you are all set to cross partners; but I consent—and pray Heaven that marriage may prove to each couple a merry tune; and none of you, ever make a false step in the dance.

MRS. M. But now, gentlemen, and ladies, don't delay, but marry to-morrow: for you are all such slippery kind of people, I'm afraid you should yet glide from each other's grasp.

SIR OS. That would be a prospect of more terror to me, than ever matrimony was: For the passion I once derided, now repays itself for my scorn, and forces me thus openly to declare—That there certainly is such a tender power, such a rapturous influence, as—love——And, that every man, who feels, like me, its genuine force, should—marry.

THE END.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *To Marry, Or Not To Marry; A Comedy, In Five Acts* by Elizabeth Inchbald]