

# My Uncle's Garret Window

By Matthew Gregory Lewis

With silent steps I'll follow you all day.—DRYDEN.

My uncle was a genius and a poet—of course, he was as poor as David's rat, and lived in a garret. He was a kind-hearted man, and I loved him too sincerely to hesitate at putting my neck in jeopardy once a day by climbing the crazy ladder, which afforded the only means of reaching his celestial abode. Yet after my taking all this trouble it frequently happened that I found my uncle too busy with the Muses to bestow any of his attention on so insignificant an animal as his nephew. On these occasions he contented himself with shaking me by the hand in silence, laying his finger on his lip, and pointing to a joint-stool which stood close by the window; for he occupied himself the only chair in the room, and even that had but three legs to boast of: the joint-stool therefore, though not so dignified a seat, was in fact a much more secure and comfortable one.

But when I found myself established on my joint-stool, how was I to employ myself? When my uncle was seized with one of these fits of inspiration, they frequently continued for a considerable time: where then was I to find amusement during this interval? My uncle was too much an author to think anybody's works worth reading except his own; for those I happened to have no great taste, and I did not care to affront him by asking for the productions of any other brain. Reading then was out of the question; but in order that my eyes might not be quite idle, I employed them in examining what was going on in the house opposite to us. By the help of a pocket telescope I could distinctly see everything which passed in our neighbour's first and second floor; and after indulging myself for some days in these observations, I became so well acquainted with every member of this unknown family, that I felt myself as much interested about their proceedings as if I had been a member of it myself.

You will say that this systematic *espionage* was not very honourable: I allow it. But then, on the other hand, it was very entertaining; and I am now going to bribe you to approve of my conduct, by admitting you to a partnership in my stolen knowledge.

The street which my uncle inhabited was narrow and the quarter was not one of the most fashionable: but the furniture of the house in question convinced me that its owner must certainly be a man of considerable opulence. This owner (for the sake of distinction we will call him Sempronius, for I have been too much occupied by his actions to have inquired for his real name as yet) this owner is not exactly the sort of man whom I should voluntarily have selected for the hero of my tale; but beggars must not be choosers, and I must take the good man as I find him. He seems to labour under some hypochondriacal complaint, and as he frequently suffers himself in his moments of weakness to indulge his ill-temper, I have not the least hopes of working him up into a portrait of heroic fortitude: on the other hand, I have as little hopes of his furnishing my drama with a striking character for my villain. It's true, he governs his whole family with a rod of iron, and I have already discovered that he is completely a domestic tyrant: everyone seems to feel constrained in his company: and it is only in the absence of the master of the mansion that innocent mirth ventures to show itself within its doors. Yet still I observe that, with the same unbending gravity with which he censures his wife and rates his servants, he receives every Sunday the visits of a distressed emigrant (with whose worth and whose wants accident has

made me well acquainted), to whose complaints he seems to listen with unwearied patience, and whom he never suffers to depart with empty pockets. As the poor gentleman retraces his steps, I observe that his walk is firmer and lighter, 'and that not unfrequently a tear trembles in his eye; but he never quits the street without turning back and with clasped hands casting a look of gratitude towards the window of Sempronius's study. Sempronius then has a good heart, but a most intolerable temper. Well! well! we will hope that his ill-temper proceeds from ill-health and from increasing years, for Sempronius cannot now be far from his grand climacteric. I conclude this from the colour of his hair, which here and there age has already silvered.

I conjecture that he must be a merchant of some kind or other. What makes me think this is, that the ground floor of his house looks as if it had been converted into a magazine. Besides he is regularly absent from home exactly at 'Change hours: I am rather of opinion that he dabbles in the funds.

But how in the name of wonder could Sempronius, so little amiable as he appears to be, have obtained such a treasure as the wife whom I am now going to describe?—or rather, how came he to be so singularly fortunate as to draw two such great prizes in Hymen's lottery; a lottery, in which (Heaven have pity on all poor Christian husbands!) there are so many blanks?—Many years ago he lost a wife . . . oh! she was worthy to have been the empress of her whole sex!—So beautiful . . . so good . . . "You have seen her then?"—(Such was my uncle's demand one day, when I was indulging myself in enthusiastic but just commendations of the lady in question)—"You have seen her then? You knew her?"—"Alas! never! I was not so fortunate."—"But you have been told of her charms and merits?"—"Not a syllable; I never heard her mentioned in my life."—"Then pray, how are you so certain, that she was so beautiful and so good?"

"Why, my dear uncle, you must know that her picture in oil hangs in the second wife's sitting-room, and never was my eye gratified by more perfect features, or a more noble countenance: and that this countenance belonged to the wife of Sempronius there can be no doubt. Sempronius himself (but much younger) is introduced in the picture; and the attitude in which the painter has represented them sufficiently marks the relation of the parties: besides, if there were no other reason for concluding that she was his wife, I should be convinced of it by the striking resemblance between her countenance and that of a young man about twenty, who appears to be our neighbour's son, and probably is the only offspring of this marriage."

"Well! sir! well! so much for her beauty and her marriage. Now sir, granting that she was a wife, what makes you suppose that she must necessarily have been a good one?"

"My dear sir, it is quite impossible that she should have been other-wise. Whenever Sempronius is displeased with his present helpmate he never fails to point to that portrait: he seems to contrast her conduct with that of the object of his reproof, and to hold her up as a model for the imitation of her whole sex; while, on the other hand, his second wife (she is reading *King Lear* at this moment, for the edition is Boydell's, and I can distinctly read the title; so we will call her Cordelia, if you please)—Cordelia then, whenever she finds her patience on the point of being shipwrecked among the numberless little domestic storms which the unhappy temper of our friend Sempronius is perpetually raising, constantly fixes her eyes on that mild heavenly countenance, and seems to ask, 'In this situation how would you have acted?' She then turns to her peevish husband with a serene look; the clouds of displeasure which were gathering on her brow have totally disappeared; she takes his hand kindly, as if imploring his pardon for having given him offence and never leaves him till her winning manners and engaging smiles have charmed away his ill-humour, as David's lyre banished the evil spirit from the bosom of the frantic Saul."

“But pray, nephew, what makes you so certain that the original of this portrait, which produces such beneficial effects, is no longer in existence?”

“Surely the presence of a second wife is a proof fully sufficient of the decease of a first.”

“But there may be no second wife in the case: Cordelia may be his daughter.”

“Impossible, my dearest uncle! absolutely impossible! A thousand little circumstances, the tender familiarity which exists between her and Sempronius, the authority with which she governs the whole house, the intimate yet respectful conduct of her stepson Edward (you see I make no scruple of christening my neighbours over again), the difference which Sempronius makes in his behaviour when addressing her and when addressing the said Edward. No; it is quite impossible that Cordelia should be anything but his wife. Besides, to put the matter out of all doubt, you must know that there is a little boy about eight or nine years old whose features exhibit the same mixed resemblance to Cordelia and Sempronius which Edward’s exhibit to Sempronius and the lady, of whose portrait I have spoken in terms of such warm approbation.”

Cordelia then is the wife of Sempronius and what a wife! Perhaps she is the only woman on earth worthy to occupy the place of her predecessor! Her whole constitution seems to be composed of gentleness and benevolence; and, in truth, it was necessary that she should be composed of such materials, in order that the vinegar of her husband’s disposition might be softened down and rendered supportable by the infusion of her oil of roses. I am thoroughly instructed in her mode of life, for I can overlook the whole of her sitting-room. It joins on to her husband’s study, and here she passes the greatest part of the day. Here she sits, works, writes, and reads: some of her books are now lying in the window, and even at this distance I can distinguish the names of “Shakespeare,” “Cowper,” and “Paley.” Here it is that she settles all the affairs of her household, and from hence, as from their centre, I can see good order, diligence, and economy spread themselves forth, and pervade every department of her family. Different occupations have all their stated hours: always active, always employed, without noise, without hurry, she manages that everything should be done in its proper time and place; and the hand with which she governs the whole machine is no less light than sure and steady.

I will only mention two other points in Cordelia’s character, which have struck, and which please me particularly. The one is, that in spite of her husband’s lectures and frequent appeals to it she still suffers the portrait of his first wife to decorate her own private apartment. The other is, that in her endeavours to soothe her husband she never fails to be successful, and that in her presence Sempronius always seems to be less gloomy and less unruly than when he is beyond the sphere of her influence.

Her stepson is established on the second floor; his room is exactly over his father’s study, and there prevails in it an air of such systematic confusion—books, letters, old pens, and inkstands lie so mingled together upon all the chairs and tables, and sheets of half-written paper full of blots and scratches are so constantly fluttering about the chamber, that I have no sort of doubt of his being a poet; not to mention a large book in a white parchment cover, which has quite the look of a common-place book, and on which he frequently writes a few lines, after biting the top of his quill for some minutes, and taking two or three turns up and down the room, accompanying his movement by vehement gesticulations. I am also convinced that his verses are generally amatory, and addressed to no imaginary object. He often copies something out of the aforesaid book with the white parchment cover, and seals it up care fully in the form of a letter, which he always gives the postman with his own hands. Besides, when he has secured his door against intruders (ah! poor lad! how little he suspects that I see everything that he is about) he frequently reads over and over again certain little notes (written on a fine shining paper with coloured

edges, and very neatly folded up), and which he seldom fails to press repeatedly to his lips before he arrives at the end of them. As to the peculiarities of his temper, I observe by what passes between him and his father, and still more between him and a certain aunt who frequents the family, that his feelings are quick and susceptible, and that he easily takes offence. He is careless and rather harum-scarum, for he sometimes leaves the key in the secretaire, where all these precious billet-doux are deposited, and then suddenly recollecting his neglect, he flies upstairs to repair it in such a hurry, that I expect him every moment to break his neck by the way. He is benevolent for he never sees a beggar without relieving him; extravagant, for he receives his allowance monthly, and it never lasts above half the time; proud and high-minded, for having applied to his father either for an increase of allowance or an advance (I could not exactly ascertain which), and receiving a refusal in the first instance, when Sempronius sent him a banknote the next morning the youth returned it, and preferred waiting till the first of the present month. I observe, too, that he is sometimes a little out of humour without cause, in which I suppose he takes after his father: however, his ill-temper never is vented upon anything except his spaniel, whom he feeds all dinner time, and who always sleeps with his head resting upon the foot of his master.

As to his half-brother, little Willy, he is too young as yet to show much character; but I am very much mistaken if he has not a decided genius for the arts. Every morsel of paper which falls in his way is immediately covered with his inventions. If his pencil is taken from him, he hunts about till he finds a piece of coal or chalk, with which he scrawls landscapes and figures over all the doors, walls, and tables, to the great annoyance of his order-loving mother, and of the house-maid, whose wet napkin has no sort of respect for the production of this juvenile Sir Joshua. In a moment the effusions of his genius are effaced forever; but in vain does his mother scold, and in vain the house-maid scrub; he sets to work again with unabated ardour, and in defiance of these enemies of art, in a few hours the walls, doors, and tables, are as fully decorated as before.

But I must not omit the portrait of the aforementioned aunt, who, though not an inmate of the family, exercises over it no inconsiderable authority. From her likeness to Sempronius she must certainly be his sister, though evidently some years older: she is tall, thin, pale, and then such a nose and chin! She is almost a daily guest, and Sempronius never suffers himself to indulge his ill-humours in her society. Sempronius is a shrewd long-headed man, and minds the main chance; from the respect which he pays her I conclude that the old lady is in good circumstances, her own mistress, without children, and that her brother flatters himself that either he or his offspring will hold no contemptible place in her will. Nay, I am not only persuaded that she has no children, but that the venerable lady is still a votary of Diana, which conclusion I draw, not only from observations made on her person and manners, but from the extreme love and intimacy which prevails between her and a large tortoise-shell cat, which generally lies basking before Cordelia's fire.

This good lady (what shall we call her? Her brother's name is Sempronius—"Amandus he; Amanda she"—So says Sterne—Sempronia be her name then)—Sempronia then seems much attached to her brother, but Cordelia is evidently no favourite with her. She treats her with such cold and formal politeness. She so often bites her thin lips as if desirous of repressing a scornful sneer, and which she takes good care not to repress. If she opens one of the volumes placed on Cordelia's table, she never fails to slap it down hastily, with such a shrug of the shoulders and such a shake of the head, and then such a turning up of the whites of her eyes to heaven. From the latter circumstance I am tempted to believe that the good lady has been a little bit by the Methodists. However, Cordelia considers it as beneath her to take notice of these little pieces of

impertinence, and only answers the sneer of contempt with which her sister-in-law occasionally favours her by a smile of the sweetest gentleness and most heavenly forbearance. As to Edward, he and his aunt are at open enmity: three minutes of conversation with her are generally sufficient to make him throw out fire and flames; then he flies out of the room, and up go the whites of her eyes more piteously than ever.

But undoubtedly her greatest favourite in the family, I mean the greatest upon two legs, is little Willy; he holds the very next place in her good graces to the tortoise-shell cat. Of this the young rogue seems conscious; and proud of enjoying that sunshine which is bestowed upon so few, he never fails to welcome her arrival by a voluntary offering of his rosy lips, and sports and frisks about her armchair as merrily and as wantonly as a butterfly flutters about a honey-pot; I warrant me the good lady is seldom unprovided with a box full of sugar-plums.

Such are the persons who compose this family, and such is the knowledge which I have obtained of them during a daily observation of several months. But lately some circumstances have occurred which have excited my curiosity respecting their concerns more than usual. I have fortunately succeeded in communicating this curiosity to my uncle's bosom; he has consented to be my amanuensis; and to-morrow (he provided with plenty of ink, pens, and paper, and myself furnished with my aforesaid pocket-telescope), it is our intention to commence an exact and systematic account of everything which passes in the house of his opposite neighbour. I am to report, and he is to register.

Having completed this introduction which was necessary to make my readers acquainted with our *dramatis personæ*, I shall proceed to my employment—Hark!—the clock strikes ten—that is the hour at which Sempronius regularly makes his appearance at Cordelia's break-fast table, and I hasten to put myself at—My Uncle's Garret Window.

*Tuesday, May 5th, 4 o'clock.*

Your new appointment of secretary, my dear uncle, is likely to be a sinecure for to-day. Cordelia and her boy are just gone into the country, and mean to pass some days there; for I saw her maid pack up two dean muslin dresses and four shifts in the chaise seat. Sempronius and his eldest son dine out: I saw the former show Edward the card of invitation, and by his pointing out a particular part of it, I conclude that he was bidding him observe the dinner-hour, and take care to be ready in time; for punctuality is not among the number of Edward's good qualities. However, he will not be late to-day, for he is dressing at this moment. A hackney-coach stops at the door. Sempronius and Edward are both gone, so you may lay down your pen, my dear uncle!

*Wednesday, 5 o'clock.*

To-day promises to be as barren as yesterday. Sempronius has finished a solitary meal in his own study, and is now making a tooth-pick. It seems he is not very skilful, for he has already spoiled two quills, and now in a pet he throws the splinters of the third to one side of the room, and the penknife to the other. Deuce take the peevish old fellow! I protest his ill—temper almost makes me lose mine. I'll step upstairs and see what Edward is about.

I might as well have stayed where I was; Edward is not at home. Look! look! the study door opens; now then we shall have something interesting, p'shaw! it's only the maiden aunt, but this is not her usual time for visiting us and bless my heart! what a fuss the old woman seems to be in! She opens the door which communicates with Cordelia's drawing-room, and looks round to see whether the coast is clear. I protest I can as little tell what to make of her mysterious proceedings as her brother, who sits there with his mouth open, his eyes staring, his brows drawn

together, his hands resting on his knees, and his whole body bending forwards. He is mightily puzzled!

But now we shall get a little insight into the business. The virgin has seated herself close at his elbow, and with her nose almost running into his ear (I am sure I pity him, poor man! I should so much dislike myself to have the old cat thus near me!) she opens all the sluices of her eloquence, while her arms assist her speech with all the powers of gesticulation.

Now what can she be chattering about? Something of consequence, that is certain, and of no pleasant import, that is equally sure; for Sempronius grows darker with every syllable, there! he was on the point of jumping up in a rage, but his tormentor grasped him by the arm, and forcing him into his chair again, insisted upon being heard to the end; still do the symptoms of repressed passion grow stronger and stronger. Now then, ay! now the lava overflows! the man is absolutely terrific when he is really incensed, till now I had only seen him play the Jupiter Tonans, when little domestic contrarieties had occurred to put him out of his way; but his anger was merely a gentle breeze compared to his present emotions. His mind is now agitated by a tempest, a tornado, a sirocco, burning and pestilential! I never saw a man in such a passion before. Bless my soul! bless my soul! what can the old cat have been telling him?

All of a sudden he leaves off prancing about the room, stalks up to his sister's chair, looks her full in the face; an appeal to her conscience, no doubt; a solemn inquiry whether all that she has been saying is not a falsehood of her own invention; the aunt is highly offended at the question, she rises with great dignity from her seat, she stretches out her yellow arm and is going to call heaven to witness that—no; no; she points to the door leading to the staircase, and a contemptuous sneer which accompanies the action assures me that she tells Sempronius that there lies the way by which he may remove all doubts. I am right. Sempronius bounces to the door, in his impatience he cannot turn the lock; he kicks the door violently, and at length it gives way; he beckons his sister and disappears. A prayer-book has almost forced itself out of her pocket; she stops to push it back again, and then follows her brother, with her hands placed orderly before her and the composure of a saint! Good soul! Bless my heart! what mischief can she be about! it is growing dusky; I declare I have a great mind to run down into the street, and watch for their coming out; then by dodging them unobserved, who knows but I may discover at last—stop! stop! I may spare myself the trouble, as I hope to live and breathe, the amiable pair are at this very moment in Edward's chamber.

Sempronius stands before his son's writing-desk; it is fastened, but that matters little; the father has forced the lock, open flies every drawer, out flies every paper, surely no deficiency in the counting-house, no suspicious entries in his books, oh! no: I have been too long intimate with Edward, and know his character and heart too well; such a thing is quite impossible; besides Sempronius finds a purse half full and throws it aside with an air of indifference; ha! ha! now I understand him! He examines the secretaire, he suspects that there is a private drawer, yes; what he wishes to discover (ah! I could tell him where to find them!) are precisely those very things which Edward is most anxious to hide from everyone. No eye has ever been suffered to see them but his own and mine; these are what Sempronius wishes to find. Mercy upon me! He has found them, the secret spring has given way; the drawer is open! And what does it contain? First comes a thick packet of letters, carefully tied together with a riband, colour sky-blue. (Have you written it down, my dear uncle? Very well!) Secondly, a nosegay, but so faded, that I cannot even guess at the flowers! Thirdly, upon my honour, nothing less than a miniature in a shagreen case! Sempronius shakes his head, and shows it to his sister; it is plain that he has never seen the original. His sister scarcely look at it, but shrugs up her shoulders: it is equally plain that she has

never seen the original either, and that the object of Edward's attachment as yet is only conjectured. Yet Sempronius does not seem the least displeased, for down goes the miniature on the floor, and away flies the poor skeleton of a nosegay out of the window. Alas! alas, for Edward, the ill-natured aunt has certainly discovered what I flattered myself was a secret only known to himself and to me; and she is now determined to take ample revenge on him for having occasionally dared to be of one opinion when she was of another.

While Sempronius is busied with the secretary, the antiquated dragon of virtue is by no means idle, she has been tossing over Edward's wardrobe for the careless youth had left the key in the lock. Her brother is now reading the letters one after another; however, their contents seem by no means to his taste, for he seldom gets through more than half a dozen lines before the paper bestrews the floor with a thousand pieces; yet still he proceeds to inspect the next. Hold! hold! Sempronia interrupts him! she has found a prize! but I cannot see anything in it which should give her so much joy; it seems to me nothing more than a plain white dimity waistcoat, which was hanging upon the arm of a chair, unconscious of harm and meditating no treason. Ha! but the aunt has discovered an inner pocket on the left side, exactly on the place against which the heart must beat. From this Sempronia now draws forth with a look of triumph a riband ornamented with embroidery in silver. Well! I protest, I can still see no harm in the riband—Sempronius, however, is not of the same opinion, for down go the remaining letters on the floor, while he seizes the riband and examines it closely. Ha! now I comprehend! the letters were not signed; there was a doubt respecting the writer; but on the riband, the name of the giver was embroidered; though whether at length, or only the initials, I will not pretend to say; however, either has answered Miss Grimalkin's purpose, for she draws up her scraggy neck half a yard higher; while her brother's face looks like a volcano, all black and fiery, and away fly the riband and the waistcoat through the window into the Street.

They fall exactly upon the head of a passenger, who, quite surprised at this unexpected salutation, stops and disengaging his head from the waistcoat, picks up the riband whose glittering ornaments—may I never speak again, if it is not Edward himself!—he recognizes the precious pledge of affection: but thrown into the street! He makes but one spring to the door—ring, ring, ring goes the bell, an old grey-headed footman opens the door, Edward rushes in, the door closes. I see that Sempronius and his amiable sister have heard the bell ring violently but before they had time to conjecture the cause, Edward stands before them breathless with speed and anxiety, his cheeks burning, his eyes starting, his mouth open, and the important riband still fluttering in his hand; his spaniel too has recognised his master's property, and has dragged the white dimity waistcoat upstairs in his mouth. Edward has got no further than the door; there he stands like a statue, as if petrified by the sight of the two arch-foes of his love, while the fragments of the letters strewn on the floor leave him no doubt, that the repository of his dearest secret has been violated.

“Walk in, young gentleman, pray, walk in, we shall be very glad of your company!” cries the father; not that I hear a syllable, but nothing can be more expressive of sarcastic politeness than the frequent bowing of his head, and the waving his hand backwards and forwards, while his lips quiver and his eyes flame. And now he points to the miniature as a proof, which puts the case out of doubt. And how does Edward look? like some miserable sinner, surprised *in flagrante*? not he, truly; the first thing he does is to seize the mis-used picture, and press it to his heart, as if anxious to make atonement for its having been treated so unworthily; and now he advances towards his father slowly but firmly, and with humility but not meanness, takes his hand, and raises it affectionately to his lips. Now if I were Sempronius this submissive action would go a

great way towards softening my heart: I should find it very difficult to remain quite as angry as I intended. But whether he is himself conscious of this effect, and is afraid of giving way to his own weakness, or whether he is ashamed of yielding so soon, and before a witness who would not fail to upbraid him for his folly, whatever be the cause, it is certain, that Edward's humility has not produced the desired effect: on the contrary Sempronius seems to be more incensed than before; and repulsing his son with violence, the sudden movement makes him strike his hand against the lips, 'which were in the act of kissing it. Edward starts back hastily and covers his mouth with his handkerchief; but he endeavours in vain to conceal the blood which gushes from his bruised lips: the cambric is dyed with crimson. This sight rouses even old Grimalkin's sensibility; she looks alarmed and places herself between them, while she grasps her brother by the arm.

And now instead of being Sempronius, if I were Edward, I would stand boldly on the consciousness of my good intentions, and collecting the whole firmness of my character, I would tell the choleric old man, "And yet, in spite of this ill-usage, I still kiss in spirit, with sincere affection, the hand which repulses me so unkindly. Yes, I avow it! and my only fault is that I did not avow it sooner, a virtuous maiden possesses my whole heart. I love her and shall love her while I live! Here is her portrait; but it is painted here"—and then I'd point to my heart—"in colours never to be effaced. Perhaps you will disapprove of my attachment at first; but only become acquainted with her merits, and I am certain of obtaining your consent. Nay, I should be certain of it even at this moment, if, instead of tearing her letters, you could but have had patience to read them through."

Now I'd wager my pocket telescope, which at this moment is invaluable, against the old goosequill with which you are writing, my dear uncle, that as soon as the blood would permit him to speak, Edward said these very words, or at least something very like them. He showed the miniature, he pointed to his heart, and afterwards to the letters, he clasped his hands together, and raised his eyes to heaven with a look of such enthusiasm, while attesting the perfections of his mistress. Upon my word, I did not give the hot-headed youth credit for so much temper and good sense.

Sempronius exercises his only talent: he fumes and storms, and stalks about the room, and curses and swears, and calls heaven and hell to witness: while the good lady sister, having completed her benevolent work, sits by the window and looks into the street, quite unconcerned, and as if she had nothing at all to do with the business.

So much the better; now that her venomous tongue is at rest, the storm begins to slacken. Sempronius walks backwards and forwards in silence for some minutes. Now he stands still, and leans against the wall with his forefinger extended upon his cheek, as if buried in profound thought; he has come to a decision; he advances towards his son, and—Heaven be thanked! then paternal affection still lives in his bosom, for of his own accord he offers his hand to Edward. Edward springs forward eagerly to grasp it. But hold! Sempronius draws it back, and the forefinger of it repeatedly moving upwards and downwards assures me that he is laying down the conditions upon which Edward may be restored again to favour.

Edward starts back; he stands motionless: his eye burns; he seems to struggle against his feelings: if Sempronius were not his father, I should expect to see the youth turn his back upon him with contempt. In short, he looks to me exactly as if the terms of peace just proposed had been "an absolute renunciation of the maiden in question, and for ever!"

I am certainly right, for at length Edward has recovered the power of speech. He places one hand upon his heart; he raises the other to heaven with an air of the most determined resolution;

and with every word which he utters his courage and his enthusiasm appear to increase. But he is not suffered to speak long. The tempest again rages; Sempronius interrupts his son with a fresh burst of thunder, and now that the fire is rekindled, the rattlesnake- in petticoats takes care to throw in a word or two as she looks over her shoulder towards the disputants, and kindly prevents the flame from being extinguished a second time.

The Lord be praised! this embarrassing scene at length is concluded. Sempronius's passion on a sudden gives place to the most frozen composure: he spreads his arms out widely, and with a shrug of the shoulders and a slight inclination of the head, he pronounces a single decisive sentence, and quits the room. Edward turns pale; he looks as if he could scarcely credit his hearing, and remains like one thunderstruck. Can you possibly guess, my dear uncle, what it was that Sempronius said at parting, and which produced so strong an effect? For my own part, I am completely puzzled.

The aunt, however, does not think proper to make her retreat at present. No, she is preparing to give her nephew a long lecture; for she turns her chair round, clears her throat in her pocket-handkerchief, smooths her petticoats, and takes a pinch of snuff. Now then, she begins.

She might spare her breath, for Edward does not hear a syllable: he seems totally absorbed in his own gloomy reflections. The virgin might have talked on till doomsday uninterrupted by him, if she had not unadvisedly taken into her head to pick up the fragments of one of the letters, which accident had thrown at her feet; and now as proof of the facts advanced in her discourse, she proceeds to read the letter aloud with a sneering look and theatrical action. The well-known words give Edward the alarm; he awakens from his lethargy. This unwarrantable intrusion into the secrets of his heart, this scornful treatment both of his mistress and himself, at once restores his presence of mind. He springs forward, snatches the paper from her hands, and throwing his arms around her, bears her swiftly but without roughness, to the landing-place. She evidently resists; her open mouth assures me that she protests loudly against this involuntary exit: but she is already on the wrong side of the threshold. Edward closes and bolts the door, and my eyes behold no longer this model of feminine perfection.

My grief for this loss, however, is but of short duration; she bounces into her brother's study, and renews her attacks upon him with increased zeal. Sempronius has seated himself at his writing-desk; he has written two notes, and in one of them (which was very short) he now encloses a parcel of bank-bills; he rings the bell and sends the old grey-headed servant out with the other. The aunt continues talking without repose, but she gets no answer. Sempronius walks up and down the room, silent, and gloomy, and without attending to her; he seems impatient for the messenger's return.

The domestic is come back—he receives the other note with its enclosure, and retires a second time; but in a minute after I see Edward undraw the bolt of his door, and the servant enters; probably, the good old man guesses the contents of the note, for while he delivers it, he turns away his head, and the back of his hand passing over his eyes, rapidly appears to be wiping away tears.

The unfortunate lover receives the note with a firm countenance; but his resolution only lasts till he has perused the contents; the letter falls from his trembling hand; his arms drop powerless by his side; he rests his head against the frame of the window: he seems totally absorbed in the bitterness of his sensations.

The old domestic opens a closet-door, and draws forth a moderate sized trunk: undesired, he proceeds to pack up the contents of a ward-robe, and of a chest of drawers. Alas! alas! poor Edward! now then I know the decision of your unyielding father. The punishment pronounced

upon you for possessing a feeling heart, eyes for beauty and sympathy for worth, is nothing less than banishment from your paternal mansion.

The trunk is packed and corded, and now with a countenance expressive of the deepest melancholy the old man offers Edward the key. Edward sees him not, hears him not, heeds him not, till he feels his right hand moistened with tears—he starts from his lethargy—he looks down—the venerable servant kneels at his feet; he has clasped the hand of his young master in both of his and presses his lips upon it. Edward compels him to rise and shakes the old man by the hand heartily and kindly—he takes the parcel of notes from the floor, and selecting one, gives it to his old attendant; but the servant looks at it with a melancholy smile, shakes his head, lays it upon the writing-desk, and hiding his eyes with his hands, he quits the apartment.

Edward now proceeds to examine his papers. Some of them are fastened together again with the aforementioned blue riband, and deposited in his bosom—with the rest he fills his pockets indiscriminately; the bank-notes are placed in a small red-morocco case, and confided to his waistcoat—the spaniel frisks around the table, and every now and then I hear him bark joyously: probably he is aware that his master prepares to go out, and for his part, he is quite ready to be of the party. But his gaiety makes a singular contrast with his master's melancholy.

Hark!—a post-chaise comes rattling up the street!—it stops before Sempronius's house—the door is already open: the postilion dismounts; he and the old servant are now in Edward's room, and carry out the trunk between them!—What, then, my poor friend Edward, am I quite to lose you?—Will your severe father not even suffer you to breathe the same air with him?—Now, by my soul, my heart bleeds for you!

The trunk is tied on—the postilion is on his horse—the chaise-step is let down—the old servant appears again in Edward's room—Edward starts up and follows him, evidently making a violent effort to tear himself away; but when he reaches the door, he stops, and turns to take a melancholy farewell-look of that chamber, which perhaps he has inhabited even from his earliest years, where he has passed so many happy and so many bitter hours, where he has so often smiled and so often wept, which he now quits, and probably for ever!—He draws his hat down over his eyes, and as he passes the threshold I can see his knees tremble!—Alas, poor youth! with a broken heart do you quit your father's dwelling; it seems, that even to say farewell to your stern judge is forbidden you!—oh! suffer with patience; suffer with firmness; preserve your good heart pure from every too bitter reflection upon him, who harsh as he is, is still your parent. He has ceased to act as a father, but never forget that you are a son.

I am too much grieved by Edward's departure to attend with any patience to the amiable pair in the study below; they may do what they please, for I will not honour them at present with my attention. Therefore, my dear uncle, you may lay down your pen for to-day; into the bargain, in half an hour now it will be too dark for me to—

Sit down again! sit down again, my dear uncle! Edward is not yet gone! At this moment he stands before his mother's picture, which (as I told you formerly) hangs over the sofa in Cordelia's sitting-room—his eyes are rooted upon those beloved features—“Ah! mother!” methinks I hear him say, “it is well for you that you sleep in the grave! It is well that you are not here to see your only son banished from the house and heart of his father, and to kiss away these tears which you would surely mingle with your own! Perhaps, were you still alive, all this would not happen; perhaps you would fold your arms round the son, who to-day is thrown out upon the wide world without shelter, and then, when my father heard the prayers of an agonized mother pleading for her only child—oh! were you but alive, my mother—were not your place now filled by a stranger!”

No, no! these last sentences Edward did not say—I wrong his justice; he is not so ungrateful for all Cordelia's kindness; for, see, he fastens the silver-embroidered riband round an alabaster vase, which stands on Cordelia's chimney-piece; doubtless he wishes to convince his stepmother that he thought of her at parting, and has bequeathed her this precious gift of love as a silent memorial of his undiminished friendship—oh! she will certainly find your legacy, poor Edward, and her own feeling heart will interpret to her the intentions and the sentiments of yours; she will often think of you while absent, will labour incessantly to effect your return; and while Cordelia remains there, you will not be quite forgotten within the dwelling of your father.

Again he turns to his mother's picture, near it hangs a small sketch of it in Indian ink, the production of Willy's all-imitating pencil; it is drawn upon a sheet of letter-paper, and fastened against the wall with a pin, thus (with the true vanity of a youthful artist) boldly challenging a comparison with the original. There are a thousand defects in the drawing; but even from hence I can see that he has succeeded in catching the resemblance. Edward eagerly snatches the paper from its place, and then having pressed his lips with pious enthusiasm upon the frame of the picture, he hastens from the apartment as abruptly as if he dreaded lest his father should appear, and deprive him of his newly found treasure.

Edward is in the chaise—the post-boy flourishes his whip—Edward is gone!

*Friday morning.*

I have nicked the very moment: Cordelia's chaise stands before the door, and the old servant and the maid are busy in taking out the seat, and several parcels. The drawing-room door opens and gay as a lark little Willy comes jumping into the chamber. His mother then cannot be far off. He carries a roll of paper under his arm, as black and smoky as if it were a manuscript dug out of the ruins of Herculaneum; he unrolls it and holds up the contents to admire their reflection in the looking-glass. Now I understand what makes the boy seem so proud and happy: at the house where he has been visiting he discovered two old coloured prints, one representing a battle, and the other a hunting-match, and his good-natured host has gratified the future Raphael by making him a present of them both. Well, Willy, this is a treasure indeed!

But see! his mother makes her appearance—the old domestic follows her. Ah! then she has already heard of Edward's banishment; I could swear it by her pale countenance and dejected air. Without taking off her pelisse, she walks slowly towards the sofa, seats herself upon it, and leaning her arm upon the table and her cheek against her hand, she seems buried in thoughts evidently of no pleasant nature—she now addresses a few short questions to the servant; his answers are equally brief—he is dismissed and Willy is ordered to accompany him.

Cordelia is now alone—she sits with her hands clasped, her eyes fixed upon the carpet. Now she raises them to heaven as if she uttered a mental prayer, and then wipes away a tear. Ah! her husband has long accustomed her to the expression of this silent grief—she rises, and paces up and down the chamber with an absent look; now her eye rests upon the flower vase, round which the embroidered riband is fastened!—she stops—she seems to be endeavouring to recollect where she had seen it before—she unties it, and while she reads the silver characters, a melancholy smile plays on her pale cheek, and she shakes her head dejectedly. Now she unlocks a small japanned cabinet, in which she is accustomed to keep her most valuable ornaments, and in one of the drawers of which she deposits the embroidered riband— now suddenly she closes the cabinet, locks it, and conceals the key in her pocket.

The door opens—Sempronius enters. Oh! then she had heard him coming upstairs. He has a pen stuck behind his ear, and probably is just come out of his counting-house (I suppose that it is in the back part of the house) to welcome his wife on her return home. The visit, however, does

not seem to be quite in his taste; he looks like a schoolboy who has committed some fault and expects to be scolded by his tutor. The first compliments are over, and the interview becomes quite comical; he evidently does not well know how to begin the relation of what has occurred during her absence, and she for her part does not seem at all inclined to give him the least assistance. They are both silent; he hums and haws, and scrapes the carpet with his feet; and sits by no means comfortably upon his chair. Bravo! how unusually polite the man is grown! he insists upon helping Cordelia to take off her pelisse, the pelisse is folded up, and yet the conversation does not get on; Sempronius walks to the window, and draws one of the Venetian blinds up. Thank you, good sir! it was very much in my way, but now I can see what you are about much better; he picks up a knitting needle, which had fallen on the floor; he looks out of window, and beats time against the frame with his fingers; now he walks to the fireplace, and sets his watch by a small chamber-clock which stands upon the mantelpiece: the clock is out of order, and has not gone for nine days to my certain knowledge.

But Cordelia, whose gentle heart cannot bear to see any human being suffer, however deservedly, now relieves him from his painful embarrassment. She rises from the sofa, with a look at once expressing the most friendly interest and the most dignified reproach, she clasps the hand of her husband, she leads him back to the sofa, and places him before the portrait of his deceased wife; there is something so noble, so exalted in her look and attitude, that she appears to me like a superior being! how clearly does her countenance express that she says at this moment to her husband, "Could yonder lips now say to you, 'Thou harsh father, where is my son?'—to such a question, what answer could you make?"

He fixes his eyes on the ground; he dares not look upon the face either of the inanimate mother of his child, or of her living representative.

And now the excellent woman implores him not to be cruel to his son and to himself, while she gives unrestricted course to her tears, and while she endeavours to awaken his feelings by caresses, which express the most heartfelt interest and goodwill, and can Sempronius resist her entreaties?

No, no! it would have been impossible, if he were not already so very much in the wrong; he feels that to give way at all, would now be to confess that in the whole affair his harshness had been inexcusable; false shame prevents his retracting the sentence which he ought never to have pronounced. Unless Edward were declared to be an undutiful son, he should be tacitly proved to be himself the most unnatural of fathers. He therefore wilfully hardens his heart and blinds his judgment, in order to escape from the conviction of his error, and he now begins a, long and animated narrative of all that has passed. Oh! how I wish that I were at his elbow in order that I might set him right occasionally in point of historical fact, if it were only for the love that I bear his good lady sister, who, if I had the management of the brush, should not be painted in this family picture in colours too flattering.

Sempronius's narrative has not produced the desired effect upon his wife, but at least he has contrived to talk himself once more into a persuasion that everything which he has done has been perfectly proper. It was visible how his importance and self-satisfaction increased with every succeeding period, for the longer he talked, the redder grew his face and the more violent his action; at first his only object was to conceal, under an appearance of resentment, how much Cordelia's representations had effected him; but he has succeeded in working himself up into a real fury, which has now got such complete possession of his mind as even to make him unjust towards Cordelia. Her tears which stream afresh—the sudden glow which flushes her pale cheeks—the look of mild reproach, which she casts upon her accuser, and which declares herself

fully justified before the tribunal of her conscience—all these circumstances can have no reference, except to some severe reproof which Sempronius, in the violence of his passion, has just pronounced against his admirable wife. Perhaps he accuses her of countenancing his son in his disobedience, perhaps she has been long the confidante of Edward's love affair, perhaps she is acquainted with the maiden in question, and it was through her means that her stepson first formed an acquaintance which, according to Sempronius's view of the business, threatens to overturn that prosperity and respectability which he has been labouring all his life to establish. Whatever be the fault laid to Cordelia's charge, at least her husband ceases to reproach her with it for the present. The church clock strikes—I suppose that it reminds him that it is time for him to go to the Exchange, for he quits the room abruptly, and bangs the door after him with such violence that he makes all the windows rattle. Business also calls me away myself, therefore farewell, my dear uncle, till after dinner.

*Friday afternoon.*

Sempronius dines at four; the meal to-day has been unusually short. It is not yet five and Sempronius has already shut himself up alone in his study, a certain sign that he is still out of temper. Ah! Cordelia is never out of temper. With a resigned melancholy air she is seated at her pianoforte. A small upright book is open before her; to judge by its dark-blue cover, and by the small proportion which the music bears to the words printed at the bottom, I suspect that she is singing something out of the Edinburgh edition of *Scotch Melodies*; probably some plaintive air, which accords with the present disposition of her thoughts. At least the slow movement of her fingers, the expression of her countenance, and her head reclining a little (but only a little) towards her left shoulder, convince me that she must be playing an adagio.

A girl enters with a band-box. Surely I have seen her face before. Oh! now I recollect her; she carries out parcels for the milliner, who lives a few doors further down the street. She opens her band-box; but Cordelia shakes her head. It seems that she wants nothing of that kind at present; but, when refused in so gentle a manner, why should the girl look so frightened? She casts a look of apprehension round her.

Hey-day! she has suddenly snatched a letter out of her bandbox, thrown it into Cordelia's lap, and now she runs downstairs ready to break her neck. The ambadress must know but little of Cordelia, if she supposes that she will receive a letter, which reaches her by so mysterious a conveyance. Accordingly she has already quitted the pianoforte in pursuit of the fugitive—the letter has fallen on the ground, and . . . but softly! she stops suddenly with her hand resting upon the lock of the door. The letter which now lies on the carpet has caught her eye; she certainly must have recognised some well-known handwriting.

She has!—she springs towards the letter, seizes it eagerly, and conceals it in her bosom, while a deep crimson overspreads her face. She now opens the other door opposite to that by which the milliner left her; probably it leads to her bed-chamber, which is in the back part of the house; the door closes, and I see Cordelia no longer.

What can be the meaning of all this? Surely I know Cordelia too well to . . . Is it possible that I should have formed an erroneous opinion of her character and principles? Nay, if I find myself d'ceived here in my notions of female virtue, I will never look for it elsewhere.

Ha! I begin to fear that the mystery will be unravelled in the most disagreeable manner. The staircase door is thrown open, and Sempronia makes her appearance, and hands into the room (not very gently or politely, I must confess) the milliner's apprentice! The venerable virgin seems to be in a great heat! what has happened? I suppose she met the girl on the stairs; and if she was hurrying down them as quick as she bolted out of the drawing-room, no wonder if she

excited suspicion in the fair bosom of Miss Grimalkin, who, I warrant, has brought her back, in order that she might examine her quite at her ease.

The examination is not a very quiet one. Our dearly beloved aunt is somewhat more violent than becomes a grand inquisitor; and the sup-posed culprit does not seem to want for spirit. Now they both talk together. If I were not so intimately acquainted with the affairs of thi-3 family, I should think that Sempronius had imported two fish-wives from Billingsgate.

The music of these two nightingales has attracted the notice of the master of the house, and he leaves his study to enjoy it more distinctly. He inquires the cause of all this uproar; but the ladies talk on without listening to him. Sempronia examines the band-box; the milliner with sarcastic politeness turns out the contents of her pockets, and begs the virgin to convince herself that there is nothing concealed in her thimble and a silver nutmeg grater. Now the storm rages more violently than ever, till Sempronius bursts out like a clap of thunder, and terrifies them both into silence. He menaces the girl with his finger. He points down the street. Ay, I suppose he threatens her with a complaint to her mistress, for she begins to look uneasy, keeps edging away towards the door, and at last appears to have considerable satisfaction in being permitted to make her escape in a whole skin. Sempronia, however, seems more martially inclined than ever since the retreat of the enemy. She proceeds to harangue with the most violent action, heedless of her brother's impatience, while he walks up and down the room, but in a sudden he stands still, and stares her full in the face, while his countenance expresses the greatest dismay and astonishment. Some important word has escaped her, which evidently has touched the master—string of his whole united sensibilities. She, too, seems considerably embarrassed at the hardy assertion which has just fallen from her. She is silent; but now she makes up her mind. She strikes her right hand closed against the open palm of her left with a look of diabolical determination, and then seizing her brother's arm, draws him back again into his study, and shuts the door.

The secret which she is now disclosing is clearly no trifle. How uneasy, how gloomy seems Sempronius! Now he starts from his chair, opens the door leading to the drawing-room, looks in to ascertain that nobody is there, then enters, and motions to his sister to follow him; the sweet creature does not require to be told twice. They approach Cordelia's writing-desk; it is unlocked—now shame upon him! He is examining the pens to see whether they have been used lately; while his worthy sister inspects the inkstand in hope of discovering some fallen drops upon the brink of it, and feels whether there is any remaining warmth to be perceived in the sealing-wax.

They have made no discoveries, and are now returning to the study. Sempronius, however, comes back to the writing-table, and counts the sheets of paper, in order that, if his wife should carry on any correspondence unknown to him, the deficiency of a sheet may apprize him of the fact. Ah! my worthy friend, how richly do you deserve the fate of which you are so apprehensive.

I am tired of this *tête-à-tête*. Is nothing to be discovered in the other apartments? Stay, did I tell you, my dear uncle, that there is an old lumber-room which joins Edwards forsaken bed-chamber? As nobody ever enters this place, except to store away empty boxes or useless furniture, Willy is here secure from interruption, and has accordingly selected it for his painting-room. Here he passes hour after hour in scratching and daubing; and here he is established at this very moment. The two coloured prints are stretched against the wall, and he often suspends his work to gaze in admiration upon the gorgeous assemblage of reds, and blues, and greens, and yellows; an assemblage, however, which he is unable to rival in his present performance; for he has emptied all his shells of paint, and has no better resource than the inkstand.

The work is complete. He seems to be mightily pleased with it. He opens the window and holds the piece of paper out of it, waving it backwards and forwards, in order that the ink, which he has not spared, may dry in the open air the sooner. If he would but turn himself ever so little more to the right, I should be able to favour him with my opinion of his performance. That will do, my little friend. Upon my word, very clever. I never saw a more striking resemblance! 'Tis the aunt's profile, and as ugly as life. There is no mistaking it; not a wrinkle about the corners of her little fiery eyes is omitted; the twist of her nose is hit off to a nicety, and the falling in of her toothless mouth (though perhaps rather overdone) is excellently preserved; nay, he has not forgotten even the great wart with which her chin is decorated. To be sure it is not a flattering one, but the portrait is the very counterpart of nature in all her undisguised deformity. But what can have induced the young rogue to employ his pencil, or rather his pen, on such an unpromising subject? This is the first caricature that I ever saw him attempt; and if it should fall into the hands of the original, I am afraid that the painter's reward would by no means be of the most satisfactory nature.

He still stands before the window, and seems to be holding forth to himself. He uses a great deal of stiff action, as if he was repeating a speech out of a play. He stops, and appears embarrassed. Now he takes a book from the table, looks into it, sets it upright and open against the window, and proceeds again in his recitation with renewed spirit. I think I can make out a G and an F. Stay, oh, I see—*Gay's Fables*. Every now and then he stops, and looks anxiously up the Street; 'tis by that way that his aunt always comes and this is about the time that she usually pays her evening visit.

I have it, I have it; he has some favour to ask of his aunt and hopes to bribe her to grant it by repeating a newly-acquired fable of Gay, and by showing her that he has passed the time of her absence in retracing her beloved resemblance. Oh, poor Willy, I fear that if such is your intention, your portrait will be thought much too like to be pleasing. It seems, by his looking so often into the street, he is not aware that Sempronia has been in the house above this half-hour.

He begins to suspect it, for he puts his drawing into his pocket, gives a parting look to his tawdry prints, takes up the box containing the empty colour-shells, and away he goes. The empty colour-shells? There, then, we have the key of the whole mystery. He is ambitious of making a picture all red and yellow, like his favourite prints; but his colour-shells must first be replenished, and this, then, is the favour, to obtain which he has given himself so much trouble.

Cordelia has just returned to the drawing-room. She is already gone again. She only looked at a card which was stuck over the mantelpiece, took a key from a bunch which was in the drawer of her writing-table and immediately left the room with it.

Willy has entered the drawing-room. He has heard his aunt's voice in the adjoining closet, for he advances towards it. Probably the time is not encouraging, for he hesitates, and opens the door softly, and by degrees, in order to reconnoitre the field of action, before he commences the attack. Sempronius looks as black as a live lobster, and his sister as red as a boiled one. Willy seems not to admire the appearance of either, and draws his little curly head back again; but his aunt is already aware of the young spy's vicinity, and before he can effect a retreat she has taken him into custody. Now, then, placing him between her knees, and compelling him to look her full in the face (how can she be so barbarous?) she insists upon his making an exact confession. Perhaps she suspects that his mother had sent him to overhear what she was saying to Sempronius.

The poor child weeps, and protests his innocence. Now she loses all patience, and drags him by the arm to the window, which she opens. What! is she threatening to throw him out of it, unless

he instantly confesses himself guilty? No, no, not so bad as that; she is only going to bring forward a proof of the truth of her charge so convincing that there can be no denying it. She points to the story above; she holds a sheet of paper out of the window, and waves it, just as Willy did the portrait. She saw him then, and probably thought that he was making signs to somebody in the street. Did she take the paper for a letter? Perhaps, too, for one written by his mother. Was there ever such a lynx in petticoats? I am half afraid that her keen eyes will discover me with my telescope at the Garret Window, and then I shall be suspected to be the lover in this romance. Fortunately, this business can be easily explained. Don't be so frightened, my little friend, you need only put your hand in your left pocket, and your deceiver will be confounded.

And that is exactly what he does. With trembling hands he draws forth the last production of his genius. She opens it eagerly; nay, there is certainly no mistaking the subject; and now, Willy, now!—there's a glorious subject for your pencil! Le Brun's *Passions* exhibit nothing to be compared with it. Unluckily she does not allow him time to study her. To tear the paper into a thousand pieces—to apply so hearty a slap on his cheek as left five white marks behind it—seize him by the arm, and turn him out of the room, slapping the door in his face—was the work of but a single minute. The unfortunate little artist retires sobbing, to mourn over the annihilation of all his air-built castles.

The closet-conference, too, is at an end. Our beloved aunt has done all the mischief in her power, sees no prospect of doing more at present, and therefore takes her departure quite satisfied with herself.

I assure you, my dear uncle, I do not like the look of this business at all. Cordelia went out just as the postman was going through the street; she sent the old footman back for something, and seized the moment of his absence to give a letter into the postman's care; there was a hurry in her manner of giving it, and she coloured so suddenly and so deeply, that I am certain there was some mystery in the business. In all probability this letter was an answer to that which she received from the milliner. I begin to grow very uneasy; it is at least certain that Cordelia carries on a correspondence, unknown to her husband, with some person in London, for it was not the general post by which the letter was forwarded.

Sempronius is still alone in his own room; he seems in a brown study; sometimes he walks up and down the chamber rubbing his forehead with his hand thoughtfully; sometimes he beats the devil's tattoo, sitting in his elbow-chair. At this moment he is playing upon the table with his fingers, but evidently without attending to what he is about.

Hark! a knock at his door! What! Sempronia returned so soon? It is very unusual for her to make two visits in one evening. What an air of triumph she wears! She must have done some notable mischief, she looks so happy. She puts me in mind at this moment of her prototype, Milton's Serpent—

—Hope elevates, and joy  
Brightens her crest.—

The door opens; she goes in, but her companion remains in the street. Surely I have seen that fellow's face before; as I hope to live, the very postman to whom Cordelia confided her letter? He is trying a piece of money with his teeth! A bribe, no doubt, and if the fellow received it from Sempronia—alas! for poor Cordelia's secret.

The aunt throws open the study door, and with a look of exultation slaps down a letter upon the table before her brother. He seizes it; he recognises the hand-writing. I think I can see his hands tremble while he bursts the letter open.

Ha! something has fallen upon the ground, which Sempronia possesses herself of without loss of time. She holds it up triumphantly to her brother. A key? Can it be that which I saw Cordelia even now take off the ring? The same idea has struck the amiable pair, for they are already in the drawing-room. The bunch of keys is in the hands of Sempronius. The look of anguish with which he lets the bunch fall again, tells me too plainly that it is that very key.

Sempronia urges him to read the letter. To judge by his countenance, matters are now worse than ever. The note could have contained but a few words, for it was read in an instant; and if his sister had not stopped him in time, in another instant he would have torn it into a thousand pieces.

I suppose the postman is impatient, for he has just sent the maid-servant up with a message; she is gone down again with a small wax light in her hand, which usually stands upon the chimney-piece. Sempronia picks up the bunch of keys and replaces them in the drawer. She takes the letter from her brother and examines it, she points to the superscription with an inquiring look; he shakes his head. No, he knows nothing of the person to whom the letter is addressed. Cordelia is in secret correspondence with a person of whom her husband knows nothing? That looks very ill; and yet that person may be a woman. Come, my dear uncle, let us believe the best; when there are two sides of the question, I always prefer the most favourable; and to think an accused person in the right till he is actually proved in the wrong, if not the most prudent plan as the world is constituted, at least is certainly the most amiable.

The maid returns with the wax taper lighted; the letter is sealed again with one of Cordelia's own seals, which lay on the writing-table. Now, then, away stalks Sempronia; she restores the letter to the perfidious postman, who bows and leaves her; and now a corner of the street deprives my eyes of the pleasure of gazing upon this paragon of female chastity.

What do you think of all this, my dear uncle? That cursed key! I am horribly afraid that it was the key of some private entrance, of some back door, or garden gate, and that the note specified the hour and day for using it; it could not have contained more, from the short time occupied by its perusal. If this conjecture be just, Sempronius is as well informed of these particulars as either the writer or receiver of the letter; and by his sending it to its destination, I conclude that he means the assignation to be kept. Is it his intention to surprise Cordelia with her unknown correspondent? It looks very like it.

At any rate I hope that this important interview is not fixed for this evening, as business (which cannot be delayed) compels me to desert my post this very moment, and will prevent my resuming it till tomorrow; therefore, my dear uncle, I must beg you to supply my place. I will leave you my telescope—keep a sharp look-out, and then I shall at least have the satisfaction of learning, from your report to-morrow everything which has taken place in Sempronius's family during my absence.

*Saturday.*

And so, my dear uncle, you are quite certain that I lost nothing by my absence yesterday evening? Nothing occurred worth noticing? Well, then, let me see whether I can have better success in my discoveries.

Hey-day! the old footman is at the door, adjusting the stirrups of a little grey pony, and Sempronius is in the very act of drawing on his boots; he seems preparing to go a journey. Well, then, this cannot possibly be the important day, for so well informed as Sempronius is of the time

of the assignation, he certainly would take care not to be out of the way; and that he does not mean to return to-night I conclude from his carrying saddle-bags.

However, he does not leave Cordelia “fair side all unguarded,”<sup>1</sup> for his she-dragon of a sister is just arrived, and her maid follows her, carrying a bundle of clothes. Cordelia’s maid appears, and the she-dragon’s abigail is given in charge to her, so that I conjecture the sister-in-law is appointed to keep a strict eye over Cordelia’s conduct till her brother returns. Methinks Cordelia does not seem quite pleased with this arrangement, though she strives to hide her dissatisfaction under the veil of civilities.

N.B. The she-dragon’s abigail is almost as old, and quite as hideous, as her mistress—to make her more so was out of the power of Nature.

Sempronius is gone. Cordelia is busied with household affairs. Our dearly beloved aunt has fixed her spectacles on her hawk’s nose, and is knitting away as if her existence depended upon it. This day will probably be unproductive, but I will just look in upon you in the evening, my dear uncle.

*Saturday afternoon.*

Cordelia is more ornamented than usual; she has a turban on, with a sultana plume, which becomes her singularly. Willy, too, has got his best clothes on—there is certainly something in the wind; his mother is reading to him out of the large Shakespeare, which I mentioned before, but she finds it difficult to make him attend to her; he jumps up every minute and runs to look out at the window.

A quarter past six. Stay!—have the goodness to hand me that newspaper, my dear uncle. Let me see—“Drury Lane—*The Honeymoon*”—“Covent Garden—*Macbeth*.” As sure as fate they are going to see *Macbeth*, and Cordelia is trying to make her boy understand the story before they set out.

Just so. A plain, decent-looking coach, with two ladies and a gentleman in it, has just stopped at Cordelia’s door. Cordelia takes her gloves and fan; she seems through civility to -press her sister-in-law to join their party. How Miss Grimalkin turns up the white of her eyes! ay, I warrant her, she looks upon a theatre as an invention of the wicked one, and would as soon set her foot in purgatory as in a play-house. Cordelia and Willy leave, and she ejaculates something as the door closes, but whether it be a prayer or a curse I will not pretend to decide—for charity’s sake we will believe the former.

The coach is gone and I may as well go too. There is nobody at home but Sempronia, and to the shame of my taste be it spoken, I have not the least inclination for a *tête-à-tête* with her. Good night, my dear uncle.

*Saturday, ten o’clock.*

No wonder, my dear uncle, that you are surprised at my returning so unexpectedly; but, would you believe it? as I was on my way home, even now, a man passed me, whom, in spite of his being muffled up in his great coat, and having drawn his hat down over his eyes, I recognised for Sempronius.

I instantly turned and followed him. He stopped at his own house, and struck thrice with a pebble the drawing-room window, in which there was a light. Instantly the light disappeared; in a minute after the door was opened without noise; the candle in her hand showed me the figure of Sempronia. Her brother stole into the house without speaking, and the door was closed again, as softly as it had been opened.

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<sup>1</sup> Comus.

Then this is the important moment, after all. Cordelia looked at an invitation card—don't you recollect the circumstance? She was aware that her husband was engaged to pass a day in the country, and appointed the evening of it for her assignation. He, on his side, was aware of her arrangement, and pretended to keep his country engagement, in order that he might surprise her with her lover.

Poor, poor Cordelia! To be sure her imprudence is highly blameable, but still . . . if she could but escape this once undiscovered, who knows but the recollection of her danger might induce her to reform altogether? Stay! stay! cannot I— Hang me if I don't warn her.

*Eleven o'clock.*

I was too late—the play was over. Cordelia was gone—and I am returned fatigued to death.

See, see! Cordehia sits in her drawing—room. Nay, to warn her now without making a tremendous bustle, would be impossible. She must take her chance. Poor, poor Cordelia!

What is she about? She takes papers out of a red morocco case which were deposited in her jewel box; they seem to be bank-notes. Surely she cannot be meditating an elopement? She seals them up and leaves the room.

Sempronia is not to be seen, nor her brother. The servants are gone to bed. Everything seems to be dark and still in the house. Surely that confounded key was not the key of her bed-chamber? such an imprudence would be quite unpardonable, especially as her bed-chamber is in the back part of the house, where I cannot see what goes forward.

Now would I give all that I am worth in the world (it would not be paying a very high price, heaven knows!) to ascertain what Sempronius is about at this moment! I warrant him he stands in some corner unobserved, just as I am doing, as attentive with his ears as I am with my eyes, listening for that which he is afraid to hear, and every instant in danger of betraying himself by the loud and anxious beating of his heart. Ah! if I am right in this conjecture, in spite of all his faults, I can't help pitying the poor miserable devil!

Ha! how is this? A faint ray of light plays upon the glass of the lumber-room windows. This is very unusual. What can any person want at such a time of night in this desolate apartment, which hardly anyone enters even during the day? Can it be Willy, whose zeal for the fine arts has induced him to leave his bed at midnight to prosecute his studies unknown to the family? No! the shadow thrown upon the side wall is of too great a length to be Willy's. The person who carries the light throws it on different parts of the chamber, as if examining whether it is already occupied by anyone. Can it be Cordelia in this solitary apartment—so late at night—her husband supposed at a distance—expecting someone to whom she sent a private key—Oh! if it is Cordelia, she must be guilty!

Guilty! guilty! I could discover in the shadow the peculiar form of the turban and of the sultana plume, with which it was decorated; they were marked out most distinctly. It is she; it is Cordelia! Never again will I pin my faith upon a woman's virtue!

The door has been left ajar, purposely I suppose lest the lover should make a noise in opening it. I can see a faint light advancing along the landing-place. From the circular form of the radiance, I should imagine that it is produced by a dark lantern. Now it enters the room, and shows me the tall figure of a man wrapped up in a great coat. It seems, too, that Cordelia's maid is in her mistress's secrets, for the stranger is accompanied by a female, whose height, shape, and white petticoats perfectly answers the description of Mrs. Betty.

Cordelia's rushlight is too near the window, and the beams of the dark lantern are both too feeble and too far off to permit my distinguishing the emotions, produced by this mysterious meeting, as the countenances of the lovers, not to mention that the gentleman's round hat shades

a great part of his features, and that the lady's back is turned directly towards me; however, the eagerness with which Cordelia hastens to meet the stranger, and the tender attitude which he assumes without delay, leave me no doubt of their mutual satisfaction. He is already on his knees before her, and is pressing her unresisting hand to his lips most passionately; and this is the signal for the storm breaking loose which is destined to overwhelm them. The worst fears of jealousy are confirmed beyond the power of doubting; mortal patience can endure no longer, a closet door suddenly bursts open, and like a clap of thunder Sempronius stands in the midst of the affrighted group.

The whole party seems petrified, not excepting Mrs. Betty. Yes, yes, Mrs. Betty, I make no doubt that your mistress's secret-keeper had many a pretty perquisite, but now you must prepare yourself to look about for another place.

Oh, how Sempronius storms! How he threatens the lover! How he upbraids his wife! How, with his hands clasped together, he devotes himself to the infernal duties, if he does not take ample vengeance on the authors of his dishonour. The stranger seems to be converted into marble by this unexpected appearance, for he has not yet had the power of quitting his kneeling attitude.

Sempronius makes such an uproar that he will soon raise the whole house. The company is already increased by two newcomers, but their stature and shape easily enables me to recognize them for old acquaintances; the one is a large water-spaniel, which I have often seen running about the house, the other short figure, who holds a rushlight and stands there astonished in his shirt, can be no other than Willy. I suppose his father's voice had broken his sleep, and made him tremble lest thieves should have found their way into the lumber-room for the express purpose of carrying off such a treasure as his two darling pictures.

His entrance only seems to increase the displeasure of Sempronius. I think I can hear him cry at this distance, "What business have you out of bed, sir?" and at the same time he applies a hearty blow on the round cheek of poor Willy. The boy staggers under the effect of this uncivil salutation, and, fearful of a second, he hastens out of the room; only in his confusion mistaking the way out, he suddenly pulls open the door of Edward's room, and—why!—what the deuce have we got here! a sixth person has tumbled head foremost into the room, Willy has fallen undermost, the spaniel helps the general confusion by barking and has established himself on the back of the outstretched intruder.

Willy has dragged himself from under his oppressor; he calls off the dog, raises the newcomer, who brings his garments hastily into order, and is rewarded for his kindness by a second sound box on the ear. No, fair lady! for it seems the intruder is a female, even if that action had not revealed you, that shape and air are not to be mistaken; you can be no other than our dearly beloved aunt. I suppose the kind soul was indulging her innocent curiosity to know how the storm would end, which she had been so instrumental in raising. With this view she concealed herself in the adjoining bedroom, and she was in the very act of listening at the keyhole with all her ears, when Willy unexpectedly pulled away the supporting door, and occasioned her to make her entrance into the society in a manner so novel and unceremonious.

This occurrence has the power of suspending even the torrent of Sempronius's resentment for a moment; the seducer has recovered the use of his faculties, and has quitted his kneeling posture. He seems disposed to make use of the present confusion, in order to effect his escape; I saw Mrs. Betty whisper him, and I guess that it was a kind hint to seize the opportunity of withdrawing, for he pulls his hat still more over his eyes and advances towards the door.

But Sempronius is aware of his intention, he springs after the fugitive, grasps him furiously by the arm, and forces him back into the middle of the chamber.

Now shame on the dastardly wretch; the seducer falls at the feet of the man whom he has so grossly injured, and with uplifted hands, seems to implore his compassion; and Cordelia—I am amazed at her assurance; she walks boldly up to her husband, as if she could justify what in itself is totally unjustifiable—or is she going honestly to avow her preference for the young offender, and her determination to set her husband's anger and the contempt of the world at defiance? I should rather suppose the latter, for with a confident air, she extends her right hand to the kneeling stranger, and takes the dark lantern out of his! What is that for? Hey-day! Now she pulls the seducer's hat off, throws the light full upon his face, and shows her husband—huzza! huzza! huzza! Edward, by heaven!

Virtuous Cordelia, what injustice have we all done you! How rejoiced am I to find myself mistaken, and Sempronius, I fancy, is by no means dissatisfied in finding a banished son where he expected to find a favoured lover. It is at least certain, that he does not withdraw the hand which Edward has seized, and is in the act of pressing to his lips, and what makes me confident that his features have relaxed something of their severity is, that Mrs. Betty is disposed to profit by the present moment to obtain absolution for her own share in the business, and without more ceremony she plumps down on her knees close by Edward. And now Cordelia, turning the lantern away from Edward's face, and throwing the light full upon her suppliant abigail's, discovers, not the features of Mrs. Betty, but those of a girl, not more than seventeen, and lovely as the virgins of Mahomet's fabled paradise.

This, then, was the object of this midnight conference. While we fancied Edward many hundred miles distant from London, love had forbade his wandering further than the residence of his beloved; and for what purpose he sought it is now made quite evident, for he holds up the left hand of the fair stranger, and points to the ring which ornaments the wedding-finger—this important step once taken, he communicated it to his adopted mother; he entreated permission to make known to her the bride of his selection, perhaps, before he set forward to seek with her his fortune through the world. This request must certainly have been conveyed in the supposed love-letter brought by the milliner's girl; the short space of time occupied in the perusal of her answer, as I said before, proved that it only contained a few words, probably nothing more than the time and place of meeting; and as Sempronius was ignorant of the address on the back, Edward must have taken the precaution of desiring his stepmother to direct to him under a feigned name, fearful lest his father by some accident should discover his being still in the metropolis, and prevent Cordelia from granting the so-much desired meeting. The conversation which succeeded her return from the country, left me no doubt that all the intercourse between his wife and son had been prohibited by the stern Sempronius; Cordelia was obliged to have recourse to mystery, however innocent her purpose, and the neglected lumber-room, as being least liable to observation from the servants, was fixed upon as the most fit place for the interview, at which she proposed not only to embrace her stepson's wife as her adopted daughter, but to smooth the difficulties of their road through life, by giving the new-married couple all the pecuniary assistance which it lay in her power to command. It was for this purpose that she sealed up the bank-notes so carefully; it was for this—but while I am making these reflections, a most animated conference has taken place between the undeceived Sempronius and his amiable sister; he seems to reproach her and her misrepresentations for having practised upon his foibles, and rendered him so unjust to his wife, so harsh to his son, so contemptible in the eyes of them both, and even to himself. But the fair accused one does not listen to his remonstrances without

evident signs of displeasure. She enters upon her defence with the more warmth, the less there is reason upon her side—he rejoins—she replies—with every moment their expostulations grow more vehement. But now Cordelia interposes like an angel of peace, gently places one white hand before the lips of her incensed husband, and extends the other in sign of amity to her embarrassed sister-in-law. It is received with an air of overstrained humility, that shows Miss Grimalkin would still be impertinent if she dared; and now she thinks it full as well to take her departure, curtsying all around her repeatedly and down to the very ground, and taking care to display all those signs of ironical civility which convert the compliment into an insult. Now she has reached the door, and turning her back most heroically upon the company with all the majesty of a turkey-cock, she gratifies me with her absence. Good night, thou model of stale virginity! Sleep soundly upon your well-earned laurels, and may your dreams be as sweet as your temper.

With her departure from our horizon all clouds seem to vanish. Her brother appears to be grown quite another man, his brow is so clear, his countenance is so much brightened, and his whole attitude expresses that he feels so much more at his ease. Now he embraces his charming wife, and that repentant kiss entreats her pardon of his unjust suspicions. Now he extends the hand of paternal forgiveness to his son, and now, when Edward leads the partner of his heart towards him, does he not fold her to his bosom with all the tenderness of a father? Oh! how lovely appears this scene of domestic reconciliation, though acted in an old lumber-room, and only viewed by the unsteady glimmerings of a rushlight and a dark lantern.

You may as well lay down your pen, my dear uncle, there is nothing more to be seen, or, if there were, I could not see it, till the tears are wiped away, which have dimmed my telescope. And now, thou happy family, for to-night farewell! Here I lay down the office of your historian; and having now been for above two months Edward's most intimate confidant and warmest friend, to-morrow I'll set myself at work to become his acquaintance.