

**A
CONTRARY
WIND**

A VARIATION ON *MANSFIELD PARK*

BY LONA MANNING

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The Address of a Frenchwoman

a short story about *Mansfield Park*'s Tom Bertram
in the anthology

*Dangerous to Know: Jane Austen's
Rakes and Gentlemen Rogues*

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PRAISE FOR *A CONTRARY WIND*

Austen-esque Reviews: Brava to Lona Manning for her thoughtful twists and skillful execution in this variation. This story was in no way predictable and it kept me guessing almost until the end!

JustJane1813 blog: Lona Manning has a very engaging writing style, while her writing also captures the essence of Austen's style and the time period in which she wrote her stories. She artfully wove text from canon into her own prose... Her creative storylines were bold enough to make this story a real page-turner.

First Impressions podcast: Her writing is not Austen, of course, but it is so good that she manages to blend it seamlessly with actual passages from *Mansfield Park*. Her grasp of the vernacular of the Regency era is incredibly well-researched and accurate.

BlueInk Reviews starred review: *A Contrary Wind* is an impressive feat. Manning not only emulates Austen's writing style so well that she often seamlessly incorporates exact passages from the original into her narrative, she also retains the claustrophobic pettiness of the upper class while setting the novel securely in its political and social context. The author creates engrossing tension through the escalating misdeeds of the Crawfords, whose just punishments will meet with modern approval. Many try to emulate Austen; not all succeed. Here, Manning triumphs. She has retained Austen's spirit, while providing a stronger Fanny who will surely win today's readers.

*"I shall think her a very obstinate, ungrateful, girl. . . .
considering who and what she is."*

Aunt Norris

*"[I]f Mansfield Park had had the government of
the winds just for a week or two, about the
equinox, there would have been a difference. Not
that we would have endangered his safety by any
tremendous weather — but only by a steady
contrary wind. . . ."*

Henry Crawford

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Synopsis of the first part of <i>Mansfield Park</i>	1
Chapter One	5
Chapter Two	19

SYNOPSIS OF THE FIRST PART OF *MANSFIELD PARK*

A Contrary Wind breaks off from Jane Austen's original text in Chapter Fifteen, at the point when the young people are casting the parts in the play Lovers' Vows. A very brief synopsis to that point is provided below for anyone who hasn't read Mansfield Park. A Contrary Wind can be read without having read Mansfield Park, but I of course recommend that you read Austen's subtle and beautifully written novel. This variation references scenes and dialogue in the original novel, so knowledge of the original will enhance the enjoyment of this variation.

Sir Thomas Bertram is a wealthy baronet with two beautiful daughters and two handsome sons. His estate, Mansfield Park, is in Northamptonshire, north of London. His wife was one of three sisters—she made a brilliant marriage when she snagged the baronet; her older sister, Mrs. Norris, married a clergyman. The third sister, Mrs. Price, married beneath her; she wed a lieutenant of marines and lives in squalor in Portsmouth with her husband, now disabled for active duty, and a large brood of children.

Mrs. Norris proposes to Sir Thomas that he take in one of the poor Price children to help that struggling family (this is so she may have the credit of being benevolent without any of the expense); he agrees, and awkward, timid little Fanny Price, aged ten, comes to live in the great mansion. She is overawed by everything and everyone, and only her cousin Edmund, the younger of the two Bertram boys, pays any attention to her or shows her kindness.

Lady Bertram is remarkable for her indolence and inactivity, so by default, the management of her household and the raising of her children has been taken up by Mrs. Norris, childless and widowed, who is a judgmental, self-important, miserly busybody. Fanny is particularly bullied by Aunt Norris. Fanny is shy, humble, and passive, but also very morally upright. Thanks to Edmund, she learns to love poetry and reading, and becomes an enthusiast for the sublimity of Nature. She grows up to be totally devoted to him and secretly loves him. (This was at a time when first cousins could marry each other).

Sir Thomas must leave Mansfield Park to attend to his “plantations” in Antigua (that is, he is a slave-owner with sugar plantations, a very considerable source of wealth for England at this time) and he is away for almost two years. During his absence, his oldest daughter, Maria, becomes engaged to the wealthy but dim-witted Mr. Rushworth, who owns a large estate known as Sotherton. Then two new characters appear—pretty, witty, and charming Mary Crawford, and her flirtatious brother Henry. They are the half-brother and half-sister of Mrs. Grant, wife to the local clergyman.

At first, Mary Crawford thinks that Tom Bertram, the heir to the Bertram estate, might make a suitable husband but finds herself, unaccountably, falling for the quieter and more serious Edmund. When she learns that Edmund plans to become a clergyman, she tries to forget about him, as she—an heiress who is used to the glamor of London society—has no interest in being a clergyman’s wife in some quiet country village. Meanwhile, Maria and Julia both fall under the spell of the captivating Henry Crawford. Fanny observes this dangerous situation, but worse, also has the heartache of watching Edmund fall in love with Mary.

Mr. Yates, a friend of Tom Bertram’s, comes for a visit and proposes that they all entertain themselves by putting on a play. This strikes Edmund and Fanny as disrespectful to Sir Thomas, especially considering that the play chosen, *Lovers’ Vows*, (a real

play whose text is available on the internet) is about a woman who has an illegitimate child. Sir Thomas would not want his virginal daughters portraying such a woman, nor the part of Amelia, a bold flirt.

The others disregard Edmund's warnings, and set about casting the parts of the play, which has two storylines—one melodramatic and one comic. Both Maria and Julia want to play the dramatic part of Agatha, but there can only be one; Maria is chosen—she will play scenes with Henry Crawford (who is playing the part of her son, not her lover) to Julia's jealousy and chagrin. Mr. Yates will play the sadder but wiser Baron who regrets having seduced Agatha in his youth; plodding Mr. Rushworth is miscast as Count Cassel, an over-the-top Don Juan who boasts of his conquests. Tom Bertram will play the Butler, a comic relief character, and petite, sprightly Mary Crawford is well cast as the saucy Amelia in the comic storyline. Naturally she wants Edmund to take the part of her lover, but can she overcome his scruples?

As the variation begins, 18-year-old Fanny is being pressed to take one of the minor roles in the play. Leading up to this evening, Fanny has been tormented by watching Edmund fall in love with Mary Crawford, while Aunt Norris has been ordering her around and belittling her as usual.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

I have placed the foreword at the end of the book for the convenience of readers who wish to skip past it and get to the story.

As the story begins, I have interspersed some of Jane Austen's writing and she is occasionally quoted throughout the book.

CHAPTER ONE

True courage is like a kite; a contrary wind raises it higher.

Jean Antoine Petit-Senn (1792-1870)

Mansfield Park, October 1808

“FANNY,” HER COUSIN TOM called from the other side of the parlour, “we want your services.”

Fanny laid down her sewing and was up in a moment, expecting some errand.

“Oh! we do not want to disturb you now. We do not want your present services. We shall only want you in our play. You must be Cottager's Wife.”

“Me!” cried Fanny, stopping in mid step. “Indeed you must excuse me. I could not act anything if you were to give me the world. No, indeed, I cannot act.”

“Indeed but you must,” her cousin returned with a smile, “for we cannot excuse you. It need not frighten you: it is a nothing of a part, a mere nothing, not above half a dozen speeches altogether.”

“It is not that I am afraid of learning by heart,” said Fanny, blushing to find herself at that moment the only speaker in the room, and to know that everyone—her cousins, their four guests and worst of all, her Aunt Norris—was looking at her, “but I really cannot act.”

“Phoo! Phoo! You'll do it very well. We do not expect perfection. You must get a brown gown, and a white apron, and a mob cap, and we must make you a few wrinkles, and a little of the crows-foot at the corner of your eyes, and you will be a very proper, little old woman.”

“Oh Fanny, pray don’t be so anxious about it,” added her cousin Maria. “Mr. Crawford and I portray the leading characters, you need only support us.”

“Yours is a very trifling part,” Maria’s fiancé Mr. Rushworth put in. “Whilst I must come in three times, you know, and have two-and-forty speeches. That’s something, is not it? But I do not much like the idea of being so fine. I shall hardly know myself in a pink satin cloak.”

“And here, I suspect, is the *true* reason for Miss Price’s reluctance,” said Tom’s friend Mr. Yates. “I fancy that she doesn’t care to yield the honours of the pink satin to Mr. Rushworth, and be forced to grace the stage dressed in peasant rags and a mob cap. I can understand your feelings very well, Miss Price, and I will be your champion. I shan’t let anyone paint crow’s feet around those soft blue eyes. What say you to appearing as a little shepherdess or a milkmaid? You will look very fetching indeed, and who will object if Cottager’s wife is young enough to be his granddaughter?”

“We will do everything in our power to make you as comfortable as possible, Miss Price,” said their guest Henry Crawford, rising from his chair to make a half bow, accompanied by his most engaging smile. “Permit me to read your part aloud to you, by way of supplying you with a friendly hint as to how to perform it. All you need do is to imitate my—”

“That is a capital notion, Crawford,” exclaimed Mr. Yates. “Miss Price, I can exactly mimic the role, as it was performed by the governess at Ecclesford. Simply follow my example.”

“Here—here—Fanny,” cried Tom, pushing an open manuscript across the table toward her. “You need only enter and say: *here’s a piece of work indeed about nothing!*”

“What a piece of work *here* is about nothing!” exclaimed her Aunt Norris, no longer able to contain herself. “I am quite ashamed of you, Fanny, to make such a difficulty of obliging your cousins in a trifle of this sort—so kind as they are to you! Take the part with a good grace, and let us hear no more of the matter, I entreat.”

Fanny looked to her cousin Edmund for help, and he laid aside his book and remonstrated with his aunt.

“Do not urge her, madam. It is not fair to urge her in this manner. You see she does not like to act. Let her choose for herself.”

“I am not going to urge her,” his aunt replied sharply, “but I shall think her a very obstinate, ungrateful girl, if she does not do what her aunt and cousins wish her—very ungrateful, indeed, considering who and what she is.”

Fanny turned crimson, then pale. Turning her back on the rest of the company, she hurried back to her seat and bent her head over her sewing.

The rest of the party were briefly silenced—Edmund was too angry to speak, Maria was chagrined that their guests were witness to this breach of decorum in their family circle and even Tom recognized that another word from him, either of comfort or censure, might destroy Fanny’s composure completely. For a moment, the only sound to be heard was the gentle snoring of Lady Bertram on her sofa, happily oblivious to the discord in the bosom of her family.

“I do not like my situation, this place is too hot for me,” Miss Crawford announced calmly, rising and moving her chair away from Mrs. Norris and settling down next to Fanny, saying to her, in a kind, low whisper, “Never mind, my dear Miss Price, this is a cross evening: everybody is cross and teasing, but do not let us mind them.”

For the next quarter of an hour Fanny received Miss Crawford’s warm praise of her needle-work, and mechanically answered her enquiries and remarks, until rising feelings of humiliation threatened to overpower her altogether. That it was *Miss Crawford* who, of all the company, was endeavouring to soothe and revive her, was a mixed blessing, as it obliged her to think better of her neighbour than she wished.

Fortunately, Miss Crawford’s attention was soon called away by the other young people. Fanny was too discomposed to attend to the

conversation but heard enough to understand that the subject was again the play, *Lovers' Vows*, and the question of which of them was to undertake which part, and she dreaded a renewal of those urgings which had destroyed her peace. She wanted to escape and go to her bedchamber, but she could not trust herself to make her excuses in a tolerably complacent fashion. As for leaving the room directly, her aunt's angry words—*considering who and what she is*—echoed in her ears again and again, humbling her too utterly to contemplate such a lack of ceremony.

Who was she, and what was she? A penniless relation, a dependent female, taken in as a child out of motives of charity. She had never resented her cousins for their superior beauty, dress, or accomplishments, and seldom did she bridle at always being at the command of her Bertram relatives. But to be accused of ingratitude, obstinacy, and wilfulness—she, who might as well not even have a will of her own, so seldom had she been given an opportunity to exercise her own inclinations? At that moment, an unaccustomed sensation burned in her breast, rising until she felt it must choke her. It was anger; it was resentment at being so misunderstood by those who should have known her best.

She had disapproved of the acting scheme, agreeing with Edmund that it was disrespectful for the younger Bertrams to engage in play-acting when their father, her uncle, was engaged on a perilous ocean voyage. As the youngest person in the household and a dependent relation, she would never presume so far as to lay down the correct course of conduct to her cousins Maria and Julia, who appeared blind to the indelicacy of representing on stage such women with whom their father would have barred all association. It was deference alone which prevented Fanny from raising those objections which could only be perceived as rebukes. She stood with Edmund in refusing to participate but had confided her feelings only to him. Unaware of her disapprobation and her forebodings of mischief, Tom laid her refusals to childish timidity, Mrs. Norris to a peevish disobliging nature.

And yet, Fanny reflected, bending lower over her work, was it not true that she would still shrink from participating in the theatricals, even if were there no such objections to be met with as had occurred to her and Edmund? Did she not wish to avoid being contrasted on the same stage with the pretty, sprightly, Miss Crawford or her handsome cousin Maria? Was it not for this same reason that, when a child, she had refused, absolutely refused, to study piano and drawing—for fear of comparisons to her more accomplished cousins? Could her seeming modesty and reticence be, in reality, a species of pride?

Feelings of self-pity, mingling with feelings of self-loathing, struggled inside of her. She had only one wish; to escape from herself. She observed Miss Crawford returning to sit next to her, she saw Miss Crawford's lips move, something was "disagreeable" to her; Fanny nodded her head in seeming acquiescence, but she heard none of it. Although her disordered mind rendered all conversations into an unintelligible babble, she could yet observe—and she caught sight of Edmund's admiring gaze fixed upon Miss Crawford. Another glance, full of meaning, he swiftly bestowed on Fanny, one which said, "Miss Crawford, and she alone, was kind enough to comfort you, and I honour her for it."

Fanny had not thought it possible to feel more despondent than she had for the last half-hour, but now fresh well-springs of misery flowed forth. Edmund was giving every evidence of being a man in love. Her own humiliation at the hands of her aunt had brought it about—Mary Crawford's pointed attentions confirmed her in Edmund's mind as being without equal in compassion and goodness. It appeared then to Fanny that Edmund would inevitably take the fatal step that would bring him lasting unhappiness and disillusionment. Mary Crawford as a clergyman's wife in a small country village! The mind revolted! The kindest and the best of men so sadly deceived! And herself a helpless witness to it all.

With a trembling voice, Fanny finally excused herself for the night. The others hardly acknowledged her departure, which was at

once all she desired and at the same time fresh proof of her insignificance to the household and her supposed nearest relations. Her resentment toward her Aunt Norris was now strangely benumbed, replaced by anger at herself, at who and what she was: a pathetic creature who could only go away and cry. She hurried up the stairs to the passageway to the back staircase and gain the privacy of her own modest room in the attic, where the sound of her sobs would not be heard over the bleak cold rain drumming against her narrow window.

* * * * *

The carriage was summoned to convey the Crawfords back to their sister's home. Edmund handed Miss Crawford in, and briefly made as though he might climb in beside her and accompany her to her own door, but her brother and a groomsman were sufficient escort and the lady herself was not welcoming. Edmund had angered Mary earlier that evening when, in a rather sententious tone, he pronounced that it was inappropriate for a clergyman (or soon-to-be clergyman in his case,) to portray one on the stage. But he was also refusing the opportunity to play the part of her lover. His indifference had wounded Mary's pride and she was very far from being ready to forgive him, barely acknowledging his cordial *adieux*.

"Well, sister," remarked her brother in a low voice, as the carriage pulled out of Edmund's hearing, "Perhaps we should make our excuses and go to Bath or London, rather than stay for this play-acting scheme. I think, for a party got up for pleasure, there were more long faces than happy ones at the Park tonight. Miss Julia spiteful, Bertram vexed with everyone, Edmund Bertram at his most insufferable, Miss Price near to fainting, and as for that aunt!"

"Maria plays the tragic part but *she* was looking particularly well pleased tonight, a matter I will leave for now to you and your conscience." Mary Crawford nodded meaningfully at her brother,

who smiled, showing himself to be rather more gratified than abashed at the accusation.

“True—I *would* regret leaving off such a fair opportunity to play the tragic hero. To be authorized by the script to kiss Maria and press her to my bosom, in front of her future husband, is too irresistible!” Henry laughed.

“We know where to lay the blame for Julia's ill-temper, do we not?”

“We do indeed—we lay the blame on female vanity and caprice—for despite my best efforts, Julia Bertram scorned to take any part but that of Agatha. In the face of such obduracy, reasoning is in vain and flattery useless. She must be first in consequence, and if she cannot, she chooses to be nothing at all.”

“As for that last, are you speaking now of the play, or of your affections, Henry? At any rate, the foolish girl should have more pride and resolution. Heaven knows *my* vanity has been mortified tonight, though I would confess it to no-one but you.” Miss Crawford willed herself to not look out the window to see if Edmund was still standing in the sweep and watching the carriage as they drove away.

“When you gave Bertram your consent to apply to his friend Charles Maddox to take up the part of Anhalt, were you in earnest? Or do you object to playing love scenes with a gentleman with whom you are barely acquainted?”

“No, Charles Maddox is not objectionable—in himself. But I thought, I *had* thought, I had more power over—” she stopped in vexation and let out a little laugh. “Perhaps I should enlist Mrs. Norris in my cause. She could scold Edmund Bertram into playing the part!”

“You remind me, I have hit upon an idea which will spare us any further scenes as we have witnessed tonight. Let us propose our own sister for the part of Cottager's Wife.”

“What a capital idea, Henry! She will be very pleased to be asked. And you know, Cottager's Wife is a comic part, and

although Miss Price has many fine qualities, I'm sure, I cannot discover that she has any wit about her."

"She is an earnest little soul, not a merry one," Henry agreed.

"Perhaps she has little enough to laugh about!"

"Yes, but we all must learn to laugh at ourselves and I fancy Miss Price cannot. Too delicate and scrupulous to walk on stage, in front of her friends!"

"But did you not perceive how she contrived to make herself the centre of attention tonight? I fancy she would have drawn less notice upon herself had she simply acquiesced! She could have, with some justice, objected on the grounds that Cottager's Wife must half-carry your poor, expiring, wronged Agatha across the stage. Little Miss Price would be hard-pressed to do so," Mary laughed. "She might even have done herself an injury in attempting it. Maria Bertram will need the talents of a Mrs. Siddons to convince *me* that she is near to expiring from want of food!"

"There, you see, Henry, I can laugh at *others*, and in time, I promise you, I will resume laughing at myself. Only do not ask me to do so tonight. I am too chagrined."

* * * * *

The grandfather clock in the front hall struck eleven, then midnight, and Fanny still lay awake in her narrow bed, unable to console herself. As miserable as her present circumstances were, the future offered no hope of improvement.

At an age when most young ladies were beginning to seriously contemplate matrimony, she had already formed the resolution that she would never enter the state; it was impossible that she would ever meet another man who could be the equal of Edmund Bertram. She rejected with contempt the idea of marrying for money, and in her humility she could not conceive of receiving an offer from one who esteemed her well enough to overlook her lack of a dowry. Settling with her family in Portsmouth appeared to be as equally

out of the question as finding a husband. Her parents had never, in the course of her nearly ten years' absence, expressed the wish that she return to them.

Fanny's visions of her own future had all centred on a plan concocted with her older brother William—namely, that they would one day live in a little cottage and she would keep house for him when he retired from the Navy. But what was she to do until then? Her cousins had paid little regard to her over the years, but how empty the great house would seem when Maria and Julia married and formed their own establishments. Tom was abroad more than at home and Edmund would remove to Thornton Lacey after his ordination. She would be left behind to grow old in the service of her aunts. A long twilight existence, fetching and carrying for Aunt Bertram and bearing Aunt Norris' slights and insults in silence, stretched ahead of her. She might have to endure ten, fifteen, twenty years of such a life before she could retire to a cottage with her brother.

And could she truly rely upon this solace, in the end? Although marriage formed no part of her brother's plans at twenty, could she expect him to regard the state with the same indifference at five or eight-and-twenty? What if William did marry, and his wife had no wish to be encumbered by a maiden sister? And whether in Mansfield, Portsmouth, or her brother's cottage, was she not dependent upon the charity of others for every mouthful she ate and every thread upon her back? Were her comings and goings to be entirely at the command of others, her own preferences never consulted?

As Fanny tossed and turned for the hundredth time that long night, a new, unbidden, notion suggested itself to her—*you are acquainted with one independent gentlewoman who earned her own bread.*

Your own governess, Miss Lee.

Why should you not do the same?

The following morning, Fanny escaped to the East Room after a half-eaten breakfast to ask herself how the thoughts she'd entertained the previous night appeared to her in the judicious light of morning.

The East Room had once been the school-room and had sat empty after the departure of their governess. It was now used solely by Fanny, the smallness of her own bedchamber making the use of the other so evidently reasonable, and Mrs. Norris, having stipulated for there never being a fire in it on Fanny's account, was tolerably resigned to her having the use of what nobody else wanted.

The aspect was so favourable that even without a fire it was habitable in many an early spring and late autumn morning to such a willing mind as Fanny's. The comfort of it in her hours of leisure was extreme. She could go there after anything unpleasant below, and find immediate consolation in some pursuit, or some train of thought at hand. Her plants, her books—of which she had been a collector from the first hour of her commanding a shilling—her writing-desk, and her works of charity and ingenuity, were all within her reach.

To this nest of comforts Fanny now walked down to try its influence on an agitated, doubting spirit. Could she, Fanny, take a position as governess? Of caring for children, she had had much experience. As the eldest daughter of a family of ten, she had been important as playfellow, instructress, and nurse until sent away to live with her uncle and aunt.

In the ordinary course of events, gentlewomen only became governesses out of necessity. It was the last resort of the genteel but poor. It was a position entered upon with resignation at best, despair and resentment at worst, by widows and orphans, by persons whose expectations had been dashed and whose hopes had been overthrown—it was not to be wondered at that governesses and

their faults were dwelt upon with much energy by ladies on their morning visits throughout the kingdom. While it was possible that some governesses become honoured and beloved members of the family, Fanny only knew that the profession never wore a happy face in any novel she had picked up.

Fanny paced unceasingly around the old work table, greatly agitated at her own audacity for even entertaining such ideas as now entered her head. She attempted to recollect, as best she might, any remarks dropped by Miss Lee concerning her opinions of the profession. But Miss Lee had been of a taciturn and formal disposition, qualities that recommended her to Sir Thomas, but she had not aroused lasting feelings of affection or confidence from her pupils.

Fanny had first met Miss Lee upon coming to Mansfield when she was but ten years old, and for many months was afraid of her, though anxious to win her approbation. The governess's biting remarks upon Fanny's backwardness, ignorance and awkward ways had often brought Fanny to tears. Almost a year passed before Miss Lee had realized that of her three pupils—Maria, Julia, and Fanny—only Fanny loved learning for learning's sake; only her timidity before the others prevented her from showing that she had memorized every textbook laid before her, and thenceforward Miss Lee was more encouraging.

Maria and Julia were overjoyed to be released from the schoolroom upon turning seventeen, while Fanny, the youngest, continued for another year, sitting with Miss Lee for several hours every morning, studying French, geography, and natural history, or walking the grounds of the park to collect botanical samples.

Although Miss Lee had less to do as a governess when she had only one pupil, she was required to devote her afternoons and many evenings to attending on Lady Bertram. When the governess was at last discharged from Mansfield Park, Fanny was old enough to supply her place as Lady Bertram's errand-runner and cribbage partner.

Fanny wondered whether these tasks were rendered less irksome to Miss Lee by the knowledge that she was paid for performing them. Would living amongst strangers be preferable to living with her cousins, if she received a salary, however small, rather than paying for her bread and board with the coinage of duty, submission, and gratitude?

A tap at the door roused her and her eyes brightened at the sight of Edmund. They had not spoken since Aunt Norris's cruel rebuke of the night before, and Fanny, her colour rising, anticipated the unlooked-for joy of a private conference with Edmund, in which he would declare his indignation at their aunt, and assure her of his esteem and regard. But no, it was the *play*, and worse, it was Miss Crawford, that occupied Edmund's thoughts and occasioned this rare, this precious conversation.

"This acting scheme gets worse and worse, you see. They have chosen almost as bad a play as they could, and now, to complete the business, are going to ask the help of a young man very slightly known to any of us. This is the end of all the privacy and propriety which was talked about at first. I know no harm of Charles Maddox; but the excessive intimacy which must spring from his being admitted among us in this manner is highly objectionable, the more than intimacy—the familiarity."

He came to the East room, he said, for her 'advice and opinion,' but a very few moments made it clear to Fanny that he had already made up his mind—he would yield—he would take the part of Anhalt himself rather than see a stranger admitted on such intimate terms. "Put yourself in Miss Crawford's place, Fanny. Consider what it would be to act Amelia with a stranger."

Fanny protested, she was 'sorry for Miss Crawford, but more sorry to see him drawn in to do what he had resolved against.' Would he abandon his objections on behalf of his father? Her last, futile, appeal was to his pride: "It will be such a triumph to the others!"

“They will not have much cause of triumph when they see how infamously I act,” Edmund responded drily, adding that he hoped, by yielding in this fashion, to persuade the others to keep the theatricals private and not involve any others in the neighbourhood, either as performers or audience. “Will not this be worth gaining?”

“Yes, it will be a great point,” Fanny answered, but reluctantly. Then Edmund did, finally, refer to her humiliation of the previous night, but only as a further reason to yield to Miss Crawford and take the part of Anhalt, for Miss Crawford “never appeared more amiable than in her behaviour to you last night. It gave her a very strong claim on my goodwill.”

At this, Fanny could only nod, and Edmund was only too willing to interpret her silence as consent.

He smiled, he spent a few moments looking over her little library with her, when he was clearly eager to be gone, to walk down to the Parsonage and convey his change of sentiments to Miss Crawford. Then he *was* gone, entirely insensible of the pain he had inflicted.

Had either circumstance—Aunt Norris’ insult or this fresh proof of Edmund’s infatuation—occurred separately, Fanny would surely have spent her morning weeping. But occurring within twelve hours of each other, the absolute misery of the whole was so stupefying that she could no longer weep and, resolving within herself that she would weep no more, Fanny jumped up from her seat and slipped downstairs to the breakfast room, unobserved by anyone.

Lady Bertram kept her recent correspondence in an elegant little desk there. All of Lady Bertram’s acquaintance, including Miss Lee, had received a note from her Ladyship hinting at the engagement of her eldest daughter to the richest landowner in the county—and the former governess, Fanny knew, had recently replied, wishing her one-time pupil every happiness. The note was postmarked from Bristol, where Miss Lee’s current employers resided.

With a rapidly beating heart, Fanny retraced her steps to the East Room where she composed a letter to Miss Lee, imploring her to keep her secret for now, and asking her advice on whether she thought her youngest pupil at Mansfield Park might be suited to become a governess. No sooner had she sealed her letter than she was summoned to walk into town on an errand for her Aunt Norris, which happily afforded her the opportunity to visit the village post office without the letter passing through the hands of servants at the Park.

She walked by Dr. and Mrs. Grant's home on the way to the village, and she could hear the lovely rippling strains of harp music issuing from the sitting room. Miss Crawford was entertaining her cousin Edmund. With tear-filled eyes, Fanny hurried past the parsonage, followed by the faint sounds of Edmund laughing in response to something witty Mary Crawford had said.

CHAPTER TWO

JULIA, USUALLY REGARDED as the more cheerful, lively, and obliging of the two Bertram sisters, had entirely lost her composure when Henry Crawford intervened in the casting of the roles of the play; both sisters recognized his preference for Maria over herself in the part of Agatha as an unspoken avowal of particular regard for the eldest sister. Maria gloried in her triumph and sought every opportunity to rehearse her Agatha with Henry Crawford's Frederick, whilst having as little as possible to do with her betrothed, Mr. Rushworth. Fortunately for Mr. Rushworth's peace of mind, *his* faculties were so heavily taxed by the demands of learning his two-and-forty speeches by heart, that he had little leisure to observe and less capacity to understand what his lady love was about.

Julia was in love with Henry Crawford and had believed he was falling in love with her. Why should she *not* believe it, when his eyes, his gestures, his whispers, had proclaimed his devotion? Now that the conviction of his preference for Maria had been forced on her, she submitted to it without any alarm for Maria's situation, or any endeavour at rational tranquillity for herself. Henry Crawford himself had attempted to soothe her through flattery and re-doubled attentions—she scorned them, and him, and he soon gave up the effort.

Nor was Julia in any humour to acknowledge the elaborate attentions and gallantries of her brother Tom's house guest, the foppish Mr. Yates, who, hailing her as "the divine Miss Julia," made a point of sitting by her at breakfast, fetching her morning dish of coffee, declaring his raptures over her dress and shoes and the arrangement of her hair, and soliciting her approval of his own choice of cravat and jacket. She knew not how, but she could not discern in his assiduous gallantries any true symptom of a lover. Her brother Tom acknowledged the unserious nature of Mr. Yates' attentions, although in terms she could not understand.

"Gentlemen must pay their due tribute to beauty, Julia, but I would be sorry to see you take Yates seriously. I was at Eton with him and....." he coughed. "Your estimable governess never taught you much classical literature, did she? Any Latin? Hadrian and Antinous? Zeus and Ganymede?"

Julia shook her head, bewildered.

"No matter. The point is, these pleasantries between ladies and gentlemen are all part of the game, don't you know, you mustn't believe Yates is falling in love with you."

"I pay no attention to Mr. Yates at all, Tom, except that he is your friend and our guest. Now go along and practise your rhyming Butler. Ask Baddeley to help you," Julia returned scornfully.

* * * * *

FANNY RETRIEVED MISS LEE'S reply a few days later at the post office. Although Miss Lee was surprised to receive Fanny's enquiry, she did not attempt to dissuade her former pupil. The old governess was a well-judging and discerning woman, and she reckoned that growing up in Mansfield Park had rendered Fanny too genteel to resume the rough-and-tumble life she had left behind in Portsmouth. Going out as a governess would allow Fanny to continue to live amongst the same set of people, and in the same style, to which she was accustomed.

Miss Lee refrained from counselling Fanny as to the wisdom or imprudence of her proposed course but did inform her that Mrs. Smallridge, a cousin by marriage of Miss Lee's own employers, was looking for a young lady of unexceptional character to undertake the charge of their daughter, who was not quite six years

of age, and their son, who was old enough to start learning his letters and sums. Miss Lee offered to forward Fanny's application to Mrs. Smallridge, with her own testimony as to Fanny's good character.

To be the tutoress of very young children appeared to Fanny to be the most probable circumstance to suit her talents—which she rated as very low—as well as her inclinations. She composed a careful letter to Mrs. Smallridge, describing herself as a gentlewoman, the daughter of a lieutenant of Marines, but raised principally by an aunt, the widow of a country parson—this last a reference to Mrs. Norris, who, it could truthfully be said, had more to do with raising her than any other adult at Mansfield Park, for it was the admonitions and scowls of the aunt that had rendered a timid and awkward young woman from a shy and retiring little girl. Fanny felt it was best to sink Sir Thomas and his family into oblivion, as she reasoned that Mrs. Smallridge might wonder why the niece of a baronet sought employment as a governess. Fanny had never dissembled so much in her life before but had observed from Maria and Julia the art of withholding information without actually stooping to deceit.

The letter was composed, folded, and sealed, but Fanny trembled at the thought of making a private visit to the post office. The bare fact of engaging in secret correspondence filled her with shame and guilt, and to act secretly, to plan to depart Mansfield struck her like a species of treason, particularly when Lady Bertram was kind to her, or when Edmund had time to talk with her.

Although Fanny had disclaimed any talent for acting, her relations would surely have been astonished at the secret she kept to herself whilst preparations went forward for the production of *Lovers' Vows*. Fanny found, before many days were past, that it was not all uninterrupted enjoyment to the party themselves, and each having their own concern, were frequently blind to the concerns of others. Everybody began to have their vexation. Edmund had many. Entirely against his judgment, a scene-painter arrived from town, and was at work, much to the increase of the expenses, and, what was worse, of the éclat of their proceedings; and his brother Tom, instead of being really guided by him as to the privacy of the representation, was giving an invitation to every family who came in his way.

Fanny, being always a very courteous listener, and often the only listener at hand, came in for the complaints and the distresses of most of them. She knew that Mr. Yates was in general thought to rant dreadfully; that Mr. Yates was disappointed in Henry Crawford; that Tom Bertram spoke so quick he would be unintelligible; that Mrs. Grant spoiled everything by laughing; that Edmund was behindhand with his part, and that it was misery to have anything to do with Mr. Rushworth, who was wanting a prompter through every speech. She knew, also, that poor Mr. Rushworth could seldom get anybody to rehearse with him: his complaint came before her as well as the rest; and so decided to her eye was her cousin Maria's avoidance of him, and so needlessly often the rehearsal of the first scene between her and Mr. Crawford, that she had soon all the terror of other complaints from him. So far from being all satisfied and all enjoying, she found everybody requiring something they had not, and giving occasion of discontent to the others.

Mrs. Norris was, in her own way, as happy as she had ever been, for she was busy from morning 'til night, living entirely at Mansfield Park, directing the servants, ordering the dinners, and supervising the sewing of the costumes and curtains. She also felt it was necessary for her to stay at Lady Bertram's side in the event that doleful news arrived concerning Sir Thomas—perhaps he would perish at sea, or be stricken by the fevers and distempers which carried away so many of his countrymen in tropical climes—and in such case, she, Lady Bertram's elder sister, would naturally be the rod and staff of the stricken family. She was confiding some of her gloomier prognostications to Mrs. Grant, who was sitting with Lady Bertram and Mrs. Norris after the conclusion of a rehearsal of the first act of the play, while Fanny, quite forgotten, was stitching on Anhalt's costume by candlelight at her own little worktable.

For a young girl, every trifling thing connected with one's beloved transmits pleasure, so the thought that she held in her hands a garment to be worn by Edmund gave her a sweet sensation, mixed with sorrow, that

she would not have exchanged for the world. So abstracted was she in her thoughts, it was in fact a wonder that some portion of the conversation of the ladies attracted her notice.

“Dr. Grant tells me the price of sugar has now fallen so low, that it is now considerably below what would repay the grower for his cost to make the sugar and bring it to market. What a shame for Sir Thomas! He has laboured so hard, away from home, yet these events conspire against him, do they not?”

“Yes, indeed, Mrs. Grant,” answered Mrs. Norris, leaning forward and speaking in a loud whisper, with a nod of her head toward Lady Bertram, who lay, half asleep, on her settee, “I heard the same. There is a glut on the market—that is what they call it—too much sugar; and in addition, with the recent prohibition on importing new labourers from Africa, the future prosperity of the West Indies plantations is very much in doubt.”

“Dear me! But I’m sure that Sir Thomas—”

“*If* he should return alive, he must come down with the marriage portion for Maria, of course, and fit up Edmund for his ordination—his new home at Thornton Lacey must be gotten into readiness—you will see now, my dear Mrs. Grant, why I am so particular about making what little economies we can at Mansfield and have done everything in my power to curb any waste or unnecessary expense.”

“No doubt they are all very obliged to you, ma’am.”

“I do not consider that, of course, for who else should I assist but my own sister and her family? I have told Lady Bertram that, as I have no children of my own, whatever I have been able to put away every year is for her dear children, but little did I imagine that the time might come when my paltry widow’s mite would be so needful!”

“Matters are not so bad as all that, surely? The price of sugar may rise again? And the family is in general well provided for, I trust. There would be his income from the rents?”

“But, with his prolonged absence,” countered Mrs. Norris, unable to give way to any ray of hope, “you may be sure his tenants are behindhand and dear Tom and Edmund are too good-natured—the returns will not be enough to meet the expenses of maintaining the estate.”

“Pray, sister, do not distress yourself,” said Lady Bertram drowsily, having half-awakened and hearing the word ‘rent.’ “Sir Thomas will never require you to pay any rent on the White house, not so long as you have need of it.”

“No doubt, Lady Bertram, the family of Sir Thomas Bertram can rely on his generosity *and* his prudence—you are all in the best of hands,” Mrs. Grant suggested, as Mrs. Norris was for a moment discomposed.

She rallied, however, and leaning forward again, said in a forceful, sibilant whisper, which carried to every corner of the room, “Of course, Sir Thomas is very capable, but what can even *he* do in the face of such calamities! Naturally Sir Thomas would not confide all the details of his financial burdens to me, and I am sure I am not one to pry, but there was the matter of poor Tom’s youthful follies, which amounted to a not inconsiderable debt, so that Sir Thomas was unable to do everything for Edmund that he intended—ahem—” and here Mrs. Norris recollected that it was this very circumstance which led to the living at Mansfield Park being settled on Dr. Grant, instead of being held for Edmund, something Sir Thomas, out of delicacy, would not have wished her to allude to before Mrs. Grant.

Mrs. Grant betrayed no consciousness, however, and Mrs. Norris resumed her catalogue of the family’s financial woes: “—and some years ago, he declared his intention to settle some funds on Fanny when *she* came of age, to enable her to live as a gentlewoman, so *that* promise must hang about his neck like a millstone, and, I have no doubt, contributes greatly to his cares. Of course, if Fanny continued to live here, and endeavoured to make herself as useful as possible, I dare say he would think his generosity in bringing her up under his roof would be at least *partly* requited, and he would be spared the great expense of a separate maintenance for her.”

Fanny gave no indication she could hear what had been said but continued sewing placidly until summoned to the little theatre to act as prompter for a scene between the ranting Mr. Yates and the befuddled Mr. Rushworth. She was surprised to discover she was not crying—her eyes were perfectly dry, but there was a strange feeling in her stomach, as though a cold little stone had taken up residence there. Perhaps she should bless her Aunt Norris for helping her to reach a resolution, for although she suspected her aunt of exaggerating the financial peril in which the family stood, she would not stay to be resented.

The next morning, Fanny asked her Aunt Norris if she needed anything taken to her home in the village, or fetched from it. As it happened, the lady wanted her good pair of scissors, so Fanny was dispatched, with the warning, “but pray, don’t make this your excuse, Fanny, to dawdle along the way—you are needed here to help finish these costumes, for I cannot do everything by myself. Don’t suppose that by staying out of sight you can shirk your share of the work to be done.”

Fanny called at the post office and sent her application to Mrs. Smallridge, care of Miss Lee, and then forgot Aunt Norris’s scissors, so stupefied was she at the enormity of what she had done, and was halfway home when she remembered and had to hurry back for them. She endeavoured to be in good time to avoid her aunt’s condemnation by running up the hill and arrived breathless, holding her side.

Edmund met her near the rose garden and gently remonstrated with her— “You have been running, Fanny, you are out of breath! Whatever are you about? You look knocked up.”

“Oh, it doesn’t signify,” Fanny panted. “I have not been out on horseback as often as I should lately, we have been so busy with the theatricals.”

“Bother the play,” laughed Edmund. “I have a tonic for you, Fanny—can you guess what it is?”

Fanny brightened and wondered if there had been a letter from her brother William.

“No, no, not that, but this did come with the post this morning—*The British Critic*,” and Edmund happily flourished his and Fanny’s favourite gazette, a magazine that listed all the new publications, with reviews and extracts. “Shall we look it over and decide upon those books whose acquisition is essential to the preservation of our happiness?”

No invitation was necessary, and Fanny almost danced beside Edmund as they re-entered the house. With joy did she anticipate that much-loved activity—looking over descriptions of books along with Edmund, discussing them, and making a list of the most desired titles to be ordered, and *that* followed by the pleasure of receiving the books in the post, and reading and comparing views with her cousin! It was the most complete happiness she knew.

“Stay, Fanny,” called Edmund as Fanny hurried ahead of him to the library, “we are in the breakfast room. I thought we should be more comfortable there.”

We? Bewildered, Fanny spun about and followed Edmund into the breakfast room, where sat Mary Crawford, looking particularly lovely, preparing her ink and quill for the list of chosen titles. She looked up and smiled expectantly as Edmund entered.

“Yes, I invited Miss Crawford to join us,” Edmund explained cheerfully as Fanny faltered at the doorway.

“Oh, come in Miss Price,” cried Miss Crawford. “We had despaired of you before Mr. Bertram saw you dashing up the hill.” Turning to Mr. Bertram, she added, “I hope we shall have some travel books! Wouldn’t you love to visit Paris, Mr. Bertram? The Bonaparte has stolen the birth right of every patriotic Englishman and woman—the right to return from Paris to disparage the place of our birth and to compare our food, fashions, and manners unfavourably with the French! It is monstrously unjust! This war seems never-ending!”

The sight of Miss Crawford preparing to perform the office *she* had always performed, hit Fanny like a blow.

“Why, Miss Price, are you well?” asked Miss Crawford, eyeing her with concern. “You look pale. It is true what your cousin says—any kind of exercise but horse-riding tires you too quickly—pray, sit down, sit down.”

Fanny managed to stammer— “The scissors—Aunt Norris—I must give—” and, backing out of the room, she turned and fled up the back stairs to her own little bedroom, where she gave way to her anguish, muffling her sobs with her quilt.

Sometime later, with reddened eyes and pale cheeks, she found Aunt Norris in the drawing room and resumed her sewing work, reasoning that Edmund by now had assumed she had been kept behind by her aunt and so could not return to the breakfast room.

“At last! My scissors!” exclaimed her aunt. “Fanny, I have been looking for you these two hours! And after I particularly asked you to hurry! You are too provoking! You are worse than thoughtless, you must have kept away out of spite and wilfulness! I have no patience with you!” And so on, until the two housemaids, bent over the green baize curtain being prepared for the theatre, furtively exchanged looks full of pity for the young lady between their furious stitches.

* * * * *

Fanny could not know how probable or improbable it might be that a young lady of only eighteen summers would be accepted as a governess, but two circumstances smiled upon her. One was that Mrs. Smallridge, the daughter of a prosperous linen-draper who had been elevated into a much higher sphere through her marriage, had the greatest admiration of excellent handwriting and propriety of composition, and Fanny’s letter was very pleasing on that score. Secondly, Miss Lee was able to assure her that Fanny was a genteel young lady, but was not one to give herself airs, and after further enquiry was kind enough to particularize Miss Price’s appearance: ‘She could by no means be called a beauty, nor was she plain, but was not the sort of young lady whom gentlemen noticed or remarked upon, being retiring and modest to a degree.’ Miss Lee’s commendation soothed Mrs. Smallridge’s apprehension about engaging a servant who might conceive herself to be superior in point of birth or breeding to the lady of the house, and a further, if unspoken, reservation which any woman no longer in the first bloom of youth must feel when introducing a young person into her family circle. Thus satisfied, she wrote out a note for Miss Lee to enclose in her own letter to Fanny:

Dear Fanny: (wrote Miss Lee), I will honour your request for secrecy at this time because of my understanding of Lady Bertram’s character. It is not to be doubted that should she learn you are contemplating accepting a post as a governess it would be a source of great uneasiness for her, and the kinder course is to inform her only if you have positively decided upon taking this position.

My acquaintance with Mr. and Mrs. Smallridge is slight, but I have observed nothing which could suggest that living under their roof would be objectionable or ill-advised, and their children are still too young to have formed any habits that you yourself could not counteract.

Should you decide to accept the post, you and I may meet in the course of the spring, but not before, as Mrs. Smallridge is expecting to be confined later this year and will not be travelling.

Yours, etc.

p.s. Mrs. Smallridge’s letter does not name a salary. I suggest you condition for not less than 20 pounds per annum, with an allowance for clothing. Your youth and inexperience do not justify a greater sum than this.

Fanny was in her favourite retreat, the East Room, wondering whether she had gone mad or was she truly contemplating leaving Mansfield Park, when a gentle tap on the door revealed Mary Crawford seeking admittance.

“Am I right? Yes; this is the East Room. My dear Miss Price, I beg your pardon, but I have made my way to you on purpose to entreat your help.”

Fanny, quite surprised, endeavoured to show herself mistress of the room by her civilities, and looked at the bright bars of her empty grate with concern.

“Thank you; I am quite warm, very warm. Allow me to stay here a little while, and do have the goodness to hear me my third act. I have brought my book, and if you would but rehearse it with me, I should be so obliged! I came here to-day intending to rehearse it with Edmund—by ourselves—against the evening, but he is not in the way; and if he were, I do not think I could go through it with him, till I have hardened myself a little; for really there is a speech or two. You will be so good, won't you?”

Fanny was most civil in her assurances, though she could not give them in a very steady voice.

“Have you ever happened to look at the part I mean?” continued Miss Crawford, opening her book. “Here it is. I did not think much of it at first—but, upon my word. There, look at that speech, and that, and that. How am I ever to look him in the face and say such things?”

Fanny thought privately that Mary Crawford had audacity enough to say and do anything, but lacking the courage to disagree or refuse the request, nodded in assent to both.

“You are to have the book, of course. Now for it. We must have two chairs at hand for you to bring forward to the front of the stage. There—what would your governess and your uncle say to see the school room chairs used for such a purpose? Could Sir Thomas look in upon us just now, he would bless himself, for we are rehearsing all over the house. Yates is storming away in the dining-room. I heard him as I came upstairs, and the theatre is engaged of course by those indefatigable rehearsers, Agatha and Frederick. If they are not perfect, I *shall* be surprised. By the bye, I looked in upon them five minutes ago, and it happened to be exactly at one of the times when they were trying not to embrace, and Mr. Rushworth was with me. I thought he began to look a little queer, so I turned it off as well as I could, by whispering to him, 'We shall have an excellent Agatha; there is something so *maternal* in her manner, so completely maternal in her voice and countenance.' Was not that well done of me? He brightened up directly. Now for my soliloquy.”

She began, and they had got through half the scene, when a tap at the door brought a pause, and the entrance of Edmund, the next moment, suspended it all.

Surprise, consciousness, and pleasure appeared in each of the three on this unexpected meeting; and for Edmund was come on the very same business that had brought Miss Crawford. He too had his book, and was seeking Fanny, to ask her to rehearse with him, and help him to prepare for the evening, without knowing Miss Crawford to be in the house; and great was the joy and animation of being thus thrown together, of comparing schemes, and sympathising in praise of Fanny's kind offices.

She could not equal them in their warmth. Her spirits sank under the glow of theirs, and she knew she was on the point of enduring yet another unendurable circumstance; watching the bewitching Miss Crawford recite those lines which constituted very nearly a declaration of love, while Edmund played the part of a man who loved passionately but could not declare himself, owing to the disparity in rank between himself and his beloved Amelia. To add to her pain, if it were possible, Anhalt was Amelia's tutor in the play, the person who educated her and shaped her mind, and thereby won her respect and love—in just such a fashion had Fanny come to love her cousin.

When the stage lovers were done exclaiming over the similarity of impulse, the conformity of thought, and the delicacy of the motive, which had prompted both of them to seek Fanny's help, Edmund proposed that they rehearse together, and Fanny was wanted only to prompt and observe them. With exquisite self-consciousness then, on the part of all the parties, they rehearsed the dialogue:

Amelia. I will not marry.

Anhalt. You mean to say, you will not fall in love.

Amelia. Oh no! [ashamed] I am in love.

Anhalt. Are in love! [starting] And with the Count?

Amelia. I wish I was.

Anhalt. Why so?

Amelia. Because he would, perhaps, love me again.

Anhalt. [warmly]. Who is there that would not?

Amelia. Would you?

Anhalt. I—I—me—I—I am out of the question.

Amelia. No; you are the very person to whom I have put the question.

Anhalt. What do you mean?

Amelia. I am glad you don't understand me. I was afraid I had spoken too plain. [in confusion].

Fanny quite correctly imputed the warmth of Anhalt's responses to Amelia as more than play-acting, and while she could not answer for the sincerity of Miss Crawford's affection for Edmund, she was in no doubt that Miss Crawford did not object to Edmund's being in love with her.

At last, she was left to herself again, and Fanny found herself retrieving the letter from Mrs. Smallridge and perused it once again with swimming eyes: *If Miss Price is able to Arrange her own conveyance to the Raleigh Inn, Oxford, on the 22nd inst., she will be Encountered by one Mrs. Butters, viz, Aunt to the Undersigned, who will conduct an Interview and, should Miss Price's answers and Appearance prove all that is Satisfactory, the said Aunt will Convey her from thence by private carriage thither to Keynsham Hill.*

Although the language of the letter hinted at an aspiration, on Mrs. Smallridge's part, to greater elegance of epistolary style than she might actually possess, this insight into her future employer's capabilities gave Fanny no alarm. The letter gave directions for writing to Mrs. Butters to confirm the arrangement, a *rendezvous* in Oxford now only two days hence. Fanny's despair made her reckless, and in the most daring act of her short life, she determined to be in Oxford at the appointed time.

She had received, over the years, gifts of pocket money from her aunt and uncle for birthdays and holidays, but unlike Maria and Julia, who made a habit of exceeding their allowances, Fanny always saved more than she spent. Apart from small acts of charity and the purchase of some books, Fanny was building a nest egg against the day she and William could at last settle in their own cottage. She possessed sufficient funds to travel to Oxford by mail coach and a little further besides.

Even as she told herself that her proposed course was rash, dangerous, and worst of all to a temperament so sensitive as hers, ridiculous, she found herself already calculating in her mind what, if anything, amongst her few possessions she might be able to carry away from the household without detection. She would take several of her plainest gowns, and perhaps a second pair of shoes—but alas!—she would leave her beloved little library behind, as she had not the strength to carry all her books with her to the village. As she looked about the East Room at the pictures and gifts she had received over the years, she felt a fresh sensation of guilt and humility. The table between the windows was covered with work-boxes and netting-boxes, all gifts from her cousins at different times, principally by Tom. All must remain, and as she contemplated these kind remembrances from her family, her Aunt Norris's accusations of ingratitude struck her as forcibly as they had ever done.

Her alternative was to continue as a silent witness while Edmund courted Mary Crawford, and if, as Fanny devoutly hoped, Miss Crawford ultimately rejected him, it was after all only a matter of time before he fixed upon another woman as his wife. Fanny knew that the woman Edmund Bertram married could style

herself, in all rationality, as the happiest and most fortunate of creatures. Fanny did not condition for happiness. At eighteen years of age, she sought only peace of mind as the best that life could offer her. Despair had given her the courage to do what once had been truly unfathomable.

Her little stock of sealing wax was exhausted, and Fanny descended to the main floor and slipped into her uncle's study to obtain some more for her letter of reply. She tiptoed through the billiard room, where the scene painter was putting the finishing touches on the painted stone walls of Frederick's prison cell, while a young housemaid watched in admiration as she pretended to be dusting the woodwork. The room smelt pleasantly of fresh-sawn lumber and oil paint and turpentine. Fanny had just reached the door of the hallway when her Aunt Norris, looking into the theatre, called for her.

"Come, Fanny," she cried, "these are fine times for you, but you must not be always walking from one room to the other, and doing the lookings-on at your ease, in this way; I want you here. I have been slaving myself till I can hardly stand, to contrive Mr. Rushworth's cloak without sending for any more satin; and now I think you may give me your help in putting it together. There are but three seams; you may do them in a trice. It would be lucky for me if I had nothing but the executive part to do. You are best off, I can tell you: but if nobody did more than you, we should not get on very fast."

Fanny took the work very quietly, without attempting any defence.

Presently, her aunt Norris exclaimed "Bother! I came away this morning without the green thread for the curtains. Fanny, go to my house and ask Betty for the green thread—stay, come back, take this bit of pink satin with you, I can use this little leftover piece to repair a cushion on my sofa."

Thus, Fanny was able to run upstairs, and seal her reply to Mrs. Jos. Butters, care of the Raleigh Inn, which assured that lady of her attendance in two days' time. Fanny hurried to the village, the letter was posted and the green thread retrieved. She debated whether she should reserve her seat on the mail coach, but to do so she would need to give her name, which might cost her the absolute secrecy she required. It would never have occurred to Fanny Price, as she then was, to give a false one.