

AI-Generated Graded Readers

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About This Edition

This book is a simplified English adaptation created for extensive reading practice.

The text was generated using ChatGPT and prepared for intermediate English learners as part of an educational project.

Target reading level: CEFR A2-B1

This edition aims to support fluency development through accessible vocabulary, expanded narration, and improved readability while preserving the original story structure.

Content Note

This adaptation is based on a historical literary work. It may contain expressions, attitudes, or depictions that some readers may consider inappropriate or offensive by today's standards. Such elements have been retained or reflected where necessary in order to preserve the historical and literary character of the original work.

Source Text

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Sarah Scott, *A Description of Millenium Hall and the Country Adjacent*
(Simplified Edition, Adapted and Simplified by ChatGPT)

Part 1: A Broken Carriage

Dear Sir, I promised to write to you when I reached my home in the north. You may be surprised that my letter has become such a long story. On my journey, I found a very unusual group of people, and I want to tell you about them. They live in a place that I will call Millenium Hall. This is not its real name, because the people there do not want others to praise them. Still, I believe their way of life may teach us something important.

Before I returned home, a doctor advised me to travel through the west of England. I had spent many years in Jamaica, where I made a good deal of money but lost some of my health. The doctor thought travel, fresh air, and exercise would help me. I knew that after I reached my quiet home in the north, I would not want to leave it again. So I decided to make this journey first. I asked Mr Lamont, the son of an old friend, to travel with me.

Lamont is about twenty-five years old, and he is clever and pleasant to look at. However, he thinks rather too highly of himself. His father has enough money to let him enjoy all the pleasures of fashionable life, and Lamont has spent much of his time doing exactly that. He reads enough to talk well in company, but he has not studied anything very deeply. He likes ideas that make him seem clever and different, and he has even come to doubt religion without thinking seriously about it. Still, he is kind and good company when he is not trying to impress a room full of people.

We travelled without any serious trouble until one afternoon in Cornwall. Then our carriage suddenly broke down several miles from the nearest town. We sent one man on horseback to find someone who could repair it, while my servant stayed with the carriage. Lamont and I saw a long road between two lines of great oak trees nearby. As we had nothing else to do, we decided to walk along it. The shade was cool, flowers grew around the trees, and the air smelled sweet.

The road seemed to lead to a large house in the distance. As we walked, we saw green fields, clean hedges, and flowers almost everywhere. After about half a mile, we heard the sound of a flute. The music was so soft and beautiful that we stopped to listen. Soon we saw the player, a shepherd watching a large group of sheep. He continued playing until one small lamb moved away from the others, and then he put down his flute and went to bring it back.

We walked on, and the land became more beautiful at every step. Roses and other flowers grew along the edges of the fields, and smaller flowers covered the ground below them. In the darker places under the trees, there were violets and lilies. Different sweet smells came to us as the wind moved through the plants. There were also healthy cattle eating the rich green grass. Even Lamont, who did not usually care much about nature, was impressed.

“If a man had to live outside human society,” he said with a laugh, “this would not be a bad place to do it.” Soon his attention moved to a group of people making hay in another field. The young women were dressed simply but very neatly, and they looked healthy and cheerful. Many children were working with them, trying hard to do their share. They seemed proud that they could help the adults. I was especially pleased to see how active and happy they were.

We now wanted more than ever to see the house at the end of the road. As we came closer, however, the sky grew dark, and a storm suddenly began. Thunder sounded above us, and bright lightning crossed the sky. The workers in the fields quickly stopped their work and ran toward the great house. Lamont and I stood under a large oak tree, but it gave us little protection from such a storm. A woman soon came out of the house and hurried toward us through the rain.

She seemed to be the housekeeper, and she asked us to come inside until the storm ended. At first we did not want to enter the home of complete strangers. “Please come in,” she said again, making it clear that we were welcome. We could hardly keep her standing in the rain while we tried to be polite. Also, I was now very curious about the people who lived in this beautiful place. So we followed her to the house that I will call Millenium Hall.

She led us through a large hall and into a long room full of light. I had never

seen a room quite like it. There were large bookcases, globes, books, paper, and many things used for study and art. Two ladies were reading while a young girl worked on a French translation. Other ladies were painting, drawing, cutting wood, and making pictures on metal. A group of girls between about ten and fourteen were also drawing, writing, sewing, and learning different kinds of useful work.

Everyone stood when we entered, and the housekeeper explained why she had brought us inside. The ladies welcomed us warmly and said they were sorry that we had stood outside when their house was so close. Lamont and I were almost too surprised to answer them properly. We had expected a rich country house, but we had not expected to find so many people reading, studying, making things, and teaching children. I also felt sorry that our arrival had stopped their work. Yet none of the ladies appeared annoyed.

There were six main ladies in the room. Mrs Maynard was a lively woman between forty and fifty, with dark hair and bright dark eyes. Miss Selvyn was younger and had a gentle, thoughtful face. Miss Mancel was tall and graceful, with brown hair and blue eyes, and she had been painting when we entered. Miss Trentham was the tallest, and marks from smallpox remained on her face, but her expression was kind and intelligent. Lady Mary Jones was thin and pale, with beautiful dark eyes and a soft voice, while Mrs Morgan, who was over fifty, had a calm and caring manner that made people trust her at once.

Their clothes were simple, clean, and good, without unnecessary decoration. The girls were also dressed simply, and everything about them was very neat. While we spoke with the ladies, the girls quietly returned to their work. They had clearly learned how to work even when other people were talking nearby. Then I heard one of the women say the name "Mrs Maynard." At once I looked carefully at her, because the name brought back an old memory.

"May I ask which Maynard family you belong to?" I asked her. Her answer made me realize that she was not only someone I had known long ago but also a relation of mine. She had also been looking at me as if my face was familiar. I had spent twenty years in Jamaica, and both time and the climate had changed my appearance greatly. She too had changed with the years, so neither of us had

known the other at first. Once we understood who we were, however, many memories of our younger days returned.

Tea was brought in, and we continued talking happily. I almost forgot that Lamont and I were travellers and had planned to leave that day. Then a servant came with news from my man: the carriage could not be repaired before the next day. The ladies immediately asked us to remain at Millenium Hall for the night. They said they did not want the broken carriage to end a meeting that had brought Mrs Maynard and me together again. I was very glad to accept their invitation, and Lamont had no wish to leave either.

The rain continued, so later Mrs Maynard asked whether we liked music. When we said yes, the ladies took us to another room where there were many musical instruments. Miss Mancel played the harpsichord, Mrs Morgan played the organ, and Lady Mary, Miss Selvyn, and Miss Trentham also played instruments. The shepherd we had heard in the field came with his flute, and several other people joined them. Some had physical problems: one young man could not walk well, and another could hardly see, but both were skilled musicians. Mrs Maynard and several of the girls sang with the group.

They played music from Handel's Messiah and Judas Maccabeus. The performance was so beautiful that I forgot everything else for a time. The children sang with the adults, and everyone seemed to understand and feel the meaning of the music. At last someone announced that supper was ready, and the concert ended. The meal was good but not too rich or expensive. Afterward we talked for a long time, and I became even more interested in these unusual women.

At eleven o'clock the ladies went to bed, and a servant showed Lamont and me to our rooms. Before sleeping, however, we stayed together for another hour and talked about everything we had seen. Lamont admitted that he liked the family very much. Still, he thought they were too serious and too far from fashionable society. "They are pleasant people," he said, "but I think we may find some very old ideas here." I did not know then how much Millenium Hall would change his opinion.

Part 2: The World Around the Hall

I rose very early the next morning because I thought it might be my last day at Millenium Hall. I wanted to enjoy as much of it as possible, so I went straight into the garden. As I passed the windows, I saw that the ladies and the girls had already begun their work. The flower garden was full of many colours, carefully placed together so that each made the others look more beautiful. Beyond it were bushes and small trees, and behind them was a quiet wood. I soon noticed a small door in a fence and decided to see what was on the other side.

The door opened onto a row of small, very neat houses. They all looked alike, and each had a little garden. An old woman was sitting outside one of them and spinning, so I stopped to speak to her. "You have a very comfortable home," I said. "Yes, sir," she answered happily. "The good ladies gave it to me. My neighbours and I have everything we need."

She told me that twelve old women lived there. Before the ladies came to the area, many poor people had little food, little work, and almost no good clothes. "We were very poor," the woman said, "and when people have no food, they often lose the strength to do anything." The ladies had given the women homes and found useful work for them. They also taught them to help one another. A woman who could not walk well might spin for another woman, while her neighbour cleaned her house or did work that she could not do herself.

One woman was almost deaf, so the ladies had given her work that did not require her to sit among people talking. She made soup and other food for sick people in the village. Other women carried the food to the sick and visited them. If someone was very ill, the ladies paid a nurse, but they still made sure that one of the old women visited often. In this way, the women who had once needed help were now able to help others. The old woman seemed especially proud of this.

I saw several small children near the houses and asked why they were there. The woman explained that the ladies helped poor families with many children. When a family had more than five children, the ladies often took care of the

younger ones after they were old enough to walk. The old women looked after them and taught them simple work such as knitting and spinning. When the children were four or five, they went to one of the schools. "They make us feel like mothers again," the woman said, "and their families become our friends."

I wondered whether all this care for children and sick people left the old women enough time to work. She told me not to worry. The ladies provided their food, drink, fuel, and other basic needs, and their spinning was used to make clothes. They only expected the women to work when they could and to keep their houses clean. One of the ladies visited the cottages every day. They had also taught the women to stop fighting over small things, to forgive one another, and to remember their own faults before blaming their neighbours.

The breakfast bell rang before I could ask more questions. I thanked the old woman and returned to the house with a very different feeling from the one I had brought into the garden. The flowers were still beautiful, but now I thought more about the people who lived there. I had seen that the ladies did not simply give money to poor people and leave them alone. They helped them become useful, active, and connected to other people. Their kindness changed both the lives and the minds of those they helped.

After breakfast, the ladies asked Lamont and me to walk with them. They took us by another path and led us into a beautiful wood. Lamont looked around and said that some famous garden designer must have planned it. The ladies smiled. Miss Trentham explained that Lady Mary, Miss Mancel, and Mrs Morgan had designed it themselves, and ordinary local workers had carried out their plans. Lamont was surprised, but he had to admit that the wood was extremely beautiful.

Paths moved between the trees and ended at pleasant views. Simple seats stood in quiet places, and on higher ground there was a small building made for people who wished to be alone. From there we could see a wide river and, farther away, the bright sea. Pictures made by the ladies hung inside the building. A little stream moved through the wood, sometimes appearing beside the path and sometimes disappearing behind trees and plants. Birds, squirrels, hares, and other animals moved freely around us because no one hunted them there.

At the edge of the wood we entered a small cave-like room built from stone, shells, and other natural things. Moss and ivy grew over parts of its walls. The little stream fell down one side and then flowed into the river below. We sat there for some time and looked across the water. I could easily have remained there much longer, but the ladies had daily work that they never allowed themselves to forget. So we started back toward the house by another path.

On the way, I noticed a large area surrounded by a green fence and thick plants. The ladies smiled when I asked what was inside, but at first they did not answer. Lamont became very interested and guessed that perhaps they kept wild animals there. He said that he enjoyed seeing lions, tigers, and other strong animals brought under human control. To him, this showed the power of human intelligence. Miss Mancel did not agree.

“I do not admire intelligence when it is used only to hurt another living thing,” she said. “Sometimes people must control animals for useful reasons. A horse may carry a person, or an ox may help with work. But it is different when we take a wild animal from its home only because we want to look at it. That animal has lost its freedom for our amusement.” She said that she could find little pleasure in watching a great animal forced to perform tricks.

Lamont smiled and said that it would be difficult to argue against kindness. Still, he pointed toward the fence. “But you also keep something inside an enclosed place,” he said. “Is that not another kind of prison?” Miss Mancel answered that he had misunderstood. The place was not made to imprison its inhabitants. It was made to protect them from other people.

She explained that several people lived there whose bodies were very different from most people’s bodies. Some were unusually short, while others were unusually tall. Before coming to Millenium Hall, they had been shown to crowds for money. People had stared at them, laughed at them, and treated them as if they were objects instead of human beings. Some had spent much of their lives in small rooms because their owners wanted complete control over them. The ladies had paid to free them and had brought them here so that they could live in peace.

We wished to see the place, but Mrs Morgan said that strangers were not

usually allowed inside. The residents had suffered too much from curious eyes in the past. She went in first and asked whether they were willing to receive us. When she returned, she said that they had agreed. She asked us not to stare at them or make their bodies the main subject of our attention. We promised to behave with respect and followed her through the gate.

Inside was a large open area divided into several parts. Some parts held birds that were raised for the Hall, while others were full of flowers and bushes. A small stream crossed the ground, and paths ran between the gardens. The people who lived there took great pleasure in growing flowers. Their house was clean and comfortable, and they had servants to help them with work that was difficult for them. One of the shorter residents kindly invited us inside to rest after our walk.

The ladies spoke to each person warmly and asked about their health. It was clear from the way the residents looked at them that they loved and trusted them deeply. Mrs Morgan later told us that their health had been poor when they first arrived. Their minds had also suffered from years of cruel treatment. At first, some even argued about who had once earned the most money for the people who showed them to the public. The ladies slowly helped them understand that this was not something they needed to be proud of.

In time they became calmer and happier. They learned to enjoy their home, their garden, and one another's company. At first they had hidden whenever they heard an unfamiliar voice outside the fence. Later, the ladies slowly introduced them to kind people from the village, and they began to receive visitors by choice. They also helped neighbours with simple work and could now speak about their former lives without the same pain. Even at church, the ladies arranged a private place where they could attend without being watched by a crowd.

We talked about all this as we walked back toward Millenium Hall. By now I was more curious than ever about the women who had created such a place. They were educated, wealthy, and able to live almost any life they wished, yet they had chosen this quiet country home and had built a new kind of society around it. When the other ladies left us, I was pleased to find myself alone with Mrs Maynard. I asked her how these women had come to live this way.

“I can tell you,” she said. “My friends do not hide their past, though they do not often speak about themselves. They have made mistakes, but they are not afraid of the truth. I will begin with the two women who first created this community, Miss Mancel and Mrs Morgan. Their lives have been connected since they were very young, so their stories cannot really be separated.” We sat down in a shaded garden place beside a small stream, and Mrs Maynard began their story.

Part 3: Louisa and Her New Friend

Mrs Maynard began with the childhood of Louisa Mancel. When Louisa was about ten years old, she lived with an aunt who had cared for her for as long as she could remember. Louisa knew that her parents were alive, but her aunt would only say that they were outside England and that Louisa would understand more when she was older. Her aunt loved her deeply and gave great care to her education. They lived quietly in a small house in Surrey, far from busy society. For Louisa, her aunt was almost the same as a mother.

Then her aunt became seriously ill. She understood that she might soon die and decided to take Louisa to London. She hoped to find some of the girl’s relations there and leave Louisa safely with them until her parents returned. But the journey was too difficult for the sick woman. She became much worse on the road and had to stop at an inn. Soon she was too weak even to continue asking people for help.

An old gentleman staying in the next room heard that the woman was very ill and went to help. He found Louisa standing beside the bed, crying deeply. Her aunt became quiet for a short time and held the child in her arms. She looked at the old gentleman and asked him to have pity on Louisa if no relation could be found. Then she prayed for the girl and asked God to protect her. A short time later, she died with Louisa still close beside her.

Louisa was so shocked that at first she could hardly move or speak. The old

gentleman took her to his room and tried to care for her. Soon afterward Mr Hintman came to the inn on other business and found the old gentleman crying. When he heard what had happened, he asked to see the child. Louisa was lying silently on a bed, full of grief and hardly aware of the people around her. Mr Hintman was immediately moved by her unhappy situation.

When Louisa was calm enough to answer questions, she could tell them very little. Her name was Louisa Mancel, and the dead woman was her aunt. She knew that she had a father and mother, but she did not know where they were or why she had never seen them. The two men searched her aunt's papers, hoping to find a name or address that would explain the mystery. They found enough money to pay the woman's final expenses, but they found nothing that told them where Louisa's family was. For the moment, the girl was completely alone.

The old gentleman offered to take Louisa into his own family, although he already had children and could not give her an expensive education. Mr Hintman then made another offer. He was rich, had no children of his own, and believed he could give Louisa every advantage. "I will take care of her," he said. "I will see that she is well educated and has everything she needs." The old gentleman was sorry to lose the child, but he knew that Mr Hintman could do much more for her, so he agreed.

Mr Hintman did not take Louisa to live in his own house because there was no woman there who could properly care for a young girl. Instead, he placed her in a French boarding school run by Mademoiselle d'Avaux. He asked the schoolmistress to provide Louisa with clothes and everything else she needed. Most of all, he wanted her to receive an excellent education. Louisa did not complain about being sent among strangers. After losing the only home she remembered, almost every place in the world seemed strange to her.

The school was very full, so Louisa had to share a room with an older girl named Miss Melvyn. This chance became one of the most important events of her life. Miss Melvyn immediately felt sorry for the sad young child. Louisa was beautiful, but it was not only her appearance that touched Miss Melvyn. She could see that Louisa's sorrow was deep and real. Soon she wanted to know more about

the young girl and to comfort her.

Miss Melvyn had also known great sorrow. She was the only child of Sir Charles and Lady Melvyn. Her mother had been an intelligent, kind, and deeply good woman, and she had given her daughter a careful education. Lady Melvyn also helped poor people and tried to make life better for everyone around her. Sir Charles was a kind man, but he did not have his wife's strong mind. Lady Melvyn quietly guided many of his decisions while always making others believe that he deserved the praise.

Miss Melvyn loved her mother and learned from her example. Lady Melvyn taught her religion, kindness, clear thinking, and the importance of using money well. Their life together was happy until Miss Melvyn was nearly fourteen. Then Lady Melvyn died. Her daughter felt that she had lost not only a mother but also her best teacher and closest friend. Sir Charles was sad too, but his feelings were less deep and did not last as long.

Before a year had passed, Sir Charles married again. His new wife had acted very kindly toward Miss Melvyn before the marriage, and the young girl believed that she had found a new friend. After the wedding, however, the new Lady Melvyn slowly showed a different character. She did not want her stepdaughter near her and began telling Sir Charles that the girl's education was not complete. At last she persuaded him to send Miss Melvyn away to boarding school.

Miss Melvyn understood that the idea had come from her stepmother, but she did not fight her father. She respected him too much and had been taught to obey him. So she went to Mademoiselle d'Avaux's school, although she was unhappy about leaving home. She had been there for three months when Louisa arrived. Because the other girls seemed childish to her, Miss Melvyn had found few close companions. Now, in the quiet and serious Louisa, she found someone she could truly love.

Louisa also became strongly attached to Miss Melvyn. She did not enjoy the usual games of children because grief had made her quieter than girls of her age. Instead, she stayed near her older friend, who helped her with her studies and spoke to her with great kindness. Miss Melvyn began to care for Louisa almost as

an older sister or mother might care for a child. Louisa, who had suddenly lost all family love, found comfort in this new affection. Their friendship grew quickly and deeply.

During the winter, Sir Charles sometimes visited his daughter, though his wife tried to prevent him from seeing her too often. Miss Melvyn never complained to him about her stepmother because she did not want to make him unhappy. She was pleased simply to know that he still wished to see her. Her stepmother rarely invited her home and would not allow her to begin some of the new studies she wanted, such as music and drawing. Even Miss Melvyn's books had been taken from her and used mainly as decoration in Lady Melvyn's room.

Louisa's situation was very different. Mr Hintman visited her often and usually brought a gift or offered some pleasure. He gave her enough money for her personal wishes and paid for music, dancing, drawing, and other lessons. Louisa was grateful, but she cared more about Miss Melvyn than about expensive pleasures. When Mr Hintman offered tickets for plays or music, Louisa sometimes refused to go because she did not want to leave her friend alone. She wanted Miss Melvyn to enjoy everything that she herself enjoyed.

When Mr Hintman asked Louisa what would please her friend most, she answered at once, "Books." He remembered that his sister had left him a good collection of books which he did not need. He sent the whole collection to the school, together with bookcases for their room. The two girls were delighted. They now spent many hours reading together, and Miss Melvyn continued to teach Louisa geography, history, religion, and other subjects that she could understand.

Louisa also wanted to use some of her money to pay for music and drawing lessons for Miss Melvyn. At first her friend refused. She thought Louisa was too young to understand the value of money and did not want to take advantage of her kindness. Louisa was deeply hurt. "If you gave something to me," she told her, "I would be happy to accept it because I would know that giving it made you happy. Why will you not let me have the same pleasure?"

Miss Melvyn understood the love behind these words and admitted that

Louisa's feelings were more thoughtful than she had expected from someone so young. Still, she found another solution. She could watch Louisa's teachers and practise the same lessons afterward without making Louisa pay more money. In this way, both girls continued learning together. Their friendship was not based only on affection; each helped the other become wiser and better.

Mr Hintman later suggested that Louisa should learn Italian. Miss Melvyn knew an Italian gentleman named Mr d'Avora, who had once been a friend of her family. He had suffered serious problems in life and had lost much of his money, but he was intelligent, kind, and very well educated. Mr Hintman arranged for him to teach Louisa. Mr d'Avora soon became interested in both girls and began helping them with much more than Italian.

He had travelled through many countries in Europe and had also visited parts of Asia and Africa. He knew a great deal about people, history, and books, and he enjoyed sharing his knowledge with the two young women. He often read with them and explained difficult ideas in simple ways. He especially cared about Miss Melvyn because he remembered her mother with gratitude and respect. Helping the daughter seemed to him a way of returning some of the kindness he had once received from her family.

The two girls now spent most of their time studying, reading, and practising what they had learned. They did not often join the other pupils, though Louisa made small gifts to the girls so that they would not feel disliked or forgotten. Years passed in this quiet way. By the time Louisa was fifteen, she had become a very beautiful and highly educated young woman. Yet she was not proud of her beauty or her abilities, and she still listened carefully to others and wanted to learn more.

Louisa enjoyed conversation and could be lively and cheerful, but she did not use her intelligence to make other people feel small. Her friendship with Miss Melvyn remained at the centre of her life, and Mr d'Avora had become a trusted teacher to them both. The lonely ten-year-old child who had entered the school after her aunt's death was lonely no longer. She had found affection, education, and a new sense of safety. For a time, it seemed that her difficult childhood had led her at last into a peaceful and happy life.

Part 4: Mr Hintman's Secret

As Louisa grew older, Mr Hintman's visits began to trouble her. When she had been a child, his warm affection had seemed natural, and she had loved him almost like a father. But now she was fifteen, and he still treated her with the same kind of physical affection. Louisa began to feel uncomfortable, though she could not easily explain why. She was afraid that asking him to change his behaviour would make her seem proud or ungrateful.

She told Miss Melvyn about her worries. Miss Melvyn was older and understood the danger more clearly, but she did not know what Louisa should do. At last she decided to ask Mr d'Avora for advice. One day, while Louisa was meeting Mr Hintman, Miss Melvyn explained the problem to him. Mr d'Avora listened carefully and said that perhaps Mr Hintman had simply forgotten that Louisa was no longer a child. Still, the matter worried him more than he showed.

After leaving the school, Mr d'Avora quietly asked people about Mr Hintman's private life. What he learned was disturbing. Mr Hintman was known as a generous and good-natured man, but he also spent large amounts of money on women. He often became interested in a woman, gave her many expensive things, and then left her when he became tired of her. Mr d'Avora now feared that his kindness to Louisa might not have been the kindness of a father. Perhaps he had educated and supported her because he hoped one day to make her his lover.

Yet Mr d'Avora could not be completely certain. A man with serious faults could still perform a truly generous action, and it was possible that Mr Hintman had honestly wanted to help an orphan child. He did not want to fill Louisa's mind with fear if there was no real danger. He therefore told Miss Melvyn only that Louisa must be careful. She should remain polite but should not allow Mr Hintman to treat her too freely. Louisa herself would have to watch his behaviour and decide what it meant.

When Miss Melvyn told Louisa this, the poor girl became deeply unhappy.

She still remembered everything Mr Hintman had done for her. He had taken her in when she was alone, paid for her education, and given her every comfort. She could hardly bear the thought that his kindness might have had a selfish purpose. At the same time, she knew that she must protect herself. She felt caught between gratitude to the man she had loved like a father and fear of what he might really want.

During the rest of the winter, Mr Hintman noticed that Louisa was less relaxed with him. He complained that she had become too quiet and serious in his company. Then, as the school was going to close for a short time at Easter, he asked her to go with him to his country house. Louisa wanted very much to refuse. She was afraid of being alone with him, and she also knew that Miss Melvyn would soon leave the school and return to her father's home.

Mr Hintman continued asking, and Louisa could find no easy way to answer. She did not want to accuse him of bad intentions without proof. If his feelings were innocent, a strong refusal would be a cruel return for years of kindness. But each day brought the planned journey closer, and Louisa's fear grew. Miss Melvyn and Mr d'Avora were also worried, yet they could find no safe answer. Louisa could only hope that something would protect her from having to make the terrible choice herself.

Two days before they were supposed to leave, Mademoiselle d'Avaux entered the girls' room with a very serious face. Louisa and Miss Melvyn immediately knew that something bad had happened. At last the schoolmistress told them that a gentleman was waiting downstairs with news. Mr Hintman had died suddenly the day before. For a moment all Louisa's fears disappeared, and she thought only of the man who had cared for her for so many years.

The news shocked her so deeply that she could not meet the gentleman who had brought it. Miss Melvyn went downstairs in her place. There she learned another painful fact: Mr Hintman had died without making a will. He had left no money to Louisa. One of his relations had persuaded the family to pay for one more year of her schooling, but after that she would have to support herself. Except for her education, her books, and a few possessions, she was almost as

poor as she had been when Mr Hintman first found her.

Then the gentleman told Miss Melvyn something even worse. Mr Hintman had spoken openly among some of his male friends about his plans for Louisa. He had not been preparing her to become an adopted daughter. He had expected her to become his lover. He believed that her gratitude and affection would make it easy to persuade her, and he had even planned a false marriage ceremony if she refused to live with him without marriage. The gentleman said that Mr Hintman had spoken about this plan only a few days before his death.

Miss Melvyn was horrified. She asked how men could know such things and still call themselves Mr Hintman's friends. The gentleman answered that people in fashionable society often accepted serious faults in their friends. He himself had remained connected to Mr Hintman mainly because they were relations. He had told Miss Melvyn the truth because he hoped it would make Louisa's grief easier to bear. Before leaving, he gave her the money that had been sent for Louisa's support.

When Miss Melvyn looked at it, she saw that Louisa now had only one hundred pounds of her own. She stayed alone for a while so that she could control her feelings before returning to her friend. Louisa had lost a man she had loved and respected, but she had also learned that much of what she believed about him had been false. When Miss Melvyn finally told her everything, Louisa did not try to protect herself from the painful truth. She listened and slowly understood how close she had come to great danger.

For several days, Louisa thought more about Mr Hintman's death than about her own poverty. She was deeply troubled that he had died so suddenly while living such a life. Yet she was also thankful that his death had saved her from the journey to his country house. She had feared poverty before, but now poverty seemed a much smaller danger. She would rather have little money and remain free than live in comfort at the price Mr Hintman had planned to demand.

Soon Louisa, Miss Melvyn, and Mr d'Avora had to think about her future. Louisa was well educated, but she was still very young. Mr d'Avora believed that this would make it difficult for her to find a good position immediately. He

advised her to live quietly for several years and then try to become a teacher in the home of a widow with children. He feared that many married women would not want a young and very beautiful woman living in the same house as their husbands.

Louisa owned some jewellery and other valuable things, so she decided to sell most of them. She kept her books and her harpsichord because they would help her continue her education and practise the skills she might later use to earn money. Miss Melvyn was soon to return home, so she looked for an inexpensive place where Louisa could live nearby. She found a room in the home of a respectable farmer only a short distance from Sir Charles's house. Louisa moved there, and the two friends were happy that they would not have to separate completely.

Miss Melvyn's life at home, however, was very uncomfortable. Her stepmother continued trying to make Sir Charles think badly of his daughter. Miss Melvyn remained calm and never spoke against Lady Melvyn because she did not want to destroy her father's peace. Lady Melvyn used this silence against her. She often told Sir Charles that Miss Melvyn behaved badly when he was not present, and when he showed doubt, his wife cried and accused him of not loving or trusting her.

Louisa became Miss Melvyn's greatest comfort. The two friends met at Louisa's small rooms almost every day, where they read together or played music. Louisa wanted to remain near her friend for as long as possible, so she tried to spend very little money. She took simple sewing work and also hoped that she might be able to sell some of her paintings. Her life was much poorer than before, but she did not feel unhappy when Miss Melvyn was beside her. Their friendship gave them both a place of peace.

Toward the end of autumn, an older wealthy man named Mr Morgan came to visit someone in the neighbourhood. He had been travelling for his health and soon met Miss Melvyn. He quickly became interested in her and wished to marry her. Miss Melvyn did not return his feelings at all. She also feared that her stepmother would support the marriage simply because it would send her far away from home.

When Mr Morgan formally asked to marry Miss Melvyn, Lady Melvyn did exactly what her stepdaughter had feared. She tried to persuade Sir Charles to support the match. Miss Melvyn refused because she could not imagine being happy with a man she did not love and could hardly even like. Ordinary pressure did not change her decision. Lady Melvyn therefore began to look for a stronger way to force her.

The farmer with whom Louisa lived had a young son named Simon. Because Miss Melvyn visited Louisa so often, Lady Melvyn saw that she could use him in a false story. One day Sir Charles found his wife crying violently. At first she said that she could not tell him what was wrong because the truth would cause him too much pain. The more she refused to speak, the more frightened he became. Finally, after making a great show of illness and distress, she told him that Miss Melvyn was secretly involved with Simon.

Sir Charles was shocked. Because he had seen how strongly his wife seemed to suffer while telling the story, he believed her. Lady Melvyn advised him that there were now only two possible choices. His daughter must marry Mr Morgan at once, or he must send her away and refuse to recognize her as his daughter. Miss Melvyn was called into the room and accused of bringing shame on the family. At first she could hardly understand what they were talking about.

When she finally heard the charge against her, her usual quiet patience disappeared. She firmly denied having any secret relationship with Simon. She told her stepmother that she had accepted many unkind actions in silence, but she could not remain silent when her good name was attacked. "Let me meet the people who accuse me," she demanded. "Even a criminal is allowed to hear the accusation and answer it." At that moment the dinner bell rang, and Mrs Maynard had to stop her story.

Part 5: A Home for Women

After dinner, four ladies came to drink tea with the women of Millenium Hall.

From their warm manner, I could see that they knew one another well. When the visitors prepared to leave, Miss Trentham suggested that we walk part of the way with them. The evening was pleasant, and we all agreed. Lady Mary said that after showing us the beauty of their land, they should now show us its true riches.

We walked through the park beside the house. There were fine old trees, several pieces of water, and a long canal that looked almost like a river. Mrs Morgan pointed to a building that I had thought was only a pretty garden house. She explained that it was a large house for pigeons. The Hall also had rabbits, fish, deer, and other animals, as well as a good dairy. In this way, the land provided much of the food they needed.

“These are our riches,” Mrs Morgan said. “We have almost everything we need here without spending very much money.” I said that such independence might make some people feel that they did not need anyone else. If a person could provide everything for himself, perhaps he might stop caring about society. Lady Mary did not agree. She said that people need much more than food and comfort. They need friendship, conversation, ideas, and chances to help others.

Lamont smiled at this. “I am surprised to hear you speak so warmly about society,” he said. “You have chosen to live far from the fashionable world.” Miss Mancel answered that a crowd and a true society were not the same thing. Many people could fill a room without trusting or helping one another. “For me,” she said, “real society means people who care for one another, speak honestly, and try to help each other.”

Lamont said that their way of life sounded very serious. Miss Mancel laughed and told him that she did not want people to stop enjoying themselves. She only preferred real happiness to empty noise. She wanted people to have enough quiet time to think about their actions and their duties to others. “You want us all to become servants to one another,” Lamont said. “No,” Miss Mancel replied. “I want people to become friends.”

Lamont then asked how a poor person could ever return a favour to a rich person. Miss Mancel answered that helping someone could itself bring great pleasure. A poor person gave the richer person a chance to do something good.

More importantly, the poor person could give love and gratitude in return. She believed that being truly loved and respected was one of life's greatest pleasures. Lamont thought about this and admitted that her argument made more sense than he had first expected.

While we talked, we came close to the house where the four visiting ladies lived. They did not ask us to enter because the evening was growing late. However, some women inside saw us from the windows and came out to greet the ladies of Millenium Hall. Their meeting was short but very warm. I noticed again how much respect and affection the visitors showed toward our friends. When we turned back, I asked Mrs Maynard about the large house and the many women who lived there.

She told me that the women of Millenium Hall had long been worried about a certain group of poor gentlewomen. These women came from respectable families but had too little money to live independently. Many had received the kind of education that taught them polite manners but gave them no useful way to earn a living. They sometimes had to live in richer people's houses and depend completely on them. There they could be treated almost like servants while still being expected to behave like ladies.

Mrs Maynard said that pride sometimes made their situation worse, but the women of Millenium Hall did not think that this made them unworthy of help. A poor woman who was often treated without respect might naturally hold strongly to the few things that still gave her pride. She might think much about her family name, education, or abilities because other people made her feel small. The ladies understood this weakness instead of laughing at it. They therefore bought the large house and turned it into a safe home for women in this situation.

They made clear rules for the new community. A woman who entered gave the income from her small fortune to the community while she lived there, but the money itself still belonged to her. If she later left, she received it back. This helped create equality because a woman with more money could not live better than one with less. Each resident had her own bedroom, while the dining room and main sitting room were shared. Everyone was given the same amount of money each

year for clothes and personal expenses.

The house provided books, musical instruments, sewing materials, and other things for useful or pleasant activity. The women kept regular hours, and a housekeeper managed the daily work with enough servants to help. Each resident took a turn giving simple household orders for one week. Their clothes had to be plain and neat, but they did not have to dress alike. If someone became sick, the women of Millenium Hall paid the extra cost of her care. Good food and everything needed for a comfortable life were also provided.

There were rules for behaviour too. A woman who seriously damaged the peace of the house could be asked to leave if most of the others voted for it. The same could happen if someone behaved in a way that brought serious trouble to the community. At first twelve women moved into the house, and they were very pleased with their new lives. Later, other women were allowed to stay there for a fixed yearly payment. Widows sometimes came for a year when they wanted a quiet place after the death of a husband.

The community had now grown to about thirty women. Some paid to live there, and several young girls were being educated by women who were related to them. The money from these residents helped the house support itself. Millenium Hall also sent food and other goods from its land when needed. Because the house was managed carefully, it no longer cost the founders as much as they had expected. It had become a stable community rather than a place that depended on constant gifts.

I wondered how thirty people with different characters could live together without continual arguments. Mrs Maynard admitted that this had been difficult at first. During the first year, the women of Millenium Hall spent much time with the new community. Instead of giving orders, they tried to teach mainly by example. They encouraged everyone to stay active because they believed that too much empty time often led to anger, jealousy, and unhappiness.

The residents began helping poor families, visiting sick people, teaching children, and doing useful work. If someone enjoyed gardening, music, reading, drawing, or sewing, she was encouraged to develop that interest. They were not

forced to spend every hour together. Apart from meals and prayers, a woman could choose her own company and activity. Some might play cards, some might sew while another read aloud, and others might make music, walk outside, work in the garden, or remain quietly in their rooms.

Mrs Maynard believed that this freedom helped keep the peace. No one had to remain in company after she became tired of it. A woman could leave, rest, and return when she was ready to enjoy other people again. The residents also did much good among the poorer people living nearby. Some had very little money themselves, but they still gave part of it to people who had even less. Their lives had changed from unhappy dependence into useful independence.

Lamont asked whether many women had been forced to leave because of bad behaviour. Mrs Maynard said that only one had actually been expelled. Another had left because she knew she might soon face the same decision and perhaps also because she disliked country life. On a few occasions, a vote had been planned against difficult residents. The fear of losing their home made those women work harder to live peacefully with the others. Some of them later became among the most pleasant members of the whole group.

Some residents had died and left their small fortunes to help continue the community. Others had married, sometimes to men they had known before and sometimes to men they met in the area. Their good conduct made them respected. I told Mrs Maynard that the women of Millenium Hall seemed to live surrounded by people whose lives they had made happier. She answered that although she had not created these good works herself, simply living among such people gave her great happiness.

Mrs Maynard also told us that the house was now completely full. Many other women had asked to enter, including some who had more money than the present residents. The ladies usually preferred to help those with the greatest need. Because they could accept no more people, they had decided to create another community of the same kind in a larger house about three miles away. Some future residents would first spend several months at Millenium Hall and learn how the community should work.

By the time Mrs Maynard finished explaining all this, we had returned to the Hall. Supper was ready, and the rest of the evening passed in general conversation. The next morning it rained, so Lamont and I could not walk outside early. Around eleven the weather cleared, and we went into the garden. The flowers smelled especially fresh after the rain, and soon Mrs Maynard joined us.

I told her that I had not forgotten where she had stopped her story the day before. She smiled and said that she had come for that very reason. We found a comfortable place in the garden and prepared to listen again. “We left Miss Melvyn asking to meet the person who accused her,” Mrs Maynard said. Then she continued the history of the two young friends.

Part 6: Miss Melvyn’s Choice

Lady Melvyn refused to let her stepdaughter meet the person who had accused her. She told Miss Melvyn that there were only two choices. She could marry Mr Morgan, or her father would publicly reject her and send her away. Sir Charles looked unhappy, but he did not dare to oppose his wife. Then Lady Melvyn took him from the room and left Miss Melvyn alone.

Miss Melvyn could hardly think. She hated the idea of marrying Mr Morgan, but she was also afraid of losing her good name. She knew that her stepmother was ready to tell any story that would help her plans. At last she ran to Louisa and told her everything. For some time Louisa could only hold her friend and cry with her. Neither young woman knew how to fight such a cruel and clever enemy.

Miss Melvyn believed that marriage should be based on trust and affection. She could not love Mr Morgan, and she felt that promising to love him would be dishonest. Yet she also believed that a good name was important. Other people watched how women of her position behaved, and a false story about her might make bad behaviour seem more common and less serious. She felt that whichever path she chose, she would be doing something she believed was wrong.

When she returned home, Lady Melvyn ordered her to speak with Mr Morgan.

Miss Melvyn decided to make one last attempt to stop the marriage. She told him clearly that she did not love him and could not imagine becoming happy as his wife. "Please think about your own happiness," she said. "You deserve a wife who truly wants to be with you. If you marry me, you already know that my heart will not be yours."

Mr Morgan was not moved by her words. He said that her beauty was more powerful than any argument she could make. He also believed that after marriage she would learn to love him because it would then be her duty. Miss Melvyn tried again to show him how uncertain such a hope was, but he would not listen. Instead, he became even more eager for the wedding. Her attempt to make him withdraw had completely failed.

Meanwhile, Lady Melvyn had persuaded young Simon to support her false story. He did not openly describe any love affair, but when Sir Charles questioned him, he gave short answers and looked down in a way that seemed to agree with the accusation. Sir Charles now believed the story more strongly. Miss Melvyn again asked to remain quietly at home until her behaviour proved her innocence. Her father almost agreed, but Lady Melvyn quickly made him change his mind.

Miss Melvyn thought about running away and living somewhere far from her family. She would gladly have worked for her food rather than marry Mr Morgan. But she knew what would happen after she left. Lady Melvyn would tell everyone that her escape proved the accusation was true. People who did not know the real reason would believe that Miss Melvyn had run away because of shame. She could not accept that result.

At last she decided to marry Mr Morgan. She had already told him honestly that she did not love him, so she had not tried to deceive him. She promised herself that if she became his wife, she would perform every duty of that position as well as she could. The decision gave her no happiness. It only seemed to her the least terrible choice among several terrible ones.

She went again to Louisa and explained what she had decided. Louisa asked her to think carefully about the long years that might follow. Miss Melvyn answered that she expected no happiness from the marriage. "Duty must guide me

now,” she said. “I must control my words and even my face. I may feel unhappy, but I must not make my husband unhappy by showing him every feeling in my heart.”

There was one thing that frightened her almost as much as the marriage itself. After becoming Mrs Morgan, she believed she should not complain about her husband to Louisa. She would feel that a wife’s duty required her to hide his faults instead of discussing them with a friend. “Please do not leave me completely,” she asked. “If you can live near me, I will still have some comfort.” Louisa promised that nothing could make her willingly give up their friendship.

Sir Charles and Lady Melvyn were pleased when they heard of her decision, and the wedding was arranged quickly. During the short time before it, Louisa was allowed to visit the house freely. Her presence helped Miss Melvyn bear the days before the marriage. When they were alone, the two friends could cry and speak honestly. In company, Miss Melvyn tried to remain calm and hide her fear.

The wedding day soon arrived. Miss Melvyn became Mrs Morgan, though everyone could see that she was deeply unhappy. Even Mr Morgan saw her distress, but it did not reduce his pleasure. The day after the marriage, Mrs Morgan asked whether Louisa might come and stay with them. Mr Morgan immediately refused. He said that his wife must have no close friend except her husband.

Mrs Morgan was shocked by his answer. Mr Morgan told her that he would allow ordinary visitors, but not a friend to whom she might speak privately about him. He even said that if she had no other close friend, perhaps she would finally learn to love him. Mrs Morgan understood that argument would not help. She accepted his decision in silence, but she had to tell Louisa the truth so that her friend would not think she had been forgotten.

Mr and Mrs Morgan remained at Sir Charles’s house only two more days. On the last day, Mr Morgan went out to visit people nearby, and the two friends had several hours together. They knew that their long years of daily friendship were ending. Louisa tried to give Mrs Morgan hope and said that perhaps kindness and patience would slowly improve her husband’s character. But neither of them truly knew when they would be free to spend time together again.

That evening they said goodbye. Louisa left before Mr Morgan returned because she did not want her tears to cause more trouble for Mrs Morgan. Mrs Morgan watched her friend walk away until the road turned and Louisa disappeared from sight. Then she began crying again. She had little time to recover before her husband returned, so she walked outside in the cool evening air until she could appear calm.

The next morning the married couple left for Mr Morgan's country home. It was a large old house in an unpleasant area with bad roads and wet ground. Mr Morgan's unmarried sister, Miss Susanna Morgan, also lived there. She was about fifty-five and had a large fortune of her own. Years of disappointment had made her proud, bitter, and very ready to find faults in other people.

Miss Susanna soon became jealous of Mrs Morgan's youth and beauty. She criticized the way Mrs Morgan managed the house and said that servants needed to be spoken to harshly every morning. Mrs Morgan preferred to treat servants with kindness and wanted them to be properly cared for when they were sick. Miss Susanna called this wasteful. Mr Morgan often agreed with his sister because he disliked spending money even when the expense was necessary.

Mr Morgan also had a difficult temper. He could become angry very quickly and then remain bad-tempered long afterward. Because he knew his wife had married him without love, he did little to make her love him. He admired her beauty but did not understand her mind or value her intelligence. Mrs Morgan nevertheless tried to perform her duties faithfully. She never spoke publicly against him, and later in life she almost never mentioned him except with respect.

Louisa's letters were one of Mrs Morgan's few comforts. Louisa herself continued living quietly in the country and trying to support herself. Her beauty, however, made the quiet life she wanted difficult. People began talking about the beautiful young woman they had seen at church. Soon people from other places came simply because they wanted to see her.

Louisa tried to sit where she would not attract attention, but this did little good. Women from important families began visiting her and discovered that her manners and intelligence were as attractive as her appearance. Louisa accepted

their kindness politely, but she avoided becoming too involved in social life. She still needed to save money and work for her future. Mr d’Avara also warned her in his letters that her beauty might make it harder, not easier, for her to find the safe and independent life they had planned.

Louisa therefore continued to live carefully and use her skills to support herself. She knew that the small amount of money she possessed could not last forever. Reading, music, sewing, and painting filled her days, while her letters kept her connected to Mrs Morgan and Mr d’Avara. She missed her closest friend deeply, but she refused to give up control of her own life. For the present, she remained poor but independent.

Part 7: Louisa and Sir Edward

After Mrs Morgan’s marriage, Louisa decided to leave the farmer’s house. One of the women who had shown her kindness was Lady Lambton, an intelligent and generous older woman. She offered Louisa a place to stay while another small home was prepared for her nearby. Louisa accepted because she had no strong reason to remain where she was. Lady Lambton soon enjoyed her company so much that she asked her to stay much longer.

Louisa found Lady Lambton kind and interesting. They both loved music, painting, books, and languages, so they had many things to do and talk about together. Lady Lambton was a good woman, though she was very proud of her rich and important family. Louisa respected her and felt grateful for her friendship. She tried not to show how much she still worried about Mrs Morgan.

Mrs Morgan never complained openly in her letters. She even tried to make her life sound better than it really was because she did not want Louisa to suffer with her. But Louisa knew her friend too well. She could feel sadness behind the words and could see that Mrs Morgan’s cheerful style had changed. Not knowing exactly how unhappy her friend was made Louisa worry even more.

Louisa had lived with Lady Lambton for more than a year when Sir Edward

Lambton returned from four years of travel. He was Lady Lambton's grandson, and both his parents were dead. Lady Lambton had cared for him and managed his affairs while he was away. She was very happy to see him return. He was now twenty-three, handsome, well educated, lively, and polite.

Sir Edward was also generous and warm-hearted. Unlike his grandmother, he cared little about family pride. He soon noticed Louisa and was greatly attracted by her beauty. At first both Louisa and Lady Lambton thought his attention was only the polite behaviour of a young man who had travelled widely. But Lady Lambton soon began to wonder if his feelings were becoming more serious.

She spoke to Louisa about this carefully. Sir Edward's family had an old and important name, but his land carried large debts. For this reason, Lady Lambton believed that he needed to marry a woman with money. She did not tell Louisa that she was also troubled by the mystery of Louisa's birth. Louisa honestly answered that Sir Edward had never spoken seriously of love to her.

Still, Louisa immediately understood the danger of her position. She asked Lady Lambton for permission to leave before Sir Edward became more deeply interested in her. Lady Lambton refused because she did not want to lose Louisa's company. She also believed that Louisa was too honourable to encourage her grandson secretly. Louisa promised that she would never knowingly do anything to hurt Lady Lambton or her family.

Sir Edward's feelings, however, became stronger each day. He admired Louisa's face, but he loved her mind and character even more. He knew that he should marry a rich woman because of his family's debts, and for some time he tried to fight his feelings. Yet he could not make himself leave the house. Every conversation with Louisa only made him love her more.

Louisa also began to understand that she was in danger. Sir Edward was kind, intelligent, and respectful toward her, and his respect touched her deeply. She again asked Lady Lambton to let her go, but the older woman still refused. Louisa did not know where else she could safely live. A young woman alone, without family protection, could easily meet new dangers.

More than six months passed in this difficult situation. At last Sir Edward

could no longer hide his love. One day, when he found Louisa alone, he told her that he loved her and wished to marry her. Louisa was not surprised, but his words caused her great pain. She had already discovered that her own heart loved him too.

For a few moments she could not answer. She wanted to accept him, but she remembered everything she owed to Lady Lambton. She could not use that lady's kindness as the means of bringing serious trouble into her family. At last Louisa controlled herself and looked away from Sir Edward because she feared her eyes would show the truth. "I respect you very much," she said, "but I cannot accept your love."

She told him that Lady Lambton had treated her with great kindness and that she would never act against the interests of the family. Sir Edward tried to answer, but Louisa did not remain to hear him. She went to her room and cried alone. Rejecting him was especially painful because she knew that, in different circumstances, she would gladly have married him. Her duty and her own wishes were now fighting inside her.

Sir Edward did not give up. He found other chances to speak with Louisa alone and asked her again to marry him. He argued that his happiness should matter more than his grandmother's pride. Lady Lambton might only be disappointed, he said, while he would be completely miserable without Louisa. He was ready to accept financial difficulty if he could have her as his wife.

His words sometimes seemed reasonable to Louisa because she loved him. For that very reason, she did not trust her own judgement. She feared that love might make a weak argument sound like a good one. Gratitude and honour still told her that she should refuse. At last she warned Sir Edward that if he continued asking her, she would have to leave the house.

Sir Edward then asked for something less. He wanted Louisa to promise that she would marry him after Lady Lambton died. Louisa refused this too. She said that such a secret promise would only be another way of deceiving his grandmother. If she believed it was wrong to marry him now, she could not honestly make a hidden agreement for the future.

Lady Lambton could see that her grandson was deeply unhappy, but she did not change her mind. She admired Louisa and knew that she was an excellent woman. Still, family pride and money seemed more important to her in this matter. She believed that the feelings of two young people would soon pass. Louisa knew that remaining in the house would only make both her own love and Sir Edward's love stronger.

She therefore wrote to Mr d'Avora and told him everything. She asked if she might stay in his home until he could help her find another safe place. Mr d'Avora immediately agreed. He believed that Louisa had acted with great honour, though he was angry that Lady Lambton's pride had caused so much pain. He promised to meet Louisa on the road so that she would not have to travel alone.

Louisa now had somewhere to go, but she did not want to disappear secretly. She went to Lady Lambton and honestly admitted that Sir Edward loved her and that she loved him in return. She explained that this was exactly why she must leave. Lady Lambton respected Louisa even more after hearing this, but she still would not allow the marriage. Together they planned for Sir Edward to be away when Louisa left.

Sir Edward had important business in another county, and his grandmother strongly advised him to go and deal with it. He had delayed the journey because he did not want to leave Louisa, but at last he agreed. The evening before his departure, he found Louisa alone once more. He again asked her to change her mind. She still refused, though this time she could not completely hide her sadness.

Tears came into Louisa's eyes as she thought that this might be the last time she would see him. Sir Edward saw her tears and understood that she did not feel nothing for him. This gave him hope. He believed that she would be happy when he returned, so he left the next day planning to finish his business as quickly as possible. Louisa spent much of that day alone, trying to control her grief.

Four days later, Louisa left Lady Lambton's house. Lady Lambton travelled with her for the first twelve miles and then placed her in Mr d'Avora's care. Before they separated, the older woman praised Louisa warmly and showed real sadness at losing her. Mr d'Avora could not understand how she could praise Louisa so

highly and still think her unfit to marry Sir Edward. But Lady Lambton's pride remained stronger than her affection.

When Sir Edward returned and discovered that Louisa had gone, he became wild with grief and anger. His grandmother refused to tell him where she was. Soon he decided to join the army in Germany as a volunteer. He said that he wanted danger because only death might end his suffering. When Lady Lambton wrote to Louisa with this news, Louisa was filled with fear and began to question her own decision.

Mr d'Avora tried to calm her. He reminded her that she had acted according to what she truly believed was right. After some time, Louisa accepted that she could not control Sir Edward's choices and had to think about her own future. Then Mr d'Avora met an old friend in London who worked for a wealthy widow named Mrs Thornby. The widow had recently lost her waiting woman and needed another servant.

Louisa agreed to apply for the position. She dressed as plainly as possible and tried to make herself look older and less attractive, but she could not hide her beauty. Mrs Thornby at first worried about taking such a young and beautiful woman into her service. Mr d'Avora explained that Louisa was sensible, careful, and completely trustworthy. As Mrs Thornby was a widow, she finally agreed to employ her.

Lady Lambton had tried to give Louisa a large present when they parted, but Louisa had refused it. She did not want money that might look like payment for giving up Sir Edward. Poverty now seemed less frightening to her than losing her honour. Mr d'Avora suggested that she use another name while she worked as a servant, so that her present situation would not cause trouble if her life changed in the future. Louisa agreed and entered Mrs Thornby's house under the name of Menil.

Part 8: A Mother Found and a Love Lost

Louisa began her new life in Mrs Thornby's house under the name of Menil. She did her work so carefully that Mrs Thornby was very pleased with her. Louisa tried to hide many of her accomplishments because they were not needed for her position. Still, her speech and manners clearly showed that she had received an excellent education. Before a week had passed, Mrs Thornby became sure that her new servant had not always lived as a servant.

Mrs Thornby asked Louisa to tell her about her past. At first Louisa tried to avoid the subject because many memories were painful. But Mrs Thornby asked again with so much kindness that Louisa could not refuse. She explained that Menil was not her real name. "My true name is Mancel," she said, "and when I was a baby, my parents left me with my aunt because they had to leave England."

Louisa had hardly finished these words when Mrs Thornby cried, "My child! My child!" She fell to her knees and thanked God with great emotion. Louisa stood beside her in complete surprise. Then Mrs Thornby put her arms around Louisa and told her the truth. "I am your mother," she said. "I am the mother who had to leave you so many years ago."

Louisa could hardly believe what she heard. She had thought that she might never know her parents, and now she had found her mother in the house where she had entered as a servant. Mrs Thornby was crying with joy and could hardly speak. Louisa helped her rise and held her close. For some time, neither woman was able to have a calm conversation.

When Mrs Thornby became quieter, she explained what had happened many years before. Louisa's father and mother had lost most of their money, and Mr Mancel had also become involved in a duel that ended badly. Because of these troubles, they had been forced to leave England. Louisa was still a baby, so they left her with Mr Mancel's sister. They planned to return for her when their situation improved.

Mr and Mrs Mancel travelled to one of the English colonies in America. Soon after they arrived, however, Mr Mancel became ill with a fever and died. His wife was left almost without money and did not know how she could safely make the long journey back to England alone. Some kind people helped her and gave her a

place to stay. She wrote to her sister-in-law about Mr Mancel's death, but it seemed that the letter never reached England.

During this difficult time, she met Mr Thornby, a wealthy gentleman living there. He admired her character and asked her to marry him. Other people spoke well of him, and Mrs Mancel had few ways to support herself. After she had been a widow for a year, she accepted his offer and became Mrs Thornby. Soon afterward, her new husband's business took them farther inland, and she remained unable to learn anything about Louisa.

Many years passed. Later Mr Thornby's health became poor, and doctors advised him to return to Europe. He and his wife first went to Italy because they hoped the climate would improve his health. For a time he seemed better, but his illness returned and he died there. He left his property in America to a nephew, but he left Mrs Thornby forty thousand pounds that he had already sent to England.

After arranging her husband's funeral and other necessary matters, Mrs Thornby finally returned to England. One of the first things she did was ask people to search for her daughter and her sister-in-law. They had not yet found either of them when Louisa entered her house by pure chance. Mrs Thornby saw this unexpected meeting as a wonderful gift. The daughter she had searched for had come directly to her without either woman knowing who the other was.

Mrs Thornby now wanted to hear everything that had happened to Louisa. Louisa first asked permission to send the happy news to Mr d'Avora. She knew that he had cared for her for years and would be delighted to know that she had found her mother. A messenger was sent to him. Then Louisa told her mother the story of her life from her aunt's death onward.

She told her about Mr Hintman, Miss Melvyn, Mr d'Avora, her poverty, and her efforts to live independently. There was only one important matter that she kept secret. She did not tell her mother that she loved Sir Edward. She still felt shy about speaking of such a personal feeling, especially so soon after being reunited with a mother she hardly knew. For the moment, she tried to keep that part of her heart to herself.

Mrs Thornby became more pleased with Louisa every day. She had expected

only the joy of finding her lost daughter, but she now discovered how intelligent, kind, and accomplished Louisa had become. Louisa also enjoyed a kind of love she had almost forgotten existed. She had found a mother who wanted to care for her and had enough money to protect her from poverty. Her outward situation had changed completely.

Yet Louisa could not be truly peaceful. Sir Edward was still serving with the army in Germany, and she knew that he had gone there because of his grief after losing her. She feared that he might place himself in unnecessary danger. Now that she had a mother and a fortune, the main reasons against their marriage had disappeared. But Louisa still found it difficult to tell Mrs Thornby about him.

One morning Mrs Thornby picked up a newspaper and began reading aloud. It contained news of a battle in Germany in which many English soldiers had been killed. Only a few names were given. Louisa immediately became pale, dropped the work she was holding, and began to shake. Her mother saw her fear and gently asked what had caused it.

Louisa could hide the truth no longer. She told Mrs Thornby about Sir Edward's love and about her own feelings for him. She explained why she had refused him and why she had left Lady Lambton's house. Mrs Thornby was sorry that Louisa had kept such an important matter secret. She told her daughter that if money had been Lady Lambton's main objection, there was no longer any reason for the two young people to remain apart.

Mrs Thornby offered to write to Lady Lambton at once. She was willing to give Louisa enough money to remove the financial difficulty and believed that Sir Edward's character made him a good husband for her daughter. Louisa gladly agreed. She now hoped that Sir Edward could be called away from the dangers of war. The letter was written and sent without delay.

Lady Lambton received the news with great pleasure. She had always respected Louisa, and now the problem of Louisa's lack of money had disappeared. She agreed to the marriage and wanted Sir Edward to know as quickly as possible. She sent an old and trusted steward to Germany with Mrs Thornby's letter and another letter from herself. The man travelled as quickly as he could.

But he arrived too late. As he entered the camp, he saw Sir Edward being carried back from an attack. Sir Edward was pale, weak, and seriously wounded. His own reckless behaviour in battle had placed him in terrible danger. When he saw the old steward, whom he had known since childhood, he understood that the man had come with important news.

The steward did not know whether he should tell a dying man about the happiness that might have been his. At last he gave Sir Edward the letters. Sir Edward read that Louisa had found her mother and now had a large fortune. More importantly, he understood that Louisa loved him and that the marriage was now welcomed by both families. For a short time his joy was so great that he seemed almost to forget his wound.

But Sir Edward knew that he was dying. He now deeply regretted the way he had acted after Louisa left him. Instead of waiting patiently, he had gone to war in despair and had repeatedly placed himself in danger. That morning he had entered the attack almost wishing to die. Now, just when life offered him the happiness he had wanted most, he had lost the chance to enjoy it.

Sir Edward did not blame Louisa. He blamed his own impatience and said that she had acted with much greater wisdom than he had. He kept Mrs Thornby's letter beside him and read it again and again. Knowing that Louisa truly loved him gave him great happiness, but it also caused him pain. He feared that his death would bring terrible sorrow to her.

Sir Edward lived for three more days, but there was no real hope that he would recover. During that time, he became calmer and accepted what was happening. He regretted his reckless actions and believed that he had been wrong to throw away the life he had been given. At last he died peacefully. The faithful steward wrote to Lady Lambton and remained with Sir Edward's body so that it could be taken home for burial.

Lady Lambton was overcome with grief when she received the news. She sent the terrible information to Mrs Thornby. Louisa, meanwhile, had been imagining Sir Edward reading the letters with joy and returning to England. When her mother began speaking very carefully to her, Louisa thought for a moment that Sir

Edward had already arrived. She even stood up and asked if he was in the house.

Mrs Thornby made her sit down again and told her that Sir Edward was dead. The change from hope to grief was too sudden for Louisa to bear. She fainted in her mother's arms and remained unconscious for some time. When she recovered, her first thoughts were full of pain and guilt. She believed that if she had accepted Sir Edward earlier, he would never have gone to war and would still be alive.

Mrs Thornby sent for Mr d'Avara, and together they tried to help Louisa see the matter more clearly. They reminded her that she had acted according to what she honestly believed was right. She could not have known what Sir Edward would later choose to do. A person could judge her own motives and actions, they told her, but she could not control every result that followed. Slowly Louisa accepted that Sir Edward's death was not a crime she had caused.

Her grief remained deep, but it became quieter. She found some comfort in knowing that Sir Edward had understood his mistake before he died and had faced death calmly. She continued to mourn him, but she no longer accused herself of killing him. Her mother and Mr d'Avara stayed close to her, and her religious faith gave her strength when human comfort was not enough. She hoped that the separation which had been so painful in this life would not last forever.

Part 9: The Beginning of Millenium Hall

Mrs Morgan shared deeply in all Louisa's joys and sorrows through their letters. Louisa told her almost everything that happened, but Mrs Morgan wrote less freely about her own life. She believed that a wife should not speak openly about her husband's faults. She also knew that Louisa would suffer if she understood how unhappy her friend was. For these reasons, Mrs Morgan tried to hide much of her pain.

Mr Morgan gave his wife very little money of her own, so she could hardly help the poor people she saw around her. Miss Susanna also continued to make daily life unpleasant. Mr Morgan drank more and more, and on many days he

became completely drunk. Mrs Morgan saw no useful way to fight either of them. She decided that angry arguments would only damage her own character without changing theirs.

Meanwhile, Louisa's life with her mother continued quietly for six years. Mrs Thornby's large fortune allowed them to live comfortably, and Louisa was admired wherever she went. Many rich and important men wished to marry her. But Louisa had decided that she would never marry. She still felt deeply connected to Sir Edward and refused every man as soon as his intentions became serious.

Mrs Thornby enjoyed seeing her daughter admired and often took her into society. Louisa herself was less interested in such attention. She tried not to give anyone false hope and sometimes made her manner more serious than was natural to her. People knew that she said she would never marry, but some men still believed they could change her mind. Louisa therefore had to give several clear refusals.

In the seventh year after Mrs Thornby's return to England, she became ill with a fever and died. Louisa was only twenty-four. Her mother left her forty thousand pounds, but the money could not make up for the loss of such a loving parent. Louisa now had no strong reason to remain in any particular place. More than ever, she wished to live near Mrs Morgan.

There was some new hope that this might become possible. Mr Morgan had slowly begun to see his wife's true value. For years she had obeyed him patiently and behaved with steady kindness. After Miss Susanna finally married a young army officer and left the house, Mr Morgan no longer heard her constant attacks against his wife. Without his sister's influence, he began to respect Mrs Morgan's good sense and conduct.

Before Louisa could move closer, however, Mr Morgan became seriously ill. A disease first affected his arms and legs and soon damaged his mind as well. He had to remain in bed and seemed to recognize only his wife. He refused food and medicine unless Mrs Morgan gave them to him. If he woke at night and could not immediately see her, he became extremely upset.

When Louisa heard about this, she feared that her friend's health would fail

under such constant work. She asked whether she might come and help. Mr Morgan was now too ill to object, so Mrs Morgan gladly agreed. After so many years of forced separation, the two friends were finally together again. Their joy was great, even though the reason for their meeting was so sad.

Louisa spent much of each day in Mr Morgan's room but stayed where he could not easily see her. In this way, Mrs Morgan could remain beside her husband while still talking with her closest friend. Mrs Morgan even slept in the sick room. She could never fully prepare for bed because Mr Morgan might call her at any hour. For three months she cared for him almost without rest.

At last Mr Morgan died. Mrs Morgan's health had become very weak from years of unhappiness and from the final months of nursing him. Louisa's presence had been her greatest support. When Mr Morgan's will was read, they learned that he had left Mrs Morgan a country estate that had recently come into his possession. Its yearly income was one thousand pounds, and its house and land were in good condition.

This estate was the place that later became Millenium Hall. Mrs Morgan also had other money from her marriage agreement and from Mr Morgan's will. After the necessary business was completed, her friends decided that she needed a change of place to recover her health. She went to Tunbridge, and Louisa went with her. There they became better acquainted with Lady Mary Jones.

Louisa had known Lady Mary before, though they had never been close friends. Now the three women spent more time together and discovered that they wanted a similar kind of life. Louisa and Mrs Morgan had already decided to leave fashionable society and settle quietly in the country. They wanted a life in which pleasure, useful work, friendship, and religion could exist together. They also asked their old friend Mr d'Avora to live with them and help manage their affairs.

Lady Mary was very interested when she heard part of their plan. She asked to join them for six months. After that time, they could decide whether they were happy living together, and she could decide whether their way of life suited her. Louisa and Mrs Morgan were glad to accept her. When Mrs Morgan's health improved enough, the three women left Tunbridge and came to the country estate.

The house was already well furnished and needed little work. Soon after arriving, the women began looking carefully at the lives of poor people around them. They opened schools for children and created homes for old people who could no longer support themselves. They lived carefully and did not spend large amounts of money on themselves. Because of this, much of their income remained available for helping others.

Their next plan was to help young couples who married in the neighbourhood. They provided basic furniture for a new home and gave them useful goods that could help them begin their working lives. They also paid for nurses when poor people became sick. Sick families received suitable food, and the Hall gave them money equal to what the sick person would normally have earned. In this way, illness did not have to bring the whole family into hunger.

Even after these expenses, the women found that they could do more. They began taking in girls whose parents had died without leaving them enough money. Sometimes they also accepted a girl from a poorer family if she showed unusual ability. These girls received a careful education and learned the skills needed to manage a house or care for children. The ladies hoped that they would later find safe and useful positions.

The girls spent most of the day close to the women of the Hall. They read aloud while the ladies worked, and each lady took a turn watching their progress for a week. They also helped while the women dressed and learned useful things during that time. Their clothes were kept simple because the ladies did not want them to become too proud of appearance. The aim was to prepare them for real life, not to make them believe that they would become rich ladies.

The women tried to make every act of charity useful in more than one way. When they educated one girl well, they believed that many other people might later benefit from her good sense and character. When they helped a young couple begin married life, they hoped to create a stable family rather than give only temporary relief. Their money was therefore used carefully. They wanted every gift to continue producing good after the first moment had passed.

Lady Mary never left after her first six months. She joined her fortune to those

of Louisa and Mrs Morgan and became a permanent member of their little society. By the time Mrs Maynard told us this story, the three women had lived together there for more than twenty years. Over those years, many of the plans they had first imagined at Tunbridge had become real. The quiet country house had slowly grown into the community we now knew as Millenium Hall.

Louisa sometimes said that her greatest sorrow had unexpectedly led her toward a life of great usefulness. If she had married Sir Edward, she believed that her deep love for him might have made her think mainly about her husband and their private happiness. Instead, the direction of her life had changed completely. She now found daily happiness in friendship, study, faith, and helping many people. She did not say that Sir Edward's death had been good, but she believed that good had grown from an event that once seemed only terrible.

Mrs Morgan also showed remarkable kindness toward the family that had once treated her so badly. Sir Charles died many years later, leaving serious debts because of Lady Melvyn's expensive way of living. Three of Mrs Morgan's younger half-brothers and half-sisters had little money for their future. Mrs Morgan owned six thousand pounds that had originally come through her mother's marriage agreement. She divided this money among those younger members of the family.

She continued helping them in other ways and often gave them useful presents. The young men and women sometimes came to stay at Millenium Hall and were welcomed kindly. Even Lady Melvyn visited during the first year after Sir Charles's death. The quiet and ordered life of the Hall did not please her, so she did not often return. Mrs Morgan, however, never allowed the cruelty she had suffered in youth to prevent her from doing good to the family when they needed her.

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Part 10: A Different Kind of Happiness

Later that day, after our visitors had gone, the ladies told us that there would be a different kind of entertainment that evening. Instead of their usual concert, there would be a country dance. A young woman whom they had helped to educate had married that morning. She had worked in service for three years, and during all that time a respectable young farmer had been courting her.

We went into the servants' hall, where many people had gathered. Sixteen couples were ready to dance, while others sat and watched. The bride wore a simple white dress with white ribbons and looked very neat. Her husband was also carefully dressed and seemed proud and happy. They were supposed to begin the dancing together, but Lamont asked permission to dance first with the bride.

The ladies agreed, and everyone seemed pleased except the bride herself. She was polite to Lamont, but it was easy to see that she would rather dance with her new husband. To make matters fair, the bridegroom was invited to dance with the oldest of the girls being educated at the Hall. Soon the whole room was full of music and movement. We remained there for more than an hour, enjoying the simple happiness of the company.

The young people laughed and tried to please one another, but there was nothing wild or rude in their behaviour. Their little attempts to attract one another were innocent and good-humoured. I had often attended much grander dances, but few had seemed so truly cheerful. There was no need for expensive clothes or splendid rooms to make the evening pleasant. The happiness of the people themselves was enough.

At supper, Mrs Maynard explained that Miss Mancel had given the bride some money to help begin married life. She had also provided cows for her dairy and

some poultry. The bride could therefore help earn money for her new family instead of depending completely on her husband. The ladies did something similar for every young woman they had educated if she had behaved well.

They also helped other girls in the parish when those girls had shown steady industry and good conduct. The gift was useful, but the honour connected with it was almost more important. Everyone knew that receiving such help meant the ladies respected the young woman's character. Because of this, many girls worked hard to deserve the same approval. The system encouraged good habits without depending on punishment.

I told the ladies that I was surprised to see unmarried women doing so much to encourage marriage. Mrs Morgan smiled. She said that they thought marriage was very important for society even though they had not chosen it for themselves. "We may not marry," she said, "but we can help many other people marry well." In that way, she joked, perhaps they did more for marriage than if each of them had simply taken one husband.

I answered that marriage seemed increasingly difficult in fashionable society. Men feared wives who might spend too much money on clothes, cards, and entertainment. Women could also fear husbands who gambled, wasted their fortunes, or were unfaithful. A marriage could bring great happiness when two people cared for one another. But if they were selfish, each could make the other's life miserable.

Miss Trentham agreed. She said that both men and women had learned expensive habits. A husband might waste money at races or gaming tables, while his wife spent money on clothes and endless entertainment. The home was then left to servants because neither husband nor wife wanted to give time to it. Instead of helping each other build a good life, they could become partners in destroying their own happiness.

She believed that this problem did not remain among rich people. People with less money often copied those above them. A tradesman's wife might want the same clothes and entertainment that she saw among richer women. The husband might then become afraid that marriage would cost more than he could afford.

What had once been enough for a comfortable family might no longer seem enough because everyone wanted to live like people richer than themselves.

Miss Trentham said that people with money and high social position therefore had a special responsibility. Their behaviour was watched and copied. If they treated waste as normal, others might also spend beyond their means. If they lived only for amusement, people below them might begin to think that such a life was the sign of success. A bad example could spread through society just as easily as a good one.

Lamont asked whether rich people should really give up their pleasures merely because poorer people might copy them. Miss Trentham answered that the question was larger than that. Rich people had more time, education, and influence than many others. These advantages gave them more chances to do useful things. If they spent all their time moving from one amusement to another, they were neglecting their own duties as well as setting a poor example.

Lamont admitted that her argument was strong. He said that ideas like these would probably remain only ideas because most people would not wish to change their lives. Still, he added that the ladies of Millenium Hall had more right than most people to speak about reform. They did not simply tell others to behave better. They had first changed their own lives and were doing what they advised others to do.

Miss Mancel answered that they did not think of themselves as reformers. Their first concern was to control their own actions. If their example helped people around them, they were glad, but they did not imagine that they could correct the whole world. There was already enough work in trying to improve themselves and in helping the people directly within their reach. Beyond that, they did not claim authority.

Lamont then asked what laws Miss Mancel meant when she spoke about rules for life. She answered that, as a Christian, she looked to the Bible. Political laws changed from one country to another, but she believed that Christian moral law came from a higher authority. It taught people how they should treat God, themselves, and other people. For her, these teachings were not only ideas to

discuss but rules that should shape daily conduct.

Lamont pointed out that many people in Christian countries did not live according to those rules. Miss Mancel said that the failures of other people did not remove her own duty. A law against stealing did not stop being a law because many people stole. In the same way, she could not excuse her own wrong actions by saying that other people behaved badly too. She believed that each person was responsible for his or her own conduct.

She also said that she did not wish to judge the final fate of other people. That was not her task. She needed to examine herself rather than spend her time condemning others. "Other people's faults cannot excuse mine," was the simple principle behind her answer. Lamont still thought her views rather strict, but he could not easily argue against them while looking at the life these women had created.

Later he told me that something had begun to change in him. He was used to hearing religious and moral ideas spoken by people whose own lives did not match their words. Here the situation was different. The women of Millenium Hall lived according to the principles they defended. Their seriousness therefore seemed less like empty preaching and more like the natural explanation of what we saw around us.

The dance downstairs ended at eleven, the usual hour when everyone was expected to return home. The next morning I happened to meet the housekeeper as I went downstairs. We began talking about the wedding. She told me that since the ladies had come to live at Millenium Hall, they had helped more than thirty young women begin married life. The amount of money differed according to each woman's needs and character.

Their interest did not end on the wedding day. They continued to watch kindly over the young couples and helped when real difficulties arose. If someone began behaving badly, the ladies gave serious advice before the mistake became a habit. When people behaved especially well, small gifts were sometimes given as signs of approval. These gifts were valued because they showed that the ladies respected the receiver's conduct.

The housekeeper also kept a careful record of young people who had been helped into working life. Thirty boys had been placed as apprentices, about sixty young people had found good positions, and thirty women had married. Employers in the surrounding area trusted the education given by the ladies so much that they often asked Millenium Hall first when they needed a servant or apprentice. Young farmers also valued the girls educated there because they had learned to be sensible, active, and responsible.

While we talked, I noticed that the fingers of one of the housekeeper's hands were closed tightly against her palm. She explained that an illness had left the hand almost useless. At first she had thought this was a terrible disaster because she needed to work for her living. She knew that she could still manage a household, but every employer she approached refused to take a woman with only one useful hand.

At last she came to Millenium Hall. Here the disability that had closed other doors actually made the ladies more willing to employ her. She smiled and said that she now had reason to value her damaged hand. Then she told me that several other servants also had physical disabilities. The cook used crutches, one maid had only one eye, another was nearly deaf, and another had only one hand.

Yet, she said, the work of the house was done extremely well. The servants knew how difficult it might be for them to find good employment elsewhere, and they were grateful for the respect they received here. This made them especially careful about their work. Even several of the musicians had health problems that prevented them from doing heavy physical labour. Playing music gave them another way to earn money and support themselves.

Mr d'Avora had also prepared carefully for the future before his death. He had chosen an honest man to help manage the ladies' affairs and had trained him for the position. The women themselves had learned to deal with the important matters concerning their property. The new steward therefore managed mainly the daily business of the household. Mr d'Avora's influence continued even though he was no longer alive.

At first I had smiled at the unusual way the ladies chose their servants. But the

more I thought about it, the more sensible it seemed. They did not separate charity from ordinary spending. When they needed to employ someone, they tried to give that work to a person who especially needed the opportunity. In this way, money that would have been spent in any case also helped someone who might otherwise have difficulty finding work.

Breakfast was soon ready, and afterward Lamont and I spoke about leaving. To our pleasure, the ladies asked us to remain for several more days. Mrs Morgan said there was only one change they would make if we stayed. Until then, because we were unexpected guests, they had not asked us to join the household prayers. If we continued as members of the household for several days, however, they wished us to attend with everyone else.

We agreed without difficulty. I was pleased that we were now being treated less like visitors and more like members of their community. That morning Mrs Maynard walked with us into the park. We sat on a green bank beneath an elm beside the canal. I reminded her that she had promised to tell us about the other women of Millenium Hall.

Mrs Maynard said that their stories would not all take as long as the history of Louisa and Mrs Morgan. She admitted that when she began speaking about those two friends, her affection made it difficult for her to stop. Now, however, she was ready to continue. The next person whose history she would tell us was Lady Mary Jones.

Part 11: Lady Mary and the Wrong Man

Lady Mary Jones was the daughter of the Earl of Brumpton and his second wife. Her mother died only a few hours after giving birth to her. When Lady Mary was about ten, her father also died. Most of his property had already been used to pay debts or had been settled on his son from his first marriage. Lady Mary therefore inherited almost nothing.

She was still too young to worry much about money. After her father's death,

she went to live with her aunt, Lady Sheerness. Her aunt promised to treat her like a daughter and certainly gave her everything she wanted. Lady Sheerness was a wealthy widow who loved fashionable society. She had plenty of money and spent much of it on pleasure.

Lady Sheerness had married when she was only sixteen. Her husband had been much older and had admired her youth, beauty, and lively character. He allowed her to do almost anything she wished. Even when he was ill at home, she filled the house with visitors or went out to fashionable entertainments. He was not jealous and even felt proud when other men admired his wife.

Lady Sheerness had learned music, dancing, dress, and all the usual skills expected of a fashionable young woman. But little attention had been given to serious thought or moral education. Religion had been treated as something too serious for a young girl. She had been taught to care most about what fashionable society approved. What other people were doing seemed to her the best guide for deciding what she should do.

Because of this education, Lady Sheerness lived from one amusement to another. She loved cards, fashionable gatherings, admiration, and attention. She was not naturally cruel or deeply bad, but she hardly ever stopped to think about her actions. Her days were so full that there was little time to consider either the past or the future. Habits that had begun as youthful foolishness slowly became part of her character.

This was the woman who became responsible for Lady Mary. Lady Sheerness truly loved her niece, but her idea of caring for a young girl was to give her freedom and pleasure. She believed that a fashionable woman needed to understand society, and that the best way to learn was to enter it as early as possible. Lady Mary therefore began attending entertainments when many girls of her age would still have spent most of their time at home.

Lady Mary was naturally intelligent, lively, and attractive. Her aunt encouraged her liveliness but did little to develop her judgement. By fifteen, Lady Mary was welcomed everywhere. People enjoyed her conversation and admired her appearance. She quickly learned to enjoy expensive clothes, constant

entertainment, and the attention of young men.

Lady Sheerness gave her plenty of money. In fact, she was proud when people noticed how well dressed her niece was and how freely she spent. Lady Mary soon became used to admiration and enjoyed making men compete for her attention. Yet none of these admirers had seriously touched her feelings. To her, courtship was mostly another kind of entertainment.

When Lady Mary was between sixteen and seventeen, she travelled with her aunt to Scarborough. There she met a gentleman named Mr Lenman. People believed that he had a large fortune in Wales. He was polite, lively, and pleasant enough in appearance. More important to Lady Mary, he seemed to be seriously in love with her.

Lady Mary had already enjoyed being admired, but being loved seemed even more exciting. Mr Lenman's attention made her feel important. She discovered that she could make him happy by being kind and unhappy by becoming cold. Sometimes she encouraged him warmly, and then a few hours later she acted as if she hardly cared about him. She enjoyed watching the changes in his feelings.

Mr Lenman understood this game better than she realized. When Lady Mary became cold, he sometimes acted less interested in her. This quickly made her want his attention again. He allowed her to enjoy her little victories, but he also learned how to control her interest. Before long, he made a serious proposal of marriage.

Lady Mary had never thought deeply about marriage. Still, the idea was new and therefore exciting. She mistook the pleasure she received from Mr Lenman's attention for love. She imagined that she must be deeply in love with him because she enjoyed being wanted by him. In truth, much of what she felt came from vanity rather than affection.

Marriage did not seem frightening to her. The married women she knew continued going to parties, playing cards, spending money, and enjoying fashionable life. Lady Mary even thought marriage might give her greater freedom because she would no longer have to follow her aunt's wishes. She could choose her own entertainments. For these reasons, Mr Lenman's proposal seemed

attractive.

But Mr Lenman did not want an ordinary public wedding. He told Lady Mary that they should marry secretly and travel north toward Scotland. Lady Mary wondered why secrecy was necessary. Mr Lenman was believed to be wealthy, and although his family was not as important as hers, his fortune was larger. She thought Lady Sheerness would probably accept him.

Mr Lenman said that he was afraid Lady Sheerness might refuse. If they asked first and she said no, then marrying afterward would look like open disobedience. If they married before asking her, however, the marriage could not be undone. Lady Sheerness might be angry for a time, but she would eventually have to accept it. He said his fear came only from loving Lady Mary so much that he could not risk losing her.

These arguments were enough for a sixteen-year-old girl who had almost never been taught to question her own wishes. There was also something exciting about the secret journey itself. Lady Mary had heard stories of young couples running away to marry in Scotland. To her imagination, an ordinary church wedding seemed dull beside such an adventure. A secret journey made her feel like the heroine of a romantic story.

She therefore agreed. They chose the day on which they would leave and planned each part of the journey. They invented many ways to prevent discovery, probably far more than they would ever need. Lady Mary almost enjoyed making these secret plans more than she cared about the marriage itself. The excitement of the adventure filled her thoughts.

The day before they were supposed to leave, Lady Mary went out in a carriage with Lady Sheerness. One of the horses suddenly became frightened. The carriage overturned and fell down a steep slope. Lady Sheerness received only small injuries, but Lady Mary was badly hurt. She was knocked unconscious, and one side of her face became terribly swollen.

She was carried home and put to bed. A fever followed, and for about two weeks she remained in a painful condition. Her life was not believed to be in danger, but her injuries were serious enough to make travel impossible. The secret

journey with Mr Lenman had to be delayed. At first her physical pain left her little energy to think about the lost adventure.

When she began to feel better, she was not as disappointed as a truly loving woman might have been. She simply imagined that travelling soon after such a bad accident would make the adventure even more interesting. Yet the long hours in bed gave her something she had rarely experienced before: time to think. For a moment she wondered whether it was really right to marry secretly without asking the aunt who had cared for her.

The thought did not remain long. Lady Mary had almost never heard people speak seriously about duty. In her usual society, people who allowed duty to control their pleasure were often laughed at. Everyone around her seemed to follow personal wishes from one entertainment to another. Lady Mary therefore asked herself why she should not follow her own wishes too, and this simple answer pushed away her doubts.

Before her face had completely recovered, a young woman she knew came to visit her. The visitor said she had heard a strange piece of news about Mr Lenman. She told Lady Mary that he was already married. His wife was a young woman with little money, and Mr Lenman had treated her so badly that for some time he had not even publicly admitted the marriage. She now lived quietly at his house in Wales.

At first Lady Mary refused to believe the story. She asked what proof there was. The visitor explained that a relation of hers knew Mr Lenman and his wife. This person had recently asked Mr Lenman about his wife's health in front of other people. Mr Lenman's embarrassed answer had made it completely clear that Mrs Lenman really existed.

Lady Mary was deeply shaken. The visitor thought this reaction showed how much she loved Mr Lenman, but love was not the main cause. Lady Mary was terrified when she understood what had almost happened. She had been preparing to run away with a man who already had a wife. The secret marriage he had promised could not have been a real marriage at all.

She also suddenly understood why Mr Lenman had been so afraid to speak to

Lady Sheerness. His story about possible family objections had only been a trick. If Lady Mary had gone with him, she might have lost her reputation and become the subject of public shame. For the first time, she saw something very different from the fashionable foolishness she knew. Mr Lenman's plan seemed truly wicked to her.

After the visitor left, Lady Mary thought again about the carriage accident. Only a short time before, she had seen it as a terrible piece of bad luck because it had stopped her journey. Now she saw that the accident had saved her. Something painful and frightening had protected her from a much greater disaster. The idea stayed strongly in her mind.

At that moment, the nurse who had cared for Lady Mary entered the room in tears of joy. She had just received news that a ship had been lost at sea. Her own son had planned to travel on that ship, but two days before it sailed he had suddenly become sick and had been unable to go. The nurse had been very unhappy about his illness because he had lost a good job. Now she understood that the illness had saved his life.

The nurse thanked God again and again. She said that she would try never again to complain so quickly about something that seemed like bad luck. If her son had remained healthy, he would probably now be dead at the bottom of the sea. The event that had first appeared to be a misfortune had protected him. She hoped her son would always remember this and be thankful.

This way of speaking was almost new to Lady Mary. She knew that God had created the world and had heard that people would one day be judged for serious crimes. But she had never thought much about the idea that God might care about the ordinary events of a person's life. The nurse's story was very close to her own experience. Illness had saved the son from a shipwreck, while an accident had saved Lady Mary from Mr Lenman's plan.

For the first time, Lady Mary felt a serious kind of gratitude. Perhaps, she thought, events were not always as simple as they appeared at first. Something painful might protect a person from a danger she could not see. This thought did not yet change her whole life, but it opened a door in her mind that had almost

always been closed. She began, briefly, to look beyond immediate pleasure and disappointment.

Mr Lenman soon learned that his marriage was now publicly known. He understood that his plan with Lady Mary could no longer succeed. Before she had recovered enough to appear in public, he quietly left Scarborough. He was unwilling to face the woman he had planned to deceive, and Lady Mary's innocence gave her a dignity before him that all his cleverness could not remove.

Part 12: Lady Mary Learns to Say No

After Lady Mary recovered, she and Lady Sheerness returned to London. They quickly went back to their old way of life. Their days and evenings were filled with visitors, cards, parties, and other amusements. They were not always truly enjoying themselves, but they were almost never quiet enough to notice. If one evening was dull, they simply expected the next one to be better.

Lady Mary told no one about her plan to run away with Mr Lenman. She was ashamed of having almost disobeyed her aunt and did not want Lady Sheerness to hear about it. Mr Lenman also had no reason to tell the story because his own conduct had been much worse. The whole dangerous adventure therefore remained almost completely secret. Lady Mary soon returned to her usual careless behaviour.

Her lively manner still encouraged men to think that she might welcome more serious attention. One of these men was Lord Robert St George. He was handsome, charming, and very fashionable. Many women admired him, and people believed that he had already had several love affairs. To Lady Mary, this made him seem even more interesting.

She felt that if so many fashionable women admired Lord Robert, she ought to admire him too. His attention also made her proud because she felt that she had won a man whom other women wanted. She began to watch for him at parties and was pleased when he came near her. She disliked seeing him pay too much

attention to another woman. Lady Mary thought these feelings proved that she was deeply in love.

In reality, much of her emotion came from pride and jealousy. She enjoyed thinking of herself as the woman Lord Robert preferred. She also talked about him with her close friends. They discussed every look, word, and small action until a moderate liking began to seem like a great passion. Soon almost everyone in their social circle knew that Lady Mary was strongly interested in him.

Lord Robert heard these reports too. He became confident that Lady Mary would be easy to influence. He saw her as young, careless, without strong principles, and deeply in love with him. He therefore did not think that marriage was necessary to gain what he wanted. All he needed, he believed, was a chance to be alone with her.

Lord Robert knew an older woman who often helped men arrange such private meetings. She was accepted in fashionable society and gave popular card parties, but her character was not very good. She wanted to live more richly than her own money allowed. Gifts from men helped her maintain that expensive life. In return, she sometimes helped them with plans they did not wish respectable people to know about.

One day this woman invited Lady Mary to her house while Lady Sheerness was ill at home. Lord Robert was also there. Most of the guests played cards in one room. The hostess took Lady Mary into another room, saying that she wanted to speak with her privately. Lord Robert soon followed them.

Lady Mary and Lord Robert began talking in their usual lively way. When they were fully involved in conversation, the older woman quietly left them together. Lady Mary did not notice this immediately. Even when she did, she was not greatly worried. She had never learned to think carefully about the danger of such a situation.

Lord Robert now spoke much more openly than before. Lady Mary soon understood that he was not asking her to marry him. He wanted a secret sexual relationship without marriage. She was completely surprised. Although her behaviour was often careless, she had never intended to do anything of that kind.

Lady Mary was offended, but at first she saw his proposal mainly as an insult to her good sense. She had always thought that a woman who entered such a relationship behaved foolishly because she risked her reputation and future. She had not yet learned to think deeply about the moral meaning of the act. So she rejected Lord Robert, but her anger was not as strong as it might have been if her ideas had been clearer.

Lord Robert was not easily discouraged. He knew that Lady Mary cared too much about him to remain angry for long. He believed that her love would finally become stronger than her ordinary caution. He therefore continued trying to persuade her. Lady Mary became more surprised and uncomfortable and finally left the room despite his attempts to keep her there.

She told him that he should think better of her judgement. Yet even then, she did not completely understand what his proposal revealed about his opinion of her. She still partly took his boldness as proof of strong desire. She had heard people speak about virtue, but in the society around her the word often seemed to mean little more than avoiding public disgrace. She therefore decided mainly that she would never again allow herself to be alone with Lord Robert.

Still, the meeting troubled her. She began wondering whether men commonly spoke to women in such a direct way. To discover what others thought, she sometimes brought similar subjects into conversation. One day she heard a lively but modest young woman express a very strong opinion. The young woman said that a sensible man would usually not behave improperly toward a woman unless something in her conduct had made him think such behaviour might be accepted.

The young woman added that if a man ever spoke to her in that way, she would immediately examine her own behaviour. Even innocent liveliness, she said, might need to be controlled if people could mistake it for something worse. A woman should behave in a way that naturally made others respect her. True virtue, she believed, created a kind of dignity that most men would hesitate to insult.

These words affected Lady Mary greatly. For the first time, she seriously asked whether her own behaviour had helped Lord Robert misunderstand her. She could not honestly say that she had shown strong anger after his proposal. She had

continued seeing him in society and had not clearly told him that his behaviour was unacceptable. Perhaps, she thought, her careless manner had given him reason to hope.

Lady Mary began watching the young woman more closely. She saw that her new acquaintance was cheerful and lively, not cold or unfriendly. Yet there was a clear difference between her liveliness and Lady Mary's. She did not make improper jokes or allow men to speak disrespectfully around her. The men who talked with her naturally behaved with greater care and respect.

Lady Mary now tried to change her own manner. This was not easy. People had known her for years as a lively and careless girl. When she became more serious during an improper conversation, friends laughed and asked why she was suddenly pretending to be so formal. When she refused to join a foolish joke, people said she must be in a bad mood.

These reactions made change difficult, but Lord Robert caused her even more pain. He still spoke to her with a freedom that she now clearly understood as disrespectful. She wanted to stop him, but she feared losing him completely. Part of her still hoped that if she did not reject him too strongly, he might continue loving her. She was caught between self-respect and her attachment to him.

Lord Robert understood her weakness. He believed that her feelings would finally help him succeed. Lady Mary became less lively because she was worried and uncertain, but her friends misunderstood this too. They joked that she was suffering from love. Their jokes made her situation even harder because she had no wise person among her usual friends to ask for help.

At last Lady Mary decided to become better acquainted with the young woman whose words had first made her question herself. The friendship was easy to begin because the young woman already liked her. Soon Lady Mary trusted her enough to explain everything about Lord Robert. She admitted both his conduct and her own strong feelings for him.

Her new friend listened with kindness but spoke clearly. She told Lady Mary that while she continued encouraging Lord Robert's hopes, she was losing something far more valuable than his attention. She was losing his respect. Lord

Robert might desire her very strongly, but desire without respect would not bring lasting happiness. If he gained what he wanted, his interest might soon disappear.

“Ask yourself what you want more,” her friend said. “Do you want his courtship, or do you want his respect?” If Lord Robert stopped caring for her simply because she refused his improper plan, then his love was not worth keeping. It would be painful to lose him, but it would be worse to keep his attention while knowing that he thought badly of her character.

Her friend also reminded her that Lady Mary herself would lose self-respect if she acted against what she knew was right. She did not say that a woman’s entire value depended on one kind of virtue. But she believed that some moral limits were too important to cross. Lady Mary already knew that she did not want to cross them. What she now needed was the courage to make Lord Robert understand that clearly.

Lady Mary accepted this advice. She decided that she would rather lose Lord Robert than continue being treated without respect. That evening Lady Sheerness had many visitors, and Lord Robert was among them. As usual, he gave Lady Mary a great deal of attention. She quietly moved with him a little away from the rest of the company and spoke to him directly.

She admitted that her own careless behaviour had partly caused the problem. She had allowed him to continue a courtship even after she understood that he did not intend marriage. She did not excuse herself. But she now told him clearly that his hopes were useless and that she would never accept the kind of relationship he wanted.

Lady Mary added that if he continued speaking to her in the same way, she would tell Lady Sheerness everything. Her aunt would certainly not accept such an insult to her niece. Lady Mary then left Lord Robert and returned to the rest of the company. The effort had been difficult, and she felt shaken afterward, but her new friend remained near and supported her.

Lord Robert was deeply surprised. He had expected Lady Mary’s feelings to make her weak. Instead, she had acted against her own wishes because she now believed it was right. He left the room soon afterward. But because they belonged

to the same social circle, they continued meeting often.

At first Lord Robert tried to break her resolution. Sometimes he paid special attention to another woman, hoping to make Lady Mary jealous. At other times he returned to Lady Mary and behaved as if his old courtship might begin again. She suffered privately, but she did not change her decision. She no longer allowed jealousy to control her actions.

Gradually Lord Robert's passion became weaker because he understood that his hopes would not succeed. His manner toward Lady Mary also changed. He began speaking to her with much greater respect. He could see that she had chosen to do what she believed was right even though her own heart made that choice painful.

This change gave Lady Mary real satisfaction. She had not stopped caring for Lord Robert, but her feelings no longer caused the same misery. She now knew that she had gained something more valuable than his careless attention. She had gained part of his respect and had begun to recover her own.

Part 13: Lady Mary Finds a New Life

When Lady Mary was about twenty, Lady Sheerness became seriously ill. Her illness continued for a long time, and the doctors could not cure it. Yet Lady Sheerness did not change the way she thought about life. She still filled every possible hour with cards, visitors, and entertainment. She seemed afraid of having even a few quiet minutes in which she might think about death.

As she became weaker, she could no longer go out so often, so people came to her house instead. Cards were sometimes played even in the morning. At night Lady Sheerness used medicine to help her sleep. Her visitors carefully avoided serious subjects and spoke as if death did not exist. Everyone helped her escape from thought rather than prepare for what was coming.

At last Lady Sheerness became so weak that she could hardly hold her own cards. Lady Mary had to deal them, arrange them, and place them in her aunt's

hand. Even then, Lady Sheerness continued playing the simplest games she could manage. Her visitors slowly began coming less often. To attract them back, she ordered expensive suppers even on evenings when she herself was too sick to remain with the company.

Lady Mary now saw fashionable friendship in a new light. While her aunt was useful as a source of entertainment, many people had called themselves her friends. As soon as illness made her less amusing, their attention became weaker. Lady Mary also saw how everyone avoided speaking honestly about death. She began to understand that pleasure alone could not create the kind of friendship a person needed in difficult times.

One evening Lady Sheerness suddenly fainted while playing cards. She was carried to bed and died about half an hour later. The guests soon left the house. They did so because it seemed proper, not because they were deeply grieved. Lady Mary, however, truly mourned the aunt who had loved and supported her, even though she now understood the serious weaknesses in Lady Sheerness's way of life.

Lady Mary expected to inherit enough money to live comfortably. Lady Sheerness's will even named her as the only heir. But the man responsible for the will gave her very different news. Almost all the money had already been spent. Worse still, Lady Sheerness had left many debts.

Creditors soon appeared, and Lady Mary gave them everything in the house that could be sold. Even this was not enough to pay all the debts. Suddenly Lady Mary found herself almost as poor as she had been when her father died. She had no independent income and little reason to expect help from the people who had filled her aunt's house. She now understood how weak those fashionable connections really were.

Lady Mary thought sadly about her choices. Perhaps the government might give a woman of her rank a small income, but she could not depend on that. She might become a permanent guest in somebody's house, but she hated the thought of living on another person's pride or pity. Even a kind hostess might eventually become tired of paying all her expenses. For a time, Lady Mary could see no safe

future for herself.

Then an unexpected visitor arrived. Lady Brumpton, the widow of Lady Mary's half-brother, came to the door and asked to see her. There had been a long quarrel between the two branches of the family. Lady Brumpton had come from a respectable but not wealthy family, and Lady Mary's father had strongly disapproved when his son married her. Lady Sheerness had continued the quarrel after his death.

Lady Brumpton herself was generous, intelligent, well educated, and widely admired. She loved books and serious conversation and welcomed writers and other educated people into her home. She was also beautiful and enjoyed being praised for her appearance, intelligence, taste, and learning. This love of admiration was her greatest weakness. Still, she had a genuinely kind heart and often helped people who were poor or in difficulty.

When Lady Brumpton heard about Lady Mary's situation, she came immediately. She said that Lady Mary had been too young to have any responsibility for the old family quarrel. She also felt that, as the widow of Lady Mary's brother, she had a duty to help her. Then she made a generous offer. Lady Mary should leave the sad house and come to live permanently with her.

Lady Mary was deeply moved. Only a few hours earlier she had been wondering how she could survive without depending on someone who might later despise her. Now a relative she hardly knew had come freely to offer protection and affection. They agreed that Lady Mary would move to Lady Brumpton's house the next day. Once again, danger had appeared suddenly in Lady Mary's life, and once again help had arrived when she least expected it.

This experience made her think seriously about all the times she had escaped disaster. The carriage accident had saved her from Mr Lenman. A new friendship had helped her resist Lord Robert. Now Lady Brumpton had appeared when poverty seemed ready to destroy her independence. Lady Mary began to feel more strongly that her life was not simply a series of accidents and pleasures.

She also remembered how Lady Sheerness had died. Her aunt had spent years trying to avoid quiet thought, but amusement had not brought peace at the end.

Lady Mary began to believe that real happiness must be something a person could possess in youth or age, in health or sickness, and in wealth or poverty. She now wanted a life guided more by reason and religion. She did not yet fully understand what such a life required, but she wanted to learn.

The next day Lady Brumpton came to fetch her. At once she gave Lady Mary a yearly income of one hundred pounds for clothes and personal needs. She also told her to ask for more if necessary. Lady Mary was therefore not treated like a poor dependent who had to request money for every small expense. Lady Brumpton's generosity allowed her to keep both comfort and dignity.

Lady Mary now entered a very different social world. Instead of speaking mainly about clothes, cards, and gossip, the visitors discussed history, literature, ideas, and learning. At first Lady Mary understood so little that some conversations almost seemed to be in another language. She honestly told Lady Brumpton how ignorant she felt. She asked what books she should read in order to improve herself.

Lady Brumpton suggested books that were currently popular in educated conversation. Lady Mary read a moral essay, then a new play, then part of a history, and afterward a fashionable book of sermons. But she soon noticed a problem. The different subjects were mixed together in her mind without order. She had learned pieces of many things without understanding any of them deeply.

Lady Mary therefore changed her method. Instead of reading whatever people happened to be discussing that week, she began a more regular course of study. She wanted knowledge that would remain useful, not only enough information to sound clever at dinner. This was an important change from her earlier life. For the first time, learning became something she valued for itself.

Lady Mary lived with Lady Brumpton for about five years. She was happy there, but she also began to see the problems caused by Lady Brumpton's love of admiration. Her hostess spent large amounts of money on clothes, furniture, and the appearance of her house. Although she was still wealthy, these expenses sometimes prevented her from helping people when her natural generosity wished to do so.

Praise also affected the way Lady Brumpton treated others. She enjoyed people who admired her and could be cold toward those who did not seem interesting or important. Her desire to gather every famous writer or clever person into her house sometimes brought unpleasant people there. Some discovered that flattery was the easiest way to influence her. Lady Mary saw that intelligence and education alone did not protect a person from weakness.

Conversation in Lady Brumpton's house could also become a kind of competition. Everyone wanted to say the cleverest thing. One person made a sharp remark, and another immediately tried to answer with something sharper. Lady Mary could take part in this easily because she was naturally quick and lively. But she began to see that real conversation should involve listening and understanding, not only trying to impress the room.

After about five years, Lady Brumpton became seriously ill with a fever. As her strength failed, many of the people who had enjoyed her brilliant company visited less often. She could no longer entertain them as before. The change reminded Lady Mary painfully of what had happened during Lady Sheerness's illness. Again she saw how quickly social admiration could disappear when a person could no longer provide pleasure.

Lady Brumpton herself also began to look back on her life differently. She told Lady Mary that illness had awakened her from a long dream of vanity. She had wanted the praise of clever and fashionable people too much. Even some of her good actions had been partly influenced by the wish to be admired. She now wished that she had spent less time seeking human applause and more time thinking about her duties to God.

Her illness slowly became worse, and she understood that she would die. Unlike Lady Sheerness, she did not try to hide from the truth. She became calm and accepted what was happening. She told Lady Mary that she had left her ten thousand pounds together with her jewels and silver. She wanted Lady Mary to know that she would not again be left without support.

Lady Brumpton eventually died, and Lady Mary once more lost a woman who had protected her. She grieved deeply, but this second death affected her

differently from the first. Her own life had now taught her much about danger, dependence, pride, friendship, and the weakness of fashionable pleasure. She had money enough to live independently and no desire to return to the endless round of social amusement.

Lady Mary began looking for a quieter life. During this period she went to Tunbridge and met Mrs Morgan and Miss Mancel. Their plans for living together in the country immediately interested her. She first asked to join them for only six months, but, as Mrs Maynard had already told us, she never wished to leave. In this way Lady Mary's long search for a different kind of happiness finally brought her to Millenium Hall.

Mrs Maynard was tired after telling this long history, so she left us in the park until dinner. That afternoon the ladies suggested a trip on the river. Several women from the other community came with us. We travelled about three miles in a comfortable boat and stopped near a small, neat house where we were invited to drink tea.

The woman who lived there was the widow of a former local minister. Her husband had died leaving her with five young children and very little money. The women of Millenium Hall had immediately helped her. They arranged a regular income, found this house for the family, furnished it, and sent some of the girls they educated to help decorate it. The result was simple but extremely pleasant.

We saw drawings in frames decorated with shells and small pieces of furniture covered with carefully arranged sea plants. The garden was equally neat. Some of the widow's children were working among the flowers while the younger ones played nearby. Inside the house was a good bookcase containing religious books, books for children, and collections of essays for lighter reading. Many of these books had been given by Miss Mancel.

The widow's pleasure in seeing the ladies made our visit especially enjoyable. After tea we returned by river in the fine evening weather. There was still time for a short concert before supper. The next morning I woke Lamont early because the housekeeper had promised to show us the schools supported by Millenium Hall. We began with the school for girls.

About fifty girls were already busy when we arrived. Some were writing or doing arithmetic, while others were reading, sewing, spinning, or knitting. Everything in the schoolroom was extremely clean and well ordered. Samples of the girls' work were displayed around the room so that they could see what others had done well. Two teachers supervised the different activities.

The girls did not learn only one kind of work. They practiced several useful skills so that if illness or accident later made one kind of employment impossible, they might still have another way to support themselves. The ladies also watched each girl's abilities carefully and tried to prepare her for work that suited her. Girls who were likely to enter domestic service sometimes practiced at the Hall under the guidance of its experienced servants.

A large kitchen garden belonged to the school, and each girl had part of it to care for. Gardening was treated as both useful work and recreation. The girls became proud of keeping their areas neat and enjoyed making little flower beds, seats, and small garden shelters. Some of the decorations we had seen at the widow's house had been made by these girls. Their greatest reward seemed to be the praise of the women from Millenium Hall.

We then visited the boys' school. It was smaller because boys usually left as soon as they were old enough for regular work, unless poor health prevented it. Even very young boys were given small spades and rakes and taught to use them. Their education followed much the same idea as the girls': religion, useful knowledge, practical skill, cleanliness, and habits of steady work were all joined together.

We returned to the Hall in time for morning prayers. After seeing how these schools worked, the service seemed especially meaningful to me. The steward read the prayers with such simple seriousness that everyone listened closely. After breakfast, Mrs Maynard agreed to walk into the garden with us again. I asked her to continue telling us about the women of Millenium Hall, and she prepared to begin the history of Miss Selvyn.

Part 14: Miss Selvyn's Education

Miss Selvyn's father came from an old and respected family, but he was not rich. As a younger son, Mr Selvyn had tried to make a living through business in London. The business did not succeed as well as he hoped, so he left it before losing all his money. When his daughter was about five years old, he moved with her to the country. His wife had already been dead for two years, so he became completely responsible for the child's education.

Mr Selvyn did not have a large income, but he was intelligent and well educated. He therefore became his daughter's main teacher. By the age of twelve, Miss Selvyn could speak and read French very well and could write English with unusual skill. She was also good at reading aloud, understood arithmetic, and had already studied some history. Her manners were gentle, and she was pleasant in both appearance and character.

Some neighbouring families did not admire this education. They thought Mr Selvyn was teaching his daughter things that did not fit her small fortune. In their opinion, she should learn mainly how to manage a household and prepare herself to become the wife of a tradesman. Part of Mr Selvyn's own income would end when he died. They therefore believed that his daughter needed a more ordinary and practical education.

Mr Selvyn did not allow this criticism to change his plans. He continued teaching Miss Selvyn and even studied new subjects himself so that he could teach them to her. At the same time, he did not raise her to expect an expensive life. He taught her that happiness required much less money than most people imagined. A person who could read, think, work, and enjoy simple pleasures did not need constant entertainment.

Miss Selvyn therefore learned both knowledge and careful habits. She had so many useful and interesting things to do that she was rarely bored. She did not need to spend money merely because she had nothing else to occupy her mind. Her father wanted her to find pleasure in her own abilities and thoughts. In this way, a small fortune did not have to mean an unhappy life.

Her education, however, had one important weakness. Mr Selvyn taught her much about the ancient philosophers and their ideas about good conduct, but he taught her little about Christianity. He was not an angry enemy of religion. He did not laugh at believers or try to make other people lose their faith. But he himself had serious doubts.

Mr Selvyn found it difficult to believe things that he could not fully understand. He thought that if human reason could not clearly explain something, perhaps that thing was not true. Since he did not want to teach his daughter beliefs that he himself doubted, he usually avoided religious questions. He preferred to let Miss Selvyn form her own judgement when she was older.

At this point in Mrs Maynard's story, I interrupted her. I said that I respected Mr Selvyn for not trying to destroy other people's beliefs merely because he had doubts himself. I had often seen people who doubted religion become almost as eager to spread their doubts as missionaries were to spread faith. I could not understand why they should wish to take religious hope away from another person if they had nothing certain to offer in its place.

Lamont asked whether a person who did not accept Christianity could still be certain that life continued after death. Mrs Maynard answered that human reason alone might make such a future life seem possible, but she did not think it could make it certain. Human reason was too limited. People could make arguments, but many ancient philosophers had disagreed about the subject. Mrs Maynard then returned to Miss Selvyn's history.

The local minister often visited Mr Selvyn. He was a learned man, but he was also gentle, humble, and deeply concerned about the people in his parish. He did not believe that his work ended after preaching in church. He often visited poor families and spoke with them in simple conversation. Because he treated them with respect and also gave much of his money to those in need, they trusted him greatly.

The minister enjoyed talking with Mr Selvyn because Mr Selvyn was intelligent and knew many things. He also became very fond of Miss Selvyn. Although she knew more than most girls of her age, she was not proud of it. She

believed that her knowledge came mainly from the care her father had taken with her education. Her natural cheerfulness also made serious conversation more pleasant.

Before long, the minister understood that Mr Selvyn had doubts about Christianity. He did not attack him or treat him as a bad man. Instead, he tried to show him that not understanding something completely did not prove that it was impossible. Human beings accepted many facts about nature even when they could not fully explain how those facts worked.

The minister gave examples from the natural world. People could observe the strange movement of a comet without fully understanding every cause behind it. There were also living creatures with abilities that seemed difficult to explain. One small creature, for example, could grow again after part of its body was cut away. The fact remained true even when people could not explain exactly why nature worked in that way.

“Our knowledge has limits,” the minister explained. “We should not say that something cannot be true simply because we do not understand how it can happen.” Human beings could study facts and ask whether there was good evidence for them. But they should be careful when trying to judge what an infinitely greater wisdom could or could not do. Human reason was useful, but it should recognize its own limits.

These conversations gradually affected Mr Selvyn. He became more willing to accept that something might be true even when he could not fully understand it. The minister also made sure that Miss Selvyn received the religious education that had been missing from her childhood. Christianity now became part of the wider education her father had already given her. She learned it through serious discussion rather than through fear or force.

Miss Selvyn continued living quietly with her father until she was nearly seventeen. Then Mr Selvyn decided to return to London. They rented a small house in Park Street. Soon after they arrived, a woman who lived next door came to welcome them. This neighbour was Lady Emilia Reynolds.

Lady Emilia was unmarried, more than thirty years old, and very wealthy. She

was attractive, gentle, thoughtful, and sensible. There was also a quiet sadness in her appearance, though this did not make her less pleasant. She knew many respectable people but did not enjoy a wild or fashionable life. Miss Selvyn's modest manner and intelligence immediately interested her.

Although there was a clear difference in their ages, Lady Emilia and Miss Selvyn quickly became close friends. Each seemed especially happy in the other's company. Mr Selvyn was pleased with this friendship. He knew that Lady Emilia's good character made her an excellent guide for a young woman who was beginning to enter society. Through Lady Emilia, Miss Selvyn could meet people without being thrown carelessly into fashionable life.

Many people whom Miss Selvyn met at Lady Emilia's house liked her very much. They often asked Lady Emilia to bring her when she visited them. Lady Emilia usually agreed because Miss Selvyn was safe under her protection. In this way, Miss Selvyn met a wider circle of people while still avoiding the constant social activity she naturally disliked. She preferred a smaller number of thoughtful friendships.

Lady Emilia also knew Lady Sheerness. The two women were very different and were never close friends, but family connections and social position brought them together sometimes. Lady Emilia could see Lady Sheerness's faults clearly, yet she tried not to speak cruelly about her. She preferred pity to harsh judgement. She was especially concerned about the effect Lady Sheerness's way of life might have on Lady Mary Jones.

Through these visits, Miss Selvyn became acquainted with Lady Mary. In fact, Miss Selvyn was the modest young woman who had earlier made Lady Mary question her own behaviour. She was also the friend to whom Lady Mary later told the truth about Lord Robert. It was Miss Selvyn who advised her to value Lord Robert's respect more than his courtship and to end a relationship that could only damage her.

Not long after helping Lady Mary, Miss Selvyn suffered a much more personal sorrow. Her father became seriously ill. His illness lasted long enough for him to arrange his affairs and speak carefully with his daughter about her future. He knew

that she would not inherit a large fortune. He therefore advised her to remain close to Lady Emilia, who was now both a dear friend and an important protector.

Miss Selvyn did not need financial reasons to follow this advice. She truly loved Lady Emilia and knew that her affection was sincere. Still, at that moment she could think of little except losing her father. Mr Selvyn had spent most of his life trying to make his daughter wise, capable, and happy. His care for her remained strong even during his last days.

When Mr Selvyn died, his daughter felt the loss deeply. Lady Emilia did everything she could to comfort her, but for some time very little could reduce her grief. Miss Selvyn discovered that her father had left her three thousand pounds. This was more than she had expected, though not enough for her to live comfortably and independently in London. Lady Emilia therefore invited her to live in her own house.

When spring came, Lady Emilia decided to spend the warmer months in the country. She rented a house about one hundred miles from London that she had liked in earlier years. Miss Selvyn went with her willingly. She was sorry to leave Lady Mary, for their friendship had become real and strong. The two young women promised to write to each other regularly so that distance would not end their connection.

Life in the country suited both Lady Emilia and Miss Selvyn extremely well. They read a great deal and lived in a calm, regular way. Fresh air, exercise, and peaceful days seemed to improve Lady Emilia's spirits. The sadness that had once been so visible in her face became less strong. Neither woman felt a serious wish to return to the noise of London.

Lady Emilia therefore gave up her London house and settled permanently in the country. She and Miss Selvyn spent most of their time together and seemed to need little other company. Their shared love of reading gave them endless occupation. Lady Emilia's affection for her younger friend became especially deep. Miss Selvyn returned that affection with equal sincerity.

About two years after they had settled there, Lord Robert St George came into the neighbourhood. He was now the colonel of a regiment staying in a town not

far away. He came to examine the condition of his regiment and decided to remain in the area for some time. His rooms outside the town were pleasantly situated, and he had no urgent reason to return elsewhere.

Lord Robert already knew Lady Emilia and Miss Selvyn slightly, so the nearness of their homes allowed him to see them often. He soon became strongly interested in Miss Selvyn. He had known women who were more beautiful, but he had rarely met one whose mind and manners pleased him so much. Her intelligence, gentleness, and quiet modesty attracted him in a way that ordinary beauty had not.

Part 15: Lord Robert Asks Again

Lord Robert's interest in Miss Selvyn soon became clear. At first she was not pleased by it because she remembered how he had treated Lady Mary. She expected that he might speak to her with the same careless freedom. But his feelings for Miss Selvyn were different. Instead of making a bold proposal himself, he became unusually uncertain and asked Lady Emilia to speak for him.

Lord Robert told Lady Emilia that he wished to marry Miss Selvyn. He explained his financial position and showed that he could support a wife comfortably. Lady Emilia listened carefully and promised to tell Miss Selvyn everything. She thought Lord Robert was handsome, wealthy, well born, and intelligent. In ordinary social terms, she believed he was a very good possible husband.

Miss Selvyn was surprised that a man known for such a gay life had suddenly become serious about marriage. She admitted that Lord Robert was charming and that many women would gladly accept him. Yet she said she had no wish to marry anyone. She was already completely content with her present life. Since happiness was difficult to find, she saw little reason to risk losing it simply because marriage was expected of women.

Lady Emilia spoke gently in favour of marriage. She wondered whether Miss

Selvyn might secretly like Lord Robert more than she wished to admit. This encouraged Miss Selvyn to explain her feelings more clearly. She said that even if she had wished to marry, she would have serious doubts about Lord Robert. Some things she knew about his past behaviour made her believe that his moral ideas would not suit her in a husband.

Lady Emilia immediately understood that this objection was important. She had never wanted to push Miss Selvyn into marriage against her wishes. She had only feared that her friend's natural reserve might make her reject a man whom she secretly loved. Once she saw that this was not the case, she accepted Miss Selvyn's decision. She asked only that Miss Selvyn tell Lord Robert herself, because he would probably not accept a refusal delivered through another person.

Lord Robert came that evening to hear her answer. Lady Emilia arranged to leave Miss Selvyn alone with him. Although this private meeting was exactly what Lord Robert had wanted, he suddenly found it difficult to speak. Miss Selvyn therefore began the conversation herself. She thanked him sincerely for thinking so well of her but told him that she could not accept his offer.

She explained again that she was happy with her present life. She did not want to change it for marriage. Lord Robert answered with great feeling and tried hard to persuade her. He could not believe that simple happiness in a single life was her real reason. He asked whether, if she had been willing to marry, she would have had any special objection to him.

Miss Selvyn first tried to avoid the question. Her decision not to marry, she said, would have made her refuse any man. Lord Robert continued asking. At last she saw that he would not be satisfied without a direct answer. She therefore decided that honesty was better than polite silence.

She told him that even if she had wanted a husband, she would not have chosen him. The problem was not his appearance, intelligence, rank, or fortune. She objected to his moral principles and especially to his past treatment of women. Of all the men she knew, she said, his earlier conduct made him one of the least suitable for the kind of husband she would want.

Lord Robert was astonished. He said that he had behaved no worse than many

other young men of his position. Love affairs, he argued, were commonly accepted as part of a young man's life. He had never imagined that a woman would blame him for having admired many women before deciding to give them all up for her. He seemed to think that Miss Selvyn should take his choice as a compliment.

Miss Selvyn answered that she wanted no such victory. She did not wish to think that she had defeated other women or changed a man famous for careless relationships. She had no desire to marry a man in the hope of reforming him. Habits and ideas formed through years of selfish behaviour could remain even after the outward behaviour changed. She wanted a husband whose principles she could already respect.

Lord Robert then asked what particular action had made her think so badly of him. Miss Selvyn answered frankly. She knew the full story of his conduct toward Lady Mary Jones. That history had deeply changed her opinion of him. Lord Robert tried to defend himself by saying that Lady Mary's careless behaviour had encouraged him to believe that she would accept his proposal.

He argued that men often judged women by the way they behaved. If a woman seemed careless about her own reputation, he said, men could hardly be expected to protect it for her. Lady Mary's free manner had seemed to him like an invitation. He admitted that he had misunderstood her, but he suggested that her own behaviour had partly caused the mistake.

Miss Selvyn strongly rejected this argument. Lady Mary had certainly been foolish and careless, she said, but foolishness was not the same as a wish to do wrong. Her behaviour came from youth, bad education, and constant fashionable excitement. Her mind was naturally good. Lord Robert had seen her lack of caution and had treated it as a chance to take advantage of her.

Miss Selvyn gave him a simple comparison. Suppose a man carelessly left his money where anyone could take it. That would be foolish, but his foolishness would not make stealing the money right. It would be even worse if he did not understand the value of what he was leaving unprotected. Another person's carelessness could never turn theft into honesty.

In Miss Selvyn's view, the same principle applied to Lord Robert's conduct. Lady Mary's poor judgement did not give him the right to harm her. If he believed in Christian moral law, he could not excuse himself by saying that society commonly accepted such behaviour from men. A clear moral rule did not disappear because fashionable people ignored it. Clever excuses could not change the action itself.

Lord Robert admitted that there was truth in what she said. Still, he asked her to remember how difficult temptation could be for people who were actually exposed to it. When a woman behaved in a very free way, he said, a man found it difficult to treat her with the respect he would show a more careful woman. Many men understood light behaviour as encouragement and acted according to that belief.

Miss Selvyn said that she wished women understood this fact better. Many young women believed that open attention from men proved that those men admired them. In reality, the same behaviour that attracted a man's attention might make him respect them less. A woman might proudly think she had gained a man's approval when she had actually lost his good opinion. Miss Selvyn believed that understanding this would change many women's behaviour.

She also thought the men's conduct was deeply dishonest. They could show great attention to a woman while privately thinking badly of her. They might speak as if they loved her while actually taking advantage of the weakness they despised. Miss Selvyn asked what sensible woman would willingly join her whole life to a man who behaved in this way. Marriage required trust, and she did not see how such double behaviour could create it.

Lord Robert answered that men did know how to respect women who deserved respect. His own behaviour toward Miss Selvyn, he said, proved this. He treated her very differently from women whose conduct he considered careless. In his view, women themselves created the difference. Men respected a woman who gave them reason to respect her.

Miss Selvyn said she was not asking him to admire behaviour that did not deserve admiration. She was asking men not to make weak women worse. If a

woman behaved foolishly, a man could simply avoid her. He did not need to pretend love, encourage her weakness, and then use that weakness as a reason for despising her. To help create the fault and then punish the woman for it seemed especially cruel.

She then ended the argument. She reminded Lord Robert that she had only spoken so openly because he had insisted on knowing her objections. Her answer remained the same. Even if she wanted marriage, she could not marry a man whose principles toward women were like his. And even if Lord Robert possessed every virtue she could wish for, she still believed her present life was too happy to exchange for the uncertainties of marriage.

Lord Robert finally understood that further persuasion would achieve nothing. He left the country and returned to London, hoping that constant entertainment would help him forget Miss Selvyn. His feelings for her had been more serious than his earlier attachments, so forgetting her was not easy. Miss Selvyn, however, did not tell Lady Mary about the proposal.

She believed Lady Mary when she said that she no longer cared deeply for Lord Robert. Even so, Miss Selvyn felt that telling her friend about his serious offer of marriage might sound like a victory. Lord Robert had once treated Lady Mary without respect but had approached Miss Selvyn in a completely different way. Miss Selvyn would not use that difference to make herself appear superior. She therefore kept the matter private.

Several peaceful years passed. Lady Emilia and Miss Selvyn continued their quiet country life with reading, conversation, and the same close friendship. Then Lady Emilia became seriously ill with a fever. The doctors tried everything they could, but her condition grew worse each day. Lady Emilia understood that she might not recover and asked them to speak honestly about her chances.

At last the doctors admitted that they had very little hope. Lady Emilia thanked them for telling her the truth and calmly said goodbye to them. Then she asked everyone except Miss Selvyn to leave the room. Miss Selvyn remained beside the bed in tears. Lady Emilia put her arms around her young friend and prepared to tell her something she had hidden for many years.

Part 16: Lady Emilia's Secret

Lady Emilia asked everyone except Miss Selvyn to leave the room. When they were alone, she put her arms around her young friend and began to cry quietly. Then she told Miss Selvyn something completely unexpected. "You have always thought of me as your friend," she said. "But I am also your mother."

Miss Selvyn could not believe her. She thought the fever had finally affected Lady Emilia's mind. Her own parents, Mr and Mrs Selvyn, had never seemed mysterious to her. She gently asked Lady Emilia to rest and not trouble herself with strange thoughts. But Lady Emilia insisted that she was speaking clearly and telling the truth.

She explained that Mr Selvyn had known the secret from the beginning. He had protected Lady Emilia from public shame and had acted as a true father to Harriot, which was Miss Selvyn's first name. Lady Emilia then took a written paper from under her pillow. She had prepared it about a year earlier because she feared that when death came, she might be too weak to explain everything herself.

Miss Selvyn began to read. In the paper, Lady Emilia described herself at seventeen years old. At that age she had fallen deeply in love with Lord Peyton. He loved her too and formally asked her father for permission to marry her. Her father accepted the match because Lord Peyton had enough money and social position.

The marriage, however, could not happen immediately. Lawyers were slowly preparing the legal agreements concerning money and property. At the same time, Lord Peyton, who was an army officer, received orders to return at once to his regiment in Ireland. He asked Lady Emilia's father to allow the wedding to take place before he left. Her father refused because he wanted every legal and social detail completed first.

Lord Peyton then suggested a secret marriage. They could marry privately before he left and have another public ceremony after his return. Lady Emilia

refused. She did not want to disobey her father, and she believed secrecy would be wrong. So the two young people prepared to separate even though everyone already expected them to marry.

The day before Lord Peyton was to leave, Lady Emilia's father had to go out of London on business. Lord Peyton spent almost the whole day with Lady Emilia. Because they were both deeply unhappy about the coming separation, they avoided other visitors and remained together. During that final day, their strong feelings overcame their judgement, and they had a sexual relationship before marriage.

Lord Peyton left London the next day as planned. His letters from Ireland were full of love and sadness. Lady Emilia still loved him deeply, but after she had time to think calmly, her view of herself changed. She felt that she had acted against her own moral beliefs. Because of this, she decided that she would never become Lord Peyton's wife.

Her reasoning was severe. Lord Peyton might forgive her while he was still passionately in love, she thought, but perhaps marriage would change his feelings. He knew how weak she had been. Lady Emilia feared that one day she would see blame in his eyes, even if he never spoke it. She already found it difficult to forgive herself and could not imagine living every day beside someone who knew the secret.

She wrote to Lord Peyton and told him she would not marry him. He strongly opposed her decision. He said that he was the one who should be blamed and that his respect for her had not changed. He asked her not to punish both of them for one mistake. But Lady Emilia believed that his generosity could not restore her own respect for herself.

She also told her father that she no longer wished to marry Lord Peyton, though she did not tell him the true reason. Her father was angry and accused her of changing her mind without honour. Finally she promised that she would never marry anyone else. This promise satisfied him because he was fond of his daughter and liked the idea that she would remain with him.

Then Lady Emilia discovered that she was pregnant. The news filled her with

fear. Lord Peyton was the only person to whom she dared tell the truth. When he received her message, he saw the pregnancy as another reason for immediate marriage. He said that he would return from Ireland even without official permission if necessary.

Lord Peyton believed marriage would protect Lady Emilia from public shame. Lady Emilia was moved by his concern, but she still refused. He soon returned to England and tried every possible argument. His affection made the decision even more painful for her, yet she did not change it. At last, seeing how badly the struggle was affecting her health, Lord Peyton promised not to press her again.

He asked only to arrange a safe way to hide the pregnancy and birth. Lady Emilia admitted that she had little skill in secrecy and accepted his help. Lord Peyton continued visiting her father as a friend. When the time of the birth came near, he invited her father to stay in the country for a short period. This gave Lady Emilia a chance to leave London without causing suspicion.

Under the excuse of visiting a relative, Lady Emilia went to a house arranged by Lord Peyton. There she was received by Mr and Mrs Selvyn. Lord Peyton had not even told them her real name because he wanted to protect her as completely as possible. They treated the unknown young woman with kindness and promised to keep everything secret.

The day after Lady Emilia arrived, she gave birth to a daughter. That child was Harriot, the woman now known as Miss Selvyn. Lady Emilia loved the baby but also felt great sadness when she looked at her. At that time she saw the child as a constant reminder of the action for which she blamed herself. Mr and Mrs Selvyn cared carefully for both mother and child.

Lady Emilia remained with them for less than two weeks. During that time, she continued writing ordinary letters to her father so that he would suspect nothing. When she was strong enough, she returned home and pretended to have a cold until she was fully recovered. She left baby Harriot with Mr and Mrs Selvyn. They had promised to bring her up as their own daughter.

Lord Peyton kept Lady Emilia's father in the country until he knew she was safely home. Then he hurried to see his daughter. Mr Selvyn later told Lady Emilia

that Lord Peyton had cried over the baby. He loved the child deeply. But he too felt that every joy connected with her was mixed with sorrow over the circumstances of her birth.

Mrs Selvyn had also recently given birth to a baby. Her own child died only a few months later. After this death, Lord Peyton asked the Selvyns to take Harriot home and publicly treat her as their own child. Their dead baby was quietly buried, and Harriot took her place in the family. From then on, almost everyone believed that Mr and Mrs Selvyn were her natural parents.

Mrs Selvyn died when Harriot was about three years old. Mr Selvyn had never been very successful in business and wished to leave London. Lord Peyton helped him do this. He arranged a small regular income for Mr Selvyn, placed three thousand pounds in his hands for Harriot's future, and also paid him one hundred pounds each year for the child's education. He told Mr Selvyn to ask for more whenever necessary.

Lady Emilia continued living with her own father until his death. She never married. She wrote that the memory of her mistake remained with her for many years and gave her the sadness Miss Selvyn had often noticed. She believed she had thrown away a marriage that might have been very happy because every later action of Lord Peyton showed his kindness and honour.

When Lady Emilia's father died, she inherited a large fortune. She began sending additional money every year to Mr Selvyn, though Lord Peyton had already provided well for Harriot. At last Lady Emilia could no longer bear never seeing her daughter. She persuaded Mr Selvyn to move back to London and secretly supplied enough money for him to live comfortably near her.

This explained what Miss Selvyn had always believed was their accidental meeting in Park Street. Lady Emilia had moved carefully into her daughter's life while pretending that they were merely new neighbours. Her affection had never been ordinary friendship. Every kind word, every visit, and every sign of concern came from a mother who could not openly call herself one.

Lady Emilia wrote that hiding this feeling had often been extremely difficult. She wanted to hold Harriot as her daughter but had to behave like a respectable

older friend. Yet as the years passed, their close friendship gave Lady Emilia great comfort. Harriot's good character even gave her hope that her long regret and sincere repentance had been accepted by God.

Lady Emilia also explained what had happened between herself and Lord Peyton. For three years after their painful separation, they avoided meeting. Lord Peyton spent much of that time abroad. They hoped that distance would weaken the intense feelings that had led them into trouble. When they finally met again, they discovered that their passionate love had become a calmer and deeper friendship.

They never married, but Lord Peyton continued treating Lady Emilia with the greatest respect. When he needed to discuss Harriot, he usually wrote rather than spoke about her. Even in those letters, he used careful language, almost as if Lady Emilia were only a trusted friend who happened to know about the child. Both parents avoided speaking Harriot's name together because it brought back memories of their painful past.

Lord Peyton sometimes visited Mr Selvyn and saw Harriot while she was growing up. Miss Selvyn herself remembered that he had always been especially kind to her when she was a child. She had never understood why. As she became older, Lord Peyton had to hide his affection more carefully because too much attention from an unrelated man might have seemed strange.

About six months before Mr Selvyn and Harriot moved to London, Lord Peyton died. Lady Emilia described him as the dearest friend of her life. His death made her wish even more strongly to have her daughter near her. She therefore arranged Mr Selvyn's move to Park Street and began the friendship that had now lasted for years.

Miss Selvyn could hardly finish reading the paper because she was crying so much. She now understood that the two people she had known as Mr Selvyn and Lady Emilia had both made great sacrifices for her. She also understood that Lord Peyton, whom she had known only as a kind family friend, had really been her father. The history changed almost every memory of her childhood.

When she finished, Miss Selvyn knelt beside Lady Emilia's bed and took her

hand. She did not look at her mother with blame. Instead, she cried because she had discovered her mother only when she was about to lose her. She told Lady Emilia that she saw years of sincere regret, self-control, love, and moral seriousness in the story she had just read.

Miss Selvyn tried to comfort her mother. She said she believed that true repentance and a life spent trying to do good could be met with mercy. She imagined Lord Peyton and Lady Emilia reunited after death, free from the sorrow that had followed them through life. She hoped that one day she herself would join them. Her words gave Lady Emilia great peace.

Lady Emilia was surprised that a daughter whose life had been so morally careful could judge her so gently. This kindness increased her hope. She said that she no longer wished to spend her final hours speaking only about their separation. However sweet it was to hold her daughter and hear herself called mother, such tenderness might make her cling too strongly to the world she was leaving.

Instead, Lady Emilia asked Harriot to pray with her. At her request, Miss Selvyn sent for the local minister. The remaining hours were spent quietly in prayer and religious reflection. Lady Emilia remained conscious and peaceful. She died during prayer without a struggle.

Miss Selvyn's grief was very deep at first. Yet the way Lady Emilia had faced death gave her some comfort. She could now look back on her mother's life with greater understanding. Lady Emilia's will left Harriot twelve thousand pounds together with her personal property. Miss Selvyn therefore became much more financially independent than she had been before.

During these years, Lady Mary had written to Miss Selvyn about the community at Millenium Hall. After settling the necessary business following Lady Emilia's death, Miss Selvyn asked if she might visit for a short time. Lady Mary and the other women welcomed the idea. Miss Selvyn came intending only to stay briefly, but the visit slowly became longer.

She remained for nearly two months and saw that the women truly wished her to stay. At last she asked whether she might join them permanently and add her fortune to their shared resources. Mrs Morgan, Miss Mancel, and Lady Mary were

delighted. Miss Selvyn therefore became another permanent member of Millenium Hall.

Her additional income allowed the women to begin another important project. They established the community for gentlewomen who had little money, the same house that Lamont and I had already visited. Miss Selvyn's private history had therefore become connected with the larger work of Millenium Hall. The fortune she inherited from Lady Emilia was now helping other women gain safety, independence, and a peaceful home.

Part 17: The New Community

After Mrs Maynard finished Miss Selvyn's history, Lamont remained thoughtful for some time. Lady Emilia's conduct had surprised him greatly. He said that she had shown unusual care and good judgement in refusing to marry Lord Peyton after what had happened between them. Whether her decision had been too severe or not, she had clearly believed that marriage would not bring either of them peace. We continued discussing the difficult choices of both men and women until the company separated.

That afternoon the ladies invited us to go with them to a house they had recently bought. This was to become the second community for gentlewomen with little money. Several workmen had already begun repairing it, so the ladies needed to inspect their progress. There was room for all of us in their coach and chaise together with our own carriage. After a short journey, we arrived at the property.

The house had once been a large and handsome country mansion. Now it looked old and neglected. The walls and main structure were still strong, but many parts of the outside needed repair. Inside, very little useful furniture remained. Time, damp, rats, and mice had damaged almost everything that earlier owners had left behind.

We were told that the last old man who had lived there had been extremely

rich and extremely unwilling to spend money. He cared so much about keeping his wealth that he hardly allowed himself to enjoy any of it. At about fifty years old, he dismissed almost all his servants and kept only one old woman. She was too weak to do much harm even if she had wanted to steal from him. In time, she also died.

After her death, the old man refused to employ anyone else. He became afraid that every stranger wanted his money. He placed heavy iron bars over doors and windows until the house seemed almost like a prison. A large and fierce dog guarded the yard day and night. The poor animal was fed so little that hunger made it even more dangerous.

Whenever the dog barked, the old man became terrified. He hurried to the only window he sometimes opened and looked outside to see who was there. Even a poor child or an old woman could frighten him until that person had completely disappeared. His wealth did not make him feel safe. The more money he possessed, the more afraid he became of losing it.

Since he had no servant, an old woman from the neighbourhood agreed to bring him food. She came to the gate and gave a special signal so that he would know it was safe to come out. At first he cooked the food himself. Later he became too weak and anxious to do even that, so she began bringing meals already prepared. This strange arrangement continued for some time.

Then one day the old man did not come to the gate. The woman returned again and again, but for three days she received no answer. At last the neighbours became worried. They did not want to break into such a strongly protected house without permission, so they sent for the old man's nephew. The nephew was the closest person who could properly enter the property.

The nephew had grown up in poverty. His own father, who was the rich man's brother, had received almost no help from this wealthy relative and had died poor. The young man himself was still living in difficult conditions. He had kept in contact with some neighbours because he knew that one day he might inherit his uncle's property. When their message reached him, he came at once.

Even with the nephew present, entering the house was difficult. The doors and

windows had been made so strong that the men could not force them open. At last they removed part of the roof. One man climbed down through the opening and then unlocked a door from inside. What they found there showed the final result of the old man's fear and love of money.

The miser was dead. His body lay across a great chest that contained his money. It was almost as if he had wanted to hold on to his wealth even after death. He had spent years protecting his fortune but had gained almost no comfort from it. He had made himself lonely, fearful, and miserable while the money remained unused beside him.

His nephew was only just old enough to control the property he had inherited. After a life of poverty, the sudden change almost overwhelmed him. He was excited by the thought that he could now buy anything he wanted. He stayed only long enough to arrange the necessary matters after his uncle's death. Then he hurried to London without taking time to understand his new estate or consider how to manage it.

In London, he immediately began living in the most expensive way possible. He rented a grand house in Grosvenor Square, ordered fashionable carriages, and bought excellent horses at prices far above their real value. He wanted everything that could show the world that he was now rich. The poverty of his early life had not taught him careful use of money. Instead, it seemed to make him eager to spend without limit.

Gambling soon became one of his main pleasures. He went regularly to fashionable clubs, kept racehorses, and spent large amounts at Newmarket. Almost every event became an excuse for a bet. A change in the weather could make him win or lose money. He seemed unable to enjoy anything unless money was also placed at risk.

In one year, he spent much of the ready money that his uncle had spent decades collecting. During the second year, he had to borrow money against parts of his land. By the third year, he began selling sections of the estate itself. The old mansion we were visiting was among the properties that had to be sold. The uncle had refused to spend money, while the nephew could not stop spending it.

I thought about the strange history of the house. Long ago, it had probably been a place of hospitality where guests were welcomed. Under the miser, it had become a dark and closed building guarded against the world. Under the nephew, it had been neglected while its value was turned into money for gambling and fashionable pleasures. Now it was entering a completely different period.

The women of Millenium Hall had bought it so that people could live there safely and comfortably. The same wealth that one man had hidden and another had wasted would now be used to help others. I found it difficult to decide which earlier owner had used money more foolishly. One had refused himself almost every comfort, while the other had destroyed his fortune through excess.

Both men had thought mainly about themselves. The miser's pleasure came from knowing that money was stored away. The nephew's pleasure came from spending it quickly. Neither seemed to ask whether wealth could improve another person's life. The women of Millenium Hall had a very different idea of what money was for.

Their own lives were comfortable, but comfort was not their final purpose. They used their property to create work, education, safety, and independence for other people. At the same time, this work gave the women themselves great satisfaction. Their charity did not make their lives empty or joyless. The happiness they gave to others seemed to return to them.

The house was already becoming active again. Many workers were repairing the building and putting the neglected land into better order. Instead of a hungry dog and a frightened old man, we now saw people earning money through useful work. The property that had once been shut against everyone was beginning to support many families. The change was pleasant to observe.

Some of the older girls from the Hall's school were also working inside. One of their teachers was with them. They were repairing pieces of furniture that had not been completely destroyed. Some of these objects had once been fine and expensive, though years of neglect had badly damaged them. The girls were learning how care and skill could make old things useful and attractive again.

I was impressed by the way the ladies joined different kinds of good work

together. The building needed repair, so local workers received employment. The furniture needed attention, so the schoolgirls gained useful practice. Later the house would provide a secure home for women who could not easily live independently. Almost every expense seemed to help more than one person.

On our way back to Millenium Hall, we stopped at the house of a clergyman. He and his wife had only a modest income, yet their home was one of the most comfortable and pleasant places I had seen. Everything was simple, clean, and well arranged. Nothing suggested either poverty or waste. Good sense seemed to have made a small income go a very long way.

For a moment, the sight almost made great wealth seem unnecessary. A person with careful habits, good taste, and enough for basic needs could clearly live very happily without riches. Yet I immediately remembered the women of Millenium Hall. Their money allowed them to support schools, homes, workers, sick families, and many other people. Wealth itself was not the problem; everything depended on how it was used.

We returned to Millenium Hall and found several neighbours waiting there. They had come to join the evening concert and stay for supper. Music filled the house again, and the evening passed pleasantly. At ten o'clock the visitors left. I was told that this was actually a little later than their usual hour because our visit had changed the normal daily schedule.

The following morning was very hot, so breakfast was served in an arbour in the flower garden. The air was still fresh from the morning dew, and the flowers gave off a strong sweet smell. I had travelled through many beautiful parts of the country, but Millenium Hall was teaching me to notice rural pleasures more carefully. The ladies seemed to understand exactly how to enjoy every season and every part of the day.

Writers often described imaginary lands where shepherds lived peacefully among beautiful fields, trees, streams, and flowers. Yet the real beauty around us seemed better than many such invented places. There were no romantic shepherd heroes walking through the gardens, but I did not feel that anything important was missing. If old stories imagined a peaceful Arcadia for men and women,

Millenium Hall seemed almost like an Arcadia created by women themselves.

After breakfast, the other ladies went away to begin their daily work. Mrs Maynard remained with us. We were so comfortable in the arbour that none of us wanted to move. I reminded my cousin that several histories still remained to be told. She agreed and prepared to continue.

The next woman whose life she chose to describe was Miss Trentham. We had already seen enough of her character to make me curious about the events that had brought her to Millenium Hall. Mrs Maynard settled herself comfortably while Lamont and I prepared to listen. Then she began the history of Harriot Trentham.

Part 18: Harriot and Mr Alworth

Harriot Trentham never knew her mother. Mrs Trentham died in the same month in which Harriot was born. Her father lived only eight years longer. When he died, he left Harriot eleven thousand pounds and placed both his daughter and her fortune under the care of his mother, Mrs Alworth.

Mrs Alworth was an intelligent and good older woman. She had lived long enough to lose all her own children, but several grandchildren remained. She therefore gathered them into her house. A grandson named Alworth was about eleven, and his sister was ten. Two other granddaughters, the Miss Denhams, were twelve and eleven.

These children had already lived together for some years when eight-year-old Harriot joined them. Because Mrs Alworth was rich, the grandchildren had all tried to gain a special place in her affection. They did not welcome another possible favourite. Harriot was beautiful, gentle, and naturally easy to love. This made the other girls see her as a rival almost immediately.

Harriot's father had educated her in a simple and honest way. He had not taught her to hide every feeling or use polite words that she did not mean. He wanted her to remain natural while still being kind. Harriot had learned that causing

unnecessary pain to another person was wrong. She therefore controlled words that might hurt someone, but she did not pretend when there was no good reason to do so.

This combination made her unusually open and gentle. She wanted to please people through kindness, not through false manners. Mrs Alworth soon became especially fond of her. Visitors also noticed Harriot's beauty at once and liked her even more when they discovered her good character. The more affection Harriot received, however, the more jealous her female cousins became.

Miss Alworth and the Miss Denhams began making small plans against her. They complained about her to their grandmother and tried to make innocent actions look bad. Harriot defended herself without anger and never kept hatred in her heart. Unfortunately, this also meant that she remained too trusting. Even after being deceived several times, she still did not expect another trick.

Her strongest defender was young Master Alworth. Unlike the girls, he felt no jealousy toward Harriot. He had an honest and affectionate character and quickly became fond of her. When he saw his sister and cousins treating Harriot unfairly, he became angry on her behalf. He often told his grandmother what had really happened.

Mrs Alworth had decided not to send her grandson to school. She believed boys sometimes learned as many bad habits as useful lessons there. Instead, she hired a private tutor when he was still very young. The tutor was intelligent, educated, religious, and good-humoured. He took his work seriously and became an important member of the household.

Because Master Alworth studied at home, Harriot often tried to spend time with him. He was the only cousin whose company she truly enjoyed. But his lessons kept him busy for much of the day. His tutor noticed Harriot's interest and began encouraging her to learn too. He soon discovered that she was both eager and unusually quick.

Mrs Alworth was pleased and allowed Harriot to share much of the education. Master Alworth was already ahead of her and often helped explain difficult ideas. Harriot sometimes understood him more easily than the tutor because the tutor

used words that were too technical for a child. Learning therefore became another pleasure that Harriot and Alworth shared. Their friendship grew stronger while their minds developed together.

Harriot continued in this life until she was sixteen. Her beauty increased as she grew older, and so did her knowledge. At that point Mrs Alworth decided that her grandson should travel abroad to complete his education. Alworth agreed that travelling would be useful, but he hated the thought of leaving Harriot. Harriot was equally unhappy about losing him.

She loved her grandmother, but Alworth was the only person in the house she regarded as a close and equal friend. His absence would take away her favourite companion. It would also leave her without the person who most often protected her against false accusations. Mrs Alworth noticed how deeply the two young people cared for one another and was pleased by it. She began hoping that they would eventually marry.

To their grandmother, the idea seemed perfect. Their ages and fortunes suited each other, and their affection had begun in childhood. Both had gentle characters, so she imagined that their marriage would be peaceful and lasting. Harriot and Alworth themselves had never thought so far ahead. They had grown up almost like brother and sister and believed that friendship was all they needed.

Alworth therefore left England without declaring romantic love. His tutor did not believe he had enough experience to guide a young man through foreign countries, so another gentleman went with him. At Harriot's request, Mrs Alworth kept the old tutor in the house. He continued teaching Harriot while Alworth was away. She used the next two years with great energy.

By the end of that time, Harriot had learned several modern languages very well and had also studied Greek and Latin. She knew much about ancient and modern philosophy and had read widely in many other subjects. Her education was far beyond what most young women of her time received. Yet she remained free from pride. Knowledge had made her more capable without making her wish to show that she was superior.

When Alworth finally returned, he found Harriot greatly changed in some

ways and completely unchanged in others. Her beauty was now at its height, and her manners had become graceful and confident. But she was still natural, sensible, and without vanity. Harriot was equally delighted to see him. Their old friendship returned immediately, with all the ease of something that had never really been broken.

During Alworth's absence, the family situation had also changed. The older Miss Denham had married and left the house. Miss Alworth hoped to marry a gentleman named Mr Parnel, but she had been waiting for her brother to return and approve the match. There was one difficulty in the history of that courtship. Mr Parnel had first wanted to marry Harriot.

Harriot had refused him, though she had no serious complaint about his character, fortune, or appearance. She simply did not want to marry him. There was also another reason that mattered greatly to her. Harriot had noticed that Miss Alworth loved Mr Parnel. Even though Miss Alworth had often treated her badly, Harriot did not want to destroy her cousin's chance of happiness.

Harriot therefore tried to turn Mr Parnel's attention toward Miss Alworth. She discouraged his hopes of marrying her while speaking well of her cousin. At first Mr Parnel remained strongly attracted to Harriot. When he spoke to Miss Alworth, he often used the conversation to complain about Harriot's refusal. Miss Alworth listened because even these complaints allowed her to remain close to him.

Harriot tried to make Mr Parnel think more clearly. She told him that marrying a woman who did not love him would not give him happiness. If both husband and wife felt little, they might perhaps live together quietly enough. But if one person loved deeply while the other remained cold, the loving partner would suffer. Harriot urged him to consider the value of marrying a woman whose whole heart was already his.

She did not at first name Miss Alworth, but Mr Parnel understood her meaning. For some time he resisted the idea. At last, after losing hope of Harriot and seeing how deeply Miss Alworth cared for him, he became more willing to consider the match. He openly told Harriot that he understood what she had been trying to do. This allowed her to speak still more directly.

Harriot advised him not to change his behaviour too suddenly. If he immediately stopped paying attention to Harriot and openly turned to Miss Alworth, her cousin might fear that he still loved Harriot. Harriot therefore suggested a gradual change. Mr Parnel should slowly reduce his attention to her and increase his attention to Miss Alworth. Harriot was willing to appear rejected if that would make her cousin more secure.

Miss Alworth was extremely happy when she finally became the clear object of Mr Parnel's courtship. She even allowed herself to believe that he had freely preferred her to Harriot. Yet she also knew that Harriot had tried to help her. Harriot gave her advice about how to win not merely Mr Parnel's attention but also his trust and respect. She believed those qualities offered a better foundation for lasting affection.

When Alworth returned from abroad, he saw no reason to oppose his sister's marriage. Mr Parnel was a suitable man, and Miss Alworth clearly wanted the match. The wedding therefore took place soon afterward. Alworth was happy for his sister, but the marriage did not interest him nearly as much as the recovery of his old friendship with Harriot.

He and Harriot now spent almost all their free time together. A walk seemed better when they shared it. A book became more interesting when they read and discussed it together. They disliked being separated and were always pleased to meet again. Other people watched them and naturally began saying that they were in love.

At first Harriot and Alworth found this description strange. Their affection felt calm, reasonable, and familiar. They had always imagined romantic love as something much more troubled and exciting. Yet they had to admit that no one was dearer to either of them. Almost every pleasure became greater when the other person shared it.

Because everyone repeated the idea so often, they gradually wondered whether the word "love" did describe what they felt. Perhaps, they thought, their characters simply made love quieter than it was in other people. Mrs Alworth had no doubts. She had wanted this marriage for years and now believed her wish was about to

be fulfilled. She therefore suggested that they marry soon.

The proposal made both young people thoughtful rather than excited. They already had each other's company and could not see exactly what marriage would add. Yet neither wished to refuse, because a refusal might hurt the other or suggest that their affection was less sincere than it seemed. They also understood that society might begin criticizing such close friendship between an unmarried man and woman.

This finally decided them. They believed that complete trust and long friendship gave them every reason to expect a happy marriage. Lawyers were asked to prepare the necessary agreements, and the family began making arrangements. But Harriot and Alworth showed no impatience. Because they were already content together, even slow legal work did not greatly trouble them.

The preparations therefore moved forward at an unusually calm pace. Mrs Alworth was more eager than the future bride and bridegroom and sometimes complained about the delay. Harriot and Alworth simply waited. They believed their future was safely settled and saw no reason to hurry. Neither of them yet knew that a short journey before the wedding would completely change the direction of their lives.

Part 19: A Marriage That Should Not Have Happened

While the marriage preparations moved slowly, Mrs Tonston, the older Miss Denham, became seriously ill. Her doctors advised her to go to Buxton for her health. The town was only about a day's journey from Mrs Alworth's house. Mrs Alworth wished to see her granddaughter, so Harriot, Mr Alworth, and the younger Miss Denham travelled there with her.

At Buxton, visitors spent much of their time together in public rooms and at shared meals. On their first day, Mr Alworth noticed a young woman named Miss Melman. She was pretty, lively, and cheerful. Her conversation was quick and fashionable, though she did not think very deeply. She was very different from the

women Mr Alworth had known closely before.

Mr Alworth had spent most of his life with sensible and quiet people. His grandmother was serious, and Harriot's intelligence was strong and steady. Miss Melman seemed exciting because she was so unlike them. She laughed easily, changed her mood quickly, and knew how to attract attention. Mr Alworth had little experience with this kind of woman.

Miss Melman soon noticed him too. He was handsome, young, and known to have a good fortune. She enjoyed making men admire her and decided that he would be an interesting conquest. Sometimes she made him believe that she liked him very much. Then she suddenly became cold and uncertain.

This changing behaviour had a strong effect on Mr Alworth. When Miss Melman was warm, he was delighted. When she became distant, he worried that he had lost her. Because he could never feel certain of her, he thought about her constantly. The difficulty of winning her made his desire grow stronger.

After only about two weeks, Harriot clearly saw what was happening. Mr Alworth showed Miss Melman an eagerness that he had never shown Harriot. At the same time, he began avoiding Harriot because he knew his conduct must hurt her. When he had to speak with her, he seemed uncomfortable and distracted. Harriot feared that she had not only lost a future husband but also her oldest friend.

This second loss troubled her much more than the first. Harriot could accept Mr Alworth marrying another woman if that marriage made him happy. What she could not bear was the thought that his friendship for her had disappeared. At first she said nothing. But then news arrived that the lawyers had finally completed the documents for her own marriage to Mr Alworth.

Harriot knew that silence was no longer sensible. She spoke to him privately and calmly. She said that the marriage arrangements could simply be cancelled. "Another woman has the heart that I never really possessed," she told him. "That does not have to destroy our friendship. You may give your hand to her and still remain my friend."

Mr Alworth was embarrassed, but Harriot's kindness encouraged him to speak honestly. He confessed that he had never understood his own emotions before. He

had always felt the deepest affection and respect for Harriot. Yet what he felt for Miss Melman was completely different. It was a strong and restless passion that he had never experienced before.

He admitted that Harriot was more beautiful and far more intelligent than Miss Melman. He did not even know much about Miss Melman's moral character. Still, the thought of marrying her filled him with excitement. He now believed that friendship and passionate love were separate feelings. Harriot had all his respect, he said, but Miss Melman had taken complete control of his passion.

Harriot was grateful for his honesty. She wanted above all to keep his respect and friendship. Yet she now understood that, while his new passion remained strong, friendship would probably seem quiet and unimportant beside it. She therefore took responsibility for ending their planned marriage. Mrs Alworth understood the reason and sadly accepted the decision.

The old lady was deeply disappointed in her grandson. She could not understand why he preferred an uncertain and foolish young woman to Harriot, whose character he had known all his life. Mrs Alworth believed he would one day regret the choice. Harriot was less angry. She even persuaded her grandmother to allow Mr Alworth and Miss Melman to marry at Mrs Alworth's own house.

Harriot now became the trusted friend of the man she had expected to marry. She listened while he spoke about Miss Melman, though doing so was painful. When the wedding arrangements were ready, the couple came to Mrs Alworth's house. Mr Alworth married Miss Melman with complete confidence that he had finally found perfect happiness. A few days later, the newly married pair left.

Harriot missed her old companion very much. Still, she sincerely hoped that his marriage would be as happy as he expected. He continued writing to her and at first described his happiness warmly. Later, after he settled in London, his letters became shorter and said less about his wife. Harriot did not immediately see any reason to worry.

Another family matter soon required her attention. The younger Miss Denham received an offer of marriage from a wealthy gentleman. The problem was that he demanded a fortune of nine thousand pounds, while Miss Denham possessed only

seven thousand. Mrs Tonston asked Mrs Alworth to provide the missing two thousand pounds. She added that her sister strongly wished to marry the man.

Mrs Alworth refused. She disliked the idea of paying extra money to secure a husband who seemed so interested in the size of a woman's fortune. Harriot tried to change her mind but failed. At last Harriot offered to give the two thousand pounds herself. She said she could easily spare it and did not want her cousin to lose what she believed would make her happy.

Mrs Alworth reminded Harriot that the Denham girls had treated her badly in childhood. Harriot answered that those actions had been childish and foolish. She had no wish to carry old anger into adult life. Mrs Alworth was so moved by Harriot's generosity that she finally paid the money herself. Miss Denham's marriage then took place at her grandmother's house.

Mrs Alworth was now growing old and weaker. Harriot remained her main companion. Yet problems from other parts of the family continued reaching them. Mr Parnel and his wife, the former Miss Alworth, were becoming unhappy together. Mrs Parnel loved her husband much more passionately than he loved her.

Her constant expressions of love began to tire Mr Parnel. He had married her partly from gratitude and respect, not from strong passion. The more she demanded equal feeling from him, the more uncomfortable he became. His natural good temper slowly turned into irritation. Mrs Parnel then cried, complained, and accused him of not loving her enough, which made the situation worse.

Harriot felt partly responsible because she had encouraged their marriage. She therefore tried to help both of them. She advised Mrs Parnel to show her love more quietly and stop demanding constant proof from her husband. She also reminded Mr Parnel that his wife's troublesome behaviour came from affection. He should not turn love into a reason for hatred simply because it was expressed badly.

Mrs Alworth added the weight of her own advice. Slowly the couple learned to live together more peacefully. Their marriage never developed the deep and equal affection Harriot valued, but open unhappiness decreased. They also had two children whom they both loved. These children gave them a strong shared

interest and helped fill some of the emptiness between them.

Near the end of the second year of Mr Alworth's marriage, Mrs Alworth died. Harriot mourned deeply for the grandmother who had protected and loved her for so many years. Mrs Alworth left Harriot four thousand pounds in addition to the fortune Harriot already possessed. The family house now belonged to Mr Alworth.

Mr Alworth wrote and asked Harriot to remain there until he came to take possession. Although they had written regularly, Harriot had not seen him since his marriage. She had refused several invitations because she would not leave her aging grandmother alone. Now she prepared the house carefully for the return of her oldest friend. The work gave her some comfort during her grief.

When Mr Alworth arrived with his wife, he and Harriot met with great joy. Their old friendship seemed immediately alive again. But Harriot soon discovered that Mr Alworth was far from happy in his marriage. He had hidden the truth from his grandmother because he knew she had expected his choice to end badly. With Harriot, however, he felt no need to hide anything.

He now understood Miss Melman's character much better. Her liveliness, which had seemed so charming at Buxton, often proved to be only restless energy. She loved public attention but cared little for quiet affection. She enjoyed being admired by many men and spent great amounts of time dressing for social occasions. When she was alone with her husband, she often seemed bored.

Mr Alworth had once been extremely jealous. Later he realized that his wife did not truly love any of the men who surrounded her. She simply loved admiration itself. This discovery reduced his jealousy but did not make him happy. He had wanted love, companionship, and intelligent conversation from marriage. Instead, he found himself almost unimportant to his own wife.

Harriot tried to help him accept his situation. She also tried to encourage Mrs Alworth to take more interest in serious thought and in her husband. Neither effort succeeded. Then another and more dangerous change began. Mr Alworth started comparing his wife with Harriot.

He saw again Harriot's natural beauty, intelligence, knowledge, steady character, and endless variety of conversation. Beside these qualities, the

attractions that had once made Miss Melman seem so exciting now appeared shallow. Mr Alworth could hardly understand how he had once preferred her. The comparison filled him with regret for the choice he had made.

Out of this regret grew a feeling for Harriot that he had strangely never experienced when he was free to marry her. He now fell passionately in love with her. He knew that this love could bring no proper happiness because he was already married. The more strongly he felt it, the more he blamed his own past foolishness. He tried to hide his feelings out of respect for Harriot.

At this time Mrs Maynard, who was telling us the story, had first become acquainted with Harriot. She quickly noticed Mr Alworth's feelings and told Harriot that he was in love with her. Harriot refused to believe it. She explained their childhood friendship and their earlier plan to marry. To her, these facts proved that his affection was only the same old friendship.

Mrs Maynard remained unconvinced. She suggested that human feelings could be strangely unreasonable. Perhaps Harriot had been too easy for Mr Alworth to obtain when they were young. Now that marriage to her had become impossible, desire had appeared where calm friendship had existed before. Harriot thought this view made human nature seem far too foolish.

For some time, she continued explaining every sign of Mr Alworth's emotion as friendship. At last he could hide the truth no longer. His unhappiness became so great that he begged Harriot to help him overcome his feelings. With great shame, he confessed that he had failed to love her at the right time and had begun loving her when it was too late.

His distress frightened Harriot. He fell at her feet and seemed almost unable to control himself. Her first concern was not anger but fear for his state of mind. She tried to make him rise and stop speaking. When she saw that he could not become calm until he knew she forgave him, she assured him that she did.

Harriot herself then began to cry. When Mr Alworth became quieter, she told him that they had only one sensible choice. They needed distance. Since the house now belonged to him, Harriot would leave. Mr Alworth begged her not to go immediately and said that losing her company at once would be more than he

could bear.

Harriot agreed to remain a little longer because she feared making his condition worse. But she continued explaining that separation was necessary. After his confession, Mr Alworth became less wild and desperate, though still deeply sad. His wife noticed almost nothing. She was too busy complaining about country life, sleeping late, dressing, playing cards, and looking for entertainment.

At last Harriot decided that she could delay no longer. She said goodbye with more pain than she allowed Mr Alworth to see. His love had awakened something new in her own heart. The sadness in his face and the gentleness with which he spoke of his feelings affected her more strongly than all his earlier qualities had ever done.

For the first time, Harriot discovered that she was no longer emotionally calm toward him. She had begun to love the man she could no longer marry. Yet she carefully hid this from Mr Alworth. If he believed his love was returned, she knew his struggle would become much harder. She therefore left him believing that her affection remained only friendship, and prepared to begin a life away from him.

Part 20: Harriot's New Life

Harriot left the country and went to London. Mrs Maynard, who had remained with her because of their growing friendship, travelled with her. Mr Alworth's wife came to London less than a month later. Mr Alworth himself was in poor health and went to Bath, taking his young son with him. His wife did not object, since she spent little time with the child even when he was near her.

At first Harriot was deeply unhappy in London. Letters from Mr Alworth made her sadness worse because they showed that he was suffering too. She had left him because she believed separation was necessary, but distance did not immediately bring peace. She could not stop thinking about him. For the first time in her life, her calm control over her feelings seemed very weak.

As more fashionable people returned to London for the season, Harriot decided

to try a different cure. She began going often into society. Her beauty, graceful appearance, and large fortune made her one of the most admired women in town. Many men wanted to marry her. She found that this general attention gave her a new kind of pleasure.

Harriot had received marriage offers before, but country courtships had seemed quiet and serious. London admiration was very different. Everywhere she went, people noticed her, praised her, and tried to please her. At first she enjoyed this excitement more than she expected. Her books were neglected because she wanted to remain busy enough to avoid thinking about Mr Alworth.

Harriot understood that part of this pleasure came from vanity. Still, she allowed herself to enjoy it because it seemed to reduce her sadness. She went from one social event to another and filled her days with company. Yet this cure worked only while the noise continued. Whenever she was alone, thoughts of Mr Alworth returned.

Even during this fashionable period, Harriot did not stop helping people in trouble. One of the people who now needed her help was Mrs Tonston, formerly the older Miss Denham. As a child, Mrs Tonston had often tried to harm Harriot through lies and jealous tricks. Harriot had never answered this behaviour with lasting anger.

Mrs Tonston's marriage had become extremely unhappy. She had created serious trouble between her husband and his family by telling false stories about them. In time, the truth was discovered. Mr Tonston became so angry that he forced his wife to leave his house. He gave her only a very small amount of money to live on.

Mrs Tonston knew that Harriot was generous even toward people who had treated her badly. She therefore asked her for help. Harriot immediately sent enough money to meet her present needs. But she did not stop there. She travelled into the country to speak directly with Mr Tonston.

Harriot told him that his wife's faults did not remove every responsibility he had toward her. Mrs Tonston had brought money into the marriage and therefore had a right to proper support. Harriot spoke so reasonably that Mr Tonston finally

agreed. He created a regular financial settlement for his wife and placed the legal papers in Harriot's hands.

Harriot then made sure that the money was paid regularly. She also spoke honestly to Mrs Tonston about the behaviour that had caused so much damage. Harriot did not simply tell her that she was an innocent victim. She tried to help her understand how jealousy, dishonesty, and a desire to hurt others had poisoned her relationships. Mrs Tonston slowly began to recognize her own faults.

Over the following years, Mrs Tonston's character changed greatly. Five years after the separation, Harriot was able to bring husband and wife together again. They learned to live peacefully and became sincerely grateful to her. Mrs Maynard mentioned this later result early in the story so that she would not need to return to it afterward.

The journey to help Mrs Tonston, however, had an unexpected result for Harriot herself. On her way back to London, she stayed at an inn where smallpox was present. She caught the disease without knowing it. Soon after she reached London, the illness appeared. Her case became extremely serious.

Mrs Maynard was in London and personally nursed her. Harriot's fever was so violent that for a time she did not know what was happening around her. When Mr Alworth heard that she was dangerously ill, he came to London as quickly as possible. He shared the work of caring for her with Mrs Maynard. His fear for Harriot was stronger than any concern about himself.

When Harriot finally recovered her senses, she learned that Mr Alworth had seen her throughout the worst part of the illness. At first she felt embarrassed. Smallpox had badly changed her appearance during the fever, and she knew he had once admired her beauty. Then another thought occurred to her. Perhaps seeing her in this condition would finally destroy his romantic love.

This idea gave Harriot some comfort. She wanted Mr Alworth to recover from a passion that could only make him unhappy. If the loss of her beauty helped him return to simple friendship, she thought she could accept it. But she soon discovered that she had been mistaken. His feelings did not disappear because her appearance had changed.

When Harriot was fully recovered, she saw that smallpox had permanently damaged the beauty for which she had once been famous. She did not pretend that this caused no pain. For years she had been admired wherever she went, and she had recently discovered how pleasant public admiration could be. The change therefore required real adjustment.

Harriot did not want to remain in London while curious or unkind people watched her and discussed her altered face. As soon as she was strong enough to travel, she left town. Mrs Maynard rented a country house for her. There Harriot could recover her health and think quietly without becoming an object of public attention.

Surprisingly, she soon became content with her new situation. Her love of reading returned. The calm pleasures that she had neglected in London began to satisfy her again. She saw more clearly that fashionable admiration had given her excitement but not lasting peace. The loss of beauty removed one of the strongest reasons for continuing that restless life.

Harriot later said that she almost regarded the illness as an unexpected reward for helping Mrs Tonston. She did not mean that suffering itself was pleasant. Rather, the illness had pushed her away from a way of life that was beginning to weaken her judgement. It had returned her to quiet habits at exactly the time when she needed them most.

The country also helped her face her feelings for Mr Alworth honestly. In London, she had tried to drive him out of her mind through noise and constant company. This worked only for short periods. The moment she became quiet, his image returned as strongly as before. Harriot now understood that she could not defeat a feeling merely by refusing to think about it.

She therefore chose a slower and more difficult method. She reminded herself that Mr Alworth was married and that her love could lead nowhere good. She used reason and religion to bring her feelings under control. She did not try to stop caring about him as a person. Instead, she tried to return that affection to the old limits of friendship.

Harriot also wrote to Mr Alworth about the same problem. She urged him not

to feed a love that could only make him miserable. The advice that helped her, she recommended to him. His feelings did not disappear completely, but he gradually gained greater control over them. Their letters became a way of helping each other live within necessary limits.

Mr Alworth spent most of his time in the country. He usually kept a few sensible friends near him and gave much attention to educating his two sons. His wife continued to spend most of the year in London, enjoying the same fashionable life that had always attracted her. Their marriage never became the happiness Mr Alworth had once imagined at Buxton.

About fourteen years before Mrs Maynard told us this story, Harriot came to visit a woman who lived near Millenium Hall. During that visit, she became acquainted with the ladies of the Hall. They liked her greatly and invited her to stay with them after her other visit ended. Harriot accepted almost immediately because the kind of life she found there was exactly what she wanted.

What began as a visit became permanent. Harriot remained at Millenium Hall and joined the community. Some years later, when Mr Maynard died and left Mrs Maynard with only a modest income, Harriot invited her friend to spend the first period of widowhood at the Hall. Mrs Maynard came and was soon welcomed by all the women. She now felt that she could hardly imagine living anywhere else.

Harriot and Mr Alworth continued writing regularly, but they avoided meeting in person. Mr Alworth's wife later had a daughter, and Harriot received permission to take responsibility for the girl's education. Harriot considered this a great gift, though the child's mother did not think it especially important. The girl was now ten years old and already unusually well educated.

Twice each year, the child visited her father for about three weeks. Harriot noticed that she always returned improved because Mr Alworth took education seriously. In this way, Harriot remained connected with the family without placing herself again in the dangerous situation she had escaped years before. Affection, reason, and distance had finally found a balance.

Harriot's fortune also increased the shared income of Millenium Hall. The women used part of this new money to begin a carpet and rug business in the

parish. The project grew successfully and eventually brought work and greater comfort to many families in the surrounding country. Harriot's private fortune had thus become another source of useful work for the wider community.

Part 21: What Is Money For?

The morning was still young when I asked Mrs Maynard to show us the carpet and rug business that Harriot's fortune had helped to establish. She agreed at once. We walked a little more than half a mile from Millenium Hall to the busiest part of the village. There we found what looked almost like a long street filled with workers.

Several hundred people were employed there. Some were children of about six years old, while others were very old men and women. Some workers spun wool, some wove it, and others dyed it. Almost everyone was busy, and many worked while singing or whistling. Their clean clothes and cheerful faces showed that they were living in reasonable comfort.

Before the business began, the area had contained many poor families and too few jobs. The ladies therefore paid skilled people to teach local workers how to make carpets and rugs. At first they supplied the money needed to start the work. They soon decided that they should also continue watching over the business themselves. They feared that an ordinary owner might care more about profit than about the workers.

The ladies did not personally manage every small detail. They employed people to direct the work and allowed them a fair profit. But the women kept control over the money paid to the workers. In this way, no manager could reduce wages simply to increase his own income. The ladies also examined the accounts carefully to prevent dishonesty.

I was especially pleased that almost everyone could find some kind of useful work. Children did lighter tasks suitable for their age, while stronger adults performed more difficult work. Old people who could no longer do heavy labour

were still given something they could manage. The ladies actually paid children and elderly workers more, compared with the amount of work they produced, than they paid healthy adults.

They did this on purpose. Industry was common enough among strong adults who needed to support themselves, but harder to maintain at the beginning and end of life. The ladies therefore wanted to encourage children to form good habits and older people to remain active as long as possible. The business was not designed only to make goods. It was also designed to support human lives.

We became so interested in watching the workers that we nearly forgot the time. When we finally returned to Millenium Hall, dinner was just being brought to the table. Later that afternoon, we told the ladies how much we had enjoyed the visit. This led naturally to another discussion about the way they used their money. Lamont had been thinking deeply about what he had seen.

He told the women that they seemed to live entirely for other people. He could hardly imagine anyone doing so much good while caring so little about personal pleasure. Miss Mancel gently disagreed with the first part of his statement. She said they certainly did not believe themselves to be doing more than duty required. In fact, they were much more aware of what they still failed to do.

Lamont was surprised by the word “duty.” He asked whether she truly believed that all this work was required of them. Miss Mancel answered that she did. She believed that time, money, intelligence, and other abilities were things trusted to human beings rather than possessions to be used without responsibility. People would therefore have to answer for the way they used them.

She explained her idea in simple terms. Christian teaching clearly told people to feed the hungry, clothe those without enough clothing, care for the sick, and help people in trouble. Even a person without inherited wealth was expected to work so that he might sometimes help someone unable to work. If this was required of people with little money, she said, surely people with much more had an even greater responsibility.

Miss Mancel did not think charity meant giving money carelessly. A rich person should use thought as well as money. She believed that reason, time, and

experience should be used to discover where help was really needed. A gift should encourage useful habits when possible and should not accidentally make a bad situation worse. Giving wisely required work.

She compared this duty with managing a household. A sensible person would spend time making sure household money was used carefully. Why, then, should that same person throw money among poor people without thinking about the result? Simply giving away money might overcome selfishness, but careless giving could still come from laziness. Miss Mancel believed both faults should be resisted.

She said that every position in life brought its own difficulties. Poverty tested people's patience and willingness to work. Wealth created different tests. Rich people had to learn self-control, humility, and concern for others. Having more choices did not remove responsibility; in some ways, it increased it.

Miss Trentham then returned to Lamont's statement that the women seemed to care nothing about their own pleasure. She said this was completely mistaken. "What good thing do we lack?" was the main point of her answer. They had comfortable rooms, good food, books, music, gardens, friendship, and useful work. They did not consider their lives a sacrifice of happiness.

They could, of course, employ many more servants simply to show their wealth. But Miss Trentham asked whether watching a large number of unnecessary servants could give as much pleasure as supporting old people or helpless children. The ladies could also spend far more money on clothes. Yet they preferred knowing that someone who had been cold now possessed warm clothing.

Their table could be filled every day with expensive food that nobody really needed. But Miss Trentham said that a simpler dinner gave greater pleasure when they knew poor families nearby also had enough to eat. Luxury was not rejected merely because it was pleasant. It was rejected when another use of the same money offered them a deeper and more lasting pleasure.

They could also spend their days travelling from one fashionable gathering to another. Miss Trentham had known such lives. People often went somewhere not because they truly wanted to be there, but because they were afraid of having

nothing to do. They searched constantly for pleasure and then became tired of it as soon as they obtained it.

Millenium Hall offered a different kind of enjoyment. The women were surrounded by people whose gratitude and affection were sincere. Their hours were filled with reading, music, conversation, exercise, practical work, and plans for helping others. Nature itself gave them daily pleasure. Miss Trentham could not see why they should leave all this simply to enter a more fashionable world.

She added that their way of life also gave them time to examine their own conduct. Constant social excitement could prevent a person from remembering mistakes or trying to correct them. Quiet did not always feel exciting, but it allowed serious thought. For the women of Millenium Hall, this was another form of happiness rather than a punishment.

Lamont admitted that the difference was powerful. Still, he wondered whether Miss Trentham judged ordinary amusements too severely. Surely, he said, people were allowed some harmless pleasures. Miss Trentham agreed completely. The problem was not pleasure itself but excess.

She gave a very simple example. Picking up pieces of straw or playing a children's game was harmless in itself. But if a man spent so much time doing it that he neglected a friend in need or failed to manage his own affairs, the harmless activity would become a problem. A schoolboy might also enjoy playing during free time, but his teacher would rightly stop him if he played instead of attending lessons.

Miss Trentham believed the same rule applied to adult pleasures. An amusement could be perfectly innocent when enjoyed in moderation. But if it made a person forget important duties, then the result was no longer innocent. The question was not simply, "Is this activity wrong?" It was also, "What am I neglecting because I spend so much time on it?"

Lamont said he had little left to argue about. He accepted that the women's lives were not joyless and that their principles were consistent with their actions. But another question remained. Their charities seemed so extensive that he imagined they must require an enormous fortune. Mrs Morgan replied that the

total was probably much smaller than he expected.

The women kept careful yearly accounts. On average, the girls' school cost about four hundred pounds a year. The boys' school cost one hundred and fifty pounds. Another hundred pounds was used to place young people as apprentices or prepare them for work in service. Clothing for the girls educated inside the Hall cost about forty pounds.

The homes for elderly poor people cost about two hundred pounds each year. About one hundred and twenty pounds supported the people with unusual physical conditions whom we had met earlier, many of whom had once been exhibited for money. Two hundred pounds more helped young couples in the Hall's parish and neighbouring parishes begin married life with basic money and furniture. Altogether, these regular charities cost about twelve hundred and ten pounds a year.

Their own household cost less than eight hundred pounds yearly. Their country location helped keep expenses low, and careful management prevented waste. The women had originally planned to spend another thousand pounds each year on the community for gentlewomen with little or no fortune. But that community eventually required much less support than expected.

They then used the same planned sum to begin the carpet and rug business. After its fourth year, the business paid all its own expenses and produced a profit. The ladies could easily have increased that profit by lowering wages, but this would have defeated their purpose. Their goal was employment and decent living conditions, not the largest possible financial return.

In fact, the success of the business created a new question: what should they do with the profits? They decided to create a fund for workers who became sick or disabled. Such people could receive comfortable support even when they were unable to work. The ladies hoped to arrange the fund so that it would continue permanently. The business would therefore care not only for active workers but also for those whom illness or age removed from work.

Lamont was astonished by the figures. He observed that many wealthy people could afford twelve hundred pounds a year for charity if they simply removed

unnecessary expenses from their own lives. Even if they copied only one part of the Millenium Hall system, he said, they might receive far greater pleasure from their fortunes than they received from wasteful display. His earlier amusement at the ladies' way of life had almost completely disappeared.

While Lamont continued talking with them, I quietly asked Mrs Maynard another question. From everything she had told me about the women's combined income, their regular expenses still seemed much lower than the money they received. Mrs Maynard explained that the written yearly budget covered only their fixed projects. Their other acts of charity were almost impossible to count.

Friends and acquaintances knew that the women were happiest when they were given a real chance to help someone in trouble. Requests therefore reached Millenium Hall constantly. The ladies did not give money to everyone who asked without first understanding the situation. But when they were convinced that a person truly needed help, they rarely refused. Some cases required very large gifts.

If they heard of a respectable family made poor by sickness or by the expense of raising many children, they often found a private way to send money. Sometimes they offered to prepare one of the children for a trade or profession. In other cases, they paid the cost needed to place a young person in suitable employment. Mrs Maynard told me that almost all the money remaining after their regular expenses was used in such private acts of assistance.

Part 22: Lamont Opens a Bible

That evening we told the ladies that we would leave Millenium Hall the next morning. We were sorry that our visit had come to an end so quickly. When we first arrived, we had expected to stay only a short time. Now it seemed difficult to believe that we were already preparing to go.

The next morning I went into Lamont's room. I found him doing something I had never expected to see. He was sitting quietly and reading the New Testament. I could not hide either my surprise or my pleasure.

Lamont understood my reaction and immediately explained himself. He said that the women of Millenium Hall had forced him to think again about Christianity. In the past, he had looked at people who called themselves Christians and had seen little difference between their actions and the actions of everyone else. Their religion seemed to have very little power over the way they actually lived.

Because of this, Lamont had doubted whether Christianity could really have the special origin Christians claimed for it. If such a religion had truly come from God, he had thought, surely it should produce clearer results in human lives. Yet he had often seen Christians who were selfish, proud, careless, or completely controlled by fashion and pleasure. Their behaviour had made the religion itself seem doubtful to him.

Millenium Hall had shown him something different. Here were women whose religious beliefs clearly influenced the way they used their money, time, intelligence, and social position. Their faith was not only something they spoke about on Sunday. It shaped their ordinary choices every day. Lamont had now seen what Christian teaching could look like when people seriously tried to follow it.

He was especially impressed by the moral ideas behind their lives. The women did not help others because they wanted public praise. They believed they had a duty to use what they possessed for good purposes. They also did not imagine that charity excused them from thinking carefully. Their religion asked them to examine themselves, control their own weaknesses, and use both reason and kindness in helping others.

Lamont told me that this had changed the question in his mind. Before, he had judged Christianity mainly by Christians who did not live according to it. Now he wanted to examine the teaching itself. If its rules could raise human conduct to the level he had seen at Millenium Hall, he thought those rules deserved serious attention. He no longer wished to dismiss them without study.

For this reason, he had risen at daybreak. He had gone quietly to the parlour and taken a Bible so that he could begin reading before the rest of the house was awake. He wanted to discover for himself what Christianity actually taught. He

also wanted to know whether the other reasons offered for believing it agreed with the moral power he now saw in its teaching.

I was deeply pleased by this change in my companion. When we went down to breakfast, I told Mrs Maynard what I had found him doing. She was as happy as I was. Neither of us tried to force Lamont into a quick conclusion. It was enough that he was now willing to examine seriously what he had once treated too lightly.

Breakfast ended, and the time came to say goodbye. We thanked the women for the kindness they had shown us throughout our visit. Before allowing us to leave, they made us promise that we would come again. We gave that promise gladly. If good manners had allowed us to remain much longer on this visit, I am not sure when we would have chosen to leave.

You may think, Sir, that I should have left Millenium Hall sooner, at least in this long account I have written to you. Perhaps you feel that I have described the place, its people, and their histories in too much detail. I cannot deny that the story has become much longer than I first intended. But remembering those days has given me so much pleasure that I found it difficult to stop writing.

I have wanted you to understand not only what these women do but also why they do it. Their schools, homes, gifts, and places of work are important, but their way of thinking is even more important. They have tried to join comfort with usefulness, friendship with duty, and religion with everyday action. Their example has remained strongly in my mind.

If this account encourages even one person to do something similar, I shall be glad that I wrote it at such length. Not everyone has the same fortune or the same opportunities as the women of Millenium Hall. But their example does not require everyone to copy the exact size of their work. A person can begin with whatever money, time, ability, or influence is actually available.

As for myself, I cannot leave their example only on these pages. My thoughts are already busy with a plan to imitate them on a smaller scale. I do not expect to create another Millenium Hall. But I have seen enough to understand that a smaller amount of good, carefully planned and faithfully continued, may still change many lives. I am, Sir.

