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Claremont McKenna College

Mistaken Murder and Written Womanhood:
The Evolution of Evelina Edwards in Late
Eighteenth-Century and Early Nineteenth-Century
Bath, England

submitted to
Professor Cody
and
Professor Moffett

by
Amanda Mell

for
Senior Thesis
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Abstract

This thesis explores the major themes and literary influences of Jane Austen's novels through the voice of Evelina Edwards, a fictional girl born in Bath, England in 1784. Over the course of nine years, Evelina reconstructs her social world in a series of diary entries and letters, mirroring the anxieties and concerns of real women during the Regency era. Her writing juxtaposes the novel of manners with mystery, both satirizing trivial concerns and confronting emotional trauma in response to death and social isolation. Class hierarchy and gender roles placed heavy restrictions on women's freedom, forcing them to carefully calibrate the consequences of their decisions. Ultimately, Evelina reconciles her desire for independence and her need for acceptance. By engaging in introspection and complex, moral reasoning, she develops empathy and learns to trust her own perceptions—independent of others' ideas, but not impervious to them.¹

¹ First, I am deeply grateful for Professor Cody, who introduced me to the “Game of Life” in her Jane Austen's Britain class. Professor Cody, your support, feedback, and imagination gave me the foundation for this thesis and inspired me to pursue a dual major in Literature and History. Thank you also to Professor Moffett, who taught me the art of creative writing and character development. Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their encouragement, edits, and advice throughout this process.

“It is only a novel...! Or, in short, only some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language.”

—Jane Austen, *Northanger Abbey*

Friday, 28 December 1798

As the new year draws closer, the time for celebration is almost upon us, yet I am inundated with worry. This is not unusual; my mother often complains that I am resistant to joy. I have not seen *her* notably joyous as of late – in my company at least – but I know the particular quality of joy of which she speaks. It is the easy kind that emanates from within, captivating crowds with inviting words, bright eyes, and soft smiles. To the public, my mother is simply Lydia Edwards, a glittering, womanly ideal that inspires all and –somehow – has disillusioned no one. Yet speaking does not arise as naturally for me as it does for her. My mind articulates sentiments quickly enough, but satisfactorily proving their existence remains a more difficult task. I struggle to conform to the appropriate etiquette at dinner parties with our guests, as I am too immersed in my innermost thoughts, where words ricochet off one another and replace themselves with new ones, spinning far beyond my grasp long before I can formulate a coherent sentence.

Most women of my acquaintance know how to pounce on prime moments for a witty quip or a gentle tease like cats with mice – only laughter is food for their nourishment. I cannot bear to conjure up cheer in my disposition when I do not feel it in my heart. I endure these gatherings without enjoyment, as I do not find meaning in the hollow pleasantries and thoughtless prattle of most conversations – among individuals bound by social convention in lieu of true affection. If my mother were not always peering at me from beneath her fluttering eyelashes and waving her fingers as if, from a distance, she could pull up the corners of my mouth, I would simply observe the streams of people that weave through the rooms of our home, following their predestined paths to society's praise or censure. But her fingers ask for more than a nod or a smile to

acknowledge strangers and greet friends – they demand action. She once surmised that I look like a judgmental owl when I watch our guests, with my head cocked to the side, eyes widened, and brows furrowed. I must be a starved one at that, for my prey is withholding. Most people fidget under the cool glare of my stares, holding their compliments and pretty laughs within. *These people are not subjects to study, Evelina*, my mother often says. While she values my intellect, her praise is eternally reluctant; I expect it is for fear of raising a bluestocking. *Your performance is pleasing, Evelina, and we must be satisfied with pleasing.* I can imagine it clearly. *You have read too excessively today. Why don't you exercise your voice? Try your hand at an instrument?* My mother's efforts are valiant – though I hope she does not expect a victory. She must be satisfied with a valiant effort, for my stubbornness will not yield to these demands. I do not believe that I was meant to perform, yet I fear I will be persuaded, or more likely coerced, into humiliating myself at our celebration of the new year.

With seven siblings and two sisters among them, I am puzzled as to why my mother does not insist that Cecilia and Lucy serve as our entertainment for the evening. Cecilia's constant chattering resembles a magpie's chirping; in every introduction to a new acquaintance, she excitedly gestures at a sparkling necklace or a polished shoe – new, shiny trinkets she hopes to add to her collection. It is nearly impossible to feel animosity towards her amid these flurries of complimentary effusions. Moreover, my sister makes quite an enthusiastic performer on the pianoforte and the harp – the two most estimable instruments for play. She has committed all of our music sheets to memory and happily sings in accompaniment to the songs he plays.

Lucy, though of a more serious demeanor, is equally unabashed. Her incisive remarks acknowledge truths that many people understand, but few are courageous enough to verbalize. Lucy's humor is also evident in her illustrations. While she is perfectly capable of toiling away for numerous hours on intricate embroidery or painstakingly delicate portraits that render great likeness to their subjects, her true talent lies in caricatures. Seated in the middle of a captivated audience, Lucy is her most natural self, despite the unnatural depictions that arise from the tip of her quill pen, which amuse and impress as much as they offend. Her drawing of Sir Philip Radcliffe, a peer in the House of Lords, has been the most popular to date, as mockery of conceited men seldom fails to bring joy and relief to those who would otherwise hide their resentment. However, Sir Philip's shock at the sight of his bushy eyebrows and elongated nose on paper, next to Lucy's flourish of a signature, has prompted even his wife and daughter to smile with pleasure.

In light of these antics, what could I possibly contribute to the festivities? I suppose my mother hopes that as her eldest daughter, I could lead my younger sisters by example – and secure a husband first. At the age of fourteen, I am too young for marriage, but I have seen my mother's eyes puncture the façades of many gentlemen – hunting for flaws, or perhaps, measuring wealth. I suppose matrimonial bliss is more often a product of luck than intention, for I cannot imagine how my mother and father coexist amicably. James Edwards, unlike his wife, is driven by his morals. Practicalities are not his concern. His interior propels him, as does mine, and I trust that any woman would feel grateful to live life by his side. While my mother and father appear perfectly cordial in my presence – always deferring to each other's opinions, smiling softly and

joining hands – I suspect a certain tension lies beneath the surface of their peaceful expressions. A dark shadow that neither husband nor wife can dismiss.

Perhaps this idea is merely a product of my cynical worldview, yet one cannot help but conceive of the worst when the truth is decidedly inaccessible. Furthermore, I do have a certain confidence in my ability to detect like-mindedness, though my mother and father remain blissfully unaware of this talent of mine. If my matchmaking skills guaranteed approbation, perhaps I would display them more openly. But alas, a married couple can have no use for them; only my siblings giggle at my pairings and join in with theories and partnerships of their own making. To my surprise, it is Arthur and Hugh who have the most passion for our game – and even more stamina than I can manage to sustain. At every ball and soirée that we attend, we forget our duty to uphold the dignity of our family; instead, my brothers and I hide behind curtains – where we determine which dancing partner receives the most laughter, or count the number of times the man in a velvet suit refers to his ‘considerable fortune.’

What interests me most are the individuals who keep to themselves: a fortnight ago, it was the gentleman who appeared wholly mesmerized by the bowl of punch, sugared fruit, and other morsels laid out on our mahogany bureau. I waited dutifully for him to shift to another side of the room, engage with the company or join his own party – of which no member emerged throughout the course of the night – but the only movement I observed was the drumming of his fingers on the silver, which paused at regular intervals when he popped a small sugared plum into his mouth. Each of these he chewed for several minutes.

It was my hope that if he were not already wedded, he could be married to the woman across the room. Wearing white muslin and short ringlets wound as tightly as her temperament, she loudly – and repeatedly – proclaimed to any man or woman in the vicinity that her chef had received the most exquisite training in France.

'He is a true disciple of *Le Cuisinier françois* and *Le Cuisinier roïal et bourgeois*. These are the most famous books on haute cuisine, you see, for people of the very foremost rank. *Naturellement*, he was employed by a French aristocrat, when then – you see – the guild system collapsed after the revolution. Finding himself out of employment, he crossed the sea to England and was fortunate enough to make acquaintance with a dear gentlewoman hoping to offer herself – and her guests – a more sumptuous repast. Oh, when I speak of myself in this way, it seems I am my own acquaintance – how silly of me, but I digress. Undoubtedly, his talents far surpass even those of the royal chefs, and he most certainly cooks the best *rôti de veau* and *fricassée* of chicken and mushrooms that Bath has to offer. It is a shame that the Edwards household cannot offer similar delights; they truly elevate the happiness of all!'

In observing this woman's pompous promotion of her staff – and of herself by connection – juxtaposed with the gentleman's contemplative silence, I determined that their union would be most complementary and proceeded to bestow the responsibility of orchestrating their meeting upon Arthur, for he is always eager to exercise his imagination. With great sincerity, Arthur, Hugh, and I deemed the pair utterly appropriate additions to *The Dunciad*, with the woman the most reminiscent of Dulness. Of course, this would require Alexander Pope to resurrect, evaluate their behavior, and elect the inclusion of party guests in his satire. Our laughter at such an improbable event soon

brought us to tears. As my siblings and I find joy in such occasions only to these ends, I hope for a new year ripe with similar opportunities.

– *Evelina Edwards*

Sunday, 30 December 1798

Before I am caught up with festivities – and the drama that inevitably ensues, despite my best efforts of circumvention – I must pen down a number of my favorite quotes to use in letter writing and personal musings. These are discovered on nights I sit before a roaring fire with my father, discussing stories we have learnt by heart – notwithstanding one particularly ghastly evening eight years ago when, caught up in the excitement of the discussion, I mistakenly spattered two of his most beloved novels with a dash of eggnog. Fortunately, not two days passed before each book was replaced – as the Christmas holiday afforded him ample time to travel to the best bookshops in London, and the wherewithal to pay for new leather-bound editions. The spoiled books were left outside the door to my bedchamber, addressed:

“For my dear daughter, who has boldly marked these books as her own. May their damaged pages serve as a gentle reminder – to confine your holiday beverages to the table.”

But tucked inside the cover was a small receipt – proof of my subscription to a circulating library nearby – the dues and fees of which my father pledged to manage in secrecy.

Both novels are dear to me for a number of reasons, one of which is more prominent than the others. Cecilia and I share a well-kept secret: we were named after the protagonists of these very books. This secret is unbeknownst to my mother, who believed

her husband had admired the names for their beauty, as all men must do with any woman or object shown preference over another. In truth, he had remembered them from two novels by Frances Burney: *Evelina* and *Cecilia*. *Evelina* was published two years before my birth, but as my father had taken it upon himself to engage in careful preparations – in the event that he must raise a daughter as best he was able – it was read again without hesitation. I was age two when *Cecilia* went to print, and this novel too became a vital resource for the naming of his second daughter, within months of its release. Cecilia and I are bound by loyalty to our father in an unspoken agreement – that we should never tell our mother where he found our names. My mother will not hear of her husband’s reading habits, as novels, in her view, are a frivolous, romantic pursuit for a man. She much prefers his studying the law or anything terribly dense and unintelligible – although she herself would not understand it if she endeavored to try.

My father is indeed unusual in his penchant for fiction, while my mother is singularly indifferent to its charms. For some odd number of years, she took up a volume of *Paradise Lost* every now and then, but was simply incapable of reading past Book I. As Milton’s epic condemns indulgence, it cannot hope to engage her, for she is already familiar with her greatest vice. Furthermore, she thinks it a virtue, as entitlement to leisure and luxury – in her mind – is the mark of an elite woman. Thus, while reading, she has drifted to sleep on too many occasions to justify continued attention to the pastime. To her, books do not carry influence, for she cannot speak of their significance as scholars do. Neither does the knowledge of particular language serve any notable benefits, as verse can only be recited as it is written and is never used to flatter oneself directly. Although the novel is quite popular amongst women her age, who gather to

discuss all the intricacies of a plot – and share opinions over tea and biscuits – she fancies herself quite beholden to the opinions of men, which condemn the novel as unsavory, and a corrupter of morals.

I, however, firmly believe in the morality of a novel – a belief I share with my father. While I rather distrust any person who – even in the newest of friendships or briefest of introductions – effusively praises and imitates the mannerisms of another, my pride has indeed clouded my vision and led me to become the most loathsome of hypocrites. For you see, I have modeled my own conduct and ideals in accordance with my namesake – a girl I cannot truly admire, for she is imaginary. As my father was struck by Evelina’s beauty, kind-hearted nature, forbearance in the face of hardship, and marriage to a handsome man of consequence and integrity, I would love nothing more than to exceed his greatest hopes for my development. Thus, I have taken to jotting down notes from this novel in particular. Some phrases I have copied exactly for their astute revelations regarding proper conduct and good breeding. These I ought not to read on too frequent an occasion, as I generally have more to teach than to learn of philanthropy:

1. *‘Generosity without delicacy, like wit without judgement, generally gives as much pain as pleasure.’*
2. *‘To despise riches, may, indeed, be philosophic, but to dispense them worthily, surely, must be more beneficial to mankind.’*

My mother talks a great deal about charity in the company of our guests; she has even taken to assuring our physician, Dr. Jasper Beaumont, that she would *certainly* join him on his visits, should any poor soul need the comfort of a woman's touch. Beyond her general charms, which can please the mind, but not heal the body, she has learnt a number of simple techniques and tricks from her father, an acclaimed physician stationed in London. As Dr. Beaumont is quite fond of my mother, he has visited us more than once to inquire about the possibility of her accompanying him on his calls. But, seeing as he only desires her assistance in treating women – whom she would rather surpass than aid – she makes sure to disappear in these moments, so that Dr. Beaumont might assume she had departed long ago, and would not return for some time.

I often feel a strange sympathy for Frances Burney, as if her private thoughts and feelings mirror my own, or, at the very least, shape my opinions – supposing the author herself can be understood through fiction. *Evelina* reflects my values and quandaries with such clarity that for much of my childhood – and even now, on some occasions – I have wondered if my father possesses great powers of foresight. In knowing how his daughter would act in the world, perhaps I was named after a character quite like myself – to serve as a guide or a governess. Though I often feel pitiful among the masses of charismatic, sociable people that populate this city, I have expended a great deal of energy to develop gratitude for my eccentricities, and of course, to reflect on how my abilities could be strengthened and improved:

3. *'She is not, indeed, like most modern young ladies; to be known in half an hour; her modest worth, and fearful excellence, require both time and encouragement to show themselves.'*
4. *'Be ever thus, my dearest Evelina, dauntless in the cause of distress! let no weak fears, no timid doubts, deter you from the exertion of your duty, according to the fullest sense of it that nature has implanted in your mind.'*
5. *'You must learn not only to judge but to act for yourself.'*

Perhaps I am unromantic, but noble ideals – although soothing – are hardly practicable. I often waver between my desire to live authentically, and the knowledge that I am subject to the same constraints as any girl my age. It is troubling to fantasize when I cannot know my future, and Mother dissuades me from embracing my true inclinations. I wish there were an absolute truth – a sense of right and wrong that was agreed upon by all:

6. *"I think there ought to be a book of the laws and customs à-la-mode, presented to all young people upon their first introduction into public company."*
7. *"Never can I consent to have this dear and timid girl brought forward to the notice of the world by such a method; a method which will subject her to all the impertinence of curiosity, the sneers of conjecture, and the stings of ridicule."*
8. *"But alas, my dear child, we are the slaves of custom, the dupes of prejudice, and dare not stem the torrent of the opposing world, even though our judgments condemn our compliance! However, since the die is cast, we must endeavor to make the best of it."*

In contrast, I believe Cecilia – though she shares the same beauty, youth, and intelligence as her namesake – is less inclined to prefer depth in her acquaintanceships. My sister puts on airs of worldliness and extravagance in the presence of those who are unimpressed – and really quite disdainful – of quiet humility. Her great obsession with the latest styles and riches – of which she may only dream unless she marries well – does entreat her to make use of her natural charms in befriending any man or woman with wealth. In short, she has acquired a taste for opulence and titles of esteem, and – in pursuit of these privileges – has dismissed many acquaintances of a kinder and gentler nature.

Cecilia's behavior does lower my confidence in her judgment – not in things, for luxuries are enviable I suppose, but in people. Though she has begun to pity the less fortunate – a pastime that supplies her with a reputation for benevolence among elite circles – she does nothing to ease the suffering of the poor and disadvantaged, nor does she defend them from censure. To make matters worse, she has taken to the changeable and scornful nature of Dr. Beaumont's wife, who finds a sizable threat in every woman of good character. I can only hope she rids herself of such petty whims in due time. I feel as if I must guide her – for certainly, my mother will lead her astray.

My sister has hardly known sorrow or experienced loss; Cecilia has obtained all she has ever desired – or brought it close within her grasp – as a product of luck and diligence both. But with pain follows growth, and an understanding of one's values; as my sister ages, she will mature, growing firmer and sweeter not unlike a ripening fruit during summer. Still, I am endlessly tired of her pretenses. When Cecilia, Lucy and I are together – insulated from the pressures to please and impress – she becomes her most

natural, unencumbered self. Even in the presence of Arthur, Hugh, and the little ones, Cecilia mocks our mother's airs the same as us; yet she fails to recognize her own affectations. Still, my sister's many admirable qualities are unmistakable – her sprightliness and optimism in the face of difficulty, her perseverance in manifesting her ideals, and her enviable versatility and imperturbable composure combine to form a powerful woman. I only hope she channels her influence towards good.

9. *“Remember, my dear Evelina, nothing is so delicate as the reputation of a woman: it is, at once, the most beautiful and most brittle of all human things.”*

– Evelina Edwards

Sunday, 30 December 1798



Pictured is Evelina, as she appears in the novel. I approached Cecilia – who was in one of her more generous moods – to request help in drawing my namesake. My sister had just finished her second share of plum pudding – a seasonal favorite of hers – and was terribly excited for our party tomorrow, for which she had prepared for yesterday. To my delight, she offered advice and guidance, enabling me to copy this illustration from the novel’s pages with some success. Despite her insistence that I exaggerate Evelina’s features, as she does in her caricatures, I replicated them precisely, and with great care. She sits as I do now, with a writing box before her and a quill in hand.

– *Evelina Edwards*

² RACKHAM, Arthur, illustrator. BURNEY, Frances. *Evelina or The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World*. London: Geo. Newnes Ltd., 1898.

Friday, 4 January 1799

Our New Year celebration proved just as disastrous as I had feared. Mother insisted that I remember the names of each visitor, even those whom we had never before met and did not expect to see again – at least until their subsequent journeys to Bath or nearby destinations. I was required to stand beside her – for she could not possibly entrust me with the responsibility of recommending myself without maternal assistance – thus, I was victim to the frequent prodding of her elbow until I relinquished my arm. By raising it stiffly, in mute resistance to the exhaustion I anticipated, and linking it with her own, I communicated the surrender of my body to my mother’s whims. Thenceforth, we commenced our turn about the perimeter of the drawing room at a pace of disheartening leisure. It was a game of pretend, almost, or a play. We performed our roles with an impressive vigor that I did not feel; still, we induced every man or woman we encountered to regard us as an inseparable pair of confidants embarking on a journey of mutual discovery. And yet, we did not arrive at any enlightened revelations about the nature of our personalities, nor did we strengthen our bond as mother and daughter. Rather, we pursued those whom Lydia Edwards deemed fit for conversation, feigning interest in our guests for the gratifying pleasure of their good opinions.

“We *will* journey to the Pump-room in due time, my darling. I’m afraid we are quickly exhausting our small set of acquaintances! But Bath has much to offer in that way.”

I surveyed the attendants, who, in actuality, comprised a group quite large in number. Though I do aspire to be recognized as a young woman of great elegance and refinement, I must wonder why men cannot carry the burden of conversation. If my

family should acquire the privilege of entertaining on an occasion of festivity, my father will dependably wander to his private quarters to fetch his pipe, until he is hurried away by my mother, who resides in a constant state of fear that our most genteel guests will be affronted by his absence. I question why she cares for their opinions when they often offend her so egregiously. Once, when Mrs. Fitzgerald scorned Bath at our dinner table, calling it a “transient city of pleasure” that could hardly suffice as a permanent home – all while enjoying our hospitality – I observed my mother’s hands clench into fists despite her ever-cordial smile. Then, following the conclusion of our meal, Joseph Stapleton, one of our particularly handsome footmen, found small crescent moons cut in the tablecloth – and subsequently employed a seamstress for their evaluation – the tears were deemed a product of sharp fingernails, and an order was sent for new fabric immediately.

Nevertheless, I do not pity my mother in these moments; any sympathy I feel is eclipsed by the fallacy of her protection, which causes me only great distress. After many hours of circling the drawing room together before the new year began, it felt as if we shared one body. But this union was of no consolation, as the cursed proximity of our two opposing minds made it all the more inconvenient. Dr. Beaumont offered me a taste of elder wine made with his very own prized elderberries, a product of his garden. A respected physician in our community, Dr. Beaumont frequently experiments with alcohol to cure ailments and strengthen constitution. Though these concoctions hardly satisfy anything more than a thirst for drink, my mother is quite intent on flattering their maker. His latest attempt at brewing a magical potion of sorts therefore provided a promising opportunity to pay him such attentions.

‘Elder wine is an antidote to anything, my dear. So delectable it distracts from an amputation!’ he bellowed. ‘Beaumont berries! Take a swish and be sure to savor it.’

In due course, Dr. Beaumont withdrew a squat, glass flask from his inner coat pocket and swung it before me. At first glance I recoiled – the wine was a rich scarlet color even more pronounced in the circle of pale faces surrounding it. In this moment, he seemed a depraved undertaker, displaying the blood of his corpses. I raised my hand to decline his offer, as I am unaccustomed to the dizzying effects of alcoholic drinks, but my mother’s eyes bore into me with such an intensity that I dropped my arm at once.

‘I would be delighted, sir.’ I hid my budding grimace with a smile while Dr. Beaumont grinned widely, his cheeks as round and rosy as the reddest of apples.

‘Beaumont berries never disappoint; I will assure you,’ he urged. I could not help but raise an eyebrow as a flurry of potential disappointments crossed my mind. I could not afford to lose my bearings by my mother’s side.

Dr. Beaumont took possession of a nearby glass, filling it with such pomp and flourish that the onslaught of several flying droplets forced me to recoil. I do not know the punishment I would have suffered had I refused his elder wine; I have never mustered sufficient courage to deny a guest’s request, although no others have warranted such displeasure. Obedience, nevertheless, is a matter of instinct in my experience. I often imagine confronting those who aggrieve me, but I can never quite bring myself to face them. Perhaps timidity obstructs my true inclinations. Is timidity too forgiving a characterization? I wish to be remembered for my contributions, but I fear that – should I achieve success – my legacy might be tarnished by my demeanor.

Some argue that Thomas Gray is known more widely for his cowardice than his poems, a mere thirteen of which he published. Though I cannot become a scholar, I aspire to grow more comfortable with failure. I cannot allow fear to determine my every action, hindering my capacity for heroism or distinction. I do hope thoughts and actions are of equal value in the eyes of God, for my mind often disagrees with my behavior. I fear many things I am made to do by those of greater power or rank – might this signify bravery? Nonetheless, my distress was lost on Dr. Beaumont, who was surely more intoxicated by my mother's cloying smile than his wine.

On this night, both careful breeding and balance were lost beneath the influence of alcohol. A sudden movement drew my gaze to Mr. Stapleton, who stood quite precariously by the doorway before staggering over to a plush seat nearby. Once settled, he swung his arms in careless oblivion to the state of his beverage, which flowed onto the pawed foot of the chair. Within a few moments he fell back and began snoring indecorously.

Mother's eyes followed mine to the scene, her lips thinning as wine pooled beneath polished wood. It gleamed a vibrant red; perhaps elderberries were to blame? *So delectable it distracts from an amputation.* I had dismissed Dr. Beaumont's recommendation as utterly exaggeratory, but surgery would seem a trivial matter, I presumed, to the unconscious man. Mr. Stapleton awoke with a violent jerk of his neck, steadying his glass on his knee. He stared inside it, seemingly boggled by the mysterious loss of its contents.

'Heavens. Ever since the frightful rebellions in France I cannot seem to control my own staff. Mere footmen and maids have declared a revolution in my household,' my

mother fussed to Dr. Beaumont.

‘Do you find him a criminal, Mrs. Edwards? Surely he could not be imprisoned for a mild case of intoxication!’

‘Mild! If he spills another drop of wine, I will certainly consider transferring his custody to the police,’ she retorted, stamping one foot as emphatically as a lady’s satin slippers could condone.

‘Poor fool! He cannot admit to a crime he’s incapable of remembering!’

I sighed at the scene before me, knowing my mother would approve of this response – it expressed a disdain in perfect alignment with her own frustration. However, I was really quite jealous of the footman, and his memorable, yet inconsequential expression of independence. I weakly attempted to defend him:

‘Might he be absolved once the hour passes midnight? It will be a new year then.’

My mother gave no verbal response. Delicately transferring my glass of wine from Dr. Beaumont’s hands to mine, she motioned for me to drink.

‘You’ve a generous daughter, Lydia,’ Dr. Beaumont acknowledged. ‘Loyal to the servants.’

‘Ah, her remarks are mere niceties. I expect she’ll start a revolution herself one day.’

‘Ho, ho! Join the footman and drink up!’

I sipped the wine expecting sweetness, but its flavor proved shockingly bitter. Pursing my lips, I shut one eye to the glass, hoping weakened vision might dilute my sense of taste.

‘Disagreeable? I must say your father has a much stronger constitution.’

‘My father is a grown man, Dr. Beaumont, who drinks daily.’

‘Evelina!’ my mother seethed. Her tone was strident, yet she spoke in a low whisper. I could hardly blink before she regained her composure.

‘How amusing my dear, as we both know your palette is quite sophisticated. The taste is acquired; simply continue drinking and I am certain that you will develop a *rightful* appreciation for elder wine.’

Our eyes locked, my cheeks reddening instantaneously. I glanced away in embarrassment, but I could feel my mother’s gaze holding steady, refusing to break until I complied.

The rest of the night passed hazily. Dr. Beaumont, however, was a constant presence, hovering near me in the manner of a bee courting a flower. Although I immediately ascertained his attention to be of the clinical kind, I amused myself with fanciful thoughts of his admiration from afar. These imaginings were merely entertainment for the night, as Dr. Beaumont is an older, married man of thirty whose wife suffers from great bouts of insecurity – so severe that she cannot withstand large celebrations for fear of the accomplished women in attendance. I have come to know that Mrs. Beaumont, though extremely loyal, does not elicit praise from her husband on too frequent an occasion. If she were to know of his many alcoholic donations, I am certain of irreparable damage to their union – impervious to the supposed healing power of elderberries.

Dr. Beaumont’s stare grew more intense with each sip of my drink, though it lacked the affectionate warmth of a lover. I suspect he was more enraptured by my

body's response to his elder wine. Who could predict what effects might transpire in girl of merely fourteen years of age? I was surely one of his youngest recipients, promising amusement for the solitary physician, who did not feel excitement towards much of anything.

Against my own volition, I did not disappoint him. As my acuity vanished, the dancers' sharp features softened into a whirlwind of colors and shapes, and I began to lose my inhibitions. Men and women of all stations failed to intimidate me as before, and to my mother's great delight, I readily engaged with anyone and everyone. As I floated about, a lord and a clergyman seemed one and the same, and I held fast to a rare confidence – that all would receive me with great delight. For the first time in a long while, my mind no longer reverberated with the noise of my thoughts. I was uncertain where they had gone, yet I did not feel it necessary to find them. Sheer nonsense earned my laughter and prompted my own foolish remarks in return. While my new manner pleased our acquaintances, I have now lost faith in their discernment. How could they possibly prefer the company of an incapacitated Evelina? But perhaps I *was* well-equipped for the exchange of pleasantries, despite my being ill-suited for intelligent discourse. Everyone seemed delightful, though I could not fathom why. If I could remember all that occurred, I am sure I would find them terribly odious.

– *Evelina Edwards*

*'The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Awaits alike th' inevitable hour.
The paths of glory lead but to the grave.*

*Nor you, ye proud, impute to these the fault,
If Memory o'er their tomb no trophies raise;
Where, through the long-drawn aisle and fretted vault,
The pealing anthem swells the note of praise.*

*Can storied urn or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
Can Honour's voice provoke the silent dust?
Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of Death'?*

*– Thomas Gray,
'Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard'*

Tuesday, 15 January 1799

Today I accompanied my mother to the Pump-room, an event she had anticipated for many years. Parties in our home or the neighbors' houses are not to her taste, as she deplures settling for the same set of guests who attend annually. My mother takes great pride in her ability to charm new acquaintances until she is considered a general favorite among them all. Surrounded only by her intimate friends, she begins to feel quite distempered and restless – particularly if she receives the very same compliments that were graciously bestowed on her days, months, or even years prior.

In my view, the wait for the Pump-room had hardly been a wait at all. As the building was finished only last week, it was just as well that we did not go immediately. Now that every room is crafted to perfection and open to the public, I have learned from numerous ladies – who are quite well-informed of the more trivial goings-on in this city – that the great room is excellent for promenading, with its colossal size, high ceilings and

glittering chandeliers. Hot mineral waters flow from a marble vase within – which are said to be excellent for one’s health – and the building’s exterior is built with lovely honey-colored stones. Best of all – my mother says – it is where the most fashionable men and women of society meet for pleasure. Although I am ‘merely the daughter of a tradesman,’ as Mrs. Fitzgerald has smugly remarked, there is plenty of opportunity to gain private discourse with the wealthiest and most influential men of society. Some, with luck, will be unmarried – and not happily so.

It is pleasanter to frequent the newest and grandest scene, and my mother could not have taken Cecilia and Lucy regardless, for they are still far too young to be paraded before the men of society – and the women, but this is of lesser importance. Thus, she was ecstatic at the opportunity to exalt the most desirable qualities of her eldest daughter to suitors who, unbeknownst to her, were quite familiar with the inauthentic nature of such talk. Her introductions failed, to say the least, but while none inspired affection, they are preserved in my memory – once I recover from the mortifications of the day – as a great source of comedy:

‘Oh Mr. Brisbane, would you observe her velvet dress! I wanted a new style, perhaps an Empire silhouette, but she expressed a passionate distaste for its low neckline in the presence of an esteemed company. Such perfect modesty!’

Though my mother’s ceaseless blathering often saved me from the perils of pleasantries, I blushed profusely at her words. To my consternation, red cheeks revealed more than any dress, but one man did extend an offer of tea. I graciously accepted, but our conversation soon turned upon subjects of which I was not in the least familiar. While I had paid heed to the memory of some, they almost certainly occurred before I was born.

Perhaps he had thought me somewhat older, which should have eased our conversation. Nevertheless, my mood brightened when I spotted Cecilia and Lucy, who had quietly followed behind us on our way to the Pump-room and were now peeking through the windows at my masquerade. When I was not otherwise engaged, I glanced out of the window to meet their eyes – quickly suppressing my laughter. If I failed to catch their attention, it sufficed to watch them twirling about on the edge of the street, affecting our mother's mannerisms.

These distractions amused me greatly, but after several hours, the buzz of conversation and music from the gallery began to aggravate my head, which commenced throbbing so intensely that all understanding was soon lost to pain. In excusing myself and making my way to the pump to partake of its mineral waters – which are said to soothe most aches with far more success than Dr. Beaumont's elderberry wine – I glanced to the window and saw Cecilia gesturing animatedly towards an approaching town coach in apparent admiration of its armorial bearings and stately aura.

Unfortunately, in the process of such rapid movements, she lost balance and tumbled into the center of Cheap Street, which, being as crowded and clamorous as it is most days, would not stop to make room for her. Without a moment's hesitation, I lifted my skirts and raced outside to ascertain her safety. I evaded my mother, who was not yet expecting my return from the pump – and apart from a few incredulous looks from passerby, who were alarmed by my haste, I escaped the notice of any person of consequence. After exiting the building, I cried out for my sister and saw an arm raised weakly in my periphery. It was Cecilia, who had emerged from the scuffle unscathed – besides one large scratch on her right elbow.

‘Evelina! Come quickly; she tumbled into the path of the coach!’ Lucy bellowed.

‘Imagine a coachman – whose very employment rests upon his remaining vigilant and smoothly steering the carriage – so recklessly determined to overrun me – as if I were a mere pebble tossed in the thoroughfare!’ Cecilia gasped – quite out of breath – and thus fell into long pauses between her words.

‘One may smile, and smile, and be a villain,’ I looked sternly upon the scene, which had awakened a new cynicism in me.

Cecilia squinted in confusion, or perhaps in the glare from the sun.

‘Who is a villain?’ Lucy asked.

‘Shakespeare,’ I muttered to confuse them, for I was disappointed in their ignorance of Hamlet. The effect of this was unsatisfying, as they began to speak of other matters, so I resolved to explain: ‘The coachman would not seem a villain at first glance, but in times such as these he conveys all of the indifference to human life that is deserving of the name.’

‘You do speak with eloquence Evelina – much more than I can muster in my current state. But now is not the time for frivolous speech, for I must be transported with some immediacy,’ Cecilia urged. My dear sister was still resting on the ground, in the shade beside the Upper Rooms. With a start, I remembered my expansive view of the street from inside; should our mother happen to gaze out of the window, we would be plainly visible to not only her, but to all of the men I was meant to charm before dinnertime.

‘I cannot be sure if he was smiling, and it is perfectly acceptable to smile without meaning, but I’d rather it did not cause me injury,’ Cecilia continued, unaware of the present risk.

‘Smiling is of no consequence. Now we are in danger of too many smiles, or worse, frowns,’ I replied as I lifted her upwards by the sleeve and hurried us off. Being so close to the spring water and its healing properties, I thought it best to escort Cecilia and Lucy inside. But with our mother near, it became necessary to devise a plan to enter the building discreetly. Facing my sisters, I alerted them to my concerns.

‘In all likelihood, our mother is walking about the room at this very moment with old friends and new acquaintances. If we happen to draw her attention, she will certainly resent us all for making a spectacle.’

‘Surely that cannot be Mother’s true complaint. She fears we will ruin Evelina’s chances at courtship!’ Lucy teased mercilessly.

‘You are absolutely right in thinking so, Lucy. Evelina has surprised us with such an affinity for romance!’ Cecilia’s speech was interrupted by several fits of giggling, and sudden wincing at the pain in her elbow as she playfully knocked it into Lucy’s side.

‘It is not me who cares for such nonsense! Neither of you can understand the burden of being the eldest child.’

‘Yes, it is drudging work to idle the day away in the Pump-room. The pastries give off far too many cumbersome flakes to eat in finery, and the water, though excellent for one’s health, is much too hot,’ Cecilia countered.

‘I will not attempt to defend myself, for I know it would be in vain. But *you* Cecilia, of all people, should feel gratitude for the water’s medicinal virtues. Besides, younger ladies must remain attentive to the eyes that observe them. We cannot bring you to the Mineral Fountain and bathe you in the hot springs within view of all who may care to see.

As neither of you are well-dressed nor well-behaved, we must avoid the master of the ceremonies and, most importantly, our mother.’

‘But Evelina, Christopher Anstey has called the baths a great smoking kettle!’ Lucy protested.

‘He also said that ‘’twas pretty to see how, like Birds of a Feather, the People of Quality flock’d all together.’ We will be counted among them if we hurry!’

From there, my sisters and I devised a plan we found quite clever, to take full advantage of the curative powers of the hot springs, without the necessity of a subscription. I thought they might kneel down by my sides, whereupon I would remove each of our shawls and wrap them around us at my waist, so as to cover their heads and bodies. Though my gown might seem split into three panels, my sisters’ shoes could be hidden under the hems of their dresses when we stood still. I would wait to approach the master of ceremonies in the midst of a crowd of people passing in and out – which seemed to keep to a steady flow – and the commotion would allow my sisters to detach from me and conceal themselves with ease among the struggling assembly.

However, on the steps of the ballroom, I found the master of ceremonies to be absent from his post – perhaps to introduce a lady to a dance partner – emboldening us to slip inside quite separately, and move to the fountain, where Cecilia took the waters. Hastening out and around the corner, we entered the King’s Bath, where my sister did not hesitate to kneel down and submerge her elbow – and I returned to our mother. Under the pretense of returning to the Pump-room fountain for several more drinks of water, I hastened back to ensure that neither Cecilia nor Lucy had caused any damage to the Baths or bothered a gentleman or lady. Before I departed with my mother, I smuggled

them out the door – again disguised – but the master of ceremonies was absent a second time, and his ledger left unattended.

Though I quite often censure Cecilia and Lucy as their eldest and most responsible sister, privately, I greatly admire them and wish to partake in more of their daring adventures. My life is exceedingly ordinary for a girl of my age; I have few talents that excite me – beyond matchmaking, which can hardly be considered a commendable skill. I prefer to read with my father, whose quiet nature and love of literature agree with me, but I do not know how I might make use of my fondness for books – for I could try my hand at novel writing, but I have not the imagination to conjure up an interesting tale. When I am home – and free from the demands of my mother – my father, a solicitor, will show me the details of one contract or another that he is drawing up or examining. He then recalls memories of his time as an apprentice clerk or explains to me the nuances of his occupation:

‘A solicitor must adhere to the highest standards of morality. *Truth* is what we aim to seek, and *justice* is afterwards served. I must not be fooled by simple lies and tricks of charm, wit, or sympathy – it is not how one states their view, or the emotions they express, but the actions they take that distinguish true claims from mere deception – to evade punishment or gain a sum of money. You must learn these lessons in your dealings with people. Do not be fooled by folly!’

It is unfathomable to me how my father was fooled by his own wife, but I do not ask, for although he has taught me the value of truth, I would rather his marriage remain an enigma. Under this guise of secrecy, he is still, to my knowledge, strong enough to resist the allurements of beauty and wealth – unless of course, a woman was to possess a

powerful intellect and unwavering integrity to match her more transient attractions. I have not found these qualities inherent in my mother's character, but perhaps societal forces have ensured their destruction. With my respect for humanity waning each day, my father holds the last vestige of it – yet, he cannot possibly comprehend the intricacies of my life, nor the fullest extent of its worth. I must look elsewhere to soothe my general worries; thus, as of late, I have resolved to write my cousin Catherine Edwards quite frequently, for she is of a similar age and disposition, and can view my family – and the problems that I face – with a fresh perspective. I will pen a letter to her soon, when something notable occurs.

– *Evelina Edwards*

Thursday, 28 January 1799

I have stopped to write a quick note, as I am endlessly frustrated with my mother, and the power that she wields in our household. Her ceaseless insistence on alterations to my personality in pursuit of marriage – and emphasis on such matters that bore me – encroaches on the few pleasures I do enjoy and has caused a drastic shift in my temperament. I am suddenly compelled to divulge my rawest emotions, no matter the inconvenience to myself or the hurt I may cause another. I behave with unbridled impertinence towards my siblings and thoughtless neglect for my father, as I cannot understand his attachment to my mother. In lacking a sufficient outlet for the expression of my emotions, I am quick to anger. My moods fluctuate erratically, and I cannot sit for the duration of a meal without clutching the tablecloth, just as my mother did in the presence of Mrs. Fitzgerald, while she passed judgment on the character of Bath's residents. I have sworn the maids to secrecy and sent the fabric to be mended several times, but however much I reprimand myself in thought – for what my mother would call my 'pitiful hysteria' – I cannot contain my outbursts, even at the sight of an unwelcome blot of ink.

Oftentimes, it is so much to bear that I cannot possibly remain at home. I have resorted to wandering about the streets, searching for moments of tranquility. My mother would be most upset to learn of these excursions, for there are skilled pickpockets in the city, and a young girl is quite ill-prepared to defend her belongings from prying hands. Still, there is some satisfaction in secrecy – in quiet resistance that is, as of yet, free of consequence. Though my body is at risk of harm, my mind finds peace in the freedom of the night air – and its darkness that shields me from censure, as I go and do what I please.

I have resolved to confess these transgressions only to Catherine, by way of letter. Cecilia, with her good-natured, amiable spirit, could not empathize with my vexations.

– *Evelina Edwards*

Saturday, 2 February 1799

My dear Catherine,

As you well know, I have endured a nagging feeling for some time. For the entirety of my young life, I have followed a narrow path with unrivaled obedience, never straying from my duties, nor placing my own desires at the forefront of my mind. But rather than propelling me towards perfect felicity, my decisions have merely detracted from my happiness. I have felt the most akin to a limp puppet, confined to the movements my mother orchestrates. But I am not the light and cheery young woman she wishes me to be; I more naturally speak of unpleasantries and heavy truths, which fail to elevate the good humour of all. Thus, I have sought an outlet for my frustration – beyond the writing I am compelled to do. Rather than endeavoring to master some domestic accomplishment – which now I believe, I should have done – I slip out most nights to explore the city in solitude.

Yet, what began as liberation from the restrictions of proper etiquette and social grace will remain in me as an opprobrious object of my reflections – the trappings of which I cannot escape. I began writing to you, as your cousin and dear friend, to relieve my inhibitions, but now I must relay information of a deeply upsetting nature – to explain my actions in response to a series of events, in the hope of receiving your approbation of my judgment. I have never felt such a tragic incident on so personal a level, yet the sight

of it was more heartrending and incredulous than I am possibly capable of conveying in words. I could never have foreseen it. I was simply wandering about town after evening, when I saw that the door to the Pump-room was left ajar. This appealed to my curiosity – I could not help but go to the Baths, for I began to wonder how they might appear once the day's crowds had dispersed and there was not a living person of which to be concerned in the nearby vicinity.

Though I merely hoped to admire the structure, or perhaps dip my toes into the hot springs, instead I came across the body of a dead girl – aged about six or seven years – by the edge of the water. The sight was awful. She looked as if she had been recently drowned – pale with a luminous tinge of blue, and still wet as if only moments ago her life had been extinguished. Her clothes were loose and sagging on her heavy frame – an image I cannot shake from the forefront of my mind. Curiously, she had been placed in an upright position on a linen towel, with her head resting on the base of a Roman column, and a note slipped under her cheek. It read:

‘I am truly sorry for what I’ve done.’

I could not fathom a compelling reason for murdering a young girl, as logic and morality do not condone it, but after reflecting on her physical appearance, the subtleties the scene conveyed, and – of course – the indisputable fact that a human being was indeed responsible for her death, my intuition perceived that it had been purposeful. Someone had strategized, trespassing when it was all but certain that witnesses would be evaded, and committed this heinous crime. If I had arrived moments before, I do not know the extent of the dangers I may have faced. Fortunately, I had stopped by the

Pulteney Bridge in a mood for reflection and contemplation as I gazed out upon the River Avon, delaying my presence at the Baths by several minutes.

Though I do wish I had been able to prevent the alleged murder, I am confident that the perpetrator would have drowned me without delay – for the purpose of preventing my interference and concealing his or her identity. It was a stroke of luck that I escaped notice, but I am still overwhelmed by a myriad of puzzling sentiments. Had the child been left in such a manner that suggested an accident – perhaps she lacked the skills to support the extent of her exploration, and the supervision to curb it, and had simply fallen into the water and found herself sinking – I would not have questioned the cause of her death. Or at least, the idea of murder would not have presented itself with such immediacy. But the killer hardly wanted to conceal the nature of the crime. It is utterly baffling – such a show of remorse that implies a mysterious compulsion to kill, despite a strong inclination otherwise, or a feeling of intense regret, which surfaced once the irreversibility of the crime was fully processed. I cannot imagine that a child might be drowned accidentally, yet any motivation to murder a young girl with so many years left to live would only be senseless. I cannot hope to understand.

You know that my father adheres to strict morals – he esteems honesty and integrity most highly. As a solicitor, he considers it his duty to express and decipher the truth, and he wants very much for me to give my testimony in court. Thus, I feel compelled to act according to the principles of logic and justice that he has imparted to his children. I must say that I have inherited his strong sense of curiosity and desire to understand reality as it truly exists – to speak only valuable remarks that can be substantiated with evidence upon further inquiry. I understand the rhetoric of persuasion; I am perceptive and inquisitive,

and I would likely drown myself – in guilt – should I refrain from reporting this reprehensible crime.

However, my uncle (and your father, as you know), is very much against my involvement in the matter. Mr. Aaron Edwards is a talented barrister by all means, but he is much less scrupulous than my father. He insists that, should I have left the scene of the murder, another person would have found the girl – that the strain of seeing her, as she lay cold and lifeless on the ground, would prove too much for a young woman of my age to bear – without the burden of explaining the intricacies of my findings to a judge.

Though I cannot disagree that the experience has taken a substantial toll on my health, I have faith in my forbearance to endure a trial, aggravating though it may be. I reject the notion that I should be catapulted into ruin should I publicly recount and analyze the details of the murder. But still, there is much tension between our fathers on the topic – yours claims that mine cannot speak with authority, as he is less familiar with the atmosphere of a courtroom. He calls him unfeeling and indifferent to my emotional stability, but I know that familial affection and harmony is a great priority to my father. He simply sees this abhorrent discovery of mine as a test of my virtue and hopes that I will choose to assert myself.

I do think that I will give the testimony. Furthermore, I am determined to resolve the rivalry between my father and uncle in any way that I am able. If you could affirm my strength in the privacy of your own home, I believe that it may appease the hostility between them. I will admit that my father does consider himself to have a superior philosophy than most. Thus, he feels he deserves a reputable platform to exercise his talents and impress his moral standpoints on others, particularly in response to their

transgressions. As we know, he could never fully realize his ambitions – the limited finances of his family did not allow him to attend university – yet, he wishes for more responsibility in his occupation. With only an apprenticeship to hone his skills, he has spent an exorbitant amount of time furthering his education in the law – their effects on day-to-day life, and the ways in which current events may alter the state of society – and devoting even further energy to studying the Christian virtues of the Bible.

This desire to inhabit the role of a barrister like your father must certainly influence his stubborn resolve to consistently embody a man of greater morals. Though this often manifests in an air of righteousness and obstinacy, I believe that it originates solely from a place of love for the human race, and a deep concern for justice. He is generally unenthused by Bath and hopes to correct any depravity that may lie uncontested within the city. I do think it is an admirable cause, and I wish with all my heart that my uncle could come to share his motivations.

In rare contrast to my father's animation, my mother has fallen silent. For several weeks now, she has avoided conversation in the drawing room and corridors of our home, feigning ignorance of my whereabouts, or blaming forgetfulness for her consistent failures in alerting me to the presence of guests. This negligence has, to her utmost convenience, excluded me from every meeting. I now sleep very late – often past breakfast – since my disregard for morning calls does not anger her as it used to. Her apathy is unnerving, I must admit, but I suppose it is what I have always longed for – though in different circumstances.

My sisters inform me that she has refrained from mentioning my name among other women, who speak of their daughters' great triumphs and imminent engagements. Even

when Henry Nash, the Pump-room's great master of ceremonies, paid us a personal visit to welcome me as a new partaker of the pleasures he so generously provides, she contrived an elaborate excuse for my absence, expressing her deepest regrets and warmest regards. She has no advice to give and is quite unprepared for this turn of events. Her knowledge of toil and heartache does not extend beyond marriage, and the tumultuous process of securing a husband.

Your mother must have thoughts on the matter, although you have not mentioned them. As she is quite stoic and rational in her opinions, I have surmised that my uncle's strong abhorrence for the ordeal has precluded them from discussion. Nevertheless, do enlighten me with her wisdom, if you are able to extract any measure of it. I have faith in the ultimate reconciliation of our fathers' viewpoints, should you and I come to a mutual understanding and join together in our efforts to mediate their conflict.

Good wishes for your health,
Evelina Edwards

Monday, 4 March 1799

I feel myself falling into a state of great anxiety and dissonance – I am practically paralyzed in my ability to direct myself in any further course of action, for I have kept a secret from every person familiar with the details of this crime: in addition to the message, I found three £10 notes a few feet away from the body. I refuse to discuss the matter with my family. Father in particular would be appalled; he would think I had tampered with the truth. I can summon no reasonable explanation for why I took the money – my family is not poor, and I am perpetually guided by my exemplary father and a knowledge of his honorable values. I can only rationalize my actions with the remembrance that the money added an additional repulsive quality to the scene – perhaps the association of monetary gain with sin – that compelled me to remove it. Guilt and shame washed over me as soon as I left the premises, but I cannot return the money now; an inventory has already been taken of the objects that were left by the child, and I do not know who the sum belongs to or if it was left to any person in particular.

I have considered pretending that I won the money in a contest, after which I will offer it to my father. I could not help but imagine how very happy he would be to receive it – his familial, monetary, and professional concerns would decrease greatly – he could support his wife, myself, and my seven siblings with relative ease, finally feel at peace with his profession, and enjoy more harmonious relationships with all. It would bring me joy to repair the fissures I take full responsibility for producing between him and my uncle. My father often travels to London, and though he does not enjoy the noise and “filthy crowds” as he calls them, he must go to make use of his brother’s connections – men who brandish both their wealth and cleverness. Thus, my uncle’s hostility – should it

continue for much longer – would greatly hinder my father’s ability to further his career. Their quarrels are the source of much of his agitation as of late, and a detriment to his confidence and sociability. At the very least, if he were to come into an appreciable sum of money, he may feel less inclined to compete with his elder brother. Or – at the very best – his travels to London would no longer prove necessary.

Although my father often engages in minor disagreements with my uncle, it is because of my own insolence that his pride – and perhaps his career – are at stake. I should not have allowed myself to roam the city at night, without the protection of sun and society. I should not have seen what I saw, nor taken what was not rightfully mine. I know that I must despise secrecy. I must be forthright and outspoken – I cannot care for the consequences. It is the *principle*, rather than my personal image, that must be attended to. How can I appear pleasant and carefree, when my inner thoughts and feelings remain in turmoil? I must put my own concerns aside in consideration of the many others this tragedy involves – the family the girl belongs to, and the brotherly bond between my own father and uncle. And of course, the child herself. I must respect her memory, and though the money was likely left by a murderer, the most deplorable kind of human being, perhaps it would bring some small consolation to her relatives in a time of grief.

Keeping the sum would seem an abominable indulgence in hypocrisy, as I would benefit from the killing (the very reason I extracted the money from the scene!) But if I returned it now, would I not bring increased suspicion upon myself as the true criminal, or an accomplice to the crime? Rumors are already spreading, and many neighbors are adamant in their conviction that I killed the girl. There were only two of us – one dead – at the Baths at that time of night, and my presence there is not justifiable by any credible

excuse. To make matters worse, it is arduous work to compile a list of viable suspects, as hundreds of people circulate throughout the Pump-room by day – though I believe the names on Mr. Nash’s ledger have been accounted for. I do hope that others are questioned, and the criminal discerned, for I could hardly mortify my family further by revealing my theft. Such an admission would humiliate my father in particular, reflecting poorly on his teachings and the quality of his moral character. Furthermore, I have failed to embody the goodness of a *heroine* – I am lesser than a mere figment of imagination – a counterfeit copy of Evelina, similar only by name. Fictional though she is, I see no harm in striving to emulate her integrity.

It is eerie to think of the curative properties of mineral water juxtaposed with the drowning of a young girl. Though my father complains of gossip and the frivolity of new fashions and theatrical entertainment in Bath, he fails to mention the potential danger. We live comfortably; I have never worried for my safety. Though death is fairly common, it is by natural causes, rather than murder, that most people pass on. I wait with apprehension and hope for the killer to be found, and the crime put to rest, along with the anxiety and terror it has caused me. I still waver with indecision and may decide to destroy the money altogether – in my humble opinion, nothing more should be accepted for the loss of a life.

More than anything, I pray that the difficulty I have had in developing my resolve – to choose a permanent mode of action – will lessen with time, but for now, I am conflicted. Not only must I attend to my legal and moral obligations – I must balance duty with the desire to protect my family’s reputation, and the temptation to aid my father in realizing his aspirations. I want so desperately to repair the wrongs I have done – to

choose rightly, and be good, but I am discouraged by forces that pull me in so many different directions. I cannot impute my suffering to God, for it was my decision – or rather, indecision – alone that has caused it. But alas, I hardly know where to begin. I will write again once I have come to a resolution – but only to myself, as Catherine cannot know my secret.

– *Evelina Edwards*

Friday, 8 November 1799

My dear Catherine,

Many months have passed since I expressed to you a stern resolve to give my testimony. If you have not yet heard about the incident from one person or another – as I am sure your father must be well-informed – I am writing to confirm that I have done so, and to address any rumors regarding the proceedings. The process was quick; I simply recounted what I had found and answered questions to ascertain my whereabouts on the night of the young girl’s murder – Father concurred that I was home for the entirety of the day until the sun had set. My replication of his speech is as follows:

‘I do not believe that my daughter has committed murder, with such minimal time and no light to see – it is simply impossible. Where would she have found the child alone, at such a late hour? No motives would induce her to drown a young girl. Inconceivable!

No – I do not know the precise moment she departed, but at 7 o’clock, she was most certainly present, reading by the fire.’

I do regret leaving home that fateful night, for if I hadn’t, I would not have aroused suspicion. Father was so consumed in his book that he did not hear my departure – I did notify him, before I left, but he mumbled something unintelligible and promptly forgot

we had spoken. Consequently, my actions are mired in uncertainty – but he is not to blame, nor are the damning conjectures of prosecutors or city-dwellers, who simply hope to solve the mystery. Though I am innocent, my own errors have brought me to the courtroom. A trial will be held soon, once a suspect is decided on.

Good wishes for your health,
Evelina Edwards

Saturday, 9 November 1799

Notes For Trial:

- ❖ Arrive holding reticule – inside, I will place all three £10 notes.
- ❖ Confess that a sum of money was left by the body – if questioned, or, if there is an opening to speak. Do not allow fear to guide you! Look above the heads of the jury (your speech will not falter should they sneer in disapproval).
- ❖ Explain in detail my reasons for removing evidence from the scene of the crime. Articulate thoughts with rationality and grace. Why should I return the money, had I murdered the girl? How could such intentions warrant murder? ~~Plead for forgiveness. Entreat the judge to believe you.~~ Describe – calmly – the horror I felt upon finding her, and my subsequent guilt (for taking the notes!). Urge that I have much cause to repent.
- ❖ *‘Concealment, my dear Maria, is the foe of tranquility: however, I may err in future, I will never be disingenuous in acknowledging my errors.’ —Frances Burney, Evelina*

Sunday, 10 November 1799

I fear I am ruined. While I did not come forward on my own, the judge implored me to speak about all that was left at the Baths – if more evidence had surfaced beyond the incriminating message – and I admitted my mistake in full. I could not lie directly, and thus I removed the £10 notes from my reticule and displayed them in the courtroom. At once a collective gasp resounded, and I shut my eyes to the gaping mouths and twisting bodies of onlookers. Yet, I could not turn my gaze from the face of one man: my father. He slumped in his seat – and, while he is rarely expressive – I knew from the white skin of his knuckles, and the clenching of his hand into a fist, that he was most egregiously dismayed. The tension between us is palpable in the very air itself; I cannot read by the fire with him anymore, as it pains me to remember the warmth he once radiated. I often wonder if his kindness has disappeared, or if I am simply unworthy of receiving it.

I want to believe that I am good, however, it is true that desire itself may engender delusion. Though my father and I have always agreed on a moral code to live by – in perfect accord with one another – our opinions now diverge with regard to honesty. I feel I have been honest, as I did not lie, and some knowledge may always be kept private. But he equates honesty to transparency – full disclosure of one's thoughts to relieve the burden of secrecy and sin. Before this trial, I too chose a path of candor and sincerity, revealing any minor transgressions of mine for my father to assess, and in turn, offer his advice. Now I expect he feels most betrayed – I did not consult him about the money, nor did he know of its existence. But we cannot always agree; I must forge my own way in the world and manifest my fate. I must make some decisions alone.

Only last night, as I flipped through the pages of *Evelina* for the impartial guidance that no person can give, did my father say,

“*Her* innocence – is convincing.’

How can I convey the turmoil I have felt, with words that carry more than mere platitudes? How *should* I explain that I am not a heroine, but a human being? Perhaps the sanctimonious think in absolutes, projecting fixed ideals onto an ever-shifting world. But I aspire to become righteous – to see complex shades and nuanced action, and to cherish those who delve beneath the surface.

– *Evelina Edwards*

‘O! useful may it be to have shewn, that, though the vicious can sometimes pour affliction upon the good, their power is transient and their punishment certain; and that innocence, though oppressed by injustice, shall, supported by patience, finally triumph over misfortune!’ —Ann Radcliffe, The Mysteries of Udolpho

Saturday, 10 December 1808

I have only now come to the realization, after shifting through the jumble of my possessions dispersed amongst these rooms that I may now call my own, that I have not written in my journal since I was fifteen years of age. I discovered it tucked inside an old bonnet of mine, which has always been my preferred mode of concealment for the secret thoughts and sentiments penned down in the shaky hand of my younger, uncertain self – blots of ink and crosses mark the pages; indecision and the manifestations of a disturbed peace of mind emanate from the very fibers of the paper.

Upon reading my most recent entries – in which the extent of my terror and fluctuating emotions I find amusingly dramatic – I was catapulted into a contemplative mood. Flashes of my childhood returned to me; vivid memories and repressed fears from the events of my youth that have shaped the woman I am today. I recalled seeing the dead girl – the trial, the money, the heavy weight of others' disappointment – and my own pain and confusion with regard to the uncalibrated nature of my newly tested moral standards. Perhaps it was not so dramatic in the context of my naiveté at that time.

But more to the true matter of why I am writing – when I certainly do not have much leisure time to spare, as I have only just embarked on this marital partnership with my beloved husband – I had promised to communicate my resolution about the £10 notes. Thus, in the wake of matrimonial pride and nostalgia for the life I leave behind, I will provide an account of the defining moments of my life since that awful trial – and preceding the bliss of my current state.

After confessing to my theft, the town erupted in gossip and professions of disgust. Accusations pelted me from all directions; I could not enter a public space without the

stares of crowds piercing through the protective shield I so desperately ventured to project – of downcast eyes, hunched shoulders, and a sheepish walk that only attracted the displeasure of more onlookers. *Liar* equated to *murderer* in their inflammatory minds, as they searched for opportunities to cast blame. My biggest regret was my father’s shame, elicited by my unpardonable conduct.

Our bond was forged from years of respect and reciprocation; his ethical teachings were imparted with the utmost care, and my applications followed: an example, or rather a product, of his character. We had always maintained true and unbroken faith in our capacity to adhere to the greatest virtues, and I had strayed – so publicly, and so severely, that my family began to consider me a suspect in the murder. This was not stated outright – rather, it was evident in their great alarm if I entered a room in which a parent or sibling was the sole inhabitant. All were hesitant to accompany me in public – though my father did manage to salvage memories of my goodness, which soon quashed his initial doubts. But alas, much to my distress, his recollections of my former innocence did not impress or persuade my accusers that my reputation should not be permanently tarnished.

I sensed the community’s doubt in my father’s judgment. Some rejected his services on the basis of his overwhelming “sentimentality,” which was thought to have clouded his ability to discern fact. I was only comforted by my knowledge of what truly occurred, my father’s acute understanding of reality, and our shared values, which assured me that his assertions would be proven correct. This hope lingered only by virtue of a presumptuous notion – that I would ultimately be discharged from all responsibility for the crime, which was by no means certain. Nevertheless, I retained faith in the purity of my own intentions and the benevolence of others. Though Bath had rejected me, I could

not be affronted when I considered the scope of the murder's impact. The men, women, and children of this city simply desired restitution for the family of a young girl whose life was so ruthlessly taken, a cause I could not deem unworthy, in spite of my personal qualms.

Still, my father had been sullen as of late due to my uncle's condescension and unsolicited advice. As Mr. Aaron Edwards did not support my decision to testify in court, the disastrous consequences I had faced in opposition to his recommendation made him – if it were possible – even more self-righteous than before. We were all in agreement that his ego had inflated to a troublesome degree. At the height of repercussions, he extended an invitation to himself to stay as a guest at our home, fully intending to *prolong* his visit under the pretense of familial support. I could not accept this as a demonstration of kindness, though it was presented as a benevolent gesture. Foremost in his mind was pride in his superior judgment. He was gleeful – more than anything – that the trial had proven detrimental not only to me, but to the entirety of my family, sinking the credibility of our name for years to come.

My hopes in Catherine's influence were to no avail, as her loyalty was conditional; the preservation of her father's good opinion was of primary importance. While her letters affirmed my sentiments with passionate profusions of sympathy, she took no action in my defense. Thus, these visits, though perhaps not deliberately malicious, certainly offered a plethora of opportunities for my uncle to boast of his impressive foresight. Quite often he disregarded his own membership in our family, as snide utterances escaped his lips in between bites of salted eggs and sweet Bath buns:

‘The Edwards family is quite untouchable now – in the least favorable sense of the word!’

On several occasions, he pointedly sniggered at our misfortune over a cup of hot tea, causing fits of choking at the breakfast table.

While my uncle’s antics were aggravating to some degree, greater concerns occupied my mind – in particular, the aching loneliness that I felt and could not manage to dispel. Though I have long abhorred men and women who seek the approval of others at the expense of their dignity, I could not help but hope for a reversal of my fortunes – as each reproach or admonishment depressed my spirits and produced even physical pain on occasion. I became quite sickly and fatigued, and – fearing my developing a serious illness – my mother and father called on Dr. Beaumont to examine me. Of course, he promptly offered up a diagnosis, detailing the specifics of some rare bodily disease. He then recommended various treatments – involving sugary wine, no doubt – though I must admit, I stopped listening midway through his rambling. I will always respect a physician’s opinion, but I firmly believe that it was Bath – and more specifically, my fall into disrepute – that was the root cause of my deteriorating health. But in time, I grew accustomed to isolation. My condition improved, and, –with a hardened constitution – infamy became my normality.

Though I knew I was innocent of committing a crime, I could not help but feel as if I had made a most egregious error. Visitors began to stop calling altogether, and friends lost their faith in my veracity, rejecting my invitations and offers. News of my illness had somehow spread, and did not arouse sympathy – to most, this was only proof of my irrefutable guilt – God’s punishment for my sins. Thus, in the interest of protecting my

family's tattered reputation – and in hopes of escaping my ignominy – I retreated into our home for the foreseeable future.

But alas, I could hardly avoid all excursions. I was often needed for tasks that my siblings were not equipped to do, as I was the eldest girl – only surpassed in age by my brother, Laurence. My siblings, all young and impressionable, were inevitably swayed by the public's belief in my inherent villainy – Cecilia in particular. Once a close confidant of mine, she soon ran from the shadow of my disgrace in favor of more illustrious society.

I dreaded these treks into Bath more than I could convey in words. My seclusion was poignantly felt in a city that touted a bustling, lively society replete with entertainments for all tastes – a milieu built for the express purpose of attracting regular droves of visitors. But although I found myself wading through a sea of ages, attitudes, and occupations – among natives and curious guests – I did not have much difficulty reaching my destinations, as crowds parted at the sight of me. Young girls hid behind their mothers, terrified that I was hunting for prey yet again – the choicest body to forcibly drag to the Baths and murder in the fashion of my first crime.

I quickly learned of the victim's name: Charlotte. Knowing this brought new depth to the pain that I felt. I knew I was not responsible for her demise – still, I could no longer bemoan my miserable existence, when young Charlotte was robbed of hers entirely. My conscience would not withstand it. These thoughts only intensified my despair, and so cycled the spiraling woe that neither I, for lack of ability, nor anyone else, for lack of desire, could manage to reduce. Mere acquaintances averted their eyes and withdrew from my presence if I dared approach.

I might have died of despair if I had not met the elder sister of Charlotte, Juliana Browning. She arrived at my home during the morning hours – unusual, as I had not expected visitors for quite some time. Our introductory visit, which commenced with standard pleasantries and polite inquiries, soon evolved into effusions of loyalty and support for my judgment:

‘Yes, I Charlotte’s elder sister – I live directly across from Bath Abbey. Being so close to the Baths – and the victim, of course – well, undoubtedly, I have kept up with the trial. But I have not come to unleash my wrath or avenge my sister – as you might expect. Rather, I am here to express my faith in your virtue, for I went over and over it all in my mind and am quite convinced that you had little reason to murder a child, even if that child was indeed Charlotte. I pray you might take comfort in my opinion.’

I began to weep. A perfect angel in my eyes, she had come to express her condolences and offer her support. I was distrustful at first – that she truly believed in my innocence – but, to my good fortune, her steady persistence in the matter finally captured my sincere appreciation.

‘I could not feel more grateful for your visit – I was quite ridden with despair in thinking that Charlotte’s family could ever believe me capable of her murder.’

Juliana offered her handkerchief, but I waved it away in protest, and fumbled about for my own.

‘I am glad to hear it, though I figured as much. I hope this knowledge – that my convictions are strong in your favor – may strengthen your fortitude. Your concern for justice is a prominent indicator of your innocence, as evidenced by your confession and severity of distress. A true killer shows no remorse! They must celebrate their genius by

revealing every vile detail of their crime. But what incentive could have driven you to steal the money, aside from some perverted manifestation of the morality that you really do possess? And, considering your desperate attempts to avoid the public eye, I am certain that you do not relish in your starring role as Bath's devilish child-killer. You do not deserve to incur such unkindness.'

'Oh, I thank you – and I assure you, I could not have made use of the money in prison. This murderer assuredly desired notice for their crime, in consideration of the note left by the body. I have surmised that it was not a true expression of remorse, but a ploy to attract attention. Thus, I hope to engage every faculty of judgment I possess to determine the true miscreant – with your assistance, I hope.'

'Yes, indeed, and while we toil away at solving the crime, the perfect solution, I propose, is to travel to Epsom with my family. There is no better means to escape the scandal than going away from it entirely!'

'Oh, I wouldn't dream of imposing – I could not burden your family more than I have done already.'

'Nonsense! I insist – there is room in our carriage – you cannot reject the idea. Without your discovery, perhaps my sister's death would have been forgotten. It is the least we could do to repay you.'

With prolonged urging, I assented to the idea, as I could not resist the comforts of another town – which would resemble home and replenish my health, without the harsh criticisms of probing eyes. I would relent to her persuasion, so long as my mother and father approved.

After several spurious shows of concern for the effects of a new environment on my health, my mother agreed:

‘Oh Evelina, should you catch cold, I may never forgive myself – though, the fashionable ladies I conversed with this very morning did insist that the waters of Epsom Wells rival every benefit of Bath’s own mineral waters – I told them that no, I was not quite sure, but they did *insist* so persistently – thus, you should go immediately. Hurry along with your packing now, so you do not antagonize the young woman with your delays, as you are wont to do.’

I noticed a tinge of relief in her eyes as I left – cloaked in maternal concern. A potential murderer gone from the household.

– *Evelina Edwards*

‘If young women were not deceived into a belief that affectation pleases, they would scarcely trouble themselves to practise it so much.’ —Maria Edgeworth, Belinda

Sunday, 11 December 1808

Though I'm grown much older since I first began to write – a full twenty-three years of age – I have failed to improve in my domestic responsibilities. I quit my previous entry before I was half-way done, as my husband had returned from hunting, and I was not yet prepared for dinner. To continue:

In Epsom, we journeyed to the Epsom Derby to view the racehorses, a sight I had only before heard of, but never seen. As the riders broke from their starting positions, my eyes flitted to the figure of a handsome man charging forward on a powerful steed. It did not require much sleuthing to find that his name was Sir James Everton, a baronet from the Somerset countryside. Every young woman at the Derby tittered with joy at the prospect of meeting such an eligible baronet, fantasizing that – for the luckiest of them – a proposal might ensue.

'He is so dashing, and wonderfully talented on a horse!' Juliana exclaimed.

My heart sank a bit, and I felt I should admonish her – for these qualities could not ensure a happy wife. But considering Juliana's enviable strength – in having resisted the pressures of a veritable mob, determined to denounce me – I concluded that my new friend's feelings were sincere enough. Still, she worried me, for her words offered nothing of originality or substance. Marriage seemed desired by all; the entire crowd – or the females within it, I should say – appeared to sigh as a collective, rippling with hopeless longing. Of course, Sir James won the race.

Now more than ever, mother and father assuredly doubted my ability to attract an eligible suitor, and I too harbored little faith in my personal charms. I was branded a criminal and had only a modest dowry to offer in marriage. Consequently, I strained

tirelessly to discipline my romantic notions by imposing reason and rationality on the whims of my heart. I was not intrigued by the notion of dying a spinster – the future that Bath’s residents expected for me – I was simply dubious of my chances at securing an engagement. How could I find an appropriate match, let alone an auspicious one? And beyond these practical concerns, I could not stomach the idea of feeling for a man without indication of mutual sympathy.

Fortunately, I soon learned that Bath’s prodigious gossip did not likewise circulate among Epsom’s population. While at first, among crowds of strangers, I fixed my gaze on the cobblestones or glanced up at the sky – only greeting passerby if politeness dictated such courtesies – I began to realize that not one person viewed me with malice or alarm. I was surely invisible to the public eye. This greatly uplifted my spirits, imbuing me with all the warmth and vitality I had lacked for the past several months. My cheeks regained their rosy tinge, and I quickly developed the strength to exert myself further – in matters of social engagement – than I could ever endure before. To my surprise, improved confidence and renewed energy significantly enhanced my demeanor, increasing the value of my social encounters. After fully persuading myself of the notion that I could live perfectly well without a husband, I soon softened to the idea.

My romantic ideals took form when Sir James held open a heavy door in the manner of a true gentleman – facilitating my entrance with greater ease. I congratulated him on the victory of his race and was met with a pleasant smile and twinkling eye, which I promptly and graciously returned. We then entered into a spirited conversation, and I found his address to be open, his manners attentive and engaging, his person handsome, and his countenance pleasing to the utmost degree. It soon became apparent that he was

wholly unfamiliar with my family, and had traveled to Bath only once, many summers ago.

Considering the number of his admirers, I had promised myself that I would not attach to him like the others – with such a wild infatuation – or at all, if possible. It seemed utterly improbable that I should supersede so many women of high stature who wished to be the sole object of his affections. Yet, I could not help but consider the benefits of our union – which his wealth would provide – should my allowance run out, leaving me unsupported. I was considered a fair beauty by most and could claim to be well-read, but in no way was I qualified to take up an occupation. Single women were not looked kindly upon by most.

I quickly endeavored to suppress these thoughts, as the substance of our connection was infinitely more important than financial gain. But to my chagrin, we could not become further acquainted, as Sir James was called away to celebrate his triumph at the Derby with his fellow competitors. Time had run out for us to become further acquainted – a substantive relationship could not be forged. I was deeply troubled by the loss. Every effort to uplift my spirits was futile, and I found myself sinking into a depressive state. My daily source of excitement had been torn away.

But despite the suddenness of Sir James' departure, I had one great consolation: over the course of our trip, Juliana and I formed the closest bond I had ever known, rivaled only by my relationship with my father – which of course, was strained as of late, as he had grown tired of defending my innocence, and had not written once since I left home.

As Charlotte's elder sister, Juliana had every right to abandon me in disgust – but I fully enjoyed her admiration. Her praise stood in stark contrast to the contempt which

emanated from the very core of most others I encountered. Though my conscience whispered that I did not deserve it, egos are easily disarmed with flattery. Thus, I could do no more than smile.

As our trip to Epsom drew to a close, I invited Juliana and Mrs. and Mrs. Browning to dine at my family's home – a gesture of appreciation for their generosity. But once the food was removed from the table and preparations began for the playing of music and games, Cecilia drew me aside to express her concerns.

‘Juliana is not sincere.’

‘Of course – you would hope to destroy my one happiness. If you had wanted to retain our intimacy, you would not have left my side long ago. You must forbid jealousy from obscuring your perceptions.’

‘I have not abandoned you. I –’

‘You do not want *my* companionship, Cecilia. I am defamed and defiled – there are too many others whose pasts are not tainted like mine.’

‘Evelina, you do not know what I have heard. Mr. and Mrs. Browning were conspiring with Juliana in the hallway – Mrs. Browning asked if she had uncovered the truth quite yet, and Juliana said she has not learned much as of yet, despite her best efforts to investigate – other than your interest and disappointment with Sir James – *that* subject we will broach another time, mind you – but I believe they find you guilty, and are looking to prove it.’

‘Are you absolutely certain?’

‘Yes, Juliana agreed to press you more explicitly.’

Alas, friendships formed quickly dissolve with equal haste. I stared in quiet disbelief at the immediate severance of our connection. Acceptance never did seem to last.

Then Juliana entered the drawing room, disrupting my reverie.

‘Well! Shall I try the harp?’ Her eyes shone brightly with excitement – a mere farce.

We smiled sweetly and pretended to be very interested.

I thought over the night. My mother had taken a great liking to Juliana while they were seated together at dinner – I should not be surprised that she was proven deceitful.

As Juliana plucked at our harp, Cecilia informed Lucy of her duplicity. Lucy then had the clever idea of sketching Juliana’s caricature – and accentuating her most unattractive features.

Having finished her song, Juliana rose and drifted over to me with glasses of Negus in each hand, while Lucy scurried away with her paper.

‘Would you take extra lemon? I have slices to spare.’

‘No, thank you.’ Surely, she hoped to loosen my inhibitions with alcohol. This would not matter, as I was innocent – so I accepted the drink.

We emptied our glasses over idle chatter, with my manner very much contained. It was a shame to lose trust – which was no easy thing to build.

‘Let us sit. If you did not recognize it by my choice of music, I am feeling a bit low tonight, perhaps in remembrance of Charlotte.’ She studied my face, in search of some pang of remorse, it seemed.

‘Ah, yes. It was a great loss – have patience and remain kind to yourself, for we will discover the perpetrator.’

I stared at the punch, and an idea began to form.

‘Oddly, I too am lost in my own memories at the moment – I am reminded of Dr. Beaumont parading around our New Year celebration with his elderberry wine – it is of a similar color to this. I do wonder if he has thoughts on the healing properties of Negus. It *did* seem awfully vulgar – his offering me a full glass of wine at our private ball. I suspect he encourages young girls to drink elsewhere!’

I had no intention of accusing an innocent man – to defend my honor or absolve my guilt. It just so happened that I found him rather suspicious.

Juliana’s expression markedly shifted.

‘He did call on Charlotte once, when she was ill around Christmastime – and poured that very wine for her to drink, which did not help her sickness; it merely put her to sleep.’

‘Yes, I was quite disoriented as well, after drinking it. Come to think of it, our footman, Mr. Stapleton, was rendered unconscious with a glass of it in hand.’

Our eyes widened in alarm. For the next hour or so, we put aside our pretensions and probed our memories for compromising evidence. Bu the time Juliana and her family departed we were both quite convinced of the physician’s guilt. For all I knew, my own mother could have served as his accomplice – she always was fond of him and had no qualms about his offering me wine.

But why would Dr. Beaumont kill a young girl? Who was the money left for? His disguise was convenient – masquerading as a savior of lives, when he lived to exterminate them. But perhaps it was an experiment gone wrong – a case of poisoning that would harm his reputation as a skilled healer, should anyone know he was the

culprit. But Charlotte's family, and all the rest who employed him, deserved to know the truth. Thus, I resolved to re-open the case for the physician's questioning.

– *Evelina Edwards*

Monday, 12 December 1808

Recording my past – in all of its detail – has been a strenuous effort. As, at a certain point, I could not write without drifting to sleep, I am starting anew again tonight.

Within several days of my conversation with Juliana, I went to the authorities to report my suspicions. A second trial was set for the following week, with Dr. Beaumont in attendance – though he was vehemently opposed to our accusations. However, before the courtroom settled, an unknown man attempted to steal the £10 notes from the coat pocket of a prosecutor in the bustle of people entering the building. The money was brought to this trial as evidence, to be shown to Dr. Beaumont, but upon further questioning of the thief, it was discovered that the notes had been left by Charlotte's body for his retrieval. The man – who went by the name of Mr. Crampton – was to be paid for his services; these included discarding the dead girl and concealing the crime. However, a quarrel with his wife had delayed him; he emerged in time to see the removal of the girl from the Baths, vowing to regain what he considered rightfully his. While Mr. Crampton had been in attendance at my trial, he was unable to take the money then; only now did he find an opportunity.

In his distressed state – a product of his exposed transgressions – he revealed his employer and the perpetrator of the crime: none other than Mr. Henry Nash, the master of ceremonies. I rebuked myself heavily for my mistake. Dr. Beaumont, though bizarre, was

not a killer. Mr. Nash, however, directed all entertainment in Bath – controlling crowds and setting proper standards for the manners and morals of guests. Furthermore, I remembered he was absent from his post on my first day at the Pump-room. During that time – it was discovered – he had found Charlotte Browning outside Bath Abbey. As the church is quite near her family’s home, she was permitted to explore it, but Mr. Nash persuaded her to accompany him with promises of a magical room full of sweets.

Such strange behavior he attributed to the adverse effects of loneliness, as Mr. Nash remained quite devastated by the loss of his own young daughter from scarlet fever only several months before. He knew Charlotte’s family – it was his duty to become acquainted with every subscriber to the Pump-room – and had seen her out in Bath, reminding him that he never could show his daughter the luxuries of society or his great command of the Pump-room. In his grief-stricken state – charmed as he was by her kindness and curiosity – he determined that Charlotte would fill this role.

She did enjoy the balls considerably and felt very darling indeed, so she returned several times more, all without her family’s knowledge. With hundreds of people milling about, they were quite safe from being seen *together*, but Mr. Nash began to take her to the Pump-room late at night, as he was quite busy during the day – and fearful that some man or woman acquainted with the Browning’s would notify them of her presence there, whereupon she would never return.

Then one fateful evening, he left her only for a short time, to attend to matters of maintenance. When he returned, he saw that she had wandered to the Baths and tragically drowned. Overcome with despair, he removed her from the waters, left the note and the money, and made himself scarce.

The prosecution demanded why he would leave such a note upon her body.

‘To express my remorse. She was meant to be dropped in a remote location, where the crime could not be traced to me,’ he pleaded, scowling at Mr. Crampton.

I looked upon the proceedings in awe – as it turned out, my decision to return the money had helped solve the mystery. The identity of the criminal was finally known – but, since the child accompanied him of her own free will, this was not a crime in itself. Her death was merely an accident, and Mr. Nash was subject only to the anguish of the family and all who had invested in the trial.

Though it was quite a shame that he was not punished by law, the people of Bath voted him out of his position as master of ceremonies, and young women and girls felt safe once again in the Pump-room. The public had finally pardoned me, recognizing my innocence, and Juliana offered her apology – though I am not confident in our remaining friends. Nevertheless, I was utterly grateful for my decision to remain loyal to the truth, and vowed never to consider acting to the contrary, when the well-being of so many others was at stake.

However, in spite of my ultimate triumph, subsequent years brought further tragedy. At seventeen years of age, an outbreak of smallpox in London proved lethal to my family. After a visit to our uncle’s home in the city – before great precautions were taken to prevent its onset – Arthur, Hugh, and Lucy contracted the disease. We returned to Bath in the hope that fresh air might diminish these symptoms, but it had no positive effect. A few nights of fever overpowered their bodies, and they passed away quietly. Several months later, it was the measles that gripped Ernest. Only myself, Cecilia, and my older brother remained alive. And my mother – after tending to them all – fell ill and died soon

after. I hoped to feel a terrible sadness at the time of her death, but our views had always differed fundamentally. Still, I cannot help but feel guilt even now for my apathy.

Cecilia was a great help to me during this time, as my brother Laurence and I, though closely interconnected by way of birth, never did transcend the threshold of cold and impersonal conversation. He had resided in Bristol since I was a small girl, only visiting Bath on rare occasions. Thus, physical distance itself made the role of confidant difficult to establish and sustain. Though Cecilia knew him less than I, she was superior in engaging us all in dialogue –and raising our spirits as best she could.

I could not turn to my father for comfort, as he managed the intensity of his grief by withdrawing into himself, likely for fear of burdening me – and disrupting my image of his calm, resilient demeanor. Of course, this loss only increased my despair, but the offense was not felt in full force, for I understood that he took great pride in his natural gift for disregarding emotional superfluity – in order to more efficiently proceed in a logical and productive manner. Yet, the loss of his wife – a nurturing caretaker, in his mind – in addition to the bulk of his children, was too much for him to bear. As the strength of our bond lay dormant for the time being, Cecilia was a great source of sympathy and stability for months on end. But gradually, my father and I did reconnect.

One year ago, I accompanied him to London to visit my uncle, aunt, and dear cousin Catherine – the brothers had agreed to a reconciliation to strengthen the family's bond amid the loss of so many loved ones. As it was the social season, it was decided that we would all attend a ball. My father could form higher connections for the benefit of his profession, and, at twenty-two, I had been out for several years and was in dire need of suitors to entertain – in Cecilia's humble opinion. Thus, it was thought to be a

marvelously productive idea. And quite a ball it was, for I caught the eye of Sir James Everton once again, as if fate had prophesied our reunion. Although he set about pursuing me with great passion, I was determined to remain prudent, urging a lengthy acquaintance before our engagement. Thus, so began a six-month courtship, after which we were married.

At twenty-three years of age, I am only now embarking on a new life with my husband. Albeit minor concerns, we are very comfortable, for which I credit his wealth and admirable character. For in spite of Sir James' comparably leisurely childhood as the eldest of only three boys abundantly provided for, he deeply respects the diligence of my father, and notes the presence of this attractive quality in myself. We are cognizant of our privilege, and well-aware – from our personal experiences – that nothing of high value is easily obtained.

– Evelina Edwards

Tuesday, 11 December 1821

I write again upon discerning that exactly thirteen years have passed since my last correspondence. I have fared well as a married woman, aside from a recent tragedy – one of Catherine’s six children has died from smallpox. A fellow playmate of young Isaac’s – who soon after developed a severe case – exposed him to the virus. I must travel to London to comfort my dear cousin, which will prove a large but worthwhile expense. I am almost joyful to leave home, for my husband and I are no longer so enamored as we once were.

Although I am now *Lady* Evelina, I have always supported the Sugar Boycott and condemned the slave trade, while my husband sees the value in it – a great point of contention between us. Sir James is below the peerage, but above all commoners, and would prefer to associate with his titled relatives. Such notions of superiority have begun to grate on my very nerves. When we dine with acquaintances or venture forth into the public sphere, I must do my best to stifle the boldness of his views – particularly during family visits – for fear that he will incite a feud.

Though I certainly esteem his many virtues, he does adopt a pretentious air with regard to rank – thus maintaining a steady resistance to the evolution of society. As I was raised by my father – a solicitor – I feel an inborn sense of pride for the emerging middle class – a pride I often fail to quell. At word of any news regarding their triumphs, I cannot help but voice an affirming quip or, on occasion, an exclamation of support. My husband feels greatly incensed when I speak in such a manner, but I smile in remembrance of my former demeanor – the shyness of a young girl who did not yet know

her own strength. While I remain soft-spoken, as I once was, I fear that my strong opinions, so readily voiced, do jeopardize my husband's strength.

I do not think it practical that he pays for his title, as the money could benefit both our children and relations. But despite these disagreements, our initial attractions remain. While Sir James provides for me, expands the boundaries of my mind, and bolsters my self-confidence, I stabilize his impulsivity, and elevate his morality and perseverance. Informing my husband of my involvement in a murder trial did not repel him in the slightest, as I had suspected it might. Rather than judge my conduct, he strives to emulate the vigor with which I adhere to my convictions and defend my moral fortitude. These efforts I continue to this day.

We are meticulous in our parenting of Adelaide, Aaron, Madeline, and Weston. However, Aaron – our eldest, at nine years of age – is most captivated by armed conflict. In recent months, he has taken to reciting from memory a collection of facts relating to the Napoleonic Wars – and most notably, the Battle of Waterloo. Despite our persistence in directing him towards university, after which he would manage the estate, he firmly maintains his ambitions to become a soldier. It remains a challenge to raise him – and his younger brother and sisters – in a manner that will befit their status and reflect the values that children of good breeding should most certainly uphold.

– *Evelina Edwards*

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