

LADY SUSAN

**JANE
AUSTEN**

THE ART OF THE NOVELLA

LADY SUSAN

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AUSTEN

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Contents

[Cover](#)

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright](#)

- [I. Lady Susan Vernon to Mr. Vernon](#)
- [II. Lady Susan Vernon to Mrs. Johnson](#)
- [III. Mrs. Vernon to Lady De Courcy](#)
- [IV. Mr. De Courcy to Mrs. Vernon](#)
- [V. Lady Susan to Mrs. Johnson](#)
- [VI. Mrs. Vernon to Mr. De Courcy](#)
- [VII. Lady Susan Vernon to Mrs. Johnson](#)
- [VIII. Mrs. Vernon to Lady De Courcy](#)
- [IX. Mrs. Johnson to Lady Susan Vernon](#)
- [X. Lady Susan Vernon to Mrs. Johnson](#)
- [XI. Mrs. Vernon to Lady De Courcy](#)
- [XII. Sir Reginald De Courcy to His Son](#)
- [XIII. Lady De Courcy to Mrs. Vernon](#)
- [XIV. Mr. De Courcy to Sir Reginald](#)
- [XV. Mrs. Vernon to Lady De Courcy](#)
- [XVI. Lady Susan to Mrs. Johnson](#)
- [XVII. Mrs. Vernon to Lady De Courcy](#)
- [XVIII. From the Same to the Same](#)
- [XIX. Lady Susan to Mrs. Johnson](#)
- [XX. Mrs. Vernon to Lady De Courcy](#)
- [XXI. Miss Vernon to Mr De Courcy](#)
- [XXII. Lady Susan to Mrs. Johnson](#)
- [XXIII. Mrs. Vernon to Lady De Courcy](#)
- [XXIV. From the Same to the Same](#)
- [XXV. Lady Susan to Mrs. Johnson](#)
- [XXVI. Mrs. Johnson to Lady Susan](#)
- [XXVII. Mrs. Vernon to Lady De Courcy](#)
- [XXVIII. Mrs. Johnson to Lady Susan](#)
- [XXIX. Lady Susan Vernon to Mrs. Johnson](#)
- [XXX. Lady Susan Vernon to Mr. De Courcy](#)
- [XXXI. Lady Susan to Mrs. Johnson](#)
- [XXXII. Mrs. Johnson to Lady Susan](#)
- [XXXIII. Lady Susan to Mrs. Johnson](#)
- [XXXIV. Mr. De Courcy to Lady Susan](#)
- [XXXV. Lady Susan to Mr. De Courcy](#)
- [XXXVI. Mr. De Courcy to Lady Susan](#)
- [XXXVII. Lady Susan to Mr. De Courcy](#)

[XXXVIII. Mrs. Johnson to Lady Susan Vernon](#)

[XXXIX. Lady Susan to Mrs. Johnson](#)

[XL. Lady De Courcy to Mrs. Vernon](#)

[XLI. Mrs. Vernon to Lady De Courcy](#)

[Conclusion](#)

[Other Books in the Series](#)

I. LADY SUSAN VERNON TO MR. VERNON

LANGFORD, D

MY DEAR BROTHER,—I can no longer refuse myself the pleasure of profiting by your kind invitation when we last parted, of spending some weeks with you at Churchill, and, therefore, if quite convenient to you and Mrs. Vernon to receive me at present, I shall hope within a few days to be introduced to a sister whom I have so long desired to be acquainted with. My kind friends here are most affectionately urgent with me to prolong my stay, but their hospitable and cheerful disposition lead them too much into society for my present situation and state of mind; and I impatiently look forward to the hour when I shall be admitted into Your delightful retirement.

I long to be made known to your dear little children, in whose hearts I shall be very eager to secure an interest. I shall soon have occasion for all my fortitude, as I am on the point of separation from my own daughter. The long illness of her dear father prevented my paying her that attention which duty and affection equally dictated, and I have but too much reason to fear that the governess to whose care I consigned her was unequal to the charge. I have therefore resolved on placing her at one of the best private schools in town, where I shall have an opportunity of leaving her myself, in my way to you. I am determined, you see, not to be denied admittance at Churchill. It would indeed give me most painful sensations to know that it were not in your power to receive me.

Your most obliged and affectionate sister,

S. VERNON

II. LADY SUSAN VERNON TO MRS. JOHNSON

LANGFORD

You were mistaken, my dear Alicia, in supposing me fixed at this place for the rest of the winter. It grieves me to say how greatly you were mistaken, for I have seldom spent three months more agreeably than those which have just flown away. At present, nothing goes smoothly. The females of the family are united against me. You foretold how it would be when I first came to Langford; and Manwaring is so uncommonly pleasing that I was not without apprehensions myself. I remember saying to myself as I drove to the house, "I like this man; pray Heaven no harm come of it!" But I was determined to be discreet, to bear in mind my being only four months a widow, and to be as quiet as possible—and I have been so, my dear creature; I have admitted no one's attentions but Manwaring's. I have avoided all general flirtation whatever; I have distinguished no creature besides, of all the numbers resorting hither, except Sir James Martin, on whom I bestowed a little notice in order to detach him from Miss Manwaring. But, if the world could know my motive THERE, they would honour me. I have been called an unkind mother, but it was the sacred impulse of maternal affection; it was the advantage of my daughter that led me on; and if that daughter were not the greatest simpleton on earth, I might have been rewarded for my exertions as I ought—Sir James did make proposals to me for Frederica—but Frederica, who was born to be the torment of my life, chose to set herself so violently against the match that I thought it better to lay aside the scheme for the present. I have more than once repented that I did not marry him myself, and were he but one degree less contemptibly weak I certainly should, but I must own myself rather romantic in that respect, and the riches only will not satisfy me. The event of all this is very provoking. Sir James is gone, Maria highly incensed, and Mrs. Manwaring insupportably jealous; so jealous, in short, and so enraged against me that in the fury of her temper I should not be surprised at her appealing to her guardian if she had the liberty of addressing him—but there your husband stands my friend, and the kindest, most amiable action of his life was his throwing her off forever on her marriage. Keep up his resentment, therefore, I charge you. We are now in a sad state; no house was ever more altered; the whole family are at war, and Manwaring scarcely dares speak to me. It is time for me to be gone; I have therefore determined on leaving them, and shall spend I hope, a comfortable day with you in town within this week. If I am as little in favour with Mr. Johnson as ever, you must come to me at No.10, Wigmore St.—but I hope this may not be the case, for as Mr. Johnson, with all his faults, is a man to whom that great word "Respectable" is always given, and I am known to be so intimate with his wife, his slighting me has an awkward look. I take town in my way to that insupportable spot, a country village, for I am really going to Churchill. Forgive me, my dear friend, it is my last resource. Were there another place in England open to me, I would prefer it. Charles Vernon is my aversion, and I am afraid of his wife. At Churchill, however, I must remain till I have something better in view. My young lady accompanied me to town, where I shall deposit her under the care of Miss Summers in Wigmore Street, till she becomes a little more reasonable. She will make good connections there, as the girls are all of the best families. The price is immense, and much beyond what I can ever attempt to pay.

Adieu, I will send you a line, as soon as I arrive in town.

Yours ever,

S. VERNON

III. MRS. VERNON TO LADY DE COURCY

CHURCHILL

My dear Mother,

I am very sorry to tell you that it will not be in our power to keep our promise of spending the Christmas with you; and we are prevented that happiness by a circumstance which is not likely to make us any amends. Lady Susan, in a letter to her brother, has declared her intention of visiting us almost immediately—and as such a visit is in all probability merely an affair of convenience, it is impossible to conjecture its length. I was by no means prepared for such an event, nor can I now account for her ladyship's conduct. Langford appeared so exactly the place for her in every respect, as well from the elegant and expensive style of living there, as from her particular attachment to Mr. Manwaring, that I was very far from expecting so speedy a distinction, though I always imagined from her increasing friendship for us since her husband's death that we should, at some future period, be obliged to receive her. Mr. Vernon, I think, was a great deal too kind to her, when he was in Staffordshire. Her behaviour to him, independent of her general character, has been so inexcusably artful and ungenerous since our marriage was first in agitation, that no one less amiable and mild than himself could have overlooked it at all; and though as his brother's widow, and in narrow circumstances it was proper to render her pecuniary assistance, I cannot help thinking his pressing invitation to her to visit us at Churchill perfectly unnecessary. Disposed, however, as he always is to think the best of everyone, her display of grief, and professions of regret, and general resolutions of prudence were sufficient to soften his heart and make him really confide in her sincerity. But as for myself, I am still unconvinced; and plausibly as her ladyship has now written, I cannot make up my mind, till I better understand her real meaning in coming to us. You may guess, therefore, my dear Madam, with what feelings I look forward to her arrival. She will have occasion for all those attractive powers for which she is celebrated to gain any share of my regard; and I shall certainly endeavour to guard myself against their influence, if not accompanied by something more substantial. She expresses a most eager desire of being acquainted with me, and makes very generous mention of my children but I am not quite weak enough to suppose a woman who has behaved with inattention if not with unkindness to her own child, should be attached to any of mine. Miss Vernon is to be placed at school in town before her mother comes to us, which I am glad of, for her sake and my own. It must be to her advantage to be separated from her mother; and a girl of sixteen who has received so wretched an education, would not be a very desirable companion here. Reginald has long wished, I know, to see this captivating Lady Susan, and we shall depend on his joining our party soon. I am glad to hear that my father continues so well, and am, with best love & etc.,

CATHERINE VERNON

IV. MR. DE COURCY TO MRS. VERNON

My dear Sister,

I congratulate you and Mr. Vernon on being about to receive into your family the most accomplished coquette in England. As a very distinguished flirt, I have always been taught to consider her; but it has lately fallen in my way to hear some particulars of her conduct at Langford, which prove that she does not confine herself to that sort of honest flirtation which satisfies most people, but aspires to the more delicious gratification of making a whole family miserable. By her behaviour to Mr. Manwaring she gave jealousy and wretchedness to his wife, and by her attentions to a young man previously attached to Mr. Manwaring's sister deprived an amiable girl of her lover. I learnt all this from Mr. Smith now in this neighbourhood (I have dined with him at Hurst and Wilford), who is just come from Langford, where he was a fortnight in the house with her ladyship, and who is therefore well qualified to make the communication.

What a woman she must be! I long to see her, and shall certainly accept your kind invitation, that may form some idea of those bewitching powers which can do so much—engaging at the same time and in the same house the affections of two men who were neither of them at liberty to bestow them—and all this without the charm of youth. I am glad to find that Miss Vernon does not come with her mother to Churchill, as she has not even manners to recommend her, and, according to Mr. Smith's account, is equally dull and proud. Where pride and stupidity unite, there can be no dissimulation worthy notice, and Miss Vernon shall be consigned to unrelenting contempt; but by all that I can gather, Lady Susan possesses a degree of captivating deceit which must be pleasing to witness and difficult to detect. I shall be with you very soon, and am your affectionate brother,

R. DE COURCY

V. LADY SUSAN TO MRS. JOHNSON

CHURCH

I received your note, my dear Alicia, just before I left town, and rejoice to be assured that Mr. Johnson suspected nothing of your engagement the evening before; it is undoubtedly better to deceive him entirely; since he will be stubborn, he must be tricked. I arrived here in safety, and have no reason to complain of my reception from Mr. Vernon; but I confess myself not equally satisfied with the conduct of his lady. She is perfectly well bred, indeed, and has the air of a woman of fashion, but her manners are not such as can persuade me of her being prepossessed in my favour. I wanted her to be delighted at seeing me—I was as amiable as possible on the occasion—but all in vain—she does not like me. To be sure, when we consider that I DID take some pains to prevent my brother-in-law from marrying her, this want of cordiality is not very surprising—and yet it shows an illiberal and vindictive spirit to resent a project which influenced me six years ago, and which never succeeded last. I am sometimes disposed to repent that I did not let Charles buy Vernon Castle when we were obliged to sell it, but it was a trying circumstance, especially as the sale took place exactly at the time of his marriage—and everybody ought to respect the delicacy of those feelings, which could not endure that my husband's dignity should be lessened by his younger brother's having possession of the family estate. Could matters have been so arranged as to prevent the necessity of our leaving the Castle, could we have lived with Charles and kept him single, I should have been very far from persuading my husband to dispose of it elsewhere; but Charles was then on the point of marrying Miss De Courcy, and the event has justified me. Here are children in abundance, and what benefit could have accrued to me from his purchasing Vernon? My having prevented it may perhaps have given his wife an unfavourable impression—but where there is a disposition to dislike a motive will never be wanting; and as to money-matters, it has not withheld him from being very useful to me. I really have a regard for him, he is so easily imposed upon!

The house is a good one, the furniture fashionable, and everything announces plenty and elegance. Charles is very rich I am sure; when a man has once got his name in a banking house he rolls in money. But they do not know what to do with their fortune, keep very little company, and never go out of town but on business. We shall be as stupid as possible. I mean to win my sister-in-law's heart through her children; I know all their names already, and am going to attach myself with the greatest sensibility to one in particular, a young Frederic, whom I take on my lap and sigh over for his dear uncle's sake.

Poor Manwaring! I need not tell you how much I miss him, how perpetually he is in my thoughts. I found a dismal letter from him on my arrival here, full of complaints of his wife and sister, and lamentations on the cruelty of his fate. I passed off the letter as his wife's, to the Vernons, and when I write to him, it must be under cover to you.

Yours ever,

S. VERNON

VI. MRS. VERNON TO MR. DE COURCY

CHURCHILL

Well, my dear Reginald, I have seen this dangerous creature, and must give you some description of her, though I hope you will soon be able to form your own judgment. She is really excessively pretty. However you may choose to question the allurements of a lady no longer young, I must, for my own part, declare that I have seldom seen so lovely a woman as Lady Susan. She is delicately fair, with fine grey eyes and dark eyelashes; and from her appearance one would not suppose her more than five or twenty, though she must in fact be ten years older. I was certainly not disposed to admire her, though always hearing she was beautiful; but I cannot help feeling that she possesses an uncommon union of symmetry, brilliancy, and grace. Her address to me was so gentle, frank, and even affectionate, that I had not known how much she has always disliked me for marrying Mr. Vernon, and that we had never met before, I should have imagined her an attached friend. One is apt, I believe, to connect assurance of manner with coquetry, and to expect that an impudent address will necessarily attend an impudent mind; at least I was myself prepared for an improper degree of confidence in Lady Susan, but her countenance is absolutely sweet, and her voice and manner winningly mild. I am sorry it is so for what is this but deceit? Unfortunately, one knows her too well. She is clever and agreeable, has a great knowledge of the world which makes conversation easy, and talks very well, with a happy command of language, which is too often used, I believe, to make black appear white. She has already almost persuaded me of her being warmly attached to her daughter, though I have so long been convinced of the contrary. She speaks of her with so much tenderness and anxiety, lamenting so bitterly the neglect of her education, which she represents however as wholly unavoidable, that I am forced to recollect how many successive springs her ladyship spent in town, while her daughter was left in Staffordshire to the care of servants or a governess very little better, to prevent my believing whatever she says.

If her manners have so great an influence on my resentful heart, you may guess how much more strongly they operate on Mr. Vernon's generous temper. I wish I could be as well satisfied as he is that it was really her choice to leave Langford for Churchill; and if she had not stayed three months there before she discovered that her friends' manner of living did not suit her situation or feelings, I might have believed that concern for the loss of such a husband as Mr. Vernon, to whom her own behaviour was far from unexceptionable, might for a time make her wish for retirement. But I cannot forget the length of her visit to the Manwarings, and when I reflect on the different mode of life which she led with them, from that to which she must now submit, I can only suppose that the wish of establishing her reputation by following, though late, the path of propriety, occasioned her removal from a family where she must in reality have been particularly happy. Your friend Mr. Smith's story, however, cannot be quite true, as she corresponds regularly with Mrs. Manwaring; at any rate it must be exaggerated; It is scarcely possible that two men should be so grossly deceived by her at once.

Yours, etc.,

CATHERINE VERNON

VII. LADY SUSAN VERNON TO MRS. JOHNSON

My dear Alicia,

You are very good in taking notice of Frederica, and I am grateful for it as a mark of your friendship; but as I cannot have a doubt of the warmth of that friendship, I am far from exacting heavy a sacrifice. She is a stupid girl, and has nothing to recommend her. I would not, therefore, on any account, have you encumber one moment of your precious time by sending her to Edward S—, especially as every visit is so many hours deducted from the grand affair of education, which I really wish to be attended to, while she remains at Miss Summers's. I want her to play and sing with some portion of taste, and a good deal of assurance, as she has *my* hand and arm, and a tolerable voice. *I* was so much indulged in my infant years that I was never obliged to attend to anything, and consequently am without those accomplishments which are necessary to finish a pretty woman. Not that I am an advocate for the prevailing fashion of acquiring a perfect knowledge in all the languages, arts, and sciences. It is throwing time away to be mistress of French, Italian, German; music, singing, and drawing, etc., will gain a woman some applause, but will not add one lover to her list. Grace and manner, after all, are of the greatest importance. I do not mean, therefore, that Frederica's acquirements should be more than superficial, and I flatter myself that she will not remain long enough at school to understand anything thoroughly. I hope to see her the wife of Sir James within twelvemonth. You know on what I ground my hope, and it is certainly a good foundation, for school must be very humiliating to a girl of Frederica's age; and by-the-by, you had better not invite her any more on that account, as I wish her to find her situation as unpleasant as possible. I am sure of Sir James at any time, and could make him renew his application by a line. I shall trouble you meanwhile to prevent his forming any other attachment when he comes to town; ask him to your house occasionally, and talk to him about Frederica that he may not forget her.

Upon the whole I commend my own conduct in this affair extremely, and regard it as a very happy mixture of circumspection and tenderness. Some mothers would have insisted on their daughter's accepting so great an offer on the first overture, but I could not answer it to myself to force Frederica into a marriage from which her heart revolted; and instead of adopting so harsh a measure merely propose to make it her own choice by rendering her thoroughly uncomfortable till she does accept of him. But enough of this tiresome girl.

You may well wonder how I contrive to pass my time here—and for the first week, it was insufferably dull. Now, however, we begin to mend; our party is enlarged by Mrs. Vernon's brother, a handsome young man, who promises me some amusement. There is something about him which rather interests me, a sort of sauciness, of familiarity which I shall teach him to correct. He is lively and seems clever, and when I have inspired him with greater respect for me than his sister's kind officiousness have implanted, he may be an agreeable flirt. There is exquisite pleasure in subduing an insolent spirit, in making a person predetermined to dislike acknowledge one's superiority. I have disconcerted him already by my calm reserve; and it shall be my endeavour to humble the pride of these self-important De Courcys still lower, to convince Mrs. Vernon that her sisterly cautions have been bestowed in vain, and to persuade Reginald that she has scandalously belied me. This project will serve at least to amuse me, and prevent my feeling so acutely this dreadful separation from you and a man whom I love. Adieu.

Yours ever,

VIII. MRS. VERNON TO LADY DE COURCY

My dear Mother,

You must not expect Reginald back again for some time. He desires me to tell you that the present open weather induces him to accept Mr. Vernon's invitation to prolong his stay in Sussex that they may have some hunting together. He means to send for his horses immediately, and it is impossible to say when you may see him in Kent. I will not disguise my sentiments on this change from you, my dear Madam, though I think you had better not communicate them to my father, whose excessive anxiety about Reginald would subject him to an alarm which might seriously affect his health and spirits. Lady Susan has certainly contrived in the space of a fortnight to make my brother like her. In short, I am persuaded that his continuing here beyond the time originally fixed for his return is occasioned as much by a degree of fascination towards her, as by the wish of hunting with Mr. Vernon, and of course I cannot receive that pleasure from the length of his visit which my brother's company would otherwise give me. I am indeed provoked at the artifice of this unprincipled woman. What stronger proof of her dangerous abilities can be given than this perversion of Reginald's judgment, which when he entered the house was so decidedly against her? In his last letter he actually gave me some particulars of her behaviour at Langford, such as he received from a gentleman who knew her perfectly well, which if true must raise abhorrence against her, and which Reginald himself was entirely disposed to credit. His opinion of her, I am sure, was as low as of any woman in England, and when he first came it was evident that he considered her as one entitled neither to delicacy nor respect, and that he felt she would be delighted with the attentions of any man inclined to flirt with her.

Her behaviour, I confess, has been calculated to do away with such an idea; I have not detected the smallest impropriety in it—nothing of vanity, of pretension, of levity—and she is altogether so attractive, that I should not wonder at his being delighted with her, had he known nothing of her previous to this personal acquaintance; but against reason, against conviction, to be so well pleased with her as I am sure he is, does really astonish me. His admiration was at first very strong, but more than was natural; and I did not wonder at his being much struck by the gentleness and delicacy of her manners; but when he has mentioned her of late, it has been in terms of more extraordinary praise, and yesterday he actually said that he could not be surprised at any effect produced on the heart of man by such loveliness and such abilities; and when I lamented in reply the badness of his disposition, he observed that whatever might have been her errors, they were to be imputed to her neglected education and early marriage, and that she was altogether a wonderful woman.

This tendency to excuse her conduct or to forget it, in the warmth of admiration, vexes me; and if I did not know that Reginald is too much at home at Churchill to need an invitation for lengthening his visit, I should regret Mr. Vernon's giving him any.

Lady Susan's intentions are of course those of absolute coquetry, or a desire of universal admiration. I cannot for a moment imagine that she has anything more serious in view, but it mortifies me to see a young man of Reginald's sense duped by her at all.

I am, etc.,

IX. MRS. JOHNSON TO LADY SUSAN VERNON

EDWARD STREET

My dearest Friend,

I congratulate you on Mr. De Courcy's arrival, and advise you by all means to marry him; his father's estate is, we know, considerable, and I believe certainly entailed. Sir Reginald is very infirm and not likely to stand in your way long. I hear the young man well spoken of, and though no one can really deserve you, my dearest Susan, Mr. De Courcy may be worth having. Manwaring will storm of course, but you easily pacify him; besides, the most scrupulous point of honour could not require you to wait for HIS emancipation. I have seen Sir James—he came to town for a few days last week, and called several times in Edward Street. I talked to him about you and your daughter, and he is so far from having forgotten you, that I am sure he would marry either of you with pleasure. I gave him hopes of Frederica's relenting, and told him a great deal of her improvements. I scolded him for making love to Maria Manwaring; he protested that he had been only in joke, and we both laughed heartily at her disappointment, and, in short, were very agreeable. He is as silly as ever.

Yours faithfully,

ALICE

X. LADY SUSAN VERNON TO MRS. JOHNSON

CHURCH

I am much obliged to you, my dear friend, for your advice respecting Mr. De Courcy, which I know was given with the full conviction of its expediency, though I am not quite determined on following it. I cannot easily resolve on anything so serious as marriage, especially as I am not at present in want of money, and might perhaps, till the old gentleman's death, be very little benefited by the match. It is true that I am vain enough to believe it within my reach. I have made him sensible of my power, and can now enjoy the pleasure of triumphing over a mind prepared to dislike me, and prejudiced against all my past actions. His sister, too, is, I hope, convinced how little the ungenerous representations of anyone to the disadvantage of another will avail when opposed to the immediate influence of intellect and manner. I see plainly that she is uneasy at my progress in the good opinion of her brother, and conclude that nothing will be wanting on her part to counteract me; but having once made him doubt the justice of her opinion of me, I think I may defy her.

It has been delightful to me to watch his advances towards intimacy, especially to observe his altered manner in consequence of my repressing by the calm dignity of my deportment, his insolent approach to direct familiarity. My conduct has been equally guarded from the first, and I never behaved less like a coquette in the whole course of my life, though perhaps my desire of dominion was never more decided. I have subdued him entirely by sentiment and serious conversation, and make him, I may venture to say, *half* in love with me, without the semblance of the most commonplace flirtation. Mrs. Vernon's consciousness of deserving every sort of revenge that it can be in my power to inflict, for her ill-offices, could alone enable her to perceive that I am actuated by any design, in a behaviour so gentle and unpretending. Let her think and act as she chooses, however; I have never yet found that the advice of a sister could prevent a young man's being in love if he chose it. We are advancing now towards some kind of confidence, and in short are likely to be engaged in a kind of platonic friendship. On *my* side, you may be sure of its never being more, for if I were not already so much attached to another person as I can be to anyone, I should make a point of not bestowing my affection on a man who had dared to think so meanly of me.

Reginald has a good figure, and is not unworthy the praise you have heard given him, but is still greatly inferior to our friend at Langford. He is less polished, less insinuating than Manwaring, and comparatively deficient in the power of saying those delightful things which put one in good humour with oneself and all the world. He is quite agreeable enough, however, to afford me amusement, and make many of those hours pass very pleasantly which would be otherwise spent in endeavouring to overcome my sister-in-law's reserve, and listening to her husband's insipid talk.

Your account of Sir James is most satisfactory, and I mean to give Miss Frederica a hint of my intentions very soon.

Yours, etc.,

S. VERNON

XI. MRS. VERNON TO LADY DE COURCY

CHURCHILL

I really grow quite uneasy, my dearest mother, about Reginald, from witnessing the very rapid increase of Lady Susan's influence. They are now on terms of the most particular friendship, frequently engaged in long conversations together; and she has contrived by the most artful coquetry to subdue his judgment to her own purposes. It is impossible to see the intimacy between them, so very soon established, without some alarm, though I can hardly suppose that Lady Susan's views extend to marriage. I wish you could get Reginald home again, under any plausible pretence. He is not at all disposed to leave us, and I have given him as many hints of my father's precarious state of health, as common decency will allow me to do in my own house. Her power over him must now be boundless, as she has entirely effaced all his former ill-opinion, and persuaded him not merely to forget, but to justify her conduct. Mr. Smith's account of her proceedings at Langford, where he accused her of having made Mr. Manwaring and a young man engaged to Miss Manwaring, distractedly in love with her, which Reginald firmly believed when he came to Churchill, is now, he is persuaded, only a scandalous invention. He has told me so in a warmth of manner which spoke his regret at having ever believed the contrary himself.

How sincerely do I grieve that she ever entered this house! I always looked forward to her coming with uneasiness—but very far was it, from originating in anxiety for Reginald. I expected a most disagreeable companion for myself, but could not imagine that my brother would be in the smallest danger of being captivated by a woman with whose principles he was so well acquainted, and whose character he so heartily despised. If you can get him away it will be a good thing.

Yours, affectionately,

CATHERINE VERNON

XII. SIR REGINALD DE COURCY TO HIS SON

I know that young men in general do not admit of any enquiry even from their nearest relations, in affairs of the heart; but I hope, my dear Reginald, that you will be superior to such as allow nothing for a father's anxiety, and think themselves privileged to refuse him their confidence and slight his advice. You must be sensible that as an only son and the representative of an ancient family, your conduct in life is most interesting to your connections. In the very important concern of marriage, especially, there is everything at stake; your own happiness, that of your parents, and the credit of your name. I do not suppose that you would deliberately form an absolute engagement of that nature without acquainting your mother and myself, or at least without being convinced that we should approve of your choice; but I cannot help fearing that you may be drawn in, by the lady who has lately attached you, to a marriage, which the whole of your family, far and near, must highly reprobate.

Lady Susan's age is itself a material objection, but her want of character is one so much more serious, that the difference of even twelve years becomes in comparison of small account. Were you not blinded by a sort of fascination, it would be ridiculous in me to repeat the instances of great misconduct on her side, so very generally known. Her neglect of her husband, her encouragement of other men, her extravagance and dissipation were so gross and notorious, that no one could be ignorant of them at the time, nor can now have forgotten them. To our family, she has always been represented in softened colours by the benevolence of Mr. Charles Vernon; and yet in spite of his generous endeavours to excuse her, we know that she did, from the most selfish motives, take all possible pains to prevent his marrying with Catherine.

My years and increasing infirmities make me very desirous, my dear Reginald, of seeing you settled in the world. To the fortune of your wife, the goodness of my own, will make me indifferent, but her family and character must be equally unexceptionable. When your choice is so fixed as that no objection can be made to either, I can promise you a ready and cheerful consent; but it is my duty to oppose a match, which deep art only could render probable, and must in the end make wretched.

It is possible her behaviour may arise only from vanity, or a wish of gaining the admiration of a man whom she must imagine to be particularly prejudiced against her; but it is more likely that she should aim at something farther. She is poor, and may naturally seek an alliance which may be advantageous to herself. You know your own rights, and that it is out of my power to prevent you inheriting the family estate. My ability of distressing you during my life would be a species of revenge to which I could hardly stoop under any circumstances. I honestly tell you my sentiments and intentions. I do not wish to work on your fears, but on your sense and affection. It would destroy every comfort of my life to know that you were married to Lady Susan Vernon. It would be the death of the honest pride with which I have hitherto considered my son; I should blush to see him, to hear of him, to think of him.

I may perhaps do no good, but that of relieving my own mind, by this letter; but I felt it my duty to tell you that your partiality for Lady Susan is no secret to your friends, and to warn you against her. I should be glad to hear your reasons for disbelieving Mr. Smith's intelligence; you had no doubt of its authenticity a month ago.

If you can give me your assurance of having no design beyond enjoying the conversation of a clever woman for a short period, and of yielding admiration only to her beauty and abilities without being blinded by them to her faults, you will restore me to happiness; but if you cannot do this, explain

me at least what has occasioned so great an alteration in your opinion of her.

I am, etc.,

REGINALD DE COUR

XIII. LADY DE COURCY TO MRS. VERNON

PARKLAN

My dear Catherine,

Unluckily I was confined to my room when your last letter came, by a cold which affected my eyes so much as to prevent my reading it myself, so I could not refuse your father when he offered to read it to me, by which means he became acquainted, to my great vexation, with all your fears about your brother. I had intended to write to Reginald myself, as soon as my eyes would let me, to point out as well as I could the danger of an intimate acquaintance with so artful a woman as Lady Susan, to a young man of his age and high expectations. I meant, moreover, to have reminded him of our being quite alone now, and very much in need of him to keep up our spirits these long winter evenings. Whether it would have done any good can never be settled now, but I am excessively vexed that Reginald should know anything of a matter which we foresaw would make him so uneasy. He caught all your fears the moment he had read your letter, and I am sure has not had the business out of his head since; he wrote by the same post to Reginald, a long letter full of it all, and particularly asking for an explanation of what he may have heard from Lady Susan to contradict the late shocking report. His answer came this morning, which I shall enclose to you, as I think you will like to see it; I wish it was more satisfactory, but it seems written with such a determination to think well of Lady Susan, that his assurances as to marriage, etc., do not set my heart at ease. I say all I can, however, to satisfy your father, and he is certainly less uneasy since Reginald's letter. How provoking it is, my dear Catherine, that this unwelcome guest of yours should not only prevent our meeting this Christmas, but be the occasion of so much vexation and trouble. Kiss the dear children for me.

Your affectionate mother,

C. DE COURCY

XIV. MR. DE COURCY TO SIR REGINALD

My dear Sir,

I have this moment received your letter, which has given me more astonishment than I ever felt before. I am to thank my sister, I suppose, for having represented me in such a light as to injure me in your opinion, and give you all this alarm. I know not why she should choose to make herself and her family uneasy by apprehending an event, which no one but herself, I can affirm, would ever have thought possible. To impute such a design to Lady Susan would be taking from her every claim to the excellent understanding which her bitterest enemies have never denied her; and equally low must sit my pretensions to common sense, if I am suspected of matrimonial views in my behaviour to her. Our difference of age must be an insuperable objection, and I entreat you, my dear Sir, to quiet your mind and no longer harbour a suspicion which cannot be more injurious to your own peace than to our understandings.

I can have no view in remaining with Lady Susan than to enjoy for a short time (as you have yourself expressed it) the conversation of a woman of high mental powers. If Mrs. Vernon would allow something to my affection for herself and her husband in the length of my visit, she would do more justice to us all; but my sister is unhappily prejudiced beyond the hope of conviction against Lady Susan. From an attachment to her husband, which in itself does honour to both, she cannot forgive those endeavours at preventing their union, which have been attributed to selfishness in Lady Susan. But in this case, as well as in many others, the world has most grossly injured that lady, by supposing the worst, where the motives of her conduct have been doubtful.

Lady Susan had heard something so materially to the disadvantage of my sister as to persuade her that the happiness of Mr. Vernon, to whom she was always much attached, would be absolutely destroyed by the marriage. And this circumstance, while it explains the true motive of Lady Susan's conduct, and removes all the blame which has been so lavished on her, may also convince us how little the general report of anyone ought to be credited, since no character, however upright, can escape the malevolence of slander. If my sister, in the security of retirement, with as little opportunity and inclination to do evil, could not avoid censure, we must not rashly condemn those who, living in the world and surrounded with temptation, should be accused of errors which they are known to have the power of committing.

I blame myself severely for having so easily believed the scandalous tales invented by Charles Smith to the prejudice of Lady Susan, as I am now convinced how greatly they have traduced her. As to Mrs. Manwaring's jealousy, it was totally his own invention; and his account of her attaching Miss Manwaring's lover was scarcely better founded. Sir James Martin had been drawn in by that young lady to pay her some attention, and as he is a man of fortune, it was easy to see that HER view extended to marriage. It is well known that Miss Manwaring is absolutely on the catch for a husband and no one therefore can pity her for losing, by the superior attractions of another woman, the chance of being able to make a worthy man completely miserable. Lady Susan was far from intending such a conquest, and in finding how warmly Miss Manwaring resented her lover's defection, determined, in spite of Mr. and Mrs. Manwaring's most urgent entreaties, to leave the family. I have reason to imagine that she did receive serious proposals from Sir James, but her removing from Langford immediately on the discovery of his attachment must acquit her on that article with every mind of common candour. You will, I am sure, my dear Sir, feel the truth of this reasoning, and will hereby

learn to do justice to the character of a very injured woman.

I know that Lady Susan in coming to Churchill was governed only by the most honourable and amiable intentions. Her prudence and economy are exemplary, her regard for Mr. Vernon equal even to HIS deserts, and her wish of obtaining my sister's good opinion merits a better return than it has received. As a mother she is unexceptionable. Her solid affection for her child is shown by placing her in hands where her education will be properly attended to; but because she has not the blind and weak partiality of most mothers, she is accused of wanting maternal tenderness. Every person of sense however, will know how to value and commend her well-directed affection, and will join me in wishing that Frederica Vernon may prove more worthy than she has yet done of her mother's tender care.

I have now, my dear Sir, written my real sentiments of Lady Susan; you will know from this letter how highly I admire her abilities, and esteem her character; but if you are not equally convinced by my full and solemn assurance that your fears have been most idly created, you will deeply mortify and distress me.

I am, etc.,

R. D^E COUR

XV. MRS. VERNON TO LADY DE COURCY

CHURCHILL

My dear Mother,

I return you Reginald's letter, and rejoice with all my heart that my father is made easy by it. Tell him so, with my congratulations; but between ourselves, I must own it has only convinced ME of my brother's having no PRESENT intention of marrying Lady Susan—not that he is in no danger of doing so three months hence. He gives a very plausible account of her behaviour at Langford; I wish it may be true, but his intelligence must come from herself, and I am less disposed to believe it than lament the degree of intimacy subsisting between them, implied by the discussion of such a subject.

I am sorry to have incurred his displeasure, but can expect nothing better while he is so very eager in Lady Susan's justification. He is very severe against me indeed, and yet I hope I have not been too hasty in my judgment of her. Poor woman! though I have reasons enough for my dislike, I cannot help pitying her at present, as she is in real distress, and with too much cause. She had this morning a letter from the lady with whom she has placed her daughter, to request that Miss Vernon might be immediately removed, as she had been detected in an attempt to run away. Why, or whither she intended to go, does not appear; but as her situation seems to have been unexceptionable, it is a sad thing and of course highly distressing to Lady Susan.

Frederica must be as much as sixteen, and ought to know better; but from what her mother insinuates I am afraid she is a perverse girl. She has been sadly neglected, however, and her mother ought to remember it.

Mr. Vernon set off for town as soon as she had determined what should be done. He is, if possible, to prevail on Miss Summers to let Frederica continue with her, and if he cannot succeed, to bring her to Churchill for the present, till some other situation can be found for her. Her ladyship is comforting herself meanwhile by strolling along the shrubbery with Reginald, calling forth all his tender feelings. I suppose, on this distressing occasion. She has been talking a great deal about it to me. She talks very well; I am afraid of being ungenerous, or I should say she talks TOO well to feel so very deeply. But I will not look for faults. She may be Reginald's wife. Heaven forbid it!—but why should I be quicker-sighted than anybody else? Mr. Vernon declares that he never saw deeper distress than hers on the receipt of the letter—and is his judgment inferior to mine?

She was very unwilling that Frederica should be allowed to come to Churchill, and justly enough, but it seems a sort of reward to behaviour deserving very differently. But it was impossible to take her anywhere else, and she is not to remain here long.

"It will be absolutely necessary," said she, "as you, my dear sister, must be sensible, to treat my daughter with some severity while she is here; a most painful necessity, but I will ENDEAVOUR to submit to it. I am afraid I have been too often indulgent, but my poor Frederica's temper could never bear opposition well. You must support and encourage me; you must urge the necessity of reproof, or you see me too lenient."

All this sounds very reasonable. Reginald is so incensed against the poor silly girl! Surely it is not to Lady Susan's credit that he should be so bitter against her daughter; his idea of her must be drawn from the mother's description.

Well, whatever may be his fate, we have the comfort of knowing that we have done our utmost to save him. We must commit the event to a Higher Power.

Yours ever, etc.,

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