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### **The Works Of Mr. George Lillo; With Some Account Of His Life**

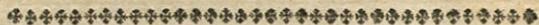
Containing, The Fatal Curiosity. A Tragedy. Marina. A Tragedy. Elmerick.  
A Tragedy. Britannia And Batavia. A Masque. And Arden Of Feversham. A  
Tragedy

**Lillo, George**

**London, 1775**

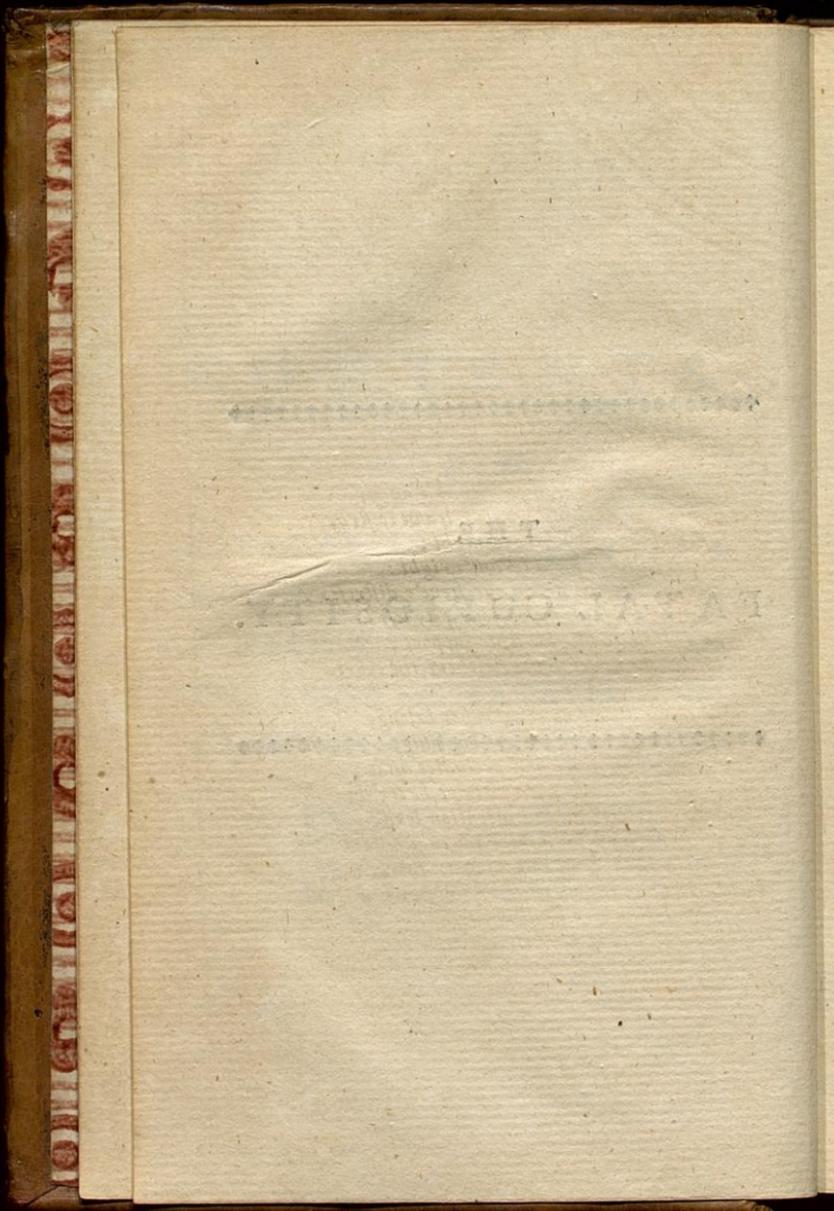
The Fatal Curiosity.

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THE  
FATAL CURIOSITY.





# P R O L O G U E.

Written by HENRY FIELDING, Esq.

Spoken by Mr. ROBERTS.

*THE* Tragic Muse has long forgot to please  
With Shakespeare's nature, or with Fletcher's ease:  
No passion mov'd, thro' five long acts you sit,  
Charm'd with the poet's language, or his wit.  
Fine things are said, no matter whence they fall;  
Each single character might speak them all.

But from this modern fashionable way,  
To-night, our author begs your leave to stray.  
No fustian hero rages here to-night;  
No armies fall, to fix a tyrant's right:  
From lower life we draw our scene's distress:  
— Let not your equals move your pity less!  
Virtue distress'd in humble state support;  
Nor think she never lives without the court.

Tho' to our scenes no royal robes belong,  
And tho' our little stage as yet be young,  
Throw both your scorn and prejudice aside;  
Let us with favour, not contempt be try'd;  
Tho' the first acts a kind attention lend,  
The growing scene shall force you to attend;  
Shall catch the eyes of every tender fair,  
And make them charm their lovers with a tear.  
The lover too by pity shall impart  
His tender passion to his fair one's heart:  
The breast which others anguish cannot move,  
Was ne'er the seat of friendship, or of love.

VOL. II.

B

DRA-

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

M E N.

Old Wilmot.	Mr. <i>Roberts.</i>
Young Wilmot.	Mr. <i>Davis.</i>
Eustace.	Mr. <i>Wooburn.</i>
Randal.	Mr. <i>Blakes.</i>

W O M E N.

Agnes, Wife to old Wilmot.	Mrs. <i>Charke.</i>
Charlot.	Miss <i>Jones.</i>
Maria.	Miss <i>Karver.</i>

*Visitors Men and Women.*

SCENE, PENRYN in Cornwall.



# FATAL CURIOSITY.

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## ACT I. SCENE I.

*A Room in WILMOT's House.*

*OLD WILMOT alone.*

**T**HE day is far advanc'd; the chearful sun  
Pursues with vigour his repeated course;  
No labour lessening nor no time decaying  
His strength, or splendor: evermore the same,  
From age to age his influence sustains  
Dependent worlds, bestows both life and motion  
On the dull mass that forms their dusky orbs,  
Cheers them with heat, and gilds them with his  
brightness.

Yet man, of jarring elements compos'd,  
Whoposts from change to change, from the first hour  
Of his frail being till his dissolution,  
Enjoys the sad prerogative above him,  
To think, and to be wretched — What is life,  
To him that's born to die! or what that wisdom  
Whose perfection ends in knowing we know no-  
thing!

Meer contradiction all! A tragic farce,  
Tedious tho' short, and without art elab'rate,  
Ridiculously sad—

*Enter RANDAL.*

Where hast been, Randal?

R A N D A L.

Not out of Penryn, sir; but to the strand,  
To hear what news from Falmouth since the storm  
Of wind last night.

B 2

OLD



## FATAL CURIOSITY.

OLD WILMOT.

It was a dreadful one.

RANDAL.

Some found it so. A noble ship from India,  
Ent'ring into the harbour, run upon a rock,  
And there was lost.

OLD WILMOT.

What came of those on board her?

RANDAL.

Some few are sav'd, but much the greater part,  
'Tis thought, are perish'd.

OLD WILMOT.

They are past the fear  
Of future tempests, or a wreck on shore;  
Those who escap'd are still expos'd to both.

RANDAL.

But I've heard news, much stranger than this ship-  
wreck

Here in Cornwall. The brave Sir Walter Raleigh,  
Being arriv'd at Plymouth from Guiana,  
A most unhappy voyage, has been betray'd  
By base Sir Lewis Stukely, his own kinsman,  
And seiz'd on by an order from the court;  
And 'tis reported, he must lose his head,  
To satisfy the Spaniards.

OLD WILMOT.

Not unlikely;

His martial genius does not suit the times.  
There's now no insolence that Spain can offer,  
But to the shame of this pacifick reign,  
Poor England must submit to—Gallant man!  
Posterity perhaps may do thee justice,  
And praise thy courage, learning and integrity,

When

FATAL CURIOSITY. 5

When thou'rt past hearing: thy successful enemies,  
 Much sooner paid, have their reward in hand,  
 And know for what they labour'd.—Such events  
 Must, questionless, excite all thinking men,  
 To love and practise virtue!

R A N D A L.

Nay, 'tis certain,  
 That virtue ne'er appears so like itself,  
 So truly bright and great, as when oppress'd.

O L D W I L M O T.

I understand no riddles.—Where's your mistress?

R A N D A L.

I saw her pass the high-street t'wards the minister.

O L D W I L M O T.

She's gone to visit Charlot—She doth well.  
 In the soft bosom of that gentle maid,  
 There dwells more goodness than the rigid race  
 Of moral pedants e'er believ'd, or taught.  
 With what amazing constancy and truth,  
 Doth she sustain the absence of our son,  
 Whom more than life she loves! how shun for him,  
 Whom we shall ne'er see more, the rich and great!  
 Who own her charms more than supply the want  
 Of shining heaps, and sigh to make her happy.  
 Since our misfortunes, we have found no friend,  
 None who regarded our distress, but her;  
 And she, by what I have observ'd of late,  
 Is tired, or exhausted—curst condition!  
 To live a burden to one only friend,  
 And blast her youth with our contagious woe!  
 Who that had reason, soul, or sense, would bear it  
 A moment longer!—then this honest wretch!—  
 I must dismiss him.—Why should I detain  
 A grateful, gen'rous youth to perish with me?

B.3

His



6 FATAL CURIOSITY.

His service may procure him bread elsewhere,  
Tho' I have none to give him. — Prithee, Randal,  
How long hast thou been with me?

R A N D A L.

Fifteen years.

I was a very child when first you took me,  
To wait upon your son, my dear young master !  
I oft have wish'd, I'd gone to India with him ;  
Tho' you, desponding, give him o'er for lost.

[OLD WILMOT *wipes his eyes.*

I am to blame—this talk revives your sorrow  
For his absence.

O L D W I L M O T.

How can that be reviv'd,  
Which never died?

R A N D A L.

The whole of my intent  
Was to confess your bounty, that supplied  
The loss of both my parents : I was long  
The object of your charitable care.

O L D W I L M O T.

No more of that : thou'st serv'd me longer since  
Without reward : so that account is balanc'd,  
Or rather I'm thy debtor—I remember,  
When poverty began to show her face  
Within these walls, and all my other servants,  
Like pamp'rd vermin from a falling house,  
Retreated with the plunder they had gain'd,  
And left me, too indulgent and remiss  
For such ungrateful wretches, to be crush'd  
Beneath the ruin they had help'd to make,  
That you, more good than wife, refus'd to leave me.

R A N D A L,

Nay, I beseech you, sir! —

O L D



FATAL CURIOSITY. 7

OLD WILMOT.

With my distress,  
In perfect contradiction to the world,  
Thy love, respect and diligence increas'd;  
Now all the recompence within my power,  
Is to discharge thee, Randal, from my hard,  
Unprofitable service.

R A N D A L.

Heaven forbid!  
Shall I forsake you in your worst necessity?—  
Believe me, sir, my honest soul abhors  
The barb'rous thought.

OLD WILMOT.

What! canst thou feed on air?  
I have not left wherewith to purchase food  
For one meal more.

R A N D A L.

Rather than leave you thus,  
I'll beg my bread, and live on others bounty  
While I serve you.

OLD WILMOT.

Down, down my swelling heart,  
Or burst in silence: 'tis thy cruel fate  
Insults thee by his kindness—he is innocent  
Of all the pain it gives thee—Go thy ways—  
I will no more suppress thy youthful hopes  
Of rising in the world.

R A N D A L.

'Tis true, I'm young,  
And never try'd my fortune, or my genius:  
Which may perhaps find out some happy means,  
As yet unthought of, to supply your wants,



8 FATAL CURIOSITY.

OLD WILMOT.

Thou tortur'st me - I hate all obligations  
Which I can ne'er return—And who art thou,  
That I shou'd stoop to take 'em from thy hand!  
Care for thyself, but take no thought for me;  
I will not want thee—trouble me no more.

RANDAL.

Be not offended, sir, and I will go.  
I ne'er repin'd at your commands before;  
But, heaven's my witness, I obey you now  
With strong reluctance, and a heavy heart.  
Farewell, my worthy master! [Going.

OLD WILMOT.

Farewel—stay—

As thou art yet a stranger to the world,  
Of which, alas! I've had too much experience,  
I shou'd, methinks, before we part, bestow  
A little counsel on thee—Dry thy eyes—  
If thou weep'st thus, I shall proceed no farther.  
Dost thou aspire to greatness, or to wealth,  
Quit books and the unprofitable search  
Of wisdom there, and study human kind:  
No science will avail thee without that;  
But that obtain'd, thou need'st not any other.  
This will instruct thee to conceal thy views,  
And wear the face of probity and honour,  
Till thou hast gain'd thy end; which must be ever  
Thy own advantage, at that man's expence  
Who shall be weak enough to think thee honest.

RANDAL.

You mock me, sure

OLD WILMOT.

I never was more serious.

RAN-



FATAL CURIOSITY. 9

R A N D A L.

Why should you counsel what you scorn'd to practice?

O L D W I L M O T.

Because that foolish scorn has been my ruin.  
I've been an idiot, but would have thee wiser,  
And treat mankind, as they would treat thee, Randal;  
As they deserve, and I've been treated by 'em.  
Thou'st seen by me, and those who now despise me,  
How men of fortune fall, and beggars rise;  
Shun my example; treasure up my precepts;  
The world's before thee — be a knave, and prosper.  
What art thou dumb? [After a long pause.]

R A N D A L.

Amazement ties my tongue.  
Where are your former principles?

O L D W I L M O T.

No matter;  
Suppose I have renounc'd 'em: I have passions,  
And love thee still; therefore would have thee think,  
The world is all a scene of deep deceit,  
And he who deals with mankind on the square,  
Is his own bubble, and undoes himself. [Exit.]

R A N D A L.

Is this the man I thought so wise and just?  
What teach, and counsel me to be a villain!  
Sure grief has made him frantick, or some fiend  
Assum'd his shape — I shall suspect my senses.  
High-minded he was ever, and improvident;  
But pitiful and generous to a fault:  
Pleasure he lov'd, but honour was his idol.  
O fatal change! O horrid transformation!  
So a majestic temple sunk to ruin,  
Becomes the loathsome shelter and abode



## 10 FATAL CURIOSITY.

Of lurking serpents, toads, and beasts of prey:  
 And scaly dragons hiss, and lions roar,  
 Where wisdom taught, and musick charm'd before.  
 [Exit.

## SCENE II.

*A Parlour in CHARLOT'S House.*

CHARLOT AND MARIA.

CHARLOT.

What terror and amazement must they feel  
 Who die by shipwreck!

MARIA.

'Tis a dreadful thought!

CHARLOT.

Ay, is it not, Maria! to descend,  
 Living and conscious, to that wat'ry tomb?  
 Alas! had we no sorrows of our own,  
 The frequent instances of others woe  
 Must give a gen'rous mind a world of pain.  
 But you forget you promis'd me to sing.  
 Tho' cheerfulness and I have long been strangers,  
 Harmonious sounds are still delightful to me.  
 There is in melody a secret charm  
 That flatters, while it adds to my disquiet,  
 And makes the deepest sadness the most pleasing.  
 There's sure no passion in the human soul,  
 But finds its food in musick—I wou'd hear  
 The song compos'd by that unhappy maid,  
 Whose faithful lover 'scap'd a thousand perils  
 From rocks, and sands, and the devouring deep;  
 And after all, being arriv'd at home,  
 Passing a narrow brook, was drowned there,  
 And perish'd in her sight.

SONG.



## SONG.

Mar, *Cease, cease, heart-easing tears ;  
Adieu, you flatt'ring fears,  
Which seven long tedious years  
Taught me to bear.*

*Tears are for lighter woes ;  
Fear no such danger knows,  
As fate remorseless shows,  
Endless despair.*

*Dear cause of all my pain,  
On the wide stormy main,  
Thou wast preserv'd in vain,  
Tho' still ador'd ;*

*Had'st thou died there unseen  
My blasted eyes had been  
Sav'd from the horrid'st scene  
Maid e'er deplor'd.*

[Charlot finds a letter.

## CHARLOT.

What's this ? — a letter supercrib'd to me !  
None could convey it here but you, Maria.  
Ungen'rous, cruel maid ! to use me thus !  
To join with flatt'ring men to break my peace,  
And persecute me to the last retreat !

## MARIA.

Why should it break your peace, to hear the sighs  
Of honourable love, and know th' effects  
Of your resistless charms ! — This letter is —

## CHARLOT. ON

No matter whence — return it back unopen'd :  
I have no love, no charms but for my Wilmot,  
Nor would have any,

## MARIA.

M A R I A.

Strange infatuation!  
Why should you waste the flower of your days  
In fruitless expectation—Wilmot's dead;  
Or living, dead to you.

C H A R L O T.

I'll not despair.  
Patience shall cherish hope, nor wrong his honour  
By unjust suspicion. I know his truth,  
And will preserve my own. But to prevent  
All future, vain, officious importunity,  
Know, thou incessant foe of my repose,  
Whether he sleeps secure from mortal cares,  
In the deep bosom of the boisterous main,  
Or tost with tempests, still endures its rage;  
Whether his weary pilgrimage by land  
Has found an end, and he now rests in peace  
In earth's cold womb, or wanders o'er her face;  
Be it my lot to waste, in pining grief,  
The remnant of my days for his known loss,  
Or live, as now, uncertain and in doubt.  
No second choice shall violate my vows:  
High heaven, which heard them, and abhors the per-  
jur'd,  
Can witness, they were made without reserve;  
Never to be retracted, ne'er dissolv'd  
By accidents or absence, time or death.

M A R I A.

I know, and long have known, my honest zeal  
To serve you gives offence — but be offended—  
This is **no** time for flattery—did your vows  
Oblige you to support his gloomy, proud,  
Impatient parents, to your utter ruin —  
You well may weep to think on what you've done.

C H A R L O T.

CHARLOT.

I weep to think that I can do no more  
For their support - what will become of 'em!—  
The hoary, helpless, miserable pair!

MARIA.

Then all these tears this sorrow is for them.

CHARLOT.

Taught by afflictions, I have learn'd to bear  
Much greater ills than poverty with patience.  
When luxury and ostentation's banish'd,  
The calls of nature are but few; and those  
These hands, not us'd to labour, may supply.  
But when I think on what my friends must suffer,  
My spirits fail, and I'm o'erwhelm'd with grief.

MARIA.

What I wou'd blame, you force me to admire,  
And mourn for you, as you lament for them.  
Your patience, constancy, and resignation  
Merit a better fate.

CHARLOT.

So pride would tell me,  
And vain self-love, but I believe them not:  
And if by wanting pleasure I have gain'd  
Humility, I'm richer for my loss.

MARIA.

You have the heavenly art, still to improve  
Your mind by all events—But here comes one,  
Whose pride seems to increase with her misfortunes.

*Enter AGNES.*

Her faded dress unfashionably fine  
As ill conceals her poverty, as that  
Strain'd complaisance her haughty, swelling heart.  
Tho' perishing with want, so far from asking,

She



14 FATAL CURIOSITY.

She ne'er receives a favour uncompell'd,  
And while she ruins, scorns to be oblig'd:  
She wants me gone, and I abhor her fight.

[Exit MARIA.]

CHARLOT.

This visit's kind.

AGNES.

Few else would think it so:  
Those who would once have thought themselves much  
honour'd  
By the least favour, tho' 'twere but a look,  
I could have shewn them, now refuse to see me.  
'Tis misery enough to be reduc'd  
To the low level of the common herd,  
Who, born to begg'ry, envy all above them;  
But 'tis the curse of curses, to endure  
The insolent contempt of those we scorn.

CHARLOT.

By scorning, we provoke them to contempt;  
And thus offend, and suffer in our turns:  
We must have patience.

AGNES.

No, I scorn them yet.  
But there's no end of suff'ring: who can say  
Their sorrows are compleat? my wretched husband,  
Tir'd with our woes, and hopeless of relief,  
Grows sick of life.

CHARLOT.

May gracious heaven support him

AGNES.

And, urg'd by indignation and despair,  
Would plunge into eternity at once,  
By foul self-muder: his fix'd love for me,

Whom

Whom he would fain persuade to share his fate,  
And take the same, uncertain, dreadful course,  
Alone withholds his hand.

CHARLOT.

And may it ever!

AGNES.

I've known with him the two extremes of life,  
The highest happiness, and deepest woe,  
With all the sharp and bitter aggravations  
Of such a vast transition—such a fall  
In the decline of life!—I have as quick,  
As exquisite a sense of pain as he,  
And wou'd do any thing, but die, to end it;  
But there my courage fails—death is the worst  
That fate can bring, and cuts off ev'ry hope.

CHARLOT.

We must not chuse, but strive to bear our lot  
Without reproach, or guilt: but by one act  
Of desperation, we may overthrow  
The merit we've been raising all our days;  
And lose our whole reward—and now, methinks,  
Now more than ever, we have cause to fear,  
And be upon our guard. The hand of heaven  
Spreads clouds on clouds o'er our benighted heads,  
And wrapt in darkness, doubles our distress.  
I had, the night last past, repeated twice,  
A strange and awful dream: I would not yield  
To fearful superstition, nor despise  
The admonition of a friendly power  
That wish'd my good.

AGNES.

I've certain plagues enough,  
Without the help of dreams, to make me wretched.

CHAR-



## CHARLOT.

I wou'd not stake my happiness or duty  
 On their uncertain credit, nor on ought  
 But reason, and the known decrees of heaven.  
 Yet dreams have sometimes shewn events to come,  
 And may excite to vigilance and care,  
 In some important hour, when all our weakness  
 Shall be attack'd, and all our strength be needful,  
 To shun the gulph that gapes for our destruction,  
 And fly from guilt, and everlasting ruin.  
 My vision may be such, and sent to warn us,  
 Now we are try'd by multiply'd afflictions,  
 To mark each motion of our swelling hearts,  
 And not attempt to extricate ourselves,  
 And seek deliverance by forbidden ways:  
 But keep our hopes and innocence entire,  
 Till we're dismiss'd to join the happy dead  
 In that blest world, where transitory pain  
 And frail imperfect virtue is rewarded  
 With endless pleasure and consummate joy;  
 Or heaven relieves us here.

## AGNES.

Well, pray proceed;  
 You've rais'd my curiosity at least.

## CHARLOT.

Methought I sat, in a dark winter's night,  
 My garments thin, my head and bosom bare,  
 On the wide summit of a barren mountain;  
 Defenceless and expos'd, in that high region,  
 To all the cruel rigours of the season.  
 The sharp bleak winds pierc'd thro' my shiv'ring  
 frame,  
 And storms of hail, and sleet, and driving rains  
 Beat with impetuous fury on my head,

Drench'd

FATAL CURIOSITY. 17

Drench'd my chill'd limbs, and pour'd a deluge  
round me.

On one hand, ever gentle Patience sat,  
On whose calm bosom I declin'd my head;  
And on the other, silent Contemplation.  
At length, to my unclos'd and watchful eyes,  
That long had roll'd in darkness, and oft rais'd  
Their chearless orbs towards the starless sky,  
And sought for light in vain, the dawn appear'd;  
And I beheld a man, an utter stranger,  
But of a graceful and exalted mien,  
Who press'd with eager transport to embrace me.  
—I shunn'd his arms—but at some words he spoke,  
Which I have now forgot, I turn'd again,  
But he was gone—And oh! transporting sight!  
Your son, my dearest Wilmot! fill'd his place.

AGNES.

If I regarded dreams, I should expect  
Some fair event from your's: I have heard nothing  
That should alarm you yet.

CHARLOT.

But what's to come,  
Tho' more obscure, is terrible indeed.  
Methought we parted soon, and when I sought him,  
You and his father—Yes, you both were there—  
Strove to conceal him from me: I pursued  
You with my cries, and call'd on heaven and earth  
To judge my wrongs, and force you to reveal  
Where you had hid my love, my life, my Wilmot!—

AGNES.

Unless you mean t' affront me, spare the rest.  
'Tis just as likely Wilmot shou'd return,  
As we become your foes.

CHARLOT.

Far be such rudeness  
From Charlot's thoughts: but when I heard you name  
Self-murder, it reviv'd the frightful image  
Of such a dreadful scene.

AGNES.

You will persist! —

CHARLOT.

Excuse me; I have done. Being a dream,  
I thought, indeed, it cou'd not give offence.

AGNES.

Not when the matter of it is offensive! —  
You cou'd not think so, had you thought at all;  
But I take nothing ill from thee — adieu;  
I've tarried longer than I first intended,  
And my poor husband mourns the while alone.

[Exit AGNES.]

CHARLOT.

She's gone abruptly, and I fear displeas'd.  
The least appearance of advice or caution  
Sets her impatient temper in a flame.  
When grief, that well might humble, swells our  
pride,  
And pride increasing, aggravates our grief,  
The tempest must prevail till we are lost.

When heaven, incens'd, proclaims unequal war  
With guilty earth, and sends its shafts from far,  
No bolt descends to strike, no flame to burn  
The humble shrubs that in low valleys mourn;  
While mountain pines, whose lofty heads aspire  
To fan the storm, and wave in fields of fire,  
And stubborn oaks that yield not to its force,  
Are burnt, o'erthrown, or shiver'd in its course.

## SCENE III.

*The Town and Port of Penryn.**Young WILMOT and EUSTACE in India habits.*

YOUNG WILMOT.

Welcome, my friend! to Penryn: here we're safe.

EUSTACE.

Then we're deliver'd twice; first from the sea,  
 And then from savage men, who, more remorseless,  
 Prey on shipwreck'd wretches, and spoil and murder  
 those

Whom fatal tempests and devouring waves,  
 In all their fury, spar'd.

YOUNG WILMOT.

It is a scandal,

Tho' malice must acquit the better sort,  
 The rude unpolisht people here in Cornwall  
 Have long lain under, and with too much justice:  
 Cou'd our superiors find some happy means  
 To mend it, they would gain immortal honour,  
 For 'tis an evil grown almost inveterate,  
 And asks a bold and skillful hand to cure.

EUSTACE.

Your treasure's safe, I hope.

YOUNG WILMOT.

'Tis here, thank heaven!

Being in jewels, when I saw our danger,  
 I hid it in my bosom.

EUSTACE.

I observ'd you,

And wonder'd how you cou'd command your  
 thoughts,

In such a time of terror and confusion.

C 2

YOUNG

## YOUNG WILMOT.

My thoughts were then at home—O England!  
England!

Thou seat of plenty, liberty and health,  
With transport I behold thy verdant fields,  
Thy lofty mountains rich with useful ore,  
Thy numerous herds, thy flocks, and winding streams:  
After a long and tedious absence, Eustace!  
With what delight we breath our native air,  
And tread the genial soil that bore us first.  
'Tis said, the world is every wise man's country;  
Yet after having view'd its various nations,  
I'm weak enough still to prefer my own  
To all I've seen beside—You smile, my friend,  
And think, perhaps, 'tis instinct more than reason:  
Why be it so. Instinct preceded reason  
In the wisest of us all, and may sometimes  
Be much the better guide. But be it either;  
I must confess, that even death itself  
Appear'd to me with twice its native horrors,  
When apprehended in a foreign land.  
Death is, no doubt, in ev'ry place the same;  
Yet observation must convince us, most men,  
Who have it in their power, chuse to expire  
Where they first drew their breath.

## EUSTACE.

Believe me, Wilmot,  
Your grave reflections were not what I smil'd at;  
I own their truth. That we're return'd to England  
Affords me all the pleasure you can feel  
Merely on that account: yet I must think  
A warmer passion gives you all this transport.  
You have not wander'd, anxious and impatient,  
From clime to clime, and compass'd sea and land  
To purchase wealth, only to spend your days

In

In idle pomp, and luxury at home :  
 I know thee better ; thou art brave and wise,  
 And must have nobler aims.

YOUNG WILMOT.

O Eustace! Eustace!

Thou knowest, for I've confess'd to thee, I love;  
 But having never seen the charming maid,  
 Thou can'st not know the fierceness of my flame.  
 My hopes and fears, like the tempestuous seas  
 That we have pass'd, now mount me to the skies;  
 Now hurl me down from that stupendous height,  
 And drive me to the center. Did you know  
 How much depends on this important hour,  
 You wou'd not be surpriz'd to see me thus.  
 The sinking fortune of our ancient house,  
 Which time and various accidents had wasted,  
 Compell'd me young to leave my native country,  
 My weeping parents, and my lovely Charlot;  
 Who rul'd, and must for ever rule my fate.  
 How I've improv'd, by care and honest commerce,  
 My little stock, you are in part a witness.  
 'Tis now seven tedious years, since I set forth;  
 And as th' uncertain course of my affairs  
 Bore me from place to place, I quickly lost  
 The means of corresponding with my friends.  
 —O! shou'd my Charlot, doubtful of my truth,  
 Or in despair ever to see me more,  
 Have given herself to some more happy lover—  
 Distraction's in the thought!—Or shou'd my parents,  
 Griev'd for my absence and oppress'd with want,  
 Have sunk beneath their burden, and expir'd,  
 While I too late was flying to relieve them;  
 The end of all my long and weary travels,  
 The hope, that made success itself a blessing,  
 Being defeated and for ever lost;  
 What were the riches of the world to me?

C 3

EUSTACE.



E U S T A C E.

The wretch who fears all that is possible,  
 Must suffer more than he who feels the worst  
 A man can feel, who lives exempt from fear.  
 A woman may be false, and friends are mortal;  
 And yet your aged parents may be living,  
 And your fair mistress constant.

Y O U N G W I L M O T.

True, they may;  
 I doubt, but I despair not— No, my friend;  
 My hopes are strong and lively as my fears,  
 And give me such a prospect of my happiness,  
 As nothing but fruition can exceed:  
 They tell me, Charlot is as true as fair,  
 As good as wife, as passionate as chaste;  
 That she with fierce impatience, like my own,  
 Laments our long and painful separation;  
 That we shall meet, never to part again;  
 That I shall see my parents, kiss the tears  
 From their pale hollow cheeks, cheer their sad hearts,  
 And drive that gaping phantom, meagre want,  
 For ever from their board; crown all their days  
 To come with peace, with pleasure, and abundance;  
 Receive their fond embraces and their blessings,  
 And be a blessing to 'em.

E U S T A C E.

'Tis our weakness:  
 Blind to events, we reason in the dark,  
 And fondly apprehend what none e'er found,  
 Or ever shall, pleasure and pain unmixt;  
 And flatter, and torment ourselves, by turns,  
 With what shall never be.

Y O U N G W I L M O T.

I'll go this instant  
 To seek my Charlot, and explore my fate.

E U S T A C E.

EUSTACE.

What in that foreign habit!

YOUNG WILMOT.

That's a trifle,

Not worth my thoughts.

EUSTACE.

The hardships you've endur'd,  
 And your long stay beneath the burning zone,  
 Where one eternal fultry summer reigns,  
 Have marr'd the native hue of your complexion:  
 Methinks you look more like a sun-burnt Indian,  
 Than a Briton.

YOUNG WILMOT.

Well, 'tis no matter, Eustace;  
 I hope my mind's not alter'd for the worse;  
 And for my outside - But inform me, friend,  
 When I may hope to see you.

EUSTACE.

When you please:

You'll find me at the inn.

YOUNG WILMOT.

When I have learnt my doom, expect me there.  
 'Till then, farewell.

EUSTACE.

Farewell; success attend you. [*Exit* EUSTACE.]

YOUNG WILMOT.

"We flatter and torment ourselves by turns,  
 "With what shall never be." Amazing folly!  
 We stand expos'd to many unavoidable  
 Calamities, and therefore fondly labour  
 T' increase their number, and inforce their weight,  
 By our fantastick hopes and groundless fears.

C 4

For

For one severe distress impos'd by fate,  
What numbers doth tormenting fear create?  
Deceiv'd by hope, Ixion like, we prove  
Immortal joys, and seem to rival Jove ;  
The cloud dissolv'd, impatient we complain,  
And pay for fancied bliss substantial pain.



ACT

## A C T II.

## S C E N E I.

CHARLOT'S House.

*Enter CHARLOT thoughtful; and soon after MARIA from the other side.*

M A R I A.

**M**ADAM, a stranger in a foreign habit  
Desires to see you.

C H A R L O T.

In a foreign habit——

'Tis strange, and unexpected—but admit him.

*[Exit MARIA.]*

Who can this stranger be? I know no foreigner.

*Enter young WILMOT.*

—Nor any man like this.

Y O U N G W I L M O T.

Ten thousand joys——

*[Going to embrace her.]*

C H A R L O T.

You are rude, sir—pray forbear, and let me know  
What business brought you here, or leave the place.

Y O U N G W I L M O T.

She knows me not, or will not seem to know me.

*[Aside.]*

Perfidious maid! am I forgot or scorn'd?

C H A R L O T.

Strange questions from a man I never knew!

Y O U N G



YOUNG WILMOT.

With what aversion, and contempt she views me!  
My fears are true; some other has her heart:  
—She's lost—my fatal absence has undone me.

[Aside.

—O! cou'd thy Wilmot have forgot thee, Charlot!

CHARLOT.

Ha! Wilmot! say! what do your words import?  
O gentle stranger! ease my swelling heart  
That else will burst! canst thou inform me ought—  
What dost thou know of Wilmot?

YOUNG WILMOT.

This I know,  
When all the winds of heaven seem'd to conspire  
Against the stormy main, and dreadful peals  
Of rattling thunder deafen'd ev'ry ear,  
And drown'd th' affrighten'd mariners loud cries;  
While livid lightning spread its sulphurous flames  
Thro' all the dark horizon, and disclos'd  
The raging seas incens'd to his destruction;  
When the good ship in which he was embark'd,  
Unable longer to support the tempest,  
Broke, and o'erwhelm'd by the impetuous surge,  
Sunk to the oozy bottom of the deep,  
And left him struggling with the warring waves;  
In that dread moment, in the jaws of death,  
When his strength fail'd, and ev'ry hope forsook him,  
And his last breath press'd towards his trembling lips,  
The neighbouring rocks, that echo'd to his moan,  
Return'd no sound articulate, but Charlot.

CHARLOT.

The fatal tempest, whose description strikes  
The hearer with astonishment, is ceas'd;  
And Wilmot is at rest. The fiercer storm

Of

Of swelling passions that o'erwhelms the soul,  
And rages worse than the mad foaming seas  
In which he perish'd, ne'er shall vex him more.

## YOUNG WILMOT.

Thou seem'st to think he's dead; enjoy that thought;  
Persuade yourself that what you wish is true,  
And triumph in your falshood—yes, he's dead;  
You were his fate. The cruel winds and waves,  
That cast him pale and breathless on the shore,  
Spar'd him for greater woes—to know his Charlot,  
Forgetting all her vows to him and heaven,  
Had cast him from her thoughts—then, then he died;  
But never must have rest. Ev'n now he wanders,  
A sad, repining, discontented ghost,  
The unsubstantial shadow of himself,  
And pours his plaintive groans in thy deaf ears,  
And stalks, unseen, before thee.

## CHARLOT.

'Tis enough——  
Detested falshood now has done its worst.  
And art thou dead?—and wou'dst thou die, my  
Wilmot!  
For one thou thought'st unjust?—thou soul of truth!  
What must be done?—which way shall I express  
Unutterable woe? or how convince  
Thy dear departed spirit of the love,  
Th' eternal love, and never-failing faith  
Of thy much injur'd, lost, despairing Charlot?

## YOUNG WILMOT.

Be still, my flutt'ring heart; hope not too soon:  
Perhaps I dream, and this is all illusion.

## CHARLOT.

If, as some teach, the mind intuitive  
Free from the narrow bounds and slavish ties

Of

## 28 FATAL CURIOSITY.

Of fordid earth, that circumscribe its power  
 While it remains below, roving at large  
 Can trace us to our most conceal'd retreat,  
 See all we act, and read our very thoughts;  
 To thee, O Wilmot! kneeling I appeal,  
 If e'er I swerv'd in action, word or thought  
 From the severest constancy of truth,  
 Or ever wish'd to taste a joy on earth  
 That center'd not in thee, since last we parted;  
 May we ne'er meet again, but thy loud wrongs  
 So close the ear of mercy to my cries,  
 That I may never see those bright abodes  
 Where truth and virtue only have admission,  
 And thou inhabit'ft now.

YOUNG WILMOT.

Assist me, heaven!

Preserve my reason, memory and sense!  
 O moderate my fierce tumultuous joys,  
 Or their excess will drive me to distraction.  
 O Charlot! Charlot! lovely, virtuous maid!  
 Can thy firm mind, in spite of time and absence,  
 Remain unshaken, and support its truth;  
 And yet thy frailer memory retain  
 No image, no idea of thy lover?  
 Why dost thou gaze so wildly? look on me;  
 Turn thy dear eyes this way; observe me well,  
 Have scorching climates, time, and this strange habit  
 So chang'd, and so disguis'd thy faithful Wilmot,  
 That nothing in my voice, my face, or mien,  
 Remains to tell my Charlot I am he?

*[After viewing him some time. She approaches weeping, and gives him her hand; and then turning towards him, sinks upon his bosom.]*

Why dost thou weep? why dost thou tremble thus?  
 Why dost thy panting heart and cautious touch

I.

Speak



FATAL CURIOSITY. 29

Speak thee but half convinc'd? whence are thy fears?  
Why art thou silent? canst thou doubt me still?

CHARLOT.

No, Wilmot! no; I'm blind with too much light:  
O'ercome with wonder, and oppress'd with joy,  
The struggling passions barr'd the doors of speech;  
But speech enlarg'd affords me no relief.  
'This vast profusion of extreme delight,  
Rising at once, and bursting from despair,  
Desies the aid of words, and mocks description:  
But for one sorrow, one sad scene of anguish,  
That checks the swelling torrent of my joys,  
I cou'd not bear the transport.

YOUNG WILMOT.

Let me know it:  
Give me my portion of thy sorrow, Charlot!  
Let me partake thy grief, or bear it for thee.

CHARLOT.

Alas! my Wilmot! these sad tears are thine;  
They flow for thy misfortunes. I am pierc'd  
With all the agonies of strong compassion,  
With all the bitter anguish you must feel  
When you shall hear your parents——

YOUNG WILMOT.

Are no more.

CHARLOT.

You apprehend me wrong.

YOUNG WILMOT.

Perhaps I do:  
Perhaps you mean to say, the greedy grave  
Was satisfied with one, and one is left  
To bless my longing eyes — but which, my Charlot!  
—And yet forbear to speak, till I have thought —

CHAR-

CHARLOT.

Nay, hear me, Wilmot!

YOUNG WILMOT.

I perforce must hear thee.  
For I might think till death, and not determine,  
Of two so dear which I cou'd bear to lose.

CHARLOT.

Afflict yourself no more with groundless fears:  
Your parents both are living; their distress,  
The poverty to which they are reduc'd,  
In spite of my weak aid, was what I mourn'd;  
And that in helpless age, to them whose youth  
Was crown'd with full prosperity, I fear,  
Is worse, much worse than death.

YOUNG WILMOT.

My joy's compleat!  
My parents living, and possess'd of thee!—  
From this blest hour, the happiest of my life,  
I'll date my rest. My anxious hopes and fears,  
My weary travels, and my dangers past,  
Are now rewarded all: now I rejoice  
In my success, and count my riches gain.  
For know, my soul's best treasure! I have wealth  
Enough to glut ev'n avarice itself:  
No more shall cruel want, or proud contempt,  
Oppress the sinking spirits, or insult  
The hoary heads of those who gave me being.

CHARLOT.

'Tis now, O riches, I conceive your worth:  
You are not base, nor can you be superfluous,  
But when misplac'd in base and sordid hands.  
Fly, fly, my Wilmot! leave thy happy Charlot!  
Thy filial piety, the sighs and tears  
Of thy lamenting parents call thee hence.

YOUNG

YOUNG WILMOT.

I have a friend, the partner of my voyage,  
Who, in the storm last night, was shipwreck'd with me.

CHARLOT.

Shipwreck'd last night!—O you immortal powers!  
What have you suffer'd! How was you preserv'd!

YOUNG WILMOT.

Let that, and all my other strange escapes  
And perilous adventures, be the theme  
Of many a happy winter night to come.  
My present purpose was t'intreat my angel,  
To know this friend, this other better Wilmot:  
And come with him this evening to my father's:  
I'll send him to thee.

CHARLOT.

I consent with pleasure.

YOUNG WILMOT.

Heaven's! what a night!—how shall I bear my joy!  
My parents, yours, my friends, all will be mine,  
And mine, like water, air, or the free splendid sun,  
The undivided portion of you all.  
If such the early hopes, the vernal bloom,  
The distant prospect of my future bliss.  
Then what the ruddy autumn!—what the fruit!—  
The full possession of thy heavenly charms!

The tedious, dark, and stormy winter o'er;  
The hind, that all its pinching hardships bore,  
With transport sees the weeks appointed bring  
The cheerful, promis'd, gay, delightful spring;  
The painted meadows, the harmonious woods,  
The gentle zephyrs, and unbridled floods,  
With all their charms, his ravish'd thoughts employ,  
But the rich harvest must compleat his joy.

SCENE

## SCENE II.

*A Street in Penryn.*

R A N D A L.

Poor! poor! and friendless! whither shall I wander,  
 And to what point direct my views and hopes?  
 A menial servant!—no—what shall I live,  
 Here in this land of freedom, live distinguish'd,  
 And mark'd the willing slave of some proud subject,  
 And swell his useles train for broken fragments;  
 The cold remains of his superfluous board?—  
 I wou'd aspire to something more and better—  
 Turn thy eyes then to the prolific ocean,  
 Whose spacious bosom opens to thy view:  
 There deathless honour, and unenvied wealth  
 Have often crown'd the brave adventurer's toils.  
 This is the native uncontested right,  
 The fair inheritance of ev'ry Briton  
 That dares put in his claim—my choice is made:  
 A long farewell to Cornwall, and to England.  
 If I return—But stay, what stranger's this  
 Who, as he views me, seems to mend his pace?

*Enter* YOUNG WILMOT.

YOUNG WILMOT.

Randal!—the dear companion of my youth!  
 Sure lavish fortune means to give me all  
 I could desire, or ask for this blest day,  
 And leave me nothing to expect hereafter.

R A N D A L.

Your pardon, sir! I know but one on earth  
 Cou'd properly salute me by the title  
 You're pleas'd to give me, and I would not think,  
 That you are he—that you are Wilmot—

YOUNG

YOUNG WILMOT.

Why?

R A N D A L.

Because I cou'd not bear the disappointment  
Shou'd I be deceiv'd.

YOUNG WILMOT.

I'm pleas'd to hear it:

Thy friendly fears better exprefs thy thoughts  
Than words cou'd do.

R A N D A L.

O! Wilmot! O! my master!

Are you return'd?

YOUNG WILMOT.

I have not yet embrac'd

My parents---I shall see you at my father's.

R A N D A L.

No, I'm discharg'd from thence---O fir! such ruin---

YOUNG WILMOT.

I've heard it all, and hasten to relieve 'em:

Sure heaven hath blest me to that very end:

I've wealth enough; nor shalt thou want a part.

R A N D A L.

I have a part already---I am blest

In your success, and share in all your joys.

YOUNG WILMOT.

I doubt it not---but tell me dost thou think,

My parents not suspecting my return,

That I may visit them, and not be known?

R A N D A L.

'Tis hard for me to judge. You are already

Grown so familiar to me, that I wonder

VOL. II.

D

I knew



## 34 FATAL CURIOSITY.

I knew you not at first: yet it may be;  
For you're much alter'd, and they think you dead.

YOUNG WILMOT.

This is certain; Charlot beheld me long,  
And heard my loud reproaches and complaints  
Without rememb'ring she had ever seen me.  
My mind at ease grows wanton: I wou'd fain  
Refine on happiness. Why may I not  
Indulge my curiosity, and try  
If it be possible by seeing first  
My parents as a stranger, to improve  
Their pleasure by surprize?

RANDAL.

It may indeed  
Inhance your own, to see from what despair  
Your timely coming, and unhop'd success  
Have given you power to raise them.

YOUNG WILMOT.

I remember  
E'er since we learn'd together you excell'd  
In writing fairly, and cou'd imitate  
Whatever hand you saw with great exactness.  
Of this I'm not so absolute a master.  
I therefore beg you'll write, in Charlot's name  
And character, a letter to my father;  
And recommend me, as a friend of her's,  
To his acquaintance.

RANDAL.

Sir, if you desire it—

And yet—

YOUNG WILMOT.

Nay, no objections—'twill save time,  
Most precious with me now. For the deception,

If



If doing what my Charlot will approve,  
 'Cause done for me and with a good intent,  
 Deserves the name, I'll answer it myself.  
 If this succeeds, I purpose to defer  
 Discov'ring who I am till Charlot comes,  
 And thou, and all who love me Ev'ry friend  
 Who witnesses my happiness to-night,  
 Will, by partaking, multiply my joys.

R A N D A L.

You grow luxurious in your mental pleasures :  
 Cou'd I deny you aught, I wou'd not write  
 This letter. To say true, I ever thought  
 Your boundless curiosity a weakness.

Y O U N G W I L M O T.

What canst thou blame in this?

R A N D A L.

Your pardon, sir!

I only speak in general : I'm ready  
 T' obey your order.

Y O U N G W I L M O T.

I am much thy debtor,  
 But I shall find a time to quit thy kindness.  
 O Randal! but imagine to thyself  
 The floods of transport, the sincere delight  
 That all my friends will feel, when I disclose  
 To my astonish'd parents my return ;  
 And then confess, that I have well contriv'd  
 By giving others joy t' exalt my own.

As pain, and anguish, in a gen'rous mind,  
 While kept conceal'd and to ourselves confin'd,  
 Want half their force ; so pleasure when it flows  
 In torrents round us more extatic grows. [*Exeunt.*]

D 2

S C E N E



## SCENE II.

*A Room in Old Wilmot's House.*

OLD WILMOT AND AGNES.

OLD WILMOT.

Here, take this Seneca, this haughty pedant,  
 Who governing the master of mankind,  
 And awing power imperial, prates of patience;  
 And praises poverty possess'd of millions:  
 — Sell him, and buy us bread. The scantiest meal  
 The vilest copy of this book e'er purchas'd,  
 Will give us more relief in this distress,  
 Than all his boasted precepts — Nay, no tears;  
 Keep them to move compassion when you beg.

AGNES.

My heart may break, but never stoop to that.

OLD WILMOT.

Nor wou'd I live to see it--but dispatch.

[Exit AGNES.]

Where must I charge this length of misery,  
 That gathers force each moment as it rolls,  
 And must at last o'erwhelm me; but on hope,  
 Vain, flattering, delusive, groundless hope;  
 A senseless expectation of relief  
 That has for years deceiv'd me?---Had I thought  
 As I do now, as wife men ever think,  
 When first this hell of poverty o'ertook me,  
 That power to die implies a right to do it,  
 And shou'd be us'd when life becomes a pain,  
 What plagues had I prevented?---True, my wife  
 Is still a slave to prejudice and fear---  
 I would not leave my better part, the dear [Weeps.  
 Faithful companion of my happier days,

To

To bear the weight of age and want alone.  
— I'll try once more. —

*Enter AGNES, and after her YOUNG WILMOT.*

OLD WILMOT.

Return'd, my life, so soon!--

AGNES.

The unexpected coming of this stranger  
Prevents my going yet.

YOUNG WILMOT.

You're, I presume,  
The gentleman to whom this is directed.

*[Gives a Letter.]*

What wild neglect, the token of despair,  
What indigence, what misery appears  
In each disorder'd, or disfurnished room  
Of this once gorgeous house? what discontent,  
What anguish and confusion fill the faces  
Of its dejected owners?

OLD WILMOT.

Sir, such welcome

As this poor house affords, you may command.  
Our ever friendly neighbour---once we hop'd  
T' have call'd fair Charlot by a dearer name---  
But we have done with hope---I pray excuse  
This incoherence---we had once a son. *[Weeps.]*

AGNES.

That you are come from that dear virtuous maid,  
Revives in us the memory of a loss,  
Which, tho' long since, we have not learn'd to bear.

YOUNG WILMOT.

The joy to see them, and the bitter pain  
It is to see them thus, touches my soul  
With tenderness and grief, that will o'erflow.

D 3

My

My bosom heaves and swells, as it wou'd burst;  
 My bowels move, and my heart melts within me.  
 ---They know me not, and yet, I fear, I shall  
 Defeat my purpose, and betray myself. [*Aside.*]

## OLD WILMOT.

The lady calls you here her valu'd friend;  
 Enough, tho' nothing more shou'd be imply'd,  
 To recommend you to our best esteem  
 ---A worthless acquisition! - may she find  
 Some means that better may express her kindness;  
 But she, perhaps, hath purpos'd to enrich  
 You with herself, and end her fruitless sorrow  
 For one whom death alone can justify  
 For leaving her so long. If it be so,  
 May you repair his loss, and be to Charlot  
 A second, happier Wilmot. Partial nature,  
 Who only favours youth, as feeble age  
 Were not her offspring or below her care,  
 Has seal'd our doom: no second hope shall spring  
 From my dead loins, and Agnes' sterile womb,  
 To dry our tears, and dissipate despair.

## AGNES.

The last and most abandon'd of our kind,  
 By heaven and earth neglected or despis'd,  
 The loathsome grave, that robb'd us of our son  
 And all our joys in him, must be our refuge.

## YOUNG WILMOT.

Let ghosts unpardon'd, or devoted fiends,  
 Fear without hope, and wail in such sad strains;  
 But grace defend the living from despair.  
 The darkest hours precede the rising sun;  
 And mercy may appear, when least expected.

## OLD WILMOT.

This I have heard a thousand times repeated,  
 And have, believing, been as oft deceiv'd.

YOUNG

## YOUNG WILMOT.

Behold in me an instance of its truth.  
 At sea twice shipwreck'd, and as oft the prey  
 Of lawless pirates; by the Arabs thrice  
 Surpriz'd, and robb'd on shore: and once reduc'd  
 To worse than these, the sum of all distress  
 That the most wretched feel on this side hell,  
 Ev'n slavery itself: yet here I stand,  
 Except one trouble that will quickly end,  
 The happiest of mankind.

## OLD WILMOT.

A rare example

Of fortune's caprice; apter to surprize,  
 Or entertain, than comfort, or instruct.  
 If you wou'd reason from events, be just,  
 And count, when you escap'd, how many perish'd;  
 And draw your inference thence.

## AGNES.

Alas! who knows,

But we were render'd childless by some storm,  
 In which you, tho' preserv'd, might bear a part.

## YOUNG WILMOT.

How has my curiosity betray'd me  
 Into superfluous pain! I faint with fondness;  
 And shall, if I stay longer, rush upon 'em,  
 Proclaim myself their son, kiss and embrace 'em  
 Till their souls, transported with the excess  
 Of pleasure and surprize, quit their frail mansions,  
 And leave 'em breathless in my longing arms.  
 By circumstances then and slow degrees,  
 They must be let into a happiness  
 Too great for them to bear at once, and live:  
 That Charlot will perform: I need not feign  
 To ask an hour for rest. [*Aside.*] Sir, I intreat

D 4

The



The favour to retire where, for a while,  
I may repose myself. You will excuse  
This freedom, and the trouble that I give you :  
'Tis long since I have slept; and nature calls.

OLD WILMOT.

I pray no more : believe we're only troubled,  
That you shou'd think any excuse were needful.

YOUNG WILMOT.

The weight of this is some incumbrance to me  
[Takes a casket out of his bosom and gives it to his  
mother.]

And its contents of value : if you please  
To take the charge of it till I awake,  
I shall not rest the worse. If I shou'd sleep  
'Till I am ask'd for, as perhaps I may,  
I beg that you wou'd wake me.

AGNES.

Doubt it not :

Distracted as I am with various woes,  
I shall remember that.

[Exit.

YOUNG WILMOT.

Merciless grief !

What ravage has it made ! how has it chang'd  
Her lovely form and mind ! I feel her anguish,  
And dread I know not what from her despair.  
My father too—O grant 'em patience, heaven !  
A little longer, a few short hours more,  
And all their cares, and mine, shall end for ever.

How near is misery and joy ally'd !  
Nor eye, nor thought can their extremes divide ;  
A moment's space is long, and light'ning slow  
To fate descending to reverse our woe,  
Or blast our hopes, and all our joys o'erthrow.

[Exeunt.

ACT

## ACT III.

## SCENE I.

*The Scene continued.**Enter AGNES alone, with the Casket in her hand.*

WHO shou'd this stranger be?—and then this  
casket—

He says it is of value, and yet trusts it,  
As if a trifle, to a stranger's hand—  
His confidence amazes me—Perhaps  
It is not what he says—I'm strongly tempted  
To open it, and see—no, let it rest.  
Why should my curiosity excite me,  
To search and pry into th' affairs of others;  
Who have t'employ my thoughts, so many cares  
And sorrows of my own?—With how much ease  
The spring gives way!—surprizing! most prodigious!

My eyes are dazzled, and my ravish'd heart  
Leaps at the glorious sight—How bright's the lustre,  
How immense the worth of these fair jewels!  
Ay, such a treasure wou'd expel for ever  
Base poverty, and all it's abject train;  
The mean devices we're reduc'd to use  
To keep out famine, and preserve our lives  
From day to day; the cold neglect of friends;  
The galling scorn, or more provoking pity  
Of an insulting world—Possess'd of these,  
Plenty, content, and power might take their turn,  
And lofty pride bare its aspiring head  
At our approach, and once more bend before us.  
—A pleasing dream!—'Tis past; and now I wake  
More wretched by the happiness I've lost.  
For sure it was a happiness to think,

Tho'



Tho' but for a moment, such a treasure mine.  
 Nay, it was more than thought — I saw and touch'd  
 The bright temptation, and I see it yet —  
 'Tis here — 'tis mine — I have it in possession —  
 — Must I resign it? must I give it back?  
 Am I in love with misery and want? —  
 To rob myself and court so vast a loss; —  
 — Retain it then But how? — There is a way —  
 Why sinks my heart? why does my blood run cold?  
 Why am I thrill'd with horror? — 'Tis not choice,  
 But dire necessity suggests the thought.

*Enter OLD WILMOT.*

OLD WILMOT.

The mind contented, with how little pains  
 The wand'ring senses yield to soft repose,  
 And die to gain new life! He's fall'n asleep  
 Already — happy man! — What dost thou think,  
 My Agnes, of our unexpected guest?  
 He seems to me a youth of great humanity:  
 Just ere he clos'd his eyes, that swam in tears,  
 He wrung my hand, and press'd it to his lips;  
 And with a look, that pierc'd me to the soul,  
 Begg'd me to comfort thee: and — dost thou hear me?  
 What art thou gazing on? — fie, 'tis not well —  
 This casket was deliver'd to you clos'd:  
 Why have you open'd it? shou'd this be known,  
 How mean must we appear?

AGNES.

And who shall know it?

OLD WILMOT.

There is a kind of pride, a decent dignity  
 Due to ourselves; which, spite of our misfortunes,  
 May be maintain'd, and cherish'd to the last.  
 To live without reproach, and without leave

To

FATAL CURIOSITY. 43

To quit the world, shews sovereign contempt,  
And noble scorn of its relentless malice.

AGNES.

Shews sovereign madness and a scorn of sense.  
Pursue no farther this detested theme:  
I will not die, I will not leave the world  
For all that you can urge, until compell'd.

OLD WILMOT.

To chace a shadow, when the setting sun  
Is darting his last rays, were just as wise,  
As your anxiety for fleeting life,  
Now the last means for its support are failing:  
Were famine not as mortal as the sword,  
This warmth might be excus'd—But take thy choice:  
Die how you will, you shall not die alone.

AGNES.

Nor live, I hope.

OLD WILMOT.

There is no fear of that.

AGNES.

Then we'll live both.

OLD WILMOT.

Strange folly! where's the means?

AGNES.

The means are there; those jewels—

OLD WILMOT.

Ha!---Take heed:

Perhaps thou dost but try me; yet take heed—  
There's nought so monstrous but the mind of man  
In some conditions may be brought t'approve;  
Theft, sacrilege, treason, and parricide,  
When flat'ring opportunity intic'd,

And



44 FATAL CURIOSITY.

And desperation drove, have been committed  
By those who once wou'd start to hear them nam'd.

AGNES.

And add to these detested suicide,  
Which, by a crime much less, we may avoid.

OLD WILMOT.

Th' inhospitable murder of our guest! —  
How cou'dst thou form a thought so very tempting,  
So advantageous, so secure and easy;  
And yet so cruel, and so full of horror?

AGNES.

'Tis less impiety, less against nature,  
To take another's life, than end our own.

OLD WILMOT.

It is no matter, whether this or that  
Be, in itself, the less or greater crime:  
Howe'er we may deceive ourselves or others,  
We act from inclination, not by rule,  
Or none could act amiss---and that all err,  
None but the conscious hypocrite denies.  
— O! what is man, his excellence and strength,  
When in an hour of trial and desertion,  
Reason, his noblest power, may be suborn'd  
To plead the cause of vile assassination!

AGNES.

You're too severe: reason may justly plead  
For her own preservation.

OLD WILMOT.

Rest contented:

Whate'er resistance I may seem to make,  
I am betray'd within: my will's seduc'd,  
And my whole soul infected. The desire  
Of life returns, and brings with it a train

Of appetites that rage to be supply'd.  
Whoever stands to parley with temptation,  
Does it to be o'ercome.

AGNES.

Then nought remains,  
But the swift execution of a deed  
That is not to be thought on, or delay'd.  
We must dispatch him sleeping: shou'd he wake,  
'Twere madness to attempt it.

OLD WILMOT.

True, his strength  
Single is more, much more than ours united;  
So may his life, perhaps, as far exceed  
Ours in duration, shou'd he 'scape this snare.  
Gen'rous, unhappy man! O! what cou'd move thee  
To put thy life and fortune in the hands  
Of wretches mad with anguish!

AGNES.

By what means?

By stabbing, suffocation, or by strangling  
Shall we effect his death?

OLD WILMOT.

Why, what a fiend!—  
How cruel, how remorseless and impatient  
Have pride, and poverty made thee?

AGNES.

Barbarous man!  
Whose wasteful riots ruin'd our estate,  
And drove our son, ere the first down had spread  
His rosy cheeks spite of my sad presages,  
Earnest intreaties, agonies and tears,  
To seek his bread 'mongst strangers, and to perish  
In some remote, inhospitable land—  
The loveliest youth, in person and in mind,

That



That ever crown'd a groaning mother's pains!  
 Where was thy pity, where thy patience then?  
 Thou cruel husband! thou unnat'ral father!  
 Thou most remorseless, most ungrateful man,  
 To waste my fortune; rob me of my son;  
 To drive me to despair, and then reproach me  
 For being what thou'lt made me.

OLD WILMOT.

Dry thy tears:

I ought not to reproach thee. I confess  
 That thou hast suffer'd much: so have we both.  
 But chide no more: I'm wrought up to thy purpose.

The poor, ill-fated, unsuspecting victim,  
 Ere he reclin'd him on the fatal couch,  
 From which he's ne'er to rise, took off the sash,  
 And costly dagger that thou saw'st him wear;  
 And thus, unthinking, furnish'd us with arms  
 Against himself. Which shall I use?

AGNES.

The sash.

If you make use of that I can assist.

OLD WILMOT.

No—'tis a dreadful office, and I'll spare  
 Thy trembling hands the guilt—steal to the door  
 And bring me word if he be still asleep.

[Exit AGNES.

Or I'm deceiv'd, or he pronounc'd himself  
 The happiest of mankind. Deluded wretch!  
 Thy thoughts are perishing, thy youthful joys,  
 Touch'd by the icy hand of grisly death,  
 Are withering in their bloom—but thought extinguish'd,

He'll never know the loss, nor feel the bitter

Pangs of disappointment – then I was wrong  
 In counting him a wretch: to die well pleas'd,  
 Is all the happiest of mankind can hope for.  
 To be a wretch, is to survive the loss  
 Of every joy, and even hope itself,  
 As I have done – why do I mourn him then?  
 For, by the anguish of my tortur'd soul,  
 He's to be envy'd, if compar'd with me.

*Enter AGNES with YOUNG WILMOT's dagger.*

AGNES.

The stranger sleeps at present; but so restless  
 His slumbers seem, they can't continue long.  
 Come, come, dispatch – Here I've secur'd his dagger.

OLD WILMOT.

O Agnes! Agnes! if there be a hell  
 'Tis it we shou'd expect it.

*[Goes to take the dagger but lets it fall.]*

AGNES.

Nay, for shame,  
 Shake off this panick, and be more yourself.

OLD WILMOT.

What's to be done? on what had we determin'd?

AGNES.

You're quite dismay'd. I'll do the deed myself.  
*[Takes up the dagger.]*

OLD WILMOT.

Give me the fatal steel  
 'Tis but a single murder,  
 Necessity, impatience and despair,  
 The three wide mouths of that true Cerberus,  
 Grim poverty, demands—They shall be stopp'd.  
 Ambition, persecution, and revenge

Devour

## 48 FATAL CURIOSITY.

Devour their millions daily : and shall I—  
 But follow me, and see how little cause  
 You had to think there was the least remains  
 Of manhood, pity, mercy, or remorse  
 Left in this savage breast. [*Going the wrong way.*]

AGNES.

Where do you go?  
 The street is that way.

OLD WILMOT.

True! I had forgot.

AGNES..

Quite, quite confounded.

OLD WILMOT.

Well, I recover.

—— I shall find the way.

[*Exit.*]

AGNES.

O softly! softly!

The least noise undoes us.— Still I fear him :  
 — No—now he seems determin'd—O! that pause,  
 That cowardly pause!— his resolution fails—  
 'Tis wisely done to lift your eyes to heaven ;  
 When did you pray before? I have no patience—  
 How he surveys him! what a look was there!—  
 How full of anguish, pity and remorse!—  
 He'll never do it—Strike, or give it o'er—  
 — No, he recovers— but that trembling arm  
 May miss its aim ; and if he fails, we're lost—  
 'Tis done—O! no; he lives, he struggles yet.

YOUNG WILMOT.

O! father! father!

[*In another Room.*]

AGNES.

Quick, repeat the blow.

What pow'r shall I invoke to aid thee, Wilmot!

---Yet



FATAL CURIOSITY. 49

—Yet hold thy hand---inconstant, wretched woman!  
What doth my heart recoil, and bleed with him  
Whose murder was contriv'd---O Wilmot! Wilmot!

*Enter CHARLOT, MARIA, EUSTACE, RANDAL  
and others.*

CHARLOT.

What strange neglect! the doors are all unbarr'd,  
And not a living creature to be seen.

*Enter WILMOT and AGNES.*

CHARLOT.

Sir, we are come to give and to receive  
A thousand greetings—Ha! what can this mean?  
Why do you look with such amazement on us?  
Are these your transports for your son's return?—  
Where is my Wilmot? has he not been here?  
Wou'd he defer your happiness so long,  
Or cou'd a habit so disguise your son,  
That you refus'd to own him?

AGNES.

Heard you that?

What prodigy of horror is disclosing,  
To render murder venial!

OLD WILMOT.

Prithee, peace:

The miserable damn'd suspend their howling,  
And the swift orbs are fixt in deep attention.

YOUNG WILMOT *groans.*

Oh! Oh! Oh!

EUSTACE.

Sure that deep groan came from the inner room.

RANDAL.

It did; and seem'd the voice of one expiring.  
Merciful heaven! where will these terrors end?

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E

That



50 FATAL CURIOSITY.

That is the dagger my young master wore ;  
And see, his father's hands are stain'd with blood.

[YOUNG WILMOT *groans again,*

EUSTACE.

Another groan ! why do we stand to gaze  
On these dumb phantoms of despair and horror ?  
Let us search farther : Randal, shew the way.

CHARLOT.

This is the third time those fantastick forms  
Have forc'd themselves upon my mental eyes,  
And sleeping gave me more than waking pains.  
O you eternal pow'rs ! if all your mercy  
To wretched mortals be not quite extinguish'd,  
And terrors only guard your awful thrones,  
Remove this dreadful vision—let me wake,  
Or sleep the sleep of death.

[*Exeunt* CHAR. MARIA, EUST. RANDAL, &c.

OLD WILMOT.

Sleep those who may ;  
I know my lot is endless perturbation.

AGNES.

Let life forsake the earth, and light the sun,  
And death and darkness bury in oblivion  
Mankind and all their deeds, that no posterity  
May ever rise to hear our horrid tale,  
Or view the grave of such detested parricides.

OLD WILMOT.

Curse and depredations are in vain :  
The sun will shine and all things have their course,  
When we, the curse and burthen of the earth,  
Shall be absorb'd, and mingled with its dust,  
Our guilt and desolation must be told,  
From age to age, to teach desponding mortals,

2

How

FATAL CURIOSITY. 51

How far beyond the reach of human thought  
Heaven, when incens'd, can punish—die thou first.

[Stabs AGNES.

I dare not trust thy weakness.

AGNES.

Ever kind,

But most in this.

OLD WILMOT.

I will not long survive thee.

AGNES.

Do not accuse thy erring mother, Wilmot!  
With too much rigour when we meet above.  
Rivers of tears, and ages spent in howling  
Cou'd ne'er express the anguish of my heart.  
To give thee life for life, and blood for blood,  
Is not enough. Had I ten thousand lives,  
I'd give them all to speak my penitence  
Deep and sincere, and equal to my crime. [Dies.

Enter CHARLOT led by MARIA, and RANDAL;  
EUSTACE, and the rest.

CHARLOT.

Welcome, despair! I'll never hope again—  
Why have you forc'd me from my Wilmot's side?  
Let me return—unhand me—let me die.  
Patience, that till this moment ne'er forsook me,  
Has took her flight; and my abandon'd mind,  
Rebellious to a lot so void of mercy  
And so unexpected, rages to madness.  
—O thou! who know'st our frame, who know'st  
these woes

Are more than human fortitude can bear,  
O! take me, take me hence, ere I relapse:  
And in distraction, with unhallow'd tongue,  
Again arraign your mercy.

[Faints.

E 2

EUSTACE.



## FATAL CURIOSITY.

EUSTACE.

Unhappy maid! this strange event my strength  
 Can scarce support; no wonder thine shou'd fail.  
 —How shall I vent my grief! O Wilmot! Wilmot!  
 Thou truest lover, and thou best of friends,  
 Are these the fruits of all thy anxious cares  
 For thy ungrateful parents?—cruel fiends  
 To use thee thus!—To recompence with death  
 Thy most unequal'd duty and affection.

OLD WILMOT.

What whining fool art thou, who wou'd'st usurp  
 My sovereign right of grief? was he thy son?  
 Say! canst thou shew thy hands reeking with blood,  
 That flow'd, thro' purer channels, from thy loins?

EUSTACE.

Forbid it heaven! that I shou'd know such guilt:  
 Yet his sad fate demands commiseration.

OLD WILMOT.

Compute the sands that bound the spacious ocean,  
 And swell their number with a single grain;  
 Increase the noise of thunder with thy voice;  
 Or when the raging wind lays nature waste,  
 Assist the tempest with thy feeble breath;  
 Add water to the sea, and fire to Etna;  
 But name not thy faint sorrow with the anguish  
 Of a curst wretch who only hopes for this

*[Stabbing himself.]*

To change the scene, but not relieve his pain.

RANDAL.

A dreadful instance of the last remorse!  
 May all your woes end here.

OLD WILMOT.

O would they end  
 A thousand ages hence, I then shou'd suffer

Much

Much less than I deserve. Yet let me say,  
You'll do but justice, to inform the world,  
This horrid deed, that punishes itself,  
Was not intended as he was our son ;  
For that we knew not, 'till it was too late.  
Proud and impatient under our afflictions,  
While heaven was labouring to make us happy,  
We brought this dreadful ruin on ourselves.  
Mankind may learn—but—oh !— [Dies.

R A N D A L.

The most will not :

Let us at least be wiser, nor complain  
Of heaven's mysterious ways, and awful reign :  
By our bold censures we invade his throne  
Who made mankind, and governs but his own :  
Tho' youthful Wilmot's sun be set ere noon,  
The ripe in virtue never die too soon. [Exeunt.

T H E E N D.



