



National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care

Creative writing #1

'June Austin'

Care and Careability Chapter 1 – He was coming to review the workings of the estate.

Heralded by an announcement at Sunday service Mr Caleb McGillicuddy had arrived at the estate house.

The rector had read on behalf of Mr Whitsome, gentleman, that he was coming to review 'the workings of the estate'.

This not being given further explication it was the talk of the congregation as they left their pews. There were gatherings all around the church, the most voluminous surrounded Mrs Bennett and her daughters.

Mrs Bennett, as she did frequently, led the conversation.

'It is most remiss of Mr Williamson not to advise his friends and neighbours of the purpose of this visit. On his arrival I will invite Mr McGillifuddly to visit so as to ascertain where he sits in his family. Should he be first, second, third, fourth, or more. Then we should know his turn of mind, to be born to run an estate, to have a living in a parish, to be soldiering, or ', she paused, ' beyond that would be unfortunate for us all. A spare is often to be underconfident and led too easily by the whispers of others in his ears. We would know if it how the estate is to be managed, its spiritual health, a major regimentation.'

On arrival Mr Bennett was despatched to make his acquaintance. A visit was expected soon after and the family were not disappointed, though in the days and weeks to follow it was to be that more distant relations were to be so.

'He stayed too short a time. It was politeness achieved, but not intelligence by either party. He asked no questions only for we to inform him of what we thought of the estate. Courtesy prevents communicating openly about the estate'.

'He said one thing to one person and another to another. I have no idea about the qualities or interests of the man'. This was to be something that was the most common report of meeting the visitor.

'Maybe he has none?' offered Mary.

'He acted as though he knew all about us and everything,' continued Mr Bennett.

'There's talk he has done this before for the Whitsome family, regarding the teaching by established tutors and governesses, swept aside and replaced by untried others recruited by advertisement,' added Elizabeth.

'Advertisement? What good can be done by employing such venal methods?' asked Mrs Bennett

'I heard he removed the almoners, and alms. It is told he has progressive ideas. He is a believer in accelerating change. Less is more. Faster is better'. Elizabeth was evaluating the evidence.

'Progressive ideas will be the end of all we know. It will end the natural order of society. One should know what will happen if one makes a change. Checks and balances are secure foundations for behaviour,' pronounced Mrs Bennett with Mr Bennett nodding

'It seems he is interested in cheques and balances,' advanced Jane in her way looking to steady the discussion.

'The difference between income and wealth colours the mind,' Mary, being didactic, commonly.

Mr Bennet interjected to his daughters' cannonade, 'It is unfortunate not to know if Mr McGillicuddy has inherited wealth or made his fortune". Mrs Bennett stopped her lace making and looked disapproving.

Elizabeth archly observed, 'It is important to know when evaluating the acquisition of entrance into society.'

Mary raised an eyebrow, 'He either has no vanity, in which case he is unaware of his failings, or he has too much in which case he will try to impose them on everyone.' She was pious and pompous, but rarely wrong.

'It is said his methods result in removal of retainers in all offices of estates', continued Mr Bennett in his reporting.

'Does he not understand that the wellbeing of estates are built on responsibilities?' said Mrs Bennet who had now stopped her lace making and was now taking a more discernible interest, concerned as she was for the future of her daughters.

'He rather seems to place the responsibility on to those who cannot resist responsibility being thrust upon them whilst escaping all responsibility himself', summarised Mary.

'That seems sharp, trickery or lax', added Elizabeth. As so often the speed of the conversation could have led to losing the destination of the evaluations but these were now captured by herself and Mary, both looked intently at each other without any pretensions of modesty.

'Or all three. Without knowing,' Mary moving into the smallest silence.

Jane felt the speed uncomfortable, and she offered some emollient, 'He has gathered around him a group of people to advise him by talking to others'.

It was not to linger as first Elizabeth spurred the conversation onwards, 'Ah a coterie. A circle of chatters. Gossip. Sweet talk'.

Then Mary, 'That he does. He has never been heard to offer an opinion of his own. Never lets another be in enmity he turns them to a friend. His ace card, judge me by what I do'.

Perplexed Mrs Bennett asked openly, her eyebrows furrowing with each interchange, 'But what does he do?'

Mary was there before Elizabeth, 'Makes changes to things so that they reflect what people say they want?'

Mrs Bennett put her lace making down, 'What they want? Is the man a Liberal?'

'He is a new Liberal' stated Mr Bennet firmly.

Elizabeth allowed not a moments pause, 'Usually this new Liberalism is nothing but economics dressed as politics. The moral sentiments of Mr Adam Smith are transparent or absent. In this case it is presented as all moral sentiments, beneath which are the basest of economics that can befall any person'.

'You mean the estate and affairs of Mr Whitsome are in the most parlous desperate straits?' asked Mrs Bennett always anxious about monetary affairs having had a life of thinking of what would happen if Mr Bennet was incapacitated, or, forfend, was to pass away.

Unusually Elizabeth was short in her response, 'Quite'.

Mrs Bennett's eyes rose as she called for a higher preservation than material welfare, 'Heaven preserve us'.

Mr Bennett was at his most comforting whilst shaking his head, 'We must pray it does. It seems nothing on Earth can dissuade the man from this Mr McGillicuddy feeling of being right'.

Elizabeth arched her eyebrows again, concealing the most developed ability with irony, 'We must trust in Heaven.' But not quite developed enough.

'He is unable to be wrong. He is constitutionally unable to sit with being associated with any wrong', was the character summation of Mr Bennett.

Jane was usually ever seeing the better side of any person, and usually only desiring good outcomes, 'Quite so, those who hold the constitution determine his rightness. He can do no wrong. No matter. Anything'.

Mr Bennett and Elizabeth and Mary all spoke as one, each with a different passion, incredulity, angst, incomprehension 'I fear we are at cross purposes'.

Jane continued unruffled, 'No I see a greater harmony and confluence'.

The triumvirate chorused, 'You see the man cares?'

Jane almost sighing with earnest patience of her family, 'No I see a man who sees the value of care and how to package it into little parcels of careability'.

Kitty who had been sitting speechless and with her head speeding from one to the other always a little behind as she identified the next speaker a moment after they had started speaking, 'What is that last word? I do not recognise it'.

Jane stood up and faced her family adopting a voice derived as the distillation of her father and sisters, 'It does not yet exist. But like with any conjurors something can appear where nothing was before. The evidence is before your eyes'.

Elizabeth who was always selecting of evidence, 'I never believe in what I am told to see. And I never believe in the words people use to describe what I am seeing'.

Jane took a breath and as if speaking each word with distaste spoke in a rarely used declamatory way becoming more certain of her thoughts that were deep within her before that very moment, 'Careability is a new concept that requires I relinquish my experience of being cared for. It is a feeling and circumstance without equivocation. Careability places the responsibility on me to accept what is being given. It is circumstances made a matter of character rather than environment. It ends with my having to care for myself'.

There was silence. The room seemed uncomfortably cooler.

Mrs Bennett, flushed with her insecurity having risen, spoke almost inaudibly, 'And if you should not be able?'

Elizabeth continued with her thesis that gained strength with each word, 'That would confirm their premise that care is unprofitable to expend on those who cannot care for themselves. And on that basis only support should be offered. The most minimal support should enable anyone to return to a state of grace, without corruption'.

Catherine, usually pliable and overshadowed by others assertiveness spoke plainly as though a narrator of a story, 'Only a person who has had no need of care could think such a thing likely'.

Jane quietly concluded her exposition, 'Quite so. You have Mr McG to a tee'.

Mr Bennett smiled knowingly, he had understood, 'Anyone who needs care would then only have it offered as the benefit of a time capped scheme. From which they can be inveigled to demonstrate benefit'.

Mrs Bennett, 'How so?'

Mr Bennett, 'By the provider being offered payment upon results.'

Mrs Bennett was becoming upset with concern, 'No matter how you dress it that seems corruption of care'.

Jane smiled and pronounced, 'It seems you are already familiar with this new concept of careability'.

Mary was summoning maximum exasperation, 'That would be care without care. A system in name only'.

Jane continued calmly pronouncing, 'You seem familiar with its delivery'.

Mr Bennett, nodding vigorously, agreeably added, 'I can see it being said to be a progressive future'.

Mrs Bennett was full thoughts for her own and her daughters' future, 'It is no future at all. To be successful careability must always keep people in the present. Eternally dependent. For to be free would be to be without income, both those delivering careability and those receiving'.

Mr Bennett took on as Mrs Bennett ended, 'And here is the beauty of the scheme. That those without care and enrolled in careability be provided with a bond to meet the costs of delivery. This bond to be repaid by the recipient over their lifetime. The provider may perhaps provide employment to support the repayments.'

Mary understood entirely, 'That sir is not a bond but bondage the sort of thing that Mr Wilberforce speaks against'.

Jane not seeking to countermand but to confirm the line of discussion, 'Yes slavery will one day be a thing of the past. But to be sure when that day comes it will be more numerous than ever before. And no one will see it. The ability of humankind to deceive itself is as uncontained as it is unfathomable'.

Mr Bennett drew breathe and spoke in his baritone, 'We are at the start of a new mercantile age. All that is familial and social will be industrial'.

Mrs Bennett becoming loosed from her tether of comportment, 'Who would have thought that commerce and care could be conceived of as co-habiting together?'

Elizabeth holding herself erect and speaking dispassionately as though knowing the certainty of her words, 'Oh I know the very person'.

Mrs Bennett, asking with all openness, 'Knowingly?'

'Constitutionally'. Jane had concluded the discussion.