

Chapter 7

When he came had had sat down a while, he easily perceived there was an alteration in my countenance, that I was not so free and pleasant with him as I used to be, and particularly, that I had been a-crying; he was not long before he took notice of it, and asked me in very kind terms what was the matter, and if anything troubled me. I would have put it off if I could, but it was not to be concealed; so after suffering many importunities to draw that out of me which I longed as much as possible to disclose, I told him that it was true something did trouble me, and something of such a nature that I could not conceal from him, and yet that I could not tell how to tell him of it neither; that it was a thing that not only surprised me, but greatly perplexed me, and that I knew not what course to take, unless he would direct me. He told me with great tenderness, that let it be what it would, I should not let it trouble me, for he would protect me from all the world.

I then began at a distance, and told him I was afraid the ladies had got some secret information of our correspondence; for that it was easy to see that their conduct was very much changed towards me for a great while, and that now it was come to that pass that they frequently found fault with me, and sometimes fell quite out with me, though I never gave them the least occasion; that whereas I used always to lie with the eldest sister, I was lately put to lie by myself, or with one of the maids; and that I had overheard them several times talking very unkindly about me; but that which confirmed it all was, that one of the servants had told me that she had heard I was to be

turned out, and that it was not safe for the family that I should be any longer in the house.

He smiled when he heard all this, and I asked him how he could make so light of it, when he must needs know that if there was any discovery I was undone for ever, and that even it would hurt him, though not ruin him as it would me. I upbraided him, that he was like all the rest of the sex, that, when they had the character and honour of a woman at their mercy, oftentimes made it their jest, and at least looked upon it as a trifle, and counted the ruin of those they had had their will of as a thing of no value.

He saw me warm and serious, and he changed his style immediately; he told me he was sorry I should have such a thought of him; that he had never given me the least occasion for it, but had been as tender of my reputation as he could be of his own; that he was sure our correspondence had been managed with so much address, that not one creature in the family had so much as a suspicion of it; that if he smiled when I told him my thoughts, it was at the assurance he lately received, that our understanding one another was not so much as known or guessed at; and that when he had told me how much reason he had to be easy, I should smile as he did, for he was very certain it would give me a full satisfaction.

'This is a mystery I cannot understand,' says I, 'or how it should be to my satisfaction that I am to be turned out of doors; for if our correspondence is

not discovered, I know not what else I have done to change the countenances of the whole family to me, or to have them treat me as they do now, who formerly used me with so much tenderness, as if I had been one of their own children.'

'Why, look you, child,' says he, 'that they are uneasy about you, that is true; but that they have the least suspicion of the case as it is, and as it respects you and I, is so far from being true, that they suspect my brother Robin; and, in short, they are fully persuaded he makes love to you; nay, the fool has put it into their heads too himself, for he is continually bantering them about it, and making a jest of himself. I confess I think he is wrong to do so, because he cannot but see it vexes them, and makes them unkind to you; but 'tis a satisfaction to me, because of the assurance it gives me, that they do not suspect me in the least, and I hope this will be to your satisfaction too.'

'So it is,' says I, 'one way; but this does not reach my case at all, nor is this the chief thing that troubles me, though I have been concerned about that too.' 'What is it, then?' says he. With which I fell to tears, and could say nothing to him at all. He strove to pacify me all he could, but began at last to be very pressing upon me to tell what it was. At last I answered that I thought I ought to tell him too, and that he had some right to know it; besides, that I wanted his direction in the case, for I was in such perplexity that I knew not what course to take, and then I related the whole affair to

him. I told him how imprudently his brother had managed himself, in making himself so public; for that if he had kept it a secret, as such a thing out to have been, I could but have denied him positively, without giving any reason for it, and he would in time have ceased his solicitations; but that he had the vanity, first, to depend upon it that I would not deny him, and then had taken the freedom to tell his resolution of having me to the whole house.

I told him how far I had resisted him, and told him how sincere and honourable his offers were. 'But,' says I, 'my case will be doubly hard; for as they carry it ill to me now, because he desires to have me, they'll carry it worse when they shall find I have denied him; and they will presently say, there's something else in it, and then out it comes that I am married already to somebody else, or that I would never refuse a match so much above me as this was.'

This discourse surprised him indeed very much. He told me that it was a critical point indeed for me to manage, and he did not see which way I should get out of it; but he would consider it, and let me know next time we met, what resolution he was come to about it; and in the meantime desired I would not give my consent to his brother, nor yet give him a flat denial, but that I would hold him in suspense a while.

I seemed to start at his saying I should not give him my consent. I told him he knew very well I had no consent to give; that he had engaged himself to

marry me, and that my consent was the same time engaged to him; that he had all along told me I was his wife, and I looked upon myself as effectually so as if the ceremony had passed; and that it was from his own mouth that I did so, he having all along persuaded me to call myself his wife.

'Well, my dear,' says he, 'don't be concerned at that now; if I am not your husband, I'll be as good as a husband to you; and do not let those things trouble you now, but let me look a little farther into this affair, and I shall be able to say more next time we meet.'

He pacified me as well as he could with this, but I found he was very thoughtful, and that though he was very kind to me and kissed me a thousand times, and more I believe, and gave me money too, yet he offered no more all the while we were together, which was above two hours, and which I much wondered at indeed at that time, considering how it used to be, and what opportunity we had.

His brother did not come from London for five or six days, and it was two days more before he got an opportunity to talk with him; but then getting him by himself he began to talk very close to him about it, and the same evening got an opportunity (for we had a long conference together) to repeat all their discourse to me, which, as near as I can remember, was to the purpose following. He told him he heard strange news of him since he went, viz. that he made love to Mrs. Betty. 'Well, says his brother a little angrily,

'and so I do. And what then? What has anybody to do with that?' 'Nay,' says his brother, 'don't be angry, Robin; I don't pretend to have anything to do with it; nor do I pretend to be angry with you about it. But I find they do concern themselves about it, and that they have used the poor girl ill about it, which I should take as done to myself.' 'Whom do you mean by THEY?' says Robin. 'I mean my mother and the girls,' says the elder brother. 'But hark ye,' says his brother, 'are you in earnest? Do you really love this girl? You may be free with me, you know.' 'Why, then,' says Robin, 'I will be free with you; I do love her above all the women in the world, and I will have her, let them say and do what they will. I believe the girl will not deny me.'

It struck me to the heart when he told me this, for though it was most rational to think I would not deny him, yet I knew in my own conscience I must deny him, and I saw my ruin in my being obliged to do so; but I knew it was my business to talk otherwise then, so I interrupted him in his story thus.

'Ay!,' said I, 'does he think I cannot deny him? But he shall find I can deny him, for all that.'

'Well, my dear,' says he, 'but let me give you the whole story as it went on between us, and then say what you will.'

Then he went on and told me that he replied thus: 'But, brother, you know

she has nothing, and you may have several ladies with good fortunes.'

'Tis no matter for that,' said Robin; 'I love the girl, and I will never please my pocket in marrying, and not please my fancy.' 'And so, my dear,' adds he, 'there is no opposing him.'

'Yes, yes,' says I, 'you shall see I can oppose him; I have learnt to say No, now though I had not learnt it before; if the best lord in the land offered me marriage now, I could very cheerfully say No to him.'

'Well, but, my dear,' says he, 'what can you say to him? You know, as you said when we talked of it before, he will ask you many questions about it, and all the house will wonder what the meaning of it should be.'

'Why,' says I, smiling, 'I can stop all their mouths at one clap by telling him, and them too, that I am married already to his elder brother.'

He smiled a little too at the word, but I could see it startled him, and he could not hide the disorder it put him into. However, he returned, 'Why, though that may be true in some sense, yet I suppose you are but in jest when you talk of giving such an answer as that; it may not be convenient on many accounts.'