

## Chapter 8

'No, no,' says I pleasantly, 'I am not so fond of letting the secret come out without your consent.'

'But what, then, can you say to him, or to them,' says he, 'when they find you positive against a match which would be apparently so much to your advantage?'

'Why,' says I, 'should I be at a loss? First of all, I am not obliged to give me any reason at all; on the other hand, I may tell them I am married already, and stop there, and that will be a full stop too to him, for he can have no reason to ask one question after it.'

'Ay,' says he; 'but the whole house will tease you about that, even to father and mother, and if you deny them positively, they will be disobliged at you, and suspicious besides.'

'Why,' says I, 'what can I do? What would have me do? I was in straight enough before, and as I told you, I was in perplexity before, and acquainted you with the circumstances, that I might have your advice.'

'My dear,' says he, 'I have been considering very much upon it, you may be sure, and though it is a piece of advice that has a great many mortifications in it to me, and may at first seem strange to you, yet, all things considered, I

see no better way for you than to let him go on; and if you find him hearty and in earnest, marry him.'

I gave him a look full of horror at those words, and, turning pale as death, was at the very point of sinking down out of the chair I sat in; when, giving a start, 'My dear,' says he aloud, 'what's the matter with you? Where are you a-going?' and a great many such things; and with jogging and called to me, fetched me a little to myself, though it was a good while before I fully recovered my senses, and was not able to speak for several minutes more.

When I was fully recovered he began again. 'My dear,' says he, 'what made you so surprised at what I said? I would have you consider seriously of it? You may see plainly how the family stand in this case, and they would be stark mad if it was my case, as it is my brother's; and for aught I see, it would be my ruin and yours too.'

'Ay!' says I, still speaking angrily; 'are all your protestations and vows to be shaken by the dislike of the family? Did I not always object that to you, and you made light thing of it, as what you were above, and would value; and is it come to this now?' said I. 'Is this your faith and honour, your love, and the solidity of your promises?'

He continued perfectly calm, notwithstanding all my reproaches, and I was not sparing of them at all; but he replied at last, 'My dear, I have not broken

one promise with you yet; I did tell you I would marry you when I was come to my estate; but you see my father is a hale, healthy man, and may live these thirty years still, and not be older than several are round us in town; and you never proposed my marrying you sooner, because you knew it might be my ruin; and as to all the rest, I have not failed you in anything, you have wanted for nothing.'

I could not deny a word of this, and had nothing to say to it in general. 'But why, then,' says I, 'can you persuade me to such a horrid step as leaving you, since you have not left me? Will you allow no affection, no love on my side, where there has been so much on your side? Have I made you no returns? Have I given no testimony of my sincerity and of my passion? Are the sacrifices I have made of honour and modesty to you no proof of my being tied to you in bonds too strong to be broken?'

'But here, my dear,' says he, 'you may come into a safe station, and appear with honour and with splendour at once, and the remembrance of what we have done may be wrapt up in an eternal silence, as if it had never happened; you shall always have my respect, and my sincere affection, only then it shall be honest, and perfectly just to my brother; you shall be my dear sister, as now you are my dear----' and there he stopped.

'Your dear whore,' says I, 'you would have said if you had gone on, and you might as well have said it; but I understand you. However, I desire you to

remember the long discourses you have had with me, and the many hours' pains you have taken to persuade me to believe myself an honest woman; that I was your wife intentionally, though not in the eyes of the world, and that it was as effectual a marriage that had passed between us as if we had been publicly wedded by the parson of the parish. You know and cannot but remember that these have been your own words to me.'

I found this was a little too close upon him, but I made it up in what follows. He stood stock-still for a while and said nothing, and I went on thus: 'You cannot,' says I, 'without the highest injustice, believe that I yielded upon all these persuasions without a love not to be questioned, not to be shaken again by anything that could happen afterward. If you have such dishonourable thoughts of me, I must ask you what foundation in any of my behaviour have I given for such a suggestion?'

'If, then, I have yielded to the importunities of my affection, and if I have been persuaded to believe that I am really, and in the essence of the thing, your wife, shall I now give the lie to all those arguments and call myself your whore, or mistress, which is the same thing? And will you transfer me to your brother? Can you transfer my affection? Can you bid me cease loving you, and bid me love him? It is in my power, think you, to make such a change at demand? No, sir,' said I, 'depend upon it 'tis impossible, and whatever the change of your side may be, I will ever be true; and I had much rather, since it is come that unhappy length, be your whore than your

brother's wife.'

He appeared pleased and touched with the impression of this last discourse, and told me that he stood where he did before; that he had not been unfaithful to me in any one promise he had ever made yet, but that there were so many terrible things presented themselves to his view in the affair before me, and that on my account in particular, that he had thought of the other as a remedy so effectual as nothing could come up to it. That he thought this would not be entire parting us, but we might love as friends all our days, and perhaps with more satisfaction than we should in the station we were now in, as things might happen; that he durst say, I could not apprehend anything from him as to betraying a secret, which could not but be the destruction of us both, if it came out; that he had but one question to ask of me that could lie in the way of it, and if that question was answered in the negative, he could not but think still it was the only step I could take.

I guessed at his question presently, namely, whether I was sure I was not with child? As to that, I told him he need not be concerned about it, for I was not with child. 'Why, then, my dear,' says he, 'we have no time to talk further now. Consider of it, and think closely about it; I cannot but be of the opinion still, that it will be the best course you can take.' And with this he took his leave, and the more hastily too, his mother and sisters ringing at the gate, just at the moment that he had risen up to go.

He left me in the utmost confusion of thought; and he easily perceived it the next day, and all the rest of the week, for it was but Tuesday evening when we talked; but he had no opportunity to come at me all that week, till the Sunday after, when I, being indisposed, did not go to church, and he, making some excuse for the like, stayed at home.

And now he had me an hour and a half again by myself, and we fell into the same arguments all over again, or at least so near the same, as it would be to no purpose to repeat them. At last I asked him warmly, what opinion he must have of my modesty, that he could suppose I should so much as entertain a thought of lying with two brothers, and assured him it could never be. I added, if he was to tell me that he would never see me more, than which nothing but death could be more terrible, yet I could never entertain a thought so dishonourable to myself, and so base to him; and therefore, I entreated him, if he had one grain of respect or affection left for me, that he would speak no more of it to me, or that he would pull his sword out and kill me. He appeared surprised at my obstinacy, as he called it; told me I was unkind to myself, and unkind to him in it; that it was a crisis unlooked for upon us both, and impossible for either of us to foresee, but that he did not see any other way to save us both from ruin, and therefore he thought it the more unkind; but that if he must say no more of it to me, he added with an unusual coldness, that he did not know anything else we had to talk of; and so he rose up to take his leave. I rose up too, as if with the same indifference; but when he came to give me as it were a parting

kiss, I burst out into such a passion of crying, that though I would have spoke, I could not, and only pressing his hand, seemed to give him the adieu, but cried vehemently.

He was sensibly moved with this; so he sat down again, and said a great many kind things to me, to abate the excess of my passion, but still urged the necessity of what he had proposed; all the while insisting, that if I did refuse, he would notwithstanding provide for me; but letting me plainly see that he would decline me in the main point--nay, even as a mistress; making it a point of honour not to lie with the woman that, for aught he knew, might come to be his brother's wife.

The bare loss of him as a gallant was not so much my affliction as the loss of his person, whom indeed I loved to distraction; and the loss of all the expectations I had, and which I always had built my hopes upon, of having him one day for my husband. These things oppressed my mind so much, that, in short, I fell very ill; the agonies of my mind, in a word, threw

me into a high fever, and long it was, that none in the family expected my life.

I was reduced very low indeed, and was often delirious and light-headed; but nothing lay so near me as the fear that, when I was light-headed, I should say something or other to his prejudice. I was distressed in my mind also to

see him, and so he was to see me, for he really loved me most passionately; but it could not be; there was not the least room to desire it on one side or other, or so much as to make it decent.