

Chapter 10

He talked a lot of rambling stuff to his sister and to me, sometimes of one thing, sometimes of another, on purpose to amuse his sister, and every now and then would turn it upon the old story, directing it to me. 'Poor Mrs. Betty,' says he, 'it is a sad thing to be in love; why, it has reduced you sadly.' At last I spoke a little. 'I am glad to see you so merry, sir,' says I; 'but I think the doctor might have found something better to do than to make his game at his patients. If I had been ill of no other distemper, I know the proverb too well to have let him come to me.' 'What proverb?' says he, 'Oh! I remember it now. What--

"Where love is the case,

The doctor's an ass."

Is not that it, Mrs. Betty?' I smiled and said nothing. 'Nay,' says he, 'I think the effect has proved it to be love, for it seems the doctor has been able to do you but little service; you mend very slowly, they say. I doubt there's somewhat in it, Mrs. Betty; I doubt you are sick of the incurables, and that is love.' I smiled and said, 'No, indeed, sir, that's none of my distemper.'

We had a deal of such discourse, and sometimes others that signified as little. By and by he asked me to sing them a song, at which I smiled, and said my singing days were over. At last he asked me if he should play upon

his flute to me; his sister said she believe it would hurt me, and that my head could not bear it. I bowed, and said, No, it would not hurt me. 'And, pray, madam.' said I, 'do not hinder it; I love the music of the flute very much.' Then his sister said, 'Well, do, then, brother.' With that he pulled out the key of his closet. 'Dear sister,' says he, 'I am very lazy; do step to my closet and fetch my flute; it lies in such a drawer,' naming a place where he was sure it was not, that she might be a little while a-looking for it.

As soon as she was gone, he related the whole story to me of the discourse his brother had about me, and of his pushing it at him, and his concern about it, which was the reason of his contriving this visit to me. I assured him I had never opened my mouth either to his brother or to anybody else. I told him the dreadful exigence I was in; that my love to him, and his offering to have me forget that affection and remove it to another, had thrown me down; and that I had a thousand times wished I might die rather than recover, and to have the same circumstances to struggle with as I had before, and that his backwardness to life had been the great reason of the slowness of my recovering. I added that I foresaw that as soon as I was well, I must quit the family, and that as for marrying his brother, I abhorred the thoughts of it after what had been my case with him, and that he might depend upon it I would never see his brother again upon that subject; that if he would break all his vows and oaths and engagements with me, be that between his conscience and his honour and himself; but he should never be able to say that I, whom he had persuaded to call myself his wife, and who

had given him the liberty to use me as a wife, was not as faithful to him as a wife ought to be, whatever he might be to me.

He was going to reply, and had said that he was sorry I could not be persuaded, and was a-going to say more, but he heard his sister a-coming, and so did I; and yet I forced out these few words as a reply, that I could never be persuaded to love one brother and marry another. He shook his head and said, 'Then I am ruined,' meaning himself; and that moment his sister entered the room and told him she could not find the flute. 'Well,' says he merrily, 'this laziness won't do'; so he gets up and goes himself to go to look for it, but comes back without it too; not but that he could have found it, but because his mind was a little disturbed, and he had no mind to play; and, besides, the errand he sent his sister on was answered another way; for he only wanted an opportunity to speak to me, which he gained, though not much to his satisfaction.

I had, however, a great deal of satisfaction in having spoken my mind to him with freedom, and with such an honest plainness, as I have related; and though it did not at all work the way I desired, that is to say, to oblige the person to me the more, yet it took from him all possibility of quitting me but by a downright breach of honour, and giving up all the faith of a gentleman to me, which he had so often engaged by, never to abandon me, but to make me his wife as soon as he came to his estate.

It was not many weeks after this before I was about the house again, and began to grow well; but I continued melancholy, silent, dull, and retired, which amazed the whole family, except he that knew the reason of it; yet it was a great while before he took any notice of it, and I, as backward to speak as he, carried respectfully to him, but never offered to speak a word to him that was particular of any kind whatsoever; and this continued for sixteen or seventeen weeks; so that, as I expected every day to be dismissed the family, on account of what distaste they had taken another way, in which I had no guilt, so I expected to hear no more of this gentleman, after all his solemn vows and protestations, but to be ruined and abandoned.

At last I broke the way myself in the family for my removing; for being talking seriously with the old lady one day, about my own circumstances in the world, and how my distemper had left a heaviness upon my spirits, that I was not the same thing I was before, the old lady said, 'I am afraid, Betty, what I have said to you about my son has had some influence upon you, and that you are melancholy on his account; pray, will you let me know how the matter stands with you both, if it may not be improper? For, as for Robin, he does nothing but rally and banter when I speak of it to him.' 'Why, truly, madam,' said I 'that matter stands as I wish it did not, and I shall be very sincere with you in it, whatever befalls me for it. Mr. Robert has several times proposed marriage to me, which is what I had no reason to expect, my poor circumstances considered; but I have always resisted him, and that perhaps in terms more positive than became me, considering the regard that

I ought to have for every branch of your family; but,' said I, 'madam, I could never so far forget my obligation to you and all your house, to offer to consent to a thing which I know must needs be disobliging to you, and this I have made my argument to him, and have positively told him that I would never entertain a thought of that kind unless I had your consent, and his father's also, to whom I was bound by so many invincible obligations.'

'And is this possible, Mrs. Betty?' says the old lady. 'Then you have been much juster to us than we have been to you; for we have all looked upon you as a kind of snare to my son, and I had a proposal to make to you for your removing, for fear of it; but I had not yet mentioned it to you, because I thought you were not thorough well, and I was afraid of grieving you too much, lest it should throw you down again; for we have all a respect for you still, though not so much as to have it be the ruin of my son; but if it be as you say, we have all wronged you very much.'

'As to the truth of what I say, madam,' said I, 'refer you to your son himself; if he will do me any justice, he must tell you the story just as I have told it.'

Away goes the old lady to her daughters and tells them the whole story, just as I had told it her; and they were surprised at it, you may be sure, as I believed they would be. One said she could never have thought it; another said Robin was a fool; a third said she would not believe a word of it, and she would warrant that Robin would tell the story another way. But the old

gentlewoman, who was resolved to go to the bottom of it before I could have the least opportunity of acquainting her son with what had passed, resolved too that she would talk with her son immediately, and to that purpose sent for him, for he was gone but to a lawyer's house in the town, upon some petty business of his own, and upon her sending he returned immediately.

Upon his coming up to them, for they were all still together, 'Sit down, Robin,' says the old lady, 'I must have some talk with you.' 'With all my heart, madam,' says Robin, looking very merry. 'I hope it is about a good wife, for I am at a great loss in that affair.' 'How can that be?' says his mother; 'did not you say you resolved to have Mrs. Betty?' 'Ay, madam,' says Robin, 'but there is one has forbid the banns.' 'Forbid, the banns!' says his mother; 'who can that be?' 'Even Mrs. Betty herself,' says Robin. 'How so?' says his mother. 'Have you asked her the question, then?' 'Yes, indeed, madam,' says Robin. 'I have attacked her in form five times since she was sick, and am beaten off; the jade is so stout she won't capitulate nor yield upon any terms, except such as I cannot effectually grant.' 'Explain yourself,' says the mother, 'for I am surprised; I do not understand you. I hope you are not in earnest.'

'Why, madam,' says he, 'the case is plain enough upon me, it explains itself; she won't have me, she says; is not that plain enough? I think 'tis plain, and pretty rough too.' 'Well, but,' says the mother, 'you talk of conditions that you cannot grant; what does she want--a settlement? Her jointure ought to

be according to her portion; but what fortune does she bring you?' 'Nay, as to fortune,' says Robin, 'she is rich enough; I am satisfied in that point; but 'tis I that am not able to come up to her terms, and she is positive she will not have me without.'

Here the sisters put in. 'Madam,' says the second sister, 'tis impossible to be serious with him; he will never give a direct answer to anything; you had better let him alone, and talk no more of it to him; you know how to dispose of her out of his way if you thought there was anything in it.' Robin was a little warmed with his sister's rudeness, but he was even with her, and yet with good manners too. 'There are two sorts of people, madam,' says he, turning to his mother, 'that there is no contending with; that is, a wise body and a fool; 'tis a little hard I should engage with both of them together.'