

Chapter 13

However, I did as he bade me, that you may be sure; and having thus taken my leave of him, I never saw him more, for he found means to break out of the bailiff's house that night or the next, and go over into France, and for the rest of the creditors scrambled for it as well as they could. How, I knew not, for I could come at no knowledge of anything, more than this, that he came home about three o'clock in the morning, caused the rest of his goods to be removed into the Mint, and the shop to be shut up; and having raised what money he could get together, he got over, as I said, to France, from whence I had one or two letters from him, and no more. I did not see him when he came home, for he having given me such instructions as above, and I having made the best of my time, I had no more business back again at the house, not knowing but I might have been stopped there by the creditors; for a commission of bankrupt being soon after issued, they might have stopped me by orders from the commissioners. But my husband, having so dexterously got out of the bailiff's house by letting himself down in a most desperate manner from almost the top of the house to the top of another building, and leaping from thence, which was almost two storeys, and which was enough indeed to have broken his neck, he came home and got away his goods before the creditors could come to seize; that is to say, before they could get out the commission, and be ready to send their officers to take possession.

My husband was so civil to me, for still I say he was much of a gentleman,

that in the first letter he wrote me from France, he let me know where he had pawned twenty pieces of fine holland for #30, which were really worth #90, and enclosed me the token and an order for the taking them up, paying the money, which I did, and made in time above #100 of them, having leisure to cut them and sell them, some and some, to private families, as opportunity offered.

However, with all this, and all that I had secured before, I found, upon casting things up, my case was very much altered, and my fortune much lessened; for, including the hollands and a parcel of fine muslins, which I carried off before, and some plate, and other things, I found I could hardly muster up #500; and my condition was very odd, for though I had no child (I had had one by my gentleman draper, but it was buried), yet I was a widow bewitched; I had a husband and no husband, and

I could not pretend to marry again, though I knew well enough my husband would never see England any more, if he lived fifty years. Thus, I say, I was limited from marriage, what offer mightsoever be made me; and I had not one friend to advise with in the condition I was in, least not one I durst trust the secret of my circumstances to, for if the commissioners were to have been informed where I was, I should have been fetched up and examined upon oath, and all I have saved be taken away from me.

Upon these apprehensions, the first thing I did was to go quite out of my

knowledge, and go by another name. This I did effectually, for I went into the Mint too, took lodgings in a very private place, dressed up in the habit of a widow, and called myself Mrs. Flanders.

Here, however, I concealed myself, and though my new acquaintances knew nothing of me, yet I soon got a great deal of company about me; and whether it be that women are scarce among the sorts of people that generally are to be found there, or that some consolations in the miseries of the place are more requisite than on other occasions, I soon found an agreeable woman was exceedingly valuable among the sons of affliction there, and that those that wanted money to pay half a crown on the pound to their creditors, and that run in debt at the sign of the Bull for their dinners, would yet find money for a supper, if they liked the woman.

However, I kept myself safe yet, though I began, like my Lord Rochester's mistress, that loved his company, but would not admit him farther, to have the scandal of a whore, without the joy; and upon this score, tired with the place, and indeed with the company too, I began to think of removing.

It was indeed a subject of strange reflection to me to see men who were overwhelmed in perplexed circumstances, who were reduced some degrees below being ruined, whose families were objects of their own terror and other people's charity, yet while a penny lasted, nay, even beyond it, endeavouring to drown themselves, labouring to forget former things, which

not it was the proper time to remember, making more work for repentance, and sinning on, as a remedy for sin past.

But it is none of my talent to preach; these men were too wicked, even for me. There was something horrid and absurd in their way of sinning, for it was all a force even upon themselves; they did not only act against conscience, but against nature; they put a rape upon their temper to drown the reflections, which their circumstances continually gave them; and nothing was more easy than to see how sighs would interrupt their songs, and paleness and anguish sit upon their brows, in spite of the forced smiles they put on; nay, sometimes it would break out at their very mouths when they had parted with their money for a lewd treat or a wicked embrace. I have heard them, turning about, fetch a deep sigh, and cry, 'What a dog am I! Well, Betty, my dear, I'll drink thy health, though'; meaning the honest wife, that perhaps had not a half-crown for herself and three or four children. The next morning they are at their penitentials again; and perhaps the poor weeping wife comes over to him, either brings him some account of what his creditors are doing, and how she and the children are turned out of doors, or some other dreadful news; and this adds to his self-reproaches; but when he has thought and pored on it till he is almost mad, having no principles to support him, nothing within him or above him to comfort him, but finding it all darkness on every side, he flies to the same relief again, viz. to drink it away, debauch it away, and falling into company of men in just the same condition with himself, he repeats the crime, and thus he goes

every day one step onward of his way to destruction.

I was not wicked enough for such fellows as these yet. On the contrary, I began to consider here very seriously what I had to do; how things stood with me, and what course I ought to take. I knew I had no friends, no, not one friend or relation in the world; and that little I had left apparently wasted, which when it was gone, I saw nothing but misery and starving was before me. Upon these considerations, I say, and filled with horror at the place I was in, and the dreadful objects which I had always before me, I resolved to be gone.

I had made an acquaintance with a very sober, good sort of a woman, who was a widow too, like me, but in better circumstances. Her husband had been a captain of a merchant ship, and having had the misfortune to be cast away coming home on a voyage from the West Indies, which would have been very profitable if he had come safe, was so reduced by the loss, that though he had saved his life then, it broke his heart, and killed him afterwards; and his widow, being pursued by the creditors, was forced to take shelter in the Mint. She soon made things up with the help of friends, and was at liberty again; and finding that I rather was there to be concealed, than by any particular prosecutions and finding also that I agreed with her, or rather she with me, in a just abhorrence of the place and of the company, she invited to go home with her till I could put myself in some posture of settling in the world to my mind; withal telling me, that it was ten to one but

some good captain of a ship might take a fancy to me, and court me, in that part of the town where she lived.

I accepted her offer, and was with her half a year, and should have been longer, but in that interval what she proposed to me happened to herself, and she married very much to her advantage. But whose fortune soever was upon the increase, mine seemed to be upon the wane, and I found nothing present, except two or three boatswains, or such fellows, but as for the commanders, they were generally of two sorts: 1. Such as, having good

business, that is to say, a good ship, resolved not to marry

but with advantage, that is, with a good fortune; 2. Such as,

being out of employ, wanted a wife to help them to a ship; I mean (1) a wife who, having some money, could enable them to hold, as they call it, a good part of a ship themselves, so to encourage owners to come in; or (2) a wife who, if she had not money, had friends who were concerned in shipping, and so could help to put the young man into a good ship, which to them is as good as a portion; and neither of these was my case, so I looked like one that was to lie on hand.

This knowledge I soon learned by experience, viz. that the state of things was altered as to matrimony, and that I was not to expect at London what I

had found in the country: that marriages were here the consequences of politic schemes for forming interests, and carrying on business, and that Love had no share, or but very little, in the matter.

That as my sister-in-law at Colchester had said, beauty, wit, manners, sense, good humour, good behaviour, education, virtue, piety, or any other qualification, whether of body or mind, had no power to recommend; that money only made a woman agreeable; that men chose mistresses indeed by the gust of their affection, and it was requisite to a whore to be handsome, well-shaped, have a good mien and a graceful behaviour; but that for a wife, no deformity would shock the fancy, no ill qualities the judgment; the money was the thing; the portion was neither crooked nor monstrous, but the money was always agreeable, whatever the wife was.

On the other hand, as the market ran very unhappily on the men's side, I found the women had lost the privilege of saying No; that it was a favour now for a woman to have the Question asked, and if any young lady had so much arrogance as to counterfeit a negative, she never had the opportunity given her of denying twice, much less of recovering that false step, and accepting what she had but seemed to decline. The men had such choice everywhere, that the case of the women was very unhappy; for they seemed to ply at every door, and if the man was by great chance refused at one house, he was sure to be received at the next.