

Chapter 14

Besides this, I observed that the men made no scruple to set themselves out, and to go a-fortunehunting, as they call it, when they had really no fortune themselves to demand it, or merit to deserve it; and that they carried it so high, that a woman was scarce allowed to inquire after the character or estate of the person that pretended to her. This I had an example of, in a young lady in the next house to me, and with whom I had contracted an intimacy; she was courted by a young captain, and though she had near #2000 to her fortune, she did but inquire of some of his neighbours about his character, his morals, or substance, and he took occasion at the next visit to let her know, truly, that he took it very ill, and that he should not give her the trouble of his visits any more. I heard of it, and I had begun my acquaintance with her, I went to see her upon it. She entered into a close conversation with me about it, and unbosomed herself very freely. I perceived presently that though she thought herself very ill used, yet she had no power to resent it, and was exceedingly piqued that she had lost him, and particularly that another of less fortune had gained him.

I fortified her mind against such a meanness, as I called it; I told her, that as low as I was in the world, I would have despised a man that should think I ought to take him upon his own recommendation only, without having the liberty to inform myself of his fortune and of his character; also I told her, that as she had a good fortune, she had no need to stoop to the disaster of the time; that it was enough that the men could insult us that had but little

money to recommend us, but if she suffered such an affront to pass upon her without resenting it, she would be rendered low-prized upon all occasions, and would be the contempt of all the women in that part of the town; that a woman can never want an opportunity to be revenged of a man that has used her ill, and that there were ways enough to humble such a fellow as that, or else certainly women were the most unhappy creatures in the world.

I found she was very well pleased with the discourse, and she told me seriously that she would be very glad to make him sensible of her just resentment, and either to bring him on again,

or have the satisfaction of her revenge being as public as possible.

I told her, that if she would take my advice, I would tell her how she should obtain her wishes in both those things, and that I would engage I would bring the man to her door again, and make him beg to be let in. She smiled at that, and soon let me see, that if he came to her door, her resentment was not so great as to give her leave to let him stand long there.

However, she listened very willingly to my offer of advice; so I told her that the first thing she ought to do was a piece of justice to herself, namely, that whereas she had been told by several people that he had reported among the ladies that he had left her, and pretended to give the advantage of the

negative to himself, she should take care to have it well spread among the women--which she could not fail of an opportunity to do in a neighbourhood so addicted to family news as that she live in was--that she had inquired into his circumstances, and found he was not the man as to estate he pretended to be. 'Let them be told, madam,' said I, 'that you had been well informed that he was not the man that you expected, and that you thought it was not safe to meddle with him; that you heard he was of an ill temper, and that he boasted how he had used the women ill upon many occasions, and that particularly he was debauched in his morals', etc. The last of which, indeed, had some truth in it; but at the same time I did not find that she seemed to like him much the worse for that part.

As I had put this into her head, she came most readily into it. Immediately she went to work to find instruments, and she had very little difficulty in the search, for telling her story in general to a couple of gossips in the neighbourhood, it was the chat of the tea-table all over that part of the town, and I met with it wherever I visited; also, as it was known that I was acquainted with the young lady herself, my opinion was asked very often, and I confirmed it with all the necessary aggravations, and set out his character in the blackest colours; but then as a piece of secret intelligence, I added, as what the other gossips knew nothing of, viz. that I had heard he was in very bad circumstances; that he was under a necessity of a fortune to support his interest with the owners of the ship he commanded; that his own part was not paid for, and if it was not paid quickly, his owners would

put him out of the ship, and his chief mate was likely to command it, who offered to buy that part which

the captain had promised to take.

I added, for I confess I was heartily piqued at the rogue, as I called him, that I had heard a rumour, too, that he had a wife alive at Plymouth, and another in the West Indies, a thing which they all knew was not very uncommon for such kind of gentlemen.

This worked as we both desire it, for presently the young lady next door, who had a father and mother that governed both her and her fortune, was shut up, and her father forbid him the house. Also in one place more where he went, the woman had the courage, however strange it was, to say No; and he could try nowhere but he was reproached with his pride, and that he pretended not to give the women leave to inquire into his character, and the like.

Well, by this time he began to be sensible of his mistake; and having alarmed all the women on that side of the water, he went over to Ratcliff, and got access to some of the ladies there; but though the young women there too were, according to the fate of the day, pretty willing to be asked, yet such was his ill-luck, that his character followed him over the water and his good name was much the same there as it was on our side; so that

though he might have had wives enough, yet it did not happen among the women that had good fortunes, which was what he wanted.

But this was not all; she very ingeniously managed another thing herself, for she got a young gentleman, who as a relation, and was indeed a married man, to come and visit her two or three times a week in a very fine chariot and good liveries, and her two agents, and I also, presently spread a report all over, that this gentleman came to court her; that he was a gentleman of a #1000 a year, and that he was fallen in love with her, and that she was going to her aunt's in the city, because it was inconvenient for the gentleman to come to her with his coach in Redriff, the streets being so narrow and difficult.

This took immediately. The captain was laughed at in all companies, and was ready to hang himself. He tried all the ways possible to come at her again, and wrote the most passionate letters to her in the world, excusing his former rashness; and in short, by great application, obtained leave to wait on her again, as he said, to clear his reputation.

At this meeting she had her full revenge of him; for she told him she wondered what he took her to be, that she should admit any man to a treaty of so much consequence as that to marriage, without inquiring very well into his circumstances; that if he thought she was to be huffed into wedlock, and that she was in the same circumstances which her neighbours might be in,

viz. to take up with the first good Christian that came, he was mistaken; that, in a word, his character was really bad, or he was very ill beholden to his neighbours; and that unless he could clear up some points, in which she had justly been prejudiced, she had no more to say to him, but to do herself justice, and give him the satisfaction of knowing that she was not afraid to say No, either to him or any man else.

With that she told him what she had heard, or rather raised herself by my means, of his character; his not having paid for the part he pretended to own of the ship he commanded; of the resolution of his owners to put him out of the command, and to put his mate in his stead; and of the scandal raised on his morals; his having been reproached with such-and-such women, and having a wife at Plymouth and in the West Indies, and the like; and she asked him whether he could deny that she had good reason, if these things were not cleared up, to refuse him, and in the meantime to insist upon having satisfaction in points so significant as they were.

He was so confounded at her discourse that he could not answer a word, and she almost began to believe that all was true, by his disorder, though at the same time she knew that she had been the raiser of all those reports herself.

After some time he recovered himself a little, and from that time became the most humble, the most modest, and most importunate man alive in his

courtship.

She carried her jest on a great way. She asked him, if he thought she was so at her last shift that she could or ought to bear such treatment, and if he did not see that she did not want those who thought it worth their while to come farther to her than he did; meaning the gentleman whom she had brought to visit her by way of sham.

She brought him by these tricks to submit to all possible measures to satisfy her, as well of his circumstances as of his behaviour. He brought her undeniable evidence of his having paid for his part of the ship; he brought her certificates from his owners, that the report of their intending to remove him from the command of the ship and put his chief mate in was false and groundless; in short, he was quite the reverse of what he was before.

Thus I convinced her, that if the men made their advantage of our sex in the affair of marriage, upon the supposition of there being such choice to be had, and of the women being so easy, it was only owing to this, that the women wanted courage to maintain their ground and to play their part; and that, according to my Lord Rochester