

Chapter 15

'A woman's ne'er so ruined but she can Revenge herself on her undoer,
Man.'

After these things this young lady played her part so well, that though she resolved to have him, and that indeed having him was the main bent of her design, yet she made his obtaining her be to him the most difficult thing in the world; and this she did, not by a haughty reserved carriage, but by a just policy, turning the tables upon him, and playing back upon him his own game; for as he pretended, by a kind of lofty carriage, to place himself above the occasion of a character, and to make inquiring into his character a kind of an affront to him, she broke with him upon that subject, and at the same time that she make him submit to all possible inquiry after his affairs, she apparently shut the door against his looking into her own.

It was enough to him to obtain her for a wife. As to what she had, she told him plainly, that as he knew her circumstances,

it was but just she should know his; and though at the same time he had only known her circumstances by common fame, yet he had made so many protestations of his passion for her, that he could ask no more but her hand to his grand request, and the like ramble according to the custom of lovers. In short, he left himself no room to ask any more questions about her

estate, and she took the advantage of it like a prudent woman, for she placed part of her fortune so in trustees, without letting him know anything of it, that it was quite out of his reach, and made him be very well content with the rest.

It is true she was pretty well besides, that is to say, she had about #1400 in money, which she gave him; and the other, after some time, she brought to light as a perquisite to herself, which he was to accept as a mighty favour, seeing though it was not to be his, it might ease him in the article of her particular expenses; and I must add, that by this conduct the gentleman himself became not only the more humble in his applications to her to obtain her, but also was much the more an obliging husband to her when he had her. I cannot but remind the ladies here how much they place themselves below the common station of a wife, which, if I may be allowed not to be partial, is low enough already; I say, they place themselves below their common station, and prepare their own mortifications, by their

submitting so to be insulted by the men beforehand, which I confess I see no necessity of.

This relation may serve, therefore, to let the ladies see that the advantage is not so much on the other side as the men think it is; and though it may be true that the men have but too much choice among us, and that some women may be found who will dishonour themselves, be cheap, and easy to

come at, and will scarce wait to be asked, yet if they will have women, as I may say, worth having, they may find them as uncomeatable as ever and that those that are otherwise are a sort of people that have such deficiencies, when had, as rather recommend the ladies that are difficult than encourage the men to go on with their easy courtship, and expect wives equally valuable that will come at first call.

Nothing is more certain than that the ladies always gain of the men by keeping their ground, and letting their pretended lovers see they can resent being slighted, and that they are not afraid of saying No. They, I observe, insult us mightily with telling us of the number of women; that the wars, and the sea, and trade, and other incidents have carried the men so much away, that there is no proportion between the numbers of the sexes, and therefore the women have the disadvantage; but I am far from granting that the number of women is so great, or the number of men so small; but if they will have me tell the truth, the disadvantage of the women is a terrible scandal upon the men, and it lies here, and here only; namely, that the age is so wicked, and the sex so debauched, that, in short, the number of such men as an honest woman ought to meddle with is small indeed, and it is but here and there that a man is to be found who is fit for a woman to venture upon.

But the consequence even of that too amounts to no more than this, that women ought to be the more nice; for how do we know the just character of

the man that makes the offer? To say that the woman should be the more easy on this occasion, is to say we should be the forwarder to venture because of the greatness of the danger, which, in my way of reasoning, is very absurd.

On the contrary, the women have ten thousand times the more reason to be wary and backward, by how much the hazard of being betrayed is the greater; and would the ladies consider this, and act the wary part, they would discover every cheat that offered; for, in short, the lives of very few men nowadays will bear a character; and if the ladies do but make a little inquiry, they will soon be able to distinguish the men and deliver themselves. As for women that do not think they own safety worth their though, that, impatient of their perfect state, resolve, as they call it, to take the first good Christian that comes, that run into matrimony as a horse rushes into the battle, I can say nothing to them but this, that they are a sort of ladies that are to be prayed for among the rest of distempered people, and to me they look like people that venture their whole estates in a lottery where there is a hundred thousand blanks to one prize.

No man of common-sense will value a woman the less for not giving up herself at the first attack, or for accepting his proposal without inquiring into his person or character; on the contrary, he must think her the weakest of all creatures in the world, as the rate of men now goes. In short, he must have a very contemptible opinion of her capacities, nay, every of her

understanding, that, having but one case of her life, shall call that life away at once, and make matrimony, like death, be a leap in the dark.

I would fain have the conduct of my sex a little regulated in this particular, which is the thing in which, of all the parts of life, I think at this time we suffer most in; 'tis nothing but lack of courage, the fear of not being married at all, and of that frightful state of life called an old maid, of which I have a story to tell by itself. This, I say, is the woman's snare; but would the ladies once but get above that fear and manage rightly, they would more certainly avoid it by standing their ground, in a case so absolutely necessary to their felicity, that by exposing themselves as they do; and if they did not marry so soon as they may do otherwise, they would make themselves amends by marrying safer. She is always married too soon who gets a bad husband, and she is never married too late who gets a good one; in a word, there is no woman, deformity or lost reputation excepted, but if she manages well, may be married safely one time or other; but if she precipitates herself, it is ten thousand to one but she is undone.

But I come now to my own case, in which there was at this time no little nicety. The circumstances I was in made the offer of a good husband the most necessary thing in the world to me, but I found soon that to be made cheap and easy was not the way. It soon began to be found that the widow had no fortune, and to say this was to say all that was ill of me, for I began to be dropped in all the discourses of matrimony. Being well-bred,

handsome, witty, modest, and agreeable; all which I had allowed to my character--whether justly or no is not the purpose--I say, all these would not do without the dross, which way now become more valuable than virtue itself. In short, the widow, they said, had no money.

I resolved, therefore, as to the state of my present circumstances, that it was absolutely necessary to change my station, and make a new appearance in some other place where I was not known, and even to pass by another name if I found occasion.

I communicated my thoughts to my intimate friend, the captain's lady, whom I had so faithfully served in her case with the captain, and who was as ready to serve me in the same kind as I could desire. I made no scruple to lay my circumstances open to her; my stock was but low, for I had made but about #540 at the close of my last affair, and I had wasted some of that; however, I had about #460 left, a great many very rich clothes, a gold watch, and some jewels, though of no extraordinary value, and about #30 or #40 left in linen not disposed of.

My dear and faithful friend, the captain's wife, was so sensible

of the service I had done her in the affair above, that she was not only a steady friend to me, but, knowing my circumstances, she frequently made me presents as money came into her hands, such as fully amounted to a

maintenance, so that I spent none of my own; and at last she made this unhappy proposal to me, viz. that as we had observed, as above, how the men made no scruple to set themselves out as persons meriting a woman of fortune, when they had really no fortune of their own, it was but just to deal with them in their own way and, if it was possible, to deceive the deceiver.

The captain's lady, in short, put this project into my head, and told me if I would be ruled by her I should certainly get a husband of fortune, without leaving him any room to reproach me with want of my own. I told her, as I had reason to do, that I would give up myself wholly to her directions, and that I would have neither tongue to speak nor feet to step in that affair but as she should direct me, depending that she would extricate me out of every difficulty she brought me into, which she said she would answer for.

The first step she put me upon was to call her cousin, and to to a relation's house of hers in the country, where she directed me, and where she brought her husband to visit me; and calling me cousin, she worked matters so about, that her husband and she together invited me most passionately to come to town and be with them, for they now live in a quite different place from where they were before. In the next place, she tells her husband that I had at least #1500 fortune, and that after some of my relations I was like to have a great deal more.