

Chapter 17

'What's that, m dear?' says he.

'Why,' says I, "'tis a little hard upon me, and 'tis harder upon you. I am told that Captain ----' (meaning my friend's husband) 'has told you I had a great deal more money than I ever pretended to have, and I am sure I never employed him to do so.'

'Well,' says he, 'Captain ---- may have told me so, but what then? If you have not so much, that may lie at his door, but you never told me what you had, so I have no reason to blame you if you have nothing at all.'

'That's is so just,' said I, 'and so generous, that it makes my having but a little a double affliction to me.'

'The less you have, my dear,' says he, 'the worse for us both; but I hope your affliction you speak of is not caused for fear I should be unkind to you, for want of a portion. No, no, if you have nothing, tell me plainly, and at once; I may perhaps tell the captain he has cheated me, but I can never say you have cheated me, for did you not give it under your hand that you were poor? and so I ought to expect you to be.'

'Well,' said I, 'my dear, I am glad I have not been concerned in deceiving you before marriage. If I deceive you since, 'tis ne'er the worse; that I am poor is

too true, but not so poor as to have nothing neither'; so I pulled out some bank bills, and gave him about #160. 'There's something, my dear,' said I, 'and not quite all neither.'

I had brought him so near to expecting nothing, by what I had said before, that the money, though the sum was small in itself, was doubly welcome to him; he owned it was more than he looked for, and that he did not question by my discourse to him, but that my fine clothes, gold watch, and a diamond ring or two, had been all my fortune.

I let him please himself with that #160 two or three days, and then, having been abroad that day, and as if I had been to fetch it, I brought him #100 more home in gold, and told him there was a little more portion for him; and, in short, in about a week more I brought him #180 more, and about #60 in linen, which I made him believe I had been obliged to take with the #100

which I gave him in gold, as a composition for a debt of #600, being little more than five shillings in the pound, and overvalued too.

'And now, my dear,' says I to him, 'I am very sorry to tell you, that there is all, and that I have given you my whole fortune.' I added, that if the person who had my #600 had not abused me, I had been worth #1000 to him, but that as it was, I had been faithful to him, and reserved nothing to myself,

but if it had been more he should have had it.

He was so obliged by the manner, and so pleased with the sum,

for he had been in a terrible fright lest it had been nothing at all, that he accepted it very thankfully. And thus I got over the fraud of passing for a fortune without money, and cheating a man into marrying me on pretence of a fortune; which, by the way, I take to be one of the most dangerous steps a woman can take, and in which she runs the most hazard of being ill-used afterwards.

My husband, to give him his due, was a man of infinite good nature, but he was no fool; and finding his income not suited to the manner of living which he had intended, if I had brought him what he expected, and being under a disappointment in his return of his plantations in Virginia, he discovered many times his inclination of going over to Virginia, to live upon his own; and often would be magnifying the way of living there, how cheap, how plentiful, how pleasant, and the like.

I began presently to understand this meaning, and I took him up very plainly one morning, and told him that I did so; that I found his estate turned to no account at this distance, compared to what it would do if he lived upon the spot, and that I found he had a mind to go and live there; and I added, that I was sensible he had been disappointed in a wife, and that

finding his expectations not answered that way, I could do no less, to make him amends, than tell him that I was very willing to go over to Virginia with him and live there.

He said a thousand kind things to me upon the subject of my making such a proposal to him. He told me, that however he was disappointed in his expectations of a fortune, he was not disappointed in a wife, and that I was all to him that a wife could be, and he was more than satisfied on the whole when the particulars were put together, but that this offer was so kind, that it was more than he could express.

To bring the story short, we agreed to go. He told me that he had a very good house there, that it was well furnished, that his mother was alive and lived in it, and one sister, which was all the relations he had; that as soon as he came there, his mother would remove to another house, which was her own for life, and his after her decease; so that I should have all the house to myself; and I found all this to be exactly as he had said.

To make this part of the story short, we put on board the ship which we went in, a large quantity of good furniture for our house, with stores of linen and other necessaries, and a good cargo for sale, and away we went.

To give an account of the manner of our voyage, which was long and full of dangers, is out of my way; I kept no journal, neither did my husband. All

that I can say is, that after a terrible passage, frightened twice with dreadful storms, and once with what was still more terrible, I mean a pirate who came on board and took away almost all our provisions; and which would have been beyond all to me, they had once taken my husband to go along with them, but by entreaties were prevailed with to leave him;--I say, after all these terrible things, we arrived in York River in Virginia, and coming to our plantation, we were received with all the demonstrations of tenderness and affection, by my husband's mother, that were possible to be expressed.

We lived here all together, my mother-in-law, at my entreaty, continuing in the house, for she was too kind a mother to be parted with; my husband likewise continued the same as at first, and I thought myself the happiest creature alive, when an odd and surprising event put an end to all that felicity in a moment, and rendered my condition the most uncomfortable, if not the most miserable, in the world.

My mother was a mighty cheerful, good-humoured old woman --I may call her old woman, for her son was above thirty; I say she was very pleasant, good company, and used to entertain me, in particular, with abundance of stories to divert me, as well of the country we were in as of the people.

Among the rest, she often told me how the greatest part of the inhabitants of the colony came thither in very indifferent circumstances from England; that, generally speaking, they were of two sorts; either, first, such as were

brought over by masters of ships to be sold as servants. 'Such as we call them, my dear,' says she, 'but they are more properly called slaves.' Or, secondly, such as are transported from Newgate and other prisons, after having been found guilty of felony and other crimes punishable with death.

'When they come here,' says she, 'we make no difference; the planters buy them, and they work together in the field till their time is out. When 'tis expired,' said she, 'they have encouragement given them to plant for themselves; for they have a certain number of acres of land allotted them by the country, and they go to work to clear and cure the land, and then to plant it with tobacco and corn for their own use; and as the tradesmen and merchants will trust them with tools and clothes and other necessaries, upon the credit of their crop before it is grown, so they again plant every year a little more than the year before, and so buy whatever they want with the crop that is before them.

'Hence, child,' says she, 'man a Newgate-bird becomes a great man, and we have,' continued she, 'several justices of the peace, officers of the trained bands, and magistrates of the towns they live in, that have been burnt in the hand.'

She was going on with that part of the story, when her own part in it interrupted her, and with a great deal of good-humoured confidence she told me she was one of the second sort of inhabitants herself; that she came

away openly, having ventured too far in a particular case, so that she was become a criminal. 'And here's the mark of it, child,' says she; and, pulling off her glove, 'look ye here,' says she, turning up the palm of her hand, and showed me a very fine white arm and hand, but branded in the inside of the hand, as in such cases it must be.

This story was very moving to me, but my mother, smiling, said, 'You need not think a thing strange, daughter, for as I told you, some of the best men in this country are burnt in the hand, and they are not ashamed to own it. There's Major ----,' says she, 'he was an eminent pickpocket; there's Justice Ba----r, was a shoplifter, and both of them were burnt in the hand; and I could name you several such as they are.'

We had frequent discourses of this kind, and abundance of instances she gave me of the like. After some time, as she was telling some stories of one that was transported but a few weeks ago, I began in an intimate kind of way to ask her to tell me something of her own story, which she did with the utmost plainness and sincerity; how she had fallen into very ill company in London in her young days, occasioned by her mother sending her frequently to carry victuals and other relief to a kinswoman of hers who was a prisoner in Newgate, and who lay in a miserable starving condition, was afterwards condemned to be hanged, but having got respite by pleading her belly, dies afterwards in the prison.

Here my mother-in-law ran out in a long account of the wicked practices in that dreadful place, and how it ruined more young people than all the town besides. 'And child,' says my mother, 'perhaps you may know little of it, or, it may be, have heard nothing about it; but depend upon it,' says she, 'we all know here that there are more thieves and rogues made by that one prison of Newgate than by all the clubs and societies of villains in the nation; 'tis that cursed place,' says my mother, 'that half peopled this colony.'