

Chapter 18

Here she went on with her own story so long, and in so particular a manner, that I began to be very uneasy; but coming to one particular that required telling her name, I thought I should have sunk down in the place. She perceived I was out of order, and asked me if I was not well, and what ailed me. I told her I was so affected with the melancholy story she had told, and the terrible things she had gone through, that it had overcome me, and I begged of her to talk no more of it. 'Why, my dear,' says she very kindly, 'what need these things trouble you? These passages were long before your time, and they give me no trouble at all now; nay, I look back on them with a particular satisfaction, as they have been a means to bring me to this place.' Then she went on to tell me how she very luckily fell into a good family, where, behaving herself well, and her mistress dying, her master married her, by whom she had my husband and his sister, and that by her diligence and good management after her husband's death, she had improved the plantations to such a degree as they then were, so that most of the estate was of her getting, not her husband's, for she had been a widow upwards of sixteen years.

I heard this part of their story with very little attention, because I wanted much to retire and give vent to my passions, which I did soon after; and let any one judge what must be the anguish of my mind, when I came to reflect that this was certainly no more or less than my own mother, and I had now had two

children, and was big with another by my own brother, and lay with him still every night.

I was now the most unhappy of all women in the world. Oh! had the story never been told me, all had been well; it had been no crime to have lain with my husband, since as to his being my relation I had known nothing of it.

I had now such a load on my mind that it kept me perpetually waking; to reveal it, which would have been some ease to me, I could not find would be to any purpose, and yet to conceal it would be next to impossible; nay, I did not doubt but I should talk of it in my sleep, and tell my husband of it whether I would or no. If I discovered it, the least thing I could expect was to lose my husband, for he was too nice and too honest a man to have continued my husband after he had known I had been his sister; so that I was perplexed to the last degree.

I leave it to any man to judge what difficulties presented to my view. I was away from my native country, at a distance prodigious, and the return to me unpassable. I lived very well, but in a circumstance insufferable in itself. If I had discovered myself to my mother, it might be difficult to convince her of the particulars, and I had no way to prove them. On the other hand, if she had questioned or doubted me, I had been undone, for the bare suggestion would have immediately separated me from my husband, without gaining

my mother or him, who would have been neither a husband nor a brother; so that between the surprise on one hand, and the uncertainty on the other, I had been sure to be undone.

In the meantime, as I was but too sure of the fact, I lived therefore in open avowed incest and whoredom, and all under the appearance of an honest wife; and though I was not much touched with the crime of it, yet the action had something in it shocking to nature, and made my husband, as he thought himself, even nauseous to me.

However, upon the most sedate consideration, I resolved that it was absolutely necessary to conceal it all and not make the least discovery of it either to mother or husband; and thus I lived with the greatest pressure imaginable for three years more, but had no more children.

During this time my mother used to be frequently telling me old stories of her former adventures, which, however, were no ways pleasant to me; for by it, though she did not tell it me in plain terms, yet I could easily understand, joined with what I had heard myself, of my first tutors, that in her younger days she had been both whore and thief; but I verily believed she had lived to repent sincerely of both, and that she was then a very pious, sober, and religious woman.

Well, let her life have been what it would then, it was certain that my life

was very uneasy to me; for I lived, as I have said, but in the worst sort of whoredom, and as I could expect no good of it, so really no good issue came of it, and all my seeming prosperity wore off, and ended in misery and destruction. It was some time, indeed, before it came to this, for, but I know not by what ill fate guided, everything went wrong with us afterwards, and that which was worse, my husband grew strangely altered, forward, jealous, and unkind, and I was as impatient of bearing his carriage, as the carriage was unreasonable and unjust. These things proceeded so far, that we came at last to be in such ill terms with one another, that I claimed a promise of him, which he entered willingly into with me when I consented to come from England with him, viz. that if I found the country not to agree with me, or that I did not like to live there, I should come away to England again when I pleased, giving him a year's warning to settle his affairs.

I say, I now claimed this promise of him, and I must confess I did it not in the most obliging terms that could be in the world neither; but I insisted that he treated me ill, that I was remote from my friends, and could do myself no justice, and that he was jealous without cause, my conversation having been unblamable, and he having no pretense for it, and that to remove to England would take away all occasion from him.

I insisted so peremptorily upon it, that he could not avoid coming to a point, either to keep his word with me or to break it; and this, notwithstanding he used all the skill he was master of, and employed his mother and other

agents to prevail with me to alter my resolutions; indeed, the bottom of the thing lay at my heart, and that made all his endeavours fruitless, for my heart was alienated from him as a husband. I loathed the thoughts of bedding with him, and used a thousand pretenses of illness and humour to prevent his touching me, fearing nothing more than to be with child by him, which to be sure would have prevented, or at least delayed, my going over to England.

However, at last I put him so out of humour, that he took up a rash and fatal resolution; in short, I should not go to England; and though he had promised me, yet it was an unreasonable thing for me to desire it; that it would be ruinous to his affairs, would unhinge his whole family, and be next to an undoing him in the world; that therefore I ought not to desire it of him, and that no wife in the world that valued her family and her husband's prosperity would insist upon such a thing.

This plunged me again, for when I considered the thing calmly, and took my husband as he really was, a diligent, careful man in the main work of laying up an estate for his children, and that he knew nothing of the dreadful circumstances that he was in, I could not but confess to myself that my proposal was very unreasonable, and what no wife that had the good of her family at heart would have desired.

But my discontents were of another nature; I looked upon him no longer as

a husband, but as a near relation, the son of my own mother, and I resolved somehow or other to be clear of him, but which way I did not know, nor did it seem possible.

It is said by the ill-natured world, of our sex, that if we are set on a thing, it is impossible to turn us from our resolutions; in short, I never ceased poring upon the means to bring to pass my voyage, and came that length with my husband at last, as to propose going without him. This provoked him to the last degree, and he called me not only an unkind wife, but an unnatural mother, and asked me how I could entertain such a thought without horror, as that of leaving my two children (for one was dead) without a mother, and to be brought up by strangers, and never to see them more. It was true, had things been right, I should not have done it, but now it was my real desire never to see them, or him either, any more; and as to the charge of unnatural, I could easily answer it to myself, while I knew that the whole relation was unnatural in the highest degree in the world.

However, it was plain there was no bringing my husband to anything; he would neither go with me nor let me go without him, and it was quite out of my power to stir without his consent, as any one that knows the constitution of the country I was in, knows very well.

We had many family quarrels about it, and they began in time to grow up to a dangerous height; for as I was quite estranged from my husband (as he

was called) in affection, so I took no heed to my words, but sometimes gave him language that was provoking; and, in short, strove all I could to bring him to a parting with me, which was what above all things in the world I desired most.

He took my carriage very ill, and indeed he might well do so, for at last I refused to bed with him, and carrying on the breach upon all occasions to extremity, he told me once he thought I was mad, and if I did not alter my conduct, he would put me under cure; that is to say, into a madhouse. I told him he should find I was far enough from mad, and that it was not in his power, or any other villain's, to murder me. I confess at the same time I was heartily frightened at his thoughts of putting me into a madhouse, which would at once have destroyed all the possibility of breaking the truth out, whatever the occasion might be; for that then no one would have given credit to a word of it.

This therefore brought me to a resolution, whatever came of it, to lay open my whole case; but which way to do it, or to whom, was an inextricable difficulty, and took me many months to resolve. In the meantime, another quarrel with my husband happened, which came up to such a mad extreme as almost pushed me on to tell it him all to his face; but though I kept it in so as not to come to the particulars, I spoke so much as put him into the utmost confusion, and in the end brought out the whole story.