

## Chapter 21

This a little amazed him, and he wrote down the words distinctly, but read them over and over before he signed them, hesitating at them several times, and repeating them: "My mother's prejudice! and your prejudice! What mysterious thing can this be?" However, at last he signed it.

'Well, says I, 'my dear, I'll ask you no more under your hand; but as you are to hear the most unexpected and surprising thing that perhaps ever befell any family in the world, I beg you to promise me you will receive it with composure and a presence of mind suitable to a man of sense.'

'I'll do my utmost,' says he, 'upon condition you will keep me no longer in suspense, for you terrify me with all these preliminaries.'

"Well, then,' says I, 'it is this: as I told you before in a heat, that I was not your lawful wife, and that our children were not legal children, so I must let you know now in calmness and in kindness, but with affliction enough, that I am your own sister, and you my own brother, and that we are both the children of our mother now alive, and in the house, who is convinced of the truth of it, in a manner not to be denied or contradicted.'

I saw him turn pale and look wild; and I said, 'Now remember your promise, and receive it with presence of mind; for who could have said more to prepare you for it than I have done? However, I called a servant, and got him

a little glass of rum (which is the usual dram of that country), for he was just fainting away. When he was a little recovered, I said to him, 'This story, you may be sure, requires a long explanation, and therefore, have patience and compose your mind to hear it out, and I'll make it as short as I can'; and with this, I told him what I thought was needful of the fact, and particularly how my mother came to discover it to me, as above. 'And now, my dear,' says I, 'you will see reason for my capitulations, and that I neither have been the cause of this matter, nor could be so, and that I could know nothing of it before now.'

'I am fully satisfied of that,' says he, 'but 'tis a dreadful surprise to me; however, I know a remedy for it all, and a remedy that shall put an end to your difficulties, without your going to England.' 'That would be strange,' said I, 'as all the rest.' 'No, no,' says he, 'I'll make it easy; there's nobody in the way of it but myself.' He looked a little disordered when he said this, but I did not apprehend anything from it at that time, believing, as it used to be said, that they who do those things never talk of them, or that they who talk of such things never do them.

But things were not come to their height with him, and I observed he became pensive and melancholy; and in a word, as I thought, a little distempered in his head. I endeavoured to talk him into temper, and to reason him into a kind of scheme for our government in the affair, and sometimes he would be well, and talk with some courage about it; but the

weight of it lay too heavy upon his thoughts, and, in short, it went so far that he made attempts upon himself, and in one of them had actually strangled himself and had not his mother come into the room in the very moment, he had died; but with the help of a Negro servant she cut him down and recovered him.

Things were now come to a lamentable height in the family. My pity for him now began to revive that affection which at first I really had for him, and I endeavoured sincerely, by all the kind carriage I could, to make up the breach; but, in short, it had gotten too great a head, it preyed upon his spirits, and it threw him into a long, lingering consumption, though it happened not to be mortal. In this distress I did not know what to do, as his life was apparently declining, and I might perhaps have married again there, very much to my advantage; it had been certainly my business to have stayed in the country, but my mind was restless too, and uneasy; I hankered after coming to England, and nothing would satisfy me without it.

In short, by an unwearied importunity, my husband, who was apparently decaying, as I observed, was at last prevailed with; and so my own fate pushing me on, the way was made clear for me, and my mother concurring, I obtained a very good cargo for my coming to England.

When I parted with my brother (for such I am now to call him), we agreed that after I arrived he should pretend to have an account that I was dead in

England, and so might marry again when he would. He promised, and engaged to me to correspond with me as a sister, and to assist and support me as long as I lived; and that if he died before me, he would leave sufficient to his mother to take care of me still, in the name of asister, and he was in some respects careful of me, when he heard of me; but it was so oddly managed that I felt the disappointments very sensibly afterwards, as you shall hear in its time.

I came away for England in the month of August, after I had been eight years in that country; and now a new scene of misfortunes attended me, which perhaps few women have gone through the life of.

We had an indifferent good voyage till we came just upon the coast of England, and where we arrived in two-and-thirty days, but were then ruffled with two or three storms, one of which drove us away to the coast of Ireland, and we put in at Kinsdale. We remained there about thirteen days, got some refreshment on shore, and put to sea again, though we met with very bad weather again, in which the ship sprung her mainmast, as they called it, for I knew not what they meant. But we got at last into Milford Haven, in Wales, where, though it was remote from our port, yet having my foot safe upon the firm ground of my native country, the isle of Britain, I resolved to venture it no more upon the waters, which had been so terrible to me; so getting my clothes and money on shore, with my bills of loading and other papers, I

resolved to come for London, and leave the ship to get to her port as she could; the port whither she was bound was to Bristol, where my brother's chief correspondent lived.

I got to London in about three weeks, where I heard a little while after that the ship was arrived in Bristol, but at the same time had the misfortune to know that by the violent weather she had been in, and the breaking of her mainmast, she had great damage on board, and that a great part of her cargo was spoiled.

I had now a new scene of life upon my hands, and a dreadful appearance it had. I was come away with a kind of final farewell. What I brought with me was indeed considerable, had it come safe, and by the help of it, I might have married again tolerably well; but as it was, I was reduced to between two or three hundred pounds in the whole, and this without any hope of recruit. I was entirely without friends, nay, even so much as without acquaintance, for I found it was absolutely necessary not to revive former acquaintances; and as for my subtle friend that set me up formerly for a fortune, she was dead, and her husband also; as I was informed, upon sending a person unknown to inquire.

The looking after my cargo of goods soon after obliged me to take a journey to Bristol, and during my attendance upon that affair I took the diversion of going to the Bath, for as I was still far from being old, so my humour, which

was always gay, continued so to an extreme; and being now, as it were, a woman of fortune though I was a woman without a fortune, I expected something or other might happen in my way that might mend my circumstances, as had been my case before.

The Bath is a place of gallantry enough; expensive, and full of snares. I went thither, indeed, in the view of taking anything that might offer, but I must do myself justice, as to protest I knew nothing amiss; I meant nothing but in an honest way, nor had I any thoughts about me at first that looked the way which afterwards I suffered them to be guided.

Here I stayed the whole latter season, as it is called there, and contracted some unhappy acquaintances, which rather prompted the follies I fell afterwards into than fortified me against them. I lived pleasantly enough, kept good company, that is to say, gay, fine company; but had the discouragement to find this way of living sunk me exceedingly, and that as I had no settled income, so spending upon the main stock was but a certain kind of bleeding to death; and this gave me many sad reflections in the interval of my other thoughts. However, I shook them off, and still flattered myself that something or other might offer for my advantage.

But I was in the wrong place for it. I was not now at Redriff, where, if I had set myself tolerably up, some honest sea captain or other might have talked with me upon the honourable terms of matrimony; but I was at the Bath,

where men find a mistress sometimes, but very rarely look for a wife; and consequently all the particular acquaintances a woman can expect to make there must have some tendency that way.

I had spent the first season well enough; for though I had contracted some acquaintance with a gentleman who came to the Bath for his diversion, yet I had entered into no felonious treaty, as it might be called. I had resisted some casual offers of gallantry, and had managed that way well enough. I was not wicked enough to come into the crime for the mere vice of it, and I had no extraordinary offers made me that tempted me with the main thing which I wanted.

However, I went this length the first season, viz. I contracted an acquaintance with a woman in whose house I lodged, who, though she did not keep an ill house, as we call it, yet had none of the best principles in herself. I had on all occasions behaved myself so well as not to get the least slur upon my reputation on any account whatever, and all the men that I had conversed with were of so good reputation that I had not given the least reflection by conversing with them; nor did any of them seem to think there was room for a wicked correspondence, if they had any of them offered it; yet there was one gentleman, as above, who always singled me out for the diversion of my company, as he called it, which, as he was pleased to say, was very agreeable to him, but at that time there was no more in it.