

Chapter 28

'Why,' says I, 'if your case is so plain as you say it is, you may be legally divorced, and then you may find honest women enough to ask the question of fairly; the sex is not so scarce that you can want a wife.'

'Well, then,' said he, 'I am in earnest; I'll take your advice; but shall I ask you one question seriously beforehand?'

'Any question,' said I, 'but that you did before.'

'No, that answer will not do,' said he, 'for, in short, that is the question I shall ask.'

'You may ask what questions you please, but you have my answer to that already,' said I. 'Besides, sir,' said I, 'can you think so ill of me as that I would give any answer to such a question beforehand? Can any woman alive believe you in earnest, or think you design anything but to banter her?'

'Well, well,' says he, 'I do not banter you, I am in earnest; consider of it.'

'But, sir,' says I, a little gravely, 'I came to you about my own business; I beg of you to let me know, what you will advise me

to do?'

'I will be prepared,' says he, 'against you come again.'

'Nay,' says I, 'you have forbid my coming any more.'

'Why so?' said he, and looked a little surprised.

'Because,' said I, 'you can't expect I should visit you on the account you talk of.'

'Well,' says he, 'you shall promise me to come again, however, and I will not say any more of it till I have gotten the divorce, but I desire you will prepare to be better conditioned when that's done, for you shall be the woman, or I will not be divorced at all; why, I owe it to your unlooked-for kindness, if it were to nothing else, but I have other reasons too.'

He could not have said anything in the world that pleased me better; however, I knew that the way to secure him was to stand off while the thing was so remote, as it appeared to be, and that it was time enough to accept of it when he was able to perform it; so I said very respectfully to him, it was time enough to consider of these things when he was in a condition to talk of them; in the meantime, I told him, I was going a great way from him, and he would find objects enough to please him better. We broke off here for the

present, and he made me promise him to come again the next day, for his resolutions upon my own business, which after some pressing I did; though had he seen farther into me, I wanted no pressing on that account.

I came the next evening, accordingly, and brought my maid with me, to let him see that I kept a maid, but I sent her away as soon as I was gone in. He would have had me let the maid have stayed, but I would not, but ordered her aloud to come for me again about nine o'clock. But he forbade that, and told me he would see me safe home, which, by the way, I was not very well please with, supposing he might do that to know where I lived and inquire into my character and circumstances. However, I ventured that, for all that the people there or thereabout knew of me, was to my advantage; and all the character he had of me, after he had inquired, was that I was a woman of fortune, and that I was a very modest, sober body; which, whether true or not in the main, yet you may see how necessary it is for all women who expect anything in the world, to preserve the character of their virtue, even when perhaps they may have sacrificed the thing itself.

I found, and was not a little please with it, that he had provided a supper for me. I found also he lived very handsomely, and had a house very handsomely furnished; all of which I was rejoiced at indeed, for I looked upon it as all my own.

We had now a second conference upon the subject-matter of the last

conference. He laid his business very home indeed; he protested his affection to me, and indeed I had no room to doubt it; he declared that it began from the first moment I talked with him, and long before I had mentioned leaving my effects with him. 'Tis no matter when it began,' thought I; 'if it will but hold, 'twill be well enough.' He then told me how much the offer I had made of trusting him with my effects, and leaving them to him, had enraged him. 'So I intended it should,' thought I, 'but then I thought you had been a single man too.' After we had supped, I observed he pressed me very hard to drink two or three glasses of wine, which, however, I declined, but drank one glass or two. He then told me he had a proposal to make to me, which I should promise him I would not take ill if I should not grant it. I told him I hoped he would make no dishonourable proposal to me, especially in his own house, and that if it was such, I desired he would not propose it, that I might not be obliged to offer any resentment to him that did not become the respect I professed for him, and the trust I had placed in him in coming to his house; and begged of him he would give me leave to go away, and accordingly began to put on my gloves and prepare to be gone, though at the same time I no more intended it than he intended to let me.

Well, he importuned me not to talk of going; he assured me he had no dishonourable thing in his thoughts about me, and was very far from offering anything to me that was dishonourable, and if I thought so, he would choose to say no more of it.

That part I did not relish at all. I told him I was ready to hear anything that he had to say, depending that he would say nothing unworthy of himself, or unfit for me to hear. Upon this, he told me his proposal was this: that I would marry him, though he had not yet obtained the divorce from the whore his wife; and to satisfy me that he meant honourably, he would promise not to desire me to live with him, or go to bed with him till the divorce was obtained. My heart said yet to this offer at first word, but it was necessary to play the hypocrite a little more with him; so I seemed to decline the motion with some warmth, and besides a little condemning the thing as unfair, told him that such a proposal could be of no signification, but to entangle us both in great difficulties; for if he should not at last obtain the divorce, yet we could not dissolve the marriage, neither could we proceed in it; so that if he was disappointed in the divorce, I left him to consider what a condition we should both be in.

In short, I carried on the argument against this so far, that I convinced him it was not a proposal that had any sense in it. Well, then he went from it to another, and that was, that I would sign and seal a contract with him, conditioning to marry him as soon as the divorce was obtained, and to be void if he could not obtain it.

I told him such a thing was more rational than the other; but as this was the first time that ever I could imagine him weak enough to be in earnest in this affair, I did not use to say Yes at first asking; I would consider of it.

I played with this lover as an angler does with a trout. I found I had him fast on the hook, so I jested with his new proposal, and put him off. I told him he knew little of me, and bade him inquire about me; I let him also go home with me to my lodging, though I would not ask him to go in, for I told him it was not decent.

In short, I ventured to avoid signing a contract of marriage, and the reason why I did it was because the lady that had invited me so earnestly to go with her into Lancashire insisted so positively upon it, and promised me such great fortunes, and such fine things there, that I was tempted to go and try. 'Perhaps,' said I, 'I may mend myself very much'; and then I made no scruple in my thoughts of quitting my honest citizen, whom I was not so much in love with as not to leave him for a richer.

In a word, I avoided a contract; but told him I would go into the north, that he should know where to write to me by the consequence of the business I had entrusted with him; that I would give him a sufficient pledge of my respect for him, for I would leave almost all I had in the world in his hands; and I would thus far give him my word, that as soon as he had sued out a divorce from his first wife, he would send me an account of it, I would come up to London, and that then we would talk seriously of the matter.

It was a base design I went with, that I must confess, though I was invited

thither with a design much worse than mine was, as the sequel will discover. Well, I went with my friend, as I called her, into Lancashire. All the way we went she caressed me with the utmost appearance of a sincere, undissembled affection; treated me, except my coach-hire, all the way; and her brother brought a gentleman's coach to Warrington to receive us, and we were carried from thence to Liverpool with as much ceremony as I could desire. We were also entertained at a merchant's house in Liverpool three or four days very handsomely; I forbear to tell his name, because of what followed. Then she told me she would carry me to an uncle's house of hers, where we should be nobly entertained. She did so; her uncle, as she called him, sent a coach and four horses for us, and we were carried near forty miles I know not whither.

We came, however, to a gentleman's seat, where was a numerous family, a large park, extraordinary company indeed, and where she was called cousin. I told her if she had resolved to bring me into such company as this, she should have let me have prepared myself, and have furnished myself with better clothes. The ladies took notice of that, and told me very genteelly they did not value people in their country so much by their clothes as they did in London; that their cousin had fully informed them of my quality, and that I did not want clothes to set me off; in short, they entertained me, not like what I was, but like what they thought I had been, namely, a widow lady of a great fortune.

The first discovery I made here was, that the family were all Roman Catholics, and the cousin too, whom I called my friend; however, I must say that nobody in the world could behave better to me, and I had all the civility shown me that I could have had if I had been of their opinion. The truth is, I had not so much principle of any kind as to be nice in point of religion, and I presently learned to speak favourably of the Romish Church; particularly, I told them I saw little but the prejudice of education in all the difference that were among Christians about religion, and if it had so happened that my father had been a Roman Catholic, I doubted not but I should have been as well pleased with their religion as my own.