

Chapter 36

I then began to write to my friend at the bank in a more kindly style, and particularly about the beginning of July I sent him a letter, that I proposed to be in town some time in August. He returned me an answer in the most passionate terms imaginable, and desired me to let him have timely notice, and he would come and meet me, two day's journey. This puzzled me scurvily, and I did not know what answer to make of it. Once I resolved to take the stage-coach to West Chester, on purpose only to have the satisfaction of coming back, that he might see me really come in the same coach; for I had a jealous thought, though I had no ground for it at all, lest he should think I was not really in the country. And it was no ill-grounded thought as you shall hear presently.

I endeavoured to reason myself out of it, but it was in vain; the impression lay so strong on my mind, that it was not to be resisted. At last it came as an addition to my new design of going into the country, that it would be an excellent blind to my old governess, and would cover entirely all my other affairs, for she did not know in the least whether my new lover lived in London or in Lancashire; and when I told her my resolution, she was fully persuaded it was in Lancashire.

Having taken my measure for this journey I let her know it, and sent the maid that tended me, from the beginning, to take a place for me in the coach. She would have had me let the maid have waited on me down to the

last stage, and come up again in the waggon, but I convinced her it would not be convenient. When I went away, she told me she would enter into no measures for correspondence, for she saw evidently that my affection to my child would cause me to write to her, and to visit her too when I came to town again. I assured her it would, and so took my leave, well satisfied to have been freed from such a house, however good my accommodations there had been, as I have related above.

I took the place in the coach not to its full extent, but to a place called Stone, in Cheshire, I think it is, where I not only had no manner of business, but not so much as the least acquaintance with any person in the town or near it. But I knew that with money in the pocket one is at home anywhere; so I lodged there two or three days, till, watching my opportunity, I found room in another stage-coach, and took passage back again for London, sending a letter to my gentleman that I should be such a certain day at Stony-Stratford, where the coachman told me he was to lodge.

It happened to be a chance coach that I had taken up, which, having been hired on purpose to carry some gentlemen to West Chester who were going for Ireland, was now returning, and did not tie itself to exact times or places as the stages did; so that, having been obliged to lie still on Sunday, he had time to get himself ready to come out, which otherwise he could not have done.

However, his warning was so short, that he could not reach to Stony-Stratford time enough to be with me at night, but he met me at a place called Brickhill the next morning, as we were just coming in to tow.

I confess I was very glad to see him, for I had thought myself a little disappointed over-night, seeing I had gone so far to contrive my coming on purpose. He pleased me doubly too by the figure he came in, for he brought a very handsome (gentleman's) coach and four horses, with a servant to attend him.

He took me out of the stage-coach immediately, which stopped at an inn in Brickhill; and putting into the same in, he set up his own coach, and bespoke his dinner. I asked him what he meant by that, for I was for going forward with the journey. He said, No, I had need of a little rest upon the road, and that was a very good sort of a house, though it was but a little town; so we would go no farther that night, whatever came of it.

I did not press him much, for since he had come so to meet me, and put himself to so much expense, it was but reasonable I should oblige him a little too; so I was easy as to that point.

After dinner we walked to see the town, to see the church, and to view the fields, and the country, as is usual for strangers to do; and our landlord was our guide in going to see the church. I observed my gentleman inquired

pretty much about the parson, and I took the hint immediately that he certainly would propose to be married; and though it was a sudden thought, it followed presently, that, in short, I would not refuse him; for, to be plain, with my circumstances I was in no condition now to say No; I had no reason now to run any more such hazards.

But while these thoughts ran round in my head, which was the work but of a few moments, I observed my landlord took him aside and whispered to him, though not very softly neither, for so much I overheard: 'Sir, if you shall have occasion----' the rest I could not hear, but it seems it was to this purpose: 'Sir, if you shall have occasion for a minister, I have a friend a little way off that will serve you, and be as private as you please.' My gentleman answered loud enough for me to hear, 'Very well, I believe I shall.'

I was no sooner come back to the inn but he fell upon me with irresistible words, that since he had had the good fortune to meet me, and everything concurred, it would be hastening his felicity if I would put an end to the matter just there. 'What do you mean?' says I, colouring a little. 'What, in an inn, and upon the road! Bless us all,' said I, as if I had been surprised, 'how can you talk so?' 'Oh, I can talk so very well,' says he, 'I came a-purpose to talk so, and I'll show you that I did'; and with that he pulls out a great bundle of papers. 'You fright me,' said I; 'what are all these?' 'Don't be frightened, my dear,' said he, and kissed me. This was the first time that he had been so free to call me 'my dear'; then he repeated it, 'Don't be frightened;

you shall see what it is all'; then he laid them all abroad. There was first the deed or sentence of divorce from his wife, and the full evidence of her playing the whore; then there were the certificates of the minister and churchwardens of the parish where she lived, proving that she was buried, and intimating the manner of her death; the copy of the coroner's warrant for a jury to sit upon her, and the verdict of the jury, who brought it in Non compos mentis. All this was indeed to the purpose, and to give me satisfaction, though, by the way, I was not so scrupulous, had he known all, but that I might have taken him without it. However, I looked them all over as well as I could, and told him that this was all very clear indeed, but that he need not have given himself the trouble to have brought them out with him, for it was time enough. Well, he said, it might be time enough for me, but notime but the present time was time enough for him.

There were other papers rolled up, and I asked him what they were. 'Why, ay,' says he, 'that's the question I wanted to have you ask me'; so he unrolls them and takes out a little shagreen case, and gives me out of it a very fine diamond ring. I could not refuse it, if I had a mind to do so, for he put it upon my finger; so I made him a curtsy and accepted it. Then he takes out another ring: 'And this,' says he, 'is for another occasion,' so he puts that in his pocket. 'Well, but let me see it, though,' says I, and smiled; 'I guess what it is; I think you are mad.' 'I should have been mad if I had done less,' says he, and still he did not show me, and I had a great mind to see it; so I says, 'Well, but let me see it.' 'Hold,' says he, 'first look here'; then he took up the

roll again and read it, and behold! it was a licence for us to be married. 'Why,' says I, 'are you distracted? Why, you were fully satisfied that I would comply and yield at first word, or resolved to take no denial.' 'The last is certainly the case,' said he. 'But you may be mistaken,' said I. 'No, no,' says he, 'how can you think so? I must not be denied, I can't be denied'; and with that he fell to kissing me so violently, I could not get rid of him.

There was a bed in the room, and we were walking to and again, eager in the discourse; at last he takes me by surprise in his arms, and threw me on the bed and himself with me, and holding me fast in his arms, but without the least offer of any indecency, courted me to consent with such repeated entreaties and arguments, protesting his affection, and vowing he would not let me go till I had promised him, that at last I said, 'Why, you resolve not to be denied, indeed, I can't be denied.' 'Well, well,' said I, and giving him a slight kiss, 'then you shan't be denied,' said I; 'let me get up.'

He was so transported with my consent, and the kind manner of it, that I began to think once he took it for a marriage, and would not stay for the form; but I wronged him, for he gave over kissing me, and then giving me two or three kisses again, thanked me for my kind yielding to him; and was so overcome with the satisfaction and joy of it, that I saw tears stand in his eyes.

I turned from him, for it filled my eyes with tears too, and I asked him leave

to retire a little to my chamber. If ever I had a grain of true repentance for a vicious and abominable life for twenty-four years past, it was then. On, what a felicity is it to mankind, said I to myself, that they cannot see into the hearts of one another! How happy had it been for me if I had been wife to a man of so much honesty, and so much affection from the beginning!

Then it occurred to me, 'What an abominable creature am I! and how is this innocent gentleman going to be abused by me! How little does he think, that having divorced a whore, he is throwing himself into the arms of another! that he is going to marry one that has lain with two brothers, and has had three children by her own brother! one that was born in Newgate, whose mother was a whore, and is now a transported thief! one that has lain with thirteen men, and has had a child since he saw me! Poor gentleman!' said I, 'what is he going to do?' After this reproaching myself was over, it following thus: 'Well, if I must be his wife, if it please God to give me grace, I'll be a true wife to him, and love him suitably to the strange excess of his passion for me; I will make him amends if possible,