

Chapter 37

by what he shall see, for the cheats and abuses I put upon him, which he does not see.'

He was impatient for my coming out of my chamber, but finding me long, he went downstairs and talked with my landlord about the parson.

My landlord, an officious though well-meaning fellow, had sent away for the neighbouring clergyman; and when my gentleman began to speak of it to him, and talk of sending for him, 'Sir,' says he to him, 'my friend is in the house'; so without any more words he brought them together. When he came to the minister, he asked him if he would venture to marry a couple of strangers that were both willing. The parson said that Mr.---- had said something to him of it; that he hoped it was no clandestine business; that he seemed to be a grave gentleman, and he supposed madam was not a girl, so that the consent of friends should be wanted. 'To put you out of doubt of that,' says my gentleman, 'read this paper'; and out he pulls the license. 'I am satisfied,' says the minister; 'where is the lady?' 'You shall see her presently,' says my gentleman.

When he had said thus he comes upstairs, and I was by that time come out of my room; so he tells me the minister was below, and that he had talked with him, and that upon showing him the license, he was free to marry us with all his heart, 'but he asks to see you'; so he asked if I would let him

come up.

"Tis time enough,' said I, 'in the morning, is it not?' 'Why,' said he, 'my dear, he seemed to scruple whether it was not some young girl stolen from her parents, and I assured him we were both of age to command our own consent; and that made him ask to see you.' 'Well,' said I, 'do as you please'; so up they brings the parson, and a merry, good sort of gentleman he was. He had been told, it seems, that we had met there by accident, that I came in the Chester coach, and my gentleman in his own coach to meet me; that we were to have met last night at Stony-Stratford, but that he could not reach so far. 'Well, sir,' says the parson, 'every ill turn has some good in it. The disappointment, sir,' says he to my gentleman, 'was yours, and the good turn is mine, for if you had met at Stony-Stratford I had not had the honour to marry you. Landlord, have you a Common Prayer Book?'

I started as if I had been frightened. 'Lord, sir,' says I, 'what do you mean? What, to marry in an inn, and at night too?' 'Madam,' says the minister, 'if you will have it be in the church, you shall; but I assure you your marriage will be as firm here as in the church; we are not tied by the canons to marry nowhere but in the church; and if you will have it in the church, it will be as public as a county fair; and as for the time of day, it does not at all weigh in this case; our princes are married in their chambers, and at eight or ten o'clock at night.'

I was a great while before I could be persuaded, and pretended not to be willing at all to be married but in the church. But it was all grimace; so I seemed at last to be prevailed on, and my landlord and his wife and daughter were called up. My landlord was father and clerk and all together, and we were married, and very merry we were; though I confess the self-reproaches which I had upon me before lay close to me, and extorted every now and then a deep sigh from me, which my bridegroom took notice of, and endeavoured to encourage me, thinking, poor man, that I had some little hesitations at the step I had taken so hastily.

We enjoyed ourselves that evening completely, and yet all was kept so private in the inn that not a servant in the house knew of it, for my landlady and her daughter waited on me, and would not let any of the maids come upstairs, except while we were at supper. My landlady's daughter I called my bridesmaid; and sending for a shopkeeper the next morning, I gave the young woman a good suit of knots, as good as the town would afford, and finding it was a lace-making town, I gave her mother a piece of bone-lace for a head.

One reason that my landlord was so close was, that he was unwilling the minister of the parish should hear of it; but for all that somebody heard of it, so at that we had the bells set a-ringing the next morning early, and the music, such as the town would afford, under our window; but my landlord brazened it out, that we were married before we came thither, only that,

being his former guests, we would have our wedding-supper at his house.

We could not find in our hearts to stir the next day; for, in short, having been disturbed by the bells in the morning, and having perhaps not slept overmuch before, we were so sleepy afterwards that we lay in bed till almost twelve o'clock.

I begged my landlady that we might not have any more music in the town, nor ringing of bells, and she managed it so well that we were very quiet; but an odd passage interrupted all my mirth for a good while. The great room of the house looked into the street, and my new spouse being belowstairs, I had walked to the end of the room; and it being a pleasant, warm day, I had opened the window, and was standing at it for some air, when I saw three gentlemen come by on horseback and go into an inn just against us.

It was not to be concealed, nor was it so doubtful as to leave me any room to question it, but the second of the three was my Lancashire husband. I was frightened to death; I never was in such a consternation in my life; I thought I should have sunk into the ground; my blood ran chill in my veins, and I trembled as if I had been in a cold fit of ague. I say, there was no room to question the truth of it; I knew his clothes, I knew his horse, and I knew his face.

The first sensible reflect I made was, that my husband was not by to see my

disorder, and that I was very glad of it. The gentlemen had not been long in the house but they came to the window of their room, as is usual; but my window was shut, you may be sure. However, I could not keep from peeping at them, and there I saw him again, heard him call out to one of the servants of the house for something he wanted, and received all the terrifying confirmations of its being the same person that were possible to be had.

My next concern was to know, if possible, what was his business there; but that was impossible. Sometimes my imagination formed an idea of one frightful thing, sometimes of another; sometime I thought he had discovered me, and was come to upbraid me with ingratitude and breach of honour; and every moment I fancied he was coming up the stairs to insult me; and innumerable fancies came into my head of what was never in his head, nor ever could be, unless the devil had revealed it to him.

I remained in this fright nearly two hours, and scarce ever kept my eye from the window or door of the inn where they were. At last, hearing a great clatter in the passage of their inn, I ran to the window, and, to my great satisfaction, saw them all three go out again and travel on westward. Had they gone towards London, I should have been still in a fright, lest I should meet him on the road again, and that he should know me; but he went the contrary way, and so I was eased of that disorder.

We resolved to be going the next day, but about six o'clock at night we were alarmed with a great uproar in the street, and people riding as if they had been out of their wits; and what was it but a hue-and-cry after three highwaymen that had robbed two coaches and some other travellers near Dunstable Hill, and notice had, it seems, been given that they had been seen at Brickhill at such a house, meaning the house where those gentlemen had been.

The house was immediately beset and searched, but there were witnesses enough that the gentlemen had been gone over three hours. The crowd having gathered about, we had the news presently; and I was heartily concerned now another way. I presently told the people of the house, that I durst to say those were not the persons, for that I knew one of the gentlemen to be a very honest person, and of a good estate in Lancashire.

The constable who came with the hue-and-cry was immediately informed of this, and came over to me to be satisfied from my own mouth, and I assured him that I saw the three gentlemen as I was at the window; that I saw them afterwards at the windows of the room they dined in; that I saw them afterwards take horse, and I could assure him I knew one of them to be such a man, that he was a gentleman of a very good estate, and an undoubted character in Lancashire, from whence I was just now upon my journey.

The assurance with which I delivered this gave the mob gentry a check, and gave the constable such satisfaction, that he immediately sounded a retreat, told his people these were not the men, but that he had an account they were very honest gentlemen; and so they went all back again. What the truth of the matter was I knew not, but certain it was that the coaches were robbed at Dunstable Hill, and #560 in money taken; besides, some of the lace merchants that always travel that way had been visited too. As to the three gentlemen, that remains to be explained hereafter.

Well, this alarm stopped us another day, though my spouse was for travelling, and told me that it was always safest travelling after a robbery, for that the thieves were sure to be gone far enough off when they had alarmed the country; but I was afraid and uneasy, and indeed principally lest my old acquaintance should be upon the road still, and should chance to see me.

I never lived four pleasanter days together in my life. I was a mere bride all this while, and my new spouse strove to make me entirely easy in everything. Oh could this state of life have continued, how had all my past troubles been forgot, and my future sorrows avoided! But I had a past life of a most wretched kind to account for, some if it in this world as well as in another.

We came away the fifth day; and my landlord, because he saw me uneasy, mounted himself, his son, and three honest country fellows with good firearms, and, without telling us of it, followed the coach, and would see us safe into Dunstable. We could do no less than treat them very handsomely at Dunstable, which cost my spouse about ten or twelve shillings, and something he gave the men for their time too, but my landlord would take nothing for himself.