

Chapter 46

I knew a woman that was so dexterous with a fellow, who indeed deserved no better usage, that while he was busy with her another way, conveyed his purse with twenty guineas in it out of his fob-pocket, where he had put it for fear of her, and put another purse with gilded counters in it into the room of it. After he had done, he says to her, 'Now han't you picked my pocket?' She jested with him, and told him she supposed he had not much to lose; he put his hand to his fob, and with his fingers felt that his purse was there, which fully satisfied him, and so she brought off his money. And this was a trade with her; she kept a sham gold watch, that is, a watch of silver gilt, and a purse of counters in her pocket to be ready on all such occasions, and I doubt not practiced it with success.

I came home with this last booty to my governess, and really when I told her the story, it so affected her that she was hardly able to forbear tears, to know how such a gentleman ran a daily risk of being undone every time a glass of wine got into his head.

But as to the purchase I got, and how entirely I stripped him, she told me it please her wonderfully. 'Nay child,' says she, 'the usage may, for aught I know, do more to reform him than all the sermons that ever he will hear in his life.' And if the remainder of the story be true, so it did.

I found the next day she was wonderful inquisitive about this gentleman;

the description I had given her of him, his dress, his person, his face, everything concurred to make her think of a gentleman whose character she knew, and family too. She mused a while, and I going still on with the particulars, she starts up; says she, 'I'll lay #100 I know the gentleman.'

'I am sorry you do,' says I, 'for I would not have him exposed on any account in the world; he has had injury enough already by me, and I would not be instrumental to do him any more.' 'No, no,' says she, 'I will do him no injury, I assure you, but you may let me satisfy my curiosity a little, for if it is he, I warrant you I find it out.' I was a little startled at that, and told her, with an apparent concern in my face, that by the same rule he might find me out, and then I was undone. She returned warmly, 'Why, do you think I will betray you, child? No, no,' says she, 'not for all he is worth in the world. I have kept your counsel in worse things than these; sure you may trust me in this.' So I said no more at that time.

She laid her scheme another way, and without acquainting me of it, but she was resolved to find it out if possible. So she goes to a certain friend of hers who was acquainted in the family that she guessed at, and told her friend she had some extraordinary business with such a gentleman (who, by the way, was no less than a baronet, and of a very good family), and that she knew not how to come at him without somebody to introduce her. Her friend promised her very readily to do it, and accordingly goes to the house to see if the gentleman was in town.

The next day she come to my governess and tells her that Sir ---- was at home, but that he had met with a disaster and was very ill, and there was no speaking with him. 'What disaster?' says my governess hastily, as if she was surprised at it. 'Why,' says her friend, 'he had been at Hampstead to visit a gentleman of his acquaintance, and as he came back again he was set upon and robbed; and having got a little drink too, as they suppose, the rogues abused him, and he is very ill.' 'Robbed!' says my governess, 'and what did they take from him?' 'Why,' says her friend, 'they took his gold watch and his gold snuff-box, his fine periwig, and what money he had in his pocket, which was considerable, to be sure, for Sir ---- never goes without a purse of guineas about him.'

'Pshaw!' says my old governess, jeering, 'I warrant you he has got drunk now and got a whore, and she has picked his pocket, and so he comes home to his wife and tells her he has been robbed. That's an old sham; a thousand such tricks are put upon the poor women every day.'

'Fie!' says her friend, 'I find you don't know Sir ----; why he is a civil a gentleman, there is not a finer man, nor a soberer, graver, modester person in the whole city; he abhors such things; there's nobody that knows him will think such a thing of him.' 'Well, well,' says my governess, 'that's none of my business; if it was, I warrant I should find there was something of that kind in it; your modest men in common opinion are sometimes no better than

other people, only they keep a better character, or, if you please, are the better hypocrites.'

'No, no,' says her friend, 'I can assure you Sir ---- is no hypocrite, he is really an honest, sober gentleman, and he has certainly been robbed.' 'Nay,' says my governess, 'it may be he has; it is no business of mine, I tell you; I only want to speak with him; my business is of another nature.' 'But,' says her friend, 'let your business be of what nature it will, you cannot see him yet, for he is not fit to be seen, for he is very ill, and bruised very much,' 'Ay,' says my governess, 'nay, then he has fallen into bad hands, to be sure,' And then she asked gravely, 'Pray, where is he bruised?' 'Why, in the head,' says her friend, 'and one of his hands, and his face, for they used him barbarously.' 'Poor gentleman,' says my governess, 'I must wait, then, till he recovers'; and adds, 'I hope it will not be long, for I want very much to speak with him.'

Away she comes to me and tells me this story. 'I have found out your fine gentleman, and a fine gentleman he was,' says she; 'but, mercy on him, he is in a sad pickle now. I wonder what the d--l you have done to him; why, you have almost killed him.' I looked at her with disorder enough. 'I killed him!' says I; 'you must mistake the person; I am sure I did nothing to him; he was very well when I left him,' said I, 'only drunk and fast asleep.' 'I know nothing of that,' says she, 'but he is in a sad pickle now'; and so she told me all that her friend had said to her. 'Well, then,' says I, 'he fell into bad hands

after I left him, for I am sure I left him safe enough.'

About ten days after, or a little more, my governess goes again to her friend, to introduce her to this gentleman; she had inquired other ways in the meantime, and found that he was about again, if not abroad again, so she got leave to speak with him.

She was a woman of a admirable address, and wanted nobody to introduce her; she told her tale much better than I shall be able to tell it for her, for she was a mistress of her tongue, as I have said already. She told him that she came, though a stranger, with a single design of doing him a service and he should find she had no other end in it; that as she came purely on so friendly an account, she begged promise from him, that if he did not accept what she should officiously propose he would not take it ill that she meddled with what was not her business. She assured him that as what she had to say was a secret that belonged to him only, so whether he accepted her offer or not, it should remain a secret to all the world, unless he exposed it himself; nor should his refusing her service in it make her so little show her respect as to do him the least injury, so that he should be entirely at liberty to act as he thought fit.

He looked very shy at first, and said he knew nothing that related to him that required much secrecy; that he had never done any man any wrong, and cared not what anybody might say of him; that it was no part of his

character to be unjust to anybody, nor could he imagine in what any man could render him any service; but that if it was so disinterested a service as she said, he could not take it ill from any one that they should endeavour to serve him; and so, as it were, left her a liberty either to tell him or not to tell, as she thought fit.

She found him so perfectly indifferent, that she was almost afraid to enter into the point with him; but, however, after some other circumlocutions she told him that by a strange and unaccountable accident she came to have a particular knowledge of the late unhappy adventure he had fallen into, and that in such a manner, that there was nobody in the world but herself and him that were acquainted with it, no, not the very person that was with him.

He looked a little angrily at first. 'What adventure?' said he. 'Why,' said she, 'of your being robbed coming from Knightbr----; Hampstead, sir, I should say,' says she. 'Be not surprised, sir,' says she, 'that I am able to tell you every step you took that day from the cloister in Smithfield to the Spring Garden at Knightsbridge, and thence to the ---- in the Strand, and how you were left asleep in the coach afterwards. I say, let not this surprise you, for, sir, I do not come to make a booty of you, I ask nothing of you, and I assure you the woman that was with you knows nothing who you are, and never shall; and yet perhaps I may serve you further still, for I did not come barely to let you know that I was informed of these things, as if I wanted a bride to conceal them; assure yourself, sir,' said she, 'that whatever you think fit to

do or say to me, it shall be all a secret as it is, as much as if I were in my grave.'

He was astonished at her discourse, and said gravely to her, 'Madam, you are a stranger to me, but it is very unfortunate that you should be let into the secret of the worst action of my life, and a thing that I am so justly ashamed of, that the only satisfaction of it to me was, that I thought it was known only to God and my own conscience.' 'Pray, sir,' says she, 'do not reckon the discovery of it to me to be any part of your misfortune. It was a thing, I believe, you were surprised into, and perhaps the woman used some art to prompt you to it; however, you will never find any just cause,' said she, 'to repent that I came to hear of it; nor can your own mouth be more silent in it than I have been, and ever shall be.'