

Chapter 49

With that I spoke aloud to the master of the shop, and said, 'Sir, you know in your own conscience that I am not the person you look for, and that I was not in your shop before, therefore I demand that you detain me here no longer, or tell me the reason of your stopping me.' The fellow grew surlier upon this than before, and said he would do neither till he thought fit. 'Very well,' said I to the constable and to the porter; 'you will be pleased to remember this, gentlemen, another time.' The porter said, 'Yes, madam'; and the constable began not to like it, and would have persuaded the mercer to dismiss him, and let me go, since, as he said, he owned I was not the person. 'Good, sir,' says the mercer to him tauntingly, 'are you a justice of peace or a constable? I charged you with her; pray do you do your duty.' The constable told him, a little moved, but very handsomely, 'I know my duty, and what I am, sir; I doubt you hardly know what you are doing.' They had some other hard words, and in the meantime the journeyman, impudent and unmanly to the last degree, used me barbarously, and one of them, the same that first seized upon me, pretended he would search me, and began to lay hands on me. I spit in his face, called out to the constable, and bade him to take notice of my usage. 'And pray, Mr. Constable,' said I, 'ask that villain's name,' pointing to the man. The constable reprov'd him decently, told him that he did not know what he did, for he knew that his master acknowledged I was not the person that was in his shop; 'and,' says the constable, 'I am afraid your master is bringing himself, and me too, into

trouble, if this gentlewoman comes to prove who she is, and where she was, and it appears that she is not the woman you pretend to.' 'Damn her,' says the fellow again, with a impudent, hardened face, 'she is the lady, you may depend upon it; I'll swear she is the same body that was in the shop, and that I gave the pieces of satin that is lost into her own hand. You shall hear more of it when Mr. William and Mr. Anthony (those were other journeymen) come back; they will know her again as well as I.'

Just as the insolent rogue was talking thus to the constable, comes back Mr. William and Mr. Anthony, as he called them, and a great rabble with them, bringing along with them the true widow that I was pretended to be; and they came sweating and blowing into the shop, and with a great deal of triumph, dragging the poor creature in the most butcherly manner up towards their master, who was in the back shop, and cried out aloud, 'Here's the widow, sir; we have catcher her at last.' 'What do ye mean by that?' says the master. 'Why, we have her already; there she sits,' says he, 'and Mr.----,' says he, 'can swear this is she.' The other man, whom they called Mr. Anthony, replied, 'Mr. ---- may say what he will, and swear what he will, but this is the woman, and there's the remnant of satin she stole; I took it out of her clothes with my own hand.'

I sat still now, and began to take a better heart, but smiled and said nothing; the master looked pale; the constable turned about and looked at me. 'Let 'em alone, Mr. Constable,' said I; 'let 'em go on.' The case was plain and could not be denied, so the constable was charged with the right thief,

and the mercer told me very civilly he was sorry for the mistake, and hoped I would not take it ill; that they had so many things of this nature put upon them every day, that they could not be blamed for being very sharp in doing themselves justice. 'Not take it ill, sir!' said I; 'how can I take it well! If you had dismissed me when your insolent fellow seized on me in the street, and brought me to you, and when you yourself acknowledged I was not the person, I would have put it by, and not taken it ill, because of the many ill things I believe you have put upon you daily; but your treatment of me since has been insufferable, and especially that of your servant; I must and will have reparation for that.'

Then he began to parley with me, said he would make me any reasonable satisfaction, and would fain have had me tell him what it was I expected. I told him that I should not be my own judge, the law should decide it for me; and as I was to be carried before a magistrate, I should let him hear there what I had to say. He told me there was no occasion to go before the justice now, I was at liberty to go where I pleased; and so, calling to the constable, told him he might let me go, for I was discharged. The constable said calmly to him, 'sir, you asked me just now if I knew whether I was a constable or justice, and bade me do my duty, and charged me with this gentlewoman as a prisoner. Now, sir, I find you do not understand what is my duty, for you would make me a justice indeed; but I must tell you it is not in my power. I may keep a prisoner when I am charged with him, but 'tis the law and the magistrate alone that can discharge that prisoner; therefore 'tis a mistake,

sir; I must carry her before a justice now, whether you think well of it or not.' The mercer was very high with the constable at first; but the constable happening to be not a hired officer, but a good, substantial kind of man (I think he was a corn-handler), and a man of good sense, stood to his business, would not discharge me without going to a justice of the peace; and I insisted upon it too. When the mercer saw that, 'Well,' says he to the constable, 'you may carry her where you please; I have nothing to say to her.' 'But, sir,' says the constable, 'you will go with us, I hope, for 'tis you that charged me with her.' 'No, not I,' says the mercer; 'I tell you I have nothing to say to her.' 'But pray, sir, do,' says the constable; 'I desire it of you for your own sake, for the justice can do nothing without you.' 'Prithee, fellow,' says the mercer, 'go about your business; I tell you I have nothing to say to the gentlewoman. I charge you in the king's name to dismiss her.' 'Sir,' says the constable, 'I find you don't know what it is to be constable; I beg of you don't oblige me to be rude to you.' 'I think I need not; you are rude enough already,' says the mercer. 'No, sir,' says the constable, 'I am not rude; you have broken the peace in bringing an honest woman out of the street, when she was about her lawful occasion, confining her in your shop, and ill-using her here by your servants; and now can you say I am rude to you? I think I am civil to you in not commanding or charging you in the king's name to go with me, and charging every man I see that passes your door to aid and assist me in carrying you by force; this you cannot but know I have power to do, and yet I forbear it, and once more entreat you to go with me.' Well, he would not for all this, and gave the constable ill language.

However, the constable kept his temper, and would not be provoked; and then I put in and said, 'Come, Mr. Constable, let him alone; I shall find ways enough to fetch him before a magistrate, I don't fear that; but there's the fellow,' says I, 'he was the man that seized on me as I was innocently going along the street, and you are a witness of the violence with me since; give me leave to charge you with him, and carry him before the justice.' 'Yes, madam,' says the constable; and turning to the fellow 'Come, young gentleman,' says he to the journeyman, 'you must go along with us; I hope you are not above the constable's power, though your master is.'

The fellow looked like a condemned thief, and hung back, then looked at his master, as if he could help him; and he, like a fool, encourage the fellow to be rude, and he truly resisted the constable, and pushed him back with a good force when he went to lay hold on him, at which the constable knocked him down, and called out for help; and immediately the shop was filled with people, and the constable seized the master and man, and all his servants.

This first ill consequence of this fray was, that the woman they had taken, who was really the thief, made off, and got clear away in the crowd; and two other that they had stopped also; whether they were really guilty or not, that I can say nothing to.

By this time some of his neighbours having come in, and, upon inquiry, seeing how things went, had endeavoured to bring the hot-brained mercer to

his senses, and he began to be convinced that he was in the wrong; and so at length we went all very quietly before the justice, with a mob of about five hundred people at our heels; and all the way I went I could hear the people ask what was the matter, and other reply and say, a mercer had stopped a gentlewoman instead of a thief, and had afterwards taken the thief, and now the gentlewoman had taken the mercer, and was carrying him before the justice. This pleased the people strangely, and made the crowd increase, and they cried out as they went, 'Which is the rogue? which is the mercer?' and especially the women. Then when they saw him they cried out, 'That's he, that's he'; and every now and then came a good dab of dirt at him; and thus we marched a good while, till the mercer thought fit to desire the constable to call a coach to protect himself from the rabble; so we rode the rest of the way, the constable and I, and the mercer and his man.

When we came to the justice, which was an ancient gentleman in Bloomsbury, the constable giving first a summary account of the matter, the justice bade me speak, and tell what I had to say. And first he asked my name, which I was very loth to give, but there was no remedy, so I told him my name was Mary Flanders, that I was a widow, my husband being a sea captain, died on a voyage to Virginia; and some other circumstances I told which he could never contradict, and that I lodged at present in town with such a person, naming my governess; but that I was preparing to go over to America, where my husband's effects lay, and that I was going that day to buy some clothes to put myself into second mourning, but had not yet been

in any shop, when that fellow, pointing to the mercer's journeyman, came rushing upon me with such fury as very much frightened me, and carried me back to his master's shop, where, though his master acknowledged I was not the person, yet he would not dismiss me, but charged a constable with me.