

Chapter 53

Thus I brought home seventy-three guineas, and let my old governess see what good luck I had at play. However, it was her advice that I should not venture again, and I took her counsel, for I never went there any more; for I knew as well as she, if the itch of play came in, I might soon lose that, and all the rest of what I had got.

Fortune had smiled upon me to that degree, and I had thriven so much, and my governess too, for she always had a share

with me, that really the old gentlewoman began to talk of leaving off while we were well, and being satisfied with what we had got; but, I know not what fate guided me, I was as backward to it now as she was when I proposed it to her before, and so in an ill hour we gave over the thoughts of it for the present, and, in a word, I grew more hardened and audacious than ever, and the success I had made my name as famous as any thief of my sort ever had been at Newgate, and in the Old Bailey.

I had sometime taken the liberty to play the same game over again, which is not according to practice, which however succeeded not amiss; but generally I took up new figures, and contrived to appear in new shapes every time I went abroad.

It was not a rumbling time of the year, and the gentlemen being most of

them gone out of town, Tunbridge, and Epsom, and such places were full of people. But the city was thin, and I thought our trade felt it a little, as well as other; so that at the latter end of the year I joined myself with a gang who usually go every year to Stourbridge Fair, and from thence to Bury Fair, in Suffolk. We promised ourselves great things there, but when I came to see how things were, I was weary of it presently; for except mere picking of pockets, there was little worth meddling with; neither, if a booty had been made, was it so easy carrying it off, nor was there such a variety of occasion for business in our way, as in London; all that I made of the whole journey was a gold watch at Bury Fair, and a small parcel of linen at Cambridge, which gave me an occasion to take leave of the place. It was an old bite, and I thought might do with a country shopkeeper, though in London it would not.

I bought at a linen-draper's shop, not in the fair, but in the town of Cambridge, as much fine holland and other things as came to about seven pounds; when I had done, I bade them be sent to such an inn, where I had purposely taken up my being the same morning, as if I was to lodge there that night.

I ordered the draper to send them home to me, about such an hour, to the inn where I lay, and I would pay him his money. At the time appointed the draper sends the goods, and I placed one of our gang at the chamber door, and when the innkeeper's maid brought the messenger to the door, who was

a young fellow, an apprentice, almost a man, she tells him her mistress was asleep, but if he would leave the things and call in about an hour, I should be awake, and he might have the money. He left the parcel very readily, and goes his way, and in about half an hour my maid and I walked off, and that very evening I hired a horse, and a man to ride before me, and went to Newmarket, and from thence got my passage in a coach that was not quite full to St. Edmund's Bury, where, as I told you, I could make but little of my trade, only at a little country opera-house made a shift to carry off a gold watch from a lady's side, who was not only intolerably merry, but, as I thought, a little fuddled, which made my work much easier.

I made off with this little booty to Ipswich, and from thence to Harwich, where I went into an inn, as if I had newly arrived from Holland, not doubting but I should make some purchase among the foreigners that came on shore there; but I found them generally empty of things of value, except what was in their portmanteaux and Dutch hampers, which were generally guarded by footmen; however, I fairly got one of their portmanteaux one evening out of the chamber where the gentleman lay, the footman being fast asleep on the bed, and I suppose very drunk.

The room in which I lodged lay next to the Dutchman's, and having dragged the heavy thing with much ado out of the chamber into mine, I went out into the street, to see if I could find any possibility of carrying it off. I walked about a great while, but could see no probability either of getting out the

thing, or of conveying away the goods that were in it if I had opened it, the town being so small, and I a perfect stranger in it; so I was returning with a resolution to carry it back again, and leave it where I found it. Just in that very moment I heard a man make a noise to some people to make haste, for the boat was going to put off, and the tide would be spent. I called to the fellow, 'What boat is it, friend,' says I, 'that you belong to?' 'The Ipswich wherry, madam,' says he. 'When do you go off?' says I. 'This moment, madam,' says he; 'do you want to go thither?' 'Yes,' said I, 'if you can stay till I fetch my things.' 'Where are your things, madam?' says he. 'At such an inn,' said I. 'Well, I'll go with you, madam,' says he, very civilly, 'and bring them for you.' 'Come away, then,' says I, and takes him with me.

The people of the inn were in a great hurry, the packet-boat from Holland being just come in, and two coaches just come also with passengers from London, for another packet-boat that was going off for Holland, which coaches were to go back next day with the passengers that were just landed. In this hurry it was not much minded that I came to the bar and paid my reckoning, telling my landlady I had gotten my passage by sea in a wherry.

These wherries are large vessels, with good accommodation for carrying passengers from Harwich to London; and though they are called wherries, which is a word used in the Thames for a small boat rowed with one or two men, yet these are vessels able to carry twenty passengers, and ten or fifteen tons of goods, and fitted to bear the sea. All this I had found out by

inquiring the night before into the several ways of going to London.

My landlady was very courteous, took my money for my reckoning, but was called away, all the house being in a hurry. So I left her, took the fellow up to my chamber, gave him the trunk, or portmanteau, for it was like a trunk, and wrapped it about with an old apron, and he went directly to his boat with it, and I after him, nobody asking us the least question about it; as for the drunken Dutch footman he was still asleep, and his master with other foreign gentlemen at supper, and very merry below, so I went clean off with it to Ipswich; and going in the night, the people of the house knew nothing but that I was gone to London by the Harwich wherry, as I had told my landlady.

I was plagued at Ipswich with the custom-house officers, who stopped my trunk, as I called it, and would open and search it. I was willing, I told them, they should search it, but husband had the key, and he was not yet come from Harwich; this I said, that if upon searching it they should find all the things be such as properly belonged to a man rather than a woman, it should not seem strange to them. However, they being positive to open the trunk I consented to have it be broken open, that is to say, to have the lock taken off, which was not difficult.

They found nothing for their turn, for the trunk had been searched before, but they discovered several things very much to my satisfaction, as

particularly a parcel of money in French pistols, and some Dutch ducatoons or rix-dollars, and the rest was chiefly two periwigs, wearing-linen, and razors, wash-balls, perfumes, and other useful things necessary for a gentleman, which all passed for my husband's, and so I was quit to them.

It was now very early in the morning, and not light, and I knew not well what course to take; for I made no doubt but I should be pursued in the morning, and perhaps be taken with the things about me; so I resolved upon taking new measures. I went publicly to an inn in the town with my trunk, as I called it, and having taken the substance out, I did not think the lumber of it worth my concern; however, I gave it the landlady of the house with a charge to take great care of it, and lay it up safe till I should come again, and away I walked in to the street.

When I was got into the town a great way from the inn, I met with an ancient woman who had just opened her door, and I fell into chat with her, and asked her a great many wild questions of things all remote to my purpose and design; but in my discourse I found by her how the town was situated, that I was in a street that went out towards Hadley, but that such a street went towards the water-side, such a street towards Colchester, and so the London road lay there.

I had soon my ends of this old woman, for I only wanted to know which was the London road, and away I walked as fast as I could; not that I intended to

go on foot, either to London or to Colchester, but I wanted to get quietly away from Ipswich.

I walked about two or three miles, and then I met a plain countryman, who was busy about some husbandry work, I did not know what, and I asked him a great many questions first, not much to the purpose, but at last told him I was going for London, and the coach was full, and I could not get a passage, and asked him if he could tell me where to hire a horse that would carry double, and an honest man to ride before me to Colchester, that so I might get a place there in the coaches. The honest clown looked earnestly at me, and said nothing for above half a minute, when, scratching his poll, 'A horse, say you and to Colchester, to carry double? why yes, mistress, alack-a-day, you may have horses enough for money.' 'Well, friend,' says I, 'that I take for granted; I don't expect it without money.' 'Why, but, mistress,' says he, 'how much are you willing to give?' 'Nay,' says I again, 'friend, I don't know what your rates are in the country here, for I am a stranger; but if you can get one for me, get it as cheap as you can, and I'll give you somewhat for your pains.'