

Chapter 54

'Why, that's honestly said too,' says the countryman. 'Not so honest, neither,' said I to myself, 'if thou knewest all.' 'Why, mistress,' says he, 'I have a horse that will carry double, and I don't much care if I go myself with you,' and the like. 'Will you?' says I; 'well, I believe you are an honest man; if you will, I shall be glad of it; I'll pay you in reason.' 'Why, look ye, mistress,' says he, 'I won't be out of reason with you, then; if I carry you to Colchester, it will be worth five shillings for myself and my horse, for I shall hardly come back to-night.'

In short, I hired the honest man and his horse; but when we came to a town upon the road (I do not remember the name of it, but it stands upon a river), I pretended myself very ill, and I could go no farther that night but if he would stay there with me, because I was a stranger, I would pay him for himself and his horse with all my heart.

This I did because I knew the Dutch gentlemen and their servants would be upon the road that day, either in the stagecoaches or riding post, and I did not know but the drunken fellow, or somebody else that might have seen me at Harwich, might see me again, and so I thought that in one day's stop they would be all gone by.

We lay all that night there, and the next morning it was not very early when I set out, so that it was near ten o'clock by the time I got to Colchester. It

was no little pleasure that I saw the town where I had so many pleasant days, and I made many inquiries after the good old friends I had once had there, but could make little out; they were all dead or removed. The young ladies had been all married or gone to London; the old gentleman and the old lady that had been my early benefactors all dead; and which troubled me most, the young gentleman my first lover, and afterwards my brother-in-law, was dead; but two sons, men grown, were left of him, but they too were transplanted to London.

I dismissed my old man here, and stayed incognito for three or four days in Colchester, and then took a passage in a waggon, because I would not venture being seen in the Harwich coaches. But I needed not have used so much caution, for there was nobody in Harwich but the woman of the house could have known me; nor was it rational to think that she, considering the hurry she was in, and that she never saw me but once, and that by candlelight, should have ever discovered me.

I was now returned to London, and though by the accident of the last adventure I got something considerable, yet I was not fond of any more country rambles, nor should I have ventured abroad again if I had carried the trade on to the end of my days. I gave my governess a history of my travels; she liked the Harwich journey well enough, and in discoursing of these things between ourselves she observed, that a thief being a creature that watches the advantages of other people's mistakes, 'tis impossible but

that to one that is vigilant and industrious many opportunities must happen, and therefore she thought that one so exquisitely keen in the trade as I was, would scarce fail of something extraordinary wherever I went.

On the other hand, every branch of my story, if duly considered, may be useful to honest people, and afford a due caution to people of some sort or other to guard against the like surprises, and to have their eyes about them when they have to do with strangers of any kind, for 'tis very seldom that some snare or other is not in their way. The moral, indeed, of all my history is left to be gathered by the senses and judgment of the reader; I am not qualified to preach to them. Let the experience of one creature completely wicked, and completely miserable, be a storehouse of useful warning to those that read.

I am drawing now towards a new variety of the scenes of life. Upon my return, being hardened by along race of crime, and success unparalleled, at least in the reach of my own knowledge, I had, as I have said, no thoughts of laying down a trade which, if I was to judge by the example of other, must, however, end at last in misery and sorrow.

It was on the Christmas day following, in the evening, that, to finish a long train of wickedness, I went abroad to see what might offer in my way; when going by a working silversmith's in Foster Lane, I saw a tempting bait indeed, and not be resisted by one of my occupation, for the shop had

nobody in it, as I could see, and a great deal of loose plate lay in the window, and at the seat of the man, who usually, as I suppose, worked at one side of the shop.

I went boldly in, and was just going to lay my hand upon a piece of plate, and might have done it, and carried it clear off, for any care that the men who belonged to the shop had taken of it; but an officious fellow in a house, not a shop, on the other side of the way, seeing me go in, and observing that there was nobody in the shop, comes running over the street, and into the shop, and without asking me what I was, or who, seizes upon me, and cries out for the people of the house.

I had not, as I said above, touched anything in the shop, and seeing a glimpse of somebody running over to the shop, I had so much presence of mind as to knock very hard with my foot on the floor of the house, and was just calling out too, when the fellow laid hands on me.

However, as I had always most courage when I was in most danger, so when the fellow laid hands on me, I stood very high upon it, that I came in to buy half a dozen of silver spoons; and to my good fortune, it was a silversmith's that sold plate,

as well as worked plate for other shops. The fellow laughed at that part, and put such a value upon the service that he had done his neighbour, that he

would have it be that I came not to buy, but to steal; and raising a great crowd. I said to the master of the shop, who by this time was fetched home from some neighbouring place, that it was in vain to make noise, and enter into talk there of the case; the fellow had insisted that I came to steal, and he must prove it, and I desired we might go before a magistrate without any more words; for I began to see I should be too hard for the man that had seized me.

The master and mistress of the shop were really not so violent as the man from t'other side of the way; and the man said, 'Mistress, you might come into the shop with a good design for aught I know, but it seemed a dangerous thing for you to come into such a shop as mine is, when you see nobody there; and I cannot do justice to my neighbour, who was so kind to me, as not to acknowledge he had reason on his side; though, upon the whole, I do not find you attempted to take anything, and I really know not what to do in it.' I pressed him to go before a magistrate with me, and if anything could be proved on me that was like a design of robbery, I should willingly submit, but if not, I expected reparation.

Just while we were in this debate, and a crowd of people gathered about the door, came by Sir T. B., an alderman of the city, and justice of the peace, and the goldsmith hearing of it, goes out, and entreated his worship to come in and decide the case.

Give the goldsmith his due, he told his story with a great deal of justice and moderation, and the fellow that had come over, and seized upon me, told his with as much heat and foolish passion, which did me good still, rather than harm. It came then to my turn to speak, and I told his worship that I was a stranger in London, being newly come out of the north; that I lodged in such a place, that I was passing this street, and went into the goldsmith's shop to buy half a dozen of spoons. By great luck I had an old silver spoon in my pocket, which I pulled out, and told him I had carried that spoon to match it with half a dozen of new ones, that it might match some I had in the country.

That seeing nobody in the shop, I knocked with my foot very hard to make the people hear, and had also called aloud with my voice; 'tis true, there was loose plate in the shop, but that nobody could say I had touched any of it, or gone near it; that a fellow came running into the shop out of the street, and laid hands on me in a furious manner, in the very moments while I was calling for the people of the house; that if he had really had a mind to have done his neighbour any service, he should have stood at a distance, and silently watched to see whether I had touched anything or no, and then have clapped in upon me, and taken me in the fact. 'That is very true,' says Mr. Alderman, and turning to the fellow that stopped me, he asked him if it was true that I knocked with my foot? He said, yes, I had knocked, but that might be because of his coming. 'Nay,' says the alderman, taking him short, 'now you contradict yourself, for just now you said she was in the shop with her back to you, and did not see you till you came upon her.' Now it was

true that my back was partly to the street, but yet as my business was of a kind that required me to have my eyes every way, so I really had a glance of him running over, as I said before, though he did not perceive it.

After a full hearing, the alderman gave it as his opinion that his neighbour was under a mistake, and that I was innocent, and the goldsmith acquiesced in it too, and his wife, and so I was dismissed; but as I was going to depart, Mr. Alderman said, 'But hold, madam, if you were designing to buy spoons, I hope you will not let my friend here lose his customer by the mistake.' I readily answered, 'No, sir, I'll buy the spoons still, if he can match my odd spoon, which I brought for a pattern'; and the goldsmith showed me some of the very same fashion. So he weighed the spoons, and they came to five-and-thirty shillings, so I pulls out my purse to pay him, in which I had near twenty guineas, for I never went without such a sum about me, whatever might happen, and I found it of use at other times as well as now.

When Mr. Alderman saw my money, he said, 'Well, madam, now I am satisfied you were wronged, and it was for this reason that I moved you should buy the spoons, and stayed till you had bought them, for if you had not had money to pay for them, I should have suspected that you did not come into the shop with an intent to buy, for indeed the sort of people who come upon these designs that you have been charged with, are seldom troubled with much gold in their pockets, as I see you are.'