

Chapter 60

'Come, my dear,' says I, 'we have along piece of work to do, if I should be to related, or you to hear, my unfortunate history; but if you are disposed to hear it, you will soon conclude with me that my condition is worse than yours.' 'How is that possible,' says he again, 'when I expect to be cast for my life the very next sessions?' 'Yes, says I, 'tis very possible, when I shall tell you that I have been cast for my life three sessions ago, and am under sentence of death; is not my case worse than yours?'

Then indeed, he stood silent again, like one struck dumb, and after a while he starts up. 'Unhappy couple!' says he. 'How can this be possible?' I took him by the hand. 'Come, my dear,' said I, 'sit down, and let us compare our sorrows. I am a prisoner in this very house, and in much worse circumstances than you, and you will be satisfied I do not come to insult you, when I tell you the particulars.' Any with this we sat down together, and I told him so much of my story as I thought was convenient, bringing it at last to my being reduced to great poverty, and representing myself as fallen into some company that led me to relieve my distresses by way that I had been utterly unacquainted with, and that they making an attempt at a tradesman's house, I was seized upon for having been but just at the door, the maid-servant pulling me in; that I neither had broke any lock nor taken anything away, and that notwithstanding that, I was brought in guilty and sentenced to die; but that the judges, having been made sensible of the hardship of my circumstances, had obtained leave to remit the sentence

upon my consenting to be transported.

I told him I fared the worse for being taken in the prison for one Moll Flanders, who was a famous successful thief, that all of them had heard of, but none of them had ever seen; but that, as he knew well, was none of my name. But I placed all to the account of my ill fortune, and that under this name I was dealt with as an old offender, though this was the first thing they had ever known of me. I gave him a long particular of things that had befallen me since I saw him, but I told him if I had seen him since he might thing I had, and then gave him an account how I had seen him at Brickhill; how furiously he was pursued, and how, by giving an account that I knew him, and that he was a very honest gentleman, one Mr.----, the hue-and-cry was stopped, and the high constable went back again.

He listened most attentively to all my story, and smiled at most of the particulars, being all of them petty matters, and infinitely below what he had been at the head of; but when I came to the story of Brickhill, he was surprised. 'And was it you, my dear,' said he, 'that gave the check to the mob that was at our heels there, at Brickhill?' 'Yes,' said I, 'it was I indeed.' And then I told him the particulars which I had observed him there. 'Why, then,' said he, 'it was you that saved my life at that time, and I am glad I owe my life to you, for I will pay the debt to you now, and I'll deliver you from the present condition you are in, or I will die in the attempt.'

I told him, by no means; it was a risk too great, not worth his running the hazard of, and for a life not worth his saving. 'Twas no matter for that, he said, it was a life worth all the world to him; a life that had given him a new life; 'for,' says he, 'I was never in real danger of being taken, but that time, till the last minute when I was taken.' Indeed, he told me his danger then lay in his believing he had not been pursued that way; for they had gone from Hockey quite another way, and had come over the enclosed country into Brickhill, not by the road, and were sure they had not been seen by anybody.

Here he gave me a long history of his life, which indeed would make a very strange history, and be infinitely diverting. He told me he took to the road about twelve years before he married me; that the woman which called him brother was not really his sister, or any kin to him, but one that belonged to their gang, and who, keeping correspondence with him, lived always in town, having good store of acquaintance; that she gave them a perfect intelligence of persons going out of town, and that they had made several good booties by her correspondence; that she thought she had fixed a fortune for him when she brought me to him, but happened to be disappointed, which he really could not blame her for; that if it had been his good luck that

I had had the estate, which she was informed I had, he had resolved to leave off the road and live a retired, sober live but never to appear in public till

some general pardon had been passed, or till he could, for money, have got his name into some particular pardon, that so he might have been perfectly easy; but that, as it had proved otherwise, he was obliged to put off his equipage and take up the old trade again.

He gave me a long account of some of his adventures, and

particularly one when he robbed the West Chester coaches near Lichfield, when he got a very great booty; and after that, how he robbed five graziers, in the west, going to Burford Fair in Wiltshire to buy sheep. He told me he got so much money on those two occasions, that if he had known where to have found me, he would certainly have embraced my proposal of going with me to Virginia, or to have settled in a plantation on some other parts of the English colonies in America.

He told me he wrote two or three letters to me, directed according to my order, but heard nothing from me. This I indeed knew to be true, but the letters coming to my hand in the time of my latter husband, I could do nothing in it, and therefore chose to give no answer, that so he might rather believe they had miscarried.

Being thus disappointed, he said, he carried on the old trade ever since, though when he had gotten so much money, he said, he did not run such desperate risks as he did before. Then he gave me some account of several

hard and desperate encounters which he had with gentlemen on the road, who parted too hardly with their money, and showed me some wounds he had received; and he had one or two very terrible wounds indeed, as particularly one by a pistol bullet, which broke his arm, and another with a sword, which ran him quite through the body, but that missing his vitals, he was cured again; one of his comrades having kept with him so faithfully, and so friendly, as that he assisted him in riding near eighty miles before his arm was set, and then got a surgeon in a considerable city, remote from that place where it was done, pretending they were gentlemen travelling towards Carlisle and that they had been attacked on the road by highwaymen, and that one of them had shot him into the arm and broke the bone.

This, he said, his friend managed so well, that they were not suspected at all, but lay still till he was perfectly cured. He gave me so many distinct accounts of his adventures, that it is with great reluctance that I decline the relating them; but I consider that this is my own story, not his.

I then inquired into the circumstances of his present case at that time, and what it was he expected when he came to be tried. He told me that they had no evidence against him, or but very little; for that of three robberies, which they were all charged with, it was his good fortune that he was but in one of them, and that there was but one witness to be had for that fact, which was not sufficient, but that it was expected some others would come in against him; that he thought indeed, when he first saw me, that I had been one that

came of that errand; but that if somebody came in against him, he hoped he should be cleared; that he had had some intimation, that if he would submit to transport himself, he might be admitted to it without a trial, but that he could not think of it with any temper, and thought he could much easier submit to be hanged.

I blamed him for that, and told him I blamed him on two accounts; first, because if he was transported, there might be a hundred ways for him that was a gentleman, and a bold enterprising man, to find his way back again, and perhaps some ways and means to come back before he went. He smiled at that part, and said he should like the last the best of the two, for he had a kind of horror upon his mind at his being sent over to the plantations, as Romans sent condemned slaves to work in the mines; that he thought the passage into another state, let it be what it would, much more tolerable at the gallows, and that this was the general notion of all the gentlemen who were driven by the exigence of their fortunes to take the road; that at the place of execution there was at least an end of all the miseries of the present state, and as for what was to follow, a man was, in his opinion, as likely to repent sincerely in the last fortnight of his life, under the pressures and agonies of a jail and the condemned hole, as he would ever be in the woods and wilderness of America; that servitude and hard labour were things gentlemen could never stoop to; that it was but the way to force them to be their own executioners afterwards, which was much worse; and that therefore he could not have any patience when he did but think of being

transported.

I used the utmost of my endeavour to persuade him, and joined that known woman's rhetoric to it--I mean, that of tears. I told him the infamy of a public execution was certainly a greater pressure upon the spirits of a gentleman than any of the mortifications that he could meet with abroad could be; that he had at least in the other a chance for his life, whereas here he had none at all; that it was the easiest thing in the world for him to manage the captain of a ship, who were, generally speaking, men of good-humour and some gallantry; and a small matter of conduct, especially if there was any money to be had, would make way for him to buy himself off when he came to Virginia.