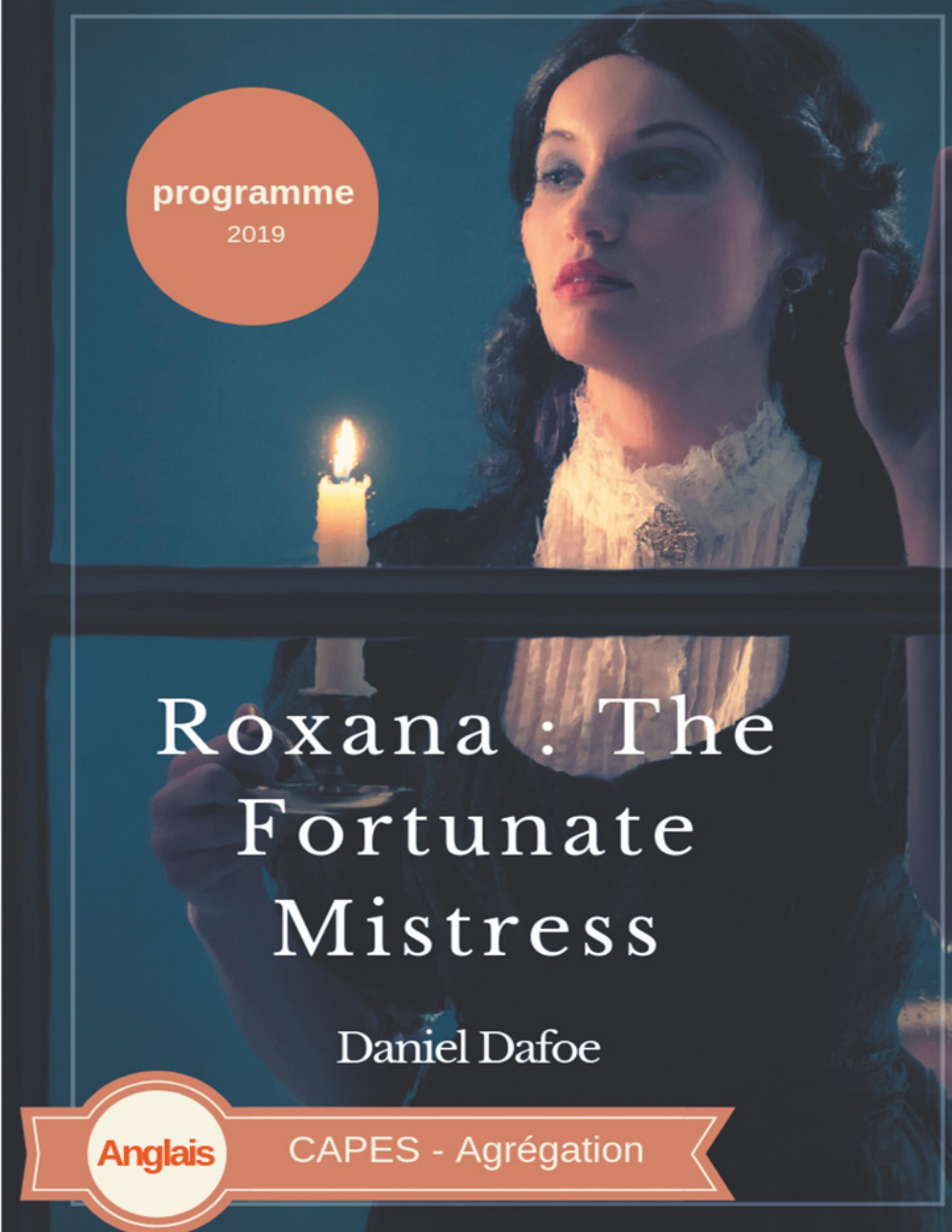

programme
2019

Roxana : The Fortunate Mistress

Daniel Dafoe

Anglais

CAPES - Agrégation

or,AHistory of the Life and Vast
Variety of Fortunes
of
Mademoiselle de Beleau,
afterwards call’d
The Countess de Wintselsheim, in
GERMANY.
Being the Person known by the Name
of the Lady Roxana, in the Time of
King Charles II.

ROXANA, THE FORTUNATE MISTRESS

I was born, as my friends told me, at the city of Poitiers, in the province or county of Poitou in France, from whence I was brought to England by my parents, who fled for their religion about the year 1683, when the Protestants were banished from France by the cruelty of their persecutors.

I, who knew little or nothing of what I was brought over hither for, was well enough pleased with being here. London, a large and gay city, took with me mighty well, who from my being a child loved a crowd and to see a great many fine folks.

I retained nothing of France but the language. My father and mother, being people of better fashion than ordinarily the people called refugees at that time were, and having fled early while it was easy to secure their effects, had, before their coming over, remitted considerable sums of money, or, as I remember, a considerable value in French brandy, paper, and other goods; and these selling very much to advantage here, my father was in very good circumstances at his coming over, so that he was far from applying to the rest of our nation that were here for countenance and relief. On the contrary, he had his door continually thronged with miserable objects of the poor starving creatures, who at that time fled hither for shelter on account of conscience or something else.

I have indeed heard my father say that he was pestered with a great many of those who for any religion they had might e’en have stayed where they were, but who flocked over hither in droves for what they call in English a livelihood; hearing with what open arms the refugees were received in England, and how they fell readily into business,

being by the charitable assistance of the people in London encouraged to work in their manufactures, in Spitalfields, Canterbury, and other places, and that they had a much better price for their work than in France and the like.

My father, I say, told me that he was more pestered with the clamours of these people than of those who were truly refugees and fled in distress merely for conscience.

I was about ten years old when I was brought over hither, where, as I have said, my father lived in very good circumstances and died in about eleven years more; in which time, as I had accomplished myself for the sociable part of the world, so I had acquainted myself with some of our English neighbours, as is the custom in London; and as, while I was young, I had picked up three or four play-fellows and companions suitable to my years, so as we grew bigger we learnt to call one another intimates and friends, and this forwarded very much the finishing me for conversation and the world.

I went to English schools, and, being young, I learnt the English tongue perfectly well, with all the customs of the English young women; so that I retained nothing of the French but the speech, nor did I so much as keep any remains of the French language tagged to my way of speaking, as most foreigners do, but spoke what we call natural English, as if I had been born here.

Being to give my own character, I must be excused to give it as impartially as possible, and as if I was speaking of another body; and the sequel will leave you to judge whether I flatter myself or no.

I was (speaking of myself as about fourteen years of age) tall and very well made, sharp as a hawk in matters of common knowledge, quick and smart in discourse, apt to be satirical, full of repartee, and a little too forward in conversation; or, as we call it in English, bold, though perfectly modest in my behaviour. Being French born, I danced, as some say, naturally, loved it extremely, and

sang well also; and so well, that, as you will hear, it was afterwards some advantage to me. With all these things, I wanted neither wit, beauty, nor money. In this manner I set out into the world, having all the advantages that any young woman could desire to recommend me to others and form a prospect of happy living to myself.

At about fifteen years of age my father gave me, as he called it in French, 25,000 livres, that is to say, two thousand pounds portion, and married me to an eminent brewer in the City. Pardon me if I conceal his name, for though he was the foundation of my ruin, I cannot take so severe a revenge upon him.

With this thing called a husband I lived eight years in good fashion, and for some part of the time kept a coach; that is to say, a kind of mock coach, for all the week the horses were kept at work in the dray carts, but on Sunday I had the privilege to go abroad in my chariot, either to church or otherwise, as my husband and I could agree about it; which, by the way, was not very often. But of that hereafter.

Before I proceed in the history of the married part of my life, you must allow me to give as impartial an account of my husband as I have done of myself. He was a jolly, handsome fellow as any woman need wish for a companion, tall and well made, rather a little too large, but not so as to be ungenteel; he danced well, which I think was the first thing that brought us together. He had an old father who managed the business carefully, so that he had little of that part laid on him but now and then to appear and show himself; and he took the advantage of it, for he troubled himself very little about it, but went abroad, kept company, hunted much, and loved it exceedingly.

After I have told you that he was a handsome man and a good sportsman, I have indeed said all; and unhappy was I—like other young people of our sex, I chose him for being a handsome, jolly fellow, as I have said — for he was otherwise a weak, empty-headed, untaught creature as any

woman could ever desire to be coupled with. And here I must take the liberty, whatever I have to reproach myself with in my after conduct, to turn to my fellow creatures, the young ladies of this country, and speak to them by way of precaution. If you have any regard to your future happiness, any view of living comfortably with a husband, any hope of preserving your fortunes or restoring them after any disaster, never, ladies, marry a fool. Any husband rather than a fool. With some other husbands you may be unhappy, but with a fool you will be miserable; with another husband you may, I say, be unhappy, but with a fool you must; nay, if he would, he cannot make you easy, everything he does is so awkward, everything he says is so empty, a woman of any sense cannot but be surfeited and sick of him twenty times a day. What is more shocking than for a woman to bring a handsome, comely fellow of a husband into company and then be obliged to blush for him every time she hears him speak; to hear other gentlemen talk sense and he able to say nothing, and so look like a fool; or, which is worse, hear him talk nonsense and be laughed at for a fool?

In the next place, there are so many sorts of fools, such an infinite variety of fools, and so hard it is to know the worst of the kind, that I am obliged to say, no fool, ladies, at all, no kind of fool; whether a mad fool or a sober fool, a wise fool or a silly fool, take anything but a fool; nay, be anything, be even an old maid, the worst of nature’s curses, rather than take up with a fool.

But to leave this awhile, for I shall have occasion to speak of it again, my case was particularly hard, for I had a variety of foolish things complicated in this unhappy match.

First, and which I must confess is very unsufferable, he was a conceited fool, tout opiniâtre; everything he said was right, was best, and was to the purpose, whoever was in company and whatever was advanced by others, though with the greatest modesty imaginable. And yet when he

came to defend what he had said by argument and reason, he would do it so weakly, so emptily, and so nothing to the purpose, that it was enough to make anybody that heard him sick and ashamed of him.

Secondly, he was positive and obstinate, and the most positive in the most simple and inconsistent things such as were intolerable to bear.

These two articles, if there had been no more, qualified him to be a most unbearable creature for a husband, and so it may be supposed at first sight what kind of life I led with him. However, I did as well as I could and held my tongue, which was the only victory I gained over him; for when he would talk after his own empty rattling way with me, and I would not answer or enter into discourse with him on the point he was upon, he would rise up in the greatest passion imaginable and go away, which was the cheapest way I had to be delivered.

I could enlarge here much upon the method I took to make my life passable and easy with the most incorrigible temper in the world, but it is too long and the articles too trifling. I shall mention some of them as the circumstances I am to relate shall necessarily bring them in.

After I had been married about four years my own father died, my mother having been dead before. He liked my match so ill, and saw so little room to be satisfied with the conduct of my husband, that though he left me 5,000 livres and more at his death, yet he left it in the hands of my elder brother, who, running on too rashly in his adventures as a merchant, failed, and lost not only what he had but what he had for me too, as you shall hear presently.

Thus I lost the last gift of my father’s bounty by having a husband not fit to be trusted with it; there’s one of the benefits of marrying a fool!

Within two years after my own father’s death my husband’s father also died, and, as I thought, left him a

considerable addition to his estate; the whole trade of the brewhouse, which was a very good one, being now his own.

But this addition to his stock was his ruin, for he had no genius to business. He had no knowledge of his accounts; he bustled a little about it indeed at first, and put on a face of business, but he soon grew slack. It was below him to inspect his books, he committed all that to his clerks and book-keepers, and while he found money in cash to pay the maltman and the excise, and put some in his pocket, he was perfectly easy and indolent, let the main chance go how it would.

I foresaw the consequences of this, and attempted several times to persuade him to apply himself to his business. I put him in mind how his customers complained of the neglect of his servants on one hand, and how abundance broke in his debt, on the other hand, for want of the clerk’s care to secure him, and the like; but he thrust me by, either with hard words or fraudulently with representing the cases otherwise than they were.

However, to cut short a dull story which ought not to be long, he began to find his trade sunk, his stock declined, and that, in short, he could not carry on his business; and once or twice his brewing utensils were extended for the excise, and the last time he was put to great extremities to clear them.

This alarmed him, and he resolved to lay down his trade, which indeed I was not sorry for; foreseeing that if he did not lay it down in time, he would be forced to do it another way, namely, as a bankrupt. Also, I was willing he should draw out while he had something left, lest I should come to be stripped at home and be turned out of doors with my children, for I had now five children by him: the only work (perhaps) that fools are good for.

I thought myself happy when he got another man to take his brewhouse clear off his hands; for, paying down a large sum of money, my husband found himself a clear man, all

his debts paid, and with between two and three thousand pounds in his pocket. And being now obliged to remove from the brewhouse, we took a house at — — a village about two miles out of town; and happy I thought myself, all things considered, that I was got off clear upon so good terms, and had my handsome fellow had but one capful of wit, I had been still well enough.

I proposed to him either to buy some place with the money or with part of it, and offered to join my part to it, which was then in being and might have been secured; so we might have lived tolerably, at least, during his life. But as it is the part of a fool to be void of counsel, so he neglected it, lived on as he did before, kept his horses and men, rode every day out to the forest a-hunting, and nothing was done all this while. But the money decreased apace, and I thought I saw my ruin hastening on without any possible way to prevent it.

I was not wanting with all that persuasions and entreaties could perform, but it was all fruitless; representing to him how fast our money wasted, and what would be our condition when it was gone, made no impression on him; but like one stupid he went on, not valuing all that tears and lamentations could be supposed to do, nor did he abate his figure or equipage, his horses or servants, even to the last, till he had not a hundred pounds left in the whole world.

It was not above three years that all the ready money was thus spending off; yet he spent it, as I may say, foolishly too, for he kept no valuable company neither, but generally with huntsmen and horse-coursers, and men meaner than himself, which is another consequence of a man’s being a fool. Such can never take delight in men more wise and capable than themselves; and that makes them converse with scoundrels, drink belch with porters, and keep company always below themselves.

This was my wretched condition, when one morning my husband told me he was sensible he was come to a

miserable condition and he would go and seek his fortune somewhere or other. He had said something to that purpose several times before that, upon my pressing him to consider his circumstances and the circumstances of his family before it should be too late. But as I found he had no meaning in anything of that kind, as indeed he had not much in anything he ever said, so I thought they were but words of course now. When he said he would be gone, I used to wish secretly, and even say in my thoughts, “I wish you would, for if you go on thus you will starve us all.”

He stayed, however, at home all that day, and lay at home that night. Early the next morning he gets out of bed, goes to a window which looked out towards the stables, and sounds his French horn, as he called it, which was his usual signal to call his men to go out a-hunting.

It was about the latter end of August, and so was light yet at five o’clock, and it was about that time that I heard him and his two men go out and shut the yard gates after them. He said nothing to me more than as usual when he used to go out upon his sport; neither did I rise or say anything to him that was material, but went to sleep again after he was gone for two hours or thereabouts.

It must be a little surprising to the reader to tell him at once that after this I never saw my husband more; but to go further, I not only never saw him more, but I never heard from him or of him, neither of any or either of his two servants or of the horses, either what became of them, where or which way they went, or what they did or intended to do, no more than if the ground had opened and swallowed them all up, and nobody had known it, except as hereafter.

I was not for the first night or two at all surprised, no, nor very much the first week or two, believing that if anything evil had befallen them I should soon enough have heard of that, and also knowing that as he had two servants and three horses with him, it would be the strangest thing in the

world that anything could befall them all, but that I must some time or other hear of them.

But you will easily allow that as time ran on a week, two weeks, a month, two months, and so on, I was dreadfully frighted at last, and the more when I looked into my own circumstances and considered the condition in which I was left; with five children and not one farthing subsistence for them, other than about seventy pounds in money and what few things of value I had about me, which, though considerable in themselves, were yet nothing to feed a family, and for a length of time too.

What to do I knew not, nor to whom to have recourse; to keep in the house where I was I could not, the rent being too great, and to leave it without his order, if my husband should return, I could not think of that neither; so that I continued extremely perplexed, melancholy, and discouraged to the last degree.

I remained in this dejected condition near a twelve-month. My husband had two sisters, who were married and lived very well, and some other near relations that I knew of and I hoped would do something for me, and I frequently sent to these to know if they could give me any account of my vagrant creature; but they all declared to me in answer that they knew nothing about him, and, after frequent sending, began to think me troublesome, and to let me know they thought so too by their treating my maid with very slight and unhandsome returns to her enquiries.

This grated hard and added to my affliction, but I had no recourse but to my tears, for I had not a friend of my own left me in the world. I should have observed that it was about half a year before this elopement of my husband that the disaster I mentioned above befell my brother, who broke, and that in such bad circumstances that I had the mortification to hear not only that he was in prison, but that there would be little or nothing to be had by way of composition.

Misfortunes seldom come alone. This was the forerunner of my husband’s flight, and as my expectations were cut off on that side, my husband gone, and my family of children on my hands and nothing to subsist them, my condition was the most deplorable that words can express.

I had some plate and some jewels, as might be supposed, my fortune and former circumstances considered, and my husband, who had never stayed to be distressed, had not been put to the necessity of rifling me, as husbands usually do in such cases. But as I had seen an end of all the ready money during the long time I had lived in a state of expectation for my husband, so I began to make away one thing after another, till those few things of value which I had began to lessen apace, and I saw nothing but misery and the utmost distress before me, even to have my children starve before my face. I leave any one that is a mother of children, and has lived in plenty and good fashion, to consider and reflect what must be my condition. As to my husband, I had now no hope or expectation of seeing him any more, and indeed, if I had, he was the man of all the men in the world the least able to help me, or to have turned his hand to the gaining one shilling towards lessening our distress. He neither had the capacity nor the inclination; he could have been no clerk, for he scarce wrote a legible hand; he was so far from being able to write sense, that he could not make sense of what others wrote; he was so far from understanding good English, that he could not spell good English. To be out of all business was his delight, and he would stand leaning against a post for half an hour together, with pipe in his mouth, with all the tranquillity in the world, smoking, like Dryden’s countryman that whistled as he went, for want of thought; and this even when his family was, as it were, starving, that little he had wasting, and that we were all bleeding to death, he not knowing, and as little considering, where to get another shilling when the last was spent.

This being his temper and the extent of his capacity, I confess I did not see so much loss in his parting with me as at first I thought I did, though it was hard and cruel to the last degree in him not giving me the least notice of his design; and indeed, that which I was most astonished at was that, seeing he must certainly have intended this excursion some few moments at least before he put it in practice, yet he did not come and take what little stock of money we had left, or at least a share of it, to bear his expense for a little while; but he did not, and I am morally certain he had not five guineas with him in the world when he went away. All that I could come to the knowledge of about him was that he left his hunting horn, which he called the French horn, in the stable, and his hunting saddle, went away in a handsome furniture as they call it, which he used sometimes to travel with, having an embroidered housing, a case of pistols, and other things belonging to them; and one of his servants had another saddle with pistols, though plain, and the other a long gun; so that they did not go out as sportsmen, but rather as travellers. What part of the world they went to I never heard for many years.

As I have said, I sent to his relations, but they sent me short and surly answers; nor did any one of them offer to come to see me or to see the children, or so much as to enquire after them, well perceiving that I was in a condition that was likely to be soon troublesome to them. But it was no time now to dally with them or with the world. I left off sending to them and went myself among them, laid my circumstances open to them, told them my whole case and the condition I was reduced to, begged they would advise me what course to take, laid myself as low as they could desire, and entreated them to consider that I was not in a condition to help myself, and that without some assistance we must all inevitably perish. I told them that if I had but one child, or two children, I would have done my endeavour to have worked for them with my needle, and should only

have come to them to beg them to help me to some work, that I might get our bread by my labour; but to think of one single woman not bred to work, and at a loss where to get employment, to get the bread of five children, that was not possible, some of my children being young too, and none of them big enough to help one another.

It was all one; I received not one farthing of assistance from anybody, was hardly asked to sit down at the two sisters' houses, nor offered to eat or drink at two more near relations. The fifth, an ancient gentlewoman, aunt-in-law to my husband, a widow, and the least able also of any of the rest, did indeed ask me to sit down, gave me a dinner, and refreshed me with a kinder treatment than any of the rest, but added the melancholy part, viz. that she would have helped me, but that indeed she was not able; which, however, I was satisfied was very true.

Here I relieved myself with the constant assistant of the afflicted, I mean tears; for, relating to her how I was received by the other of my husband's relations, it made me burst into tears, and I cried vehemently for a great while together, till I made the good old gentlewoman cry too several times.

However, I came home from them all without any relief, and went on at home till I was reduced to such inexpressible distress, that it is not to be described. I had been several times after this at the old aunt's, for I prevailed with her to promise me to go and talk with the other relations; at least, that if possible she could bring some of them to take off the children or to contribute something towards their maintenance; and to do her justice, she did use her endeavour with them, but all was to no purpose, they would do nothing, at least that way. I think, with much entreaty, she obtained by a kind of collection among them all, about eleven or twelve shillings in money, which, though it was a present comfort, was yet not to be named as capable to deliver me from any part of the load that lay upon me.

There was a poor woman that had been a kind of a dependent upon our family, and who I had often, among the rest of the relations, been very kind to. My maid put it into my head one morning to send to this poor woman and to see whether she might not be able to help in this dreadful case.

I must remember it here, to the praise of this poor girl, my maid, that though I was not able to give her any wages, and had told her so, nay, I was not able to pay her the wages that I was in arrears to her, yet she would not leave me; nay, and as long as she had any money when I had none, she would help me out of her own; for which, though I acknowledged her kindness and fidelity, yet it was but a bad coin that she was paid in at last, as will appear in its place.

Amy (for that was her name) put it into my thoughts to send for this poor woman to come to me, for I was now in great distress, and I resolved to do so; but just the very morning that I intended it, the old aunt, with the poor woman in her company, came to see me. The good old gentlewoman was, it seems, heartily concerned for me, and had been talking again among those people, to see what she could do for me, but to very little purpose.

You shall judge a little of my present distress by the posture she found me in. I had five little children, the eldest was under ten years old, and I had not a shilling in the house to buy them victuals, but had sent Amy out with a silver spoon to sell it and bring home something from the butcher’s, and I was in a parlour, sitting on the ground with a great heap of old rags, linen, and other things about me, looking them over to see if I had anything among them that would sell or pawn for a little money, and had been crying ready to burst myself to think what I should do next.

At this juncture they knocked at the door. I thought it had been Amy, so I did not rise up, but one of the children opened the door and they came directly into the room where I was, and where they found me in that posture and

crying vehemently, as above. I was surprised at their coming, you may be sure, especially seeing the person I had but just before resolved to send for. But when they saw me, how I looked, for my eyes were swelled with crying, and what a condition I was in as to the house and the heaps of things that were about me, and especially when I told them what I was doing and on what occasion, they sat down, like Job's three comforters, and said not one word to me for a great while, but both of them cried as fast and as heartily as I did.

The truth was, there was no need of much discourse in the case, the thing spoke for itself. They saw me in rags and dirt, who was but a little before riding in my coach; thin, and looking almost like one starved, who was before fat and beautiful. The house, that was before handsomely furnished with pictures and ornaments, cabinets, pier-glasses, and everything suitable, was now stripped and naked, most of the goods having been seized by the landlord for rent or sold to buy necessaries. In a word, all was misery and distress, the face of ruin was everywhere to be seen; we had eaten up almost everything, and little remained, unless, like one of the pitiful women of Jerusalem, I should eat up my very children themselves.

After these two good creatures had sat, as I say, in silence some time, and had then looked about them, my maid Amy came in and brought with her a small breast of mutton and two great bunches of turnips, which she intended to stew for our dinner. As for me, my heart was so overwhelmed at seeing these two friends, for such they were, though poor, and at their seeing me in such a condition, that I fell into another violent fit of crying; so that, in short, I could not speak to them again for a great while longer.

During my being in such an agony they went to my maid Amy at another part of the same room, and talked with her. Amy told them all my circumstances, and set them forth in such moving terms and so to the life, that I could not upon

any terms have done it like her myself; and, in a word, affected them both with it in such a manner, that the old aunt came to me, and though hardly able to speak for tears, “Look ye, cousin,” said she in a few words, “things must not stand thus; some course must be taken, and that forthwith. Pray, where were these children born?” I told her the parish where we lived before; that four of them were born there and one in the house where I now was, where the landlord, after having seized my goods for the rent past, not then knowing my circumstances, had now given me leave to live for a whole year more without any rent, being moved with compassion, but that this year was now almost expired.

Upon hearing this account they came to this resolution: that the children should be all carried by them to the door of one of the relations mentioned above and be set down there by the maid Amy, and that I, the mother, should remove for some days, shut up the doors, and be gone; that the people should be told that if they did not think fit to take some care of the children, they might send for the churchwardens if they thought that better, for that they were born in that parish and there they must be provided for; as for the other child which was born in the parish of — — that was already taken care of by the parish officers there, for indeed they were so sensible of the distress of the family, that they had at first word done what was their part to do.

This was what these good women proposed, and bade me leave the rest to them. I was at first sadly afflicted at the thoughts of parting with my children, and especially at that terrible thing their being taken into the parish keeping; and then a hundred terrible things came into my thoughts, viz. of parish children being starved at nurse, of their being ruined, let grow crooked, lamed, and the like for want of being taken care of, and this sank my very heart within me.

But the misery of my own circumstances hardened my heart against my own flesh and blood, and when I considered they must inevitably be starved, and I too, if I

continued to keep them about me, I began to be reconciled to parting with them all, anyhow and anywhere, that I might be freed from the dreadful necessity of seeing them all perish and perishing with them myself. So I agreed to go away out of the house and leave the management of the whole matter to my maid Amy and to them; and accordingly I did so, and the same afternoon they carried them all away to one of their aunts.

Amy, a resolute girl, knocked at the door with the children all with her, and bade the eldest, as soon as the door was open, run in, and the rest after her, She set them all down at the door before she knocked, and when she knocked she stayed till a maidservant came to the door. “Sweetheart,” said she, “pray go in and tell your mistress, here are her little cousins come to see her from — — ” naming the town where we lived; at which the maid offered to go back. “Here, child,” says Amy, “take one of them in your hand, and I’ll bring the rest.” So she gives her the least, and the wench goes in mighty innocently with the little one in her hand; upon which Amy turns the rest in after her, shuts the door softly, and marches off as fast as she could.

Just in the interval of this, and even while the maid and her mistress were quarrelling, for the mistress raved and scolded at her like a madwoman, and had ordered her to go and stop the maid Amy and turn all the children out of the doors again, but she had been at the door and Amy was gone, and the wench was out of her wits and the mistress too — I say, just at this juncture came the poor old woman, not the aunt, but the other of the two that had been with me, and knocks at the door. The aunt did not go because she had pretended to advocate for me, and they would have suspected her of some contrivance; but as for the other woman, they did not so much as know that she had kept up any correspondence with me.

Amy and she had contrived this between them, and it was well enough contrived that they did so. When she came into

the house the mistress was fuming and raging like one distracted, and calling the maid all the foolish jades and sluts that she could think of, and that she would take the children and turn them all out into the streets. The good poor woman, seeing her in such a passion, turned about as if she would be gone again, and said, “Madam, I’ll come another time, I see you are engaged.” “No, no, Mrs. — — ” says the mistress, “I am not much engaged; sit down. This senseless creature here has brought in my fool of a brother’s whole house of children upon me, and tells me that a wench brought them to the door and thrust them in and bade her carry them to me; but it shall be no disturbance to me, for I have ordered them to be set in the street without the door, and so let the churchwardens take care of them, or else make this dull jade carry them back to — — again and let her that brought them into the world look after them if she will. What does she send her brats to me for?”

“The last indeed had been the best of the two,” says the poor woman, “if it had been to be done; and that brings me to tell you my errand and the occasion of my coming, for I came on purpose about this very business, and to have prevented this being put upon you if I could; but I see I am come too late.”

“How do you mean too late?” says the mistress. “What, have you been concerned in this affair, then? What, have you helped bring this family slur upon us?”

“I hope you do not think such a thing of me, madam,” says the poor woman; “but I went this morning to — — to see my old mistress and benefactor, for she had been very kind to me, and when I came to the door I found all fast locked and bolted, and the house looking as if nobody was at home.

“I knocked at the door but nobody came, till at last some of the neighbours’ servants called to me and said, ‘There’s nobody lives there, mistress, what do you knock for?’ I

seemed surprised at that. ‘What, nobody live there!’ said I; ‘what d’ye mean? Does not Mrs. — — live there?’ The answer was, ‘No, she is gone’; at which I parleyed with one of them and asked her what was the matter. ‘Matter,’ says she, ‘why, ’tis matter enough; the poor gentlewoman has lived there all alone, and without anything to subsist her, a long time, and this morning the landlord turned her out of doors.’

“‘Out of doors!’ says I; ‘what, with all her children! poor lambs, what is become of them?’ ‘Why, truly nothing worse,’ said they, ‘can come to them than staying here, for they were almost starved with hunger.’ So the neighbours seeing the poor lady in such distress, for she stood crying and wringing her hands over her children like one distracted, sent for the churchwardens to take care of the children; and they when they came took the youngest, which was born in this parish, and have got it a very good nurse and taken care of it; but as for the other four, they had sent them away to some of their father’s relations, who were very substantial people and who, besides that, lived in the parish where they were born.

“I was not so surprised at this as not presently to foresee that this trouble would be brought upon you or upon Mr. — — so I came immediately to bring you word of it, that you might be prepared for it and might not be surprised, but I see they have been too nimble for me, so that I know not what to advise. The poor woman, it seems, is turned out of doors into the street, and another of the neighbours there told me that when they took her children from her she swooned away, and when they recovered her out of that she ran distracted, and is put into a madhouse by the parish, for there is nobody else to take any care of her.”

This was all acted to the life by this good, kind, poor creature; for though her design was perfectly good and charitable, yet there was not one word of it true in fact; for I was not turned out of doors by the landlord, nor gone

distracted. It was true indeed that at parting with my poor children I fainted, and was like one mad when I came to myself and found they were gone, but I remained in the house a good while after that, as you shall hear.

While the poor woman was telling this dismal story, in came the gentlewoman's husband, and though her heart was hardened against all pity, who was really and nearly related to the children, for they were the children of her own brother, yet the good man was quite softened with the dismal relation of the circumstances of the family; and when the poor woman had done he said to his wife, "This is a dismal case, my dear, indeed, and something must be done." His wife fell a-raving at him. "What!" says she, "do you want to have four children to keep? Have we not children of our own? Would you have these brats come and eat up my children's bread? No, no, let them go to the parish, and let them take care of them; I'll take care of my own."

"Come, come, my dear," says the husband, "charity is a duty to the poor, and he that gives to the poor lends to the Lord; let us lend our heavenly Father a little of our children's bread, as you call it; it will be a store well laid up for them, and will be the best security that our children shall never come to want charity or be turned out of doors as these poor innocent creatures are."

"Don't tell me of security," says the wife; " 'tis a good security for our children to keep what we have together and provide for them, and then 'tis time enough to help to keep other folks' children. Charity begins at home."

"Well, my dear," says he again, "I only talk of putting out a little money to interest; our Maker is a good borrower. Never fear making a bad debt there, child, I'll be bound for it."

"Don't banter me with your charity and your allegories," says the wife angrily; "I tell you they are my relations, not

yours, and they shall not roost here, they shall go to the parish.”

“All your relations are my relations now,” says the good gentleman very calmly, “and I won’t see your relations in distress and not pity them, any more than I would my own. Indeed, my dear, they shan’t go to the parish; I assure you none of my wife’s relations shall come to the parish if I can help it.”

“What! will you take four children to keep?” says the wife.

“No, no, my dear,” says he, “there’s your sister — — I’ll go and talk with her; and your uncle — — I’ll send for him and the rest. I’ll warrant you when we are all together we will find ways and means to keep four poor little creatures from beggary and starving, or else it will be very hard; we are none of us in so bad circumstances but we are able to spare a mite for the fatherless; don’t shut up your bowels of compassion against your own flesh and blood. Could you hear these poor innocent children cry at your door for hunger and give them no bread?”

“Prithee, why need they cry at our door?” says she, “ ’tis the business of the parish to provide for them. They shan’t cry at our door; if they do, I’ll give them nothing.” “Won’t you?” says he; “but I will. Remember that dreadful Scripture is directly against us, Prov. 21. 13: ‘Whoso stoppeth his ears at the cry of the poor, he also shall cry himself, but shall not be heard.’ ”

“Well, well,” said she, “you must do what you will, because you pretend to be master; but if I had my will, I would send them where they ought to be sent, I would send them from whence they came.”

Then the poor woman put in and said, “But, madam, that is sending them to starve indeed, for the parish has no obligation to take care of them, and so they would lie and perish in the street.”

“Or be sent back again,” says the husband, “to our parish in a cripple-cart by the Justice’s warrant, and so expose us

and all the relations to the last degree among our neighbours, and among those who knew the good old gentleman their grandfather, who lived and flourished in this parish so many years and was so well beloved among all people, and deserved it so well."

"I don't value that one farthing, not I," says the wife, "I'll keep none of them."

"Well, my dear," says her husband, "but I value it, for I won't have such a blot lie upon the family and upon your children; he was a worthy, ancient, and good man, and his name is respected among all his neighbours; it will be a reproach to you that are his daughter, and to our children that are his grandchildren, that we should let your brother's children perish, or come to be a charge to the public, in the very place where your family once flourished. Come, say no more, I'll see what can be done."

Upon this he sends and gathers all the relations together at a tavern hard by, and sent for the four little children that they might see them, and they all at first word agreed to have them taken care of; and because his wife was so furious that she would not suffer one of them to be kept at home, they agreed to keep them all together for a while. So they committed them to the poor woman that had managed the affair for them, and entered into obligations to one another to supply the needful sums for their maintenance; and not to have one separated from the rest, they sent for the youngest from the parish where it was taken in, and had them all brought up together.

It would take up too long a part of this story to give a particular account with what a charitable tenderness this good person, who was but uncle-in-law to them, managed that affair; how careful he was of them, went constantly to see them, and to see that they were well provided for, clothed, put to school, and at last put out in the world for their advantage; but 'tis enough to say he acted more like a father to them than an uncle-in-law, though all along much

against his wife’s consent, who was of a disposition not so tender and compassionate as her husband.

You may believe I heard this with the same pleasure which I now feel at the relating it again, for I was terribly frighted at the apprehensions of my children being brought to misery and distress, as these must be who have no friends but are left to parish benevolence.

I was now, however, entering on a new scene of life. I had a great house upon my hands, and some furniture left in it, but I was no more able to maintain myself and my maid Amy in it than I was my five children; nor had I anything to subsist with but what I might get by working, and that was not a town where much work was to be had.

My landlord had been very kind indeed after he came to know my circumstances, though before he was acquainted with that part he had gone so far as to seize my goods, and to carry some of them off too.

But I had lived three-quarters of a year in his house after that and had paid him no rent, and, which was worse, I was in no condition to pay him any. However, I observed he came oftener to see me, looked kinder upon me, and spoke more friendly to me than he used to do; particularly the last two or three times he had been there he observed, he said, how poorly I lived, how low I was reduced, and the like, told me it grieved him for my sake; and the last time of all he was kinder still, told me he came to dine with me, and that I should give him leave to treat me. So he called my maid Amy and sent her out to buy a joint of meat; he told her what she should buy, but naming two or three things, either of which she might take. The maid, a cunning wench, and faithful to me as the skin to my back, did not buy anything outright, but brought the butcher along with her with both the things that she had chosen, for him to please himself; the one was a large very good leg of veal, the other a piece of the fore-ribs of roasting beef. He looked at them, but bade me chaffer with the butcher for him, and I did so, and came

back to him and told him what the butcher demanded for either of them and what each of them came to; so he pulls out 11s. 3d., which they came to together, and bade me take them both; the rest, he said, would serve another time.

I was surprised, you may be sure, at the bounty of a man that had but a little while ago been my terror and had torn the goods out of my house like a fury; but I considered that my distresses had mollified his temper, and that he had afterwards been so compassionate as to give me leave to live rent free in the house a whole year.

But now he put on the face, not of a man of compassion only, but of a man of friendship and kindness, and this was so unexpected that it was surprising. We chatted together, and were, as I may call it, cheerful, which was more than I could say I had been for three years before. He sent for wine and beer too, for I had none; poor Amy and I had drank nothing but water for many weeks, and indeed I have often wondered at the faithful temper of the poor girl, for which I but ill requited her at last.

When Amy was come with the wine he made her fill a glass to him, and with the glass in his hand he came to me and kissed me, which I was, I confess, a little surprised at, but more at what followed; for he told me that as the sad condition which I was reduced to had made him pity me, so my conduct in it and the courage I bore it with had given him a more than ordinary respect for me, and made him very thoughtful for my good; that he was resolved for the present to do something to relieve me, and to employ his thoughts in the meantime to see if he could, for the future, put me into a way to support myself.

While he found me change colour and look surprised at his discourse, for so I did, to be sure, he turns to my maid Amy, and looking at her, he says to me “I say all this, madam, before your maid, because both she and you shall know that I have no ill design, and that I have in mere kindness resolved to do something for you if I can; and as I have been

a witness of the uncommon honesty and fidelity of Mrs. Amy here to you in all your distresses, I know she may be trusted with so honest a design as mine is, for, I assure you, I bear a proportioned regard to your maid too for her affection to you.”

Amy made him a curtsy, and the poor girl looked so confounded with joy that she could not speak, but her colour came and went, and every now and then she blushed as red as scarlet and the next minute looked as pale as death. Well, having said this, he sat down, made me sit down, and then drank to me and made me drink two glasses of wine together. “For,” says he, “you have need of it”; and so indeed I had. When he had done so, “Come, Amy,” says he, “with your mistress’s leave you shall have a glass too”; so he made her drink two glasses also. And then rising up, “And now, Amy,” says he, “go and get dinner; and you, madam,” says he to me, “go up and dress you, and come down and smile and be merry,” adding, “I’ll make you easy if I can “; and in the meantime, he said, he would walk in the garden.

When he was gone, Amy changed her countenance indeed and looked as merry as ever she did in her life. “Dear madam,” says she, “what does this gentleman mean.” “Nay, Amy,” said I, “he means to do us good, you see, don’t he? I know no other meaning he can have, for he can get nothing by me.” “I warrant you, madam,” says she, “he’ll ask you a favour by and by.” “No, no, you are mistaken, Amy, I dare say,” said I; “you heard what he said, didn’t you?” “Ay,” says Amy, “it’s no matter for that; you shall see what he will do after dinner.” “Well, well, Amy,” says I, “you have hard thoughts of him; I cannot be of your opinion. I don’t see anything in him yet that looks like it.” “As to that, madam,” says Amy, “I don’t see anything of it yet neither; but what should move a gentleman to take pity on us as he does?” “Nay,” says I, “that’s a hard thing too, that we should judge a man to be wicked because he’s charitable, and vicious

because he’s kind.” “Oh, madam,” says Amy, “there’s abundance of charity begins in that vice, and he is not so unacquainted with things as not to know that poverty is the strongest incentive, a temptation against which no virtue is powerful enough to stand out; he knows your condition as well as you do.” “Well, and what then?” “Why, then he knows too that you are young and handsome, and he has the surest bait in the world to take you with.”

“Well, Amy,” said I, “but he may find himself mistaken too in such a thing as that.” “Why, madam,” says Amy, “I hope you won’t deny him if he should offer it.”

“What d’ye mean by that, hussy?” said I. “No, I’d starve first.”

“I hope not, madam, I hope you would be wiser; I’m

sure if he will set you up, as he talks of, you ought to deny him nothing; and you will starve if you do not consent, that’s certain.”

“What! consent to lie with him for bread? Amy,” said I, “how can you talk so?”

“Nay, madam,” says Amy, “I don’t think you would for anything else; it would not be lawful for anything else but for bread, madam. Why, nobody can starve; there’s no bearing that, I’m sure.”

“Ay,” says I, “but if he would give me an estate to live on, he should not lie with me, I assure you.”

“Why, look you, madam, if he would but give you enough to live easy upon, he should lie with me for it with all my heart.”

“That’s a token, Amy, of inimitable kindness to me,” said I, “and I know how to value it; but there’s more friendship than honesty in it, Amy.”

“Oh, madam,” says Amy, “I’d do anything to get you out of this sad condition. As to honesty, I think honesty is out of the question when starvation is the case; are not we almost starved to death?”

“I am indeed,” said I, “and thou art for my sake; but to be a whore, Amy!"— and there I stopped.

“Dear madam,” says Amy, “if I will starve for your sake, I will be a whore or anything for your sake; why, I would die for you if I were put to it.”

“Why, that’s an excess of affection, Amy,” said I, “I never met with before; I wish I may be ever in condition to make some returns suitable. But, however, Amy, you shall not be a whore to him, to oblige him to be kind to me; no, Amy, nor I won’t be a whore to him if he would give me much more than he is able to give me or do for me.”

“Why, madam,” says Amy, “I don’t say I will go and ask him; but I say if he should promise to do so and so for you, and the condition was such that he would not serve you unless I would let him lie with me, he should lie with me as often as he would rather than you should not have his assistance. But this is but talk, madam, I don’t see any need of such discourse, and you are of opinion that there will be no need of it.”

“Indeed, so I am, Amy; but,” said I, “if there was, I tell you again I’d die before I would consent, or before you should consent for my sake.”

Hitherto I had not only preserved the virtue itself, but the virtuous inclination and resolution; and had I kept myself there I had been happy, though I had perished of mere hunger; for, without question, a woman ought rather to die than to prostitute her virtue and honour, let the temptation be what it will.

But to return to my story. He walked about the garden, which was indeed all in disorder and overrun with weeds, because I had not been able to hire a gardener to do anything to it, no, not so much as to dig up ground enough to sow a few turnips and carrots for family use. After he had viewed it, he came in and sent Amy to fetch a poor man, a gardener that used to help our manservant, and carried him

into the garden and ordered him to do several things in it to put it into a little order; and this took him up near an hour.

By this time I had dressed me as well as I could, for though I had good linen left still, yet I had but a poor head-dress, and no knots but old fragments, no necklace, no ear-rings; all those things were gone long ago for mere bread.

However, I was tight and clean, and in better plight than he had seen me in a great while, and he looked extremely pleased to see me so, for he said I looked so disconsolate and so afflicted before, that it grieved him to see me; and he bade me pluck up a good heart, for he hoped to put me in a condition to live in the world and be beholden to nobody.

I told him that was impossible, for I must be beholden to him for it, for all the friends I had in the world would not or could not do so much for me as that he spoke of. “Well, widow,” says he (so he called me, and so indeed I was in the worst sense that desolate word could be used in), “if you are beholden to me, you shall be beholden to nobody else.”

By this time dinner was ready and Amy came in to lay the cloth, and indeed it was happy there was none to dine but he and I, for I had but six plates left in the house and but two dishes. However, he knew how things were, and bade me make no scruple about bringing out what I had, he hoped to see me in a better plight. He did not come, he said, to be entertained, but to entertain me and comfort and encourage me. Thus he went on, speaking so cheerfully to me and such cheerful things, that it was a cordial to my very soul to hear him speak.

Well, we went to dinner. I’m sure I had not eaten a good meal hardly in a twelvemonth, at least not of such a joint of meat as the leg of veal was. I ate indeed very heartily, and so did he, and he made me drink three or four glasses of wine, so that, in short, my spirits were lifted up to a degree I had not been used to; and I was not only cheerful but merry, and so he pressed me to be.

I told him I had a great deal of reason to be merry, seeing he had been so kind to me and had given me hopes of recovering me from the worst circumstances that ever woman of any sort of fortune was sunk into; that he could not but believe that what he had said to me was like life from the dead; that it was like recovering one sick from the brink of the grave. How I should ever make him a return any way suitable was what I had not yet had time to think of; I could only say that I should never forget it while I had life, and should be always ready to acknowledge it.

He said that was all he desired of me, that his reward would be the satisfaction of having rescued me from misery; that he found he was obliging one that knew what gratitude meant; that he would make it his business to make me completely easy, first or last, if it lay in his power; and in the meantime he bade me consider of anything that I thought he might do for me for my advantage and in order to make me perfectly easy.

After we had talked thus he bade me be cheerful. “Come,” says he, “lay aside these melancholy things and let us be merry.” Amy waited at the table, and she smiled and laughed and was so merry she could hardly contain it, for the girl loved me to an excess hardly to be described; and it was such an unexpected thing to hear any one talk to her mistress, that the wench was beside herself almost; and as soon as dinner was over, Amy went upstairs and put on her best clothes too, and came down dressed like a gentlewoman.

We sat together talking of a thousand things, of what had been and what was to be, all the rest of the day, and in the evening he took his leave of me with a thousand expressions of kindness and tenderness and true affection to me, but offered not the least of what my maid Amy had suggested.

At his going away he took me in his arms, protested an honest kindness to me, said a thousand kind things to me