

The Distress'd Wife

John Gay

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The Distress'd Wife. A Comedy. By the late Mr. Gay

ADVERTISEMENT.

This COMEDY was finished by Mr. GAY, and intended for the Stage before his Death; when it was left with his other Papers to the Care of his Noble Friend and Patron the Duke of Queensberry: His Grace has accordingly permitted it to the Press, as it is here printed from the Original in the Author's own Hand-writing.

MEN.

Sir Thomas Willit,
Barter,
Lord Courtlove,
Pert,
Forward,
Flutter,
Trenchwell,
Humphry,
Fibber.

The Distress'd Wife

WOMEN.

*Lady Willit,
Lady Frankair,
Miss Sprightly,
Miss Friendless,
Fetch,
Lady Rampant,
Mrs. Buxom,
Mrs. Clackit .*

ACT I.

SCENE I.

Sir Thomas Willit, Mr. Barter.

Bart.

Why did you bring her to Town at all? Why did not you pack her off into the Country three Months ago?

Sir Tho.

But to fall upon the Sex in so *severe* a Manner looks like Pique. You old Batchelors should not judge of *all* Women by those you have convers'd with.

Bart.

Had I been ever married, Nephew, you might have suspected me of Pique and Prejudice. Consider too, that a Looker-on very often sees the Over-sights of those that are engag'd in the Game; and of all Mankind, according to my Observations, a Husband sees the least of what his Wife is a doing.

Sir Tho.

But there may be Exceptions, Sir.

Bart.

I tell you, Nephew, 'tis every Husband's Case. A Wife hath a thousand. Ways of blinding you. (Not to mention lying) What think you of Flattery, Fondness, and Tears? Those are Hood-winks that Wives have ready upon every Occasion.

Sir Tho.

Perhaps I have not the strongest Reasons to be an Advocate for Matrimony; yet, for our own Sakes, we should conceal our Wives Infirmities; for, if Family Disputes were to be made publick, of all States, the State of Matrimony must be the most ridiculous. I grant you, Sir, I have been very credulous; and that she had teaz'd and flatter'd me too into Ambition; and I *did* believe some great Relations of hers were to procure me an Employment, so that I must take Part of the Folly of bringing her to Town upon myself.

Bart.

And had you not a more profitable Employment, than they *could* give you, in looking after your own Affairs in the Country? Employments and Titles are the Shadows that you Country Gentlemen catch at, and Knaves run away with your Substance. Besides, Nephew, you are whimsical, and have Opinions of your own. Then too, you have a perverse uncourtly Manner of speaking your Mind. Never think of an Employment without implicit

ACT I.

The Distress'd Wife

political Faith, and the other necessary Qualifications.

Sir Tho.

I have given up all Views, and am fix'd and determin'd for the Country. Such another Year's Expence would irretrievably ruin me.

Bart.

A Man with *such* a Wife is never fix'd, is never determin'd; he is the Weather-cock, and she the Wind that blows it. Give me leave to doubt your Resolutions, for I can believe No-body in the Family but your Wife, because she knows what she *will* do.

Sir Tho.

Nay, Sir, you may believe me; for Debts, Duns, and Necessity, have ty'd me down to be so un-husband-like as to *make* my Wife do a reasonable Thing.

Bart.

But when she (with Fondness and Tears) assures you, that Matters are just upon a Crisis, that a good Employment will soon set all Affairs to rights; you must be convinc'd she hath your Interest at heart, and you cannot in Gratitude refuse to accept of her good Offices in Town for a Month or two longer.

Sir Tho.

Spare me, Sir; for I know and own my Weakness in being led into this foolish Scheme.

Bart.

But are you sure that you *can* be so uncomplaisant, as to throw a Lady into a Condition of Life that she is utterly unfit for? For you must have experienc'd she hath all the suitable Extravagance becoming a Court-Lady. Nay, you too (without an Employment) have show'd yourself qualified for one, by running into Luxuries you could not support. Does she game as deep as ever?

Sir Tho.

You know she does.

Bart.

And can you be so unreasonable as to put her out of the Way of so *innocent* an Amusement?

Sir Tho.

Why will you aggravate Matters? I am but too sensible of 'em already. But it is necessary to pay Tradesmen's Bills upon leaving the Town, and my Steward hath been so slack in his Remittances, that I shall be oblig'd to take up another Thousand.

Bart.

To enable your Wife to play with a freer Spirit.

Sir Tho.

The Moment I have satisfied my Creditors, I will remove her from the Temptation; and nothing she *can* say shall make me alter my Opinion.

Bart.

Upon that Condition, I will find a Friend, who shall furnish you with the Sum; for your own, and her Extravagancies, have drain'd *me* of all my

The Distress'd Wife

Ready Money. But is your Wife prepar'd for this terrible Change?

Sir Tho.

If you mean, that she is convinc'd, that she hath consented to live in a regular Way (a Way that almost every Woman detests and despises) that is a Question I shall never ask her. Though she is obstinate, I am as peremptory; so, without disputing a Point I know she never will give up, the Authority of a Husband shall prevent all her Objections. We shall have Time enough for a Reconciliation when we are settled in the Country.

Bart.

Since I find you have got the Use of your Reason again, I shall take the Privilege of a Friend, and tell you, it was high time, upon every Account, to do as you have determin'd. Your Character, as well as Fortune, suffers.

Sir Tho.

I beg you to explain yourself.

Bart.

Is there not a Bargain and Sale on foot of your Neice *Sprightly*, to that formal Pedant in Politicks, Lord *Courtlove*? The whole Town looks upon that Treaty of Marriage (as you call it) in no other Light.

Sir Tho.

She is a Relation of my Wife, and 'tis an Affair that I have never meddled with.

Bart.

How can the Thing possibly have any other Appearance? What are your Pretensions to an Employment? What were you to give for it? I know the common Way of dealing hath been, for so much Honour, or so much Conscience; but there have been those too, who have dealt for Wives, Daughters, and Neices. In short, no Place is to be had without a valuable Consideration some Way or another.

Sir Tho.

I know there have been Proposals from Lord *Courtlove*; but what is that to me?

Bart.

The World (in Things of this Nature) will suppose a Man and his Wife agreed, though they know Ten Thousand Instances to the contrary. 'Tis impossible for us to distinguish to whom the Folly or Indiscretion properly belongs, with that Exactness you can do between yourselves; so that your Wife's Conduct, in this Particular, must reflect upon you.

Sir Tho.

That old Beau is an arrant Assembly-haunter.

Bart.

But this is a serious Affair.

Sir Tho.

Not a young Girl of any Consequence can appear, but he is her profess'd Follower; and they all coquet it with him only to turn him into Ridicule.

Bart.

That is not the Case here. Indeed, Nephew, your Wife's Behaviour is down-right scandalous.

The Distress'd Wife

SCENE II.

Sir Thomas Willit, Barter, Lady Willit.

La. Will.

How can you be so provoking, *Sir Thomas*? Was there no Place in the House to bring your Company into but my Dressing-room? *Mr. Barter*, your Servant. After all, this is intolerable that one can never have a Room to one's self.

Sir Tho.

My Uncle, Madam, was desirous of paying his Respects to you.

La. Will.

And why had not you brought him to my Bed-side?

Bart.

If your Ladyship is out of Humour.

[Going.

La. Will.

Pardon me, *Mr. Barter*; I was not speaking to you. But you must allow that (notwithstanding the Privileges of a Husband) a Wife ought to be treated with common good Manners. That's all.

Sir Tho.

Your Objections then, Madam, are to me, it seems.

La. Will.

Bless me, how can any Creature alive be so captious? I vow, *Mr. Barter*, I look upon your Visit as very obliging. But when one is just out of Bed! You might have been so civil, methinks, to have sent up to know if one saw Company or no.

Sir Tho.

Nay, prithee, Child, don't make yourself ridiculous. How can you put yourself out of Humour for such Trifles? I had sent for my Uncle to advise with him about settling my Affairs upon our leaving the Town.

La. Will.

How should he be Judge of our Affairs?

Sir Tho.

I am Judge of 'em, Madam. I wish you were so too.

La. Will.

I wish some People would not be so over-fond of their own Opinions. 'Tis astonishing a Man can have so perverse a Conduct, as to make it impossible for one to serve him.

Sir Tho.

What do you mean, Madam?

La. Will.

To speak plainer then, you are *not* a Judge of your own Affairs. Sure you will allow *me* to know what I am doing.

The Distress'd Wife

Sir Tho.

Then I must speak plainer too, Madam, and acquaint you, that my Circumstances oblige me to put an End to your Negotiations, and that my Resolutions are taken to retrieve, to look after and support the Estate I was born to. The Wild–goose Chase is over. Let the Necessitous and Sycophants haunt Levees, and seek to sponge upon the Publick; 'tis a Pursuit beneath a free–born Country Gentleman. So, Madam, I will not be the Occasion of one Lie more, either from you or your Friends, for I here cancel all Court–promises; and frankly own, that I am ashamed of the Part you have made me act.

La. Will.

I beg you, Sir *Thomas*, don't speak so disagreeably loud. My Head akes, and you worry one to Death.

Sir Tho.

Have you call'd in all your Tradesmen's Bills?

La. Will.

One would think you had found those Creatures forward and impertinent enough without my Encouragement.

Sir Tho.

But these are Things, Child, that must be settled.

La. Will.

Always upon this Topic! A Man with these vulgar Scruples about him is his own eternal Dun. Was there ever a Man, who grew to be of any Consequence, who did not run out? Would you have Credit, and not make use of it? Now, Mr. *Barter*, is not this narrow way of thinking provoking?

Bart.

You would not, Madam, condescend to appeal to a Merchant upon this Subject. We live on in the humdrum way of Honesty and Regularity: We think, we act differently from People at your End of the Town; and as it never yet was known, can it now be expected, that Courtiers should ever stoop to regulate their Conduct by ours? As I am no Judge, you must excuse me from giving my Opinion.

La. Will.

I wish you had never given your Opinion to somebody else; for my Husband is never so unreasonable as after he hath conversed with you. Would your Wisdom advise him now, out of Caprice, to abandon a very considerable Thing, that is ready for his Acceptance?

Sir Tho.

You know my Resolution, and I advise you to prepare for it.

La. Will.

And do you really think this Language is even becoming a Husband? For Heaven's Sake have done. You know I am out of order, and Company kills me; so that I must beg to be excused. A Brute!

SCENE III.

Sir Thomas Willit, Barter.

Bart.

The Distress'd Wife

I never enter into a Dispute with a Woman; for every Reason against her, only serves to make her the more obstinate in her own Opinion.

Enter Fibber.

Fibb.

Lord *Courtlove*, Sir.

[Exit.

SCENE IV.

Sir Thomas Willit, Barter, Lord Courtlove.

Ld. Court.

The Business of the Day will make the Levee sooner than usual this Morning: If you will give me Leave, Sir *Thomas*, I will have the Honour of waiting upon you. I hope I do not break in upon Business. Pray, who is this Gentleman? May one talk before him? You will pardon my Caution.

Sir Tho.

My Uncle, my Lord.

Ld. Court.

Mr. *Barter*, your most Obedient Servant. The Honour of being known to you is what I have been long solliciting. Are we to have the Favour of your Company? Shall I have the Honour of presenting you?

Bart.

To whom, and where, my Lord?

Ld. Court.

Sir *Thomas* and I are going together to the Levee.

Bart.

My Nephew may do what he pleases; I have neither Business, nor any thing to ask; and I would not make my self seem a Dependant, to swell any Great Man's Vanity in *Christendom*.

Ld. Court.

I beg your Pardon, Sir. You Merchants have your own Ways of Thinking

Bart.

And of Speaking and Acting too. But you know, my Lord, we are a particular Race of People.

Ld. Court.

Pray, Sir *Thomas*, hath Mr. *Barter* been disoblig'd? I think it would not be prudent to talk upon your Affair before him.

Sir Tho.

My Uncle is perfectly well acquainted with every Step I am taking, and I beg you to give him no Suspicions of

The Distress'd Wife

me.

Ld. Court.

Believe me, *Sir Thomas*, you have not a common Promise; I would not have your Impatience shew you look upon it as such. Your want of Confidence of late, I know, hath given some unjust Jealousies, but all those may be got over. And will you just now, by any little Omissions, make your *Affair* impracticable? You are sensible all my small Interest is engag'd to serve you: I have made a Point of it, and the Thing shall be done.

Sir Tho.

And so you have answer'd for my Attendance this Morning. I have Business, my Lord.

Ld. Court.

At this particular Time, Sir, I know your absenting yourself must be taken Notice of; and it would not easily be forgiven. My Zeal, Sir, for your Interest, was the Occasion of this Visit.

Sir Tho.

Is Attendance and Homage then expected from me as a Duty? Am I number'd among the prostitute Hirelings of Power? I hope my Behaviour hath not made me appear to the World in the contemptible Light I do to you and your Friends. 'Tis high Time, my Lord, that my Conduct should rectify your Mistake.

Ld. Court.

Without your further appearing in it, *Sir Thomas*, I say the Thing shall be done. But at present I wave the Discourse. You must pardon me, Sir, if I am somewhat solicitous about my own Success. Am I to be happy with *Miss Sprightly*? Did she listen to the last Proposals I made to *Lady Willit*?

Sir Tho.

The Girl never ask'd my Advice; but if your Lordship asks it, I own I think the Inequality of your Age makes the Thing ridiculous.

Ld. Court.

The Alliance, the Fortune I hope is unexceptionable.

Sir. Tho.

'Tis not, my Lord, that I think your Applications desperate; for Daughters, as well as Fathers and Mothers, set their Hearts on nothing but Title and Fortune. As to Love, daily Examples shew you, they seldom wholly rely upon a Husband.

Ld. Court.

We are upon no Secret, *Mr. Barter*. You cannot be a Stranger to my Treaty of Marriage with *Miss Sprightly*.

Bart.

If the Girl was not so great a Fortune, methinks your Lordship's Love would appear somewhat more disinterested.

Sir Tho.

I have quitted all my Pretensions to an Employment; and did your Lordship weigh the *Affair* rightly, you would give up yours to a Wife. An Employment frequently runs you into every fashionable Extravagance, Luxury and Debt: Does not a Wife do the same? An Employment influences your Words and Actions, even against Reason and common Sense: A Wife hath done, and can do the same. As I am resolved to do one reasonable Thing myself, I advise your Lordship, to do another. Keep your Reason, keep your Liberty, and think no more of my Neice.

SCENE IV.

The Distress'd Wife

Ld. Court.

She seems to wait only for your Approbation.

Sir. Tho.

Excuse me, my Lord. If I know her; she is not to be influenc'd, but by her own Inclinations: What those are I could never find out; perhaps they may be at present to a Title; after you have her, they may be to something else. Were it in my Power, I would not do your Lordship so ill an Office.

Ld. Court.

I trust my self to your Friendship. I am sorry I cannot have the Honour of your Company where I am going; when I return to pay my Respects to the Ladies, I hope to bring you Proofs that my Friendship was not merely Profession.

SCENE V.

Sir Thomas Willit, Barter.

Bart.

I find you have the Use of your Reason when your Wife is not by; consider yourself as a Man, and consider her as a Woman, and you may have it then too. You were born to Freedom, and would you seek to make yourself a Slave? You were born to Fortune, and would you stoop to make yourself a Beggar? For of all Beggars, I look upon a Minister's Follower to be the meanest.

Sir Tho.

I have still, Sir, so much of the Spirit of a true *Briton*, that I despise myself for the Steps I have been led into. 'Tis true, I am one Flesh with my Wife, but my Mind is my own; and you shall soon be convinc'd, that I have so reasonable a Regard for her, that my own Honour shall govern me, and not her capricious Passions.

Bart.

That you may not be disappointed of the Sum upon this Emergency, it shall be my immediate Business to find out a Person to supply you. I'll be with you again an Hour or two before Dinner.

Sir Tho.

I shall ever own the Obligation, and you will soon have the Pleasure to see that your good Offices were not thrown away.

SCENE VI.

Sir Thomas Willit, Humphrey.

Sir Tho.

Well, *Humphrey*, what want you?

Humph.

My Lady, Sir, hath order'd me to call upon the Wine-Merchant for six Dozen more of Champagne. Now the Case is, Mr. *Bottler* wont deliver a drop more without Ready Money. Alack-a-day, Sir! Things are hugely alter'd from what they were in old *Sir Thomas's* Time. But Servants must see all and say nothing.

The Distress'd Wife

Sir Tho.

'Tis no matter, *Humphrey*. You may tell my Wife, that I gave you Orders to the contrary.

Humph.

Well. It is no wonder that your fine Folk live so Great, when they pay for nothing. Now to my thinking, to squander more than a Man hath, is not so reputable a Thing as your People of Quality seem to think. Why now, an't like your Honour, there's your Taylor uses you like a Dog. My Lady too, methinks, had better play less and pay better. But Servants, they say, must see and say nothing. What, though it be the Fashion, to my thinking, there is no such mighty matter of Greatness in being bubbled by Knaves, and spunging upon Industry. Now, for my Part, I can't find out where would be the lessening of a Great Man, though he should pay his Debts. Great Folk have great Privileges, that's certain But, troth, I think 'tis e'en as creditable to be Just and Honest.

Sir Tho.

I thank thee, *Humphrey*, for thy blunt Reproof. I feel the Shame of being in Debt. 'Tis a Life of Dependance, and beneath a Man of Honour.

Humph.

And they tell me too, that Matters are going at a wild Rate in the Country yonder. Hath your Honour spoke with your Tenant *John Trenchwell*, who came to Town last Night? But here he is himself, and he can better inform your Honour. He would very fain have seen your Honour as soon as he came to Town.

SCENE VII.

Sir Thomas Willit, Humphrey, Trenchwell.

Sir Tho.

Farmer *Trenchwell*, I am glad to see you. Pray, what Business brought you to Town?

Trench.

My Business, *Sir Thomas*, is merely upon your Account. As I have always found you a kind Landlord, I thought it my Duty to serve you to the best of my Power.

Sir Tho.

What is that Paper in your Hand? Hath a Life dropp'd, and do you want to renew?

Trench.

That you might not look upon it as a private Pique of mine, you will find there the Hands of most of your creditable Tenants. *Survey*, Sir, hath abused you.

Humph.

Open his Eyes, Master *Trenchwell*. Be a Rogue never so Rich and Great, 'tis the Part of an Honest Man to detect him. Fear him not, Farmer *Trenchwell*. A Knave, before he is found out, is proud and insolent; but after he is found out, he is the meanest of Cowards. Speak out; speak plain. 'Tis what every Servant of the Family hath long thought of him.

Sir Tho.

'Tis a Remonstrance I see against *Survey*, my Steward.

Trench.

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He never had any Thing to transact with any one Tenant, but he had a private Job of his own. By what Means, think you, hath he purchased all those fine Tenements round you? Only give your Tenants a Hearing, and you will not want Proofs.

Sir Tho.

I always took *Survey* to be an honest Fellow.

Trench.

And do you think so still?

Sir Tho.

I don't know what to think.

Trench.

Read on. Only see how he hath acted since he was left to himself.

Humph.

Well said, teach him to know a Rogue from an honest Man. 'Tis a Lesson that Country Gentlemen almost always pay for Learning. Now he does not care to find him out, because it will give him the Trouble of looking into his own Affairs. Then too, none of your high-born Gentlemen ever care to own they have been imposed upon.

Sir Tho.

The Facts charg'd against him are very strong.

Trench.

And very true.

Sir Tho.

I have been very kind to the Fellow.

Trench.

Knavery, *Sir Thomas*, is not confin'd to *London*. We are not so ignorant of the Way of the World. Pray, how think you Stewards get richer than their Masters? Ah, dear *Sir* they know how to make the most of a Place too.

SCENE VIII.

Sir Thomas Willit, Trenchwell, Humphrey, Lady Willit.

La. Will.

How can you have your Creatures in one's Dressing-Room? You know I want to dress. What Business have you here? Did not I order you to go to the Wine-Merchant?

Sir Tho.

I shall give Direction about it, Child. Here's my honest Neighbour, *Trenchwell*, hath brought me a most flagrant Information against *Survey*.

La. Will.

A Gentleman would have a fine Time on't to be influenc'd by a few discontented Peasants.

The Distress'd Wife

Sir Tho.

But the Thing, Madam, must be enquired into.

La. Will.

How can any Creature be so dull, so unentertaining, to be always pothering over his own Affairs! Can you be so unlike a Gentleman, to think your Father left you an Estate to look after it? What are Stewards for?

Sir Tho.

To look after Fool's Estates, till they leave 'em nothing to look after.

La. Will.

Short and pithy. But why am I to be worried? I am not your Steward; am I? Do you know that I am to have Company to Breakfast? *Fetch*, get my Things ready to dress this Instant.

[Calls at the Door.

Sir Tho.

Since the Company and Discourse are disagreeable to you, we'll talk farther upon this Affair below.

La. Will.

What is the Wench stupid? *Fetch* No let the disagreeable Crew be gone first. And let me know when every thing is ready.

SCENE IX.

Sir Thomas Willit, Trenchwell, Humphrey.

Sir Tho.

Where shall one look for Honesty? Who hath it? Or of what Use is it to the Owner? 'Tis a Restraint upon a Man's Fortune; 'tis a Curb upon Opportunity, and makes either a publick or private Trust worth nothing.

What's its Reward? Poverty. Is it among the Rich? No. For it never keeps Company with Avarice, Luxury and Extravagance. Is it among the Vulgar? No. For they act by Imitation. Who can one trust? If I trust my Servant, I tempt him. If I trust my Friend, I lose him. If I trust my Wife, for the quiet of the Family, she looks upon it as her Duty to deceive me.

*'Tis then our selves who, by implicit Trust,
Tempt Servants, Friends and Wives to be Unjust.*

ACT II.

SCENE I.

Lady Willit, Fetch.

Lady Willit sitting at her Toilet.

La. Will.

Bless me! How can any Mortal be so awkward! [*Fetch combing her Hair.*] Dost think I have no Feeling? Am I to be flea'd alive? Go begone. [*going.*] Come hither. [*returning.*] Who do you think is to dress me? Tell 'em

The Distress'd Wife

I'll have the Teakettle ready this Instant. *[going]* Is the Wench distracted? What, am I to sit all Day long with my Hair about my Ears like a Mermaid? *[returning.]* Now, I'll be sworn for't, thou hast not spoke for the Tea-water all this while, though I order'd it an Hour ago.

Fetch.

Not by *me*, Madam.

La. Will.

So you tell me I lye that's all. *[going.]* What is the blundering Fool a doing? Am I to be dress'd to Day or no? *[returning]* Bid the Porter bring me up the Book of Visits. Why don't you go? *[going.]* Must I bid you do the same Thing a thousand Times over and over again? I am to have no Breakfast to Day, that I find you are determin'd upon. *[stops at the Door.]*

Fetch.

Your Ladyship bid me call the Porter.

La. Will.

And where is he? Thou hast not done any *one* Thing that I have order'd thee all this day. *[going.]* Bring me the Lavender-drops. *[returning]* No, I won't have any now you know I hate 'em One would think the Wench had learn'd from her Master, and that I was born to be contradicted. The Visiting-book, I suppose, is to be a secret; and I am the last of the Family who is to be trusted with it. Go, get you out of my Sight, provoking Slut. *[stops at the Door.]*

Fetch.

Your Ladyship hares one so so so, that you will not give one Ti ti me to do a hundred Things at once.

La. Will.

Don't stand there a pouting and blubbering. Is the Creature grown a Changeling? *Fetch, Fetch, Fetch*, come hither, I say. *[raises her Voice every Time she calls]* Well, Madam, now I speak to you calmly. *[Fetch returns.]* Will you be so obliging as to desire the Porter to bring me the Book of Visits, as soon as he and you shall think convenient. *[going]* But first (d'ye hear me?) *[returns.]* bring me the Cellar yonder. *[brings the Box.]* What am I to drink out of? A Tea-cup, Fool.

Fetch.

I hope your Ladyship is well. *[brings the Tea-cup.]*

La. Will.

Thou art so intolerably stupid, there's no enduring thee. I have rav'd myself into the Spleen, hold, hold. *[pours some Cordial-Water into the Tea-cup.]*

Fetch.

What signifies that Drop or two? indeed, Madam, your Ladyship should take a little more.

La. Will.

There, there; enough. One would think, Girl, thou hadst a Mind to fuddle me. *[drinks.]* So, then you won't take it away again! What art thou pothering about? *Fetch*, how long is it since we came to Town?

Fetch.

The four Months, Madam, are out this Week.

The Distress'd Wife

La. Will.

Well; methinks it is but a Day, an Hour, a Minute. I am determin'd he shall *not* have his Will in ev'ry thing. I am *not* to be dangled about whenever and wherever his odious Business calls him. Well. And where's the Porter?

SCENE II.

Lady Willit.

[rises.]

La. Will.

Sure nothing can be more shocking than knowing the Day of one's Death, except knowing the Day one is to be buried in the Country! There to be stuck, and to have a new Suit every Spring like a Tree, for the Benefit of the Birds of the Air and the Beasts of the Field; to be gaz'd at every *Sunday* at Church by Ploughmen and their Cubs, and draw the Envy of their Wives and Daughters!

SCENE III.

Lady Willit, Fetch, Fibber.

La. Will.

Thou wilt always be a blundering Fellow, *Fibber*. *[sits down.]* Give me the Book then. *[snatches the Book out of his Hand and looks on it every now and then.]* Wilt thou never learn to know any Body? Every Creature is let in you should keep out, and I am deny'd to every Body you should let in. I am not at home this Morning d'ye hear me? I mean to no Odd-body, to no Formals. I'll see No-body whatever. To me Visits are now as troublesome as to a Man under Sentence. Hath your Master, *Fibber*, given any Orders about going into the Country?

Fib.

The Servants, Madam, talk of this Week.

La. Will.

Servants will always be talking impertinently. I desire I may have no more of your Blunders. You may go. *[going]* But stay; *[returns.]* You know I always am at home to Mr. *Pert*. *[going.]* Now, *Fetch*, pray tell me sincerely; who do you think the prettiest Fellow of all my Visitors? *Fibber*. Call him back, and bid him wait without. *[Fetch goes out and returns.]*

SCENE IV.

Lady Willit, Fetch.

La. Will.

Well, Why don't you answer me?

[rises.]

Fetch.

Dear Madam!

The Distress'd Wife

L. Will.

Nay, *Fetch*, you *shall* tell me.

Fetch.

Why, Madam, I own, (if I must speak Truth) I think Mr. *Pert* is a *charming* Man.

La. Will.

Now, *Fetch*, you say that to flatter me.

Fetch.

Sure no Creature alive was ever half so entertaining. 'Tis a pity he is so given to whisper.

La. Will.

After all, a Woman, as well as a Minister, would lose half her Importance without her Whisperers. They give one an Air of Consequence at an Assembly. I know the Women hate me for it, for it makes the Men appear too particular.

Fetch.

Now I love a Man that speaks out.

La. Will.

Well, And what's the Use of a Whisper? The Fault of it, *Fetch*, is, that it is often too plain.

Fetch.

Your Ladyship should not betray his Whispers.

La. Will.

How dare you? I won't suffer you, *Fetch*, to be impertinent. But why is not the Porter here? Would'st thou have me call him? [*Ex. Fetch, and returns.*] For what was it I wanted him? oh

SCENE V.

Lady Willit, Fetch, Fibber.

La. Will.

If Mr. *Forward* calls, I think Yes You *may* let him in. But no one living Creature besides. [*going.*]
Hold Where is the stupid Fellow going? [*returns.*] And Lord *Courtlove* too. No 'Tis no matter. But be sure you let me know when he is with Miss *Sprightly*.

Fetch.

Your Ladyship hath forgot Mr. *Flutter*.

La. Will.

The Fellow could not be such a Blockhead to deny me to him. You know he is always admitted.

Fibber.

And if Lady *Frankair* calls

La. Will.

The Distress'd Wife

How canst thou ask such a Question! Have not I sent to her twice this Morning? If she is not here in five Minutes, order the Footman to go again. Now you know my Commands. But, be sure you let in no Fusties.

SCENE VI.

Lady Willit, Fetch.

La. Will.

How happy is that Creature! Of all the Women in the World I envy Lady *Frankair*.

Fetch.

Why so, Madam?

La. Will.

She hath her Will in every thing, be it ever so unreasonable. Then too, she hath not (like most of our fine Ladies) lost her Reputation, I should say gain'd a Reputation for nothing Besides, who lives more elegantly? Who dresses better? Who hath more Command in her Family? Who plays deeper and handsomer? Who hath the Credit of more Intrigues, and hath really had 'em? Half of the Women in Town have had nothing but the Vanity of having lost their Reputation. Sure there was a Time, when Men and Women had other Pleasures besides Vanity! The flirting Fellows now play at making Love, as the Children make believe Gossipings and Christenings. But, Lady *Frankair*; sure, she hath more Wit and more real Pleasure! Wou'd I were that very individual Woman!

Fetch.

But they say she runs her Husband in debt most monstrously.

La. Will.

And wouldst thou really, *Fetch*, have a Woman deny herself the Use of her Husband's Fortune? [*sits down.*] Thou talkest so like my Husband, there's no bearing thee. I have an Aversion to any Body that is so intolerably wise.

Why dost not thou talk to me too of Oeconomy? I am surfeited with that hideous Word. Don't you know we have Company to Dinner, and that I am to be dress'd To-day? Nay, prithee, Wench, don't lay violent Hands upon me. I won't dress yet. See if the Tea-things are ready.

Enter Fibber.

Fib.

Lady *Frankair*, Madam.

La. Will.

Why did not you bid her come up, Fool? [*rises.*]

[*Ex. Fibber.*]

The Distress'd Wife

SCENE VII.

Lady Willit, Lady Frankair.

La. Frank.

Sure, Child, you can never be so tame a domestic Animal as to submit to dwell with Birds and Beasts! The Town was built for rational Creatures. Pluck up the Spirit of a Woman of Sense, and be obstinate.

La. Will.

How different is the State of Marriage! To you 'tis a Convenience; to me 'tis a Bridle; to you 'tis Liberty; to me 'tis Chains; to you tis a Gallant; to me 'tis only a Clog, a Dog in the Manger, a Husband.

La. Frank.

All this is owing to your too easy complying Temper. I dare say (as if he were another Man) you now and then sit with him, converse with him, and have been unguarded enough to have been convinc'd by him. Now that is what I can have no Notion of. 'Tis such as you, Child, that make Husbands impertinent. But, after all, why in these violent Agonies? The Employment, that I know will be offer'd him, *must* keep him in Town. My Brother *Courtlove* tells me the Thing is sure. But pray, how are he and Miss *Sprightly* together at present?

La. Will.

Never were two such unaccountable Creatures! The Thing may seem incredible, yet 'tis certain, the Man absolutely will not accept of an Employment, and the Woman refuses a Title. In short, my dear, there are a thousand disagreeable Circumstances, that concur to make my Case desperate.

La. Frank.

'Tis not, Child, that he hath any Objections to an Employment. 'Tis the Expectation, 'tis the Delay, that hath disgusted him. A Promise hath disobliged many a Country-Gentleman; but the Employment never fails to reconcile 'em again.

La. Will.

But there are other Things too. Could you imagine him still so little acquainted with good Breeding as to be jealous? There are Creatures who can never get the better of their natural Rusticity. Besides, 'tis evident, I am beset with Spies. He keeps that awkward Couzen of his in the House for nothing else, who worries me with her Company eternally; and though she leads the Life of a Dog, like a Spaniel, she is the fonder of me for her ill usage. That Girl, I suspect hath been a Devil to me.

La. Frank.

I really think her pretty; then too, she seems a harmless, good sort of a Creature: I dare swear she is inoffensive, that is to say, unobserving.

La Will.

Hang her, I hate her.

La. Frank.

But your Business, my dear, at present is to gain Time. You must contrive to defer the Journey, or you are utterly lost.

La. Will.

What must be, must be. 'Tis meerly possible the Country may be agreeable to Cows and Asses; I hate Meadows

The Distress'd Wife

and Trees. The Country Air for Health! 'Tis a Lye. 'Tis Plague, Pestilence and Death.

La. Frank.

Why can't you be sick?

La. Will.

To have the immediate Sentence of Banishment by the Prescription of a Physician.

La Frank.

But what think you of the Spleen, Vapours, Fits? Never fear, Child, the Physicians will keep such Patients in Town for their own Sakes. The Spleen hath weakened many a Husband's Authority; the Vapours have blown up many a dreadful Resolution; and by well-tim'd Fits I have known the most miserable Slaves of Wives grow to absolute Dominion.

[Fetch enters; the Tea-table brought in.]

La. Will.

Nay, I must and will try what can be done; for I had rather really *die* in Town than *live* in the Country; though I hate Paradise, 'tis painted so monstrously like it. What is Death, but leaving the Company one likes? And is not one depriv'd of that in the Country? Death is Oblivion, 'tis a State of Forgetfulness; but *there* we live and hear of Pleasures that we are ever debarr'd from; and where's the Difference of being buried in a Church-yard, or an odious Country-house? A restless, walking dead Thing, who is sensible she is dead and feels herself buried!

[They sit down at the Tea-table.]

La. Frank.

Only gain Time, Child, and you must gain your Ends.

La. Will.

'Twas the malicious Penny post Letter, about me and Mr. *Pert*, that made him thus entirely untractable. I will get to the Bottom of it, I am determin'd. I know the Girl hates me. *Fetch*, go call my Cozen *Jenny* to me this instant.

[They sit down at the Tea-table.]

SCENE VIII.

Lady Willit, Lady Frankair, Miss Friendless, Fetch.

La. Will.

Heavens! How like a Mawkin the Thing looks! Whence came you now? From slopping of Tea to be sure! Miss *Sprightly* and you are always nuzling your Heads together. I will have no pouting don't stand biting your Thumbs, but sit you down. Now, *Jenny*, don't deny it; for I know that giggling Flirt and you are always turning the Family into Ridicule that you are oblig'd to.

Friend.

How can your Ladyship think me so ungrateful! Let me entreat you, Madam, to have a little Consideration for me before Company.

The Distress'd Wife

La. Frank.

Are you for a Cup of Tea, Miss *Friendless*.

La. Will.

Don't trouble yourself, Madam; the Girl is so cramm'd already, that she can't guzzle down a Drop more. You, that are an Observer in the Family, without doubt, must know all Things. Will Lord *Courtlove* carry his Point with Miss *Sprightly*? Now I take *Jack Forward* to be her Favourite.

La. Frank.

Miss *Friendless*, your Tea will be cold.

La. Will.

Dear Madam, do you mean to drown the Girl? I told you she had breakfasted already. But, *Jenny*, why don't you Answer me? Don't be in your Sullens.

Friendl.

She trusts me with none of her Secrets.

La. Will.

How monstrously this Girl will lye! There. [*She rises and turns her round, and then sits down, Friendless remains standing.*] Turn about and show your self. Now, pray tell me, Lady *Frankair*, is this Creature fit to appear in civiliz'd Company?

Friendl.

How can you be so inhuman?

[*Going.*

La. Will.

Nay; you shan't stir. Now, *Jenny*, let me ask you one Question, and know that I will have an Answer. How frightfully the Girl stares! What Letter was that, which put Sir *Thomas* in such insufferable Ill-humour Yesterday? Come, own it fairly. 'Twas Miss *Sprightly* set you upon it. That Flirt would have a Regiment of Lovers. I have long observ'd she hath an Eye to Mr. *Pert*, and she thinks I prevent his coquetting it with her. Now is not this true, Cousin *Jenny*?

Friendl.

Your Ladyship sure is not in earnest.

La. Will.

Let me have a direct Answer; for know, I will be satisfied.

Friendl.

You may believe me, Madam.

La. Will.

But I won't believe you. The Thing shall be brought to Light. Now will I be hang'd if she hath not another Letter in her Pocket to carry on the same Mischief. *Fetch*, turn out the Creature's Pocket. I know I am your Aversion.

Friendl.

What a Life am I born to! Chambermaids, Kitchen-maids, Scullions are to be envy'd. I am tormented, like a Boy's

The Distress'd Wife

Bird, merely for Diversion.

La. Frank.

Really, Madam, you are now too severe.

La. Will.

Nay, Madam, that is my Business. *Fetch*, do as I bid you, Hussy.

Friendl.

Ah!

La. Will.

Why does not the Wench give it me? What a Luggage is here! Why dost not thou carry a Knap-sack?

Friendl.

I beg it of you. How can your Ladyship expose one so!

La. Will.

What have we here? A tawdry Purse of her own Work. Couldst thou imagine this a Thing that cou'd ever be of Use in thy Pocket? Here; take your dirty Trumpery.

The Top of a Tooth-pick Case, a Bit of Sealing-wax, and a Huswife. There; why don't you take your trolloping Things as I give them you? A Knotting-Needle, a Glass Necklace, and a Mother of Pearl Snuff-box. So, now I see which way all my Snuff goes. There pick 'em up when I bid you.

Friendl.

'Tis not to be borne. I *will* have my Pocket.

La. Will.

You will! How? Am *I* to be insulted thus? Am *I* to be talk'd to in this Manner? You *will!* *Fetch*, keep the Girl from me till I have done. You shall find, Madam, that *I* have the Command in my own House. You grow so monstrously uneasy, that I fancy the Secret is not far off. This broken-clasp Pocket-book, may be worth Perusal; and this Letter too, may make some Discovery. There, take all your nasty Litter; [*Flings her the Pocket. They rise from the Tea-table.*] it makes me sick; there's no enduring it. *To Mrs Elizabeth Pantry.* Pray, how long hath this Correspondence been between you and my House-keeper?

Friendl.

Your Ladyship cannot be so ill-bred as to break open one's Letters.

La. Will.

That such a Creature should talk of Good-breeding [*breaks open the Letter.*] Are you now convinc'd, Lady *Frankair*, of the Girl's Impertinence? [*reads.*] *Mrs. Pantry, As I promised to give you Intelligence of our leaving London, that you might get Things in order, I can now tell you that I guess it will be the latter End of this Week. Your Friend and Humble Servant, Jane Friendless.* You are Beast enough to be fond of the Country, I find, and I am to be lugg'd thither to keep you Company. But the Pocket-Book may be of more Consequence. [*reads.*] *For seeing the Play with Mrs. Fetch, one Shilling and Sixpence. Lost at Cribbage to Mrs. Fetch, Two-pence Halfpenny. For seeing the Wax-work in Fleet-street, Six-pence.* Nothing but a paultry Account of her Expences. But what have we here? [*reads.*] *A Collection of the newest Expressions in Use among the fine Gentlemen and Ladies.* What can'st thou mean by all this Nonsense? [*reads.*] *Having an Affair with a Lady. Being well with a Lady. Expressions not fit for a modest Pen to explain. To follow a Woman. That is, when a Man takes all Occasions to show the Town that he follows her.*

The Distress'd Wife

Friendl.

You tear me to—pieces. Dear Madam, have some Mercy.

La. Will. [Reads.]

A Dangler. One that passes his Time with the Ladies; who says nothing, does nothing, means nothing, and whom nothing is meant to. It puts one in mind of Mr. Flutter. Fool! A Flirt. One that gives himself all the Airs of making Love in Publick; that is of vast Consequence to himself, and to Nobody besides. Something of Mr. Pert ridiculous Slut! [reads.] A fine Man. Just what I take Mr. Pert to be. A Man who knows little and pretends to every thing . horridly ignorant! [reads.] A pretty Fellow that is, a fine dress'd Man with little Sense and a great deal of Assurance. Mr. Forward is what one may call a pretty Fellow. Foolish beyond Expression! The Man is married; that is, hath an extravagant Wife, is hen—peck'd, and a Cuckold, like [looking on Lady Frankair.] The Girl is horridly scurrilous. Fusties, Formals, and Odd—bodies. That is, her own, and her Husband's Relations. The only just Remark thou hast made! Here, take your impertinent Book, get into your own Room, and darn your tatter'd Pinners, Slattern.

SCENE IX.

Lady Willit, Lady Frankair.

La. Frank.

Supposing the Girl innocent, your Passion made you very provoking.

La. Will.

I can't endure any thing so intolerably forward. Sure all the fine Men have abandoned me to Day; they desert me as Rats do a falling House: they have a Presentiment of my Disgrace, my Ruin, my Banishment.

La. Frank.

That is the Point you are to guard against. Don't insist upon too much; get but a Reprieve, and with *my* Instructions you shall carry every thing you wish.

La. Will.

Now is that Creature gone to grunt out her Grievances to Miss *Sprightly*. But she shall not have that Satisfaction.

La. Frank.

Make *her* your single View. On the Success of my Brother *Courtlove's* Affair, in short, depends your Happiness or Misery.

La. Will.

I know that malicious Cousin of his underhand opposes me in every thing. Let us break in upon their Conversation.

La. Frank.

I am for *working* up the Girl to the Match. Respect keeps a Man from hurrying on an Affair, which may be the very Thing a Woman wishes; now upon such an Occasion 'tis incredible, how much we Women can do with one another. 'Tis certain, my Brother is extravagantly fond of her; for it is not to be supposed but he might have as good Offers.

La. Willit.

The Distress'd Wife

Your Ladyship speaks my very Sentiments. Let us about it this Moment.

La. Frank.

Man knows us not; we trifle with their Art:

Woman can only Judge of Woman's Heart.

ACT III.

SCENE I.

Lady Willit, Lady Frankair, Miss Sprightly.

Spright.

But after all, Lady *Frankair*, the Match would be ridiculous; you must think Lord *Courtlove* too old.

La. Frank.

What can you mean, Child? I am proposing him for a Husband, and you are thinking of a Lover. Now those in my Opinion require very different Qualifications.

La. Will.

You should consider, Neice, he is a Man of Quality.

Spright.

I should consider too, that many a Woman hath paid too dear for a Title.

La. Will.

But then his Estate

Spright.

No doubt is sufficient to keep more Women than one. No Woman can be so unreasonable, as to expect my Lord should live beneath his Quality.

La. Will.

Besides all this, his Employment

Spright.

That is one of the strongest Temptations to a Man to give up himself, I grant you; but Women have other Temptations that are more prevalent.

La. Will.

What Temptations but these can induce a Woman to marry? I always thought the Girl wanted Discretion; but now, Child, you have convinc'd me you know nothing of the World.

Spright.

And you really would persuade me to make myself an old Child's Rattle, one that will be every Day more and more a Child, one that can never grow to a Man! Pardon me, Madam, I had forgot he was your Ladyship's Brother; but, however, you know that can't make him younger, and I speak only of my Lord's Age.

The Distress'd Wife

La. Frank.

Miss *Sprightly* hath so many Lovers, that she doth not care to determine on one for fear of losing all the rest. Now is not that the Case, Miss? Believe me, Child, after Marriage all the rest will double their Application.

La. Will.

You have then so little Consideration for your own Happiness, that you would venture on a young Fellow. Now, Lady *Frankair*, is it not surprising that Girls can have so little Judgment? Suppose that Mr. *Pert* really was in earnest. Nay, don't colour, Neice, for I know he hath sent you Verses.

Spright.

What then? That is, not that he admires me, but that I may admire him. That's but a Pump, Madam; I know where his Passion lies, though I think his most prevalent one is his own dear self.

La. Will.

Nay, now, Child, you are piqu'd. But perhaps I may be mistaken, for *Jack Forward* is perpetually flirting it with you.

Spright.

Ever talking, and ever saying nothing. There is more Entertainment in the chattering of a Monkey, because one may imagine that Creature *means* something.

La. Will.

Yet you seem to listen, Neice, to what you now give yourself such violent Airs of despising. Perhaps, after all, *Flutter* is the Man.

Spright.

I do seem to listen, I grant you. But does not your Ladyship think there is a Pleasure in hearing Fools expose themselves. Some Women listen for one Reason, and some for another.

La. Will.

Though every Woman thinks she hath it, 'tis evident a *true* Taste for Men is very uncommon. Look ye, Neice, I have consider'd your Happiness more than your Inexperience can possibly consider it; and I must own to you, that Lord *Courtlove* hath had my Consent.

La. Frank.

All Miss *Sprightly's* Objections seem to arise from her particular Notions of that Family Convenience, a Husband. Look round, Miss, among the Husbands that you converse with, and then tell me, by what you see, what 'tis you expect.

La. Will.

'Tis morally impossible, Child, you can think of Love and a Husband together. You are past sixteen; and 'tis high time for you to have the Views of a reasonable Woman.

La. Frankair.

Would you seek to put yourself in the Power of one Man, take a young Husband; would you have many Men in your own Power, chuse an old one.

La. Will.

Are not a Jointure and Pin-money Security for every Husband's good Behaviour?

The Distress'd Wife

La. Frank.

Are they not the Pledges, the Insurance of our Liberty and Independence?

La. Will.

What can a Woman wish for more? Is not every Pleasure included, Child, in the having your own Will?

La. Frank.

You seem to have no Notion of the real Pleasures of a Woman. I am convinc'd, Miss, you read Romances.

La. Will.

Were you, like me, to lose three Parts of your Life in a detestable Country House, it might be a frightful Proposal.

La. Frank.

But to have for Life the Opportunities of Masquerades, Assemblies, Opera's, Plays, Park and Drawing-Rooms!

La. Will.

How can such a Woman be ever unhappy! Let me die, Girl, if I don't envy you.

La. Frank.

As Lord *Courtlove* is my Brother, whatever I say may be thought partial.

La. Will.

The flirting with young Fellows is conversing with them in their own Way; they mean nothing else: But Lord *Courtlove's* Address is of the last Consequence. Now, don't be ridiculous, Child; I know you will think yourself oblig'd to me. But here he comes. Lord *Courtlove*, your Servant.

SCENE II.

Lady Willit, Lady Frankair, Miss Sprightly, Lord Courtlove.

Ld. Court.

Ladies, your most humble Servant.

Spright.

No whispering, I beg you.

Ld. Court.

Though 'tis look'd upon as Ill-manners, it is always excuseable in a Lover.

Spright.

Your Lordship's Proposals are no Secret; and why should we make believe Love, when you are only talking of Marriage? Lady *Frankair*, and Lady *Willit*, have been instructing me in the Duty of a Wife. But are we really in earnest about this Affair, my Lord? Nay, I *must* own they have set the Thing in an agreeable Light enough on one Side. But 'tis astonishing to me, how a Man, with so much Wisdom about him, can take it into his Head to marry! My good Aunt here tells me, she hath promis'd for me; perhaps, 'tis because she knows that no Woman knows her own Mind, or, in this Case, can Answer for herself. Take Care, my Lord, what you offer; should I take you at your Word, I know you are a Man of Honour, whatever may be the Consequence.

La. Will.

The Distress'd Wife

I now, Neice, for your Sake, will look upon the Affair as concluded.

La. Frank.

There may be some Things they would not chuse to talk over before Company.

SCENE III.

Lord Courtlove. Miss Sprightly.

Lord Courtlove.

Lady *Willit*, Madam, hath promis'd that this Day she will deliver Happiness into my Possession.

Sprightly.

Then Lady *Willit*, my Lord, hath promis'd she does not know what: For, as I take it, your Happiness will depend more upon me than her; and no Woman knows what a Wife she shall make any more than she knows what she shall be in t'other World; perhaps an Angel, perhaps a Fury. Look ye, my Lord, you may venture if you please; all I can promise is to be a Wife as the World goes. Now you know what you have to trust to.

Lord Courtlove.

Could I but obtain your Consent.

Sprightly.

What signifies my Consent? After Marriage I can act without your Consent, as you act without mine before. That's a most enormous Perriwig, my Lord; o'my Conscience, 'twould load an Ass, and cover Head, Ears and all.

Lord Courtlove.

You ramble from the Question, Madam.

Sprightly.

Look ye, my Lord, I tell you before-hand, I wont be grave; it is so like Dullness, I hate it.

Lord Courtlove.

If Candour, Benevolence and Affability can cement Affections, our mutual Happiness will know no Period.

Sprightly.

And are Candour, Benevolence and Affability all that I am to expect?

Lord Courtlove.

Inclusive of the just Duties of conjugal Affection.

Sprightly.

The Distress'd Wife

Your Lordship speaks with so much Solemnity, and so much Deliberation, that your Thoughts seem to be run away, and your Words, I fear, will never overtake 'em. Lord *Courtlove*.

While I feel the satyrical Strokes of your Wit, I admire it.

Sprightly.

I am glad you like it, for 'tis what I can't help, and you must expect. An Owl! an Ass! Sure all grave Animals are ridiculous but Man. Really, my Lord, whenever I see you in this solemn wise Way, I shall think of a grave Animal; and I must laugh, whatever be the Consequence.

Lord *Courtlove*.

Shall I never have the Favour of a serious Answer? How can I leave my Heart in so undetermin'd, so precarious a State! This, Madam, is a Day of publick Importance too; and I think it hard, that the Care of Kingdoms should call me from what I value more. Though it is a particular ministerial Point, and I have given my Word and Honour; if possible, I will get my Attendance dispens'd withal. Think, Madam, how I shall suffer with Impatience.

SCENE IV.

Miss Sprightly. Forward.

Forw.

What, in the name of Love, can you mean, Madam? Marriage would infallibly turn the Jest upon yourself: The whole Town have given you to Lord *Courtlove*. To make a Man so perfectly happy, without the least Prospect of a Return, is the utmost pitch of Generosity. Now I (who know the Men you have in your Power) have a better Opinion of your Judgment. Think of the Consequence of *such* an Husband: To wed, to sleep; no more!

Sprightly.

Am I to be terrified with *Shakespear*? Let *Shakespear* then thus answer you.

Of all the Wonders that I yet have heard,

It seems to me most strange Women should fear;

Since Marriage is a necessary Ill,

And will come when it will come.

Why, *Forward*, you have not the least Idea of Love; who can mention that and Judgment together. Love and Judgment! they are Things, *Forward*, that are incompatible.

Forw.

Only think on *me*, Madam. *You* are Witness of my Love; and no Creature alive can dispute my Judgment.

Sprightly.

Yes, *I* dispute it; or why this contemptible Opinion of *me*? For I am not that credulous foolish Thing, to imagine you ever meant to marry me. All the fine Ladies in Town would tear my Eyes out. You belong to the Sex, and 'twould be inhuman to rob 'em of so innocent an Amusement.

Forw.

Innocent! That such a Charge should ever light upon me! Wou'd (for some Lady's Quiet, who shall be nameless) that all Husbands were of your Opinion. Yet, perhaps, I may have this infamous Character, and it may be owing to my Secresy and Discretion.

The Distress'd Wife

Sprightly.

Suppose, now, I should pin you down to your Proposal. Poor Lady *Frankair*!

Forw.

The Town is malicious. Gallantry, nothing but Gallantry.

Sprightly.

But Lady *Rampant*.

Forw.

Importunate, silly Woman! I have left her off these three Weeks.

Sprightly.

The Widow *Buxom* too.

Forw.

Sure the Women themselves must have a Vanity in telling it! Where the Devil got you your Intelligence?

Sprightly.

And the forlorn, disconsolate, Mrs. *Clackit*.

Forw.

Defend me from her! She is of so forward a Constitution, that her Reputation was sing'd at Fifteen. Was the Girl ever such an Ideot to think I meant to marry her?

Sprightly.

I am not that Ideot, *Forward*. Some Women are to be ruin'd one Way, and some another; but 'tis not every Woman's good Fortune to be ruin'd by Marriage. How can your fine Women be so unconscionable! Nay, there's my Aunt too, Lady *Willit*, wou'd never forgive me. I know this Visit was meant to her; so I shall not have the Vanity to take it to myself.

Forw.

You know, Miss *Sprightly*, where she is particular; but I take it to be more owing to *Fetch*'s Insinuation than her Inclinations; for that *Pert* is a most egregious Coxcomb; he hath just Capacity enough to corrupt a Chamber-maid.

Sprightly.

You are now, *Forward*, giving Proofs of your Secresy and Discretion; for you know 'tis not safe to trust one of the Family.

Forw.

No; faith, Madam, I am in earnest. Not that I think his Success so sure neither. For by this time (for some Reasons I know) I believe Sir *Thomas* smoaks their Intimacy.

Sprightly.

For some Reasons!

Forw.

I mean, Madam, the Affair is grown so very publick. But what's all this to the purpose? I come, Madam, to save you. Only imagine yourself married to your old Fellow. He *may* be jealous; he *must* be inconvenient; for

The Distress'd Wife

Husbands will every now and then be thrusting themselves into their Wives Parties of Pleasure.

Sprightly.

These are Terrors we must risque; but Woman's Resolution gets the better of 'em all. Now, *Jack Forward*, don't take this to yourself. Between one Fool's Vanity, and another's Resentment, a Woman's Reputation is in prodigious safe Hands among you fine Gentlemen.

Forw.

What do you mean, Madam?

Sprightly.

Did not you say just now that *Pert* was a Coxcomb? 'Tis plain you converse with the Ladies, for the finest Woman alive could not treat a Friend more familiarly. But should my Aunt surprise us together, her jealous Temper would conclude I don't know what. So, Mr. *Forward*, your Servant.

SCENE V.

Forward. Fetch. Flutter. Pert.

Fetch.

My Lady, Sir, is in the utmost Confusion, that any Business should make you wait; in two or three Minutes she'll be at liberty. Now don't go, Mr. *Forward*, I know she'll take it mortally ill. Mr. *Flutter*, your Servant. Mr. *Pert* ! I *must* own I am always glad to see you, though I blush to tell you so. Were not you very impudent last Night? How could you have the Assurance to make me such a Proposal? But then, how can I have the Assurance to remember it?

Forw.

You must always be particular. Why may not we too share the Pleasure of Mrs. *Fetch*'s Conversation?

Fetch.

You must excuse me, Gentlemen, for I dare not stay; My Lady will be with you immediately.

SCENE VI.

Forward. Flutter. Pert.

Flutter.

Most certainly she must be at Prayers; for that is the only thing the fine Women are now asham'd to do before us.

Pert.

Perhaps she is with her Husband, and would not chuse to appear ridiculous, by being caught in such disagreeable Company.

Flutter.

Let me die, if I don't think *Jack Forward* is well with more Women than any one Man in *England*.

Pert.

Only mention him, and they cry, that *Forward* is so easy, so good-natur'd.

The Distress'd Wife

Flutter.

Good-nature is another name for Flattery; 'tis upon that Score the Women are so fond of it.

Pert.

But is your Visit, *Forward*, to Lady *Willit* or Miss *Sprightly*?

Flutter.

How can you, *Jack*, be so inhuman, as not to rescue the Girl out of the Paws of that old Baboon?

Forw.

You must always take a Woman in her own Way. She hath her Scruples about Marriage; and I had always (though she was a fair Hit) too much Good-nature to ruin her.

Flutter.

I'll lay you Fifty Guineas there is one in the Company that still might have her.

Pert.

You might have said three, and had a sure Bet on't. One does not care to shock the Girl. Let me die, if I have not been forc'd to turn the Discourse, to prevent her proposing it.

Forw.

I dare swear she hath ask'd *Flutter*.

Flutt.

Never directly, as I hope to be sav'd.

[Adjusting himself at the Glass.]

Pert.

Let her marry. That is not our Affair; a Husband is a Stalking-horse, that makes the Game the surer.

Forw.

That *Flutter* hath so much Vanity, and such a Stock of Assurance!

Pert.

And what Accomplishments are more successful? His Vanity takes with the Women, as they are fond of what is like themselves.

Forw.

And without Assurance they find a Man good for nothing.

Pert.

The Fellow is a Fool; but what then? A Fool with a Woman may have his Merits.

Forw.

What, in Contemplation!

Pert.

Why, *Flutter*, you seem as if you were thinking.

The Distress'd Wife

Flutt.

I hate that *Forward*. Wherever he is admitted he makes others appear as insignificant as himself. You know him to be a conceited Puppy.

Pert.

But we must bear him; for whoever follows the fine Women must take up with the Company they keep.

Flutt.

Why so disconsolate, *Forward*? Never despair upon Miss *Sprightly*'s Account.

Pert.

Let Lord *Courtlove* have her. We shall have her flirting about, and taking all the Liberties of a Wife in a Fortnight.

[Pert at the Looking-Glass.

Forw.

I am sick of that *Pert*. The Fellow follows me every where like my Shadow, and is of no more Consequence.

Flutt.

Then too he hath Invention equal to his Vanity.

Forw.

The Puppy must think we have the Faith of Prudes, who are ready to believe all Scandal, for the sake of telling it again.

SCENE VII.

Pert. Flutter. Forward. Sir Thomas Willet.

Sir Thom.

Gentlemen, your Servant. My Wife is a little indispos'd, and begs to be excus'd this Morning. I have Business, and you must pardon me.

[Exit.

Pert.

Whoever makes Love to the Wife must sometimes bear the Husband's Impertinence.

Forw.

Let me die, if I don't pity the poor Woman who must bear both his and her Husband's too.

[To Flutter.

SCENE VIII.

Pert. Fetch.

[Fetch enters and twitches Pert by the Sleeve.

The Distress'd Wife

Fetch.

Never was any thing so unluckily! O dear Mr. *Pert!* what is it that we have done?

Pert.

Nothing yet, my dear Girl; and you cannot blame me.

Fetch.

There's no enduring you. How can you be so impudent? Now don't look upon my calling you back as an Encouragement; for if you are so provokingly rude again, let me die if I don't tear your Eyes out.

Pert.

Would you have me love you, and not tell you so? Nay, pr'ythee Child. What is the meaning of these Airs?

Fetch.

Let go my Hand, you Devil. I won't be pull'd and haul'd. Why am I to be talk'd to in this audacious manner? What do you take me for?

Pert.

You shall not go, Child. I will know what hath happen'd.

Fetch.

Don't be rude then. The Minute you grow uncivil, depend upon it I'll leave you.

Pert.

'Tis in vain, Child; I will have it so. You shall sit down by me.

Fetch.

I tell you I won't. Should I be caught (*sits down:*) in this familiar Way, what is there one might not think of me? And so you must know, you have made a most dreadful Quarrel in the Family. That impudent Letter you sent to dissuade me from going into the Country, set me in such a Fluster, that in the Hurry and Confusion I only burnt the Cover, and Sir *Thomas* found the Letter; and his Jealousy imagines it was sent to his Wife. Now you know, be the Consequences never so terrible, I dare not tell the Truth, and take it upon my self. We may set out for the Country to Night for ought I know. Every Thing hath that Appearance.

Pert.

Well, my Dear, and what's all this to us? *Now* is your Time to resolve then.

Fetch.

What! to be a Whore! [*Rises.*] I am not that credulous Fool you take me for.

Pert.

You mistake the Thing, Child. I have more Regard for your Reputation, and I never propos'd but to keep you.

Fetch.

Keep me! Impertinence.

Pert.

Why not? Marriage of late is grown to that prodigious Expence, that few Estates can support it. Pr'ythee, Child, how do you think that young Gentlewomen of small Fortunes dispose of themselves? 'Tis become quite reputable. You see 'em admitted every where. Then where can lie your Objection?

The Distress'd Wife

Fetch.

I wonder how I can have the Impudence to listen to you.

Pert.

Only look upon that Paper.

Fetch.

I look upon your odious Papers!

Pert.

A Hundred, and for Life.

Fetch.

I tell you I wont be ruin'd.

Pert.

'Tis a Settlement, Child. Do not all Women, even in Marriage, look upon that as the most material Part of the Ceremony.

Fetch.

So you won't be answered!

Pert.

Let us sign and seal.

Fetch.

Let me die, if ever I see your Face again!

Pert.

A Hundred, and for Life.

Fetch.

A Whore! faugh. Because you are a pretty Man, you think you may say any Thing. Let me go.

Pert.

For Life! Look upon it, read it.

Fetch.

Insinuating Monster! You know I like you, and that makes you give yourself these Liberties. I tell you again, I *won't*. What would you have me say to you?

Pert.

You are determin'd then, like your Lady, to lose your Life in the Country, in Marriage and Penitence.

Fetch.

If any Man could prevail But what am I saying? I *won't*. Dear Mr. *Pert*, don't insist upon it. I *won't*. My Reputation!

Pert.

What dost thou mean, Child, by Reputation? Why shou'd you frighten yourself with such unfashionable

The Distress'd Wife

Scruples? If you were a Wife, you could not be so ungenteel as once to think of it; and 'tis really silly to make those Distinctions between before Marriage and after.

Fetch.

I am afraid to trust my Words with my Thoughts. I don't know what to say.

Pert.

You will then.

Fetch.

Sure the only Security of any Woman's Virtue is to keep it out of Temptation!

[Sighs.]

Pert.

Well then, my Dear, the Affair is fix'd.

Fetch.

I was not so impudent to consent, was I? I have *not* given my Word, Mr. *Pert*. But if you are resolv'd to ruin me. My Lady rings, and I must leave you this Moment. Nay, dear, dear Mr. *Pert*, I won't be kiss'd. But am I to take that Paper with me?

Pert.

Hold, Child, Things of this Nature, like Marriage, must be done in form. Every Thing shall be ready when next we meet. Think, my Dear, what I have sav'd you from. Had you gone into the Country with these Scruples about you, you must have dy'd a Maid, or at least have been married. How many married Women will now envy you!

How sweet, though short, would be the nuptial Life!

If 'twas no longer Love, no longer Wife.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.

Lady Willit. Fetch.

La. *Willit*.

Well! And what is become of all the Men? Did not I charge you not to let 'em go?

Fetch.

Sir *Thomas*, Madam

La. *Willit*.

Sir *Thomas*! always Sir *Thomas*! I have so much of him, that I am sick of the very Name. For Heaven's sake, talk of something more agreeable. Can I never have any one thing done that I order? Are they gone, I ask you?

The Distress'd Wife

Fetch.

Your Husband then, Madam

La. *Willit.*

Husband! hideous! How *can* the Wench be so vulgar! Husband! Didst thou ever hear that Word even in mix'd Conversation that was commonly well-bred; for who can tell but there may be married Women in Company? To my Face too! What have I done to be mortified in this brutal manner?

Fetch.

Your Ladyship ask'd me a Question.

La. *Willit.*

And why don't you answer me?

Fetch.

Sir *Thomas* then, Madam, told 'em you were indispos'd, and desir'd to be excus'd.

La. *Willit.*

A Savage! You *could* have told him he ly'd.

Fetch.

There are Familiarities that might become your Ladyship

La. *Willit.*

Impertinence! Don't talk to me. It kills me to think of his Behaviour. I'm sick to Death of him. [*Flings her self on the Couch.*] The Salts where are they? Where have you mislaid the Bottle, Monster? What *is* the blund'ring Fool looking for? I know you saw I had it in my Hand, and thou wouldst not have the Humanity all this while to tell me of it. So you won't then give me that Play-Book when I bid you! I'll read and try to forget him.

Fetch.

Your Ladyship changes your Mind so often, that 'tis impossible for any Servant alive to keep pace with it. La. *Willit.*

You will talk then!

Fetch.

When one does all one can to please you.

La. *Willit.*

Hold your Tongue, I say, and don't provoke me. I hate this silly Trash.

[Flings away the Book.]

The Distress'd Wife

SCENE II.

Lady Willit. Fetch. Fibber.

La. *Willit.*

What does this Fellow want? How dar'd you come into the Room without being sent for? Where's the Blockhead going? Well, what hast thou to say to me now?

Fibb.

Miss *Clackit* presents her humble Service to your Ladyship, and hopes that you have not forgot that she is to go to the Opera with your Ladyship to Night. She'll call upon your Ladyship at Half an Hour after Five.

La. *Willit.*

Say that I'm out of Order; that I see no Company; Say any thing. Now, *can* that Brute ever make me amends for the Loss of an Opera?

Fibb.

Mrs. *Buxom*, Madam, sent Word, that she hath secur'd a Box for the new Play next Week, and that there will be room for your Ladyship, Lady *Frankair* and Miss *Sprightly*.

La. *Willit.*

What *will* become of me! I must and will keep my Engagements. Why did I ever know there was such a Place as *London*? Was there no body besides?

Fibb.

Lady *Rampant* depends upon your Ladyship to make up her Quadrille Party after the Opera.

La. *Willit.*

'Tis intollerable, that one must set every agreeable Thing aside for the impertinent Business of a Husband. You may go. But hast thou any thing else to say to me?

Fibb.

Only the Man left the Masquerade Tickets for your Ladyship. Here they are, Madam. La. *Willit.*

Blockhead! Fool. (*Tears 'em to pieces.*) But why, I pray, were not these Messages deliver'd me as they were sent?

Fibb.

Your Ladyship was with Sir *Thomas*; and I had his positive Orders to the contrary.

La. *Willit.*

Get you out of my Sight. How dar'd you to think of obeying him in any thing that related to me?

The Distress'd Wife

SCENE III.

Lady Willit. Fetch. Friendless.

La. *Willit.*

This Cousin of his is a most hypocritical Jade. I must and will unravel this Affair. Call her to me then. *[Exit Fetch, and returns with Friendless.* But now I think on't I'll stay till I have seen Lady *Frankair*. Have you any Business with me, Madam?

Friendly.

Did not your Ladyship send for me?

La. *Willit.*

I send for you! Don't flatter thy self; Girl, I am not in such miserable Distress for Company. You may go again.

SCENE IV.

Lady Willit. Fetch.

La. *Willit.*

How could you be such a blund'ring Creature? Did not I bid you call Miss *Sprightly*.

[Going.

Fetch.

Really, Madam, you confound me.

[Returns.

La. *Willit.*

I won't be spoke to. Where are you going? *[Going.]* I won't see her now; I've chang'd my Mind.

Fetch.

If it be not an unreasonable Request from a Servant, I could wish your Ladyship would know your own Mind before you speak; 'twould save you a great many Words, and me a great deal of Trouble.

La. *Willit.*

I tell you, *Fetch*, I won't bear your Insolence. Go, see who 'tis that knocks. If 'tis Lady *Frankair*, that blund'ring Fool of a Porter may deny me. I'll call when I want you.

SCENE V.

Lady Willit. Lady Frankair.

La. *Willit.*

The Distress'd Wife

If I had done any thing to make him jealous, it wou'd not vex me.

La. *Frankair*.

Hath he still the use of his Reason? Sure, he must be more than Man, or you less than Woman! What, let a Man that loves you have his own Way! How can you answer it to the Sex?

La. *Willit*.

The Creature fancies too he hath Business.

La. *Frankair*.

And fancies you have Pleasure. Why cannot each of you follow your own Amusement? Did ever any Man but a Husband talk to a Woman about Business? One wou'd imagine they did not know what we were made for.

[Enter Fibber.

Fibb.

Lord *Courtlove*, Madam.

[Exit Fibber.

SCENE VI.

Lady Willit. Lady Frankair. Lord Courtlove.

La. *Willit*.

Is the Affair settled? You must pardon me, my Lord; for I am very impatient.

Lord *Court*.

The Promise is renew'd, but the Place is gone. What is a Promise? A Civility, and nothing more; and yet greedy necessitous Fools will depend upon it; they will flatter, they will lye, they will betray for it; they will run in Debt upon it; they take it too as current Coin, and 'till their Creditors fall upon 'em, they never find the Mistake. Excuse me, Ladies, for I have lost all Temper.

La. *Willit*.

Then I am wretched.

La. *Frankair*.

You are a lost Woman if you trust your self in the Country with him. We must defer it.

La. *Willit*.

But how, but how! that's the Question, my dear Lady *Frankair* .

La. *Frankair*.

Miss *Sprightly* must have my Brother. Nay, Child, we must some way or other bring it about.

The Distress'd Wife

La. *Willit*.

Wou'd I cou'd marry him!

La. *Frankair*.

I hope Sir *Thomas* hath never seen you in this tame governable way. Shou'd he imagine you had so much Condescension in your Constitution, there is no Husband alive but wou'd take the Advantage of it. How many of 'em have I known spoil'd to all Intents and Purposes by our Compliance to what they call reasonable Things! Now I can have no Notion that a Husband can propose a reasonable Thing.

La. *Willit*.

I am sorry your Ladyship hath so mean an Opinion of my Understanding. Sir *Thomas* may give himself what Airs he pleases, but upon this Head I have nothing to accuse myself.

La. *Frankair*.

Support the Dignity of your Character now or never. Though you are his Wife, determine to be always your own Woman.

La. *Willit*.

But who can hinder the Creature from thrusting his Advice upon one? Had I ever taken it, I should not wonder at him. But, dear Lady *Frankair*, can you think of any Scheme to save me, for I hate to be obstinate when there is no Occasion for it?

La. *Frankair*.

Keep your Temper, Child; your Case is not yet desperate. Now wou'd not any one swear that Man was really unhappy? So disconsolate, so sighing, and all for the Loss of a Woman! Had he been a Year or two married, he would have learnt to have born a Loss of this kind with more philosophical Resignation. Brother, nay prithee, Brother, is it the ill Usage of Friends or of your Mistress that touches you?

Lord *Courtlove*.

'Tis not that I am so unexperienc'd in publick Business, as to expect that every Promise should be comply'd with; but 'tis hard, Sister, that one of my Consequence shou'd be treated like a common Country Gentleman.

La. *Frankair*.

Have not you told me, Child, that Mr. *Barter* influences your Husband in every Thing? We must make that Man our Friend.

La. *Willit*.

Never think of it. Had it not been for that meddling Fool, Mine had never once thought of his Debts, nor the Family been in this Confusion.

La. *Frankair*.

The Distress'd Wife

Yet there may be Ways of softening him.

La. *Willit*.

You don't know him.

La. *Frankair*.

Pardon me, Madam.

La. *Willit*.

'Tis impossible. La. *Frankair*.

Have not you observ'd, that he and I of late are very well together? He makes up to me upon all Occasions. We only ask him, Child, to speak and act contrary to his Opinion; Trifles that, my Brother knows, are every Day got the better of in Things of greater consequence. What Offers hath he refus'd? Hath he ever been rightly apply'd to?

La. *Willit*.

But then that cursed Devil of a Girl, *Friendless*, is so set against me.

La. *Frankair*.

Now I really don't think the Girl, in common Justice to herself, should part with her Interest in Miss *Sprightly* for nothing. My Brother ought to have offer'd her some sort of Civility. As the Interest with our Friends is a saleable Commodity, pray, why shou'd not she make the best of it too?

Lord *Courtlove*.

Without doubt; it hath been a shameful Omission.

La. *Willit*.

Now is it not astonishing, Madam, that that hideous Girl should ever be of Consequence enough to be brib'd? 'Tis ridiculous.

Lord *Courtlove*.

That, Madam, shall be my *Affair*.

La. *Frankair*.

You are now, my Dear, in the right Way.

La. *Willit*.

What a ling'ring Death have you sav'd me from! *Fetch*, Tell my Cousin *Jenny* to come to me immediately. Lady *Frankair* and I, my Lord, will leave you to manage that aukward Creature. 'Twou'd make one mad to think that such a Wretch should thrive upon my Distresses.

SCENE VI.

The Distress'd Wife

SCENE VII.

Lady Willit. Lady Frankair. Lady Courtlove. Friendless.

La. *Frankair.*

Don't you think the Girl prodigiously genteel to-day? Come hither, Child. I never saw a Head more becoming. This is a mighty pretty Silk, Miss *Friendless*; the Sleeve too is so easy. Was this Apron, Child, of your own Work?

Friendless.

Your Ladyship's Civility is so like Flattery, that it puts me in Confusion. I am so unacquainted with both of 'em, that 'tis hard for me to distinguish one from t'other.

La. *Willit.*

Now wou'd any Body imagine by that Creature's Looks, that she had so much Mischief and Malice within her.

[To Lady Frankair.

Lord *Courtlove.*

The Distinctions Miss *Sprightly* shows you, are to me indisputable Proofs of your Merit.

[To Friendless:

La. *Frankair.*

I differ with you Madam: Miss *Sprightly*, in my Opinion, does *not* want Sense.

[To Lady Willit.

La. *Willit.*

And yet she seems to think Love the most reasonable Motive to Marriage. Now is that like a Woman of common Understanding? The Girl is unaccountable.

La. *Frankair.*

Our last Conversation must have had some Effect upon her.

La. *Willit.*

Is Miss *Sprightly*, Cousin *Jenny*, in her own Room.

Friendless.

I left her there, Madam.

La. *Willit.*

The Distress'd Wife

Let us set upon her once again: She is the only Woman I ever knew that another Woman could not find out; though we are such Riddles to Men, we are not such mysterious Things to one another. I leave you, Cousin *Jenny*, to entertain Lord *Courtlove*.

SCENE VIII.

Lord Courtlove. Friendless.

Lord Courtlove.

Those Eyes! Were not my Heart already engag'd, I must have lov'd now.

Friendless.

I am unus'd to Flattery, my Lord; 'tis thrown away upon me, for I have not yet learnt that easy happy Faith, to join with every Flatterer in flattering myself.

Lord Courtlove.

That Modesty, Madam, is too severe, which takes Offence at Truth. You cannot be a Stranger to my Passion, who enjoy the Intimacies of a Conversation, which (though you deserve) I always envy. Were *your* Friendship to second my Address to Miss *Sprightly*, it could not possibly fail of Success.

Friendless.

Your Lordship's Ear perhaps is as little acquainted with Truth as mine is with Flattery; so that to one of your Rank I cannot be so ill-bred to speak it without Permission. Pardon me, then, my Lord, if I am not of your Opinion.

Lord Courtlove.

I know you could do it, Miss *Jenny*.

Friendless.

I should deceive your Lordship, if I did not dissuade you from this Pursuit.

Lord Courtlove.

Would she but let me know her Objections.

Friendless.

As in this Case they generally depend upon Fancy and Caprice, a Woman either can't give 'em, or wont give 'em.

Lord Courtlove.

I know, Miss, you have Good-nature; I know too the Credit you have with her. Might I hope for your good Offices, you shou'd not find me ungrateful.

Friendless.

What do you mean, my Lord?

Lord Courtlove.

The Distress'd Wife

Mean, Madam! I said I wou'd not be ungrateful.

Friendless.

Have I ever call'd your Gratitude in question, my Lord?

Lord *Courtlove*.

I thought the courtly Phrase of transacting Business had been better understood.

Friendless.

But why are you so mysterious?

Lord *Courtlove*.

I mean then, Madam, (you must pardon me) that the Thing shall turn out to your own Interest too.

Friendless.

To my Interest!

Lord *Courtlove*.

A Thousand Guineas, or a Diamond Ring of that Value.

Friendless.

For what? To sell my Friend. Were I a Man you wou'd not have had the Courage to have offer'd me this Affront.

Lord *Courtlove*.

Excuse me, Madam; 'tis an Affront that Men of the greatest Distinction pocket up without the least Scruple.

Friendless.

Is it because I want Fortune you presume to use me thus? Which of us two thinks the other the most contemptible?

Lord *Courtlove*.

The Present is not so inconsiderable, but the richest Person might have accepted it.

Friendless.

A Man who wou'd bribe me to be his Friend (by tacitly calling me a Knave) very justly makes me his Enemy. Could I serve you, were I inclin'd to serve you, my Honour would now forbid me.

SCENE IX.

Lord Courtlove. Friendless. Fetch.

Fetch.

My Lady, and Lady *Frankair* are in the Drawing-Room, and desire your Lordship's Company immediately.

The Distress'd Wife

Lord *Courtlove*.

I hope, Miss, you will think more favourably of me, and not misinterpret a Civility.

[Exit.

Friendless.

Is Miss *Sprightly* alone, Mrs. *Fetch*?

Fetch.

My Lady bid me charge you not to stir from this Room 'till she sent for you. You had best not provoke her; for Miss, yonder, hath put her most horridly out of Humour.

SCENE X.

Miss Sprightly. Friendless.

Sprightly.

I have left my Aunt like a Woman distracted: She thinks me very unreasonable that I won't be married for her Conveniency; now I think a Woman runs a sufficient Risque who marries for her own.

Friendless.

Your Lover hath been just now offering me Proofs of his *good* Opinion of *you*, and his *ill* Opinion of *me*; for he wou'd have brib'd handsomely for you.

Sprightly.

I am sure, Child, he must hold thy Parts in prodigious contempt: 'Tis the great Commerce of the World; for a Man of Rank or Figure is above selling any thing but his Friend, or Himself.

Friendless.

How can you divert yourself by being worried every Day of your Life? Have you put an end to it at last by a peremptory Answer?

Sprightly.

My Uncle, I find, holds his Resolution of going into the Country, and then there's an end of all his Wife's Schemes at once. 'Tis a Sphere that stints the Genius of an extravagant affected Woman. Inclination may be the same, but Opportunities must be wanting; and she cannot have those frequent Temptations of making herself and her Husband so conspicuously ridiculous.

Friendless.

The Want of Fortune is felt so severely in no Condition of Life, as in being oblig'd to a proud imperious Relation. While she is talking to me, I am in such Awe, that my very Reason is not my own. In all Places my Circumstance must be the same.

Sprightly.

You will always find a Friend in me.

Friendless.

Her very Civilities are Insults.

The Distress'd Wife

Sprightly.

That Lady *Frankair* hath been the poor Woman's Ruin.

Friendless.

She affects her Phrases.

Sprightly.

Her very Vices, like an imitating Poet.

Friendless.

Then, without the common Skill or Views of a Gamester, she plays immoderately.

Sprightly.

And 'tis by that (if I mistake not) Lady *Frankair* pays herself for her Instructions.

Friendless.

Now were I a Man, I should be the most jealous of my Wife's *Woman*—Companion.

Sprightly.

She is over-run with Affectation; she is an awkward Copy of that very Woman, or rather of every Woman in Fashion. Why does she paint? Not that she wants a Complexion, but because Lady *Flareit* does it. Why are all the Fops in Town admitted to her Toilet? Because she hath seen 'em at Lady *Frankair*'s. Why are common Cheats and Sharpers admitted among her Visits? Because she hath seen the particular Civilities shown 'em at Lady *Quadrille*'s. She is asham'd of going to Church, because Lady *Frankair* hath no Religion. Then too she wou'd fain have the Reputation of making her Husband a Cuckold, in Imitation of a hundred of the fine Ladies of her Acquaintance.

SCENE XI.

Miss Sprightly. Friendless. Fetch.

Fetch.

Miss *Friendless*, my Lady wants you this Moment.

Sprightly.

Nay, you shall not go, Child; for in the Humour she is in, I know she wou'd use you like a Dog.

Fetch.

I dare not, Madam, return without her. 'Tis well for us that her Humours are divided among her Husband and the whole Family; for if they were to light upon one, where's the Patience that cou'd bear 'em?

Sprightly.

You know, *Fetch*, Miss *Friendless* hath always had her full Share of her.

Friendless.

But, after all, Miss *Sprightly*, I must go.

The Distress'd Wife

SCENE XII.

Sprightly. Friendless. Fetch. Lady Willit. Lady Frankair.

La. *Willit.*

I knew they were together. You impertinent Slut, why did not you bring me an Answer? *[To Fetch.]* Well, Miss, and does your aukward privy Counsellor there, applaud you for being so obstinately bent against your own Interest? *[To Sprightly]* Why is Lord *Courtlove* thy Aversion, Girl? Only because he is my Friend. Who hast thou in thy Eye for her? *[To Friendless.]* Depend upon it, that malicious Creature intends to sell thee, Child. *[To Sprightly.]*

Sprightly.

Let me have the Honour and Shame of my own Actions; for, like your Ladyship, I am influenc'd by my own Passions only. I am as much averse to Advice as you can be: Do all you can, you see I take my own.

La. *Willit.*

Ah *Jenny, Jenny*, thou art a Devil.

Friendless.

You wrong me, Madam. But Gratitude keeps me silent; I dare not trust myself with a Reply. La. *Willit.*

That is to say, you cou'd be saucy if you wou'd. Nay, I cannot be surpriz'd at the Insolence of every one in the Family, when my Husband sets 'em an Example.

Sprightly.

Does your Ladyship never accuse yourself as well as other People?

La. *Willit.*

I don't want Accusers, Miss *Sprightly*: I think that Matter is but too evident. That sullen Creature, *[Pointing to Friendless.]* Lady *Frankair*, is a Proof, that Mischief is the only Cunning of Fools. What does the Fellow want?

[Enter Humphrey]

SCENE XIII.

Lady Willit. Lady Frankair, Sprightly. Friendless. Fetch. Humphrey.

Humphrey.

My Master, Madam; no Offence I hope to your Ladyship

La. *Willit.*

And didst thou think this a likely Place to find him in? These aukward Country Clowns think a Man and his Wife inseparable.

The Distress'd Wife

Humphrey.

Nay, Madam, I am not so fond of ill Words, for that matter, as to seek to talk to you great Ladies. Then too, I have liv'd so long in a great Family, that (as 'tis my Duty) I leave my Lady in the Wrong whenever she pleases to be so; no Offence I hope, Madam.

[Going.]

La. *Willit.*

This insufferable Fool will eternally be talking. Who wants your Master? That that Creature's Master should be mine! Why does not the Fellow answer me? Who wants him?

Humphrey.

His Uncle, Madam, Mr. *Barter.*

La. *Willit.*

My Husband too out of the way! never was any thing so lucky. Lay hold of this Opportunity, my dear Lady *Frankair.* Tell Mr.

Barter, that I desire the Favour of his Company.

[Exit Humphrey.]

Lady *Frankair* and I have Business; so you two may go together and rail at me. In a Minute or two do you, *Fetch,* come and whisper me.

SCENE XIV.

Lady Willit. Lady Frankair. Mr. Barter.

La. *Willit.*

After I have given your Ladyship a sufficient Time to tempt him as a Woman, (don't think, Lady *Frankair,* that I suspect your Parts) I'll send Lord *Courtlove* to secure your Conquest by what governs the World, Interest. Love alone will never do; Men think as coolly, and as reasonably, Child, upon these Affairs as we. Mr. *Barter,* your Servant.

La. *Frankair.*

Business takes a Man off from his Friends so immoderately, that one hath very seldom the Pleasure of seeing you. Now, dear Mr. *Barter,* tell me sincerely; don't you, at some Hours of the Day, think of what is more entertaining? I can have no Notion that a reasonable Creature (as you are) can entirely lose himself in the City; for you shall never persuade me that such Conversation can possibly be agreeable.

Barter.

Why not agreeable? We have our Affectations, our Vanities, our Follies, and our Vices. We rail, we are civil, and laugh at one another with the same Familiarity and Friendship as you do. Then too, as you laugh at us, we laugh at you; so that we are never at a loss for something diverting and ridiculous.

[Fetch enters and whispers.]

La. *Willit.*

The Distress'd Wife

You'll excuse me, Madam. I beg your pardon, Mr. *Barter*: 'Tis an Affair that cannot detain me long. You see I use you both without Ceremony.

SCENE XV.

Lady Frankair. Barter.

La. Frankair.

How cou'd you be so provoking, as not to be at my last Assembly? I hope you don't put me upon the foot of sending to you.

Barter.

You know, Madam, I had been at one before; and my Curiosity was fully answer'd. Every body was talking round me, and not a Creature had any thing to say; not a Man or Woman but was in the hurry of Business, and not one of 'em had any thing to do; 'till at last I found all of 'em worn down, and dispirited with one another's Impertinence, except a few Friends who were seeking to ruin each other at the Gaming-Table.

La. Frankair.

But, dear Mr. *Barter*, how can you be so severe? 'Tis impossible to enter into the Diversions of the Place at once. 'Tis what one may call the Exchange of Love and Gallantry; the Transactions and Bargains are settled in the Crowd, but the Business is concluded in a *tête a tête* at their own Houses. You may depend upon it, by it's being so much frequented, that it answers the Men's and Women's Ends some way or other.

Bart.

But I have no Schemes of that kind.

La. Frankair.

Why have you not?

Bart.

At my Time of Life, Madam, I shall not begin to make myself ridiculous.

La. Frankair.

At my Time of Life! When did you ever hear a Woman make use of that Expression? Are not you a Man? Beyond dispute you make yourself ten times as ridiculous by forgetting you are one. Were you once settled among us; I see you have it about you to relish Life. A Woman is a better Judge in this Case than you are of yourself.

Bart.

I have not Vanity enough to be work'd into a Fool by Flattery.

La. Frankair.

How can you take a thing so maliciously?

The Distress'd Wife

Bart.

Really, Madam, one wou'd not chuse to be an aukward Fool; the general Follies and Vices never sit easy upon a Man of Business; the pretty Fellows owe 'em entirely to Education. *La. Frankair.*

Let me die, Mr. *Barter*, if I am not serious in this Affair! Suppose now, by my Brother's Marriage to Miss *Sprightly* (which I know your Advice cou'd easily bring about) our Families were link'd in the same Interest; and that your Nephew, by a considerable Employment, was oblig'd to reside in Town, there might be Things too worth *your* acceptance; and, pray, what Objections cou'd you have to living among us?

Bart.

I am *not* asham'd of my Profession, Madam.

La. Frankair.

But you must allow, that at our End of the Town we live with greater Elegance. *Why* is the Pursuit of Riches, but to attain Ease and Pleasure?

Bart.

I hate Luxury and Ostentation.

La. Frankair.

To what purpose have you Wealth? Wou'd you not enjoy it?

Bart.

I do. Extravagance and Profusion *never* enjoy'd it. Besides, 'tis a Life that I am unqualified for. I have the narrow stinted Genius of Honesty and Independance, and shou'd but expose my Education by living within my Fortune.

La. Frankair.

But, dear Mr. *Barter*, after all (putting you out of the Case) is it not monstrously absurd in your *Nephew* to set himself against his own Interest? To abandon a Preferment that is thrown in his way? How are Families rais'd?

Bart.

They *ought* to be rais'd, Madam, by Industry and Honour.

SCENE XVI.

Lady Frankair. Barter. Lord Courtlove.

La. Frankair.

Dear Brother, I am glad you are come to my assistance. I know you will think Mr. *Barter* prodigiously in the wrong.

Lord Courtlove.

The Distress'd Wife

Though I have as yet the Misfortune to be very little known to him, I am so well acquainted with his Character, that I own myself partial to his Opinions.

La. *Frankair*.

I have been making downright Court to him; and wou'd fain persuade him to divide himself between Business and Pleasure, and live at our End of the Town.

Lord *Courtlove*.

The Life must unquestionably be more agreeable, and it might too be attended with its Advantages.

Bart.

Luxury, Necessity, and Dependance, are Advantages inconsistent with our Way of Life. Industry and Commerce (however unfashionable) oblige us to Oeconomy and Justice; and (notwithstanding the politer Examples of the *World*) our Credit does *still*, in a great measure, depend upon our moral Character.

La. *Frankair*.

We all know you City People get a prodigious deal of Money; but still a Merchant! there's something in that Word that gives one an Idea of of of I don't know what: In short, we Ladies have an unaccountable Prejudice against you.

Bart.

Is the Name then a Term of Reproach? Where is the Profession that is so honourable? What is it that supports every Individual of our Country? 'Tis Commerce. On what depends the Glory, the Credit, the Power of the Nation? On Commerce. To what does the Crown itself owe its Splendor and Dignity? To Commerce. To what owe you the Revenue of your own half-ruin'd Estates? To Commerce: And are you so ungrateful then to treat the Profession with Contempt by which you are maintain'd?

Lord *Courtlove*.

A City Life, Sister, may be disagreeable to you fine Ladies; but your's is not the Opinion of *all* the People of Fashion and Quality.

Bart.

When People of Rank and Figure can profess Gaming, I am not surpriz'd that we are so contemptible; for Commerce is the very Reverse of it. In Gaming, one Man's Gain is t'other's Ruin; but Commerce is for the mutual Advantage of both. Lord *Courtlove*.

But you must allow, Sir, that Advantages have been made by a good Correspondence at this End of the Town; (which upon certain Occasions might be of use to you.) You know Instances, many Instances, among you of what I mean. The Countenance of Men in Power, early Intelligence, a seasonable Hint! Some of your greatest Fortunes have been rais'd this way.

Bart.

'Tis too evident, my Lord. But then one exorbitant Fortune of this sort hath made at least a thousand Beggars. 'Tis the most fraudulent, the most pernicious Gaming, under a more specious Denomination; and those who practise it, disgrace the Profession of a Merchant.

The Distress'd Wife

Lord *Courtlove*.

Pardon me, Sir; I meant the Proposal as a Civility.

Bart.

Your Sister, my Lord, I perceive is to flatter me, and you are to bribe me to influence my Nephew to sell his Niece. The Case is plain; or, why all this Sollicitude, this Artifice about Miss *Sprightly*?

La. *Frankair*.

How can you, Brother, talk to a Creature who is so horridly out of Humour? One would imagine Mr. *Barter* had a mind to the Girl himself.

Lord *Courtlove*.

Nay, dear Sister, keep your Temper.

Bart.

This whole Proceeding, in the Eye of the World, appears so very mercenary, so very corrupt, that your Honour suffers. Pardon my Freedom, my Lord.

Lord *Courtlove*.

As to notional Honour, you are undoubtedly in the right of it; but what is that to the Practice of Mankind?

Bart.

'Tis you, my Lord, and such as you, that influence the Manners of Mankind. Common Charity obliges those of your Rank to show clear and conspicuous Proofs of Honour and Disinterestedness; for whenever you are mean and mercenary, the Vulgar are hang'd for following your Example. La. *Frankair*.

Now is not this astonishing, Brother, that an arrant Citizen should pretend to censure the Behaviour of a Man of Quality?

Lord *Courtlove*.

Common Sense, alike in all Men, can distinguish Honour and Infamy.

Bart.

When I speak in Defence of Probity and Honour, I mean to show my Respect to your Lordship; and in that Light I hope the Freedoms I have taken will need no Apology.

La. *Frankair*.

The Creature begins to be intollerably ill-bred. Let us leave him.

Lord *Courtlove*.

The Resolution I have taken will convince you, that I think myself oblig'd to you.

The Distress'd Wife

[To Barter.]

La. Frankair.

Lady Willit expects us. Sir, your Servant.

Bart.

This Conversation I find hath detain'd us both too long. I wish I may have Time to prepare the Account before my Nephew's Return.

Lord Courtlove.

When you are at leisure, I beg you wou'd give me leave to communicate my Thoughts to you. How unlike is an honest Man to a Flatterer! Mr. *Barter*, your most obedient

[Exit Lord Courtlove and La. Frankair.]

Bart.

*Honour alone supports a noble Name;
Without it, Title but sets off the Shame.*

ACT V.

SCENE I.

Lady Willit. Friendless.

La. Willit.

You know, Cousin *Jenny*, I have always been extreamly kind to you. Had there been a Yard more of this Lace I shou'd have made it up for my own wearing. The Lappits are somewhat scrimp, 'tis true, but 'tis entirely new, and prodigious fine; and yet, Girl, I can no more make thee grateful than I can make thee genteel.

Friendless.

I can never forget my Obligations.

La. Willit.

Wilt thou never learn to live easy in a Family? Is it not monstrous, to be so solicitous about pleasing my Husband? Is there a Woman in the World that cou'd forgive thee? Recollect your Behaviour, and you must own I have been too good to you.

Friendless.

Might I be allow'd to vindicate myself.

La. Willit.

Nay, dear *Jenny*, you know I know you. For thy own sake and mine don't talk. I don't remember I gave you that Fan.

The Distress'd Wife

[Takes her Fan.]

Friendless.

Mr. *Barter*, Madam, gave it to me La. *Willit*.

As a Reward for the meritorious Mischief thou hast done me. Here, take it, Girl; by my Treatment of late, 'tis plain, thou hast richly deserv'd it.

Friendless.

If I ever offended you, it was by unseasonable Sincerity and Truth.

La. *Willit*.

Sincerity and Truth! I am surfeited with the hypocritical Cant. My Husband is eternally stunning me with those two hideous Expressions, as an Excuse for his Insolence and Ill-manners. I talk to you now, Cousin *Jenny*, as a Friend.

Friendless.

Your Ladyship will always find me such.

La. *Willit*.

Tell me truly then (for you *are* in the Secrets of the Family) why is my Husband grown more a Brute than ever of late?

Friendless.

I really think he loves you.

La. *Willit*.

Suppose he does; art thou really Fool enough to think *that* a Motive to reconcile me to his brutal Behaviour? The Love of a Husband, Girl, is not of that *prodigious* Consequence.

Friendless.

The Importunity of Creditors in Town, the Frauds of his Steward in the Country, must have made him uneasy.

La. *Willit*.

Don't be impertinent, *Jenny*. How dare you think of the Affairs of the Family? Answer the Question I ask you. Why am I thus outrageously insulted? Who hath set him against me? That devilish Letter, *Jenny*.

Friendless.

Miss *Sprightly* told me, that *Forward* did as good as own it, and that 'twas writ in Pique and Envy to *Pert*. The *Occasion* of Jealousies is always to be avoided; for be the *Suspicion* true or false, the *Mischief* is the same; and what hath *now* happen'd must convince you, that the *Vanity* of Fools hath embroil'd more Families than real Intrigues.

La. *Willit*.

Thou art grown most affectedly wise, *Jenny*.

ACT V.

The Distress'd Wife

Friendless.

That daily Flutter at your Toilette may be only innocent Amusement to you, but it may gall the Heart of a Husband.

La. *Willit.*

'Tis then the Company I keep, that gives you and him the Offence. How intolerably like my Husband the Girl talks! Dost thou think, Child, that I was married to deny my self the common Liberties of a married Woman? Would'st thou have a Man and his Wife so disagreeably malicious, as to be eternally intruding themselves into each other's Company? Ah, *Jenny, Jenny!* 'tis now a clear Point who is his Abettor: 'Tis *you* that have set him on. Impertinence! Get you out of my sight.

SCENE II.

Lady Willit. Friendless. Sir Thomas Willit.

Sir *Thomas.*

Nay, dear Child, why are these unreasonable Passions?

La. *Willit.*

Unreasonable Passions! *You* know, Sir *Thomas*, I have had my unreasonable Provocations. Do you imagine that no body hath the Talent of saying or doing a shocking Thing but your self?

Sir *Thomas.*

You need not go, Cousin *Jenny.*

La. *Willit.*

Go, I say.

Sir *Thomas.*

Dear Child, keep your Temper.

La. *Willit.*

I won't. *Hear* her, *believe* her, and make me and your self unhappy. I shall *not* interrupt the Conversation.

SCENE III.

Sir Thomas Willit. Friendless.

Sir *Thomas.*

Get your self ready, Cousin *Jenny*, to set out for the Country upon the first Notice; for the Moment I take my Resolutions, nothing upon Earth shall defer it. But stay, Child, the present Uneasiness of the Family can be no

The Distress'd Wife

Secret to you.

Friendl.

Would it were in my power to remedy it. *Sir Thom.*

I am not so morose, to deny a Wise the natural Caprice and Coquetry of the Sex. But of late her Conduct hath been insupportable.

Friendl.

'Tis the Way of the World that offends you. Her Behaviour is owing to Imitation more than Inclination. Are not all the Ladies of her Acquaintance so many Precedents for every thing she says or does? There is a Fashion in Conversation, in Amusements, in Follies, in Vices as well as in Dress.

Sir Thom.

This detestable Town is more infectious than the Plague: A Woman lives not one Day in it without catching some fashionable Vice or other.

Friendl.

Were Men to judge by Appearances, the whole Town wou'd be over-run with Jealousy; for a Woman is asham'd to seem to love her Husband. I am vindicating the Manners of the Sex, yet I am an Advocate for her Innocence.

Sir Thom.

Innocence! Such Innocence hath every bad Consequence of Guilt. I don't know what to think of her.

Friendl.

Consider, Sir, the fashionable Hyprocrisy of the Age is to appear vicious.

Sir Thom.

This is the first time I ever suspected you for her Confidant. But, as a Woman, 'tis natural to think a Husband must be in the wrong when he is jealous.

Friendl.

I speak in Justice to her, and in Duty and Sincerity to you.

Sir Thom.

Whatsoever they say behind one another's Backs, to deceive a Husband, one Woman will vindicate another. But it may be the Girl's real Opinion; she is credulous, and good natur'd.

I have Business now. You may go, Child.

SCENE IV.

Sir Thomas Willit. Barter.

Bart.

Were we to remove into another Room, we should be less liable to be interrupted. You see I have not forgot the Offence I committed in the Morning.

Sir Thom.

I have no notion of these Ceremonies and Punctilios between Man and Wife. Sit down, Sir; we will not be interrupted.

The Distress'd Wife

Bart.

Your Debts turn out greater than you imagin'd. These Receipts have exhausted the whole Sum. Mrs. *Glib*, the Lace-woman's Bill, of a Year and a half's standing (which was not in your List) amounts to a hundred and fifteen Pounds. Here's a Bill too of Mr. *Gloss*, the Mercer, of Eighty-three; and this of Mrs. *Spangle*, the Embroiderer, of Thirty-seven. I have order'd 'em to call upon me to Morrow, and, if you are satisfied in their Demands, I will discharge the Debt, and place it to Account. You see, Nephew, I am willing to do every thing in my power to forward the reasonable, the honest Resolution you have taken.

Sir Thom.

'Tis not enough that a Man means to be just, when by his Negligence, Indolence or Vanity in living beyond his Fortune, he puts it out of his own power to be so. You are not supplying a Squanderer, but retrieving a Family: That is the Obligation I shall have to you.

Fibb.

Your Honour's Letters, Sir, by the Post.

[Enter Fibber and Exit.]

Sir Thom.

The Seal is quite broken, and not so much as botch'd up again. The Curiosity or Fears of Mankind are prodigious.

Bart.

'Tis a Grievance that is become so general, that no Particular will take it upon him to complain. *Sir Thom.*

Madam The Letter I find is directed to my Wife. How could the Fellow be such a Blunderer! This is a Liberty I never allow'd my self; but as 'tis my Steward's Hand, and can be no Secret, you will excuse me.

[Reads.]

Madam, Your Ladyship must protect me from the Information of Trenchwell, or the Money I have advanc'd to you from time to time must all be brought to Account

To what will not a Woman condescend to gratify her Extravagance!

[Sitting thoughtfully.]

Bart.

No ill News, I hope. *Sir Thom.*

'Tis not her Fault; 'tis my own Negligence.

In short, Madam, my Affairs are in such Confusion, that unless I receive a satisfactory Letter from your Ladyship the very next Post, I shall be oblig'd to make the best of my Way to Calais.

Survey.

Read it, Sir. Know me before you trust me.

[Barter reads.]

Well! Now am I to be trusted?

Bart.

The more you want a Friend, the more ready I am to serve you.

Sir Thom.

SCENE IV.

The Distress'd Wife

An Hour may be of the utmost consequence. I have taken my Resolution.

Bart.

There are People of yours below that stay for me.

SCENE V.

Sir Thomas Willit. Humphrey.

Sir Thom.

Humphrey, Let the Coach and Six be got ready with all the expedition possible.

Humph.

Before the Servants have din'd, Sir!

Sir Thom.

I don't dine in Town.

Humph.

Now I cou'd not help satisfying you, if you did not know where I was going. But Servants must not ask Questions.

Sir Thom.

Saddle–Horses too for the Servants. D'ye hear?

Humph.

Yes, Sir.

Sir Thom.

Let 'em be ready, and in the way, for I shall not stay a Minute for any one of 'em. But hold, *Humphrey* Tell my Wife I wou'd speak with her immediately. Go then.

Humph.

Methinks, that you might be sure you knew your own Mind rightly, you had better see my Lady first. Or what hath been, may be; and we may, mayhap, have every thing to undo again.

[Exit Humphrey.]

Enter Lady Willit.

Sir Thom.

Dear Child, I am glad you are come. I had just sent to desire to speak to you.

SCENE VI.

Sir Thomas. Lady Willit.

La. *Willit.*

And what disagreeable thing have you to say to me? If it is about Business, let me intreat you, dear Sir *Thomas*, to keep it to your self; for I won't be plagu'd and worried every Hour of my Life with such impertinent Trifles.

Sir *Thom.*

As I am settling Accounts with my Creditors

La. *Willit.*

You know I hate Accounts. What have I do with your Creditors? Wou'd you have me pay 'em?

Sir *Thom.*

Do you know any thing of these Bills, Child?

La. *Willit.*

To-morrow Morning, a Week hence, some time or other, when I have nothing else to do, if I don't forget it, I will ask you for 'em.

Sir *Thom.*

I only want to be satisfied if any thing hath been paid. Some of the People themselves are below.

La. *Willit.*

If you like to be entertain'd with their Impertinence, send for 'em up. Whether they or you dun me, the thing is much the same. But after all, what wou'd you have me do? Give me your hideous Papers then. *Sarah Glib* never was any thing like the Impudence of that Woman! She had the Assurance t'other Day to ask me for her Money; a Creature who takes such intolerable Liberties, by my Consent shou'd never be paid. *Gloss* and *Spangle* too! Once a Week ever since we came to Town have these odious Names been laid upon my Toilette. Send the Creatures away, I beg you; People of Fashion should not encourage 'em, and (for the Quiet of one another) shou'd *never* comply with a Dun. Was it upon this important Affair I was sent for.

[Flings down the Bills.]

Sir *Thom.*

Nay; stay, Child.

La. *Willit.*

I hate you when you are in this provoking wise Way.

The Distress'd Wife

Sir *Thom.*

I have something of consequence to acquaint you with.

La. *Willit.*

I han't time to hear it now.

Sir *Thom.*

But I must speak with you.

La. *Willit.*

Speak then.

Sir *Thom.*

I have order'd the Coach and Six to be at the Door as soon as it can be got ready.

La. *Willit.*

The Coach and Six!

Sir *Thom.*

To set out for the Country immediately.

La. *Willit.*

Immediately!

Sir *Thom.*

The very Moment the Coach is ready.

La. *Willit.*

You might have been so civil to have ask'd me if I would have the Horses kept in Town. Now, dear Sir *Thomas*, wou'd not a hir'd Set have serv'd your purpose full as well?

Sir *Thom.*

Take nothing with you but what is absolutely necessary upon the Road. Every thing else, Child, shall be sent after us.

La. *Willit.*

Am I a necessary Part of your Baggage, that I am to be bundled up with you at an Hour's warning?

The Distress'd Wife

Sir *Thom.*

Our Affairs, Child, have made it absolutely necessary.

La. *Willit.*

Well! and do I detain you?

Sir *Thom.*

You know 'tis impossible for us to stay in Town.

La. *Willit.*

That a Dun or two can put you so hideously out of Humour! Don't you almost every where see, that they are the everlasting Retinue of a Man of Fortune?

Sir *Thom.*

You must allow me to know my own Affairs, Madam.

La. *Willit.*

And you must allow me to know my own Mind Sir.

Sir *Thom.*

My Resolutions, Madam, are taken; so, send for your Maid, and order your things, for the Coach will be at the Door in less than half an Hour.

La. *Willit.*

In less than half an Hour! My Head akes most intolerably; and it kills me to talk.

[Sits down.

Sir *Thom.*

The Journey, the Air, the Exercise, Child, will do you good.

La. *Willit.*

To do me good was never a Motive for your doing any thing. I wonder how you can have the Assurance to give that for a Reason. Your Usage, Sir, of late hath prepared me to bear your Absence for ten or twelve Days; and you can have no Business that can keep you longer. Therefore say no more about it, for I will not go.

Sir *Thom.*

But, dear Child, consider

The Distress'd Wife

La. *Willit*.

I won't.

Sir *Thom*.

'Tis impossible the Family can subsist in Town a Day longer. 'Tis in vain to dispute; the thing must be done.

La. *Willit*.

Must!

Sir *Thom*.

Will you get your self ready then?

La. *Willit*.

No.

Sir *Thom*.

Shall I call your Maid to you?

La. *Willit*.

No.

Sir *Thom*.

Will you think reasonably?

La. *Willit*.

No.

[Sobbing and crying.]

Sir *Thom*.

This is not to be born. Nay; pr'ythee, Child, don't give way to these Passions. 'Twill be to no purpose to act this Part over and over again. Wipe your Eyes, my Dear; and when a thing must be done, tho' it is a Husband's Proposal, do it cheerfully.

[Takes her by the Hand.]

La. *Willit*.

For Heaven's sake, Sir *Thomas*, let me alone.

The Distress'd Wife

Sir *Thom.*

Answer me then. La. *Willit.*

I won't be haul'd and worried. Sir *Thom.*

You or I, my Dear, must get the better of these capricious Humours. [*Rings; Enter Humphrey.*] Tell *Fetch* to come to your Mistress.

Humph.

She's not in the House, Sir.

Sir *Thom.*

My Cousin *Jenny* then. [*Exit Humphrey.*] Speak to me, Child. These Fits of unreasonable Obstinacy are owing to my unreasonable Compliance; and the low Spirits you so often and so opportunely complain of, are owing to your too high Spirits. Leave off the fine Lady, and be a reasonable Woman. La. *Willit.*

Inhuman Creature! ah

[*Screams.*]

SCENE VII.

Sir Thomas. Lady Willit. Friendless.

Sir *Thom.*

A Glass of Water and the Hartshorn immediately, Cousin *Jenny* .

Friendl.

My Lady is in her usual Way, I see.

Sir *Thom.*

But I am not in my usual Way. Leave her to me, Child; and pack up those Things that will be necessary upon the Road. The Key, you see, is in the Travelling-Box.

Friendl.

My Lady will travel in her Sultane, I suppose.

Sir *Thom.*

In any thing. Nay, pr'ythee, Child, get the better of your self, and order what you wou'd take with you. What *are* you doing, Cousin *Jenny*?

Friendl.

This Cordial-Water Box *must* go, for my Lady never travels without it.

Sir *Thom.*

Dispatch, Girl, and ask no Questions.

Friendl.

And her Toilette too

The Distress'd Wife

Sir *Thom.*

Only the things that are necessary. Every thing else shall be sent after her.

[The Cover of the Box falls down.]

La. *Willit.*

How can you kill one with these intolerable Noises.

[Starts.]

Sir *Thom.*

Recover your Reason, my Dear; and give her Directions your self.

[She rises.]

La. *Willit.*

How dar'd you touch any thing without my Orders? Lay every thing where you found it, audacious Slut!

Sir *Thomas.*

Will you tell her then what you *wou'd* have done?

La. *Willit.*

No.

Sir *Thomas.*

Pack it up then, Cousin *Jenny.*

La. *Willit.*

How! did not you hear what I said?

Sir *Thomas.*

You must go as you are then; for nothing shall detain me I have Affairs with my Brother below; so agree the matter between yourselves.

SCENE VIII.

Lady Willit. Friendless. Fibber.

La. *Willit.*

Are these the Proofs of your Gratitude to me, for all the kind Things I have done for you?

[Enter Fibber.]

Fib.

Lady *Frankair* and three or four Ladies more to wait upon your Ladyship. La. *Willit.*

The Distress'd Wife

Get you gone then, both of you.

SCENE IX.

Lady Willit. Lady Frankair. Lady Rampant. Mrs. Buxom. Mrs. Clackit.

La. Willit.

The Brute hath really ruffled me. [*At the Looking-glass.*] I look horridly fluster'd. To be got the better of by a Husband! Shou'd it ever be known, I shou'd be deserted by the Men, and laugh'd at by the Women. Though I feel myself miserable, I won't make myself ridiculous. *Lady Frankair*, your Servant.

La. Frankair.

What is the meaning of this sudden Resolution? If you go with him, Child, you go to eternal Banishment.

La. Rampant.

Are you really leaving us, my Dear?

Buxom.

I thought I had known you.

Clackit.

Are you mad, Child?

La. Ramp.

What a wretched hideous thing is a Country-house!

Buxom.

'Tis an everlasting *tête a tête* (without the chance of one agreeable Interruption) and with whom? With a Husband.

La. Willit.

Ah!

[Sighs.

La. Ramp.

That is a terrible Circumstance. *La. Willit.*

But he hath real Business, *Lady Rampant*; and 'twas I prevail'd upon him.

Buxom.

A new Opera next Week, and *Lady Willit* not at it!

Clackit.

'Tis incredible!

The Distress'd Wife

La. *Ramp*.
'Tis impossible!

Buxom.
Nay, Madam, 'tis for our Interest that you never shou'd come to Town; for we shall have all the fine Men flirting at us again.

La. *Willit*.

The Loss of a new Opera is a Mortification. Sir *Thomas*, indeed, wou'd have perswaded me to stay, but I know his Affairs must suffer.

La. *Ramp*.
You are grown most unaccountably considerate.

Clackit.
But, dear Child, what an odious Journey are you taking?

Buxom.
Why, Sir *Thomas*'s House is a thousand Miles off.

La. *Willit*.

'Tis a dreadful Way, that's certain.

[*Sighs*.

Clackit.
Now, I protest, I wou'd not marry a Man that had a Country–House. I should be in perpetual Apprehensions, when a Husband had such a hideous mortifying thing in his power.

Buxom.
You will wish La. *Ramp*.
You will be moap'd.

Clackit.
You will despair.

La. *Ramp*.
Could you bear to be a Country Gentlewoman, Mrs. *Clackit*?

Clackit.
Let me dye, if I should not hang myself.

Buxom.
How many Days Journey is it?

La. *Willit*.

Dear Madam, don't name it. But 'tis my own Choice; and as my Going, so my Return depends entirely upon my self.

The Distress'd Wife

La. Ramp.

How many Women have been lost to all true Pleasure, by trusting themselves with their Husbands a hundred Miles from *London!*

Clackit.

Believe me, Child, 'tis a most terrible Undertaking.

Buxom.

'Tis like Hell; 'tis easy to get thither. But to return, there's the Point.

Clackit.

I advise you as a Friend, my Dear; let him do his Business by himself, and don't trust your self with him.

La. Willit.

When I saw his Affairs requir'd it, it was my Duty to perswade him.

La. Ramp.

The very Sentiments of a notable Country Houswife!

Clackit.

When a Man and Woman are come to take each other's Advice, they have done with the World, and the World hath done with them. So, my Dear, I wish you a good Journey.

[Salutes her.]

La. Ramp.

I am afraid we incommode your Ladyship.

[Salutes her.]

Buxom.

'Tis a mortifying thing to part with you, my Dear. But I see you are in a hurry.

[Salutes her.]

SCENE X.

Lady Willit. Lady Frankair. Fetch.

La. Frankair.

Really, Child, you carried off your Distress very handsomely.

Enter Fetch.

La. Willit.

How dar'd you to be out of the way when I wanted you?

Fetch.

Your Ladyship's Affairs call you into the Country; and at present 'tis inconvenient to me.

The Distress'd Wife

La. *Willit*.

To you! Hold your Tongue, Impertinence.

Fetch.

I have born this Usage but too long. I *was* your Servant, Madam.

La. *Willit*.

Have done, I say.

Fetch.

Your Ladyship may spare your Anger for her that shall succeed me. All I ask, Madam, is my Discharge.

La. *Willit*.

There's no bearing it. Don't talk to me.

Fetch.

Your Ladyship may treat your Servants as you please; but as my Circumstances are chang'd, your Ladyship, methinks, might give me better Language.

La. *Willit*.

You will talk then! Sir *Thomas* below, Hussy, will pay you your Wages. Get you gone.

Fetch.

Nay, Madam, for that matter, unless your Ladyship can behave your self more civilly I shall cut short the Conversation. Madam, your Servant.

SCENE XI.

Lady Willit. Lady Frankair. Sprightly in her Travelling Habit.

Sprightly.

Is not your Ladyship ready yet?

La. *Willit*.

Dear Child, what do you mean? You have never given Lord *Courtlove* a positive Answer. You may trifle with a Lover too long. I know you intend to have him. Such an Offer! You have too good Sense to refuse it.

La. *Frankair*.

This is the only Point, Child, that can respite your Sentence. [*To Lady Willit. They seem in earnest Conversation with Sprightly.*]

SCENE XII.

Lady Willit. Lady Frankair. Sprightly. Sir Thomas. Friendless.

Friendless.

The Letter that gave you so much Disquiet, *Fetch* own'd to me was writ to her by *Pert*. As I have the Happiness of your Family at heart, I thought it my Duty to let you know it. 'Tis upon his Account she hath quitted your Service. The Step she hath taken I own surprizes me; but there is no so sure a Trap for a Woman as a Coxcomb. A Chambermaid is often the Pursuit, when the Lady loses her Reputation.

Sir Thom.

How happy have you made me by this Discovery! [*To Friendless.*] I expect the Coach at the Door, Child, every moment.

[*To Lady Willit.*]

La. Willit.

And will you haul this Girl out of Town from so beneficial an Offer? How can you ever answer it to her or yourself? Can a Day or two longer be of such consequence?

Sprightly.

Put me out of the Case, I beg you, my dear Aunt. I long for the Country; I dream of the Country. Wou'd I were there this Instant. *La. Willit.*

How can you be so malicious?

Sprightly.

The Thing must soon discover itself; so I had as good own it. My Cousin *Harry*, just before he went to *Oxford* 'tis now above four Months

La. Willit.

What of him, Child?

Sprightly.

Married me; that's all. There are Reasons too that would have hindered me from keeping the Secret long; so, my sweet, kind Aunt, you see there is a just Impediment to this most honourable Match of your Proposal. You may be surprized, you may be angry; I like him, I love him, and sure no Woman alive was ever half so happy! My Friend here was Witness to my Happiness. Say what you will, you shall not put me out of humour, for the Man is my own, and so is my Fortune.

La. Willit.

But after all, Niece, your Encouragement of Lord *Courtlove* is not to be vindicated.

Sprightly.

Your Encouragement, you mean. The dear Creature is now in the Country ready to receive me. Wou'd I cou'd fly to him! Now, if he is not as impatient as I am, I cou'd never forgive him. But he is, he must be, and I believe him so.

SCENE XIII.

Lady Willit. Lady Frankair. Sprightly. Sir Thomas. Friendless. Lord Courtlove. Barter.

Lord *Courtlove*.

Her Person, her Behaviour, her Virtue, hath won me. I shall not be embarras'd with Settlements, nor shall I be run out with Extravagance. I commit myself and Fortune, Sir, to your disposal.

Bart.

As she hath a good Understanding she must have Gratitude. Lord *Courtlove*, Miss *Friendless*, offers himself to you for a Husband. La. *Frankair*.

Dear Brother, don't make yourself ridiculous.

[Barter talks to Friendless.

La. *Willit*.

'Tis impossible he *can* be in earnest.

Lord *Courtlove*.

Your whole Conduct hath charm'd me.

Friendless.

So generous an Offer! and in my Circumstance!

Bart.

Is not to be refus'd. I know he esteems you; and your Happiness now depends upon your own Behaviour.

Friendless.

I have a dread of Greatness, and never indulg'd a Thought of Ambition. Yet, considering I am taken off from my present Dependance, though I am thrown into an Affluence of Fortune, I must be less unhappy.

La. *Willit*.

How unaccountably are Women dispos'd of! How insensible is that Creature of her Happiness! Now, dear Sir *Thomas*, we must stay to see Cousin *Jenny* married.

Sir *Thom*.

I beg you, Child, press me no furthe. *[To Lady Willit.]* The Necessity will excuse the Trouble I give you. I must leave this and every other thing to you.

[To Barter.]

La. *Frankair*.

Your Ladyship hath forgot the seventy–five Pounds: I shou'd not have ask'd you for it, if I had not a troublesome Play–Debt of my own upon my Hands.

The Distress'd Wife

La. Willit.

From you too, Lady *Frankair*! This is a Dun that is insupportable. I hope your Lordship will insist upon his staying.

Sir *Thom*.

'Tis in vain, Child. There read that Letter from *Survey*. Now ask me to stay in Town an Hour longer.

Bart.

To Night, Miss *Friendless*, you are to be my Charge; To-morrow I shall resign it to your Lordship.

Sprightly.

I wish your Lordship Joy. In chusing her, you have made me and yourself happy.

[*Enter Humphrey.*]

Humphrey.

The Coach is ready, Sir. Sir *Thom*.

There; take that Box with you.

[*Exit Humphrey.*]

Sprightly.

My dear *Jenny*, Happiness attend you.

[*Salutes her.*]

Sir *Thom*.

I shall be impatient 'till I hear from you. [*To Barter.*] You will excuse Ceremony, my Lord. Come, my Dear. La. *Frankair*.

Now, dear Child, let me beg you not to forget me. You know what I mean.

[*Salutes her.*]

[*Ex. Sir Thomas, Lady Willit, and Sprightly.*]

Bart.

How happy might that Woman have been if she wou'd have acted in her own Sphere! Her Affectation was not satisfied with her own Follies, but she must pick up those of every one of her Acquaintance. And how happy might that Man have been, if he cou'd have been contented with the Independance of his own hereditary Estate! The Man hath recover'd his Reason; and the Woman, when she hath no more fashionable Fools to keep her in countenance, must return to herself. Vanity and Affectation wou'd be now thrown away; for unless People can be conspicuously so, they never think it worth while to be ridiculous.

Those, who the Gifts of Fortune truly rate,

Find and secure the independant State.

How much we hazard by superfluous Cost!

In ev'ry Debt some Liberty is lost.

He then, whose Fortune and Expence agree,

Is wise and great; for he alone is free.