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The History Of Tom Jones, A Foundling

In Four Volumes

Fielding, Henry

London, 1750

Chap. VIII. Schemes of Lady Bellaston for the Ruin of Jones.

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‘ as well as you, must excuse me ; for I am in haste to dress.’—‘ Well but,’ said the Squire, ‘ do appoint a Time.’ — ‘ Indeed,’ said she, ‘ I can appoint no Time.— I tell you, I will see you in the Afternoon.’ — ‘ What the Devil would you have me do ?’ cries the Squire, turning to *Blifil*, ‘ I can no more turn her, than a Beagle can turn an old Hare. Perhaps, she will be in a better Humour in the Afternoon.’ — ‘ I am condemned, I see, Sir, to Misfortune,’ answered *Blifil*, ‘ but I shall always own my Obligations to you.’—He then took a ceremonious Leave of Mrs. *Western*, who was altogether as ceremonious on her Part ; and then they departed, the Squire muttering to himself with an Oath, that *Blifil* should see his Daughter in the Afternoon.

If Mr. *Western* was little pleased with this Interview, *Blifil* was less. As to the former, he imputed the whole Behaviour of his Sister to her Humour only, and to her Dissatisfaction at the Omission of Ceremony in the Visit ; but *Blifil* saw a little deeper into Things. He suspected somewhat of more Consequence, from two or three Words which dropt from the Lady ; and, to say the Truth, he suspected right, as will appear when I have unfolded the several Matters which will be contained in the following Chapter.

C H A P. VIII.

Schemes of Lady Bellafton for the Ruin of Jones ;

LOVE had taken too deep a Root in the Mind of Lord *Fellamar* to be plucked up by the rude Hands of Mr. *Western*. In the Heat of

Repentment he had indeed given a Commission to Captain *Egglane*, which the Captain had far exceeded in the Execution; nor had it been executed at all, had his Lordship been able to find the Captain after he had seen Lady *Bellaſton*, which was in the Afternoon of the Day after he had received the Affront; but ſo industrious was the Captain in the Diſcharge of his Duty, that having after long Enquiry found out the Squire's Lodgings very late in the Evening, he ſat up all Night at a Tavern, that he might not miſs the Squire in the Morning, and by that Means miſſed the Revocation which my Lord had ſent to his Lodgings.

In the Afternoon then next after the intended Rape of *Sophia*, his Lordſhip, as we have ſaid, made a Viſit to Lady *Bellaſton*, who laid open ſo much of the Character of the Squire, that his Lordſhip plainly ſaw the Abſurdity he had been guilty of in taking any Offence at his Words, eſpecially as he had thoſe honourable Deſigns on his Daughter. He then unboſomed the Violence of his Paſſion to Lady *Bellaſton*, who readily undertook the Cauſe, and encouraged him with certain Assurance of a moſt favourable Reception, from all the Elders of the Family, and from the Father himſelf when he ſhould be ſober, and ſhould be made acquainted with the Nature of the Offer made to his Daughter. The only Danger, ſhe ſaid, lay in the Fellow ſhe had formerly mentioned, who, though a Beggard and a Vagabond, had by ſome Means or other, ſhe knew not what, procured himſelf tolerable Cloaths, and paſt for a Gentleman. 'Now,' ſays ſhe, 'as I have, for the Sake of my Couſin, made it my Buſineſs to enquire after this Fellow, I have luckily

luckily found out his Lodgings; with which she then acquainted his Lordship. 'I am thinking, my Lord,' added she, '(for this Fellow is too mean for your personal Repentment) whether it would not be possible for your Lordship to contrive some Method of having him pressed and sent on board a Ship. Neither Law nor Conscience forbid this Project: for the Fellow, I promise you, however well drest, is but a Vagabond, and as proper as any Fellow in the Streets to be pressed into the Service; and as for the conscientious Part, surely the Preservation of a young Lady from such Ruin is a most meritorious Act; nay, with Regard to the Fellow himself, unless he could succeed (which Heaven forbid) with my Cousin, it may probably be the Means of preserving him from the Gallows, and perhaps may make his Fortune in an honest Way.'

Lord *Fellamar* very heartily thanked her Ladyship, for the Part which she was pleased to take in the Affair, upon the Success of which his whole future Happiness entirely depended. He said, he saw at present no Objection to the pressing Scheme, and would consider of putting it in Execution. He then most earnestly recommended to her Ladyship, to do him the Honour of immediately mentioning his Proposals to the Family; to whom, he said, he offered a *Carte Blanche*, and would settle his Fortune in almost any Manner they should require. And after uttering many Ecstasies and Raptures concerning *Sophia*, he took his Leave and departed, but not before he had received the strongest Charge to beware of *Jones*, and to lose no Time in securing his Person where:

he should no longer be in a Capacity of making any Attempts to the Ruin of the young Lady.

The Moment Mrs. *Western* was arrived at her Lodgings, a Card was dispatched with her Compliments to Lady *Bellafton*; who no sooner received it, than with the Impatience of a Lover, she flew to her Cousin, rejoiced at this fair Opportunity, which beyond her Hopes offered itself: for she was much better pleased with the Prospect of making the Proposals to a Woman of Sense, and who knew the World, than to a Gentleman whom she honoured with the Appellation of *Hottentot*; though indeed from him she apprehended no Danger of a Refusal.

The two Ladies being met, after very short previous Ceremonials, fell to Business, which was indeed almost as soon concluded as begun; for Mrs. *Western* no sooner heard the Name of Lord *Fellamar* than her Cheeks glowed with Pleasure; but when she was acquainted with the Eagerness of his Passion, the Earnestness of his Proposals, and the Generosity of his Offer, she declared her full Satisfaction in the most explicit Terms.

In the Progress of their Conversation, their Discourse turned to *Jones*, and both Cousins very pathetically lamented the unfortunate Attachment which both agreed *Sophia* had to that young Fellow; and Mrs. *Western* entirely attributed it to the Folly of her Brother's Management. She concluded however at last, with declaring her Confidence in the good Understanding of her Niece, who though she would not give up her Affection in Favour of *Bliss*, will, I doubt not, says she, soon be prevailed upon to sacrifice a simple Inclination to the Addresses of a fine Gentleman, who brings her both a Title and a large

Estate: For indeed,' added she, 'I must do *Sophy* the Justice to confess, this *Bliss* is but a hideous kind of Fellow, as you know, *Bellafton*, all Country Gentlemen are, and hath nothing but his Fortune to recommend him.'

'Nay, said Lady *Bellafton*, 'I don't then so much wonder at my Cousin; for I promise you, this *Jones* is a very agreeable Fellow, and hath one Virtue which the Men say is a great Recommendation to us. What do you think, *Bell*—I shall certainly make you laugh; nay, I can hardly tell you myself for laughing—Will you believe that the Fellow hath had the Assurance to make Love to me? But if you should be inclined to disbelieve it, here is Evidence enough, his own Hand-writing, I assure you.' She then delivered her Cousin the Letter with the Proposals of Marriage, which if the Reader hath a Desire to see, he will find already on Record in the XVth Book of this History.

'Upon my Word, I am astonished,' said Mrs. *Western*, 'this is indeed a Master-piece of Assurance. With your Leave, I may possibly make some Use of this Letter.' 'You have my full Liberty,' cries Lady *Bellafton*, 'to apply it to what Purpose you please. However, I would not have it shewn to any but Miss *Western*, nor to her unless you find Occasion.' 'Well, and how did you use the Fellow?' returned Mrs. *Western*. 'Not as a Husband,' said the Lady, 'I am not married, I promise you, my Dear. You know, *Bell*, I have try'd the Comforts once already; and once I think is enough for any reasonable Woman.'

This Letter, Lady *Bellafton* thought would certainly turn the Balance against *Jones* in the
I 6 Mind

Mind of *Sophia*, and she was emboldened to give it up, partly by her Hopes of having him instantly dispatched out of the Way, and partly by having secured the Evidence of *Honour*, who, upon founding her, she saw sufficient Reason to imagine, was prepared to testify whatever she pleased.

But perhaps the Reader may wonder why Lady *Bellafton*, who in her Heart hated *Sophia*, should be so desirous of promoting a Match, which was so much to the Interest of the young Lady. Now, I would desire such Readers to look carefully into human Nature, Page almost the last, and there he will find in scarce legible Characters, that Women, notwithstanding the preposterous Behaviour of Mothers, Aunts, &c. in matrimonial Matters, do in Reality think it so great a Misfortune to have their Inclinations in Love thwarted, that they imagine, they ought never to carry Enmity higher than upon these Disappointments; again, he will find it written much about the same Place, that a Woman who hath once been pleased with the Possession of a Man, will go above half way to the Devil, to prevent any other Woman from enjoying the same.

If he will not be contented with these Reasons, I freely confess I see no other Motive to the Actions of that Lady, unless we will conceive she was bribed by Lord *Fellamar*, which for my own Part I see no Cause to suspect.

Now this was the Affair which Mrs. *Western* was preparing to introduce to *Sophia*, by some prefatory Discourse on the Folly of Love, and on the Wisdom of legal Prostitution for Hire, when her Brother and *Bliffl* broke abruptly in upon her; and hence arose all that Coldness in her Behaviour to *Bliffl*, which tho' the Squire, as was usual.