

Chapter 3

I had no policy in all this; you may easily see it was all nature; but it was joined with so much innocence and so much passion that, in short, it set the good motherly creature a-weeping too, and she cried at last as fast as I did, and then took me and led me out of the teaching-room. 'Come,' says she, 'you shan't go to service; you shall live with me'; and this pacified me for the present.

Some time after this, she going to wait on the Mayor, and talking of such things as belonged to her business, at last my story came up, and my good nurse told Mr. Mayor the whole tale. He was so pleased with it, that he would call his lady and his two daughters to hear it, and it made mirth enough among them, you may be sure.

However, not a week had passed over, but on a sudden comes Mrs. Mayoress and her two daughters to the house to see my old nurse, and to see her school and the children. When they had looked about them a little, 'Well, Mrs.----,' says the Mayoress to my nurse, 'and pray which is the little lass that intends to be a gentlewoman?' I heard her, and I was terribly frightened at first, though I did not know why neither; but Mrs. Mayoress comes up to me. 'Well, miss,' says she, 'and what are you at work upon?' The word miss was a language that had hardly been heard of in our school, and I wondered what sad name it was she called me. However, I stood up,

made a curtsy, and she took my work out of my hand, looked on it, and said it was very well; then she took up one of the hands. 'Nay,' says she, 'the child may come to be a gentlewoman for aught anybody knows; she has a gentlewoman's hand,' says she. This pleased me mightily, you may be sure; but Mrs. Mayoress did not stop there, but giving me my work again, she put her hand in her pocket, gave me a shilling, and bid me mind my work, and learn to work well, and I might be a gentlewoman for aught she knew.

Now all this while my good old nurse, Mrs. Mayoress, and all the rest of them did not understand me at all, for they meant one sort of thing by the word gentlewoman, and I meant quite another; for alas! all I understood by being a gentlewoman was to be able to work for myself, and get enough to keep me without that terrible bugbear going to service, whereas they meant to live great, rich and high, and I know not what.

Well, after Mrs. Mayoress was gone, her two daughters came in, and they called for the gentlewoman too, and they talked a long while to me, and I answered them in my innocent way; but always, if they asked me whether I resolved to be a gentlewoman, I answered Yes. At last one of them asked me what a gentlewoman was? That puzzled me much; but, however, I explained myself negatively, that it was one that did not go to service, to do housework. They were pleased to be familiar with me, and like my little prattle to them, which, it seems, was agreeable enough to them, and they gave me money too.

As for my money, I gave it all to my mistress-nurse, as I called her, and told her she should have all I got for myself when I was a gentlewoman, as well as now. By this and some other of my talk, my old tutoress began to understand me about what I meant by being a gentlewoman, and that I understood by it no more than to be able to get my bread by my own work; and at last she asked me whether it was not so.

I told her, yes, and insisted on it, that to do so was to be a gentlewoman; 'for,' says I, 'there is such a one,' naming a woman that mended lace and washed the ladies' laced-heads; 'she,' says I, 'is a gentlewoman, and they call her madam.'

"Poor child," says my good old nurse, 'you may soon be such a gentlewoman as that, for she is a person of ill fame, and has had two or three bastards.'

I did not understand anything of that; but I answered, 'I am sure they call her madam, and she does not go to service nor do housework'; and therefore I insisted that she was a gentlewoman, and I would be such a gentlewoman as that.

The ladies were told all this again, to be sure, and they made themselves merry with it, and every now and then the young ladies, Mr. Mayor's daughters, would come and see me, and ask where the little gentlewoman

was, which made me not a little proud of myself.

This held a great while, and I was often visited by these young ladies, and sometimes they brought others with them; so that I was known by it almost all over the town.

I was now about ten years old, and began to look a little womanish, for I was mighty grave and humble, very mannerly, and as I had often heard the ladies say I was pretty, and would be a very handsome woman, so you may be sure that hearing them say so made me not a little proud. However, that pride had no ill effect upon me yet; only, as they often gave me money, and I gave it to my old nurse, she, honest woman, was so just to me as to lay it all out again for me, and gave me head-dresses, and linen, and gloves, and ribbons, and I went very neat, and always clean; for that I would do, and if I had rags on, I would always be clean, or else I would dabble them in water myself; but, I say, my good nurse, when I had money given me, very honestly laid it out for me, and would always tell the ladies this or that was bought with their money; and this made them oftentimes give me more, till at last I was indeed called upon by the magistrates, as I understood it, to go out to service; but then I was come to be so good a workwoman myself, and the ladies were so kind to me, that it was plain I could maintain myself--that is to say, I could earn as much for my nurse as she was able by it to keep me--so she told them that if they would give her leave, she would keep the gentlewoman, as she called me, to be her assistant and teach the children,

which I was very well able to do; for I was very nimble at my work, and had a good hand with my needle, though I was yet very young.

But the kindness of the ladies of the town did not end here, for when they came to understand that I was no more maintained by the public allowance as before, they gave me money oftener than formerly; and as I grew up they brought me work to do for them, such as linen to make, and laces to mend, and heads to dress up, and not only paid me for doing them, but even taught me how to do them; so that now I was a gentlewoman indeed, as I understood that word, I not only found myself clothes and paid my nurse for my keeping, but got money in my pocket too beforehand.

The ladies also gave me clothes frequently of their own or their children's; some stockings, some petticoats, some gowns, some one thing, some another, and these my old woman managed for me like a mere mother, and kept them for me, obliged me to mend them, and turn them and twist them to the best advantage, for she was a rare housewife.

At last one of the ladies took so much fancy to me that she would have me home to her house, for a month, she said, to be among her daughters.

Now, though this was exceeding kind in her, yet, as my old good woman said to her, unless she resolved to keep me for good and all, she would do the little gentlewoman more harm than good. 'Well,' says the lady, 'that's true;

and therefore I'll only take her home for a week, then, that I may see how my daughters and she agree together, and how I like her temper, and then I'll tell you more; and in the meantime, if anybody comes to see her as they used to do, you may only tell them you have sent her out to my house.'

This was prudently managed enough, and I went to the lady's

house; but I was so pleased there with the young ladies, and they so pleased with me, that I had enough to do to come away, and they were as unwilling to part with me.

However, I did come away, and lived almost a year more with my honest old woman, and began now to be very helpful to her; for I was almost fourteen years old, was tall of my age, and looked a little womanish; but I had such a taste of genteel living at the lady's house that I was not so easy in my old quarters as I used to be, and I thought it was fine to be a gentlewoman indeed, for I had quite other notions of a gentlewoman now than I had before; and as I thought, I say, that it was fine to be a gentlewoman, so I loved to be among gentlewomen, and therefore I longed to be there again.

About the time that I was fourteen years and a quarter old, my good nurse, mother I rather to call her, fell sick and died. I was then in a sad condition indeed, for as there is no great bustle in putting an end to a poor body's family when once they are carried to the grave, so the poor good woman

being buried, the parish children she kept were immediately removed by the church-wardens; the school was at an end, and the children of it had no more to do but just stay at home till they were sent somewhere else; and as for what she left, her daughter, a married woman with six or seven children, came and swept it all away at once, and removing the goods, they had no more to say to me than to jest with me, and tell me that the little gentlewoman might set up for herself if she pleased.

I was frightened out of my wits almost, and knew not what to do, for I was, as it were, turned out of doors to the wide world, and that which was still worse, the old honest woman had two-and-

twenty shillings of mine in her hand, which was all the estate the little gentlewoman had in the world; and when I asked the daughter for it, she huffed me and laughed at me, and told me she had nothing to do with it.

It was true the good, poor woman had told her daughter of it, and that it lay in such a place, that it was the child's money, and had called once or twice for me to give it me, but I was, unhappily, out of the way somewhere or other, and when I came back she was past being in a condition to speak of it. However, the daughter was so honest afterwards as to give it me, though at first she used me cruelly about it.

Now was I a poor gentlewoman indeed, and I was just that very night to be

turned into the wide world; for the daughter removed all the goods, and I had not so much as a lodging to go to, or a bit of bread to eat. But it seems some of the neighbours, who had known my circumstances, took so much compassion of me as to acquaint the lady in whose family I had been a week, as I mentioned above; and immediately she sent her maid to fetch me away, and two of her daughters came with the maid though unsent. So I went with them, bag and baggage, and with a glad heart, you may be sure. The fright of my condition had made such an impression upon me, that I did not want now to be a gentlewoman, but was very willing to be a servant, and that any kind of servant they thought fit to have me be.