

Chapter 33

Every word this creature said was a cordial to me, and put new life and new spirit into my heart; my blood began to circulate immediately, and I was quite another body; I ate my victuals again, and grew better presently after it. She said a great deal more to the same purpose, and then, having pressed me to be free with her, and promised in the solemnest manner to be secret, she stopped a little, as if waiting to see what impression it made on me, and what I would say.

I was too sensible to the want I was in of such a woman, not to accept her offer; I told her my case was partly as she guessed, and partly not, for I was really married, and had a husband, though he was in such fine circumstances and so remote at that time, as that he could not appear publicly.

She took me short, and told me that was none of her business; all the ladies that came under her care were married women to her. 'Every woman,' she says, 'that is with child has a father for it,' and whether that father was a husband or no husband, was no business of hers; her business was to assist me in my present circumstances, whether I had a husband or no. 'For, madam,' says she, 'to have a husband that cannot appear, is to have no husband in the sense of the case; and, therefore, whether you are a wife or a mistress is all one to me.'

I found presently, that whether I was a whore or a wife, I was to pass for a whore here, so I let that go. I told her it was true, as she said, but that, however, if I must tell her my case, I must tell it her as it was; so I related it to her as short as I could, and I concluded it to her thus. 'I trouble you with all this, madam,' said I, 'not that, as you said before, it is much to the purpose in your affair, but this is to the purpose, namely, that I am not in any pain about being seen, or being public or concealed, for 'tis perfectly indifferent to me; but my difficulty is, that I have no acquaintance in this part of the nation.'

'I understand you, madam' says she; 'you have no security to bring to prevent the parish impertinences usual in such cases, and perhaps,' says she, 'do not know very well how to dispose of the child when it comes.' 'The last,' says I, 'is not so much my concern as the first.' 'Well, madam,' answered the midwife, 'dare you put yourself into my hands? I live in such a place; though I do not inquire after you, you may inquire after me. My name is B----; I live in such a street'--naming the street--'

at the sign of the Cradle. My profession is a midwife, and I have many ladies that come to my house to lie in. I have given security to the parish in general terms to secure them from any charge from whatsoever shall come into the world under my roof. I have but one question to ask in the whole affair, madam,' says she, 'and if that be answered you shall be entirely easy for all the rest.'

I presently understood what she meant, and told her, 'Madam, I believe I understand you. I thank God, though I want friends in this part of the world, I do not want money, so far as may be necessary, though I do not abound in that neither': this I added because I would not make her expect great things. 'Well, madam,' says she, 'that is the thing indeed, without which nothing can be done in these cases; and yet,' says she, 'you shall see that I will not impose upon you, or offer anything that is unkind to you, and if you desire it, you shall know everything beforehand, that you may suit yourself to the occasion, and be neither costly or sparing as you see fit.'

I told her she seemed to be so perfectly sensible of my condition, that I had nothing to ask of her but this, that as I had told her that I had money sufficient, but not a great quantity, she would order it so that I might be at as little superfluous charge as possible.

She replied that she would bring in an account of the expenses of it in two or three shapes, and like a bill of fare, I should choose as I pleased; and I desired her to do so.

The next day she brought it, and the copy of her three bills was a follows:--

1. For three months' lodging in her house, including my diet, at 10s. a week
.6#, 0s., 0d.

2. For a nurse for the month, and use of childbed linen
. . . .1#, 10s., 0d.

3. For a minister to christen the child, and to the godfathers and clerk
. . .1#, 10s., 0d.

4. For a supper at the christening if I had five friends at it
.1#, 0s., 0d.

For her fees as a midwife, and the taking off the trouble of the parish
. . 3#, 3s., 0d.

To her maid servant attending . 0#, 10s., 0d.

13#, 13s. 0d

This was the first bill; the second was the same terms:--

1. For three months' lodging and diet, etc., at 20s.

per week13#, 0s., 0d.

2. For a nurse for the month, and the use of linen and lace
. . . .2#, 10s., 0d.

3. For the minister to christen the child, etc., as above
. 2#, 0s., 0d.

4. For supper and for sweetmeats
. 3#, 3s., 0d.

For her fees as above 5#, 5s., 0d.

For a servant-maid 1#, 0s., 0d.

26#, 18s., 0d

This was the second-rate bill; the third, she said, was for a degree higher,
and when the father or friends appeared:--

1. For three months' lodging and diet, having two rooms and a garret for a
servant . . 30#, 0s., 0d.,

2. For a nurse for the month, and the finest suit of childbed linen
. 4#, 4s., 0d.

3. For the minister to christen the child, etc.
. . . 2#, 10s., 0d.

4. For a super, the gentlemen to send in the wine
. . 6#, 0s., 0d.

For my fees, etc. 10#, 10s., 0d.

The maid, besides their own maid, only
. 0#, 10s., 0d.

53#, 14s., 0d.

I looked upon all three bills, and smiled, and told her I did not see but that she was very reasonable in her demands, all things considered, and for that I did not doubt but her accommodations were good.

She told me I should be judge of that when I saw them. I told her I was sorry to tell her that I feared I must be her lowest- rated customer. 'And perhaps, madam,' said I, 'you will make me the less welcome upon that account.' 'No, not at all,' said she; 'for where I have one of the third sort I have two of the second, and four to one of the first, and I get as much by them in proportion as by any; but if you doubt my care of you, I will allow any friend you have to overlook and see if you are well waited on or no.'

Then she explained the particulars of her bill. 'In the first place, madam,' said she, 'I would have you observe that here is three months' keeping; you are but ten shillings a week; I undertake to say you will not complain of my table. I suppose,' says she, 'you do not live cheaper where you are now?' 'No, indeed,' said I, 'not so cheap, for I give six shillings per week for my chamber, and find my own diet as well as I can, which costs me a great deal more.'

'Then, madam,' says she, 'if the child should not live, or should be dead-born, as you know sometimes happens, then there is the minister's article saved; and if you have no friends to come to you, you may save the expense of a supper; so that take those articles out, madam,' says she, 'your lying in will not cost you above #5, 3s. in all more than your ordinary charge of living.'

This was the most reasonable thing that I ever heard of; so I smiled, and told

her I would come and be her customer; but I told her also, that as I had two months and more to do, I might perhaps be obliged to stay longer with her than three months, and desired to know if she would not be obliged to remove me before it was proper. No, she said; her house was large, and besides, she never put anybody to remove, that had lain in, till they were willing to go; and if she had more ladies offered, she was not so ill-beloved among her neighbours but she could provide accommodations for twenty, if there was occasion.

I found she was an eminent lady in her way; and, in short, I agreed to put myself into her hands, and promised her. She then talked of other things, looked about into my accommodations where I was, found fault with my wanting attendance and conveniences, and that I should not be used so at her house. I told her I was shy of speaking, for the woman of the house looked stranger, or at least I thought so, since I had been ill, because I was with child; and I was afraid she would put some affront or other upon me, supposing that I had been able to give but a slight account of myself.

'Oh dear,' said she, 'her ladyship is no stranger to these things; she has tried to entertain ladies in your condition several times, but she could not secure the parish; and besides, she is not such a nice lady as you take her to be; however, since you are a-going, you shall not meddle with her, but I'll see you are a little better looked after while you are here than I think you are, and it shall not cost you the more neither.'

I did not understand her at all; however, I thanked her, and so we parted. The next morning she sent me a chicken roasted and hot, and a pint bottle of sherry, and ordered the maid to tell me that she was to wait on me every day as long as I stayed there.

This was surprisingly good and kind, and I accepted it very willingly. At night she sent to me again, to know if I wanted anything, and how I did, and to order the maid to come to her in the morning with my dinner. The maid had orders to make me some chocolate in the morning before she came away, and did so, and at noon she brought me the sweetbread of a breast of veal, whole, and a dish of soup for my dinner; and after this manner she nursed me up at a distance, so that I was mightily well pleased, and quickly well, for indeed my dejections before were the principal part of my illness.