

Chapter 35

So I resolved to unbosom myself to her. I told her the history of my Lancashire marriage, and how both of us had been disappointed; how we came together, and how we parted; how he absolutely discharged me, as far as lay in him, free liberty to marry again, protesting that if he knew it he would never claim me, or disturb or expose me; that I thought I was free, but was dreadfully afraid to venture, for fear of the consequences that might follow in case of a discovery.

Then I told her what a good offer I had; showed her my friend's two last letters, inviting me to come to London, and let her see with what affection and earnestness they were written, but blotted out the name, and also the story about the disaster of his wife, only that she was dead.

She fell a-laughing at my scruples about marrying, and told me the other was no marriage, but a cheat on both sides; and that, as we were parted by mutual consent, the nature of the contract was destroyed, and the obligation was mutually discharged. She had arguments for this at the tip of her tongue; and, in short, reasoned me out of my reason; not but that it was too by the help of my own inclination.

But then came the great and main difficulty, and that was the child; this, she told me in so many words, must be removed, and that so as that it should never be possible for any one to discover it. I knew there was no

marrying without entirely concealing that I had had a child, for he would soon have discovered by the age of it that it was born, nay, and gotten too, since my parley with him, and that would have destroyed all the affair.

But it touched my heart so forcibly to think of parting entirely with the child, and, for aught I knew, of having it murdered, or starved by neglect and ill-usage (which was much the same), that I could not think of it without horror. I wish all those women who consent to the disposing their children out of the way, as it is called, for decency sake, would consider that 'tis only a contrived method for murder; that is to say, a-killing their children with safety.

It is manifest to all that understand anything of children, that we are born into the world helpless, and incapable either to supply our own wants or so much as make them known; and that without help we must perish; and this help requires not only an assisting hand, whether of the mother or somebody else, but there are two things necessary in that assisting hand, that is, care and skill; without both which, half the children that are born would die, nay, thought they were not to be denied food; and one half more of those that remained would be cripples or fools, lose their limbs, and perhaps their sense. I question not but that these are partly the reasons why affection was placed by nature in the hearts of mothers to their children; without which they would never be able to give themselves up, as 'tis necessary they should, to the care and waking pains needful to the

support of their children.

Since this care is needful to the life of children, to neglect them is to murder them; again, to give them up to be managed by those people who have none of that needful affection placed by nature in them, is to neglect them in the highest degree; nay, in some it goes farther, and is a neglect in order to their being lost; so that 'tis even an intentional murder, whether the child lives or dies.

All those things represented themselves to my view, and that is the blackest and most frightful form: and as I was very free with my governess, whom I had now learned to call mother, I represented to her all the dark thoughts which I had upon me about it, and told her what distress I was in. She seemed graver by much at this part than at the other; but as she was hardened in these things beyond all possibility of being touched with the religious part, and the scruples about the murder, so she was equally impenetrable in that part which related to affection. She asked me if she had not been careful and tender to me in my lying in, as if I had been her own child. I told her I owned she had. 'Well, my dear,' says she, 'and when you are gone, what are you to me? And what would it be to me if you were to be hanged? Do you think there are not women who, as it is their trade and they get their bread by it, value themselves upon their being as careful of children as their own mothers can be, and understand it rather better? Yes, yes, child,' says she, 'fear it not; how were we nursed ourselves? Are you

sure you was nursed up by your own mother? and yet you look fat and fair, child,' says the old beldam; and with that she stroked me over the face.

'Never be concerned, child,' says she, going on in her drolling way; 'I have no murderers about me; I employ the best and the honestest nurses that can be had, and have as few children miscarry under their hands as there would if they were all nursed by mothers; we want neither care nor skill.'

She touched me to the quick when she asked if I was sure that I was nursed by my own mother; on the contrary I was sure I was not; and I trembled, and looked pale at the very expression. 'Sure,' said I to myself, 'this creature cannot be a witch, or have any conversation with a spirit, that can inform her what was done with me before I was able to know it myself'; and I looked at her as if I had been frightened; but reflecting that it could not be possible for her to know anything about me, that disorder went off, and I began to be easy, but it was not presently.

She perceived the disorder I was in, but did not know the meaning of it; so she ran on in her wild talk upon the weakness of my supposing that children were murdered because they were not all nursed by the mother, and to persuade me that the children she disposed of were as well used as if the mothers had the nursing of them themselves.

'It may be true, mother,' says I, 'for aught I know, but my doubts are very strongly grounded indeed.' 'Come, then,' says she, 'let's hear some of them.'

'Why, first,' says I, 'you give a piece of money to these people to take the child off the parent's hands, and to take care of it as long as it lives. Now we know, mother,' said I, 'that those are poor people, and their gain consists in being quit of the charge as soon as they can; how can I doubt but that, as it is best for them to have the child die, they are not over solicitous about life?'

'This is all vapours and fancy,' says the old woman; 'I tell you their credit depends upon the child's life, and they are as careful as any mother of you all.'

'O mother,' says I, 'if I was but sure my little baby would be carefully looked to, and have justice done it, I should be happy indeed; but it is impossible I can be satisfied in that point unless I saw it, and to see it would be ruin and destruction to me, as now my case stands; so what to do I know not.'

'A fine story!' says the governess. 'You would see the child, and you would not see the child; you would be concealed and discovered both together. These are things impossible, my dear; so you must e'en do as other conscientious mothers have done before you, and be contented with things as they must be, though they are not as you wish them to be.'

I understood what she meant by conscientious mothers; she would have said conscientious whores, but she was not willing to disoblige me, for really in this case I was not a whore, because legally married, the force of former

marriage excepted.

However, let me be what I would, I was not come up to that pitch of hardness common to the profession; I mean, to be unnatural, and regardless of the safety of my child; and I preserved this honest affection so long, that I was upon the point of giving up my friend at the bank, who lay so hard at me to come to him and marry him, that, in short, there was hardly any room to deny him.

At last my old governess came to me, with her usual assurance. 'Come, my dear,' says she, 'I have found out a way how you shall be at a certainty that your child shall be used well, and yet the people that take care of it shall never know you, or who the mother of the child is.'

'Oh mother,' says I, 'if you can do so, you will engage me to you for ever.'
'Well,' says she, 'are you willing to be a some small annual expense, more than what we usually give to the people we contract with?' 'Ay,' says I, 'with all my heart, provided I may be concealed.'
'As to that,' says the governess, 'you shall be secure, for the nurse shall never so much as dare to inquire about you, and you shall once or twice a year go with me and see yourchild, and see how 'tis used, and be satisfied that it is in good hands, nobody knowing who you are.'

'Why,' said I, 'do you think, mother, that when I come to see my child, I shall

be able to conceal my being the mother of it? Do you think that possible?'

'Well, well,' says my governess, 'if you discover it, the nurse shall be never the wiser; for she shall be forbid to ask any questions about you, or to take any notice. If she offers it, she shall lose the money which you are suppose to give her, and the child shall be taken from her too.'

I was very well pleased with this. So the next week a countrywoman was brought from Hertford, or thereabouts, who was to take the child off our hands entirely for #10 in money. But if I would allow #5 a year more of her, she would be obliged to bring the child to my governess's house as often as we desired, or we should come down and look at it, and see how well she used it.

The woman was very wholesome-looking, a likely woman, a cottager's wife, but she had very good clothes and linen, and everything well about her; and with a heavy heart and many a tear, I let her have my child. I had been down at Hertford, and looked at her and at her dwelling, which I liked well enough; and I promised her great things if she would be kind to the child, so she knew at first word that I was the child's mother. But she seemed to be so much out of the way, and to have no room to inquire after me, that I thought I was safe enough. So, in short, I consented to let her have the child, and I gave her #10; that is to say, I gave it to my governess, who gave it the poor woman before my face, she agreeing never to return the child

back to me, or to claim anything more for its keeping or bringing up; only that I promised, if she took a great deal of care of it, I would give her something more as often as I came to see it; so that I was not bound to pay the #5, only that I promised my governess I would do it. And thus my great care was over, after a manner, which though it did not at all satisfy my mind, yet was the most convenient for me, as my affairs then stood, of any that could be thought of at that time.