

## Chapter 43

This is a direction not of the kindest sort to the fraternity, but 'tis certainly a key to the clue of a pickpocket's motions, and whoever can follow it will as certainly catch the thief as he will be sure to miss if he does not.

I had another adventure, which puts this matter out of doubt, and which may be an instruction for posterity in the case of a pickpocket. My good old governess, to give a short touch at her history, though she had left off the trade, was, as I may say, born a pickpocket, and, as I understood afterwards, had run through all the several degrees of that art, and yet had never been taken but once, when she was so grossly detected, that she was convicted and ordered to be transported; but being a woman of a rare tongue, and withal having money in her pocket, she found means, the ship putting into Ireland for provisions, to get on shore there, where she lived and practised her old trade for some years; when falling into another sort of bad company, she turned midwife and procuress, and played a hundred pranks there, which she gave me a little history of in confidence between us as we grew more intimate; and it was to this wicked creature that I owed all the art and dexterity I arrived to, in which there were few that ever went beyond me, or that practised so long without any misfortune.

It was after those adventures in Ireland, and when she was pretty well known in that country, that she left Dublin and came over to England, where, the time of her transportation being not expired, she left her former

trade, for fear of falling into bad hands again, for then she was sure to have gone to wreck. Here she set up the same trade she had followed in Ireland, in which she soon, by her admirable management and good tongue, arrived to the height which I have already described, and indeed began to be rich, though her trade fell off again afterwards, as I have hinted before.

I mentioned thus much of the history of this woman here, the better to account for the concern she had in the wicked life I was now leading, into all the particulars of which she led me, as it were, by the hand, and gave me such directions, and I so well followed them, that I grew the greatest artist of my time and worked myself out of every danger with such dexterity, that when several more of my comrades ran themselves into Newgate presently, and by that time they had been half a year at the trade, I had now practised upwards of five years, and the people at Newgate did not so much as know me; they had heard much of me indeed, and often expected me there, but I always got off, though many times in the extremest danger.

One of the greatest dangers I was now in, was that I was too well known among the trade, and some of them, whose hatred was owing rather to envy than any injury I had done them, began to be angry that I should always escape when they were always caught and hurried to Newgate. These were they that gave me the name of Moll Flanders; for it was no more of affinity with my real name or with any of the name I had ever gone by, than black is of kin to white, except that once, as before, I called myself Mrs. Flanders;

when I sheltered myself in the Mint; but that these rogues never knew, nor could I ever learn how they came to give me the name, or what the occasion of it was.

I was soon informed that some of these who were gotten fast into Newgate had vowed to impeach me; and as I knew that two or three of them were but too able to do it, I was under a great concern about it, and kept within doors for a good while. But my governess--whom I always made partner in my success, and who now played a sure game with me, for that she had a share of the gain and no share in the hazard--I say, my governess was something impatient of my leading such a useless, unprofitable life, as she called it; and she laid a new contrivance for my going abroad, and this was to dress me up in men's clothes, and so put me into a new kind of practice.

I was tall and personable, but a little too smooth-faced for a man; however, I seldom went abroad but in the night, it did well enough; but it was a long time before I could behave in my new clothes--I mean, as to my craft. It was impossible to be so nimble, so ready, so dexterous at these things in a dress so contrary to nature; and I did everything clumsily, so I had neither the success nor the easiness of escape that I had before, and I resolved to leave it off; but that resolution was confirmed soon after by the following accident.

As my governess disguised me like a man, so she joined me with a man, a young fellow that was nimble enough at his business, and for about three

weeks we did very well together. Our principal trade was watching shopkeepers' counters, and slipping off any kind of goods we could see carelessly laid anywhere, and we made several good bargains, as we called them, at this work. And as we kept always together, so we grew very intimate, yet he never knew that I was not a man,

nay, though I several times went home with him to his lodgings, according as our business directed, and four or five times lay with him all night. But our design lay another way, and it was absolutely necessary to me to conceal my sex from him, as appeared afterwards. The circumstances of our living, coming in late, and having such and such business to do as required that nobody should be trusted with the coming into our lodgings, were such as made it impossible to me to refuse lying with him, unless I would have owned my sex; and as it was, I effectually concealed myself. But his ill, and my good fortune, soon put an end to this life, which I must own I was sick of too, on several other accounts. We had made several prizes in this new way of business, but the last would be extraordinary. There was a shop in a certain street which had a warehouse behind it that looked into another street, the house making the corner of the turning.

Through the window of the warehouse we saw, lying on the counter or showboard, which was just before it, five pieces of silks, besides other stuffs, and though it was almost dark, yet the people, being busy in the fore-shop with customers, had not had time to shut up those windows, or else had

forgot it.

This the young fellow was so overjoyed with, that he could not restrain himself. It lay all within his reach he said, and he swore violently to me that he would have it, if he broke down the house for it. I dissuaded him a little, but saw there was no remedy; so he ran rashly upon it, slipped out a square of the sash window dexterously enough, and without noise, and got out four pieces of the silks, and came with them towards me, but was immediately pursued with a terrible clutter and noise. We were standing together indeed, but I had not taken any of the goods out of his hand, when I said to him hastily, 'You are undone, fly, for God's sake!' He ran like lightning, and I too, but the pursuit was hotter after him because he had the goods, than after me. He dropped two of the pieces, which stopped them a little, but the crowd increased and pursued us both. They took him soon after with the other two pieces upon him, and then the rest followed me. I ran for it and got into my governess's house whither some quick-eyed people followed me to warmly as to fix me there. They did not immediately knock, at the door, by which I got time to throw off my disguise and dress me in my own clothes; besides, when they came there, my governess, who had her tale ready, kept her door shut, and called out to them and told them there was no man come in there. The people affirmed there did a man come in there, and swore they would break open the door.

My governess, not at all surprised, spoke calmly to them, told them they

should very freely come and search her house, if they should bring a constable, and let in none but such as the constable would admit, for it was unreasonable to let in a whole crowd. This they could not refuse, though they were a crowd. So a constable was fetched immediately, and she very freely opened the door; the constable kept the door, and the men he appointed searched the house, my governess going with them from room to room. When she came to my room she called to me, and said aloud, 'Cousin, pray open the door; here's some gentlemen that must come and look into your room.'

I had a little girl with me, which was my governess's grandchild, as she called her; and I bade her open the door, and there sat I at work with a great litter of things about me, as if I had been at work all day, being myself quite undressed, with only night-clothes on my head, and a loose morning-gown wrapped about me. My governess made a kind of excuse for their disturbing me, telling me partly the occasion of it, and that she had no remedy but to open the doors to them, and let them satisfy themselves, for all she could say to them would not satisfy them. I sat still, and bid them search the room if they pleased, for if there was anybody in the house, I was sure they were not in my room; and as for the rest of the house, I had nothing to say to that, I did not understand what they looked for.

Everything looked so innocent and so honest about me, that they treated me civilly than I expected, but it was not till they had searched the room to a

nicety, even under the bed, in the bed, and everywhere else where it was possible anything could be hid. When they had done this, and could find nothing, they asked my pardon for troubling me, and went down.

When they had thus searched the house from bottom to top, and then top to bottom, and could find nothing, they appeased the mob pretty well; but they carried my governess before the justice. Two men swore that they saw the man whom they pursued go into her house. My governess rattled and made a great noise that her house should be insulted, and that she should be used thus for nothing; that if a man did come in, he might go out again presently for aught she knew, for she was ready to make oath that no man had been within her doors all that day as she knew of (and that was very true indeed); that is might be indeed that as she was abovestairs, any fellow in a fright might find the door open and run in for shelter when he was pursued, but that she knew nothing of it; and if it had been so, he certainly went out again, perhaps at the other door, for she had another door into an alley, and so had made his escape and cheated them all.