

Chapter 51

He treated us handsomely indeed, and paid the money cheerfully enough; so that it cost him #200 in all, or rather more. At our last meeting, when all was agreed, the case of the journeyman came up, and the mercer begged very hard for him; told me he was a man that had kept a shop of his own, and been in good business, had a wife, and several children, and was very poor; that he had nothing to make satisfaction with, but he should come to beg my pardon on his knees, if I desired it, as openly as I pleased. I had no spleen at the saucy rogue, nor were his submissions anything to me, since there was nothing to be got by him, so I thought it was as good to throw that in generously as not; so I told him I did not desire the ruin of any man, and therefore at his request I would forgive the wretch; it was below me to seek any revenge.

When we were at supper he brought the poor fellow in to make acknowledgment, which he would have done with as much mean humility as his offence was with insulting haughtiness and pride, in which he was an instance of a complete baseness of spirit, impious, cruel, and relentless when uppermost and in prosperity, abject and low-spirited when down in affliction. However, I abated his cringes, told him I forgave him, and desired he might withdraw, as if I did not care for the sight of him, though I had forgiven him.

I was now in good circumstances indeed, if I could have known my time for

leaving off, and my governess often said I was the richest of the trade in England; and so I believe I was, for I had #700 by me in money, besides clothes, rings, some plate, and two gold watches, and all of them stolen, for I had innumerable jobs besides these I have mentioned. Oh! had I even now had the grace of repentance, I had still leisure to have looked back upon my follies, and have made some reparation; but the satisfaction I was to make for the public mischiefs I had done was yet left behind; and I could not forbear going abroad again, as I called it now, than any more I could when my extremity really drove me out for bread.

It was not long after the affair with the mercer was made up, that I went out in an equipage quite different from any I had ever appeared in before. I dressed myself like a beggar woman, in the coarsest and most despicable rags I could get, and I walked about peering and peeping into every door and window I came near; and indeed I was in such a plight now that I knew as ill how to behave in as ever I did in any. I naturally abhorred dirt and rags; I had been bred up tight and cleanly, and could be no other, whatever condition I was in; so that this was the most uneasy disguise to me that ever I put on. I said presently to myself that this would not do, for this was a dress that everybody was shy and afraid of; and I thought everybody looked at me, as if they were afraid I should come near them, lest I should take something from them, or afraid to come near me, lest they should get something from me. I wandered about all the evening the first time I went out, and made nothing of it, but came home again wet, draggled, and tired.

However, I went out again the next night, and then I met with a little adventure, which had like to have cost me dear. As I was standing near a tavern door, there comes a gentleman on horseback, and lights at the door, and wanting to go into the tavern, he calls one of the drawers to hold his horse. He stayed pretty long in the tavern, and the drawer heard his master call, and thought he would be angry with him. Seeing me stand by him, he called to me, 'Here, woman,' says he, 'hold this horse a while, till I go in; if the gentleman comes, he'll give you something.' 'Yes,' says I, and takes the horse, and walks off with him very soberly, and carried him to my governess.

This had been a booty to those that had understood it; but never was poor thief more at a loss to know what to do with anything that was stolen; for when I came home, my governess was quite confounded, and what to do with the creature, we neither of us knew. To send him to a stable was doing nothing, for it was certain that public notice would be given in the Gazette, and the horse described, so that we durst not go to fetch it again.

All the remedy we had for this unlucky adventure was to go and set up the horse at an inn, and send a note by a porter to the tavern, that the gentleman's horse that was lost such a time was left at such an inn, and that he might be had there; that the poor woman that held him, having led him about the street, not being able to lead him back again, had left him there. We might have waited till the owner had published and offered a

reward, but we did not care to venture the receiving the reward.

So this was a robbery and no robbery, for little was lost by it, and nothing was got by it, and I was quite sick of going out in a beggar's dress; it did not answer at all, and besides, I thought it was ominous and threatening.

While I was in this disguise, I fell in with a parcel of folks of a worse kind than any I ever sorted with, and I saw a little into their ways too. These were coiners of money, and they made some very good offers to me, as to profit; but the part they would have had me have embarked in was the most dangerous part. I mean that of the very working the die, as they call it, which, had I been taken, had been certain death, and that at a stake--I say, to be burnt to death at a stake; so that though I was to appearance but a beggar, and they promised mountains of gold and silver to me to engage, yet it would not do. It is true, if I had been really a beggar, or had been desperate as when I began, I might perhaps have closed with it; for what care they to die that can't tell how to live? But at present this was not my condition, at least I was for no such terrible risks as those; besides, the very thoughts of being burnt at a stake struck terror into my very soul, chilled my blood, and gave me the vapours to such a degree, as I could not think of it without trembling.

This put an end to my disguise too, for as I did not like the proposal, so I did not tell them so, but seemed to relish it, and promised to meet again. But I

durst see them no more; for if I had seen them, and not complied, though I had declined it with the greatest assurance of secrecy in the world, they would have gone near to have murdered me, to make sure work, and make themselves easy, as they call it. What kind of easiness that is, they may best judge that understand how easy men are that can murder people to prevent danger.

This and horse-stealing were things quite out of my way, and I might easily resolve I would have to more to say to them; my business seemed to lie another way, and though it had hazard enough in it too, yet it was more suitable to me, and what had more of art in it, and more room to escape, and more chances for a-coming off if a surprise should happen.

I had several proposals made also to me about that time, to come into a gang of house-breakers; but that was a thing I had no mind to venture at neither, any more than I had at the coining trade. I offered to go along with two men and a woman, that made it their business to get into houses by stratagem, and with them I was willing enough to venture. But there were three of them already, and they did not care to part, nor I to have too many in a gang, so I did not close with them, but declined them, and they paid dear for their next attempt.

But at length I met with a woman that had often told me what adventures she had made, and with success, at the waterside, and I closed with her,

and we drove on our business pretty well. One day we came among some Dutch people at St. Catherine's, where we went on pretence to buy goods that were privately got on shore. I was two or three times in a house where we saw a good quantity of prohibited goods, and my companion once brought away three pieces of Dutch black silk that turned to good account, and I had my share of it; but in all the journeys I made by myself, I could not get an opportunity to do anything, so I laid it aside, for I had been so often, that they began to suspect something, and were so shy, that I saw nothing was to be done.

This baulked me a little, and I resolved to push at something or other, for I was not used to come back so often without purchase; so the next day I dressed myself up fine, and took a walk to the other end of the town. I passed through the Exchange in the Strand, but had no notion of finding anything to do there, when on a sudden I saw a great cluttering in the place, and all the people, shopkeepers as well as others, standing up and staring; and what should it be but some great duchess come into the Exchange, and they said the queen was coming. I set myself close up to a shop-side with my back to the counter, as if to let the crowd pass by, when keeping my eye upon a parcel of lace which the shopkeeper was showing to some ladies that stood by me, the shopkeeper and her maid were so taken up with looking to see who was coming, and what shop they would go to, that I found means to slip a paper of lace into my pocket and come clear off with it; so the lady-milliner paid dear enough for her gaping after the queen.

I went off from the shop, as if driven along by the throng, and mingling myself with the crowd, went out at the other door of the Exchange, and so got away before they missed their lace; and because I would not be followed, I called a coach and shut myself up in it. I had scarce shut the coach doors up, but I saw the milliner's maid and five or six more come running out into the street, and crying out as if they were frightened. They did not cry 'Stop thief!' because nobody ran away, but I could hear the word 'robbed,' and 'lace,' two or three times, and saw the wench wringing her hands, and run staring to and again, like one scared. The coachman that had taken me up was getting up into the box, but was not quite up, so that the horse had not begun to move; so that I was terrible uneasy, and I took the packet of lace and laid it ready to have dropped it out at the flap of the coach, which opens before, just behind the coachman; but to my great satisfaction, in less than a minute the coach began to move, that is to say, as soon as the coachman had got up and spoken to his horses; so he drove away without any interruption, and I brought off my purchase, which was worth near #20.