

## Chapter 57

I sunk down when they brought me news of it, and after I came to myself again, I thought I should have died with the weight of it. My governess acted a true mother to me; she pitied me, she cried with me, and for me, but she could not help me; and to add to the terror of it, 'twas the discourse all over the house that I should die for it. I could hear them talk it among themselves very often, and see them shake their heads and say they were sorry for it, and the like, as is usual in the place. But still nobody came to tell me their thoughts, till at last one of the keepers came to me privately, and said with a sigh, 'Well, Mrs. Flanders, you will be tried on Friday' (this was but a Wednesday); 'what do you intend to do?' I turned as white as a clout, and said, 'God knows what I shall do; for my part, I know not what to do.' 'Why,' says he, 'I won't flatter you, I would have you prepare for death, for I doubt you will be cast; and as they say you are an old offender, I doubt you will find but little mercy. They say,' added he, 'your case is very plain, and that the witnesses swear so home against you, there will be no standing it.'

This was a stab into the very vitals of one under such a burthen

as I was oppressed with before, and I could not speak to him a word, good or bad, for a great while; but at last I burst out into tears, and said to him, 'Lord! Mr.----, what must I do?' 'Do!' says he, 'send for the ordinary; send for a minister and talk with him; for, indeed, Mrs. Flanders, unless you have

very good friends, you are no woman for this world.'

This was plain dealing indeed, but it was very harsh to me, at least I thought it so. He left me in the greatest confusion imaginable, and all that night I lay awake. And now I began to say my prayers, which I had scarce done before since my last husband's death, or from a little while after. And truly I may well call it saying my prayers, for I was in such a confusion, and had such horror upon my mind, that though I cried, and repeated several times the ordinary expression of 'Lord, have mercy upon me!' I never brought myself to any sense of my being a miserable sinner, as indeed I was, and of confessing my sins to God, and begging pardon for the sake of Jesus Christ. I was overwhelmed with the sense of my condition, being tried for my life, and being sure to be condemned, and then I was as sure to be executed, and on this account I cried out all night, 'Lord, what will become of me? Lord! what shall I do? Lord! I shall be hanged! Lord, have mercy upon me!' and the like.

My poor afflicted governess was now as much concerned as I, and a great deal more truly penitent, though she had no prospect of being brought to trial and sentence. Not but that she deserved it as much as I, and so she said herself; but she had not done anything herself for many years, other than receiving what I and others stole, and encouraging us to steal it. But she cried, and took on like a distracted body, wringing her hands, and crying out that she was undone, that she believed there was a curse from

heaven upon her, that she should be damned, that she had been the destruction of all her friends, that she had brought such a one, and such a one, and such a one to the gallows; and there she reckoned up ten or eleven people, some of which I have given account of, that came to untimely ends; and that now she was the occasion of my ruin, for she had persuaded me to go on, when I would have left off. I interrupted her there. 'No, mother, no,' said I, 'don't speak of that, for you would have had me left off when I got the mercer's money again, and when I came home from Harwich, and I would not hearken to you; therefore you have not been to blame; it is I only have ruined myself, I have brought myself to this misery'; and thus we spent many hours together.

Well, there was no remedy; the prosecution went on, and on the Thursday I was carried down to the sessions-house, where I was arraigned, as they called it, and the next day I was appointed to be tried. At the arraignment I pleaded 'Not guilty,' and well I might, for I was indicted for felony and burglary; that is, for feloniously stealing two pieces of brocaded silk, value #46, the goods of Anthony Johnson, and for breaking open his doors; whereas I knew very well they could not pretend to prove I had broken up the doors, or so much as lifted up a latch.

On the Friday I was brought to my trial. I had exhausted my spirits with crying for two or three days before, so that I slept better the Thursday night than I expected, and had more courage for my trial than indeed I thought

possible for me to have.

When the trial began, the indictment was read, I would have spoke, but they told me the witnesses must be heard first, and then I should have time to be heard. The witnesses were the two wenches, a couple of hard-mouthed jades indeed, for though the thing was truth in the main, yet they aggravated it to the utmost extremity, and swore I had the goods wholly in my possession, that I had hid them among my clothes, that I was going off with them, that I had one foot over the threshold when they discovered themselves, and then I put t' other over, so that I was quite out of the house in the street with the goods before they took hold of me, and then they seized me, and brought me back again, and they took the goods upon me. The fact in general was all true, but I believe, and insisted upon it, that they stopped me before I had set my foot clear of the threshold of the house. But that did not argue much, for certain it was that I had taken the goods, and I was bringing them away, if I had not been taken.

But I pleaded that I had stole nothing, they had lost nothing,

that the door was open, and I went in, seeing the goods lie

there, and with design to buy. If, seeing nobody in the house, I had taken any of them up in my hand it could not be concluded that I intended to steal them, for that I never carried them

farther than the door to look on them with the better light.

The Court would not allow that by any means, and made a kind of a jest of my intending to buy the goods, that being no shop for the selling of anything, and as to carrying them to the door to look at them, the maids made their impudent mocks upon that, and spent their wit upon it very much; told the Court I had looked at them sufficiently, and approved them very well, for I had packed them up under my clothes, and was a-going with them.

In short, I was found guilty of felony, but acquitted of the burglary, which was but small comfort to me, the first bringing me to a sentence of death, and the last would have done no more. The next day I was carried down to receive the dreadful sentence, and when they came to ask me what I had to say why sentence should not pass, I stood mute a while, but somebody that stood behind me prompted me aloud to speak to the judges, for that they could represent things favourably for me. This encouraged me to speak, and I told them I had nothing to say to stop the sentence, but that I had much to say to bespeak the mercy of the Court; that I hoped they would allow something in such a case for the circumstances of it; that I had broken no doors, had carried nothing off; that nobody had lost anything; that the person whose goods they were was pleased to say he desired mercy might be shown (which indeed he very honestly did); that, at the worst, it was the first

offence, and that I had never been before any court of justice before; and, in a word, I spoke with more courage than I thought I could have done, and in such a moving tone, and though with tears, yet not so many tears as to obstruct my speech, that I could see it moved others to tears that heard me.

The judges sat grave and mute, gave me an easy hearing, and time to say all that I would, but, saying neither Yes nor No to it, pronounced the sentence of death upon me, a sentence that was to me like death itself, which, after it was read, confounded me. I had no more spirit left in me, I had no tongue to speak, or eyes to look up either to God or man.

My poor governess was utterly disconsolate, and she that was my comforter before, wanted comfort now herself; and sometimes mourning, sometimes raging, was as much out of herself, as to all outward appearance, as any mad woman in Bedlam. Nor was she only disconsolate as to me, but she was struck with horror at the sense of her own wicked life, and began to look back upon it with a taste quite different from mine, for she was penitent to the highest degree for her sins, as well as sorrowful for the misfortune. She sent for a minister, too, a serious, pious, good man, and applied herself with such earnestness, by his assistance, to the work of a sincere repentance, that I believe, and so did the minister too, that she was a true penitent; and, which is still more, she was not only so for the occasion, and at that juncture, but she continued so, as I was informed, to the day of her death.

It is rather to be thought of than expressed what was now my condition. I had nothing before me but present death; and as I had no friends to assist me, or to stir for me, I expected nothing but to find my name in the dead warrant, which was to come down for the execution, the Friday afterwards, of five more and myself.

In the meantime my poor distressed governess sent me a minister, who at her request first, and at my own afterwards, came to visit me. He exhorted me seriously to repent of all my sins, and to dally no longer with my soul; not flattering myself with hopes of life, which, he said, he was informed there was no room to expect, but unfeignedly to look up to God with my whole soul, and to cry for pardon in the name of Jesus Christ. He backed his discourses with proper quotations of Scripture, encouraging the greatest sinner to repent, and turn from their evil way, and when he had done, he kneeled down and prayed with me.

It was now that, for the first time, I felt any real signs of repentance. I now began to look back upon my past life with abhorrence, and having a kind of view into the other side of time, and things of life, as I believe they do with everybody at such a time, began to look with a different aspect, and quite another shape, than they did before. The greatest and best things, the views of felicity, the joy, the griefs of life, were quite other things; and I had nothing in my thoughts but what was so infinitely superior to what I had

known in life, that it appeared to me to be the greatest stupidity in nature to lay any weight upon anything, though the most valuable in this world.