

The Chambermaid's Choice



Maria had hoped that her second marriage would make for a better future. Though born the daughter of a cook, she had dreams of being in high society. But at sixteen, she fell madly in love with a nobleman's valet. When they married, she consigned herself to be dismissed as one of the serving class. After Maria gave birth to a son, her valet husband died. At age eighteen she was a grieving widow and a single mother. Not long after, her little boy died too.

Then she got a second chance at love. But when her young musician took her home to meet his prominent family, they looked down their haughty noses at this girl from the serving class. His father would ever after refer to her as "the chambermaid." Her husband's family would always view her as an inferior interloper. It was no wonder that Maria's second marriage soon soured.

She later referred to her life as "a chain of sorrows." The couple's first child died six days after he was born. The "chambermaid" would bury five of her eight children. But her worst heartache was watching the decline of a husband who enjoyed the tavern more than practicing his music. If he

wasn't in a drunken stupor, he was with other women. Then the beatings began. After he took advantage of her in one of his brutal rages, Maria discovered she was pregnant. She determined that she wasn't about to bring a child conceived by rape into her miserable world.

She found her way to a woman who traded in concoctions that induced miscarriage. Three drops of that deadly liquid would kill her baby. Any more might end her life too. She dumped it all into a cup of tea. But before she was able to drink it, the cup was accidentally knocked off the table. At first she was hysterical. Then she resigned herself to the fact that God must have a purpose for her unwanted child.

He turned out to be a strange little boy, often reclusive and unresponsive. But he did have his family's love for music. When a local teacher took him on as a piano student, no one imagined that she was gaining a prodigy. Maria was forty years old when Wolfgang Mozart allegedly declared that her son was destined for greatness. Two months later, the teenage prodigy rushed home to be at her deathbed. She told her son that giving birth to him was the best thing she ever did in her unhappy life.

We should all be grateful that Maria van Beethoven did not abort little Ludwig, a child of rape who would grow up to write the world's greatest symphonies. Maybe you, too, were unplanned or unwanted. But God conceived you as his masterpiece. Perhaps you are facing a tough choice or

difficult circumstances. Answers never come easily in times like these. Hopefully Maria's story and that of her unwanted child, Ludwig van Beethoven, might give you courage to do this:

Trust God. He knows who belongs in your life and who doesn't.



I was thrust into your arms at my birth. You have
been my God from the moment I was born.

PSALM 22:10

The Hand That Rocks the Cradle



Sukey was a feminist long before it was fashionable. In an age when girls were raised to please husbands and birth babies, she had bigger dreams. Her doting daddy treated her more like a son than a daughter. While other girls were learning how to cook and sew, he taught her Latin and Greek. When ladies retired to the parlor after dinner, she joined the men in the library.

Because she was allowed to soar intellectually, Sukey set her heart on publishing poetry a century before Jane Austen broke the gender barrier, and she fantasized about being the first woman admitted to Oxford. But her father clipped her wings by forcing her to marry Samuel, a mediocre preacher. She would spend her marriage in rural parishes with country bumpkins.

Their first parish was a dreary village with a mud cottage manse. She gave birth to seven children, only to watch three of them die. A careless midwife maimed the seventh for life. After six difficult pregnancies in eight years, Sukey almost died of exhaustion.

Things looked up when they were called to a richer parish. But Samuel managed money as badly as he preached. When their eighth child was born, he took to the road to earn extra income. He returned home enough times to sire five more children, who all died in infancy. After their manse burned down, Samuel abandoned his family. When he finally returned, Sukey birthed five more babies in rapid succession. He left it to her to educate their passel of kids. Both sons and daughters got as fine an education as the young scholars at Oxford.

When he was sixty-five, Samuel suffered a stroke. Sukey cared for him for seven years while they survived on charity. The feminist who dreamed of publishing poetry spent her life in obscurity. She gave birth to nineteen children, burying eight of them in infancy. Only seven were still alive when she died. You might be tempted to weep for her if you didn't know the rest of her story.

Her daddy nicknamed her Sukey. But history remembers her by her given name, Susanna, the wife of the Reverend Samuel Wesley. One of her sons, John, sparked a great revival in colonial America that birthed the Revolutionary War. Along the way, he founded the Methodist Church. Another son, Charles, penned more than nine thousand poems and hymns. Samuel Jr. became one of England's greatest scholars. Hetty became the poet her mother was never allowed to be. Two other daughters were prominent educators. All of

Sukey's dreams, and so much more, were realized through the children she nurtured and inspired. One might argue that there would be no United States had there been no Susanna Wesley. Certainly, millions owe their spiritual lives to that woman.

Do you see your story in Sukey's disappointments? Have your dreams been dashed or your hopes postponed? Maybe life has deposited you at a wide spot on the road to nowhere. Is it possible that God has placed you here for bigger purposes than you can dare imagine? Take heart from Susanna Wesley's story:

God's gifts put our best dreams to shame.



“I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

JEREMIAH 29:11, NIV