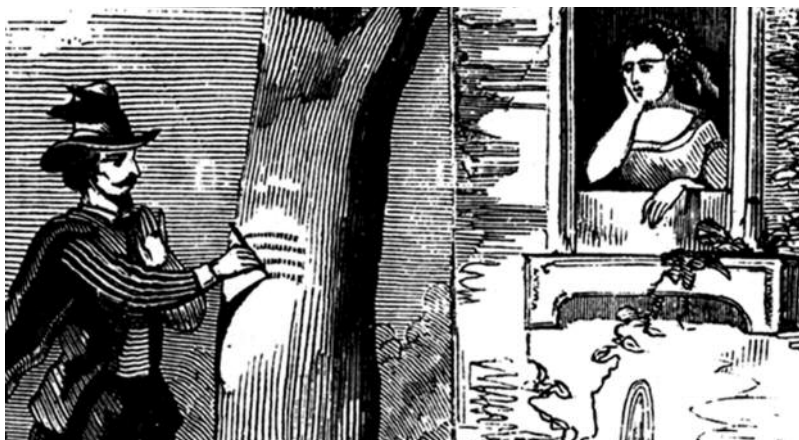


The servant Juliana

and the inn on Vidre Street

Around 1427, the young Juliana was seventeen and lived in Vidre Street, near the Capuchin convent. She was the illegitimate daughter of Pere Miró and a freed slave who used her as a servant. Juliana lived in an innkeeper's house, where, as well as being a servant, she helped with the business. The building consisted of a ground floor with two entrances. One was to enter the home and the other the business, which was well-known and busy.

The young minion was courted by a nineteen-year-old Barcelona merchant, Mateu Solivella. He had wanted to get closer to the girl for several months and had given her some precious silk to make a sash. She, with great care, as the boy liked



her, made him a sash which he made his favourite accessory. Mateu tried hard to make Juliana love him, he wanted to convince her that his intentions were good and aimed to make her believe in what he said. Sometimes, with a friend who played the lute, he went at the break of dawn to serenade her and swore that he would have her for his wife. To prove that his promise was a serious one he gave her a silver ring with a chain and a pearl. She was fond of Mateu, but she was not completely sure of him. In spite of all the affection, she wanted a firm marriage commitment.

The first day of August, Mateu convinced Juliana to meet him at night in order to run away. Although she was not completely convinced, she was afraid of losing the loving boy and finally gave in to his plans. Unfortunately, somebody found out about the plan and reported it.

The following morning they were found together in Mateu's house. The authorities arrested them and they had to stand trial. Juliana realised that the gallant young man was not prepared to accept any responsibility and she was accused of having gone to the boy's house of her own accord, blinded by desire.

During the trial —documented in the diocese archive of Barcelona and in the city's historic archives—, presided by a judge and a priest, Juliana explained that she had fallen into a trap based on the young merchant's promises, who had been following her for quite a while. When she left home she always came across him in whatever street or square she went to. He would follow her and make passes at her. At the beginning, she would pay no attention and continue on her way, but his insistence paid off and she fell in love with him. She also explained how the whole situation had evolved: one night a boy had knocked on the inn door, which was locked on the inside. Juliana, who was there, heard and moved closer to the door where Mateu suggested they run away. The plan simply involved running away together, but Juliana was not prepared to flee without first getting married. Mateu agreed, but asked her to wait for her brother, who was away, to come back for the wedding. The girl, although she knew that she was not doing the right thing, agreed so as not to lose her loved one and, without even changing, left. They locked



the door carefully with some thick cord and they made their getaway. Mateu was barefoot to avoid making noise and carrying his sword in case there were problems. When they were far enough away, they started running through the dark, narrow streets until they got to Jonqueres Street, right on the edge of the city where he lived.

After Juliana's long declaration, it was Mateu's turn, who denied the story and gave his own version, according to which it was her who had suddenly turned up at his house and that her escape story was simply aimed at putting the blame on him.

Poor Juliana, both frightened and saddened by such disloyalty, repeated her declaration time and time again, to the point that she even described the entire itinerary in full detail. On leaving the inn she had headed for Call Street and afterwards, along Banys Nous and Palla streets, until she got to Nova Square, near the cathedral, where they heard a noise. Mateu took out his sword and stopped, protected by the darkness, until there was silence again. They then continued on their way along the streets of Capellans, Sagristans, Forn d'en Ripoll and Magdalenes, until they got to Jonqueres. Once in the young merchant's house, they

surrendered to carnal pleasures, but after several hours the girl regretted it and wanted to get back to the inn. Mateu went with her but when they got there they found the door ajar. The rope had disappeared and the window was wide open, obvious signs that their escape had been discovered. Juliana felt terrified of whatever the punishment might be and refused to go in. Their only option was to go back to the boy's house, which is where the authorities found them the following morning.

Mateu, however, continued to deny the girl's version of events and simply insisted that he had not accompanied her anywhere, and that the initiative was all hers.

The disconsolate Juliana was lucky to have some vital support. Her natural father, the trader Pere Simó, defended her behaviour, protected her and welcomed her into his home during the trial. The statements of several customers of the inn also confirmed that Mateu never left her alone.

Given the evidence, the tribunal decided to believe Juliana. In those days, a marriage commitment was a sacred one, and more so if there had been an engagement gift such as a ring, which several statements had confirmed. Mateu was condemned to fulfil his promise of marriage, or double the dowry which Juliana was entitled to, in accordance with her humble background.

The most surprising aspect of the case is that the court decided in favour of the illegitimate daughter of a former slave, rather than the version of a man of good social status. All was explained three years later: the innkeeper had had a high position in the court of Pere el Cerimoniós and his establishment was both well-known and highly rated by a prestigious clientele, which included servants of the crown, merchants and notaries who testified in the girl's favour. Furthermore, his wife, Antònia, was Pere Miró's daughter and therefore Juliana's sister, while the innkeeper was really her brother-in-law. Personal and family relationships had acted in the girl's favour, and had thankfully been able to save her honour.

Nevertheless, Mateu Solivella never married Juliana, but did so with a well-placed woman with whom he had a son and a daughter. In 1452, just before he died at the age forty four, Mateu

Barcelona women

drew up a will which left a lot of money to a natural son, Joan Solivella. In the document there was no mention of the boy's mother, who may have been Juliana or any other careless young girl who had fallen victim to the seductive merchant's dirty tricks.