

Our Mutual Friend Vol.II

By

Charles Dickens

*Free*editorial 

Our Mutual Friend

Chapter 1

OF AN EDUCATIONAL CHARACTER

The school at which young Charley Hexam had first learned from a book the streets being, for pupils of his degree, the great Preparatory Establishment in which very much that is never unlearned is learned without and before book was a miserable loft in an unsavoury yard. Its atmosphere was oppressive and disagreeable; it was crowded, noisy, and confusing; half the pupils dropped asleep, or fell into a state of waking stupefaction; the other half kept them in either condition by maintaining a monotonous droning noise, as if they were performing, out of time and tune, on a ruder sort of bagpipe. The teachers, animated solely by good intentions, had no idea of execution, and a lamentable jumble was the upshot of their kind endeavours.

It was a school for all ages, and for both sexes. The latter were kept apart, and

the former were partitioned off into square assortments. But, all the place was pervaded by a grimly ludicrous pretence that every pupil was childish and innocent. This pretence, much favoured by the ladyvisitors, led to the ghastliest absurdities. Young women old in the vices of the commonest and worst life, were expected to profess themselves enthralled by the good child's book, the Adventures of Little Margery, who resided in the village cottage by the mill; severely reprov'd and morally squashed the miller, when she was five and he was fifty; divided her porridge with singing birds; denied herself a new nankeen bonnet, on the ground that the turnips did not wear nankeen bonnets, neither did the sheep who ate them; who plaited straw and delivered the dreariest orations to all comers, at all sorts of unseasonable times. So, unwieldy young dredgers and hulking mudlarks were referred to the experiences of Thomas Twopence, who, having resolved not to rob (under circumstances of uncommon atrocity) his particular friend and benefactor, of eighteenpence, presently came into supernatural possession of three and sixpence, and lived a shining light ever afterwards. (Note, that the benefactor came to no good.) Several swaggering sinners had written their own biographies in the same strain; it always appearing from the lessons of those very boastful persons, that you were to do good, not because it WAS good, but because you were to make a good thing of it. Contrariwise, the adult pupils were taught to read (if they could learn) out of the New Testament; and by dint of stumbling over the syllables and keeping their bewildered eyes on the particular syllables coming round to their turn, were as absolutely ignorant of the sublime history, as if they had never seen or heard of it. An exceedingly and confoundingly perplexing jumble of a school, in fact, where black spirits and grey, red spirits and white, jumbled jumbled jumbled jumbled, jumbled every night. And particularly every Sunday night. For then, an inclined plane of unfortunate infants would be handed over to the prosiest and worst of all the teachers with good intentions, whom nobody older would endure. Who, taking his stand on the floor before them as chief executioner, would be attended by a conventional volunteer boy as executioner's assistant. When and where it first became the conventional system that a weary or inattentive infant in a class must have its face smoothed downward with a hot hand, or when and where the conventional volunteer boy first beheld such system in operation, and became inflamed with a sacred zeal to administer it, matters not. It was the function of the chief executioner to hold forth, and it was the function of the acolyte to dart at sleeping infants, yawning infants, restless infants, whimpering infants, and smooth their wretched faces; sometimes with one hand, as if he were anointing them for a whisker; sometimes with both hands, applied after the fashion of blinkers. And so the jumble would be in action in this department for a mortal hour; the exponent drawling on to My Dearert Childerrener, let us say, for example, about the beautiful coming to the

Sepulchre; and repeating the word Sepulchre (commonly used among infants) five hundred times, and never once hinting what it meant; the conventional boy smoothing away right and left, as an infallible commentary; the whole hotbed of flushed and exhausted infants exchanging measles, rashes, whoopingcough, fever, and stomach disorders, as if they were assembled in High Market for the purpose.

Even in this temple of good intentions, an exceptionally sharp boy exceptionally determined to learn, could learn something, and, having learned it, could impart it much better than the teachers; as being more knowing than they, and not at the disadvantage in which they stood towards the shrewder pupils. In this way it had come about that Charley Hexam had risen in the jumble, taught in the jumble, and been received from the jumble into a better school.

'So you want to go and see your sister, Hexam?'

'If you please, Mr Headstone.'

'I have half a mind to go with you. Where does your sister live?'

'Why, she is not settled yet, Mr Headstone. I'd rather you didn't see her till she is settled, if it was all the same to you.'

'Look here, Hexam.' Mr Bradley Headstone, highly certificated stipendiary schoolmaster, drew his right forefinger through one of the buttonholes of the boy's coat, and looked at it attentively. 'I hope your sister may be good company for you?'

'Why do you doubt it, Mr Headstone?'

'I did not say I doubted it.'

'No, sir; you didn't say so.'

Bradley Headstone looked at his finger again, took it out of the buttonhole and looked at it closer, bit the side of it and looked at it again.

'You see, Hexam, you will be one of us. In good time you are sure to pass a creditable examination and become one of us. Then the question is'

The boy waited so long for the question, while the schoolmaster looked at a new side of his finger, and bit it, and looked at it again, that at length the boy repeated:

'The question is, sir?'

'Whether you had not better leave well alone.'

'Is it well to leave my sister alone, Mr Headstone?'

'I do not say so, because I do not know. I put it to you. I ask you to think of it. I want you to consider. You know how well you are doing here.'

'After all, she got me here,' said the boy, with a struggle.

'Perceiving the necessity of it,' acquiesced the schoolmaster, 'and making up her mind fully to the separation. Yes.'

The boy, with a return of that former reluctance or struggle or whatever it was, seemed to debate with himself. At length he said, raising his eyes to the master's face:

'I wish you'd come with me and see her, Mr Headstone, though she is not settled. I wish you'd come with me, and take her in the rough, and judge her for yourself.'

'You are sure you would not like,' asked the schoolmaster, 'to prepare her?'

'My sister Lizzie,' said the boy, proudly, 'wants no preparing, Mr Headstone. What she is, she is, and shows herself to be. There's no pretending about my sister.'

His confidence in her, sat more easily upon him than the indecision with which he had twice contended. It was his better nature to be true to her, if it were his worse nature to be wholly selfish. And as yet the better nature had the stronger hold.

'Well, I can spare the evening,' said the schoolmaster. 'I am ready to walk with you.'

'Thank you, Mr Headstone. And I am ready to go.'

Bradley Headstone, in his decent black coat and waistcoat, and decent white shirt, and decent formal black tie, and decent pantaloons of pepper and salt, with his decent silver watch in his pocket and its decent hairguard round his neck, looked a thoroughly decent young man of sixandtwenty. He was never seen in any other dress, and yet there was a certain stiffness in his manner of wearing this, as if there were a want of adaptation between him and it, recalling some mechanics in their holiday clothes. He had acquired mechanically a great store of teacher's knowledge. He could do mental arithmetic mechanically, sing at sight mechanically, blow various wind instruments mechanically, even play the great church organ mechanically. From his early childhood up, his mind had been a place of mechanical stowage. The arrangement of his wholesale warehouse, so that it might be always ready to meet the demands of retail dealers history here, geography

there, astronomy to the right, political economy to the left, natural history, the physical sciences, figures, music, the lower mathematics, and what not, all in their several places; this care had imparted to his countenance a look of care; while the habit of questioning and being questioned had given him a suspicious manner, or a manner that would be better described as one of lying in wait. There was a kind of settled trouble in the face. It was the face belonging to a naturally slow or inattentive intellect that had toiled hard to get what it had won, and that had to hold it now that it was gotten. He always seemed to be uneasy lest anything should be missing from his mental warehouse, and taking stock to assure himself.

Suppression of so much to make room for so much, had given him a constrained manner, over and above. Yet there was enough of what was animal, and of what was fiery (though smouldering), still visible in him, to suggest that if young Bradley Headstone, when a pauper lad, had chanced to be told off for the sea, he would not have been the last man in a ship's crew. Regarding that origin of his, he was proud, moody, and sullen, desiring it to be forgotten. And few people knew of it.

In some visits to the Jumble his attention had been attracted to this boy Hexam. An undeniable boy for a pupil-teacher; an undeniable boy to do credit to the master who should bring him on. Combined with this consideration, there may have been some thought of the pauper lad now never to be mentioned. Be that how it might, he had with pains gradually worked the boy into his own school, and procured him some offices to discharge there, which were repaid with food and lodging. Such were the circumstances that had brought together, Bradley Headstone and young Charley Hexam that autumn evening. Autumn, because full half a year had come and gone since the bird of prey lay dead upon the rivershore.

The schools for they were twofold, as the sexes were down in that district of the flat country tending to the Thames, where Kent and Surrey meet, and where the railways still bestride the market-gardens that will soon die under them. The schools were newly built, and there were so many like them all over the country, that one might have thought the whole were but one restless edifice with the locomotive gift of Aladdin's palace. They were in a neighbourhood which looked like a toy neighbourhood taken in blocks out of a box by a child of particularly incoherent mind, and set up anyhow; here, one side of a new street; there, a large solitary public-house facing nowhere; here, another unfinished street already in ruins; there, a church; here, an immense new warehouse; there, a dilapidated old country villa; then, a medley of black ditch, sparkling cucumber-frame, rank field, richly cultivated kitchen-garden, brick viaduct, arch-spanned canal, and disorder of frowziness and fog. As if the child had given the table a kick, and gone to sleep.

But, even among schoolbuildings, schoolteachers, and schoolpupils, all according to pattern and all engendered in the light of the latest Gospel according to Monotony, the older pattern into which so many fortunes have been shaped for good and evil, comes out. It came out in Miss Peecher the schoolmistress, watering her flowers, as Mr Bradley Headstone walked forth. It came out in Miss Peecher the schoolmistress, watering the flowers in the little dusty bit of garden attached to her small official residence, with little windows like the eyes in needles, and little doors like the covers of schoolbooks.

Small, shining, neat, methodical, and buxom was Miss Peecher; cherrycheeked and tuneful of voice. A little pincushion, a little housewife, a little book, a little workbox, a little set of tables and weights and measures, and a little woman, all in one. She could write a little essay on any subject, exactly a slate long, beginning at the lefthand top of one side and ending at the righthand bottom of the other, and the essay should be strictly according to rule. If Mr Bradley Headstone had addressed a written proposal of marriage to her, she would probably have replied in a complete little essay on the theme exactly a slate long, but would certainly have replied Yes. For she loved him. The decent hairguard that went round his neck and took care of his decent silver watch was an object of envy to her. So would Miss Peecher have gone round his neck and taken care of him. Of him, insensible. Because he did not love Miss Peecher.

Miss Peecher's favourite pupil, who assisted her in her little household, was in attendance with a can of water to replenish her little wateringpot, and sufficiently divined the state of Miss Peecher's affections to feel it necessary that she herself should love young Charley Hexam. So, there was a double palpitation among the double stocks and double wallflowers, when the master and the boy looked over the little gate.

'A fine evening, Miss Peecher,' said the Master.

'A very fine evening, Mr Headstone,' said Miss Peecher. 'Are you taking a walk?'

'Hexam and I are going to take a long walk.'

'Charming weather,' remarked Miss Peecher, 'FOR a long walk.'

'Ours is rather on business than mere pleasure,' said the Master. Miss Peecher inverting her wateringpot, and very carefully shaking out the few last drops over a flower, as if there were some special virtue in them which would make it a Jack's beanstalk before morning, called for replenishment to her pupil, who had been speaking to the boy.

'Goodnight, Miss Peecher,' said the Master.

'Goodnight, Mr Headstone,' said the Mistress.

The pupil had been, in her state of pupilage, so imbued with the classcustom of stretching out an arm, as if to hail a cab or omnibus, whenever she found she had an observation on hand to offer to Miss Peecher, that she often did it in their domestic relations; and she did it now.

'Well, Mary Anne?' said Miss Peecher.

'If you please, ma'am, Hexam said they were going to see his sister.'

'But that can't be, I think,' returned Miss Peecher: 'because Mr Headstone can have no business with HER.'

Mary Anne again hailed.

'Well, Mary Anne?'

'If you please, ma'am, perhaps it's Hexam's business?'

'That may be,' said Miss Peecher. 'I didn't think of that. Not that it matters at all.'

Mary Anne again hailed.

'Well, Mary Anne?'

'They say she's very handsome.'

'Oh, Mary Anne, Mary Anne!' returned Miss Peecher, slightly colouring and shaking her head, a little out of humour; 'how often have I told you not to use that vague expression, not to speak in that general way? When you say THEY say, what do you mean? Part of speech They?'

Mary Anne hooked her right arm behind her in her left hand, as being under examination, and replied:

'Personal pronoun.'

'Person, They?'

'Third person.'

'Number, They?'

'Plural number.'

'Then how many do you mean, Mary Anne? Two? Or more?'

'I beg your pardon, ma'am,' said Mary Anne, disconcerted now she came to

think of it; 'but I don't know that I mean more than her brother himself.' As she said it, she unhooked her arm.

'I felt convinced of it,' returned Miss Peecher, smiling again. 'Now pray, Mary Anne, be careful another time. He says is very different from they say, remember. Difference between he says and they say? Give it me.'

Mary Anne immediately hooked her right arm behind her in her left hand an attitude absolutely necessary to the situation and replied: 'One is indicative mood, present tense, third person singular, verb active to say. Other is indicative mood, present tense, third person plural, verb active to say.'

'Why verb active, Mary Anne?'

'Because it takes a pronoun after it in the objective case, Miss Peecher.'

'Very good indeed,' remarked Miss Peecher, with encouragement. 'In fact, could not be better. Don't forget to apply it, another time, Mary Anne.' This said, Miss Peecher finished the watering of her flowers, and went into her little official residence, and took a refresher of the principal rivers and mountains of the world, their breadths, depths, and heights, before settling the measurements of the body of a dress for her own personal occupation.

Bradley Headstone and Charley Hexam duly got to the Surrey side of Westminster Bridge, and crossed the bridge, and made along the Middlesex shore towards Millbank. In this region are a certain little street called Church Street, and a certain little blind square, called Smith Square, in the centre of which last retreat is a very hideous church with four towers at the four corners, generally resembling some petrified monster, frightful and gigantic, on its back with its legs in the air. They found a tree near by in a corner, and a blacksmith's forge, and a timber yard, and a dealer's in old iron. What a rusty portion of a boiler and a great iron wheel or so meant by lying halfburied in the dealer's forecourt, nobody seemed to know or to want to know. Like the Miller of questionable jollity in the song, They cared for Nobody, no not they, and Nobody cared for them.

After making the round of this place, and noting that there was a deadly kind of repose on it, more as though it had taken laudanum than fallen into a natural rest, they stopped at the point where the street and the square joined, and where there were some little quiet houses in a row. To these Charley Hexam finally led the way, and at one of these stopped.

'This must be where my sister lives, sir. This is where she came for a temporary lodging, soon after father's death.'

'How often have you seen her since?'

'Why, only twice, sir,' returned the boy, with his former reluctance; 'but that's as much her doing as mine.'

'How does she support herself?'

'She was always a fair needlewoman, and she keeps the stockroom of a seaman's outfitter.'

'Does she ever work at her own lodging here?'

'Sometimes; but her regular hours and regular occupation are at their place of business, I believe, sir. This is the number.'

The boy knocked at a door, and the door promptly opened with a spring and a click. A parlour door within a small entry stood open, and disclosed a childa dwarfa girila somethingsitting on a little low oldfashioned armchair, which had a kind of little working bench before it.

'I can't get up,' said the child, 'because my back's bad, and my legs are queer. But I'm the person of the house.'

'Who else is at home?' asked Charley Hexam, staring.

'Nobody's at home at present,' returned the child, with a glib assertion of her dignity, 'except the person of the house. What did you want, young man?'

'I wanted to see my sister.'

'Many young men have sisters,' returned the child. 'Give me your name, young man?'

The queer little figure, and the queer but not ugly little face, with its bright grey eyes, were so sharp, that the sharpness of the manner seemed unavoidable. As if, being turned out of that mould, it must be sharp.

'Hexam is my name.'

'Ah, indeed?' said the person of the house. 'I thought it might be. Your sister will be in, in about a quarter of an hour. I am very fond of your sister. She's my particular friend. Take a seat. And this gentleman's name?'

'Mr Headstone, my schoolmaster.'

'Take a seat. And would you please to shut the street door first? I can't very well do it myself; because my back's so bad, and my legs are so queer.'

They complied in silence, and the little figure went on with its work of gumming or gluing together with a camel'shair brush certain pieces of cardboard and thin wood, previously cut into various shapes. The scissors and knives upon the bench showed that the child herself had cut them; and the

bright scraps of velvet and silk and ribbon also strewn upon the bench showed that when duly stuffed (and stuffing too was there), she was to cover them smartly. The dexterity of her nimble fingers was remarkable, and, as she brought two thin edges accurately together by giving them a little bite, she would glance at the visitors out of the corners of her grey eyes with a look that outsharpened all her other sharpness.

'You can't tell me the name of my trade, I'll be bound,' she said, after taking several of these observations.

'You make pincushions,' said Charley.

'What else do I make?'

'Penwipers,' said Bradley Headstone.

'Ha! ha! What else do I make? You're a schoolmaster, but you can't tell me.'

'You do something,' he returned, pointing to a corner of the little bench, 'with straw; but I don't know what.'

'Well done you!' cried the person of the house. 'I only make pincushions and penwipers, to use up my waste. But my straw really does belong to my business. Try again. What do I make with my straw?'

'Dinnermats?'

'A schoolmaster, and says dinnermats! I'll give you a clue to my trade, in a game of forfeits. I love my love with a B because she's Beautiful; I hate my love with a B because she is Brazen; I took her to the sign of the Blue Boar, and I treated her with Bonnets; her name's Bouncer, and she lives in Bedlam. Now, what do I make with my straw?'

'Ladies' bonnets?'

'Fine ladies', said the person of the house, nodding assent. 'Dolls'. I'm a Doll's Dressmaker.'

'I hope it's a good business?'

The person of the house shrugged her shoulders and shook her head. 'No. Poorly paid. And I'm often so pressed for time! I had a doll married, last week, and was obliged to work all night. And it's not good for me, on account of my back being so bad and my legs so queer.'

They looked at the little creature with a wonder that did not diminish, and the schoolmaster said: 'I am sorry your fine ladies are so inconsiderate.'

'It's the way with them,' said the person of the house, shrugging her shoulders

again. 'And they take no care of their clothes, and they never keep to the same fashions a month. I work for a doll with three daughters. Bless you, she's enough to ruin her husband!' The person of the house gave a weird little laugh here, and gave them another look out of the corners of her eyes. She had an elfin chin that was capable of great expression; and whenever she gave this look, she hitched this chin up. As if her eyes and her chin worked together on the same wires.

'Are you always as busy as you are now?'

'Busier. I'm slack just now. I finished a large mourning order the day before yesterday. Doll I work for, lost a canarybird.' The person of the house gave another little laugh, and then nodded her head several times, as who should moralize, 'Oh this world, this world!'

'Are you alone all day?' asked Bradley Headstone. 'Don't any of the neighbouring children?'

'Ah, lud!' cried the person of the house, with a little scream, as if the word had pricked her. 'Don't talk of children. I can't bear children. I know their tricks and their manners.' She said this with an angry little shake of her tight fist close before her eyes.

Perhaps it scarcely required the teacherhabit, to perceive that the doll's dressmaker was inclined to be bitter on the difference between herself and other children. But both master and pupil understood it so.

'Always running about and screeching, always playing and fighting, always skipskippping on the pavement and chalking it for their games! Oh! I know their tricks and their manners!' Shaking the little fist as before. 'And that's not all. Ever so often calling names in through a person's keyhole, and imitating a person's back and legs. Oh! I know their tricks and their manners. And I'll tell you what I'd do, to punish 'em. There's doors under the church in the Squareblack doors, leading into black vaults. Well! I'd open one of those doors, and I'd cram 'em all in, and then I'd lock the door and through the keyhole I'd blow in pepper.'

'What would be the good of blowing in pepper?' asked Charley Hexam.

'To set 'em sneezing,' said the person of the house, 'and make their eyes water. And when they were all sneezing and inflamed, I'd mock 'em through the keyhole. Just as they, with their tricks and their manners, mock a person through a person's keyhole!'

An uncommonly emphatic shake of her little fist close before her eyes, seemed to ease the mind of the person of the house; for she added with recovered

composure, 'No, no, no. No children for me. Give me grownups.'

It was difficult to guess the age of this strange creature, for her poor figure furnished no clue to it, and her face was at once so young and so old. Twelve, or at the most thirteen, might be near the mark.

'I always did like grownups,' she went on, 'and always kept company with them. So sensible. Sit so quiet. Don't go prancing and capering about! And I mean always to keep among none but grownups till I marry. I suppose I must make up my mind to marry, one of these days.'

She listened to a step outside that caught her ear, and there was a soft knock at the door. Pulling at a handle within her reach, she said, with a pleased laugh: 'Now here, for instance, is a grownup that's my particular friend!' and Lizzie Hexam in a black dress entered the room.

'Charley! You!'

Taking him to her arms in the old way of which he seemed a little ashamed she saw no one else.

'There, there, there, Liz, all right my dear. See! Here's Mr Headstone come with me.'

Her eyes met those of the schoolmaster, who had evidently expected to see a very different sort of person, and a murmured word or two of salutation passed between them. She was a little flurried by the unexpected visit, and the schoolmaster was not at his ease. But he never was, quite.

'I told Mr Headstone you were not settled, Liz, but he was so kind as to take an interest in coming, and so I brought him. How well you look!'

Bradley seemed to think so.

'Ah! Don't she, don't she?' cried the person of the house, resuming her occupation, though the twilight was falling fast. 'I believe you she does! But go on with your chat, one and all:

You one two three,

My companie,

And don't mind me.'

pointing this impromptu rhyme with three points of her thin forefinger.

'I didn't expect a visit from you, Charley,' said his sister. 'I supposed that if you wanted to see me you would have sent to me, appointing me to come somewhere near the school, as I did last time. I saw my brother near the

school, sir,' to Bradley Headstone, 'because it's easier for me to go there, than for him to come here. I work about midway between the two places.'

'You don't see much of one another,' said Bradley, not improving in respect of ease.

'No.' With a rather sad shake of her head. 'Charley always does well, Mr Headstone?'

'He could not do better. I regard his course as quite plain before him.'

'I hoped so. I am so thankful. So well done of you, Charley dear! It is better for me not to come (except when he wants me) between him and his prospects. You think so, Mr Headstone?'

Conscious that his pupilteacher was looking for his answer, that he himself had suggested the boy's keeping aloof from this sister, now seen for the first time face to face, Bradley Headstone stammered:

'Your brother is very much occupied, you know. He has to work hard. One cannot but say that the less his attention is diverted from his work, the better for his future. When he shall have established himself, why then it will be another thing then.'

Lizzie shook her head again, and returned, with a quiet smile: 'I always advised him as you advise him. Did I not, Charley?'

'Well, never mind that now,' said the boy. 'How are you getting on?'

'Very well, Charley. I want for nothing.'

'You have your own room here?'

'Oh yes. Upstairs. And it's quiet, and pleasant, and airy.'

'And she always has the use of this room for visitors,' said the person of the house, screwing up one of her little bony fists, like an operaglass, and looking through it, with her eyes and her chin in that quaint accordance. 'Always this room for visitors; haven't you, Lizzie dear?'

It happened that Bradley Headstone noticed a very slight action of Lizzie Hexam's hand, as though it checked the doll's dressmaker. And it happened that the latter noticed him in the same instant; for she made a double eyeglass of her two hands, looked at him through it, and cried, with a waggish shake of her head: 'Aha! Caught you spying, did I?'

It might have fallen out so, any way; but Bradley Headstone also noticed that immediately after this, Lizzie, who had not taken off her bonnet, rather hurriedly proposed that as the room was getting dark they should go out into

the air. They went out; the visitors saying goodnight to the doll's dressmaker, whom they left, leaning back in her chair with her arms crossed, singing to herself in a sweet thoughtful little voice.

'I'll saunter on by the river,' said Bradley. 'You will be glad to talk together.'

As his uneasy figure went on before them among the evening shadows, the boy said to his sister, petulantly:

'When are you going to settle yourself in some Christian sort of place, Liz? I thought you were going to do it before now.'

'I am very well where I am, Charley.'

'Very well where you are! I am ashamed to have brought Mr Headstone with me. How came you to get into such company as that little witch's?'

'By chance at first, as it seemed, Charley. But I think it must have been by something more than chance, for that child You remember the bills upon the walls at home?'

'Confound the bills upon the walls at home! I want to forget the bills upon the walls at home, and it would be better for you to do the same,' grumbled the boy. 'Well; what of them?'

'This child is the grandchild of the old man.'

'What old man?'

'The terrible drunken old man, in the list slippers and the nightcap.'

The boy asked, rubbing his nose in a manner that half expressed vexation at hearing so much, and half curiosity to hear more: 'How came you to make that out? What a girl you are!'

'The child's father is employed by the house that employs me; that's how I came to know it, Charley. The father is like his own father, a weak wretched trembling creature, falling to pieces, never sober. But a good workman too, at the work he does. The mother is dead. This poor ailing little creature has come to be what she is, surrounded by drunken people from her cradle if she ever had one, Charley.'

'I don't see what you have to do with her, for all that,' said the boy.

'Don't you, Charley?'

The boy looked doggedly at the river. They were at Millbank, and the river rolled on their left. His sister gently touched him on the shoulder, and pointed to it.

'Any compensationrestitutionnever mind the word, you know my meaning. Father's grave.'

But he did not respond with any tenderness. After a moody silence he broke out in an illused tone:

'It'll be a very hard thing, Liz, if, when I am trying my best to get up in the world, you pull me back.'

'I, Charley?'

'Yes, you, Liz. Why can't you let bygones be bygones? Why can't you, as Mr Headstone said to me this very evening about another matter, leave well alone? What we have got to do, is, to turn our faces full in our new direction, and keep straight on.'

'And never look back? Not even to try to make some amends?'

'You are such a dreamer,' said the boy, with his former petulance. 'It was all very well when we sat before the firewhen we looked into the hollow down by the flarebut we are looking into the real world, now.'

'Ah, we were looking into the real world then, Charley!'

'I understand what you mean by that, but you are not justified in it. I don't want, as I raise myself to shake you off, Liz. I want to carry you up with me. That's what I want to do, and mean to do. I know what I owe you. I said to Mr Headstone this very evening, "After all, my sister got me here." Well, then. Don't pull me back, and hold me down. That's all I ask, and surely that's not unconscionable.'

She had kept a steadfast look upon him, and she answered with composure:

'I am not here selfishly, Charley. To please myself I could not be too far from that river.'

'Nor could you be too far from it to please me. Let us get quit of it equally. Why should you linger about it any more than I? I give it a wide berth.'

'I can't get away from it, I think,' said Lizzie, passing her hand across her forehead. 'It's no purpose of mine that I live by it still.'

'There you go, Liz! Dreaming again! You lodge yourself of your own accord in a house with a drunkentailor, I supposeor something of the sort, and a little crooked antic of a child, or old person, or whatever it is, and then you talk as if you were drawn or driven there. Now, do be more practical.'

She had been practical enough with him, in suffering and striving for him; but she only laid her hand upon his shouldernot reproachfullyand tapped it twice

or thrice. She had been used to do so, to soothe him when she carried him about, a child as heavy as herself. Tears started to his eyes.

'Upon my word, Liz,' drawing the back of his hand across them, 'I mean to be a good brother to you, and to prove that I know what I owe you. All I say is, that I hope you'll control your fancies a little, on my account. I'll get a school, and then you must come and live with me, and you'll have to control your fancies then, so why not now? Now, say I haven't vexed you.'

'You haven't, Charley, you haven't.'

'And say I haven't hurt you.'

'You haven't, Charley.' But this answer was less ready.

'Say you are sure I didn't mean to. Come! There's Mr Headstone stopping and looking over the wall at the tide, to hint that it's time to go. Kiss me, and tell me that you know I didn't mean to hurt you.'

She told him so, and they embraced, and walked on and came up with the schoolmaster.

'But we go your sister's way,' he remarked, when the boy told him he was ready. And with his cumbrous and uneasy action he stiffly offered her his arm. Her hand was just within it, when she drew it back. He looked round with a start, as if he thought she had detected something that repelled her, in the momentary touch.

'I will not go in just yet,' said Lizzie. 'And you have a distance before you, and will walk faster without me.'

Being by this time close to Vauxhall Bridge, they resolved, in consequence, to take that way over the Thames, and they left her; Bradley Headstone giving her his hand at parting, and she thanking him for his care of her brother.

The master and the pupil walked on, rapidly and silently. They had nearly crossed the bridge, when a gentleman came coolly sauntering towards them, with a cigar in his mouth, his coat thrown back, and his hands behind him. Something in the careless manner of this person, and in a certain lazily arrogant air with which he approached, holding possession of twice as much pavement as another would have claimed, instantly caught the boy's attention. As the gentleman passed the boy looked at him narrowly, and then stood still, looking after him.

'Who is it that you stare after?' asked Bradley.

'Why!' said the boy, with a confused and pondering frown upon his face, 'It IS that Wrayburn one!'

Bradley Headstone scrutinized the boy as closely as the boy had scrutinized the gentleman.

'I beg your pardon, Mr Headstone, but I couldn't help wondering what in the world brought HIM here!'

Though he said it as if his wonder were past at the same time resuming the walk it was not lost upon the master that he looked over his shoulder after speaking, and that the same perplexed and pondering frown was heavy on his face.

'You don't appear to like your friend, Hexam?'

'I DON'T like him,' said the boy.

'Why not?'

'He took hold of me by the chin in a precious impertinent way, the first time I ever saw him,' said the boy.

'Again, why?'

'For nothing. Orit's much the same because something I happened to say about my sister didn't happen to please him.'

'Then he knows your sister?'

'He didn't at that time,' said the boy, still moodily pondering.

'Does now?'

The boy had so lost himself that he looked at Mr Bradley Headstone as they walked on side by side, without attempting to reply until the question had been repeated; then he nodded and answered, 'Yes, sir.'

'Going to see her, I dare say.'

'It can't be!' said the boy, quickly. 'He doesn't know her well enough. I should like to catch him at it!'

When they had walked on for a time, more rapidly than before, the master said, clasping the pupil's arm between the elbow and the shoulder with his hand:

'You were going to tell me something about that person. What did you say his name was?'

'Wrayburn. Mr Eugene Wrayburn. He is what they call a barrister, with nothing to do. The first time he came to our old place was when my father was alive. He came on business; not that it was HIS business HE never had any

business she was brought by a friend of his.'

'And the other times?'

'There was only one other time that I know of. When my father was killed by accident, he chanced to be one of the finders. He was mooning about, I suppose, taking liberties with people's chins; but there he was, somehow. He brought the news home to my sister early in the morning, and brought Miss Abbey Potterson, a neighbour, to help break it to her. He was mooning about the house when I was fetched home in the afternoon they didn't know where to find me till my sister could be brought round sufficiently to tell them and then he mooned away.'

'And is that all?'

'That's all, sir.'

Bradley Headstone gradually released the boy's arm, as if he were thoughtful, and they walked on side by side as before. After a long silence between them, Bradley resumed the talk.

'I suppose your sister' with a curious break both before and after the words, 'has received hardly any teaching, Hexam?'

'Hardly any, sir.'

'Sacrificed, no doubt, to her father's objections. I remember them in your case. Yet your sister scarcely looks or speaks like an ignorant person.'

'Lizzie has as much thought as the best, Mr Headstone. Too much, perhaps, without teaching. I used to call the fire at home, her books, for she was always full of fanciessometimes quite wise fancies, considering when she sat looking at it.'

'I don't like that,' said Bradley Headstone.

His pupil was a little surprised by this striking in with so sudden and decided and emotional an objection, but took it as a proof of the master's interest in himself. It emboldened him to say:

'I have never brought myself to mention it openly to you, Mr Headstone, and you're my witness that I couldn't even make up my mind to take it from you before we came out tonight; but it's a painful thing to think that if I get on as well as you hope, I shall be I won't say disgraced, because I don't mean disgraced but rather put to the blush if it was known by a sister who has been very good to me.'

'Yes,' said Bradley Headstone in a slurring way, for his mind scarcely seemed

to touch that point, so smoothly did it glide to another, 'and there is this possibility to consider. Some man who had worked his way might come to admire your sister and might even in time bring himself to think of marrying your sister and it would be a sad drawback and a heavy penalty upon him, if; overcoming in his mind other inequalities of condition and other considerations against it, this inequality and this consideration remained in full force.'

'That's much my own meaning, sir.'

'Ay, ay,' said Bradley Headstone, 'but you spoke of a mere brother. Now, the case I have supposed would be a much stronger case; because an admirer, a husband, would form the connexion voluntarily, besides being obliged to proclaim it: which a brother is not. After all, you know, it must be said of you that you couldn't help yourself: while it would be said of him, with equal reason, that he could.'

'That's true, sir. Sometimes since Lizzie was left free by father's death, I have thought that such a young woman might soon acquire more than enough to pass muster. And sometimes I have even thought that perhaps Miss Peecher'

'For the purpose, I would advise Not Miss Peecher,' Bradley Headstone struck in with a recurrence of his late decision of manner.

'Would you be so kind as to think of it for me, Mr Headstone?'

'Yes, Hexam, yes. I'll think of it. I'll think maturely of it. I'll think well of it.'

Their walk was almost a silent one afterwards, until it ended at the schoolhouse. There, one of neat Miss Peecher's little windows, like the eyes in needles, was illuminated, and in a corner near it sat Mary Anne watching, while Miss Peecher at the table stitched at the neat little body she was making up by brown paper pattern for her own wearing. N.B. Miss Peecher and Miss Peecher's pupils were not much encouraged in the unscholastic art of needlework, by Government.

Mary Anne with her face to the window, held her arm up.

'Well, Mary Anne?'

'Mr Headstone coming home, ma'am.'

In about a minute, Mary Anne again hailed.

'Yes, Mary Anne?'

'Gone in and locked his door, ma'am.'

Miss Peecher repressed a sigh as she gathered her work together for bed, and

transfixed that part of her dress where her heart would have been if she had had the dress on, with a sharp, sharp needle.

Chapter 2

STILL EDUCATIONAL

The person of the house, doll's dressmaker and manufacturer of ornamental pincushions and penwipers, sat in her quaint little low armchair, singing in the dark, until Lizzie came back. The person of the house had attained that dignity while yet of very tender years indeed, through being the only trustworthy person IN the house.

'Well LizzieMizzieWizzie,' said she, breaking off in her song, 'what's the news out of doors?'

'What's the news in doors?' returned Lizzie, playfully smoothing the bright long fair hair which grew very luxuriant and beautiful on the head of the doll's dressmaker.

'Let me see, said the blind man. Why the last news is, that I don't mean to marry your brother.'

'No?'

'Noo,' shaking her head and her chin. 'Don't like the boy.'

'What do you say to his master?'

'I say that I think he's bespoke.'

Lizzie finished putting the hair carefully back over the misshapen shoulders, and then lighted a candle. It showed the little parlour to be dingy, but orderly and clean. She stood it on the mantelshelf, remote from the dressmaker's eyes, and then put the room door open, and the house door open, and turned the little low chair and its occupant towards the outer air. It was a sultry night, and this was a fineweather arrangement when the day's work was done. To complete it, she seated herself in a chair by the side of the little chair, and protectingly drew under her arm the spare hand that crept up to her.

'This is what your loving Jenny Wren calls the best time in the day and night,' said the person of the house. Her real name was Fanny Cleaver; but she had long ago chosen to bestow upon herself the appellation of Miss Jenny Wren.

'I have been thinking,' Jenny went on, 'as I sat at work today, what a thing it would be, if I should be able to have your company till I am married, or at least courted. Because when I am courted, I shall make Him do some of the things that you do for me. He couldn't brush my hair like you do, or help me up and down stairs like you do, and he couldn't do anything like you do; but he could take my work home, and he could call for orders in his clumsy way. And he shall too. I'LL trot him about, I can tell him!'

Jenny Wren had her personal vanities happily for her and no intentions were stronger in her breast than the various trials and torments that were, in the fulness of time, to be inflicted upon 'him.'

'Wherever he may happen to be just at present, or whoever he may happen to be,' said Miss Wren, 'I know his tricks and his manners, and I give him warning to look out.'

'Don't you think you are rather hard upon him?' asked her friend, smiling, and smoothing her hair.

'Not a bit,' replied the sage Miss Wren, with an air of vast experience. 'My dear, they don't care for you, those fellows, if you're NOT hard upon 'em. But I was saying If I should be able to have your company. Ah! What a large If! Ain't it?'

'I have no intention of parting company, Jenny.'

'Don't say that, or you'll go directly.'

'Am I so little to be relied upon?'

'You're more to be relied upon than silver and gold.' As she said it, Miss Wren suddenly broke off, screwed up her eyes and her chin, and looked prodigiously knowing. 'Aha!

Who comes here?

A Grenadier.

What does he want?

A pot of beer.

And nothing else in the world, my dear!'

A man's figure paused on the pavement at the outer door. 'Mr Eugene Wrayburn, ain't it?' said Miss Wren.

'So I am told,' was the answer.

'You may come in, if you're good.'

'I am not good,' said Eugene, 'but I'll come in.'

He gave his hand to Jenny Wren, and he gave his hand to Lizzie, and he stood leaning by the door at Lizzie's side. He had been strolling with his cigar, he said, (it was smoked out and gone by this time,) and he had strolled round to return in that direction that he might look in as he passed. Had she not seen her brother tonight?

'Yes,' said Lizzie, whose manner was a little troubled.

Gracious condescension on our brother's part! Mr Eugene Wrayburn thought he had passed my young gentleman on the bridge yonder. Who was his friend with him?

'The schoolmaster.'

'To be sure. Looked like it.'

Lizzie sat so still, that one could not have said wherein the fact of her manner being troubled was expressed; and yet one could not have doubted it. Eugene was as easy as ever; but perhaps, as she sat with her eyes cast down, it might have been rather more perceptible that his attention was concentrated upon her for certain moments, than its concentration upon any subject for any short time ever was, elsewhere.

'I have nothing to report, Lizzie,' said Eugene. 'But, having promised you that an eye should be always kept on Mr Riderhood through my friend Lightwood, I like occasionally to renew my assurance that I keep my promise, and keep my friend up to the mark.'

'I should not have doubted it, sir.'

'Generally, I confess myself a man to be doubted,' returned Eugene, coolly, 'for all that.'

'Why are you?' asked the sharp Miss Wren.

'Because, my dear,' said the airy Eugene, 'I am a bad idle dog.'

'Then why don't you reform and be a good dog?' inquired Miss Wren.

'Because, my dear,' returned Eugene, 'there's nobody who makes it worth my while. Have you considered my suggestion, Lizzie?' This in a lower voice, but only as if it were a graver matter; not at all to the exclusion of the person of the house.

'I have thought of it, Mr Wrayburn, but I have not been able to make up my mind to accept it.'

'False pride!' said Eugene.

'I think not, Mr Wrayburn. I hope not.'

'False pride!' repeated Eugene. 'Why, what else is it? The thing is worth nothing in itself. The thing is worth nothing to me. What can it be worth to me? You know the most I make of it. I propose to be of some use to somebody which I never was in this world, and never shall be on any other occasion by paying some qualified person of your own sex and age, so many (or rather so few) contemptible shillings, to come here, certain nights in the week, and give you certain instruction which you wouldn't want if you hadn't been a self-denying daughter and sister. You know that it's good to have it, or you would never have so devoted yourself to your brother's having it. Then why not have it: especially when our friend Miss Jenny here would profit by it too? If I proposed to be the teacher, or to attend the lessons obviously incongruous! but as to that, I might as well be on the other side of the globe, or not on the globe at all. False pride, Lizzie. Because true pride wouldn't shame, or be shamed by, your thankless brother. True pride wouldn't have schoolmasters brought here, like doctors, to look at a bad case. True pride would go to work and do it. You know that, well enough, for you know that your own true pride would do it tomorrow, if you had the ways and means which false pride won't let me supply. Very well. I add no more than this. Your false pride does wrong to yourself and does wrong to your dead father.'

'How to my father, Mr Wrayburn?' she asked, with an anxious face.

'How to your father? Can you ask! By perpetuating the consequences of his ignorant and blind obstinacy. By resolving not to set right the wrong he did you. By determining that the deprivation to which he condemned you, and which he forced upon you, shall always rest upon his head.'

It chanced to be a subtle string to sound, in her who had so spoken to her brother within the hour. It sounded far more forcibly, because of the change in the speaker for the moment; the passing appearance of earnestness, complete conviction, injured resentment of suspicion, generous and unselfish interest. All these qualities, in him usually so light and careless, she felt to be inseparable from some touch of their opposites in her own breast. She thought, had she, so far below him and so different, rejected this disinterestedness, because of some vain misgiving that he sought her out, or heeded any personal attractions that he might descry in her? The poor girl, pure of heart and purpose, could not bear to think it. Sinking before her own eyes, as she suspected herself of it, she drooped her head as though she had done him some wicked and grievous injury, and broke into silent tears.

'Don't be distressed,' said Eugene, very, very kindly. 'I hope it is not I who

have distressed you. I meant no more than to put the matter in its true light before you; though I acknowledge I did it selfishly enough, for I am disappointed.'

Disappointed of doing her a service. How else COULD he be disappointed?

'It won't break my heart,' laughed Eugene; 'it won't stay by me eightandforty hours; but I am genuinely disappointed. I had set my fancy on doing this little thing for you and for our friend Miss Jenny. The novelty of my doing anything in the least useful, had its charms. I see, now, that I might have managed it better. I might have affected to do it wholly for our friend Miss J. I might have got myself up, morally, as Sir Eugene Bountiful. But upon my soul I can't make flourishes, and I would rather be disappointed than try.'

If he meant to follow home what was in Lizzie's thoughts, it was skilfully done. If he followed it by mere fortuitous coincidence, it was done by an evil chance.

'It opened out so naturally before me,' said Eugene. 'The ball seemed so thrown into my hands by accident! I happen to be originally brought into contact with you, Lizzie, on those two occasions that you know of. I happen to be able to promise you that a watch shall be kept upon that false accuser, Riderhood. I happen to be able to give you some little consolation in the darkest hour of your distress, by assuring you that I don't believe him. On the same occasion I tell you that I am the idlest and least of lawyers, but that I am better than none, in a case I have noted down with my own hand, and that you may be always sure of my best help, and incidentally of Lightwood's too, in your efforts to clear your father. So, it gradually takes my fancy that I may help you so easily! to clear your father of that other blame which I mentioned a few minutes ago, and which is a just and real one. I hope I have explained myself; for I am heartily sorry to have distressed you. I hate to claim to mean well, but I really did mean honestly and simply well, and I want you to know it.'

'I have never doubted that, Mr Wrayburn,' said Lizzie; the more repentant, the less he claimed.

'I am very glad to hear it. Though if you had quite understood my whole meaning at first, I think you would not have refused. Do you think you would?'

'I don't know that I should, Mr Wrayburn.'

'Well! Then why refuse now you do understand it?'

'It's not easy for me to talk to you,' returned Lizzie, in some confusion, 'for you

see all the consequences of what I say, as soon as I say it.'

'Take all the consequences,' laughed Eugene, 'and take away my disappointment. Lizzie Hexam, as I truly respect you, and as I am your friend and a poor devil of a gentleman, I protest I don't even now understand why you hesitate.'

There was an appearance of openness, trustfulness, unsuspecting generosity, in his words and manner, that won the poor girl over; and not only won her over, but again caused her to feel as though she had been influenced by the opposite qualities, with vanity at their head.

'I will not hesitate any longer, Mr Wrayburn. I hope you will not think the worse of me for having hesitated at all. For myself and for Jenny let me answer for you, Jenny dear?'

The little creature had been leaning back, attentive, with her elbows resting on the elbows of her chair, and her chin upon her hands. Without changing her attitude, she answered, 'Yes!' so suddenly that it rather seemed as if she had chopped the monosyllable than spoken it.

'For myself and for Jenny, I thankfully accept your kind offer.'

'Agreed! Dismissed!' said Eugene, giving Lizzie his hand before lightly waving it, as if he waved the whole subject away. 'I hope it may not be often that so much is made of so little!'

Then he fell to talking playfully with Jenny Wren. 'I think of setting up a doll, Miss Jenny,' he said.

'You had better not,' replied the dressmaker.

'Why not?'

'You are sure to break it. All you children do.'

'But that makes good for trade, you know, Miss Wren,' returned Eugene. 'Much as people's breaking promises and contracts and bargains of all sorts, makes good for MY trade.'

'I don't know about that,' Miss Wren retorted; 'but you had better by half set up a penwiper, and turn industrious, and use it.'

'Why, if we were all as industrious as you, little BusyBody, we should begin to work as soon as we could crawl, and there would be a bad thing!'

'Do you mean,' returned the little creature, with a flush suffusing her face, 'bad for your backs and your legs?'

'No, no, no,' said Eugene; shocked to do him justice at the thought of trifling with her infirmity. 'Bad for business, bad for business. If we all set to work as soon as we could use our hands, it would be all over with the dolls' dressmakers.'

'There's something in that,' replied Miss Wren; 'you have a sort of an idea in your noddle sometimes.' Then, in a changed tone; 'Talking of ideas, my Lizzie,' they were sitting side by side as they had sat at first, 'I wonder how it happens that when I am work, work, working here, all alone in the summertime, I smell flowers.'

'As a commonplace individual, I should say,' Eugene suggested languidly for he was growing weary of the person of the house 'that you smell flowers because you DO smell flowers.'

'No I don't,' said the little creature, resting one arm upon the elbow of her chair, resting her chin upon that hand, and looking vacantly before her; 'this is not a flowery neighbourhood. It's anything but that. And yet as I sit at work, I smell miles of flowers. I smell roses, till I think I see the roseleaves lying in heaps, bushels, on the floor. I smell fallen leaves, till I put down my hands and expect to make them rustle. I smell the white and the pink May in the hedges, and all sorts of flowers that I never was among. For I have seen very few flowers indeed, in my life.'

'Pleasant fancies to have, Jenny dear!' said her friend: with a glance towards Eugene as if she would have asked him whether they were given the child in compensation for her losses.

'So I think, Lizzie, when they come to me. And the birds I hear! Oh!' cried the little creature, holding out her hand and looking upward, 'how they sing!'

There was something in the face and action for the moment, quite inspired and beautiful. Then the chin dropped musingly upon the hand again.

'I dare say my birds sing better than other birds, and my flowers smell better than other flowers. For when I was a little child,' in a tone as though it were ages ago, 'the children that I used to see early in the morning were very different from any others that I ever saw. They were not like me; they were not chilled, anxious, ragged, or beaten; they were never in pain. They were not like the children of the neighbours; they never made me tremble all over, by setting up shrill noises, and they never mocked me. Such numbers of them too! All in white dresses, and with something shining on the borders, and on their heads, that I have never been able to imitate with my work, though I know it so well. They used to come down in long bright slanting rows, and say all together, "Who is this in pain! Who is this in pain!" When I told them who it was, they answered, "Come and play with us!" When I said "I never play! I

can't play!" they swept about me and took me up, and made me light. Then it was all delicious ease and rest till they laid me down, and said, all together, "Have patience, and we will come again." Whenever they came back, I used to know they were coming before I saw the long bright rows, by hearing them ask, all together a long way off, "Who is this in pain! Who is this in pain!" And I used to cry out, "O my blessed children, it's poor me. Have pity on me. Take me up and make me light!"

By degrees, as she progressed in this remembrance, the hand was raised, the late ecstatic look returned, and she became quite beautiful. Having so paused for a moment, silent, with a listening smile upon her face, she looked round and recalled herself.

'What poor fun you think me; don't you, Mr Wrayburn? You may well look tired of me. But it's Saturday night, and I won't detain you.'

'That is to say, Miss Wren,' observed Eugene, quite ready to profit by the hint, 'you wish me to go?'

'Well, it's Saturday night,' she returned, 'and my child's coming home. And my child is a troublesome bad child, and costs me a world of scolding. I would rather you didn't see my child.'

'A doll?' said Eugene, not understanding, and looking for an explanation.

But Lizzie, with her lips only, shaping the two words, 'Her father,' he delayed no longer. He took his leave immediately. At the corner of the street he stopped to light another cigar, and possibly to ask himself what he was doing otherwise. If so, the answer was indefinite and vague. Who knows what he is doing, who is careless what he does!

A man stumbled against him as he turned away, who mumbled some maudlin apology. Looking after this man, Eugene saw him go in at the door by which he himself had just come out.

On the man's stumbling into the room, Lizzie rose to leave it.

'Don't go away, Miss Hexam,' he said in a submissive manner, speaking thickly and with difficulty. 'Don't fly from unfortunate man in shattered state of health. Give poor invalid honour of your company. It ain'tain't catching.'

Lizzie murmured that she had something to do in her own room, and went away upstairs.

'How's my Jenny?' said the man, timidly. 'How's my Jenny Wren, best of children, object dearest affections brokenhearted invalid?'

To which the person of the house, stretching out her arm in an attitude of

command, replied with irresponsible asperity: 'Go along with you! Go along into your corner! Get into your corner directly!'

The wretched spectacle made as if he would have offered some remonstrance; but not venturing to resist the person of the house, thought better of it, and went and sat down on a particular chair of disgrace.

'Ohhh!' cried the person of the house, pointing her little finger, 'You bad old boy! Ohhh you naughty, wicked creature! WHAT do you mean by it?'

The shaking figure, unnerved and disjointed from head to foot, put out its two hands a little way, as making overtures of peace and reconciliation. Abject tears stood in its eyes, and stained the blotched red of its cheeks. The swollen leadcoloured under lip trembled with a shameful whine. The whole indecorous threadbare ruin, from the broken shoes to the prematurelygrey scanty hair, grovelled. Not with any sense worthy to be called a sense, of this dire reversal of the places of parent and child, but in a pitiful expostulation to be let off from a scolding.

'I know your tricks and your manners,' cried Miss Wren. 'I know where you've been to!' (which indeed it did not require discernment to discover). 'Oh, you disgraceful old chap!'

The very breathing of the figure was contemptible, as it laboured and rattled in that operation, like a blundering clock.

'Slave, slave, slave, from morning to night,' pursued the person of the house, 'and all for this! WHAT do you mean by it?'

There was something in that emphasized 'What,' which absurdly frightened the figure. As often as the person of the house worked her way round to it even as soon as he saw that it was coming he collapsed in an extra degree.

'I wish you had been taken up, and locked up,' said the person of the house. 'I wish you had been poked into cells and black holes, and run over by rats and spiders and beetles. I know their tricks and their manners, and they'd have tickled you nicely. Ain't you ashamed of yourself?'

'Yes, my dear,' stammered the father.

'Then,' said the person of the house, terrifying him by a grand muster of her spirits and forces before recurring to the emphatic word, 'WHAT do you mean by it?'

'Circumstances over which had no control,' was the miserable creature's plea in extenuation.

'T'LL circumstance you and control you too,' retorted the person of the house,

speaking with vehement sharpness, 'if you talk in that way. I'll give you in charge to the police, and have you fined five shillings when you can't pay, and then I won't pay the money for you, and you'll be transported for life. How should you like to be transported for life?'

'Shouldn't like it. Poor shattered invalid. Trouble nobody long,' cried the wretched figure.

'Come, come!' said the person of the house, tapping the table near her in a businesslike manner, and shaking her head and her chin; 'you know what you've got to do. Put down your money this instant.'

The obedient figure began to rummage in its pockets.

'Spent a fortune out of your wages, I'll be bound!' said the person of the house. 'Put it here! All you've got left! Every farthing!'

Such a business as he made of collecting it from his dogs'eared pockets; of expecting it in this pocket, and not finding it; of not expecting it in that pocket, and passing it over; of finding no pocket where that other pocket ought to be!

'Is this all?' demanded the person of the house, when a confused heap of pence and shillings lay on the table.

'Got no more,' was the rueful answer, with an accordant shake of the head.

'Let me make sure. You know what you've got to do. Turn all your pockets inside out, and leave 'em so!' cried the person of the house.

He obeyed. And if anything could have made him look more abject or more dismally ridiculous than before, it would have been his so displaying himself.

'Here's but seven and eightpence halfpenny!' exclaimed Miss Wren, after reducing the heap to order. 'Oh, you prodigal old son! Now you shall be starved.'

'No, don't starve me,' he urged, whimpering.

'If you were treated as you ought to be,' said Miss Wren, 'you'd be fed upon the skewers of cats' meat; only the skewers, after the cats had had the meat. As it is, go to bed.'

When he stumbled out of the corner to comply, he again put out both his hands, and pleaded: 'Circumstances over which no control'

'Get along with you to bed!' cried Miss Wren, snapping him up. 'Don't speak to me. I'm not going to forgive you. Go to bed this moment!'

Seeing another emphatic 'What' upon its way, he evaded it by complying and

was heard to shuffle heavily up stairs, and shut his door, and throw himself on his bed. Within a little while afterwards, Lizzie came down.

'Shall we have our supper, Jenny dear?'

'Ah! bless us and save us, we need have something to keep us going,' returned Miss Jenny, shrugging her shoulders.

Lizzie laid a cloth upon the little bench (more handy for the person of the house than an ordinary table), and put upon it such plain fare as they were accustomed to have, and drew up a stool for herself.

'Now for supper! What are you thinking of, Jenny darling?'

'I was thinking,' she returned, coming out of a deep study, 'what I would do to Him, if he should turn out a drunkard.'

'Oh, but he won't,' said Lizzie. 'You'll take care of that, beforehand.'

'I shall try to take care of it beforehand, but he might deceive me. Oh, my dear, all those fellows with their tricks and their manners do deceive!' With the little fist in full action. 'And if so, I tell you what I think I'd do. When he was asleep, I'd make a spoon red hot, and I'd have some boiling liquor bubbling in a saucepan, and I'd take it out hissing, and I'd open his mouth with the other hand or perhaps he'd sleep with his mouth ready open and I'd pour it down his throat, and blister it and choke him.'

'I am sure you would do no such horrible thing,' said Lizzie.

'Shouldn't I? Well; perhaps I shouldn't. But I should like to!'

'I am equally sure you would not.'

'Not even like to? Well, you generally know best. Only you haven't always lived among it as I have lived and your back isn't bad and your legs are not queer.'

As they went on with their supper, Lizzie tried to bring her round to that prettier and better state. But, the charm was broken. The person of the house was the person of a house full of sordid shames and cares, with an upper room in which that abased figure was infecting even innocent sleep with sensual brutality and degradation. The doll's dressmaker had become a little quaint shrew; of the world, worldly; of the earth, earthy.

Poor doll's dressmaker! How often so dragged down by hands that should have raised her up; how often so misdirected when losing her way on the eternal road, and asking guidance! Poor, poor little doll's dressmaker!

Chapter 3

A PIECE OF WORK

Britannia, sitting meditating one fine day (perhaps in the attitude in which she is presented on the copper coinage), discovers all of a sudden that she wants Veneering in Parliament. It occurs to her that Veneering is 'a representative man' which cannot in these times be doubted and that Her Majesty's faithful Commons are incomplete without him. So, Britannia mentions to a legal gentleman of her acquaintance that if Veneering will 'put down' five thousand pounds, he may write a couple of initial letters after his name at the extremely cheap rate of two thousand five hundred per letter. It is clearly understood between Britannia and the legal gentleman that nobody is to take up the five thousand pounds, but that being put down they will disappear by magical conjuration and enchantment.

The legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence going straight from that lady to Veneering, thus commissioned, Veneering declares himself highly flattered, but requires breathing time to ascertain 'whether his friends will rally round him.' Above all things, he says, it behoves him to be clear, at a crisis of this importance, 'whether his friends will rally round him.' The legal gentleman, in the interests of his client cannot allow much time for this purpose, as the lady rather thinks she knows somebody prepared to put down six thousand pounds; but he says he will give Veneering four hours.

Veneering then says to Mrs Veneering, 'We must work,' and throws himself into a Hansom cab. Mrs Veneering in the same moment relinquishes baby to Nurse; presses her aquiline hands upon her brow, to arrange the throbbing intellect within; orders out the carriage; and repeats in a distracted and devoted manner, compounded of Ophelia and any selfimmolating female of antiquity you may prefer, 'We must work.'

Veneering having instructed his driver to charge at the Public in the streets, like the LifeGuards at Waterloo, is driven furiously to Duke Street, Saint James's. There, he finds Twemlow in his lodgings, fresh from the hands of a secret artist who has been doing something to his hair with yolks of eggs. The process requiring that Twemlow shall, for two hours after the application, allow his hair to stick upright and dry gradually, he is in an appropriate state for the receipt of startling intelligence; looking equally like the Monument on Fish Street Hill, and King Priam on a certain incendiary occasion not wholly unknown as a neat point from the classics.

'My dear Twemlow,' says Veneering, grasping both his hands, 'as the dearest

and oldest of my friends'

('Then there can be no more doubt about it in future,' thinks Twemlow, 'and I AM!')

'Are you of opinion that your cousin, Lord Snigsworth, would give his name as a Member of my Committee? I don't go so far as to ask for his lordship; I only ask for his name. Do you think he would give me his name?'

In sudden low spirits, Twemlow replies, 'I don't think he would.'

'My political opinions,' says Veneering, not previously aware of having any, 'are identical with those of Lord Snigsworth, and perhaps as a matter of public feeling and public principle, Lord Snigsworth would give me his name.'

'It might be so,' says Twemlow; 'but' And perplexedly scratching his head, forgetful of the yolks of eggs, is the more discomfited by being reminded how sticky he is.

'Between such old and intimate friends as ourselves,' pursues Veneering, 'there should in such a case be no reserve. Promise me that if I ask you to do anything for me which you don't like to do, or feel the slightest difficulty in doing, you will freely tell me so.'

This, Twemlow is so kind as to promise, with every appearance of most heartily intending to keep his word.

'Would you have any objection to write down to Snigsworthy Park, and ask this favour of Lord Snigsworth? Of course if it were granted I should know that I owed it solely to you; while at the same time you would put it to Lord Snigsworth entirely upon public grounds. Would you have any objection?'

Says Twemlow, with his hand to his forehead, 'You have exacted a promise from me.'

'I have, my dear Twemlow.'

'And you expect me to keep it honourably.'

'I do, my dear Twemlow.'

'ON the whole, then; observe me,' urges Twemlow with great nicety, as if; in the case of its having been off the whole, he would have done it directly'ON the whole, I must beg you to excuse me from addressing any communication to Lord Snigsworth.'

'Bless you, bless you!' says Veneering; horribly disappointed, but grasping him by both hands again, in a particularly fervent manner.

It is not to be wondered at that poor Twemlow should decline to inflict a letter on his noble cousin (who has gout in the temper), inasmuch as his noble cousin, who allows him a small annuity on which he lives, takes it out of him, as the phrase goes, in extreme severity; putting him, when he visits at Snigsworthy Park, under a kind of martial law; ordaining that he shall hang his hat on a particular peg, sit on a particular chair, talk on particular subjects to particular people, and perform particular exercises: such as sounding the praises of the Family Varnish (not to say Pictures), and abstaining from the choicest of the Family Wines unless expressly invited to partake.

'One thing, however, I CAN do for you,' says Twemlow; 'and that is, work for you.'

Veneering blesses him again.

'I'll go,' says Twemlow, in a rising hurry of spirits, 'to the club; let us see now; what o'clock is it?'

'Twenty minutes to eleven.'

'I'll be,' says Twemlow, 'at the club by ten minutes to twelve, and I'll never leave it all day.'

Veneering feels that his friends are rallying round him, and says, 'Thank you, thank you. I knew I could rely upon you. I said to Anastatia before leaving home just now to come to you of course the first friend I have seen on a subject so momentous to me, my dear Twemlow I said to Anastatia, "We must work."'

'You were right, you were right,' replies Twemlow. 'Tell me. Is SHE working?'

'She is,' says Veneering.

'Good!' cries Twemlow, polite little gentleman that he is. 'A woman's tact is invaluable. To have the dear sex with us, is to have everything with us.'

'But you have not imparted to me,' remarks Veneering, 'what you think of my entering the House of Commons?'

'I think,' rejoins Twemlow, feelingly, 'that it is the best club in London.'

Veneering again blesses him, plunges down stairs, rushes into his Hansom, and directs the driver to be up and at the British Public, and to charge into the City.

Meanwhile Twemlow, in an increasing hurry of spirits, gets his hair down as well as he can which is not very well; for, after these glutinous applications it is restive, and has a surface on it somewhat in the nature of pastry and gets to the club by the appointed time. At the club he promptly secures a large window, writing materials, and all the newspapers, and establishes himself;

immoveable, to be respectfully contemplated by Pall Mall. Sometimes, when a man enters who nods to him, Twemlow says, 'Do you know Veneering?' Man says, 'No; member of the club?' Twemlow says, 'Yes. Coming in for PocketBreaches.' Man says, 'Ah! Hope he may find it worth the money!' yawns, and saunters out. Towards six o'clock of the afternoon, Twemlow begins to persuade himself that he is positively jaded with work, and thinks it much to be regretted that he was not brought up as a Parliamentary agent.

From Twemlow's, Veneering dashes at Podsnap's place of business. Finds Podsnap reading the paper, standing, and inclined to be oratorical over the astonishing discovery he has made, that Italy is not England. Respectfully entreats Podsnap's pardon for stopping the flow of his words of wisdom, and informs him what is in the wind. Tells Podsnap that their political opinions are identical. Gives Podsnap to understand that he, Veneering, formed his political opinions while sitting at the feet of him, Podsnap. Seeks earnestly to know whether Podsnap 'will rally round him?'

Says Podsnap, something sternly, 'Now, first of all, Veneering, do you ask my advice?'

Veneering falters that as so old and so dear a friend

'Yes, yes, that's all very well,' says Podsnap; 'but have you made up your mind to take this borough of PocketBreaches on its own terms, or do you ask my opinion whether you shall take it or leave it alone?'

Veneering repeats that his heart's desire and his soul's thirst are, that Podsnap shall rally round him.

'Now, I'll be plain with you, Veneering,' says Podsnap, knitting his brows. 'You will infer that I don't care about Parliament, from the fact of my not being there?'

Why, of course Veneering knows that! Of course Veneering knows that if Podsnap chose to go there, he would be there, in a space of time that might be stated by the light and thoughtless as a jiffy.

'It is not worth my while,' pursues Podsnap, becoming handsomely mollified, 'and it is the reverse of important to my position. But it is not my wish to set myself up as law for another man, differently situated. You think it IS worth YOUR while, and IS important to YOUR position. Is that so?'

Always with the proviso that Podsnap will rally round him, Veneering thinks it is so.

'Then you don't ask my advice,' says Podsnap. 'Good. Then I won't give it you. But you do ask my help. Good. Then I'll work for you.'

Veneering instantly blesses him, and apprises him that Twemlow is already working. Podsnap does not quite approve that anybody should be already working regarding it rather in the light of a liberty but tolerates Twemlow, and says he is a well-connected old female who will do no harm.

'I have nothing very particular to do today,' adds Podsnap, 'and I'll mix with some influential people. I had engaged myself to dinner, but I'll send Mrs Podsnap and get off going myself; and I'll dine with you at eight. It's important we should report progress and compare notes. Now, let me see. You ought to have a couple of active energetic fellows, of gentlemanly manners, to go about.'

Veneering, after cogitation, thinks of Boots and Brewer.

'Whom I have met at your house,' says Podsnap. 'Yes. They'll do very well. Let them each have a cab, and go about.'

Veneering immediately mentions what a blessing he feels it, to possess a friend capable of such grand administrative suggestions, and really is elated at this going about of Boots and Brewer, as an idea wearing an electioneering aspect and looking desperately like business. Leaving Podsnap, at a handgallop, he descends upon Boots and Brewer, who enthusiastically rally round him by at once bolting off in cabs, taking opposite directions. Then Veneering repairs to the legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence, and with him transacts some delicate affairs of business, and issues an address to the independent electors of Pocket Breaches, announcing that he is coming among them for their suffrages, as the mariner returns to the home of his early childhood: a phrase which is none the worse for his never having been near the place in his life, and not even now distinctly knowing where it is.

Mrs Veneering, during the same eventful hours, is not idle. No sooner does the carriage turn out, all complete, than she turns into it, all complete, and gives the word 'To Lady Tippins's.' That charmer dwells over a staymaker's in the Belgravian Borders, with a lifesize model in the window on the ground floor of a distinguished beauty in a blue petticoat, staylace in hand, looking over her shoulder at the town in innocent surprise. As well she may, to find herself dressing under the circumstances.

Lady Tippins at home? Lady Tippins at home, with the room darkened, and her back (like the lady's at the groundfloor window, though for a different reason) cunningly turned towards the light. Lady Tippins is so surprised by seeing her dear Mrs Veneering so early in the middle of the night, the pretty creature calls it that her eyelids almost go up, under the influence of that emotion.

To whom Mrs Veneering incoherently communicates, how that Veneering has

been offered PocketBreaches; how that it is the time for rallying round; how that Veneering has said 'We must work'; how that she is here, as a wife and mother, to entreat Lady Tippins to work; how that the carriage is at Lady Tippins's disposal for purposes of work; how that she, proprietress of said brand new elegant equipage, will return home on foot on bleeding feet if need be to work (not specifying how), until she drops by the side of baby's crib.

'My love,' says Lady Tippins, 'compose yourself; we'll bring him in.' And Lady Tippins really does work, and work the Veneering horses too; for she clatters about town all day, calling upon everybody she knows, and showing her entertaining powers and green fan to immense advantage, by rattling on with, My dear soul, what do you think? What do you suppose me to be? You'll never guess. I'm pretending to be an electioneering agent. And for what place of all places? PocketBreaches. And why? Because the dearest friend I have in the world has bought it. And who is the dearest friend I have in the world? A man of the name of Veneering. Not omitting his wife, who is the other dearest friend I have in the world; and I positively declare I forgot their baby, who is the other. And we are carrying on this little farce to keep up appearances, and isn't it refreshing! Then, my precious child, the fun of it is that nobody knows who these Veneerings are, and that they know nobody, and that they have a house out of the Tales of the Genii, and give dinners out of the Arabian Nights. Curious to see 'em, my dear? Say you'll know 'em. Come and dine with 'em. They shan't bore you. Say who shall meet you. We'll make up a party of our own, and I'll engage that they shall not interfere with you for one single moment. You really ought to see their gold and silver camels. I call their dinnertable, the Caravan. Do come and dine with my Veneerings, my own Veneerings, my exclusive property, the dearest friends I have in the world! And above all, my dear, be sure you promise me your vote and interest and all sorts of plumpers for PocketBreaches; for we couldn't think of spending sixpence on it, my love, and can only consent to be brought in by the spontaneous thingummies of the incorruptible whatdoyoucallums.

Now, the point of view seized by the bewitching Tippins, that this same working and rallying round is to keep up appearances, may have something in it, but not all the truth. More is done, or considered to be done which does as well by taking cabs, and 'going about,' than the fair Tippins knew of. Many vast vague reputations have been made, solely by taking cabs and going about. This particularly obtains in all Parliamentary affairs. Whether the business in hand be to get a man in, or get a man out, or get a man over, or promote a railway, or jockey a railway, or what else, nothing is understood to be so effectual as scouring nowhere in a violent hurry in short, as taking cabs and going about.

Probably because this reason is in the air, Twemlow, far from being singular in

his persuasion that he works like a Trojan, is capped by Podsnap, who in his turn is capped by Boots and Brewer. At eight o'clock when all these hard workers assemble to dine at Veneering's, it is understood that the cabs of Boots and Brewer mustn't leave the door, but that pails of water must be brought from the nearest baitingplace, and cast over the horses' legs on the very spot, lest Boots and Brewer should have instant occasion to mount and away. Those fleet messengers require the Analytical to see that their hats are deposited where they can be laid hold of at an instant's notice; and they dine (remarkably well though) with the air of firemen in charge of an engine, expecting intelligence of some tremendous conflagration.

Mrs Veneering faintly remarks, as dinner opens, that many such days would be too much for her.

'Many such days would be too much for all of us,' says Podsnap; 'but we'll bring him in!'

'We'll bring him in,' says Lady Tippins, sportively waving her green fan. 'Veneering for ever!'

'We'll bring him in!' says Twemlow.

'We'll bring him in!' say Boots and Brewer.

Strictly speaking, it would be hard to show cause why they should not bring him in, PocketBreaches having closed its little bargain, and there being no opposition. However, it is agreed that they must 'work' to the last, and that if they did not work, something indefinite would happen. It is likewise agreed that they are all so exhausted with the work behind them, and need to be so fortified for the work before them, as to require peculiar strengthening from Veneering's cellar. Therefore, the Analytical has orders to produce the cream of the cream of his binns, and therefore it falls out that rallying becomes rather a trying word for the occasion; Lady Tippins being observed gamely to inculcate the necessity of rearing round their dear Veneering; Podsnap advocating roaring round him; Boots and Brewer declaring their intention of reeling round him; and Veneering thanking his devoted friends one and all, with great emotion, for rarullarulling round him.

In these inspiring moments, Brewer strikes out an idea which is the great hit of the day. He consults his watch, and says (like Guy Fawkes), he'll now go down to the House of Commons and see how things look.

'I'll keep about the lobby for an hour or so,' says Brewer, with a deeply mysterious countenance, 'and if things look well, I won't come back, but will order my cab for nine in the morning.'

'You couldn't do better,' says Podsnap.

Veneering expresses his inability ever to acknowledge this last service. Tears stand in Mrs Veneering's affectionate eyes. Boots shows envy, loses ground, and is regarded as possessing a second-rate mind. They all crowd to the door, to see Brewer off. Brewer says to his driver, 'Now, is your horse pretty fresh?' eyeing the animal with critical scrutiny. Driver says he's as fresh as butter. 'Put him along then,' says Brewer; 'House of Commons.' Driver darts up, Brewer leaps in, they cheer him as he departs, and Mr Podsnap says, 'Mark my words, sir. That's a man of resource; that's a man to make his way in life.'

When the time comes for Veneering to deliver a neat and appropriate stammer to the men of PocketBreaches, only Podsnap and Twemlow accompany him by railway to that sequestered spot. The legal gentleman is at the PocketBreaches Branch Station, with an open carriage with a printed bill 'Veneering for ever' stuck upon it, as if it were a wall; and they gloriously proceed, amidst the grins of the populace, to a feeble little town hall on crutches, with some onions and bootlaces under it, which the legal gentleman says are a Market; and from the front window of that edifice Veneering speaks to the listening earth. In the moment of his taking his hat off, Podsnap, as per agreement made with Mrs Veneering, telegraphs to that wife and mother, 'He's up.'

Veneering loses his way in the usual No Thoroughfares of speech, and Podsnap and Twemlow say Hear hear! and sometimes, when he can't by any means back himself out of some very unlucky No Thoroughfare, 'Hear Hear!' with an air of facetious conviction, as if the ingenuity of the thing gave them a sensation of exquisite pleasure. But Veneering makes two remarkably good points; so good, that they are supposed to have been suggested to him by the legal gentleman in Britannia's confidence, while briefly conferring on the stairs.

Point the first is this. Veneering institutes an original comparison between the country, and a ship; pointedly calling the ship, the Vessel of the State, and the Minister the Man at the Helm. Veneering's object is to let PocketBreaches know that his friend on his right (Podsnap) is a man of wealth. Consequently says he, 'And, gentlemen, when the timbers of the Vessel of the State are unsound and the Man at the Helm is unskilful, would those great Marine Insurers, who rank among our worldfamed merchantprinces would they insure her, gentlemen? Would they underwrite her? Would they incur a risk in her? Would they have confidence in her? Why, gentlemen, if I appealed to my honourable friend upon my right, himself among the greatest and most respected of that great and much respected class, he would answer No!'

Point the second is this. The telling fact that Twemlow is related to Lord

Snigsworth, must be let off. Veneering supposes a state of public affairs that probably never could by any possibility exist (though this is not quite certain, in consequence of his picture being unintelligible to himself and everybody else), and thus proceeds. 'Why, gentlemen, if I were to indicate such a programme to any class of society, I say it would be received with derision, would be pointed at by the finger of scorn. If I indicated such a programme to any worthy and intelligent tradesman of your town, I will here be personal, and say Our town what would he reply? He would reply, "Away with it!" That's what HE would reply, gentlemen. In his honest indignation he would reply, "Away with it!" But suppose I mounted higher in the social scale. Suppose I drew my arm through the arm of my respected friend upon my left, and, walking with him through the ancestral woods of his family, and under the spreading beeches of Snigsworthy Park, approached the noble hall, crossed the courtyard, entered by the door, went up the staircase, and, passing from room to room, found myself at last in the august presence of my friend's near kinsman, Lord Snigsworth. And suppose I said to that venerable earl, "My Lord, I am here before your lordship, presented by your lordship's near kinsman, my friend upon my left, to indicate that programme;" what would his lordship answer? Why, he would answer, "Away with it!" That's what he would answer, gentlemen. "Away with it!" Unconsciously using, in his exalted sphere, the exact language of the worthy and intelligent tradesman of our town, the near and dear kinsman of my friend upon my left would answer in his wrath, "Away with it!"'

Veneering finishes with this last success, and Mr Podsnap telegraphs to Mrs Veneering, 'He's down.'

Then, dinner is had at the Hotel with the legal gentleman, and then there are in due succession, nomination, and declaration. Finally Mr Podsnap telegraphs to Mrs Veneering, 'We have brought him in.'

Another gorgeous dinner awaits them on their return to the Veneering halls, and Lady Tippins awaits them, and Boots and Brewer await them. There is a modest assertion on everybody's part that everybody singlehanded 'brought him in'; but in the main it is conceded by all, that that stroke of business on Brewer's part, in going down to the house that night to see how things looked, was the masterstroke.

A touching little incident is related by Mrs Veneering, in the course of the evening. Mrs Veneering is habitually disposed to be tearful, and has an extra disposition that way after her late excitement. Previous to withdrawing from the dinnertable with Lady Tippins, she says, in a pathetic and physically weak manner:

'You will all think it foolish of me, I know, but I must mention it. As I sat by

Baby's crib, on the night before the election, Baby was very uneasy in her sleep.'

The Analytical chemist, who is gloomily looking on, has diabolical impulses to suggest 'Wind' and throw up his situation; but represses them.

'After an interval almost convulsive, Baby curled her little hands in one another and smiled.'

Mrs Veneering stopping here, Mr Podsnap deems it incumbent on him to say: 'I wonder why!'

'Could it be, I asked myself,' says Mrs Veneering, looking about her for her pocket-handkerchief, 'that the Fairies were telling Baby that her papa would shortly be an M. P.?'

So overcome by the sentiment is Mrs Veneering, that they all get up to make a clear stage for Veneering, who goes round the table to the rescue, and bears her out backward, with her feet impressively scraping the carpet: after remarking that her work has been too much for her strength. Whether the fairies made any mention of the five thousand pounds, and it disagreed with Baby, is not speculated upon.

Poor little Twemlow, quite done up, is touched, and still continues touched after he is safely housed over the livery-stable yard in Duke Street, Saint James's. But there, upon his sofa, a tremendous consideration breaks in upon the mild gentleman, putting all softer considerations to the rout.

'Gracious heavens! Now I have time to think of it, he never saw one of his constituents in all his days, until we saw them together!'

After having paced the room in distress of mind, with his hand to his forehead, the innocent Twemlow returns to his sofa and moans:

'I shall either go distracted, or die, of this man. He comes upon me too late in life. I am not strong enough to bear him!'

Chapter 4

CUPID PROMPTED

To use the cold language of the world, Mrs Alfred Lamble rapidly improved the acquaintance of Miss Podsnap. To use the warm language of Mrs Lamble, she and her sweet Georgiana soon became one: in heart, in mind, in sentiment,

in soul.

Whenever Georgiana could escape from the thralldom of Podsnappery; could throw off the bedclothes of the custardcoloured phaeton, and get up; could shrink out of the range of her mother's rocking, and (so to speak) rescue her poor little frosty toes from being rocked over; she repaired to her friend, Mrs Alfred Lamble. Mrs Podsnap by no means objected. As a consciously 'splendid woman,' accustomed to overhear herself so denominated by elderly osteologists pursuing their studies in dinner society, Mrs Podsnap could dispense with her daughter. Mr Podsnap, for his part, on being informed where Georgiana was, swelled with patronage of the Lambles. That they, when unable to lay hold of him, should respectfully grasp at the hem of his mantle; that they, when they could not bask in the glory of him the sun, should take up with the pale reflected light of the watery young moon his daughter; appeared quite natural, becoming, and proper. It gave him a better opinion of the discretion of the Lambles than he had heretofore held, as showing that they appreciated the value of the connexion. So, Georgiana repairing to her friend, Mr Podsnap went out to dinner, and to dinner, and yet to dinner, arm in arm with Mrs Podsnap: settling his obstinate head in his cravat and shirtcollar, much as if he were performing on the Pandean pipes, in his own honour, the triumphal march, See the conquering Podsnap comes, Sound the trumpets, beat the drums!

It was a trait in Mr Podsnap's character (and in one form or other it will be generally seen to pervade the depths and shallows of Podsnappery), that he could not endure a hint of disparagement of any friend or acquaintance of his. 'How dare you?' he would seem to say, in such a case. 'What do you mean? I have licensed this person. This person has taken out MY certificate. Through this person you strike at me, Podsnap the Great. And it is not that I particularly care for the person's dignity, but that I do most particularly care for Podsnap's.' Hence, if any one in his presence had presumed to doubt the responsibility of the Lambles, he would have been mightily huffed. Not that any one did, for Veneering, M.P., was always the authority for their being very rich, and perhaps believed it. As indeed he might, if he chose, for anything he knew of the matter.

Mr and Mrs Lamble's house in Sackville Street, Piccadilly, was but a temporary residence. It has done well enough, they informed their friends, for Mr Lamble when a bachelor, but it would not do now. So, they were always looking at palatial residences in the best situations, and always very nearly taking or buying one, but never quite concluding the bargain. Hereby they made for themselves a shining little reputation apart. People said, on seeing a vacant palatial residence, 'The very thing for the Lambles!' and wrote to the Lambles about it, and the Lambles always went to look at it, but

unfortunately it never exactly answered. In short, they suffered so many disappointments, that they began to think it would be necessary to build a palatial residence. And hereby they made another shining reputation; many persons of their acquaintance becoming by anticipation dissatisfied with their own houses, and envious of the nonexistent Lammle structure.

The handsome fittings and furnishings of the house in Sackville Street were piled thick and high over the skeleton upstairs, and if it ever whispered from under its load of upholstery, 'Here I am in the closet!' it was to very few ears, and certainly never to Miss Podsnap's. What Miss Podsnap was particularly charmed with, next to the graces of her friend, was the happiness of her friend's married life. This was frequently their theme of conversation.

'I am sure,' said Miss Podsnap, 'Mr Lammle is like a lover. At least II should think he was.'

'Georgiana, darling!' said Mrs Lammle, holding up a forefinger, 'Take care!'

'Oh my goodness me!' exclaimed Miss Podsnap, reddening. 'What have I said now?'

'Alfred, you know,' hinted Mrs Lammle, playfully shaking her head. 'You were never to say Mr Lammle any more, Georgiana.'

'Oh! Alfred, then. I am glad it's no worse. I was afraid I had said something shocking. I am always saying something wrong to ma.'

'To me, Georgiana dearest?'

'No, not to you; you are not ma. I wish you were.'

Mrs Lammle bestowed a sweet and loving smile upon her friend, which Miss Podsnap returned as she best could. They sat at lunch in Mrs Lammle's own boudoir.

'And so, dearest Georgiana, Alfred is like your notion of a lover?'

'I don't say that, Sophronia,' Georgiana replied, beginning to conceal her elbows. 'I haven't any notion of a lover. The dreadful wretches that ma brings up at places to torment me, are not lovers. I only mean that Mr'

'Again, dearest Georgiana?'

'That Alfred'

'Sounds much better, darling.'

'Loves you so. He always treats you with such delicate gallantry and attention. Now, don't he?'

'Truly, my dear,' said Mrs Lammle, with a rather singular expression crossing her face. 'I believe that he loves me, fully as much as I love him.'

'Oh, what happiness!' exclaimed Miss Podsnap.

'But do you know, my Georgiana,' Mrs Lammle resumed presently, 'that there is something suspicious in your enthusiastic sympathy with Alfred's tenderness?'

'Good gracious no, I hope not!'

'Doesn't it rather suggest,' said Mrs Lammle archly, 'that my Georgiana's little heart is'

'Oh don't!' Miss Podsnap blushing besought her. 'Please don't! I assure you, Sophronia, that I only praise Alfred, because he is your husband and so fond of you.'

Sophronia's glance was as if a rather new light broke in upon her. It shaded off into a cool smile, as she said, with her eyes upon her lunch, and her eyebrows raised:

'You are quite wrong, my love, in your guess at my meaning. What I insinuated was, that my Georgiana's little heart was growing conscious of a vacancy.'

'No, no, no,' said Georgiana. 'I wouldn't have anybody say anything to me in that way for I don't know how many thousand pounds.'

'In what way, my Georgiana?' inquired Mrs Lammle, still smiling coolly with her eyes upon her lunch, and her eyebrows raised.

'YOU know,' returned poor little Miss Podsnap. 'I think I should go out of my mind, Sophronia, with vexation and shyness and detestation, if anybody did. It's enough for me to see how loving you and your husband are. That's a different thing. I couldn't bear to have anything of that sort going on with myself. I should beg and pray to have the person taken away and trampled upon.'

Ah! here was Alfred. Having stolen in unobserved, he playfully leaned on the back of Sophronia's chair, and, as Miss Podsnap saw him, put one of Sophronia's wandering locks to his lips, and waved a kiss from it towards Miss Podsnap.

'What is this about husbands and detestations?' inquired the captivating Alfred.

'Why, they say,' returned his wife, 'that listeners never hear any good of themselves; though you but pray how long have you been here, sir?'

'This instant arrived, my own.'

'Then I may go on though if you had been here but a moment or two sooner, you would have heard your praises sounded by Georgiana.'

'Only, if they were to be called praises at all which I really don't think they were,' explained Miss Podsnap in a flutter, 'for being so devoted to Sophronia.'

'Sophronia!' murmured Alfred. 'My life!' and kissed her hand. In return for which she kissed his watchchain.

'But it was not I who was to be taken away and trampled upon, I hope?' said Alfred, drawing a seat between them.

'Ask Georgiana, my soul,' replied his wife.

Alfred touchingly appealed to Georgiana.

'Oh, it was nobody,' replied Miss Podsnap. 'It was nonsense.'

'But if you are determined to know, Mr Inquisitive Pet, as I suppose you are,' said the happy and fond Sophronia, smiling, 'it was any one who should venture to aspire to Georgiana.'

'Sophronia, my love,' remonstrated Mr Lammle, becoming graver, 'you are not serious?'

'Alfred, my love,' returned his wife, 'I dare say Georgiana was not, but I am.'

'Now this,' said Mr Lammle, 'shows the accidental combinations that there are in things! Could you believe, my Ownest, that I came in here with the name of an aspirant to our Georgiana on my lips?'

'Of course I could believe, Alfred,' said Mrs Lammle, 'anything that YOU told me.'

'You dear one! And I anything that YOU told me.'

How delightful those interchanges, and the looks accompanying them! Now, if the skeleton upstairs had taken that opportunity, for instance, of calling out 'Here I am, suffocating in the closet!'

'I give you my honour, my dear Sophronia'

'And I know what that is, love,' said she.

'You do, my darling that I came into the room all but uttering young Fledgeby's name. Tell Georgiana, dearest, about young Fledgeby.'

'Oh no, don't! Please don't!' cried Miss Podsnap, putting her fingers in her ears.

'I'd rather not.'

Mrs Lammle laughed in her gayest manner, and, removing her Georgiana's unresisting hands, and playfully holding them in her own at arms' length, sometimes near together and sometimes wide apart, went on:

'You must know, you dearly beloved little goose, that once upon a time there was a certain person called young Fledgeby. And this young Fledgeby, who was of an excellent family and rich, was known to two other certain persons, dearly attached to one another and called Mr and Mrs Alfred Lammle. So this young Fledgeby, being one night at the play, there sees with Mr and Mrs Alfred Lammle, a certain heroine called'

'No, don't say Georgiana Podsnap!' pleaded that young lady almost in tears. 'Please don't. Oh do do do say somebody else! Not Georgiana Podsnap. Oh don't, don't, don't!'

'No other,' said Mrs Lammle, laughing airily, and, full of affectionate blandishments, opening and closing Georgiana's arms like a pair of compasses, 'than my little Georgiana Podsnap. So this young Fledgeby goes to that Alfred Lammle and says'

'Oh pleeeeee don't!' Georgiana, as if the supplication were being squeezed out of her by powerful compression. 'I so hate him for saying it!'

'For saying what, my dear?' laughed Mrs Lammle.

'Oh, I don't know what he said,' cried Georgiana wildly, 'but I hate him all the same for saying it.'

'My dear,' said Mrs Lammle, always laughing in her most captivating way, 'the poor young fellow only says that he is stricken all of a heap.'

'Oh, what shall I ever do!' interposed Georgiana. 'Oh my goodness what a Fool he must be!'

'And implores to be asked to dinner, and to make a fourth at the play another time. And so he dines tomorrow and goes to the Opera with us. That's all. Except, my dear Georgiana and what will you think of this! that he is infinitely shyer than you, and far more afraid of you than you ever were of any one in all your days!'

In perturbation of mind Miss Podsnap still fumed and plucked at her hands a little, but could not help laughing at the notion of anybody's being afraid of her. With that advantage, Sophronia flattered her and rallied her more successfully, and then the insinuating Alfred flattered her and rallied her, and promised that at any moment when she might require that service at his hands,

he would take young Fledgeby out and trample on him. Thus it remained amicably understood that young Fledgeby was to come to admire, and that Georgiana was to come to be admired; and Georgiana with the entirely new sensation in her breast of having that prospect before her, and with many kisses from her dear Sophronia in present possession, preceded six feet one of discontented footman (an amount of the article that always came for her when she walked home) to her father's dwelling.

The happy pair being left together, Mrs Lammler said to her husband:

'If I understand this girl, sir, your dangerous fascinations have produced some effect upon her. I mention the conquest in good time because I apprehend your scheme to be more important to you than your vanity.'

There was a mirror on the wall before them, and her eyes just caught him smirking in it. She gave the reflected image a look of the deepest disdain, and the image received it in the glass. Next moment they quietly eyed each other, as if they, the principals, had had no part in that expressive transaction.

It may have been that Mrs Lammler tried in some manner to excuse her conduct to herself by depreciating the poor little victim of whom she spoke with acrimonious contempt. It may have been too that in this she did not quite succeed, for it is very difficult to resist confidence, and she knew she had Georgiana's.

Nothing more was said between the happy pair. Perhaps conspirators who have once established an understanding, may not be overfond of repeating the terms and objects of their conspiracy. Next day came; came Georgiana; and came Fledgeby.

Georgiana had by this time seen a good deal of the house and its frequenters. As there was a certain handsome room with a billiard table in it on the ground floor, eating out a backyard which might have been Mr Lammler's office, or library, but was called by neither name, but simply Mr Lammler's room, so it would have been hard for stronger female heads than Georgiana's to determine whether its frequenters were men of pleasure or men of business. Between the room and the men there were strong points of general resemblance. Both were too gaudy, too slangy, too odorous of cigars, and too much given to horseflesh; the latter characteristic being exemplified in the room by its decorations, and in the men by their conversation. Highstepping horses seemed necessary to all Mr Lammler's friends as necessary as their transaction of business together in a gipsy way at untimely hours of the morning and evening, and in rushes and snatches. There were friends who seemed to be always coming and going across the Channel, on errands about the Bourse, and Greek and Spanish and India and Mexican and par and premium and

discount and three quarters and seven eighths. There were other friends who seemed to be always lolling and lounging in and out of the City, on questions of the Bourse, and Greek and Spanish and India and Mexican and par and premium and discount and three quarters and seven eighths. They were all feverish, boastful, and indefinitely loose; and they all ate and drank a great deal; and made bets in eating and drinking. They all spoke of sums of money, and only mentioned the sums and left the money to be understood; as 'five and forty thousand Tom,' or 'Two hundred and twentytwo on every individual share in the lot Joe.' They seemed to divide the world into two classes of people; people who were making enormous fortunes, and people who were being enormously ruined. They were always in a hurry, and yet seemed to have nothing tangible to do; except a few of them (these, mostly asthmatic and thickclipped) who were for ever demonstrating to the rest, with gold pencilcases which they could hardly hold because of the big rings on their forefingers, how money was to be made. Lastly, they all swore at their grooms, and the grooms were not quite as respectful or complete as other men's grooms; seeming somehow to fall short of the groom point as their masters fell short of the gentleman point.

Young Fledgeby was none of these. Young Fledgeby had a peachy cheek, or a cheek compounded of the peach and the red red red wall on which it grows, and was an awkward, sandyhaired, smalleyed youth, exceeding slim (his enemies would have said lanky), and prone to selfexamination in the articles of whisker and moustache. While feeling for the whisker that he anxiously expected, Fledgeby underwent remarkable fluctuations of spirits, ranging along the whole scale from confidence to despair. There were times when he started, as exclaiming 'By Jupiter here it is at last!' There were other times when, being equally depressed, he would be seen to shake his head, and give up hope. To see him at those periods leaning on a chimneypiece, like as on an urn containing the ashes of his ambition, with the cheek that would not sprout, upon the hand on which that cheek had forced conviction, was a distressing sight.

Not so was Fledgeby seen on this occasion. Arrayed in superb raiment, with his opera hat under his arm, he concluded his selfexamination hopefully, awaited the arrival of Miss Podsnap, and talked smalltalk with Mrs Lammle. In facetious homage to the smallness of his talk, and the jerky nature of his manners, Fledgeby's familiars had agreed to confer upon him (behind his back) the honorary title of Fascination Fledgeby.

'Warm weather, Mrs Lammle,' said Fascination Fledgeby. Mrs Lammle thought it scarcely as warm as it had been yesterday. 'Perhaps not,' said Fascination Fledgeby, with great quickness of repartee; 'but I expect it will be devilish warm tomorrow.'

He threw off another little scintillation. 'Been out today, Mrs Lammle?'

Mrs Lammle answered, for a short drive.

'Some people,' said Fascination Fledgeby, 'are accustomed to take long drives; but it generally appears to me that if they make 'em too long, they overdo it.'

Being in such feather, he might have surpassed himself in his next sally, had not Miss Podsnap been announced. Mrs Lammle flew to embrace her darling little Georgy, and when the first transports were over, presented Mr Fledgeby. Mr Lammle came on the scene last, for he was always late, and so were the frequenters always late; all hands being bound to be made late, by private information about the Bourse, and Greek and Spanish and India and Mexican and par and premium and discount and three quarters and seven eighths.

A handsome little dinner was served immediately, and Mr Lammle sat sparkling at his end of the table, with his servant behind his chair, and HIS everlingering doubts upon the subject of his wages behind himself. Mr Lammle's utmost powers of sparkling were in requisition today, for Fascination Fledgeby and Georgiana not only struck each other speechless, but struck each other into astonishing attitudes; Georgiana, as she sat facing Fledgeby, making such efforts to conceal her elbows as were totally incompatible with the use of a knife and fork; and Fledgeby, as he sat facing Georgiana, avoiding her countenance by every possible device, and betraying the discomposure of his mind in feeling for his whiskers with his spoon, his wine glass, and his bread.

So, Mr and Mrs Alfred Lammle had to prompt, and this is how they prompted.

'Georgiana,' said Mr Lammle, low and smiling, and sparkling all over, like a harlequin; 'you are not in your usual spirits. Why are you not in your usual spirits, Georgiana?'

Georgiana faltered that she was much the same as she was in general; she was not aware of being different.

'Not aware of being different!' retorted Mr Alfred Lammle. 'You, my dear Georgiana! Who are always so natural and unconstrained with us! Who are such a relief from the crowd that are all alike! Who are the embodiment of gentleness, simplicity, and reality!'

Miss Podsnap looked at the door, as if she entertained confused thoughts of taking refuge from these compliments in flight.

'Now, I will be judged,' said Mr Lammle, raising his voice a little, 'by my friend Fledgeby.'

'Oh DON'T!' Miss Podsnap faintly ejaculated: when Mrs Lammle took the promptbook.

'I beg your pardon, Alfred, my dear, but I cannot part with Mr Fledgeby quite yet; you must wait for him a moment. Mr Fledgeby and I are engaged in a personal discussion.'

Fledgeby must have conducted it on his side with immense art, for no appearance of uttering one syllable had escaped him.

'A personal discussion, Sophronia, my love? What discussion? Fledgeby, I am jealous. What discussion, Fledgeby?'

'Shall I tell him, Mr Fledgeby?' asked Mrs Lammle.

Trying to look as if he knew anything about it, Fascination replied, 'Yes, tell him.'

'We were discussing then,' said Mrs Lammle, 'if you MUST know, Alfred, whether Mr Fledgeby was in his usual flow of spirits.'

'Why, that is the very point, Sophronia, that Georgiana and I were discussing as to herself! What did Fledgeby say?'

'Oh, a likely thing, sir, that I am going to tell you everything, and be told nothing! What did Georgiana say?'

'Georgiana said she was doing her usual justice to herself today, and I said she was not.'

'Precisely,' exclaimed Mrs Lammle, 'what I said to Mr Fledgeby.' Still, it wouldn't do. They would not look at one another. No, not even when the sparkling host proposed that the quartette should take an appropriately sparkling glass of wine. Georgiana looked from her wine glass at Mr Lammle and at Mrs Lammle; but mightn't, couldn't, shouldn't, wouldn't, look at Mr Fledgeby. Fascination looked from his wine glass at Mrs Lammle and at Mr Lammle; but mightn't, couldn't, shouldn't, wouldn't, look at Georgiana.

More prompting was necessary. Cupid must be brought up to the mark. The manager had put him down in the bill for the part, and he must play it.

'Sophronia, my dear,' said Mr Lammle, 'I don't like the colour of your dress.'

'I appeal,' said Mrs Lammle, 'to Mr Fledgeby.'

'And I,' said Mr Lammle, 'to Georgiana.'

'Georgy, my love,' remarked Mrs Lammle aside to her dear girl, 'I rely upon you not to go over to the opposition. Now, Mr Fledgeby.'

Fascination wished to know if the colour were not called rosecolour? Yes, said Mr Lammle; actually he knew everything; it was really rosecolour. Fascination took rosecolour to mean the colour of roses. (In this he was very warmly supported by Mr and Mrs Lammle.) Fascination had heard the term Queen of Flowers applied to the Rose. Similarly, it might be said that the dress was the Queen of Dresses. ('Very happy, Fledgeby!' from Mr Lammle.) Notwithstanding, Fascination's opinion was that we all had our eyes on at least a large majority of us and that his farther opinion was several ands, with nothing beyond them.

'Oh, Mr Fledgeby,' said Mrs Lammle, 'to desert me in that way! Oh, Mr Fledgeby, to abandon my poor dear injured rose and declare for blue!'

'Victory, victory!' cried Mr Lammle; 'your dress is condemned, my dear.'

'But what,' said Mrs Lammle, stealing her affectionate hand towards her dear girl's, 'what does Georgy say?'

'She says,' replied Mr Lammle, interpreting for her, 'that in her eyes you look well in any colour, Sophronia, and that if she had expected to be embarrassed by so pretty a compliment as she has received, she would have worn another colour herself. Though I tell her, in reply, that it would not have saved her, for whatever colour she had worn would have been Fledgeby's colour. But what does Fledgeby say?'

'He says,' replied Mrs Lammle, interpreting for him, and patting the back of her dear girl's hand, as if it were Fledgeby who was patting it, 'that it was no compliment, but a little natural act of homage that he couldn't resist. And,' expressing more feeling as if it were more feeling on the part of Fledgeby, 'he is right, he is right!'

Still, no not even now, would they look at one another. Seeming to gnash his sparkling teeth, studs, eyes, and buttons, all at once, Mr Lammle secretly bent a dark frown on the two, expressive of an intense desire to bring them together by knocking their heads together.

'Have you heard this opera of tonight, Fledgeby?' he asked, stopping very short, to prevent himself from running on into 'confound you.'

'Why no, not exactly,' said Fledgeby. 'In fact I don't know a note of it.'

'Neither do you know it, Georgy?' said Mrs Lammle. 'Nno,' replied Georgiana, faintly, under the sympathetic coincidence.

'Why, then,' said Mrs Lammle, charmed by the discovery which flowed from the premises, 'you neither of you know it! How charming!'

Even the craven Fledgeby felt that the time was now come when he must strike a blow. He struck it by saying, partly to Mrs Lammle and partly to the circumambient air, 'I consider myself very fortunate in being reserved by'

As he stopped dead, Mr Lammle, making that gingerous bush of his whiskers to look out of, offered him the word 'Destiny.'

'No, I wasn't going to say that,' said Fledgeby. 'I was going to say Fate. I consider it very fortunate that Fate has written in the book ofin the book which is its own propertythat I should go to that opera for the first time under the memorable circumstances of going with Miss Podsnap.'

To which Georgiana replied, hooking her two little fingers in one another, and addressing the tablecloth, 'Thank you, but I generally go with no one but you, Sophronia, and I like that very much.'

Content perforce with this success for the time, Mr Lammle let Miss Podsnap out of the room, as if he were opening her cage door, and Mrs Lammle followed. Coffee being presently served up stairs, he kept a watch on Fledgeby until Miss Podsnap's cup was empty, and then directed him with his finger (as if that young gentleman were a slow Retriever) to go and fetch it. This feat he performed, not only without failure, but even with the original embellishment of informing Miss Podsnap that green tea was considered bad for the nerves. Though there Miss Podsnap unintentionally threw him out by faltering, 'Oh, is it indeed? How does it act?' Which he was not prepared to elucidate.

The carriage announced, Mrs Lammle said; 'Don't mind me, Mr Fledgeby, my skirts and cloak occupy both my hands, take Miss Podsnap.' And he took her, and Mrs Lammle went next, and Mr Lammle went last, savagely following his little flock, like a drover.

But he was all sparkle and glitter in the box at the Opera, and there he and his dear wife made a conversation between Fledgeby and Georgiana in the following ingenious and skilful manner. They sat in this order: Mrs Lammle, Fascination Fledgeby, Georgiana, Mr Lammle. Mrs Lammle made leading remarks to Fledgeby, only requiring monosyllabic replies. Mr Lammle did the like with Georgiana. At times Mrs Lammle would lean forward to address Mr Lammle to this purpose.

'Alfred, my dear, Mr Fledgeby very justly says, apropos of the last scene, that true constancy would not require any such stimulant as the stage deems necessary.' To which Mr Lammle would reply, 'Ay, Sophronia, my love, but as Georgiana has observed to me, the lady had no sufficient reason to know the state of the gentleman's affections.' To which Mrs Lammle would rejoin, 'Very true, Alfred; but Mr Fledgeby points out,' this. To which Alfred would demur: 'Undoubtedly, Sophronia, but Georgiana acutely remarks,' that. Through this

device the two young people conversed at great length and committed themselves to a variety of delicate sentiments, without having once opened their lips, save to say yes or no, and even that not to one another.

Fledgeby took his leave of Miss Podsnap at the carriage door, and the Lammles dropped her at her own home, and on the way Mrs Lamble archly rallied her, in her fond and protecting manner, by saying at intervals, 'Oh little Georgiana, little Georgiana!' Which was not much; but the tone added, 'You have enslaved your Fledgeby.'

And thus the Lammles got home at last, and the lady sat down moody and weary, looking at her dark lord engaged in a deed of violence with a bottle of sodawater as though he were wringing the neck of some unlucky creature and pouring its blood down his throat. As he wiped his dripping whiskers in an ogreish way, he met her eyes, and pausing, said, with no very gentle voice:

'Well?'

'Was such an absolute Booby necessary to the purpose?'

'I know what I am doing. He is no such dolt as you suppose.'

'A genius, perhaps?'

'You sneer, perhaps; and you take a lofty air upon yourself perhaps! But I tell you this: when that young fellow's interest is concerned, he holds as tight as a horseleech. When money is in question with that young fellow, he is a match for the Devil.'

'Is he a match for you?'

'He is. Almost as good a one as you thought me for you. He has no quality of youth in him, but such as you have seen today. Touch him upon money, and you touch no booby then. He really is a dolt, I suppose, in other things; but it answers his one purpose very well.'

'Has she money in her own right in any case?'

'Ay! she has money in her own right in any case. You have done so well today, Sophronia, that I answer the question, though you know I object to any such questions. You have done so well today, Sophronia, that you must be tired. Get to bed.'

Chapter 5

MERCURY PROMPTING

Fledgeby deserved Mr Alfred Lammle's eulogium. He was the meanest cur existing, with a single pair of legs. And instinct (a word we all clearly understand) going largely on four legs, and reason always on two, meanness on four legs never attains the perfection of meanness on two.

The father of this young gentleman had been a moneylender, who had transacted professional business with the mother of this young gentleman, when he, the latter, was waiting in the vast dark antechambers of the present world to be born. The lady, a widow, being unable to pay the moneylender, married him; and in due course, Fledgeby was summoned out of the vast dark antechambers to come and be presented to the RegistrarGeneral. Rather a curious speculation how Fledgeby would otherwise have disposed of his leisure until Doomsday.

Fledgeby's mother offended her family by marrying Fledgeby's father. It is one of the easiest achievements in life to offend your family when your family want to get rid of you. Fledgeby's mother's family had been very much offended with her for being poor, and broke with her for becoming comparatively rich. Fledgeby's mother's family was the Snigsworth family. She had even the high honour to be cousin to Lord Snigsworthso many times removed that the noble Earl would have had no compunction in removing her one time more and dropping her clean outside the cousinly pale; but cousin for all that.

Among her premarital transactions with Fledgeby's father, Fledgeby's mother had raised money of him at a great disadvantage on a certain reversionary interest. The reversion falling in soon after they were married, Fledgeby's father laid hold of the cash for his separate use and benefit. This led to subjective differences of opinion, not to say objective interchanges of bootjacks, backgammon boards, and other such domestic missiles, between Fledgeby's father and Fledgeby's mother, and those led to Fledgeby's mother spending as much money as she could, and to Fledgeby's father doing all he couldn't to restrain her. Fledgeby's childhood had been, in consequence, a stormy one; but the winds and the waves had gone down in the grave, and Fledgeby flourished alone.

He lived in chambers in the Albany, did Fledgeby, and maintained a spruce appearance. But his youthful fire was all composed of sparks from the grindstone; and as the sparks flew off, went out, and never warmed anything, be sure that Fledgeby had his tools at the grindstone, and turned it with a wary eye.

Mr Alfred Lammle came round to the Albany to breakfast with Fledgeby.

Present on the table, one scanty pot of tea, one scanty loaf, two scanty pats of butter, two scanty rashers of bacon, two pitiful eggs, and an abundance of handsome china bought a secondhand bargain.

'What did you think of Georgiana?' asked Mr Lammle.

'Why, I'll tell you,' said Fledgeby, very deliberately.

'Do, my boy.'

'You misunderstand me,' said Fledgeby. 'I don't mean I'll tell you that. I mean I'll tell you something else.'

'Tell me anything, old fellow!'

'Ah, but there you misunderstand me again,' said Fledgeby. 'I mean I'll tell you nothing.'

Mr Lammle sparkled at him, but frowned at him too.

'Look here,' said Fledgeby. 'You're deep and you're ready. Whether I am deep or not, never mind. I am not ready. But I can do one thing, Lammle, I can hold my tongue. And I intend always doing it.'

'You are a longheaded fellow, Fledgeby.'

'May be, or may not be. If I am a shorttongued fellow, it may amount to the same thing. Now, Lammle, I am never going to answer questions.'

'My dear fellow, it was the simplest question in the world.'

'Never mind. It seemed so, but things are not always what they seem. I saw a man examined as a witness in Westminster Hall. Questions put to him seemed the simplest in the world, but turned out to be anything rather than that, after he had answered 'em. Very well. Then he should have held his tongue. If he had held his tongue he would have kept out of scrapes that he got into.'

'If I had held my tongue, you would never have seen the subject of my question,' remarked Lammle, darkening.

'Now, Lammle,' said Fascination Fledgeby, calmly feeling for his whisker, 'it won't do. I won't be led on into a discussion. I can't manage a discussion. But I can manage to hold my tongue.'

'Can?' Mr Lammle fell back upon propitiation. 'I should think you could! Why, when these fellows of our acquaintance drink and you drink with them, the more talkative they get, the more silent you get. The more they let out, the more you keep in.'

'I don't object, Lammle,' returned Fledgeby, with an internal chuckle, 'to being

understood, though I object to being questioned. That certainly IS the way I do it.'

'And when all the rest of us are discussing our ventures, none of us ever know what a single venture of yours is!'

'And none of you ever will from me, Lammle,' replied Fledgeby, with another internal chuckle; 'that certainly IS the way I do it.'

'Why of course it is, I know!' rejoined Lammle, with a flourish of frankness, and a laugh, and stretching out his hands as if to show the universe a remarkable man in Fledgeby. 'If I hadn't known it of my Fledgeby, should I have proposed our little compact of advantage, to my Fledgeby?'

'Ah!' remarked Fascination, shaking his head slyly. 'But I am not to be got at in that way. I am not vain. That sort of vanity don't pay, Lammle. No, no, no. Compliments only make me hold my tongue the more.'

Alfred Lammle pushed his plate away (no great sacrifice under the circumstances of there being so little in it), thrust his hands in his pockets, leaned back in his chair, and contemplated Fledgeby in silence. Then he slowly released his left hand from its pocket, and made that bush of his whiskers, still contemplating him in silence. Then he slowly broke silence, and slowly said: 'WhattheDevil is this fellow about this morning?'

'Now, look here, Lammle,' said Fascination Fledgeby, with the meanest of twinkles in his meanest of eyes: which were too near together, by the way: 'look here, Lammle; I am very well aware that I didn't show to advantage last night, and that you and your wifewho, I consider, is a very clever woman and an agreeable womandid. I am not calculated to show to advantage under that sort of circumstances. I know very well you two did show to advantage, and managed capitally. But don't you on that account come talking to me as if I was your doll and puppet, because I am not.'

'And all this,' cried Alfred, after studying with a look the meanness that was fain to have the meanest help, and yet was so mean as to turn upon it: 'all this because of one simple natural question!'

'You should have waited till I thought proper to say something about it of myself. I don't like your coming over me with your Georgianas, as if you was her proprietor and mine too.'

'Well, when you are in the gracious mind to say anything about it of yourself,' retorted Lammle, 'pray do.'

'I have done it. I have said you managed capitally. You and your wife both. If you'll go on managing capitally, I'll go on doing my part. Only don't crow.'

'I crow!' exclaimed Lammle, shrugging his shoulders.

'Or,' pursued the other 'or take it in your head that people are your puppets because they don't come out to advantage at the particular moments when you do, with the assistance of a very clever and agreeable wife. All the rest keep on doing, and let Mrs Lammle keep on doing. Now, I have held my tongue when I thought proper, and I have spoken when I thought proper, and there's an end of that. And now the question is,' proceeded Fledgeby, with the greatest reluctance, 'will you have another egg?'

'No, I won't,' said Lammle, shortly.

'Perhaps you're right and will find yourself better without it,' replied Fascination, in greatly improved spirits. 'To ask you if you'll have another rasher would be unmeaning flattery, for it would make you thirsty all day. Will you have some more bread and butter?'

'No, I won't,' repeated Lammle.

'Then I will,' said Fascination. And it was not a mere retort for the sound's sake, but was a cheerful cogent consequence of the refusal; for if Lammle had applied himself again to the loaf, it would have been so heavily visited, in Fledgeby's opinion, as to demand abstinence from bread, on his part, for the remainder of that meal at least, if not for the whole of the next.

Whether this young gentleman (for he was but threeandtwenty) combined with the miserly vice of an old man, any of the openhanded vices of a young one, was a moot point; so very honourably did he keep his own counsel. He was sensible of the value of appearances as an investment, and liked to dress well; but he drove a bargain for every moveable about him, from the coat on his back to the china on his breakfasttable; and every bargain by representing somebody's ruin or somebody's loss, acquired a peculiar charm for him. It was a part of his avarice to take, within narrow bounds, long odds at races; if he won, he drove harder bargains; if he lost, he half starved himself until next time. Why money should be so precious to an Ass too dull and mean to exchange it for any other satisfaction, is strange; but there is no animal so sure to get laden with it, as the Ass who sees nothing written on the face of the earth and sky but the three letters L. S. D. not Luxury, Sensuality, Dissoluteness, which they often stand for, but the three dry letters. Your concentrated Fox is seldom comparable to your concentrated Ass in moneybreeding.

Fascination Fledgeby feigned to be a young gentleman living on his means, but was known secretly to be a kind of outlaw in the billbroking line, and to put money out at high interest in various ways. His circle of familiar acquaintance, from Mr Lammle round, all had a touch of the outlaw, as to their

rovings in the merry greenwood of Jobbery Forest, lying on the outskirts of the ShareMarket and the Stock Exchange.

'I suppose you, Lammle,' said Fledgeby, eating his bread and butter, 'always did go in for female society?'

'Always,' replied Lammle, glooming considerably under his late treatment.

'Came natural to you, eh?' said Fledgeby.

'The sex were pleased to like me, sir,' said Lammle sulkily, but with the air of a man who had not been able to help himself.

'Made a pretty good thing of marrying, didn't you?' asked Fledgeby.

The other smiled (an ugly smile), and tapped one tap upon his nose.

'My late governor made a mess of it,' said Fledgeby. 'But Georis the right name Georgina or Georgiana?'

'Georgiana.'

'I was thinking yesterday, I didn't know there was such a name. I thought it must end in ina.'

'Why?'

'Why, you playif you canthe Concertina, you know,' replied Fledgeby, meditating very slowly. 'And you havewhen you catch itthe Scarlatina. And you can come down from a balloon in a parachno you can't though. Well, say GeorgeuteI mean Georgiana.'

'You were going to remark of Georgiana?' Lammle moodily hinted, after waiting in vain.

'I was going to remark of Georgiana, sir,' said Fledgeby, not at all pleased to be reminded of his having forgotten it, 'that she don't seem to be violent. Don't seem to be of the pitchingin order.'

'She has the gentleness of the dove, Mr Fledgeby.'

'Of course you'll say so,' replied Fledgeby, sharpening, the moment his interest was touched by another. 'But you know, the real lookout is this:what I say, not what you say. I say having my late governor and my late mother in my eyethat Georgiana don't seem to be of the pitchingin order.'

The respected Mr Lammle was a bully, by nature and by usual practice. Perceiving, as Fledgeby's affronts cumulated, that conciliation by no means answered the purpose here, he now directed a scowling look into Fledgeby's small eyes for the effect of the opposite treatment. Satisfied by what he saw

there, he burst into a violent passion and struck his hand upon the table, making the china ring and dance.

'You are a very offensive fellow, sir,' cried Mr Lammle, rising. 'You are a highly offensive scoundrel. What do you mean by this behaviour?'

'I say!' remonstrated Fledgeby. 'Don't break out.'

'You are a very offensive fellow sir,' repeated Mr Lammle. 'You are a highly offensive scoundrel!'

'I SAY, you know!' urged Fledgeby, quailing.

'Why, you coarse and vulgar vagabond!' said Mr Lammle, looking fiercely about him, 'if your servant was here to give me sixpence of your money to get my boots cleaned afterwards for you are not worth the expenditure I'd kick you.'

'No you wouldn't,' pleaded Fledgeby. 'I am sure you'd think better of it.'

'I tell you what, Mr Fledgeby,' said Lammle advancing on him. 'Since you presume to contradict me, I'll assert myself a little. Give me your nose!'

Fledgeby covered it with his hand instead, and said, retreating, 'I beg you won't!'

'Give me your nose, sir,' repeated Lammle.

Still covering that feature and backing, Mr Fledgeby reiterated (apparently with a severe cold in his head), 'I beg, I beg, you won't.'

'And this fellow,' exclaimed Lammle, stopping and making the most of his chest 'This fellow presumes on my having selected him out of all the young fellows I know, for an advantageous opportunity! This fellow presumes on my having in my desk round the corner, his dirty note of hand for a wretched sum payable on the occurrence of a certain event, which event can only be of my and my wife's bringing about! This fellow, Fledgeby, presumes to be impertinent to me, Lammle. Give me your nose sir!'

'No! Stop! I beg your pardon,' said Fledgeby, with humility.

'What do you say, sir?' demanded Mr Lammle, seeming too furious to understand.

'I beg your pardon,' repeated Fledgeby.

'Repeat your words louder, sir. The just indignation of a gentleman has sent the blood boiling to my head. I don't hear you.'

'I say,' repeated Fledgeby, with laborious explanatory politeness, 'I beg your pardon.'

Mr Lammle paused. 'As a man of honour,' said he, throwing himself into a chair, 'I am disarmed.'

Mr Fledgeby also took a chair, though less demonstratively, and by slow approaches removed his hand from his nose. Some natural diffidence assailed him as to blowing it, so shortly after its having assumed a personal and delicate, not to say public, character; but he overcame his scruples by degrees, and modestly took that liberty under an implied protest.

'Lammle,' he said sneakingly, when that was done, 'I hope we are friends again?'

'Mr Fledgeby,' returned Lammle, 'say no more.'

'I must have gone too far in making myself disagreeable,' said Fledgeby, 'but I never intended it.'

'Say no more, say no more!' Mr Lammle repeated in a magnificent tone. 'Give me your'Fledgeby started'hand.'

They shook hands, and on Mr Lammle's part, in particular, there ensued great geniality. For, he was quite as much of a dastard as the other, and had been in equal danger of falling into the second place for good, when he took heart just in time, to act upon the information conveyed to him by Fledgeby's eye.

The breakfast ended in a perfect understanding. Incessant machinations were to be kept at work by Mr and Mrs Lammle; love was to be made for Fledgeby, and conquest was to be insured to him; he on his part very humbly admitting his defects as to the softer social arts, and entreating to be backed to the utmost by his two able coadjutors.

Little recked Mr Podsnap of the traps and toils besetting his Young Person. He regarded her as safe within the Temple of Podsnappery, hiding the fulness of time when she, Georgiana, should take him, FitzPodsnap, who with all his worldly goods should her endow. It would call a blush into the cheek of his standard Young Person to have anything to do with such matters save to take as directed, and with worldly goods as per settlement to be endowed. Who giveth this woman to be married to this man? I, Podsnap. Perish the daring thought that any smaller creation should come between!

It was a public holiday, and Fledgeby did not recover his spirits or his usual temperature of nose until the afternoon. Walking into the City in the holiday afternoon, he walked against a living stream setting out of it; and thus, when he turned into the precincts of St Mary Axe, he found a prevalent repose and quiet there. A yellow overhanging plasterfronted house at which he stopped was quiet too. The blinds were all drawn down, and the inscription Pubsey and

Co. seemed to doze in the countinghouse window on the groundfloor giving on the sleepy street.

Fledgeby knocked and rang, and Fledgeby rang and knocked, but no one came. Fledgeby crossed the narrow street and looked up at the housewindows, but nobody looked down at Fledgeby. He got out of temper, crossed the narrow street again, and pulled the housebell as if it were the house's nose, and he were taking a hint from his late experience. His ear at the keyhole seemed then, at last, to give him assurance that something stirred within. His eye at the keyhole seemed to confirm his ear, for he angrily pulled the house's nose again, and pulled and pulled and continued to pull, until a human nose appeared in the dark doorway.

'Now you sir!' cried Fledgeby. 'These are nice games!'

He addressed an old Jewish man in an ancient coat, long of skirt, and wide of pocket. A venerable man, bald and shining at the top of his head, and with long grey hair flowing down at its sides and mingling with his beard. A man who with a graceful Eastern action of homage bent his head, and stretched out his hands with the palms downward, as if to deprecate the wrath of a superior.

'What have you been up to?' said Fledgeby, storming at him.

'Generous Christian master,' urged the Jewish man, 'it being holiday, I looked for no one.'

'Holiday he blowed!' said Fledgeby, entering. 'What have YOU got to do with holidays? Shut the door.'

With his former action the old man obeyed. In the entry hung his rusty largebrimmed lowcrowned hat, as long out of date as his coat; in the corner near it stood his staffno walkingstick but a veritable staff. Fledgeby turned into the countinghouse, perched himself on a business stool, and cocked his hat. There were light boxes on shelves in the countinghouse, and strings of mock beads hanging up. There were samples of cheap clocks, and samples of cheap vases of flowers. Foreign toys, all.

Perched on the stool with his hat cocked on his head and one of his legs dangling, the youth of Fledgeby hardly contrasted to advantage with the age of the Jewish man as he stood with his bare head bowed, and his eyes (which he only raised in speaking) on the ground. His clothing was worn down to the rusty hue of the hat in the entry, but though he looked shabby he did not look mean. Now, Fledgeby, though not shabby, did look mean.

'You have not told me what you were up to, you sir,' said Fledgeby, scratching his head with the brim of his hat.

'Sir, I was breathing the air.'

'In the cellar, that you didn't hear?'

'On the housetop.'

'Upon my soul! That's a way of doing business.'

'Sir,' the old man represented with a grave and patient air, 'there must be two parties to the transaction of business, and the holiday has left me alone.'

'Ah! Can't be buyer and seller too. That's what the Jews say; ain't it?'

'At least we say truly, if we say so,' answered the old man with a smile.

'Your people need speak the truth sometimes, for they lie enough,' remarked Fascination Fledgeby.

'Sir, there is,' returned the old man with quiet emphasis, 'too much untruth among all denominations of men.'

Rather dashed, Fascination Fledgeby took another scratch at his intellectual head with his hat, to gain time for rallying.

'For instance,' he resumed, as though it were he who had spoken last, 'who but you and I ever heard of a poor Jew?'

'The Jews,' said the old man, raising his eyes from the ground with his former smile. 'They hear of poor Jews often, and are very good to them.'

'Bother that!' returned Fledgeby. 'You know what I mean. You'd persuade me if you could, that you are a poor Jew. I wish you'd confess how much you really did make out of my late governor. I should have a better opinion of you.'

The old man only bent his head, and stretched out his hands as before.

'Don't go on posturing like a Deaf and Dumb School,' said the ingenious Fledgeby, 'but express yourself like a Christianor as nearly as you can.'

'I had had sickness and misfortunes, and was so poor,' said the old man, 'as hopelessly to owe the father, principal and interest. The son inheriting, was so merciful as to forgive me both, and place me here.'

He made a little gesture as though he kissed the hem of an imaginary garment worn by the noble youth before him. It was humbly done, but picturesquely, and was not abasing to the doer.

'You won't say more, I see,' said Fledgeby, looking at him as if he would like to try the effect of extracting a doubletooth or two, 'and so it's of no use my putting it to you. But confess this, Riah; who believes you to be poor now?'

'No one,' said the old man.

'There you're right,' assented Fledgeby.

'No one,' repeated the old man with a grave slow wave of his head. 'All scout it as a fable. Were I to say "This little fancy business is not mine";' with a lithe sweep of his easilyturning hand around him, to comprehend the various objects on the shelves; "'it is the little business of a Christian young gentleman who places me, his servant, in trust and charge here, and to whom I am accountable for every single bead," they would laugh. When, in the larger moneybusiness, I tell the borrowers'

'I say, old chap!' interposed Fledgeby, 'I hope you mind what you DO tell 'em?'

'Sir, I tell them no more than I am about to repeat. When I tell them, "I cannot promise this, I cannot answer for the other, I must see my principal, I have not the money, I am a poor man and it does not rest with me," they are so unbelieving and so impatient, that they sometimes curse me in Jehovah's name.'

'That's deuced good, that is!' said Fascination Fledgeby.

'And at other times they say, "Can it never be done without these tricks, Mr Riah? Come, come, Mr Riah, we know the arts of your people"my people!"If the money is to be lent, fetch it, fetch it; if it is not to be lent, keep it and say so." They never believe me.'

'THAT'S all right,' said Fascination Fledgeby.

'They say, "We know, Mr Riah, we know. We have but to look at you, and we know."'

'Oh, a good 'un are you for the post,' thought Fledgeby, 'and a good 'un was I to mark you out for it! I may be slow, but I am precious sure.'

Not a syllable of this reflection shaped itself in any scrap of Mr Fledgeby's breath, lest it should tend to put his servant's price up. But looking at the old man as he stood quiet with his head bowed and his eyes cast down, he felt that to relinquish an inch of his baldness, an inch of his grey hair, an inch of his coatskirt, an inch of his hatbrim, an inch of his walkingstaff, would be to relinquish hundreds of pounds.

'Look here, Riah,' said Fledgeby, mollified by these selfapproving considerations. 'I want to go a little more into buyingup queer bills. Look out in that direction.'

'Sir, it shall be done.'

'Casting my eye over the accounts, I find that branch of business pays pretty fairly, and I am game for extending it. I like to know people's affairs likewise. So look out.'

'Sir, I will, promptly.'

'Put it about in the right quarters, that you'll buy queer bills by the lump by the pound weight if that's allsupposing you see your way to a fair chance on looking over the parcel. And there's one thing more. Come to me with the books for periodical inspection as usual, at eight on Monday morning.'

Riah drew some folding tablets from his breast and noted it down.

'That's all I wanted to say at the present time,' continued Fledgeby in a grudging vein, as he got off the stool, 'except that I wish you'd take the air where you can hear the bell, or the knocker, either one of the two or both. Bytheby how DO you take the air at the top of the house? Do you stick your head out of a chimneypot?'

'Sir, there are leads there, and I have made a little garden there.'

'To bury your money in, you old dodger?'

'A thumbnail's space of garden would hold the treasure I bury, master,' said Riah. 'Twelve shillings a week, even when they are an old man's wages, bury themselves.'

'I should like to know what you really are worth,' returned Fledgeby, with whom his growing rich on that stipend and gratitude was a very convenient fiction. 'But come! Let's have a look at your garden on the tiles, before I go!'

The old man took a step back, and hesitated.

'Truly, sir, I have company there.'

'Have you, by George!' said Fledgeby; 'I suppose you happen to know whose premises these are?'

'Sir, they are yours, and I am your servant in them.'

'Oh! I thought you might have overlooked that,' retorted Fledgeby, with his eyes on Riah's beard as he felt for his own; 'having company on my premises, you know!'

'Come up and see the guests, sir. I hope for your admission that they can do no harm.'

Passing him with a courteous reverence, specially unlike any action that Mr Fledgeby could for his life have imparted to his own head and hands, the old

man began to ascend the stairs. As he toiled on before, with his palm upon the stairrail, and his long black skirt, a very gaberdine, overhanging each successive step, he might have been the leader in some pilgrimage of devotional ascent to a prophet's tomb. Not troubled by any such weak imagining, Fascination Fledgeby merely speculated on the time of life at which his beard had begun, and thought once more what a good 'un he was for the part.

Some final wooden steps conducted them, stooping under a low penthouse roof, to the housetop. Riah stood still, and, turning to his master, pointed out his guests.

Lizzie Hexam and Jenny Wren. For whom, perhaps with some old instinct of his race, the gentle Jew had spread a carpet. Seated on it, against no more romantic object than a blackened chimneystack over which some bumble creeper had been trained, they both pored over one book; both with attentive faces; Jenny with the sharper; Lizzie with the more perplexed. Another little book or two were lying near, and a common basket of common fruit, and another basket full of strings of beads and tinsel scraps. A few boxes of humble flowers and evergreens completed the garden; and the encompassing wilderness of dowager old chimneys twirled their cowls and fluttered their smoke, rather as if they were bridling, and fanning themselves, and looking on in a state of airy surprise.

Taking her eyes off the book, to test her memory of something in it, Lizzie was the first to see herself observed. As she rose, Miss Wren likewise became conscious, and said, irreverently addressing the great chief of the premises: 'Whoever you are, I can't get up, because my back's bad and my legs are queer.'

'This is my master,' said Riah, stepping forward.

('Don't look like anybody's master,' observed Miss Wren to herself, with a hitch of her chin and eyes.)

'This, sir,' pursued the old man, 'is a little dressmaker for little people. Explain to the master, Jenny.'

'Dolls; that's all,' said Jenny, shortly. 'Very difficult to fit too, because their figures are so uncertain. You never know where to expect their waists.'

'Her friend,' resumed the old man, motioning towards Lizzie; 'and as industrious as virtuous. But that they both are. They are busy early and late, sir, early and late; and in byetimes, as on this holiday, they go to booklearning.'

'Not much good to be got out of that,' remarked Fledgeby.

'Depends upon the person!' quoth Miss Wren, snapping him up.

'I made acquaintance with my guests, sir,' pursued the Jew, with an evident purpose of drawing out the dressmaker, 'through their coming here to buy of our damage and waste for Miss Jenny's millinery. Our waste goes into the best of company, sir, on her rosycheeked little customers. They wear it in their hair, and on their balldresses, and even (so she tells me) are presented at Court with it.'

'Ah!' said Fledgeby, on whose intelligence this dollfancy made rather strong demands; 'she's been buying that basketful today, I suppose?'

'I suppose she has,' Miss Jenny interposed; 'and paying for it too, most likely!'

'Let's have a look at it,' said the suspicious chief. Riah handed it to him. 'How much for this now?'

'Two precious silver shillings,' said Miss Wren.

Riah confirmed her with two nods, as Fledgeby looked to him. A nod for each shilling.

'Well,' said Fledgeby, poking into the contents of the basket with his forefinger, 'the price is not so bad. You have got good measure, Miss Whatsit.'

'Try Jenny,' suggested that young lady with great calmness.

'You have got good measure, Miss Jenny; but the price is not so bad. And you,' said Fledgeby, turning to the other visitor, 'do you buy anything here, miss?'

'No, sir.'

'Nor sell anything neither, miss?'

'No, sir.'

Looking askew at the questioner, Jenny stole her hand up to her friend's, and drew her friend down, so that she bent beside her on her knee.

'We are thankful to come here for rest, sir,' said Jenny. 'You see, you don't know what the rest of this place is to us; does he, Lizzie? It's the quiet, and the air.'

'The quiet!' repeated Fledgeby, with a contemptuous turn of his head towards the City's roar. 'And the air!' with a 'Poof!' at the smoke.

'Ah!' said Jenny. 'But it's so high. And you see the clouds rushing on above the narrow streets, not minding them, and you see the golden arrows pointing at

the mountains in the sky from which the wind comes, and you feel as if you were dead.'

The little creature looked above her, holding up her slight transparent hand.

'How do you feel when you are dead?' asked Fledgeby, much perplexed.

'Oh, so tranquil!' cried the little creature, smiling. 'Oh, so peaceful and so thankful! And you hear the people who are alive, crying, and working, and calling to one another down in the close dark streets, and you seem to pity them so! And such a chain has fallen from you, and such a strange good sorrowful happiness comes upon you!'

Her eyes fell on the old man, who, with his hands folded, quietly looked on.

'Why it was only just now,' said the little creature, pointing at him, 'that I fancied I saw him come out of his grave! He toiled out at that low door so bent and worn, and then he took his breath and stood upright, and looked all round him at the sky, and the wind blew upon him, and his life down in the dark was over! Till he was called back to life,' she added, looking round at Fledgeby with that lower look of sharpness. 'Why did you call him back?'

'He was long enough coming, anyhow,' grumbled Fledgeby.

'But you are not dead, you know,' said Jenny Wren. 'Get down to life!'

Mr Fledgeby seemed to think it rather a good suggestion, and with a nod turned round. As Riah followed to attend him down the stairs, the little creature called out to the Jew in a silvery tone, 'Don't be long gone. Come back, and be dead!' And still as they went down they heard the little sweet voice, more and more faintly, half calling and half singing, 'Come back and be dead, Come back and be dead!'

When they got down into the entry, Fledgeby, pausing under the shadow of the broad old hat, and mechanically poising the staff, said to the old man:

'That's a handsome girl, that one in her senses.'

'And as good as handsome,' answered Riah.

'At all events,' observed Fledgeby, with a dry whistle, 'I hope she ain't bad enough to put any chap up to the fastenings, and get the premises broken open. You look out. Keep your weather eye awake and don't make any more acquaintances, however handsome. Of course you always keep my name to yourself?'

'Sir, assuredly I do.'

'If they ask it, say it's Pubsey, or say it's Co, or say it's anything you like, but

what it is.'

His grateful servant whose race gratitude is deep, strong, and enduring bowed his head, and actually did now put the hem of his coat to his lips: though so lightly that the wearer knew nothing of it.

Thus, Fascination Fledgeby went his way, exulting in the artful cleverness with which he had turned his thumb down on a Jew, and the old man went his different way upstairs. As he mounted, the call or song began to sound in his ears again, and, looking above, he saw the face of the little creature looking down out of a Glory of her long bright radiant hair, and musically repeating to him, like a vision:

'Come up and be dead! Come up and be dead!'

Chapter 6

A RIDDLE WITHOUT AN ANSWER

Again Mr Mortimer Lightwood and Mr Eugene Wrayburn sat together in the Temple. This evening, however, they were not together in the place of business of the eminent solicitor, but in another dismal set of chambers facing it on the same second floor; on whose dungeonlike black outer door appeared the legend:

PRIVATE MR EUGENE WRAYBURN MR MORTIMER LIGHTWOOD

(Mr Lightwood's Offices opposite.)

Appearances indicated that this establishment was a very recent institution. The white letters of the inscription were extremely white and extremely strong to the sense of smell, the complexion of the tables and chairs was (like Lady Tippins's) a little too blooming to be believed in, and the carpets and floorcloth seemed to rush at the beholder's face in the unusual prominence of their patterns. But the Temple, accustomed to tone down both the still life and the human life that has much to do with it, would soon get the better of all that.

'Well!' said Eugene, on one side of the fire, 'I feel tolerably comfortable. I hope the upholsterer may do the same.'

'Why shouldn't he?' asked Lightwood, from the other side of the fire.

'To be sure,' pursued Eugene, reflecting, 'he is not in the secret of our pecuniary affairs, so perhaps he may be in an easy frame of mind.'

'We shall pay him,' said Mortimer.

'Shall we, really?' returned Eugene, indolently surprised. 'You don't say so!'

'I mean to pay him, Eugene, for my part,' said Mortimer, in a slightly injured tone.

'Ah! I mean to pay him too,' retorted Eugene. 'But then I mean so much that I that I don't mean.'

'Don't mean?'

'So much that I only mean and shall always only mean and nothing more, my dear Mortimer. It's the same thing.'

His friend, lying back in his easy chair, watched him lying back in his easy chair, as he stretched out his legs on the hearthrug, and said, with the amused look that Eugene Wrayburn could always awaken in him without seeming to try or care:

'Anyhow, your vagaries have increased the bill.'

'Calls the domestic virtues vagaries!' exclaimed Eugene, raising his eyes to the ceiling.

'This very complete little kitchen of ours,' said Mortimer, 'in which nothing will ever be cooked'

'My dear, dear Mortimer,' returned his friend, lazily lifting his head a little to look at him, 'how often have I pointed out to you that its moral influence is the important thing?'

'Its moral influence on this fellow!' exclaimed Lightwood, laughing.

'Do me the favour,' said Eugene, getting out of his chair with much gravity, 'to come and inspect that feature of our establishment which you rashly disparage.' With that, taking up a candle, he conducted his chum into the fourth room of the set of chambers a little narrow room which was very completely and neatly fitted as a kitchen. 'See!' said Eugene, 'miniature flourbarrel, rollingpin, spicebox, shelf of brown jars, choppingboard, coffeemill, dresser elegantly furnished with crockery, saucepans and pans, roasting jack, a charming kettle, an armoury of dishcovers. The moral influence of these objects, in forming the domestic virtues, may have an immense influence upon me; not upon you, for you are a hopeless case, but upon me. In fact, I have an idea that I feel the domestic virtues already forming. Do me the favour to step into my bedroom. Secretaire, you see, and abstruse set of solid mahogany pigeonholes, one for every letter of the alphabet. To what use do I devote them? I receive a bill say from Jones. I

docket it neatly at the secretaire, JONES, and I put it into pigeonhole J. It's the next thing to a receipt and is quite as satisfactory to ME. And I very much wish, Mortimer,' sitting on his bed, with the air of a philosopher lecturing a disciple, 'that my example might induce YOU to cultivate habits of punctuality and method; and, by means of the moral influences with which I have surrounded you, to encourage the formation of the domestic virtues.'

Mortimer laughed again, with his usual commentaries of 'How CAN you be so ridiculous, Eugene!' and 'What an absurd fellow you are!' but when his laugh was out, there was something serious, if not anxious, in his face. Despite that pernicious assumption of lassitude and indifference, which had become his second nature, he was strongly attached to his friend. He had founded himself upon Eugene when they were yet boys at school; and at this hour imitated him no less, admired him no less, loved him no less, than in those departed days.

'Eugene,' said he, 'if I could find you in earnest for a minute, I would try to say an earnest word to you.'

'An earnest word?' repeated Eugene. 'The moral influences are beginning to work. Say on.'

'Well, I will,' returned the other, 'though you are not earnest yet.'

'In this desire for earnestness,' murmured Eugene, with the air of one who was meditating deeply, 'I trace the happy influences of the little flourbarrel and the coffeemill. Gratifying.'

'Eugene,' resumed Mortimer, disregarding the light interruption, and laying a hand upon Eugene's shoulder, as he, Mortimer, stood before him seated on his bed, 'you are withholding something from me.'

Eugene looked at him, but said nothing.

'All this past summer, you have been withholding something from me. Before we entered on our boating vacation, you were as bent upon it as I have seen you upon anything since we first rowed together. But you cared very little for it when it came, often found it a tie and a drag upon you, and were constantly away. Now it was well enough halfadozen times, a dozen times, twenty times, to say to me in your own odd manner, which I know so well and like so much, that your disappearances were precautions against our boring one another; but of course after a short while I began to know that they covered something. I don't ask what it is, as you have not told me; but the fact is so. Say, is it not?'

'I give you my word of honour, Mortimer,' returned Eugene, after a serious pause of a few moments, 'that I don't know.'

'Don't know, Eugene?'

'Upon my soul, don't know. I know less about myself than about most people in the world, and I don't know.'

'You have some design in your mind?'

'Have I? I don't think I have.'

'At any rate, you have some subject of interest there which used not to be there?'

'I really can't say,' replied Eugene, shaking his head blankly, after pausing again to reconsider. 'At times I have thought yes; at other times I have thought no. Now, I have been inclined to pursue such a subject; now I have felt that it was absurd, and that it tired and embarrassed me. Absolutely, I can't say. Frankly and faithfully, I would if I could.'

So replying, he clapped a hand, in his turn, on his friend's shoulder, as he rose from his seat upon the bed, and said:

'You must take your friend as he is. You know what I am, my dear Mortimer. You know how dreadfully susceptible I am to boredom. You know that when I became enough of a man to find myself an embodied conundrum, I bored myself to the last degree by trying to find out what I meant. You know that at length I gave it up, and declined to guess any more. Then how can I possibly give you the answer that I have not discovered? The old nursery form runs, "Riddlemeriddlemeree, p'raps you can't tell me what this may be?" My reply runs, "No. Upon my life, I can't."'

So much of what was fantastically true to his own knowledge of this utterly careless Eugene, mingled with the answer, that Mortimer could not receive it as a mere evasion. Besides, it was given with an engaging air of openness, and of special exemption of the one friend he valued, from his reckless indifference.

'Come, dear boy!' said Eugene. 'Let us try the effect of smoking. If it enlightens me at all on this question, I will impart unreservedly.'

They returned to the room they had come from, and, finding it heated, opened a window. Having lighted their cigars, they leaned out of this window, smoking, and looking down at the moonlight, as it shone into the court below.

'No enlightenment,' resumed Eugene, after certain minutes of silence. 'I feel sincerely apologetic, my dear Mortimer, but nothing comes.'

'If nothing comes,' returned Mortimer, 'nothing can come from it. So I shall hope that this may hold good throughout, and that there may be nothing on foot. Nothing injurious to you, Eugene, or'

Eugene stayed him for a moment with his hand on his arm, while he took a piece of earth from an old flowerpot on the windowsill and dexterously shot it at a little point of light opposite; having done which to his satisfaction, he said, 'Or?'

'Or injurious to any one else.'

'How,' said Eugene, taking another little piece of earth, and shooting it with great precision at the former mark, 'how injurious to any one else?'

'I don't know.'

'And,' said Eugene, taking, as he said the word, another shot, 'to whom else?'

'I don't know.'

Checking himself with another piece of earth in his hand, Eugene looked at his friend inquiringly and a little suspiciously. There was no concealed or halfexpressed meaning in his face.

'Two belated wanderers in the mazes of the law,' said Eugene, attracted by the sound of footsteps, and glancing down as he spoke, 'stray into the court. They examine the doorposts of number one, seeking the name they want. Not finding it at number one, they come to number two. On the hat of wanderer number two, the shorter one, I drop this pellet. Hitting him on the hat, I smoke serenely, and become absorbed in contemplation of the sky.'

Both the wanderers looked up towards the window; but, after interchanging a mutter or two, soon applied themselves to the doorposts below. There they seemed to discover what they wanted, for they disappeared from view by entering at the doorway. 'When they emerge,' said Eugene, 'you shall see me bring them both down'; and so prepared two pellets for the purpose.

He had not reckoned on their seeking his name, or Lightwood's. But either the one or the other would seem to be in question, for now there came a knock at the door. 'I am on duty tonight,' said Mortimer, 'stay you where you are, Eugene.' Requiring no persuasion, he stayed there, smoking quietly, and not at all curious to know who knocked, until Mortimer spoke to him from within the room, and touched him. Then, drawing in his head, he found the visitors to be young Charley Hexam and the schoolmaster; both standing facing him, and both recognized at a glance.

'You recollect this young fellow, Eugene?' said Mortimer.

'Let me look at him,' returned Wrayburn, coolly. 'Oh, yes, yes. I recollect him!'

He had not been about to repeat that former action of taking him by the chin, but the boy had suspected him of it, and had thrown up his arm with an angry

start. Laughingly, Wrayburn looked to Lightwood for an explanation of this odd visit.

'He says he has something to say.'

'Surely it must be to you, Mortimer.'

'So I thought, but he says no. He says it is to you.'

'Yes, I do say so,' interposed the boy. 'And I mean to say what I want to say, too, Mr Eugene Wrayburn!'

Passing him with his eyes as if there were nothing where he stood, Eugene looked on to Bradley Headstone. With consummate indolence, he turned to Mortimer, inquiring: 'And who may this other person be?'

'I am Charles Hexam's friend,' said Bradley; 'I am Charles Hexam's schoolmaster.'

'My good sir, you should teach your pupils better manners,' returned Eugene.

Composedly smoking, he leaned an elbow on the chimneypiece, at the side of the fire, and looked at the schoolmaster. It was a cruel look, in its cold disdain of him, as a creature of no worth. The schoolmaster looked at him, and that, too, was a cruel look, though of the different kind, that it had a raging jealousy and fiery wrath in it.

Very remarkably, neither Eugene Wrayburn nor Bradley Headstone looked at all at the boy. Through the ensuing dialogue, those two, no matter who spoke, or whom was addressed, looked at each other. There was some secret, sure perception between them, which set them against one another in all ways.

'In some high respects, Mr Eugene Wrayburn,' said Bradley, answering him with pale and quivering lips, 'the natural feelings of my pupils are stronger than my teaching.'

'In most respects, I dare say,' replied Eugene, enjoying his cigar, 'though whether high or low is of no importance. You have my name very correctly. Pray what is yours?'

'It cannot concern you much to know, but'

'True,' interposed Eugene, striking sharply and cutting him short at his mistake, 'it does not concern me at all to know. I can say Schoolmaster, which is a most respectable title. You are right, Schoolmaster.'

It was not the dullest part of this goad in its galling of Bradley Headstone, that he had made it himself in a moment of incautious anger. He tried to set his lips so as to prevent their quivering, but they quivered fast.

'Mr Eugene Wrayburn,' said the boy, 'I want a word with you. I have wanted it so much, that we have looked out your address in the book, and we have been to your office, and we have come from your office here.'

'You have given yourself much trouble, Schoolmaster,' observed Eugene, blowing the feathery ash from his cigar. 'I hope it may prove remunerative.'

'And I am glad to speak,' pursued the boy, 'in presence of Mr Lightwood, because it was through Mr Lightwood that you ever saw my sister.'

For a mere moment, Wrayburn turned his eyes aside from the schoolmaster to note the effect of the last word on Mortimer, who, standing on the opposite side of the fire, as soon as the word was spoken, turned his face towards the fire and looked down into it.

'Similarly, it was through Mr Lightwood that you ever saw her again, for you were with him on the night when my father was found, and so I found you with her on the next day. Since then, you have seen my sister often. You have seen my sister oftener and oftener. And I want to know why?'

'Was this worth while, Schoolmaster?' murmured Eugene, with the air of a disinterested adviser. 'So much trouble for nothing? You should know best, but I think not.'

'I don't know, Mr Wrayburn,' answered Bradley, with his passion rising, 'why you address me'

'Don't you?' said Eugene. 'Then I won't.'

He said it so tauntingly in his perfect placidity, that the respectable righthand clutching the respectable hairguard of the respectable watch could have wound it round his throat and strangled him with it. Not another word did Eugene deem it worth while to utter, but stood leaning his head upon his hand, smoking, and looking imperturbably at the chafing Bradley Headstone with his clutching righthand, until Bradley was wellnigh mad.

'Mr Wrayburn,' proceeded the boy, 'we not only know this that I have charged upon you, but we know more. It has not yet come to my sister's knowledge that we have found it out, but we have. We had a plan, Mr Headstone and I, for my sister's education, and for its being advised and overlooked by Mr Headstone, who is a much more competent authority, whatever you may pretend to think, as you smoke, than you could produce, if you tried. Then, what do we find? What do we find, Mr Lightwood? Why, we find that my sister is already being taught, without our knowing it. We find that while my sister gives an unwilling and cold ear to our schemes for her advantage, her brother, and Mr Headstone, the most competent authority, as his certificates

would easily prove, that could be produced she is wilfully and willingly profiting by other schemes. Ay, and taking pains, too, for I know what such pains are. And so does Mr Headstone! Well! Somebody pays for this, is a thought that naturally occurs to us; who pays? We apply ourselves to find out, Mr Lightwood, and we find that your friend, this Mr Eugene Wrayburn, here, pays. Then I ask him what right has he to do it, and what does he mean by it, and how comes he to be taking such a liberty without my consent, when I am raising myself in the scale of society by my own exertions and Mr Headstone's aid, and have no right to have any darkness cast upon my prospects, or any imputation upon my respectability, through my sister?'

The boyish weakness of this speech, combined with its great selfishness, made it a poor one indeed. And yet Bradley Headstone, used to the little audience of a school, and unused to the larger ways of men, showed a kind of exultation in it.

'Now I tell Mr Eugene Wrayburn,' pursued the boy, forced into the use of the third person by the hopelessness of addressing him in the first, 'that I object to his having any acquaintance at all with my sister, and that I request him to drop it altogether. He is not to take it into his head that I am afraid of my sister's caring for HIM'

(As the boy sneered, the Master sneered, and Eugene blew off the feathery ash again.)

'But I object to it, and that's enough. I am more important to my sister than he thinks. As I raise myself, I intend to raise her; she knows that, and she has to look to me for her prospects. Now I understand all this very well, and so does Mr Headstone. My sister is an excellent girl, but she has some romantic notions; not about such things as your Mr Eugene Wrayburns, but about the death of my father and other matters of that sort. Mr Wrayburn encourages those notions to make himself of importance, and so she thinks she ought to be grateful to him, and perhaps even likes to be. Now I don't choose her to be grateful to him, or to be grateful to anybody but me, except Mr Headstone. And I tell Mr Wrayburn that if he don't take heed of what I say, it will be worse for her. Let him turn that over in his memory, and make sure of it. Worse for her!'

A pause ensued, in which the schoolmaster looked very awkward.

'May I suggest, Schoolmaster,' said Eugene, removing his fastwaning cigar from his lips to glance at it, 'that you can now take your pupil away.'

'And Mr Lightwood,' added the boy, with a burning face, under the flaming aggravation of getting no sort of answer or attention, 'I hope you'll take notice of what I have said to your friend, and of what your friend has heard me say,

word by word, whatever he pretends to the contrary. You are bound to take notice of it, Mr Lightwood, for, as I have already mentioned, you first brought your friend into my sister's company, and but for you we never should have seen him. Lord knows none of us ever wanted him, any more than any of us will ever miss him. Now Mr Headstone, as Mr Eugene Wrayburn has been obliged to hear what I had to say, and couldn't help himself, and as I have said it out to the last word, we have done all we wanted to do, and may go.'

'Go downstairs, and leave me a moment, Hexam,' he returned. The boy complying with an indignant look and as much noise as he could make, swung out of the room; and Lightwood went to the window, and leaned there, looking out.

'You think me of no more value than the dirt under your feet,' said Bradley to Eugene, speaking in a carefully weighed and measured tone, or he could not have spoken at all.

'I assure you, Schoolmaster,' replied Eugene, 'I don't think about you.'

'That's not true,' returned the other; 'you know better.'

'That's coarse,' Eugene retorted; 'but you DON'T know better.'

'Mr Wrayburn, at least I know very well that it would be idle to set myself against you in insolent words or overbearing manners. That lad who has just gone out could put you to shame in halfadozen branches of knowledge in half an hour, but you can throw him aside like an inferior. You can do as much by me, I have no doubt, beforehand.'

'Possibly,' remarked Eugene.

'But I am more than a lad,' said Bradley, with his clutching hand, 'and I WILL be heard, sir.'

'As a schoolmaster,' said Eugene, 'you are always being heard. That ought to content you.'

'But it does not content me,' replied the other, white with passion. 'Do you suppose that a man, in forming himself for the duties I discharge, and in watching and repressing himself daily to discharge them well, dismisses a man's nature?'

'I suppose you,' said Eugene, 'judging from what I see as I look at you, to be rather too passionate for a good schoolmaster.' As he spoke, he tossed away the end of his cigar.

'Passionate with you, sir, I admit I am. Passionate with you, sir, I respect myself for being. But I have not Devils for my pupils.'

'For your Teachers, I should rather say,' replied Eugene.

'Mr Wrayburn.'

'Schoolmaster.'

'Sir, my name is Bradley Headstone.'

'As you justly said, my good sir, your name cannot concern me. Now, what more?'

'This more. Oh, what a misfortune is mine,' cried Bradley, breaking off to wipe the starting perspiration from his face as he shook from head to foot, 'that I cannot so control myself as to appear a stronger creature than this, when a man who has not felt in all his life what I have felt in a day can so command himself!' He said it in a very agony, and even followed it with an errant motion of his hands as if he could have torn himself.

Eugene Wrayburn looked on at him, as if he found him beginning to be rather an entertaining study.

'Mr Wrayburn, I desire to say something to you on my own part.'

'Come, come, Schoolmaster,' returned Eugene, with a languid approach to impatience as the other again struggled with himself; 'say what you have to say. And let me remind you that the door is standing open, and your young friend waiting for you on the stairs.'

'When I accompanied that youth here, sir, I did so with the purpose of adding, as a man whom you should not be permitted to put aside, in case you put him aside as a boy, that his instinct is correct and right.' Thus Bradley Headstone, with great effort and difficulty.

'Is that all?' asked Eugene.

'No, sir,' said the other, flushed and fierce. 'I strongly support him in his disapproval of your visits to his sister, and in his objection to your officiousness and worse in what you have taken upon yourself to do for her.'

'Is THAT all?' asked Eugene.

'No, sir. I determined to tell you that you are not justified in these proceedings, and that they are injurious to his sister.'

'Are you her schoolmaster as well as her brother's? Or perhaps you would like to be?' said Eugene.

It was a stab that the blood followed, in its rush to Bradley Headstone's face, as swiftly as if it had been dealt with a dagger. 'What do you mean by that?'

was as much as he could utter.

'A natural ambition enough,' said Eugene, coolly. 'Far be it from me to say otherwise. The sister who is something too much upon your lips, perhaps is so very different from all the associations to which she had been used, and from all the low obscure people about her, that it is a very natural ambition.'

'Do you throw my obscurity in my teeth, Mr Wrayburn?'

'That can hardly be, for I know nothing concerning it, Schoolmaster, and seek to know nothing.'

'You reproach me with my origin,' said Bradley Headstone; 'you cast insinuations at my bringing up. But I tell you, sir, I have worked my way onward, out of both and in spite of both, and have a right to be considered a better man than you, with better reasons for being proud.'

'How I can reproach you with what is not within my knowledge, or how I can cast stones that were never in my hand, is a problem for the ingenuity of a schoolmaster to prove,' returned Eugene. 'Is THAT all?'

'No, sir. If you suppose that boy'

'Who really will be tired of waiting,' said Eugene, politely.

'If you suppose that boy to be friendless, Mr Wrayburn, you deceive yourself. I am his friend, and you shall find me so.'

'And you will find HIM on the stairs,' remarked Eugene.

'You may have promised yourself, sir, that you could do what you chose here, because you had to deal with a mere boy, inexperienced, friendless, and unassisted. But I give you warning that this mean calculation is wrong. You have to do with a man also. You have to do with me. I will support him, and, if need be, require reparation for him. My hand and heart are in this cause, and are open to him.'

'And quite a coincidence the door is open,' remarked Eugene.

'I scorn your shifty evasions, and I scorn you,' said the schoolmaster. 'In the meanness of your nature you revile me with the meanness of my birth. I hold you in contempt for it. But if you don't profit by this visit, and act accordingly, you will find me as bitterly in earnest against you as I could be if I deemed you worth a second thought on my own account.'

With a consciously bad grace and stiff manner, as Wrayburn looked so easily and calmly on, he went out with these words, and the heavy door closed like a furnace door upon his red and white heats of rage.

'A curious monomaniac,' said Eugene. 'The man seems to believe that everybody was acquainted with his mother!'

Mortimer Lightwood being still at the window, to which he had in delicacy withdrawn, Eugene called to him, and he fell to slowly pacing the room.

'My dear fellow,' said Eugene, as he lighted another cigar, 'I fear my unexpected visitors have been troublesome. If as a setoff (excuse the legal phrase from a barristeratlaw) you would like to ask Tippins to tea, I pledge myself to make love to her.'

'Eugene, Eugene, Eugene,' replied Mortimer, still pacing the room, 'I am sorry for this. And to think that I have been so blind!'

'How blind, dear boy?' inquired his unmoved friend.

'What were your words that night at the riverside publichouse?' said Lightwood, stopping. 'What was it that you asked me? Did I feel like a dark combination of traitor and pickpocket when I thought of that girl?'

'I seem to remember the expression,' said Eugene.

'How do YOU feel when you think of her just now?'

His friend made no direct reply, but observed, after a few whiffs of his cigar, 'Don't mistake the situation. There is no better girl in all this London than Lizzie Hexam. There is no better among my people at home; no better among your people.'

'Granted. What follows?'

'There,' said Eugene, looking after him dubiously as he paced away to the other end of the room, 'you put me again upon guessing the riddle that I have given up.'

'Eugene, do you design to capture and desert this girl?'

'My dear fellow, no.'

'Do you design to marry her?'

'My dear fellow, no.'

'Do you design to pursue her?'

'My dear fellow, I don't design anything. I have no design whatever. I am incapable of designs. If I conceived a design, I should speedily abandon it, exhausted by the operation.'

'Oh Eugene, Eugene!'

'My dear Mortimer, not that tone of melancholy reproach, I entreat. What can I do more than tell you all I know, and acknowledge my ignorance of all I don't know! How does that little old song go, which, under pretence of being cheerful, is by far the most lugubrious I ever heard in my life?

"Away with melancholy,
Nor doleful changes ring
On life and human folly,
But merrily merrily sing
Fal la!"

Don't let us sing Fal la, my dear Mortimer (which is comparatively unmeaning), but let us sing that we give up guessing the riddle altogether.'

'Are you in communication with this girl, Eugene, and is what these people say true?'

'I concede both admissions to my honourable and learned friend.'

'Then what is to come of it? What are you doing? Where are you going?'

'My dear Mortimer, one would think the schoolmaster had left behind him a catechizing infection. You are ruffled by the want of another cigar. Take one of these, I entreat. Light it at mine, which is in perfect order. So! Now do me the justice to observe that I am doing all I can towards selfimprovement, and that you have a light thrown on those household implements which, when you only saw them as in a glass darkly, you were hastilyI must say hastilyinclined to depreciate. Sensible of my deficiencies, I have surrounded myself with moral influences expressly meant to promote the formation of the domestic virtues. To those influences, and to the improving society of my friend from boyhood, commend me with your best wishes.'

'Ah, Eugene!' said Lightwood, affectionately, now standing near him, so that they both stood in one little cloud of smoke; 'I would that you answered my three questions! What is to come of it? What are you doing? Where are you going?'

'And my dear Mortimer,' returned Eugene, lightly fanning away the smoke with his hand for the better exposition of his frankness of face and manner, 'believe me, I would answer them instantly if I could. But to enable me to do so, I must first have found out the troublesome conundrum long abandoned. Here it is. Eugene Wrayburn.' Tapping his forehead and breast. 'Riddleme,

riddlemeree, perhaps you can't tell me what this may be? No, upon my life I can't. I give it up!

Chapter 7

IN WHICH A FRIENDLY MOVE IS ORIGINATED

The arrangement between Mr Boffin and his literary man, Mr Silas Wegg, so far altered with the altered habits of Mr Boffin's life, as that the Roman Empire usually declined in the morning and in the eminently aristocratic family mansion, rather than in the evening, as of yore, and in Boffin's Bower. There were occasions, however, when Mr Boffin, seeking a brief refuge from the blandishments of fashion, would present himself at the Bower after dark, to anticipate the next sallying forth of Wegg, and would there, on the old settle, pursue the downward fortunes of those enervated and corrupted masters of the world who were by this time on their last legs. If Wegg had been worse paid for his office, or better qualified to discharge it, he would have considered these visits complimentary and agreeable; but, holding the position of a handsomely remunerated humbug, he resented them. This was quite according to rule, for the incompetent servant, by whomsoever employed, is always against his employer. Even those born governors, noble and right honourable creatures, who have been the most imbecile in high places, have uniformly shown themselves the most opposed (sometimes in belying distrust, sometimes in vapid insolence) to THEIR employer. What is in such wise true of the public master and servant, is equally true of the private master and servant all the world over.

When Mr Silas Wegg did at last obtain free access to 'Our House', as he had been wont to call the mansion outside which he had sat shelterless so long, and when he did at last find it in all particulars as different from his mental plans of it as according to the nature of things it well could be, that farseeing and farreaching character, by way of asserting himself and making out a case for compensation, affected to fall into a melancholy strain of musing over the mournful past; as if the house and he had had a fall in life together.

'And this, sir,' Silas would say to his patron, sadly nodding his head and musing, 'was once Our House! This, sir, is the building from which I have so often seen those great creatures, Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker' whose very names were of his own inventing 'pass and repass! And has it come to this, indeed! Ah dear me, dear me!'

So tender were his lamentations, that the kindly Mr Boffin was quite sorry for him, and almost felt mistrustful that in buying the house he had done him an irreparable injury.

Two or three diplomatic interviews, the result of great subtlety on Mr Wegg's part, but assuming the mask of careless yielding to a fortuitous combination of circumstances impelling him towards Clerkenwell, had enabled him to complete his bargain with Mr Venus.

'Bring me round to the Bower,' said Silas, when the bargain was closed, 'next Saturday evening, and if a sociable glass of old Jamaikey warm should meet your views, I am not the man to begrudge it.'

'You are aware of my being poor company, sir,' replied Mr Venus, 'but be it so.'

It being so, here is Saturday evening come, and here is Mr Venus come, and ringing at the Bowergate.

Mr Wegg opens the gate, descries a sort of brown paper truncheon under Mr Venus's arm, and remarks, in a dry tone: 'Oh! I thought perhaps you might have come in a cab.'

'No, Mr Wegg,' replies Venus. 'I am not above a parcel.'

'Above a parcel! No!' says Wegg, with some dissatisfaction. But does not openly growl, 'a certain sort of parcel might be above you.'

'Here is your purchase, Mr Wegg,' says Venus, politely handing it over, 'and I am glad to restore it to the source from whence it flowed.'

'Thankee,' says Wegg. 'Now this affair is concluded, I may mention to you in a friendly way that I've my doubts whether, if I had consulted a lawyer, you could have kept this article back from me. I only throw it out as a legal point.'

'Do you think so, Mr Wegg? I bought you in open contract.'

'You can't buy human flesh and blood in this country, sir; not alive, you can't,' says Wegg, shaking his head. 'Then query, bone?'

'As a legal point?' asks Venus.

'As a legal point.'

'I am not competent to speak upon that, Mr Wegg,' says Venus, reddening and growing something louder; 'but upon a point of fact I think myself competent to speak; and as a point of fact I would have seen you will you allow me to say, further?'

'I wouldn't say more than further, if I was you,' Mr Wegg suggests, pacifically.

'Before I'd have given that packet into your hand without being paid my price for it. I don't pretend to know how the point of law may stand, but I'm thoroughly confident upon the point of fact.'

As Mr Venus is irritable (no doubt owing to his disappointment in love), and as it is not the cue of Mr Wegg to have him out of temper, the latter gentleman soothingly remarks, 'I only put it as a little case; I only put it ha'porthetically.'

'Then I'd rather, Mr Wegg, you put it another time, penn'orthetically,' is Mr Venus's retort, 'for I tell you candidly I don't like your little cases.'

Arrived by this time in Mr Wegg's sittingroom, made bright on the chilly evening by gaslight and fire, Mr Venus softens and compliments him on his abode; profiting by the occasion to remind Wegg that he (Venus) told him he had got into a good thing.

'Tolerable,' Wegg rejoins. 'But bear in mind, Mr Venus, that there's no gold without its alloy. Mix for yourself and take a seat in the chimbleycorner. Will you perform upon a pipe, sir?'

'I am but an indifferent performer, sir,' returns the other; 'but I'll accompany you with a whiff or two at intervals.'

So, Mr Venus mixes, and Wegg mixes; and Mr Venus lights and puffs, and Wegg lights and puffs.

'And there's alloy even in this metal of yours, Mr Wegg, you was remarking?'

'Mystery,' returns Wegg. 'I don't like it, Mr Venus. I don't like to have the life knocked out of former inhabitants of this house, in the gloomy dark, and not know who did it.'

'Might you have any suspicions, Mr Wegg?'

'No,' returns that gentleman. 'I know who profits by it. But I've no suspicions.'

Having said which, Mr Wegg smokes and looks at the fire with a most determined expression of Charity; as if he had caught that cardinal virtue by the skirts as she felt it her painful duty to depart from him, and held her by main force.

'Similarly,' resumes Wegg, 'I have observations as I can offer upon certain points and parties; but I make no objections, Mr Venus. Here is an immense fortune drops from the clouds upon a person that shall be nameless. Here is a weekly allowance, with a certain weight of coals, drops from the clouds upon me. Which of us is the better man? Not the person that shall be nameless. That's an observation of mine, but I don't make it an objection. I take my allowance and my certain weight of coals. He takes his fortune. That's the way

it works.'

'It would be a good thing for me, if I could see things in the calm light you do, Mr Wegg.'

'Again look here,' pursues Silas, with an oratorical flourish of his pipe and his wooden leg: the latter having an undignified tendency to tilt him back in his chair; 'here's another observation, Mr Venus, unaccompanied with an objection. Him that shall be nameless is liable to be talked over. He gets talked over. Him that shall be nameless, having me at his right hand, naturally looking to be promoted higher, and you may perhaps say meriting to be promoted higher'

(Mr Venus murmurs that he does say so.)

'Him that shall be nameless, under such circumstances passes me by, and puts a talkingover stranger above my head. Which of us two is the better man? Which of us two can repeat most poetry? Which of us two has, in the service of him that shall be nameless, tackled the Romans, both civil and military, till he has got as husky as if he'd been weaned and ever since brought up on sawdust? Not the talkingover stranger. Yet the house is as free to him as if it was his, and he has his room, and is put upon a footing, and draws about a thousand a year. I am banished to the Bower, to be found in it like a piece of furniture whenever wanted. Merit, therefore, don't win. That's the way it works. I observe it, because I can't help observing it, being accustomed to take a powerful sight of notice; but I don't object. Ever here before, Mr Venus?'

'Not inside the gate, Mr Wegg.'

'You've been as far as the gate then, Mr Venus?'

'Yes, Mr Wegg, and peeped in from curiosity.'

'Did you see anything?'

'Nothing but the dustyard.'

Mr Wegg rolls his eyes all round the room, in that ever unsatisfied quest of his, and then rolls his eyes all round Mr Venus; as if suspicious of his having something about him to be found out.

'And yet, sir,' he pursues, 'being acquainted with old Mr Harmon, one would have thought it might have been polite in you, too, to give him a call. And you're naturally of a polite disposition, you are.' This last clause as a softening compliment to Mr Venus.

'It is true, sir,' replies Venus, winking his weak eyes, and running his fingers through his dusty shock of hair, 'that I was so, before a certain observation

soured me. You understand to what I allude, Mr Wegg? To a certain written statement respecting not wishing to be regarded in a certain light. Since that, all is fled, save gall.'

'Not all,' says Mr Wegg, in a tone of sentimental condolence.

'Yes, sir,' returns Venus, 'all! The world may deem it harsh, but I'd quite as soon pitch into my best friend as not. Indeed, I'd sooner!'

Involuntarily making a pass with his wooden leg to guard himself as Mr Venus springs up in the emphasis of this unsociable declaration, Mr Wegg tilts over on his back, chair and all, and is rescued by that harmless misanthrope, in a disjointed state and ruefully rubbing his head.

'Why, you lost your balance, Mr Wegg,' says Venus, handing him his pipe.

'And about time to do it,' grumbles Silas, 'when a man's visitors, without a word of notice, conduct themselves with the sudden viciousness of Jacksinboxes! Don't come flying out of your chair like that, Mr Venus!'

'I ask your pardon, Mr Wegg. I am so soured.'

'Yes, but hang it,' says Wegg argumentatively, 'a wellgoverned mind can be soured sitting! And as to being regarded in lights, there's bumpey lights as well as bony. IN which,' again rubbing his head, 'I object to regard myself.'

'I'll bear it in memory, sir.'

'If you'll be so good.' Mr Wegg slowly subdues his ironical tone and his lingering irritation, and resumes his pipe. 'We were talking of old Mr Harmon being a friend of yours.'

'Not a friend, Mr Wegg. Only known to speak to, and to have a little deal with now and then. A very inquisitive character, Mr Wegg, regarding what was found in the dust. As inquisitive as secret.'

'Ah! You found him secret?' returns Wegg, with a greedy relish.

'He had always the look of it, and the manner of it.'

'Ah!' with another roll of his eyes. 'As to what was found in the dust now. Did you ever hear him mention how he found it, my dear friend? Living on the mysterious premises, one would like to know. For instance, where he found things? Or, for instance, how he set about it? Whether he began at the top of the mounds, or whether he began at the bottom. Whether he prodded'; Mr Wegg's pantomime is skilful and expressive here; 'or whether he scooped? Should you say scooped, my dear Mr Venus; or should you as a mansay prodded?'

'I should say neither, Mr Wegg.'

'As a fellowman, Mr Venusmix againwhy neither?'

'Because I suppose, sir, that what was found, was found in the sorting and sifting. All the mounds are sorted and sifted?'

'You shall see 'em and pass your opinion. Mix again.'

On each occasion of his saying 'mix again', Mr Wegg, with a hop on his wooden leg, hitches his chair a little nearer; more as if he were proposing that himself and Mr Venus should mix again, than that they should replenish their glasses.

'Living (as I said before) on the mysterious premises,' says Wegg when the other has acted on his hospitable entreaty, 'one likes to know. Would you be inclined to say nowas a brotherthat he ever hid things in the dust, as well as found 'em?'

'Mr Wegg, on the whole I should say he might.'

Mr Wegg claps on his spectacles, and admiringly surveys Mr Venus from head to foot.

'As a mortal equally with myself, whose hand I take in mine for the first time this day, having unaccountably overlooked that act so full of boundless confidence binding a fellowcreetur TO a fellow creetur,' says Wegg, holding Mr Venus's palm out, flat and ready for smiting, and now smiting it; 'as suchand no otherfor I scorn all lowlier ties betwixt myself and the man walking with his face erect that alone I call my Twinregarded and regarding in this trustful bondwhat do you think he might have hid?'

'It is but a supposition, Mr Wegg.'

'As a Being with his hand upon his heart,' cries Wegg; and the apostrophe is not the less impressive for the Being's hand being actually upon his rum and water; 'put your supposition into language, and bring it out, Mr Venus!'

'He was the species of old gentleman, sir,' slowly returns that practical anatomist, after drinking, 'that I should judge likely to take such opportunities as this place offered, of stowing away money, valuables, maybe papers.'

'As one that was ever an ornament to human life,' says Mr Wegg, again holding out Mr Venus's palm as if he were going to tell his fortune by chiromancy, and holding his own up ready for smiting it when the time should come; 'as one that the poet might have had his eye on, in writing the national naval words:

Helm aweather, now lay her close,

Yard arm and yard arm she lies;

Again, cried I, Mr Venus, give her t'other dose,

Man shrouds and grapple, sir, or she flies!

that is to say, regarded in the light of true British Oak, for such you are explain, Mr Venus, the expression "papers"!

'Seeing that the old gentleman was generally cutting off some near relation, or blocking out some natural affection,' Mr Venus rejoins, 'he most likely made a good many wills and codicils.'

The palm of Silas Wegg descends with a sounding smack upon the palm of Venus, and Wegg lavishly exclaims, 'Twin in opinion equally with feeling! Mix a little more!'

Having now hitched his wooden leg and his chair close in front of Mr Venus, Mr Wegg rapidly mixes for both, gives his visitor his glass, touches its rim with the rim of his own, puts his own to his lips, puts it down, and spreading his hands on his visitor's knees thus addresses him:

'Mr Venus. It ain't that I object to being passed over for a stranger, though I regard the stranger as a more than doubtful customer. It ain't for the sake of making money, though money is ever welcome. It ain't for myself, though I am not so haughty as to be above doing myself a good turn. It's for the cause of the right.'

Mr Venus, passively winking his weak eyes both at once, demands: 'What is, Mr Wegg?'

'The friendly move, sir, that I now propose. You see the move, sir?'

'Till you have pointed it out, Mr Wegg, I can't say whether I do or not.'

'If there IS anything to be found on these premises, let us find it together. Let us make the friendly move of agreeing to look for it together. Let us make the friendly move of agreeing to share the profits of it equally betwixt us. In the cause of the right.' Thus Silas assuming a noble air.

'Then,' says Mr Venus, looking up, after meditating with his hair held in his hands, as if he could only fix his attention by fixing his head; 'if anything was to be unburied from under the dust, it would be kept a secret by you and me? Would that be it, Mr Wegg?'

'That would depend upon what it was, Mr Venus. Say it was money, or plate, or jewellery, it would be as much ours as anybody else's.'

Mr Venus rubs an eyebrow, interrogatively.

'In the cause of the right it would. Because it would be unknowingly sold with the mounds else, and the buyer would get what he was never meant to have, and never bought. And what would that be, Mr Venus, but the cause of the wrong?'

'Say it was papers,' Mr Venus propounds.

'According to what they contained we should offer to dispose of 'em to the parties most interested,' replies Wegg, promptly.

'In the cause of the right, Mr Wegg?'

'Always so, Mr Venus. If the parties should use them in the cause of the wrong, that would be their act and deed. Mr Venus. I have an opinion of you, sir, to which it is not easy to give mouth. Since I called upon you that evening when you were, as I may say, floating your powerful mind in tea, I have felt that you required to be roused with an object. In this friendly move, sir, you will have a glorious object to rouse you.'

Mr Wegg then goes on to enlarge upon what throughout has been uppermost in his crafty mind: the qualifications of Mr Venus for such a search. He expatiates on Mr Venus's patient habits and delicate manipulation; on his skill in piecing little things together; on his knowledge of various tissues and textures; on the likelihood of small indications leading him on to the discovery of great concealments. 'While as to myself,' says Wegg, 'I am not good at it. Whether I gave myself up to prodding, or whether I gave myself up to scooping, I couldn't do it with that delicate touch so as not to show that I was disturbing the mounds. Quite different with YOU, going to work (as YOU would) in the light of a fellowman, holily pledged in a friendly move to his brother man.' Mr Wegg next modestly remarks on the want of adaptation in a wooden leg to ladders and such like airy perches, and also hints at an inherent tendency in that timber fiction, when called into action for the purposes of a promenade on an ashey slope, to stick itself into the yielding foothold, and peg its owner to one spot. Then, leaving this part of the subject, he remarks on the special phenomenon that before his installation in the Bower, it was from Mr Venus that he first heard of the legend of hidden wealth in the Mounds: 'which', he observes with a vaguely pious air, 'was surely never meant for nothing.' Lastly, he returns to the cause of the right, gloomily foreshadowing the possibility of something being unearthed to criminate Mr Boffin (of whom he once more candidly admits it cannot be denied that he profits by a murder), and anticipating his denunciation by the friendly movers to avenging justice. And this, Mr Wegg expressly points out, not at all for the sake of the reward though it would be a want of principle not to take it.

To all this, Mr Venus, with his shock of dusty hair cocked after the manner of a terrier's ears, attends profoundly. When Mr Wegg, having finished, opens his arms wide, as if to show Mr Venus how bare his breast is, and then folds them pending a reply, Mr Venus winks at him with both eyes some little time before speaking.

'I see you have tried it by yourself, Mr Wegg,' he says when he does speak. 'You have found out the difficulties by experience.'

'No, it can hardly be said that I have tried it,' replies Wegg, a little dashed by the hint. 'I have just skimmed it. Skimmed it.'

'And found nothing besides the difficulties?'

Wegg shakes his head.

'I scarcely know what to say to this, Mr Wegg,' observes Venus, after ruminating for a while.

'Say yes,' Wegg naturally urges.

'If I wasn't soured, my answer would be no. But being soured, Mr Wegg, and driven to reckless madness and desperation, I suppose it's Yes.'

Wegg joyfully reproduces the two glasses, repeats the ceremony of clinking their rims, and inwardly drinks with great heartiness to the health and success in life of the young lady who has reduced Mr Venus to his present convenient state of mind.

The articles of the friendly move are then severally recited and agreed upon. They are but secrecy, fidelity, and perseverance. The Bower to be always free of access to Mr Venus for his researches, and every precaution to be taken against their attracting observation in the neighbourhood.

'There's a footstep!' exclaims Venus.

'Where?' cries Wegg, starting.

'Outside. St!'

They are in the act of ratifying the treaty of friendly move, by shaking hands upon it. They softly break off, light their pipes which have gone out, and lean back in their chairs. No doubt, a footstep. It approaches the window, and a hand taps at the glass. 'Come in!' calls Wegg; meaning come round by the door. But the heavy oldfashioned sash is slowly raised, and a head slowly looks in out of the dark background of night.

'Pray is Mr Silas Wegg here? Oh! I see him!'

The friendly movers might not have been quite at their ease, even though the visitor had entered in the usual manner. But, leaning on the breasthigh window, and staring in out of the darkness, they find the visitor extremely embarrassing. Especially Mr Venus: who removes his pipe, draws back his head, and stares at the starrer, as if it were his own Hindoo baby come to fetch him home.

'Good evening, Mr Wegg. The yard gatelock should be looked to, if you please; it don't catch.'

'Is it Mr Rokesmith?' falters Wegg.

'It is Mr Rokesmith. Don't let me disturb you. I am not coming in. I have only a message for you, which I undertook to deliver on my way home to my lodgings. I was in two minds about coming beyond the gate without ringing: not knowing but you might have a dog about.'

'I wish I had,' mutters Wegg, with his back turned as he rose from his chair. St! Hush! The talkingover stranger, Mr Venus.'

'Is that any one I know?' inquires the staring Secretary.

'No, Mr Rokesmith. Friend of mine. Passing the evening with me.'

'Oh! I beg his pardon. Mr Boffin wishes you to know that he does not expect you to stay at home any evening, on the chance of his coming. It has occurred to him that he may, without intending it, have been a tie upon you. In future, if he should come without notice, he will take his chance of finding you, and it will be all the same to him if he does not. I undertook to tell you on my way. That's all.'

With that, and 'Good night,' the Secretary lowers the window, and disappears. They listen, and hear his footsteps go back to the gate, and hear the gate close after him.

'And for that individual, Mr Venus,' remarks Wegg, when he is fully gone, 'I have been passed over! Let me ask you what you think of him?'

Apparently, Mr Venus does not know what to think of him, for he makes sundry efforts to reply, without delivering himself of any other articulate utterance than that he has 'a singular look'.

'A double look, you mean, sir,' rejoins Wegg, playing bitterly upon the word. 'That's HIS look. Any amount of singular look for me, but not a double look! That's an underhanded mind, sir.'

'Do you say there's something against him?' Venus asks.

'Something against him?' repeats Wegg. 'Something? What would the relief be to my feelings as a fellowman if I wasn't the slave of truth, and didn't feel myself compelled to answer, Everything!'

See into what wonderful maudlin refuges, featherless ostriches plunge their heads! It is such unspeakable moral compensation to Wegg, to be overcome by the consideration that Mr Rokesmith has an underhanded mind!

'On this starlight night, Mr Venus,' he remarks, when he is showing that friendly mover out across the yard, and both are something the worse for mixing again and again: 'on this starlight night to think that talking over strangers, and underhanded minds, can go walking home under the sky, as if they was all square!'

'The spectacle of those orbs,' says Mr Venus, gazing upward with his hat tumbling off; 'brings heavy on me her crushing words that she did not wish to regard herself nor yet to be regarded in that'

'I know! I know! You needn't repeat 'em,' says Wegg, pressing his hand. 'But think how those stars steady me in the cause of the right against some that shall be nameless. It isn't that I bear malice. But see how they glisten with old remembrances! Old remembrances of what, sir?'

Mr Venus begins drearily replying, 'Of her words, in her own handwriting, that she does not wish to regard herself, nor yet' when Silas cuts him short with dignity.

'No, sir! Remembrances of Our House, of Master George, of Aunt Jane, of Uncle Parker, all laid waste! All offered up sacrifices to the minion of fortune and the worm of the hour!'

Chapter 8

IN WHICH AN INNOCENT ELOPEMENT OCCURS

The minion of fortune and the worm of the hour, or in less cutting language, Nicodemus Boffin, Esquire, the Golden Dustman, had become as much at home in his eminently aristocratic family mansion as he was likely ever to be. He could not but feel that, like an eminently aristocratic family cheese, it was much too large for his wants, and bred an infinite amount of parasites; but he was content to regard this drawback on his property as a sort of perpetual Legacy Duty. He felt the more resigned to it, forasmuch as Mrs Boffin enjoyed herself completely, and Miss Bella was delighted.

That young lady was, no doubt, an acquisition to the Boffins. She was far too pretty to be unattractive anywhere, and far too quick of perception to be below the tone of her new career. Whether it improved her heart might be a matter of taste that was open to question; but as touching another matter of taste, its improvement of her appearance and manner, there could be no question whatever.

And thus it soon came about that Miss Bella began to set Mrs Boffin right; and even further, that Miss Bella began to feel ill at ease, and as it were responsible, when she saw Mrs Boffin going wrong. Not that so sweet a disposition and so sound a nature could ever go very wrong even among the great visiting authorities who agreed that the Boffins were 'charmingly vulgar' (which for certain was not their own case in saying so), but that when she made a slip on the social ice on which all the children of Podsnappery, with genteel souls to be saved, are required to skate in circles, or to slide in long rows, she inevitably tripped Miss Bella up (so that young lady felt), and caused her to experience great confusion under the glances of the more skilful performers engaged in those iceexercises.

At Miss Bella's time of life it was not to be expected that she should examine herself very closely on the congruity or stability of her position in Mr Boffin's house. And as she had never been sparing of complaints of her old home when she had no other to compare it with, so there was no novelty of ingratitude or disdain in her very much preferring her new one.

'An invaluable man is Rokesmith,' said Mr Boffin, after some two or three months. 'But I can't quite make him out.'

Neither could Bella, so she found the subject rather interesting.

'He takes more care of my affairs, morning, noon, and night,' said Mr Boffin, 'than fifty other men put together either could or would; and yet he has ways of his own that are like tying a scaffoldingpole right across the road, and bringing me up short when I am almost awalking arm in arm with him.'

'May I ask how so, sir?' inquired Bella.

'Well, my dear,' said Mr Boffin, 'he won't meet any company here, but you. When we have visitors, I should wish him to have his regular place at the table like ourselves; but no, he won't take it.'

'If he considers himself above it,' said Miss Bella, with an airy toss of her head, 'I should leave him alone.'

'It ain't that, my dear,' replied Mr Boffin, thinking it over. 'He don't consider himself above it.'

'Perhaps he considers himself beneath it,' suggested Bella. 'If so, he ought to know best.'

'No, my dear; nor it ain't that, neither. No,' repeated Mr Boffin, with a shake of his head, after again thinking it over; 'Rokesmith's a modest man, but he don't consider himself beneath it.'

'Then what does he consider, sir?' asked Bella.

'Dashed if I know!' said Mr Boffin. 'It seemed at first as if it was only Lightwood that he objected to meet. And now it seems to be everybody, except you.'

Oho! thought Miss Bella. 'Indeed! That's it, is it!' For Mr Mortimer Lightwood had dined there two or three times, and she had met him elsewhere, and he had shown her some attention. 'Rather cool in a Secretary and Pa's lodger to make me the subject of his jealousy!'

That Pa's daughter should be so contemptuous of Pa's lodger was odd; but there were odder anomalies than that in the mind of the spoiled girl: spoiled first by poverty, and then by wealth. Be it this history's part, however, to leave them to unravel themselves.

'A little too much, I think,' Miss Bella reflected scornfully, 'to have Pa's lodger laying claim to me, and keeping eligible people off! A little too much, indeed, to have the opportunities opened to me by Mr and Mrs Boffin, appropriated by a mere Secretary and Pa's lodger!'

Yet it was not so very long ago that Bella had been fluttered by the discovery that this same Secretary and lodger seem to like her. Ah! but the eminently aristocratic mansion and Mrs Boffin's dressmaker had not come into play then.

In spite of his seemingly retiring manners a very intrusive person, this Secretary and lodger, in Miss Bella's opinion. Always a light in his officeroom when we came home from the play or Opera, and he always at the carriage door to hand us out. Always a provoking radiance too on Mrs Boffin's face, and an abominably cheerful reception of him, as if it were possible seriously to approve what the man had in his mind!

'You never charge me, Miss Wilfer,' said the Secretary, encountering her by chance alone in the great drawingroom, 'with commissions for home. I shall always be happy to execute any commands you may have in that direction.'

'Pray what may you mean, Mr Rokesmith?' inquired Miss Bella, with languidly drooping eyelids.

'By home? I mean your father's house at Holloway.'

She coloured under the retort so skilfully thrust, that the words seemed to be merely a plain answer, given in plain good faith and said, rather more emphatically and sharply:

'What commissions and commands are you speaking of?'

'Only little words of remembrance as I assume you sent somehow or other,' replied the Secretary with his former air. 'It would be a pleasure to me if you would make me the bearer of them. As you know, I come and go between the two houses every day.'

'You needn't remind me of that, sir.'

She was too quick in this petulant sally against 'Pa's lodger'; and she felt that she had been so when she met his quiet look.

'They don't send many what was your expression? words of remembrance to me,' said Bella, making haste to take refuge in illusage.

'They frequently ask me about you, and I give them such slight intelligence as I can.'

'I hope it's truly given,' exclaimed Bella.

'I hope you cannot doubt it, for it would be very much against you, if you could.'

'No, I do not doubt it. I deserve the reproach, which is very just indeed. I beg your pardon, Mr Rokesmith.'

'I should beg you not to do so, but that it shows you to such admirable advantage,' he replied with earnestness. 'Forgive me; I could not help saying that. To return to what I have digressed from, let me add that perhaps they think I report them to you, deliver little messages, and the like. But I forbear to trouble you, as you never ask me.'

'I am going, sir,' said Bella, looking at him as if he had reproved her, 'to see them tomorrow.'

'Is that,' he asked, hesitating, 'said to me, or to them?'

'To which you please.'

'To both? Shall I make it a message?'

'You can if you like, Mr Rokesmith. Message or no message, I am going to see them tomorrow.'

'Then I will tell them so.'

He lingered a moment, as though to give her the opportunity of prolonging the conversation if she wished. As she remained silent, he left her. Two incidents of the little interview were felt by Miss Bella herself, when alone again, to be very curious. The first was, that he unquestionably left her with a penitent air upon her, and a penitent feeling in her heart. The second was, that she had not an intention or a thought of going home, until she had announced it to him as a settled design.

'What can I mean by it, or what can he mean by it?' was her mental inquiry: 'He has no right to any power over me, and how do I come to mind him when I don't care for him?'

Mrs Boffin, insisting that Bella should make tomorrow's expedition in the chariot, she went home in great grandeur. Mrs Wilfer and Miss Lavinia had speculated much on the probabilities and improbabilities of her coming in this gorgeous state, and, on beholding the chariot from the window at which they were secreted to look out for it, agreed that it must be detained at the door as long as possible, for the mortification and confusion of the neighbours. Then they repaired to the usual family room, to receive Miss Bella with a becoming show of indifference.

The family room looked very small and very mean, and the downward staircase by which it was attained looked very narrow and very crooked. The little house and all its arrangements were a poor contrast to the eminently aristocratic dwelling. 'I can hardly believe,' thought Bella, 'that I ever did endure life in this place!'

Gloomy majesty on the part of Mrs Wilfer, and native pertness on the part of Lavvy, did not mend the matter. Bella really stood in natural need of a little help, and she got none.

'This,' said Mrs Wilfer, presenting a cheek to be kissed, as sympathetic and responsive as the back of the bowl of a spoon, 'is quite an honour! You will probably find your sister Lavvy grown, Bella.'

'Ma,' Miss Lavinia interposed, 'there can be no objection to your being aggravating, because Bella richly deserves it; but I really must request that you will not drag in such ridiculous nonsense as my having grown when I am past the growing age.'

'I grew, myself,' Mrs Wilfer sternly proclaimed, 'after I was married.'

'Very well, Ma,' returned Lavvy, 'then I think you had much better have left it alone.'

The lofty glare with which the majestic woman received this answer, might

have embarrassed a less pert opponent, but it had no effect upon Lavinia: who, leaving her parent to the enjoyment of any amount of glaring at she might deem desirable under the circumstances, accosted her sister, undismayed.

'I suppose you won't consider yourself quite disgraced, Bella, if I give you a kiss? Well! And how do you do, Bella? And how are your Boffins?'

'Peace!' exclaimed Mrs Wilfer. 'Hold! I will not suffer this tone of levity.'

'My goodness me! How are your Spoffins, then?' said Lavvy, 'since Ma so very much objects to your Boffins.'

'Impertinent girl! Minx!' said Mrs Wilfer, with dread severity.

'I don't care whether I am a Minx, or a Sphinx,' returned Lavinia, coolly, tossing her head; 'it's exactly the same thing to me, and I'd every bit as soon be one as the other; but I know this I'll not grow after I'm married!'

'You will not? YOU will not?' repeated Mrs Wilfer, solemnly.

'No, Ma, I will not. Nothing shall induce me.'

Mrs Wilfer, having waved her gloves, became loftily pathetic.

'But it was to be expected;' thus she spake. 'A child of mine deserts me for the proud and prosperous, and another child of mine despises me. It is quite fitting.'

'Ma,' Bella struck in, 'Mr and Mrs Boffin are prosperous, no doubt; but you have no right to say they are proud. You must know very well that they are not.'

'In short, Ma,' said Lavvy, bouncing over to the enemy without a word of notice, 'you must know very well or if you don't, more shame for you! that Mr and Mrs Boffin are just absolute perfection.'

'Truly,' returned Mrs Wilfer, courteously receiving the deserter, 'it would seem that we are required to think so. And this, Lavinia, is my reason for objecting to a tone of levity. Mrs Boffin (of whose physiognomy I can never speak with the composure I would desire to preserve), and your mother, are not on terms of intimacy. It is not for a moment to be supposed that she and her husband dare to presume to speak of this family as the Wilfers. I cannot therefore condescend to speak of them as the Boffins. No; for such a tone call it familiarity, levity, equality, or what you will would imply those social interchanges which do not exist. Do I render myself intelligible?'

Without taking the least notice of this inquiry, albeit delivered in an imposing and forensic manner, Lavinia reminded her sister, 'After all, you know, Bella,

you haven't told us how your Whatshisnames are.'

'I don't want to speak of them here,' replied Bella, suppressing indignation, and tapping her foot on the floor. 'They are much too kind and too good to be drawn into these discussions.'

'Why put it so?' demanded Mrs Wilfer, with biting sarcasm. 'Why adopt a circuitous form of speech? It is polite and it is obliging; but why do it? Why not openly say that they are much too kind and too good for US? We understand the allusion. Why disguise the phrase?'

'Ma,' said Bella, with one beat of her foot, 'you are enough to drive a saint mad, and so is Lavvy.'

'Unfortunate Lavvy!' cried Mrs Wilfer, in a tone of commiseration. 'She always comes for it. My poor child!' But Lavvy, with the suddenness of her former desertion, now bounced over to the other enemy: very sharply remarking, 'Don't patronize ME, Ma, because I can take care of myself.'

'I only wonder,' resumed Mrs Wilfer, directing her observations to her elder daughter, as safer on the whole than her utterly unmanageable younger, 'that you found time and inclination to tear yourself from Mr and Mrs Boffin, and come to see us at all. I only wonder that our claims, contending against the superior claims of Mr and Mrs Boffin, had any weight. I feel I ought to be thankful for gaining so much, in competition with Mr and Mrs Boffin.' (The good lady bitterly emphasized the first letter of the word Boffin, as if it represented her chief objection to the owners of that name, and as if she could have born Doffin, Moffin, or Poffin much better.)

'Ma,' said Bella, angrily, 'you force me to say that I am truly sorry I did come home, and that I never will come home again, except when poor dear Pa is here. For, Pa is too magnanimous to feel envy and spite towards my generous friends, and Pa is delicate enough and gentle enough to remember the sort of little claim they thought I had upon them and the unusually trying position in which, through no act of my own, I had been placed. And I always did love poor dear Pa better than all the rest of you put together, and I always do and I always shall!'

Here Bella, deriving no comfort from her charming bonnet and her elegant dress, burst into tears.

'I think, R.W.,' cried Mrs Wilfer, lifting up her eyes and apostrophising the air, 'that if you were present, it would be a trial to your feelings to hear your wife and the mother of your family depreciated in your name. But Fate has spared you this, R.W., whatever it may have thought proper to inflict upon her!'

Here Mrs Wilfer burst into tears.

'I hate the Boffins!' protested Miss Lavinia. 'I don't care who objects to their being called the Boffins. I WILL call 'em the Boffins. The Boffins, the Boffins, the Boffins! And I say they are mischiefmaking Boffins, and I say the Boffins have set Bella against me, and I tell the Boffins to their faces:' which was not strictly the fact, but the young lady was excited: 'that they are detestable Boffins, disreputable Boffins, odious Boffins, beastly Boffins. There!'

Here Miss Lavinia burst into tears.

The front gardengate clanked, and the Secretary was seen coming at a brisk pace up the steps. 'Leave Me to open the door to him,' said Mrs Wilfer, rising with stately resignation as she shook her head and dried her eyes; 'we have at present no stipendiary girl to do so. We have nothing to conceal. If he sees these traces of emotion on our cheeks, let him construe them as he may.'

With those words she stalked out. In a few moments she stalked in again, proclaiming in her heraldic manner, 'Mr Rokesmith is the bearer of a packet for Miss Bella Wilfer.'

Mr Rokesmith followed close upon his name, and of course saw what was amiss. But he discreetly affected to see nothing, and addressed Miss Bella.

'Mr Boffin intended to have placed this in the carriage for you this morning. He wished you to have it, as a little keepsake he had prepared it is only a purse, Miss Wilfer but as he was disappointed in his fancy, I volunteered to come after you with it.'

Bella took it in her hand, and thanked him.

'We have been quarrelling here a little, Mr Rokesmith, but not more than we used; you know our agreeable ways among ourselves. You find me just going. Goodbye, mamma. Goodbye, Lavvy!' and with a kiss for each Miss Bella turned to the door. The Secretary would have attended her, but Mrs Wilfer advancing and saying with dignity, 'Pardon me! Permit me to assert my natural right to escort my child to the equipage which is in waiting for her,' he begged pardon and gave place. It was a very magnificent spectacle indeed, to see Mrs Wilfer throw open the housedoor, and loudly demand with extended gloves, 'The male domestic of Mrs Boffin!' To whom presenting himself, she delivered the brief but majestic charge, 'Miss Wilfer. Coming out!' and so delivered her over, like a female Lieutenant of the Tower relinquishing a State Prisoner. The effect of this ceremonial was for some quarter of an hour afterwards perfectly paralyzing on the neighbours, and was much enhanced by the worthy lady

airing herself for that term in a kind of splendidly serene trance on the top step.

When Bella was seated in the carriage, she opened the little packet in her hand. It contained a pretty purse, and the purse contained a bank note for fifty pounds. 'This shall be a joyful surprise for poor dear Pa,' said Bella, 'and I'll take it myself into the City!'

As she was uninformed respecting the exact locality of the place of business of Chicksey Veneering and Stobbles, but knew it to be near Mincing Lane, she directed herself to be driven to the corner of that darksome spot. Thence she despatched 'the male domestic of Mrs Boffin,' in search of the countinghouse of Chicksey Veneering and Stobbles, with a message importing that if R. Wilfer could come out, there was a lady waiting who would be glad to speak with him. The delivery of these mysterious words from the mouth of a footman caused so great an excitement in the countinghouse, that a youthful scout was instantly appointed to follow Rumty, observe the lady, and come in with his report. Nor was the agitation by any means diminished, when the scout rushed back with the intelligence that the lady was 'a slapup gal in a bangup chariot.'

Rumty himself, with his pen behind his ear under his rusty hat, arrived at the carriagedoor in a breathless condition, and had been fairly lugged into the vehicle by his cravat and embraced almost unto choking, before he recognized his daughter. 'My dear child!' he then panted, incoherently. 'Good gracious me! What a lovely woman you are! I thought you had been unkind and forgotten your mother and sister.'

'I have just been to see them, Pa dear.'

'Oh! and howhow did you find your mother?' asked R. W., dubiously.

'Very disagreeable, Pa, and so was Lavvy.'

'They are sometimes a little liable to it,' observed the patient cherub; 'but I hope you made allowances, Bella, my dear?'

'No. I was disagreeable too, Pa; we were all of us disagreeable together. But I want you to come and dine with me somewhere, Pa.'

'Why, my dear, I have already partaken of aif one might mention such an article in this superb chariotof aSaveloy,' replied R. Wilfer, modestly dropping his voice on the word, as he eyed the canarycoloured fittings.

'Oh! That's nothing, Pa!'

'Truly, it ain't as much as one could sometimes wish it to be, my dear,' he

admitted, drawing his hand across his mouth. 'Still, when circumstances over which you have no control, interpose obstacles between yourself and Small Germans, you can't do better than bring a contented mind to hear on'again dropping his voice in deference to the chariot'Saveloys!'

'You poor good Pa! Pa, do, I beg and pray, get leave for the rest of the day, and come and pass it with me!'

'Well, my dear, I'll cut back and ask for leave.'

'But before you cut back,' said Bella, who had already taken him by the chin, pulled his hat off, and begun to stick up his hair in her old way, 'do say that you are sure I am giddy and inconsiderate, but have never really slighted you, Pa.'

'My dear, I say it with all my heart. And might I likewise observe,' her father delicately hinted, with a glance out at window, 'that perhaps it might be calculated to attract attention, having one's hair publicly done by a lovely woman in an elegant turnout in Fenchurch Street?'

Bella laughed and put on his hat again. But when his boyish figure bobbed away, its shabbiness and cheerful patience smote the tears out of her eyes. 'I hate that Secretary for thinking it of me,' she said to herself, 'and yet it seems half true!'

Back came her father, more like a boy than ever, in his release from school. 'All right, my dear. Leave given at once. Really very handsomely done!'

'Now where can we find some quiet place, Pa, in which I can wait for you while you go on an errand for me, if I send the carriage away?'

It demanded cogitation. 'You see, my dear,' he explained, 'you really have become such a very lovely woman, that it ought to be a very quiet place.' At length he suggested, 'Near the garden up by the Trinity House on Tower Hill.' So, they were driven there, and Bella dismissed the chariot; sending a pencilled note by it to Mrs Boffin, that she was with her father.

'Now, Pa, attend to what I am going to say, and promise and vow to be obedient.'

'I promise and vow, my dear.'

'You ask no questions. You take this purse; you go to the nearest place where they keep everything of the very very best, ready made; you buy and put on, the most beautiful suit of clothes, the most beautiful hat, and the most beautiful pair of bright boots (patent leather, Pa, mind!) that are to be got for money; and you come back to me.'

'But, my dear Bella'

'Take care, Pa!' pointing her forefinger at him, merrily. 'You have promised and vowed. It's perjury, you know.'

There was water in the foolish little fellow's eyes, but she kissed them dry (though her own were wet), and he bobbed away again. After half an hour, he came back, so brilliantly transformed, that Bella was obliged to walk round him in ecstatic admiration twenty times, before she could draw her arm through his, and delightedly squeeze it.

'Now, Pa,' said Bella, hugging him close, 'take this lovely woman out to dinner.'

'Where shall we go, my dear?'

'Greenwich!' said Bella, valiantly. 'And be sure you treat this lovely woman with everything of the best.'

While they were going along to take boat, 'Don't you wish, my dear,' said R. W., timidly, 'that your mother was here?'

'No, I don't, Pa, for I like to have you all to myself today. I was always your little favourite at home, and you were always mine. We have run away together often, before now; haven't we, Pa?'

'Ah, to be sure we have! Many a Sunday when your mother was was a little liable to it,' repeating his former delicate expression after pausing to cough.

'Yes, and I am afraid I was seldom or never as good as I ought to have been, Pa. I made you carry me, over and over again, when you should have made me walk; and I often drove you in harness, when you would much rather have sat down and read your newspaper: didn't I?'

'Sometimes, sometimes. But Lor, what a child you were! What a companion you were!'

'Companion? That's just what I want to be today, Pa.'

'You are safe to succeed, my love. Your brothers and sisters have all in their turns been companions to me, to a certain extent, but only to a certain extent. Your mother has, throughout life, been a companion that any man might look up to and commit the sayings of, to memory and form himself upon if he'

'If he liked the model?' suggested Bella.

'Weell, yees,' he returned, thinking about it, not quite satisfied with the phrase: 'or perhaps I might say, if it was in him. Supposing, for instance, that a man

wanted to be always marching, he would find your mother an inestimable companion. But if he had any taste for walking, or should wish at any time to break into a trot, he might sometimes find it a little difficult to keep step with your mother. Or take it this way, Bella,' he added, after a moment's reflection; 'Supposing that a man had to go through life, we won't say with a companion, but we'll say to a tune. Very good. Supposing that the tune allotted to him was the Dead March in Saul. Well. It would be a very suitable tune for particular occasions none better but it would be difficult to keep time with in the ordinary run of domestic transactions. For instance, if he took his supper after a hard day, to the Dead March in Saul, his food might be likely to sit heavy on him. Or, if he was at any time inclined to relieve his mind by singing a comic song or dancing a hornpipe, and was obliged to do it to the Dead March in Saul, he might find himself put out in the execution of his lively intentions.'

'Poor Pa!' thought Bella, as she hung upon his arm.

'Now, what I will say for you, my dear,' the cherub pursued mildly and without a notion of complaining, 'is, that you are so adaptable. So adaptable.'

'Indeed I am afraid I have shown a wretched temper, Pa. I am afraid I have been very complaining, and very capricious. I seldom or never thought of it before. But when I sat in the carriage just now and saw you coming along the pavement, I reproached myself.'

'Not at all, my dear. Don't speak of such a thing.'

A happy and a chatty man was Pa in his new clothes that day. Take it for all in all, it was perhaps the happiest day he had ever known in his life; not even excepting that on which his heroic partner had approached the nuptial altar to the tune of the Dead March in Saul.

The little expedition down the river was delightful, and the little room overlooking the river into which they were shown for dinner was delightful. Everything was delightful. The park was delightful, the punch was delightful, the dishes of fish were delightful, the wine was delightful. Bella was more delightful than any other item in the festival; drawing Pa out in the gayest manner; making a point of always mentioning herself as the lovely woman; stimulating Pa to order things, by declaring that the lovely woman insisted on being treated with them; and in short causing Pa to be quite enraptured with the consideration that he WAS the Pa of such a charming daughter.

And then, as they sat looking at the ships and steamboats making their way to the sea with the tide that was running down, the lovely woman imagined all sorts of voyages for herself and Pa. Now, Pa, in the character of owner of a lumbering squaresailed collier, was tacking away to Newcastle, to fetch black diamonds to make his fortune with; now, Pa was going to China in that

handsome threemasted ship, to bring home opium, with which he would for ever cut out Chicksey Veneering and Stobbles, and to bring home silks and shawls without end for the decoration of his charming daughter. Now, John Harmon's disastrous fate was all a dream, and he had come home and found the lovely woman just the article for him, and the lovely woman had found him just the article for her, and they were going away on a trip, in their gallant bark, to look after their vines, with streamers flying at all points, a band playing on deck and Pa established in the great cabin. Now, John Harmon was consigned to his grave again, and a merchant of immense wealth (name unknown) had courted and married the lovely woman, and he was so enormously rich that everything you saw upon the river sailing or steaming belonged to him, and he kept a perfect fleet of yachts for pleasure, and that little impudent yacht which you saw over there, with the great white sail, was called The Bella, in honour of his wife, and she held her state aboard when it pleased her, like a modern Cleopatra. Anon, there would embark in that troopship when she got to Gravesend, a mighty general, of large property (name also unknown), who wouldn't hear of going to victory without his wife, and whose wife was the lovely woman, and she was destined to become the idol of all the red coats and blue jackets afloat and aloft. And then again: you saw that ship being towed out by a steamtug? Well! where did you suppose she was going to? She was going among the coral reefs and cocoanuts and all that sort of thing, and she was chartered for a fortunate individual of the name of Pa (himself on board, and much respected by all hands), and she was going, for his sole profit and advantage, to fetch a cargo of sweetsmelling woods, the most beautiful that ever were seen, and the most profitable that ever were heard of; and her cargo would be a great fortune, as indeed it ought to be: the lovely woman who had purchased her and fitted her expressly for this voyage, being married to an Indian Prince, who was a SomethingorOther, and who wore Cashmere shawls all over himself and diamonds and emeralds blazing in his turban, and was beautifully coffeecoloured and excessively devoted, though a little too jealous. Thus Bella ran on merrily, in a manner perfectly enchanting to Pa, who was as willing to put his head into the Sultan's tub of water as the beggarboys below the window were to put THEIR heads in the mud.

'I suppose, my dear,' said Pa after dinner, 'we may come to the conclusion at home, that we have lost you for good?'

Bella shook her head. Didn't know. Couldn't say. All she was able to report was, that she was most handsomely supplied with everything she could possibly want, and that whenever she hinted at leaving Mr and Mrs Boffin, they wouldn't hear of it.

'And now, Pa,' pursued Bella, 'I'll make a confession to you. I am the most

mercenary little wretch that ever lived in the world.'

'I should hardly have thought it of you, my dear,' returned her father, first glancing at himself; and then at the dessert.

'I understand what you mean, Pa, but it's not that. It's not that I care for money to keep as money, but I do care so much for what it will buy!'

'Really I think most of us do,' returned R. W.

'But not to the dreadful extent that I do, Pa. Oo!' cried Bella, screwing the exclamation out of herself with a twist of her dimpled chin. 'I AM so mercenary!'

With a wistful glance R. W. said, in default of having anything better to say: 'About when did you begin to feel it coming on, my dear?'

'That's it, Pa. That's the terrible part of it. When I was at home, and only knew what it was to be poor, I grumbled but didn't so much mind. When I was at home expecting to be rich, I thought vaguely of all the great things I would do. But when I had been disappointed of my splendid fortune, and came to see it from day to day in other hands, and to have before my eyes what it could really do, then I became the mercenary little wretch I am.'

'It's your fancy, my dear.'

'I can assure you it's nothing of the sort, Pa!' said Bella, nodding at him, with her very pretty eyebrows raised as high as they would go, and looking comically frightened. 'It's a fact. I am always avariciously scheming.'

'Lor! But how?'

'I'll tell you, Pa. I don't mind telling YOU, because we have always been favourites of each other's, and because you are not like a Pa, but more like a sort of a younger brother with a dear venerable chubbiness on him. And besides,' added Bella, laughing as she pointed a rallying finger at his face, 'because I have got you in my power. This is a secret expedition. If ever you tell of me, I'll tell of you. I'll tell Ma that you dined at Greenwich.'

'Well; seriously, my dear,' observed R. W., with some trepidation of manner, 'it might be as well not to mention it.'

'Aha!' laughed Bella. 'I knew you wouldn't like it, sir! So you keep my confidence, and I'll keep yours. But betray the lovely woman, and you shall find her a serpent. Now, you may give me a kiss, Pa, and I should like to give your hair a turn, because it has been dreadfully neglected in my absence.'

R. W. submitted his head to the operator, and the operator went on talking; at

the same time putting separate locks of his hair through a curious process of being smartly rolled over her two revolving forefingers, which were then suddenly pulled out of it in opposite lateral directions. On each of these occasions the patient winced and winked.

'I have made up my mind that I must have money, Pa. I feel that I can't beg it, borrow it, or steal it; and so I have resolved that I must marry it.'

R. W. cast up his eyes towards her, as well as he could under the operating circumstances, and said in a tone of remonstrance, 'My dear Bella!'

'Have resolved, I say, Pa, that to get money I must marry money. In consequence of which, I am always looking out for money to captivate.'

'My dear Bella!'

'Yes, Pa, that is the state of the case. If ever there was a mercenary plotter whose thoughts and designs were always in her mean occupation, I am the amiable creature. But I don't care. I hate and detest being poor, and I won't be poor if I can marry money. Now you are deliciously fluffy, Pa, and in a state to astonish the waiter and pay the bill.'

'But, my dear Bella, this is quite alarming at your age.'

'I told you so, Pa, but you wouldn't believe it,' returned Bella, with a pleasant childish gravity. 'Isn't it shocking?'

'It would be quite so, if you fully knew what you said, my dear, or meant it.'

'Well, Pa, I can only tell you that I mean nothing else. Talk to me of love!' said Bella, contemptuously: though her face and figure certainly rendered the subject no incongruous one. 'Talk to me of fiery dragons! But talk to me of poverty and wealth, and there indeed we touch upon realities.'

'My Dear, this is becoming Awful' her father was emphatically beginning: when she stopped him.

'Pa, tell me. Did you marry money?'

'You know I didn't, my dear.'

Bella hummed the Dead March in Saul, and said, after all it signified very little! But seeing him look grave and downcast, she took him round the neck and kissed him back to cheerfulness again.

'I didn't mean that last touch, Pa; it was only said in joke. Now mind! You are not to tell of me, and I'll not tell of you. And more than that; I promise to have no secrets from you, Pa, and you may make certain that, whatever mercenary things go on, I shall always tell you all about them in strict confidence.'

Fain to be satisfied with this concession from the lovely woman, R. W. rang the bell, and paid the bill. 'Now, all the rest of this, Pa,' said Bella, rolling up the purse when they were alone again, hammering it small with her little fist on the table, and cramming it into one of the pockets of his new waistcoat, 'is for you, to buy presents with for them at home, and to pay bills with, and to divide as you like, and spend exactly as you think proper. Last of all take notice, Pa, that it's not the fruit of any avaricious scheme. Perhaps if it was, your little mercenary wretch of a daughter wouldn't make so free with it!'

After which, she tugged at his coat with both hands, and pulled him all askew in buttoning that garment over the precious waistcoat pocket, and then tied her dimples into her bonnetstrings in a very knowing way, and took him back to London. Arrived at Mr Boffin's door, she set him with his back against it, tenderly took him by the ears as convenient handles for her purpose, and kissed him until he knocked muffled double knocks at the door with the back of his head. That done, she once more reminded him of their compact and gaily parted from him.

Not so gaily, however, but that tears filled her eyes as he went away down the dark street. Not so gaily, but that she several times said, 'Ah, poor little Pa! Ah, poor dear struggling shabby little Pa!' before she took heart to knock at the door. Not so gaily, but that the brilliant furniture seemed to stare her out of countenance as if it insisted on being compared with the dingy furniture at home. Not so gaily, but that she fell into very low spirits sitting late in her own room, and very heartily wept, as she wished, now that the deceased old John Harmon had never made a will about her, now that the deceased young John Harmon had lived to marry her. 'Contradictory things to wish,' said Bella, 'but my life and fortunes are so contradictory altogether that what can I expect myself to be!'

Chapter 9

IN WHICH THE ORPHAN MAKES HIS WILL

The Secretary, working in the Dismal Swamp betimes next morning, was informed that a youth waited in the hall who gave the name of Sloppy. The footman who communicated this intelligence made a decent pause before uttering the name, to express that it was forced on his reluctance by the youth in question, and that if the youth had had the good sense and good taste to inherit some other name it would have spared the feelings of him the bearer.

'Mrs Boffin will be very well pleased,' said the Secretary in a perfectly composed way. 'Show him in.'

Mr Sloppy being introduced, remained close to the door: revealing in various parts of his form many surprising, confounding, and incomprehensible buttons.

'I am glad to see you,' said John Rokesmith, in a cheerful tone of welcome. 'I have been expecting you.'

Sloppy explained that he had meant to come before, but that the Orphan (of whom he made mention as Our Johnny) had been ailing, and he had waited to report him well.

'Then he is well now?' said the Secretary.

'No he ain't,' said Sloppy.

Mr Sloppy having shaken his head to a considerable extent, proceeded to remark that he thought Johnny 'must have took 'em from the Minders.' Being asked what he meant, he answered, them that come out upon him and partickler his chest. Being requested to explain himself, he stated that there was some of 'em wot you couldn't kiver with a sixpence. Pressed to fall back upon a nominative case, he opined that they wos about as red as ever red could be. 'But as long as they strikes out'ards, sir,' continued Sloppy, 'they ain't so much. It's their striking in'ards that's to be kep off.'

John Rokesmith hoped the child had had medical attendance? Oh yes, said Sloppy, he had been took to the doctor's shop once. And what did the doctor call it? Rokesmith asked him. After some perplexed reflection, Sloppy answered, brightening, 'He called it something as wos wery long for spots.' Rokesmith suggested measles. 'No,' said Sloppy with confidence, 'ever so much longer than THEM, sir!' (Mr Sloppy was elevated by this fact, and seemed to consider that it reflected credit on the poor little patient.)

'Mrs Boffin will be sorry to hear this,' said Rokesmith.

'Mrs Higden said so, sir, when she kep it from her, hoping as Our Johnny would work round.'

'But I hope he will?' said Rokesmith, with a quick turn upon the messenger.

'I hope so,' answered Sloppy. 'It all depends on their striking in'ards.' He then went on to say that whether Johnny had 'took 'em' from the Minders, or whether the Minders had 'took em from Johnny, the Minders had been sent home and had 'got em. Furthermore, that Mrs Higden's days and nights being devoted to Our Johnny, who was never out of her lap, the whole of the

mangling arrangements had devolved upon himself, and he had had 'rather a tight time'. The ungainly piece of honesty beamed and blushed as he said it, quite enraptured with the remembrance of having been serviceable.

'Last night,' said Sloppy, 'when I was aturning at the wheel pretty late, the mangle seemed to go like Our Johnny's breathing. It begun beautiful, then as it went out it shook a little and got unsteady, then as it took the turn to come home it had a rattlelike and lumbered a bit, then it come smooth, and so it went on till I scarce know'd which was mangle and which was Our Johnny. Nor Our Johnny, he scarce know'd either, for sometimes when the mangle lumbers he says, "Me choking, Granny!" and Mrs Higden holds him up in her lap and says to me "Bide a bit, Sloppy," and we all stops together. And when Our Johnny gets his breathing again, I turns again, and we all goes on together.'

Sloppy had gradually expanded with his description into a stare and a vacant grin. He now contracted, being silent, into a halfrepressed gush of tears, and, under pretence of being heated, drew the under part of his sleeve across his eyes with a singularly awkward, laborious, and roundabout smear.

'This is unfortunate,' said Rokesmith. 'I must go and break it to Mrs Boffin. Stay you here, Sloppy.'

Sloppy stayed there, staring at the pattern of the paper on the wall, until the Secretary and Mrs Boffin came back together. And with Mrs Boffin was a young lady (Miss Bella Wilfer by name) who was better worth staring at, it occurred to Sloppy, than the best of wallpapering.

'Ah, my poor dear pretty little John Harmon!' exclaimed Mrs Boffin.

'Yes mum,' said the sympathetic Sloppy.

'You don't think he is in a very, very bad way, do you?' asked the pleasant creature with her wholesome cordiality.

Put upon his good faith, and finding it in collision with his inclinations, Sloppy threw back his head and uttered a mellifluous howl, rounded off with a sniff.

'So bad as that!' cried Mrs Boffin. 'And Betty Higden not to tell me of it sooner!'

'I think she might have been mistrustful, mum,' answered Sloppy, hesitating.

'Of what, for Heaven's sake?'

'I think she might have been mistrustful, mum,' returned Sloppy with submission, 'of standing in Our Johnny's light. There's so much trouble in

illness, and so much expense, and she's seen such a lot of its being objected to.'

'But she never can have thought,' said Mrs Boffin, 'that I would grudge the dear child anything?'

'No mum, but she might have thought (as a habitlike) of its standing in Johnny's light, and might have tried to bring him through it unbeknownst.'

Sloppy knew his ground well. To conceal herself in sickness, like a lower animal; to creep out of sight and coil herself away and die; had become this woman's instinct. To catch up in her arms the sick child who was dear to her, and hide it as if it were a criminal, and keep off all ministration but such as her own ignorant tenderness and patience could supply, had become this woman's idea of maternal love, fidelity, and duty. The shameful accounts we read, every week in the Christian year, my lords and gentlemen and honourable boards, the infamous records of small official inhumanity, do not pass by the people as they pass by us. And hence these irrational, blind, and obstinate prejudices, so astonishing to our magnificence, and having no more reason in them God save the Queen and Confound their politics, no, than smoke has in coming from fire!

'It's not a right place for the poor child to stay in,' said Mrs Boffin. 'Tell us, dear Mr Rokesmith, what to do for the best.'

He had already thought what to do, and the consultation was very short. He could pave the way, he said, in half an hour, and then they would go down to Brentford. 'Pray take me,' said Bella. Therefore a carriage was ordered, of capacity to take them all, and in the meantime Sloppy was regaled, feasting alone in the Secretary's room, with a complete realization of that fairy vision, meat, beer, vegetables, and pudding. In consequence of which his buttons became more importunate of public notice than before, with the exception of two or three about the region of the waistband, which modestly withdrew into a creasy retirement.

Punctual to the time, appeared the carriage and the Secretary. He sat on the box, and Mr Sloppy graced the rumble. So, to the Three Magpies as before: where Mrs Boffin and Miss Bella were handed out, and whence they all went on foot to Mrs Betty Higden's.

But, on the way down, they had stopped at a toyshop, and had bought that noble charger, a description of whose points and trappings had on the last occasion conciliated the then worldlyminded orphan, and also a Noah's ark, and also a yellow bird with an artificial voice in him, and also a military doll so well dressed that if he had only been of lifesize his brotherofficers in the Guards might never have found him out. Bearing these gifts, they raised the

latch of Betty Higden's door, and saw her sitting in the dimmest and furthest corner with poor Johnny in her lap.

'And how's my boy, Betty?' asked Mrs Boffin, sitting down beside her.

'He's bad! He's bad!' said Betty. 'I begin to be afeerd he'll not be yours any more than mine. All others belonging to him have gone to the Power and the Glory, and I have a mind that they're drawing him to them leading him away.'

'No, no, no,' said Mrs Boffin.

'I don't know why else he clenches his little hand as if it had hold of a finger that I can't see. Look at it,' said Betty, opening the wrappers in which the flushed child lay, and showing his small right hand lying closed upon his breast. 'It's always so. It don't mind me.'

'Is he asleep?'

'No, I think not. You're not asleep, my Johnny?'

'No,' said Johnny, with a quiet air of pity for himself; and without opening his eyes.

'Here's the lady, Johnny. And the horse.'

Johnny could bear the lady, with complete indifference, but not the horse. Opening his heavy eyes, he slowly broke into a smile on beholding that splendid phenomenon, and wanted to take it in his arms. As it was much too big, it was put upon a chair where he could hold it by the mane and contemplate it. Which he soon forgot to do.

But, Johnny murmuring something with his eyes closed, and Mrs Boffin not knowing what, old Betty bent her ear to listen and took pains to understand. Being asked by her to repeat what he had said, he did so two or three times, and then it came out that he must have seen more than they supposed when he looked up to see the horse, for the murmur was, 'Who is the boofer lady?' Now, the boofer, or beautiful, lady was Bella; and whereas this notice from the poor baby would have touched her of itself; it was rendered more pathetic by the late melting of her heart to her poor little father, and their joke about the lovely woman. So, Bella's behaviour was very tender and very natural when she kneeled on the brick floor to clasp the child, and when the child, with a child's admiration of what is young and pretty, fondled the boofer lady.

'Now, my good dear Betty,' said Mrs Boffin, hoping that she saw her opportunity, and laying her hand persuasively on her arm; 'we have come to remove Johnny from this cottage to where he can be taken better care of.'

Instantly, and before another word could be spoken, the old woman started up

with blazing eyes, and rushed at the door with the sick child.

'Stand away from me every one of ye!' she cried out wildly. 'I see what ye mean now. Let me go my way, all of ye. I'd sooner kill the Pretty, and kill myself!'

'Stay, stay!' said Rokesmith, soothing her. 'You don't understand.'

'I understand too well. I know too much about it, sir. I've run from it too many a year. No! Never for me, nor for the child, while there's water enough in England to cover us!'

The terror, the shame, the passion of horror and repugnance, firing the worn face and perfectly maddening it, would have been a quite terrible sight, if embodied in one old fellowcreature alone. Yet it 'crops up' as our slang goes my lords and gentlemen and honourable boards, in other fellowcreatures, rather frequently!

'It's been chasing me all my life, but it shall never take me nor mine alive!' cried old Betty. 'I've done with ye. I'd have fastened door and window and starved out, afore I'd ever have let ye in, if I had known what ye came for!'

But, catching sight of Mrs Boffin's wholesome face, she relented, and crouching down by the door and bending over her burden to hush it, said humbly: 'Maybe my fears has put me wrong. If they have so, tell me, and the good Lord forgive me! I'm quick to take this fright, I know, and my head is summ'at light with wearying and watching.'

'There, there, there!' returned Mrs Boffin. 'Come, come! Say no more of it, Betty. It was a mistake, a mistake. Any one of us might have made it in your place, and felt just as you do.'

'The Lord bless ye!' said the old woman, stretching out her hand.

'Now, see, Betty,' pursued the sweet compassionate soul, holding the hand kindly, 'what I really did mean, and what I should have begun by saying out, if I had only been a little wiser and handier. We want to move Johnny to a place where there are none but children; a place set up on purpose for sick children; where the good doctors and nurses pass their lives with children, talk to none but children, touch none but children, comfort and cure none but children.'

'Is there really such a place?' asked the old woman, with a gaze of wonder.

'Yes, Betty, on my word, and you shall see it. If my home was a better place for the dear boy, I'd take him to it; but indeed indeed it's not.'

'You shall take him,' returned Betty, fervently kissing the comforting hand, 'where you will, my deary. I am not so hard, but that I believe your face and

voice, and I will, as long as I can see and hear.'

This victory gained, Rokesmith made haste to profit by it, for he saw how woefully time had been lost. He despatched Sloppy to bring the carriage to the door; caused the child to be carefully wrapped up; bade old Betty get her bonnet on; collected the toys, enabling the little fellow to comprehend that his treasures were to be transported with him; and had all things prepared so easily that they were ready for the carriage as soon as it appeared, and in a minute afterwards were on their way. Sloppy they left behind, relieving his overcharged breast with a paroxysm of mangling.

At the Children's Hospital, the gallant steed, the Noah's ark, yellow bird, and the officer in the Guards, were made as welcome as their childowner. But the doctor said aside to Rokesmith, 'This should have been days ago. Too late!'

However, they were all carried up into a fresh airy room, and there Johnny came to himself, out of a sleep or a swoon or whatever it was, to find himself lying in a little quiet bed, with a little platform over his breast, on which were already arranged, to give him heart and urge him to cheer up, the Noah's ark, the noble steed, and the yellow bird; with the officer in the Guards doing duty over the whole, quite as much to the satisfaction of his country as if he had been upon Parade. And at the bed's head was a coloured picture beautiful to see, representing as it were another Johnny seated on the knee of some Angel surely who loved little children. And, marvellous fact, to lie and stare at: Johnny had become one of a little family, all in little quiet beds (except two playing dominoes in little armchairs at a little table on the hearth): and on all the little beds were little platforms whereon were to be seen dolls' houses, woolly dogs with mechanical barks in them not very dissimilar from the artificial voice pervading the bowels of the yellow bird, tin armies, Moorish tumblers, wooden tea things, and the riches of the earth.

As Johnny murmured something in his placid admiration, the ministering women at his bed's head asked him what he said. It seemed that he wanted to know whether all these were brothers and sisters of his? So they told him yes. It seemed then, that he wanted to know whether God had brought them all together there? So they told him yes again. They made out then, that he wanted to know whether they would all get out of pain? So they answered yes to that question likewise, and made him understand that the reply included himself.

Johnny's powers of sustaining conversation were as yet so very imperfectly developed, even in a state of health, that in sickness they were little more than monosyllabic. But, he had to be washed and tended, and remedies were applied, and though those offices were far, far more skilfully and lightly done than ever anything had been done for him in his little life, so rough and short,

they would have hurt and tired him but for an amazing circumstance which laid hold of his attention. This was no less than the appearance on his own little platform in pairs, of All Creation, on its way into his own particular ark: the elephant leading, and the fly, with a diffident sense of his size, politely bringing up the rear. A very little brother lying in the next bed with a broken leg, was so enchanted by this spectacle that his delight exalted its enthralling interest; and so came rest and sleep.

'I see you are not afraid to leave the dear child here, Betty,' whispered Mrs Boffin.

'No, ma'am. Most willingly, most thankfully, with all my heart and soul.'

So, they kissed him, and left him there, and old Betty was to come back early in the morning, and nobody but Rokesmith knew for certain how that the doctor had said, 'This should have been days ago. Too late!'

But, Rokesmith knowing it, and knowing that his bearing it in mind would be acceptable thereafter to that good woman who had been the only light in the childhood of desolate John Harmon dead and gone, resolved that late at night he would go back to the bedside of John Harmon's namesake, and see how it fared with him.

The family whom God had brought together were not all asleep, but were all quiet. From bed to bed, a light womanly tread and a pleasant fresh face passed in the silence of the night. A little head would lift itself up into the softened light here and there, to be kissed as the face went by for these little patients are very loving and would then submit itself to be composed to rest again. The mite with the broken leg was restless, and moaned; but after a while turned his face towards Johnny's bed, to fortify himself with a view of the ark, and fell asleep. Over most of the beds, the toys were yet grouped as the children had left them when they last laid themselves down, and, in their innocent grotesqueness and incongruity, they might have stood for the children's dreams.

The doctor came in too, to see how it fared with Johnny. And he and Rokesmith stood together, looking down with compassion on him.

'What is it, Johnny?' Rokesmith was the questioner, and put an arm round the poor baby as he made a struggle.

'Him!' said the little fellow. 'Those!'

The doctor was quick to understand children, and, taking the horse, the ark, the yellow bird, and the man in the Guards, from Johnny's bed, softly placed them on that of his next neighbour, the mite with the broken leg.

With a weary and yet a pleased smile, and with an action as if he stretched his little figure out to rest, the child heaved his body on the sustaining arm, and seeking Rokesmith's face with his lips, said:

'A kiss for the boofer lady.'

Having now bequeathed all he had to dispose of, and arranged his affairs in this world, Johnny, thus speaking, left it.

Chapter 10

A SUCCESSOR

Some of the Reverend Frank Milvey's brethren had found themselves exceedingly uncomfortable in their minds, because they were required to bury the dead too hopefully. But, the Reverend Frank, inclining to the belief that they were required to do one or two other things (say out of nineandthirty) calculated to trouble their consciences rather more if they would think as much about them, held his peace.

Indeed, the Reverend Frank Milvey was a forbearing man, who noticed many sad warps and blights in the vineyard wherein he worked, and did not profess that they made him savagely wise. He only learned that the more he himself knew, in his little limited human way, the better he could distantly imagine what Omniscience might know.

Wherefore, if the Reverend Frank had had to read the words that troubled some of his brethren, and profitably touched innumerable hearts, in a worse case than Johnny's, he would have done so out of the pity and humility of his soul. Reading them over Johnny, he thought of his own six children, but not of his poverty, and read them with dimmed eyes. And very seriously did he and his bright little wife, who had been listening, look down into the small grave and walk home arminarm.

There was grief in the aristocratic house, and there was joy in the Bower. Mr Wegg argued, if an orphan were wanted, was he not an orphan himself; and could a better be desired? And why go beating about Brentford bushes, seeking orphans forsooth who had established no claims upon you and made no sacrifices for you, when here was an orphan ready to your hand who had given up in your cause, Miss Elizabeth, Master George, Aunt Jane, and Uncle Parker?

Mr Wegg chuckled, consequently, when he heard the tidings. Nay, it was

afterwards affirmed by a witness who shall at present be nameless, that in the seclusion of the Bower he poked out his wooden leg, in the stageballet manner, and executed a taunting or triumphant pirouette on the genuine leg remaining to him.

John Rokesmith's manner towards Mrs Boffin at this time, was more the manner of a young man towards a mother, than that of a Secretary towards his employer's wife. It had always been marked by a subdued affectionate deference that seemed to have sprung up on the very day of his engagement; whatever was odd in her dress or her ways had seemed to have no oddity for him; he had sometimes borne a quietly amused face in her company, but still it had seemed as if the pleasure her genial temper and radiant nature yielded him, could have been quite as naturally expressed in a tear as in a smile. The completeness of his sympathy with her fancy for having a little John Harmon to protect and rear, he had shown in every act and word, and now that the kind fancy was disappointed, he treated it with a manly tenderness and respect for which she could hardly thank him enough.

'But I do thank you, Mr Rokesmith,' said Mrs Boffin, 'and I thank you most kindly. You love children.'

'I hope everybody does.'

'They ought,' said Mrs Boffin; 'but we don't all of us do what we ought, do us?'

John Rokesmith replied, 'Some among us supply the shortcomings of the rest. You have loved children well, Mr Boffin has told me.'

'Not a bit better than he has, but that's his way; he puts all the good upon me. You speak rather sadly, Mr Rokesmith.'

'Do I?'

'It sounds to me so. Were you one of many children?' He shook his head.

'An only child?'

'No there was another. Dead long ago.'

'Father or mother alive?'

'Dead.'

'And the rest of your relations?'

'Dead if I ever had any living. I never heard of any.'

At this point of the dialogue Bella came in with a light step. She paused at the door a moment, hesitating whether to remain or retire; perplexed by finding

that she was not observed.

'Now, don't mind an old lady's talk,' said Mrs Boffin, 'but tell me. Are you quite sure, Mr Rokesmith, that you have never had a disappointment in love?'

'Quite sure. Why do you ask me?'

'Why, for this reason. Sometimes you have a kind of keptdown manner with you, which is not like your age. You can't be thirty?'

'I am not yet thirty.'

Deeming it high time to make her presence known, Bella coughed here to attract attention, begged pardon, and said she would go, fearing that she interrupted some matter of business.

'No, don't go,' rejoined Mrs Boffin, 'because we are coming to business, instead of having begun it, and you belong to it as much now, my dear Bella, as I do. But I want my Noddy to consult with us. Would somebody be so good as find my Noddy for me?'

Rokesmith departed on that errand, and presently returned accompanied by Mr Boffin at his jogtrot. Bella felt a little vague trepidation as to the subjectmatter of this same consultation, until Mrs Boffin announced it.

'Now, you come and sit by me, my dear,' said that worthy soul, taking her comfortable place on a large ottoman in the centre of the room, and drawing her arm through Bella's; 'and Noddy, you sit here, and Mr Rokesmith you sit there. Now, you see, what I want to talk about, is this. Mr and Mrs Milvey have sent me the kindest note possible (which Mr Rokesmith just now read to me out aloud, for I ain't good at handwritings), offering to find me another little child to name and educate and bring up. Well. This has set me thinking.'

('And she is a steamingein at it,' murmured Mr Boffin, in an admiring parenthesis, 'when she once begins. It mayn't be so easy to start her; but once started, she's a ingein.')

'This has set me thinking, I say,' repeated Mrs Boffin, cordially beaming under the influence of her husband's compliment, 'and I have thought two things. First of all, that I have grown timid of reviving John Harmon's name. It's an unfortunate name, and I fancy I should reproach myself if I gave it to another dear child, and it proved again unlucky.'

'Now, whether,' said Mr Boffin, gravely propounding a case for his Secretary's opinion; 'whether one might call that a superstition?'

'It is a matter of feeling with Mrs Boffin,' said Rokesmith, gently. 'The name has always been unfortunate. It has now this new unfortunate association

connected with it. The name has died out. Why revive it? Might I ask Miss Wilfer what she thinks?'

'It has not been a fortunate name for me,' said Bella, colouring 'or at least it was not, until it led to my being here but that is not the point in my thoughts. As we had given the name to the poor child, and as the poor child took so lovingly to me, I think I should feel jealous of calling another child by it. I think I should feel as if the name had become endeared to me, and I had no right to use it so.'

'And that's your opinion?' remarked Mr Boffin, observant of the Secretary's face and again addressing him.

'I say again, it is a matter of feeling,' returned the Secretary. 'I think Miss Wilfer's feeling very womanly and pretty.'

'Now, give us your opinion, Noddy,' said Mrs Boffin.

'My opinion, old lady,' returned the Golden Dustman, 'is your opinion.'

'Then,' said Mrs Boffin, 'we agree not to revive John Harmon's name, but to let it rest in the grave. It is, as Mr Rokesmith says, a matter of feeling, but Lor how many matters ARE matters of feeling! Well; and so I come to the second thing I have thought of. You must know, Bella, my dear, and Mr Rokesmith, that when I first named to my husband my thoughts of adopting a little orphan boy in remembrance of John Harmon, I further named to my husband that it was comforting to think that how the poor boy would be benefited by John's own money, and protected from John's own forlornness.'

'Hear, hear!' cried Mr Boffin. 'So she did. Ancoar!'

'No, not Ancoar, Noddy, my dear,' returned Mrs Boffin, 'because I am going to say something else. I meant that, I am sure, as much as I still mean it. But this little death has made me ask myself the question, seriously, whether I wasn't too bent upon pleasing myself. Else why did I seek out so much for a pretty child, and a child quite to my liking? Wanting to do good, why not do it for its own sake, and put my tastes and likings by?'

'Perhaps,' said Bella; and perhaps she said it with some little sensitiveness arising out of those old curious relations of hers towards the murdered man; 'perhaps, in reviving the name, you would not have liked to give it to a less interesting child than the original. He interested you very much.'

'Well, my dear,' returned Mrs Boffin, giving her a squeeze, 'it's kind of you to find that reason out, and I hope it may have been so, and indeed to a certain extent I believe it was so, but I am afraid not to the whole extent. However, that don't come in question now, because we have done with the name.'

'Laid it up as a remembrance,' suggested Bella, musingly.

'Much better said, my dear; laid it up as a remembrance. Well then; I have been thinking if I take any orphan to provide for, let it not be a pet and a plaything for me, but a creature to be helped for its own sake.'

'Not pretty then?' said Bella.

'No,' returned Mrs Boffin, stoutly.

'Nor prepossessing then?' said Bella.

'No,' returned Mrs Boffin. 'Not necessarily so. That's as it may happen. A well-disposed boy comes in my way who may be even a little wanting in such advantages for getting on in life, but is honest and industrious and requires a helping hand and deserves it. If I am very much in earnest and quite determined to be unselfish, let me take care of HIM.'

Here the footman whose feelings had been hurt on the former occasion, appeared, and crossing to Rokesmith apologetically announced the objectionable Sloppy.

The four members of Council looked at one another, and paused. 'Shall he be brought here, ma'am?' asked Rokesmith.

'Yes,' said Mrs Boffin. Whereupon the footman disappeared, reappeared presenting Sloppy, and retired much disgusted.

The consideration of Mrs Boffin had clothed Mr Sloppy in a suit of black, on which the tailor had received personal directions from Rokesmith to expend the utmost cunning of his art, with a view to the concealment of the cohering and sustaining buttons. But, so much more powerful were the frailties of Sloppy's form than the strongest resources of tailoring science, that he now stood before the Council, a perfect Argus in the way of buttons: shining and winking and gleaming and twinkling out of a hundred of those eyes of bright metal, at the dazzled spectators. The artistic taste of some unknown hatter had furnished him with a hatband of wholesale capacity which was fluted behind, from the crown of his hat to the brim, and terminated in a black bunch, from which the imagination shrunk discomfited and the reason revolted. Some special powers with which his legs were endowed, had already hitched up his glossy trousers at the ankles, and bagged them at the knees; while similar gifts in his arms had raised his coatsleeves from his wrists and accumulated them at his elbows. Thus set forth, with the additional embellishments of a very little tail to his coat, and a yawning gulf at his waistband, Sloppy stood confessed.

'And how is Betty, my good fellow?' Mrs Boffin asked him.

'Thankee, mum,' said Sloppy, 'she do pretty nicely, and sending her dooty and many thanks for the tea and all favours and wishing to know the family's healths.'

'Have you just come, Sloppy?'

'Yes, mum.'

'Then you have not had your dinner yet?'

'No, mum. But I mean to it. For I ain't forgotten your handsome orders that I was never to go away without having had a good 'un off of meat and beer and pudding: there was four of 'em, for I reckoned 'em up when I had 'em; meat one, beer two, vegetables three, and which was four? Why, pudding, HE was four!' Here Sloppy threw his head back, opened his mouth wide, and laughed rapturously.

'How are the two poor little Minders?' asked Mrs Boffin.

'Striking right out, mum, and coming round beautiful.'

Mrs Boffin looked on the other three members of Council, and then said, beckoning with her finger:

'Sloppy.'

'Yes, mum.'

'Come forward, Sloppy. Should you like to dine here every day?'

'Off of all four on 'em, mum? O mum!' Sloppy's feelings obliged him to squeeze his hat, and contract one leg at the knee.

'Yes. And should you like to be always taken care of here, if you were industrious and deserving?'

'Oh, mum! But there's Mrs Higden,' said Sloppy, checking himself in his raptures, drawing back, and shaking his head with very serious meaning. 'There's Mrs Higden. Mrs Higden goes before all. None can ever be better friends to me than Mrs Higden's been. And she must be turned for, must Mrs Higden. Where would Mrs Higden be if she warn't turned for!' At the mere thought of Mrs Higden in this inconceivable affliction, Mr Sloppy's countenance became pale, and manifested the most distressful emotions.

'You are as right as right can be, Sloppy,' said Mrs Boffin 'and far be it from me to tell you otherwise. It shall be seen to. If Betty Higden can be turned for all the same, you shall come here and be taken care of for life, and be made able to keep her in other ways than the turning.'

'Even as to that, mum,' answered the ecstatic Sloppy, 'the turning might be done in the night, don't you see? I could be here in the day, and turn in the night. I don't want no sleep, I don't. Or even if I any ways should want a wink or two,' added Sloppy, after a moment's apologetic reflection, 'I could take 'em turning. I've took 'em turning many a time, and enjoyed 'em wonderful!'

On the grateful impulse of the moment, Mr Sloppy kissed Mrs Boffin's hand, and then detaching himself from that good creature that he might have room enough for his feelings, threw back his head, opened his mouth wide, and uttered a dismal howl. It was creditable to his tenderness of heart, but suggested that he might on occasion give some offence to the neighbours: the rather, as the footman looked in, and begged pardon, finding he was not wanted, but excused himself; on the ground 'that he thought it was Cats.'

Chapter 11

SOME AFFAIRS OF THE HEART

Little Miss Peecher, from her little official dwellinghouse, with its little windows like the eyes in needles, and its little doors like the covers of schoolbooks, was very observant indeed of the object of her quiet affections. Love, though said to be afflicted with blindness, is a vigilant watchman, and Miss Peecher kept him on double duty over Mr Bradley Headstone. It was not that she was naturally given to playing the spy it was not that she was at all secret, plotting, or mean it was simply that she loved the irresponsive Bradley with all the primitive and homely stock of love that had never been examined or certificated out of her. If her faithful slate had had the latent qualities of sympathetic paper, and its pencil those of invisible ink, many a little treatise calculated to astonish the pupils would have come bursting through the dry sums in schooltime under the warming influence of Miss Peecher's bosom. For, oftentimes when school was not, and her calm leisure and calm little house were her own, Miss Peecher would commit to the confidential slate an imaginary description of how, upon a balmy evening at dusk, two figures might have been observed in the marketgarden ground round the corner, of whom one, being a manly form, bent over the other, being a womanly form of short stature and some compactness, and breathed in a low voice the words, 'Emma Peecher, wilt thou be my own?' after which the womanly form's head reposed upon the manly form's shoulder, and the nightingales tuned up. Though all unseen, and unsuspected by the pupils, Bradley Headstone even pervaded the school exercises. Was Geography in question? He would come

triumphantly flying out of Vesuvius and Aetna ahead of the lava, and would boil unharmed in the hot springs of Iceland, and would float majestically down the Ganges and the Nile. Did History chronicle a king of men? Behold him in pepperandsalt pantaloons, with his watchguard round his neck. Were copies to be written? In capital B's and H's most of the girls under Miss Peecher's tuition were half a year ahead of every other letter in the alphabet. And Mental Arithmetic, administered by Miss Peecher, often devoted itself to providing Bradley Headstone with a wardrobe of fabulous extent: fourscore and four neckties at two and ninepencehalfpenny, two gross of silver watches at four pounds fifteen and sixpence, seventyfour black hats at eighteen shillings; and many similar superfluities.

The vigilant watchman, using his daily opportunities of turning his eyes in Bradley's direction, soon apprized Miss Peecher that Bradley was more preoccupied than had been his wont, and more given to strolling about with a downcast and reserved face, turning something difficult in his mind that was not in the scholastic syllabus. Putting this and that togethercombining under the head 'this,' present appearances and the intimacy with Charley Hexam, and ranging under the head 'that' the visit to his sister, the watchman reported to Miss Peecher his strong suspicions that the sister was at the bottom of it.

'I wonder,' said Miss Peecher, as she sat making up her weekly report on a halfholiday afternoon, 'what they call Hexam's sister?'

Mary Anne, at her needlework, attendant and attentive, held her arm up.

'Well, Mary Anne?'

'She is named Lizzie, ma'am.'

'She can hardly be named Lizzie, I think, Mary Anne,' returned Miss Peecher, in a tunefully instructive voice. 'Is Lizzie a Christian name, Mary Anne?'

Mary Anne laid down her work, rose, hooked herself behind, as being under catechization, and replied: 'No, it is a corruption, Miss Peecher.'

'Who gave her that name?' Miss Peecher was going on, from the mere force of habit, when she checked herself; on Mary Anne's evincing theological impatience to strike in with her godfathers and her godmothers, and said: 'I mean of what name is it a corruption?'

'Elizabeth, or Eliza, Miss Peecher.'

'Right, Mary Anne. Whether there were any Lizzies in the early Christian Church must be considered very doubtful, very doubtful.' Miss Peecher was exceedingly sage here. 'Speaking correctly, we say, then, that Hexam's sister is called Lizzie; not that she is named so. Do we not, Mary Anne?'

'We do, Miss Peecher.'

'And where,' pursued Miss Peecher, complacent in her little transparent fiction of conducting the examination in a semiofficial manner for Mary Anne's benefit, not her own, 'where does this young woman, who is called but not named Lizzie, live? Think, now, before answering.'

'In Church Street, Smith Square, by Mill Bank, ma'am.'

'In Church Street, Smith Square, by Mill Bank,' repeated Miss Peecher, as if possessed beforehand of the book in which it was written. Exactly so. And what occupation does this young woman pursue, Mary Anne? Take time.'

'She has a place of trust at an outfitter's in the City, ma'am.'

'Oh!' said Miss Peecher, pondering on it; but smoothly added, in a confirmatory tone, 'At an outfitter's in the City. Yees?'

'And Charley' Mary Anne was proceeding, when Miss Peecher stared.

'I mean Hexam, Miss Peecher.'

'I should think you did, Mary Anne. I am glad to hear you do. And Hexam'

'Says,' Mary Anne went on, 'that he is not pleased with his sister, and that his sister won't be guided by his advice, and persists in being guided by somebody else's; and that'

'Mr Headstone coming across the garden!' exclaimed Miss Peecher, with a flushed glance at the lookingglass. 'You have answered very well, Mary Anne. You are forming an excellent habit of arranging your thoughts clearly. That will do.'

The discreet Mary Anne resumed her seat and her silence, and stitched, and stitched, and was stitching when the schoolmaster's shadow came in before him, announcing that he might be instantly expected.

'Good evening, Miss Peecher,' he said, pursuing the shadow, and taking its place.

'Good evening, Mr Headstone. Mary Anne, a chair.'

'Thank you,' said Bradley, seating himself in his constrained manner. 'This is but a flying visit. I have looked in, on my way, to ask a kindness of you as a neighbour.'

'Did you say on your way, Mr Headstone?' asked Miss Peecher.

'On my way towere I am going.'

'Church Street, Smith Square, by Mill Bank,' repeated Miss Peecher, in her own thoughts.

'Charley Hexam has gone to get a book or two he wants, and will probably be back before me. As we leave my house empty, I took the liberty of telling him I would leave the key here. Would you kindly allow me to do so?'

'Certainly, Mr Headstone. Going for an evening walk, sir?'

'Partly for a walk, and partly foron business.'

'Business in Church Street, Smith Square, by Mill Bank,' repeated Miss Peecher to herself.

'Having said which,' pursued Bradley, laying his doorkey on the table, 'I must be already going. There is nothing I can do for you, Miss Peecher?'

'Thank you, Mr Headstone. In which direction?'

'In the direction of Westminster.'

'Mill Bank,' Miss Peecher repeated in her own thoughts once again. 'No, thank you, Mr Headstone; I'll not trouble you.'

'You couldn't trouble me,' said the schoolmaster.

'Ah!' returned Miss Peecher, though not aloud; 'but you can trouble ME!' And for all her quiet manner, and her quiet smile, she was full of trouble as he went his way.

She was right touching his destination. He held as straight a course for the house of the dolls' dressmaker as the wisdom of his ancestors, exemplified in the construction of the intervening streets, would let him, and walked with a bent head hammering at one fixed idea. It had been an immoveable idea since he first set eyes upon her. It seemed to him as if all that he could suppress in himself he had suppressed, as if all that he could restrain in himself he had restrained, and the time had come in a rush, in a moment when the power of selfcommand had departed from him. Love at first sight is a trite expression quite sufficiently discussed; enough that in certain smouldering natures like this man's, that passion leaps into a blaze, and makes such head as fire does in a rage of wind, when other passions, but for its mastery, could be held in chains. As a multitude of weak, imitative natures are always lying by, ready to go mad upon the next wrong idea that may be broached in these times, generally some form of tribute to Somebody for something that never was done, or, if ever done, that was done by Somebody Else so these less ordinary natures may lie by for years, ready on the touch of an instant to burst into flame.

The schoolmaster went his way, brooding and brooding, and a sense of being vanquished in a struggle might have been pieced out of his worried face. Truly, in his breast there lingered a resentful shame to find himself defeated by this passion for Charley Hexam's sister, though in the very selfsame moments he was concentrating himself upon the object of bringing the passion to a successful issue.

He appeared before the dolls' dressmaker, sitting alone at her work. 'Oho!' thought that sharp young personage, 'it's you, is it? I know your tricks and your manners, my friend!'

'Hexam's sister,' said Bradley Headstone, 'is not come home yet?'

'You are quite a conjuror,' returned Miss Wren.

'I will wait, if you please, for I want to speak to her.'

'Do you?' returned Miss Wren. 'Sit down. I hope it's mutual.' Bradley glanced distrustfully at the shrewd face again bending over the work, and said, trying to conquer doubt and hesitation:

'I hope you don't imply that my visit will be unacceptable to Hexam's sister?'

'There! Don't call her that. I can't bear you to call her that,' returned Miss Wren, snapping her fingers in a volley of impatient snaps, 'for I don't like Hexam.'

'Indeed?'

'No.' Miss Wren wrinkled her nose, to express dislike. 'Selfish. Thinks only of himself. The way with all of you.'

'The way with all of us? Then you don't like ME?'

'Soso,' replied Miss Wren, with a shrug and a laugh. 'Don't know much about you.'

'But I was not aware it was the way with all of us,' said Bradley, returning to the accusation, a little injured. 'Won't you say, some of us?'

'Meaning,' returned the little creature, 'every one of you, but you. Hah! Now look this lady in the face. This is Mrs Truth. The Honourable. Full-dressed.'

Bradley glanced at the doll she held up for his observation which had been lying on its face on her bench, while with a needle and thread she fastened the dress on at the back and looked from it to her.

'I stand the Honourable Mrs T. on my bench in this corner against the wall, where her blue eyes can shine upon you,' pursued Miss Wren, doing so, and

making two little dabs at him in the air with her needle, as if she pricked him with it in his own eyes; 'and I defy you to tell me, with Mrs T. for a witness, what you have come here for.'

'To see Hexam's sister.'

'You don't say so!' retorted Miss Wren, hitching her chin. 'But on whose account?'

'Her own.'

'O Mrs T.!' exclaimed Miss Wren. 'You hear him!'

'To reason with her,' pursued Bradley, half humouring what was present, and half angry with what was not present; 'for her own sake.'

'Oh Mrs T.!' exclaimed the dressmaker.

'For her own sake,' repeated Bradley, warming, 'and for her brother's, and as a perfectly disinterested person.'

'Really, Mrs T.,' remarked the dressmaker, 'since it comes to this, we must positively turn you with your face to the wall.' She had hardly done so, when Lizzie Hexam arrived, and showed some surprise on seeing Bradley Headstone there, and Jenny shaking her little fist at him close before her eyes, and the Honourable Mrs T. with her face to the wall.

'Here's a perfectly disinterested person, Lizzie dear,' said the knowing Miss Wren, 'come to talk with you, for your own sake and your brother's. Think of that. I am sure there ought to be no third party present at anything so very kind and so very serious; and so, if you'll remove the third party upstairs, my dear, the third party will retire.'

Lizzie took the hand which the dolls' dressmaker held out to her for the purpose of being supported away, but only looked at her with an inquiring smile, and made no other movement.

'The third party hobbles awfully, you know, when she's left to herself;' said Miss Wren, 'her back being so bad, and her legs so queer; so she can't retire gracefully unless you help her, Lizzie.'

'She can do no better than stay where she is,' returned Lizzie, releasing the hand, and laying her own lightly on Miss Jenny's curls. And then to Bradley: 'From Charley, sir?'

In an irresolute way, and stealing a clumsy look at her, Bradley rose to place a chair for her, and then returned to his own.

'Strictly speaking,' said he, 'I come from Charley, because I left him only a

little while ago; but I am not commissioned by Charley. I come of my own spontaneous act.'

With her elbows on her bench, and her chin upon her hands, Miss Jenny Wren sat looking at him with a watchful sidelong look. Lizzie, in her different way, sat looking at him too.

'The fact is,' began Bradley, with a mouth so dry that he had some difficulty in articulating his words: the consciousness of which rendered his manner still more ungainly and undecided; 'the truth is, that Charley, having no secrets from me (to the best of my belief), has confided the whole of this matter to me.'

He came to a stop, and Lizzie asked: 'what matter, sir?'

'I thought,' returned the schoolmaster, stealing another look at her, and seeming to try in vain to sustain it; for the look dropped as it lighted on her eyes, 'that it might be so superfluous as to be almost impertinent, to enter upon a definition of it. My allusion was to this matter of your having put aside your brother's plans for you, and given the preference to those of Mr I believe the name is Mr Eugene Wrayburn.'

He made this point of not being certain of the name, with another uneasy look at her, which dropped like the last.

Nothing being said on the other side, he had to begin again, and began with new embarrassment.

'Your brother's plans were communicated to me when he first had them in his thoughts. In point of fact he spoke to me about them when I was last herewhen we were walking back together, and when Iwhen the impression was fresh upon me of having seen his sister.'

There might have been no meaning in it, but the little dressmaker here removed one of her supporting hands from her chin, and musingly turned the Honourable Mrs T. with her face to the company. That done, she fell into her former attitude.

'I approved of his idea,' said Bradley, with his uneasy look wandering to the doll, and unconsciously resting there longer than it had rested on Lizzie, 'both because your brother ought naturally to be the originator of any such scheme, and because I hoped to be able to promote it. I should have had inexpressible pleasure, I should have taken inexpressible interest, in promoting it. Therefore I must acknowledge that when your brother was disappointed, I too was disappointed. I wish to avoid reservation or concealment, and I fully acknowledge that.'

He appeared to have encouraged himself by having got so far. At all events he went on with much greater firmness and force of emphasis: though with a curious disposition to set his teeth, and with a curious tightscrewing movement of his right hand in the clenching palm of his left, like the action of one who was being physically hurt, and was unwilling to cry out.

'I am a man of strong feelings, and I have strongly felt this disappointment. I do strongly feel it. I don't show what I feel; some of us are obliged habitually to keep it down. To keep it down. But to return to your brother. He has taken the matter so much to heart that he has remonstrated (in my presence he remonstrated) with Mr Eugene Wrayburn, if that be the name. He did so, quite ineffectually. As any one not blinded to the real character of MrMr Eugene Wrayburnwould readily suppose.'

He looked at Lizzie again, and held the look. And his face turned from burning red to white, and from white back to burning red, and so for the time to lasting deadly white.

'Finally, I resolved to come here alone, and appeal to you. I resolved to come here alone, and entreat you to retract the course you have chosen, and instead of confiding in a mere stranger a person of most insolent behaviour to your brother and othersto prefer your brother and your brother's friend.'

Lizzie Hexam had changed colour when those changes came over him, and her face now expressed some anger, more dislike, and even a touch of fear. But she answered him very steadily.

'I cannot doubt, Mr Headstone, that your visit is well meant. You have been so good a friend to Charley that I have no right to doubt it. I have nothing to tell Charley, but that I accepted the help to which he so much objects before he made any plans for me; or certainly before I knew of any. It was considerately and delicately offered, and there were reasons that had weight with me which should be as dear to Charley as to me. I have no more to say to Charley on this subject.'

His lips trembled and stood apart, as he followed this repudiation of himself; and limitation of her words to her brother.

'I should have told Charley, if he had come to me,' she resumed, as though it were an afterthought, 'that Jenny and I find our teacher very able and very patient, and that she takes great pains with us. So much so, that we have said to her we hope in a very little while to be able to go on by ourselves. Charley knows about teachers, and I should also have told him, for his satisfaction, that ours comes from an institution where teachers are regularly brought up.'

'I should like to ask you,' said Bradley Headstone, grinding his words slowly

out, as though they came from a rusty mill; 'I should like to ask you, if I may without offence, whether you would have objected; rather, I should like to say, if I may without offence, that I wish I had had the opportunity of coming here with your brother and devoting my poor abilities and experience to your service.'

'Thank you, Mr Headstone.'

'But I fear,' he pursued, after a pause, furtively wrenching at the seat of his chair with one hand, as if he would have wrenched the chair to pieces, and gloomily observing her while her eyes were cast down, 'that my humble services would not have found much favour with you?'

She made no reply, and the poor stricken wretch sat contending with himself in a heat of passion and torment. After a while he took out his handkerchief and wiped his forehead and hands.

'There is only one thing more I had to say, but it is the most important. There is a reason against this matter, there is a personal relation concerned in this matter, not yet explained to you. It might I don't say it would induce you to think differently. To proceed under the present circumstances is out of the question. Will you please come to the understanding that there shall be another interview on the subject?'

'With Charley, Mr Headstone?'

'Withwell,' he answered, breaking off, 'yes! Say with him too. Will you please come to the understanding that there must be another interview under more favourable circumstances, before the whole case can be submitted?'

'I don't,' said Lizzie, shaking her head, 'understand your meaning, Mr Headstone.'

'Limit my meaning for the present,' he interrupted, 'to the whole case being submitted to you in another interview.'

'What case, Mr Headstone? What is wanting to it?'

'You shall be informed in the other interview.' Then he said, as if in a burst of irrepressible despair, 'I leave it all incomplete! There is a spell upon me, I think!' And then added, almost as if he asked for pity, 'Goodnight!'

He held out his hand. As she, with manifest hesitation, not to say reluctance, touched it, a strange tremble passed over him, and his face, so deadly white, was moved as by a stroke of pain. Then he was gone.

The dolls' dressmaker sat with her attitude unchanged, eyeing the door by which he had departed, until Lizzie pushed her bench aside and sat down near

her. Then, eyeing Lizzie as she had previously eyed Bradley and the door, Miss Wren chopped that very sudden and keen chop in which her jaws sometimes indulged, leaned back in her chair with folded arms, and thus expressed herself:

'Humph! If he I mean, of course, my dear, the party who is coming to court me when the time comes should be THAT sort of man, he may spare himself the trouble. HE wouldn't do to be trotted about and made useful. He'd take fire and blow up while he was about it.'

'And so you would be rid of him,' said Lizzie, humouring her.

'Not so easily,' returned Miss Wren. 'He wouldn't blow up alone. He'd carry me up with him. I know his tricks and his manners.'

'Would he want to hurt you, do you mean?' asked Lizzie.

'Mightn't exactly want to do it, my dear,' returned Miss Wren; 'but a lot of gunpowder among lighted lucifermatches in the next room might almost as well be here.'

'He is a very strange man,' said Lizzie, thoughtfully.

'I wish he was so very strange a man as to be a total stranger,' answered the sharp little thing.

It being Lizzie's regular occupation when they were alone of an evening to brush out and smooth the long fair hair of the dolls' dressmaker, she unfastened a ribbon that kept it back while the little creature was at her work, and it fell in a beautiful shower over the poor shoulders that were much in need of such adorning rain. 'Not now, Lizzie, dear,' said Jenny; 'let us have a talk by the fire.' With those words, she in her turn loosened her friend's dark hair, and it dropped of its own weight over her bosom, in two rich masses. Pretending to compare the colours and admire the contrast, Jenny so managed a mere touch or two of her nimble hands, as that she herself laying a cheek on one of the dark folds, seemed blinded by her own clustering curls to all but the fire, while the fine handsome face and brow of Lizzie were revealed without obstruction in the sombre light.

'Let us have a talk,' said Jenny, 'about Mr Eugene Wrayburn.'

Something sparkled down among the fair hair resting on the dark hair; and if it were not a star which it couldn't be it was an eye; and if it were an eye, it was Jenny Wren's eye, bright and watchful as the bird's whose name she had taken.

'Why about Mr Wrayburn?' Lizzie asked.

'For no better reason than because I'm in the humour. I wonder whether he's

rich!'

'No, not rich.'

'Poor?'

'I think so, for a gentleman.'

'Ah! To be sure! Yes, he's a gentleman. Not of our sort; is he?' A shake of the head, a thoughtful shake of the head, and the answer, softly spoken, 'Oh no, oh no!'

The dolls' dressmaker had an arm round her friend's waist. Adjusting the arm, she slyly took the opportunity of blowing at her own hair where it fell over her face; then the eye down there, under lighter shadows sparkled more brightly and appeared more watchful.

'When He turns up, he shan't be a gentleman; I'll very soon send him packing, if he is. However, he's not Mr Wrayburn; I haven't captivated HIM. I wonder whether anybody has, Lizzie!'

'It is very likely.'

'Is it very likely? I wonder who!'

'Is it not very likely that some lady has been taken by him, and that he may love her dearly?'

'Perhaps. I don't know. What would you think of him, Lizzie, if you were a lady?'

'I a lady!' she repeated, laughing. 'Such a fancy!'

'Yes. But say: just as a fancy, and for instance.'

'I a lady! I, a poor girl who used to row poor father on the river. I, who had rowed poor father out and home on the very night when I saw him for the first time. I, who was made so timid by his looking at me, that I got up and went out!'

('He did look at you, even that night, though you were not a lady!' thought Miss Wren.)

'I a lady!' Lizzie went on in a low voice, with her eyes upon the fire. 'I, with poor father's grave not even cleared of undeserved stain and shame, and he trying to clear it for me! I a lady!'

'Only as a fancy, and for instance,' urged Miss Wren.

'Too much, Jenny, dear, too much! My fancy is not able to get that far.' As the

low fire gleamed upon her, it showed her smiling, mournfully and abstractedly.

'But I am in the humour, and I must be humoured, Lizzie, because after all I am a poor little thing, and have had a hard day with my bad child. Look in the fire, as I like to hear you tell how you used to do when you lived in that dreary old house that had once been a windmill. Look in the what was its name when you told fortunes with your brother that I DON'T like?'

'The hollow down by the flare?'

'Ah! That's the name! You can find a lady there, I know.'

'More easily than I can make one of such material as myself, Jenny.'

The sparkling eye looked steadfastly up, as the musing face looked thoughtfully down. 'Well?' said the dolls' dressmaker, 'We have found our lady?'

Lizzie nodded, and asked, 'Shall she be rich?'

'She had better be, as he's poor.'

'She is very rich. Shall she be handsome?'

'Even you can be that, Lizzie, so she ought to be.'

'She is very handsome.'

'What does she say about him?' asked Miss Jenny, in a low voice: watchful, through an intervening silence, of the face looking down at the fire.

'She is glad, glad, to be rich, that he may have the money. She is glad, glad, to be beautiful, that he may be proud of her. Her poor heart'

'Eh? Her poor heart?' said Miss Wren.

'Her heart is given him, with all its love and truth. She would joyfully die with him, or, better than that, die for him. She knows he has failings, but she thinks they have grown up through his being like one cast away, for the want of something to trust in, and care for, and think well of. And she says, that lady rich and beautiful that I can never come near, "Only put me in that empty place, only try how little I mind myself, only prove what a world of things I will do and bear for you, and I hope that you might even come to be much better than you are, through me who am so much worse, and hardly worth the thinking of beside you."'

As the face looking at the fire had become exalted and forgetful in the rapture of these words, the little creature, openly clearing away her fair hair with her disengaged hand, had gazed at it with earnest attention and something like

alarm. Now that the speaker ceased, the little creature laid down her head again, and moaned, 'O me, O me, O me!'

'In pain, dear Jenny?' asked Lizzie, as if awakened.

'Yes, but not the old pain. Lay me down, lay me down. Don't go out of my sight tonight. Lock the door and keep close to me.' Then turning away her face, she said in a whisper to herself, 'My Lizzie, my poor Lizzie! O my blessed children, come back in the long bright slanting rows, and come for her, not me. She wants help more than I, my blessed children!'

She had stretched her hands up with that higher and better look, and now she turned again, and folded them round Lizzie's neck, and rocked herself on Lizzie's breast.

Chapter 12

MORE BIRDS OF PREY

Rogue Riderhood dwelt deep and dark in Limehouse Hole, among the riggers, and the mast, oar and block makers, and the boatbuilders, and the saillofts, as in a kind of ship's hold stored full of waterside characters, some no better than himself, some very much better, and none much worse. The Hole, albeit in a general way not over nice in its choice of company, was rather shy in reference to the honour of cultivating the Rogue's acquaintance; more frequently giving him the cold shoulder than the warm hand, and seldom or never drinking with him unless at his own expense. A part of the Hole, indeed, contained so much public spirit and private virtue that not even this strong leverage could move it to good fellowship with a tainted accuser. But, there may have been the drawback on this magnanimous morality, that its exponents held a true witness before Justice to be the next unneighbourly and accursed character to a false one.

Had it not been for the daughter whom he often mentioned, Mr Riderhood might have found the Hole a mere grave as to any means it would yield him of getting a living. But Miss Pleasant Riderhood had some little position and connection in Limehouse Hole. Upon the smallest of small scales, she was an unlicensed pawnbroker, keeping what was popularly called a Leaving Shop, by lending insignificant sums on insignificant articles of property deposited with her as security. In her fourandtwentieth year of life, Pleasant was already in her fifth year of this way of trade. Her deceased mother had established the business, and on that parent's demise she had appropriated a secret capital of

fifteen shillings to establishing herself in it; the existence of such capital in a pillow being the last intelligible confidential communication made to her by the departed, before succumbing to dropsical conditions of snuff and gin, incompatible equally with coherence and existence.

Why christened Pleasant, the late Mrs Riderhood might possibly have been at some time able to explain, and possibly not. Her daughter had no information on that point. Pleasant she found herself, and she couldn't help it. She had not been consulted on the question, any more than on the question of her coming into these terrestrial parts, to want a name. Similarly, she found herself possessed of what is colloquially termed a swivel eye (derived from her father), which she might perhaps have declined if her sentiments on the subject had been taken. She was not otherwise positively illlooking, though anxious, meagre, of a muddy complexion, and looking as old again as she really was.

As some dogs have it in the blood, or are trained, to worry certain creatures to a certain point, so not to make the comparison disrespectfully Pleasant Riderhood had it in the blood, or had been trained, to regard seamen, within certain limits, as her prey. Show her a man in a blue jacket, and, figuratively speaking, she pinned him instantly. Yet, all things considered, she was not of an evil mind or an unkindly disposition. For, observe how many things were to be considered according to her own unfortunate experience. Show Pleasant Riderhood a Wedding in the street, and she only saw two people taking out a regular licence to quarrel and fight. Show her a Christening, and she saw a little heathen personage having a quite superfluous name bestowed upon it, inasmuch as it would be commonly addressed by some abusive epithet: which little personage was not in the least wanted by anybody, and would be shoved and banged out of everybody's way, until it should grow big enough to shove and bang. Show her a Funeral, and she saw an unremunerative ceremony in the nature of a black masquerade, conferring a temporary gentility on the performers, at an immense expense, and representing the only formal party ever given by the deceased. Show her a live father, and she saw but a duplicate of her own father, who from her infancy had been taken with fits and starts of discharging his duty to her, which duty was always incorporated in the form of a fist or a leathern strap, and being discharged hurt her. All things considered, therefore, Pleasant Riderhood was not so very, very bad. There was even a touch of romance in her of such romance as could creep into Limehouse Hole and maybe sometimes of a summer evening, when she stood with folded arms at her shopdoor, looking from the reeking street to the sky where the sun was setting, she may have had some vaporous visions of faroff islands in the southern seas or elsewhere (not being geographically particular), where it would be good to roam with a congenial partner among groves of breadfruit,

waiting for ships to be wafted from the hollow ports of civilization. For, sailors to be got the better of, were essential to Miss Pleasant's Eden.

Not on a summer evening did she come to her little shopdoor, when a certain man standing over against the house on the opposite side of the street took notice of her. That was on a cold shrewd windy evening, after dark. Pleasant Riderhood shared with most of the lady inhabitants of the Hole, the peculiarity that her hair was a ragged knot, constantly coming down behind, and that she never could enter upon any undertaking without first twisting it into place. At that particular moment, being newly come to the threshold to take a look out of doors, she was winding herself up with both hands after this fashion. And so prevalent was the fashion, that on the occasion of a fight or other disturbance in the Hole, the ladies would be seen flocking from all quarters universally twisting their backhair as they came along, and many of them, in the hurry of the moment, carrying their backcombs in their mouths.

It was a wretched little shop, with a roof that any man standing in it could touch with his hand; little better than a cellar or cave, down three steps. Yet in its illlighted window, among a flaring handkerchief or two, an old peacoat or so, a few valueless watches and compasses, a jar of tobacco and two crossed pipes, a bottle of walnut ketchup, and some horrible sweets these creature discomforts serving as a blind to the main business of the Leaving Shop was displayed the inscription SEAMAN'S BOARDINGHOUSE.

Taking notice of Pleasant Riderhood at the door, the man crossed so quickly that she was still winding herself up, when he stood close before her.

'Is your father at home?' said he.

'I think he is,' returned Pleasant, dropping her arms; 'come in.'

It was a tentative reply, the man having a seafaring appearance. Her father was not at home, and Pleasant knew it. 'Take a seat by the fire,' were her hospitable words when she had got him in; 'men of your calling are always welcome here.'

'Thankee,' said the man.

His manner was the manner of a sailor, and his hands were the hands of a sailor, except that they were smooth. Pleasant had an eye for sailors, and she noticed the unused colour and texture of the hands, sunburnt though they were, as sharply as she noticed their unmistakable looseness and suppleness, as he sat himself down with his left arm carelessly thrown across his left leg a little above the knee, and the right arm as carelessly thrown over the elbow of the wooden chair, with the hand curved, half open and half shut, as if it had just let go a rope.

'Might you be looking for a BoardingHouse?' Pleasant inquired, taking her observant stand on one side of the fire.

'I don't rightly know my plans yet,' returned the man.

'You ain't looking for a Leaving Shop?'

'No,' said the man.

'No,' assented Pleasant, 'you've got too much of an outfit on you for that. But if you should want either, this is both.'

'Ay, ay!' said the man, glancing round the place. 'I know. I've been here before.'

'Did you Leave anything when you were here before?' asked Pleasant, with a view to principal and interest.

'No.' The man shook his head.

'I am pretty sure you never boarded here?'

'No.' The man again shook his head.

'What DID you do here when you were here before?' asked Pleasant. 'For I don't remember you.'

'It's not at all likely you should. I only stood at the door, one night on the lower step therewhile a shipmate of mine looked in to speak to your father. I remember the place well.' Looking very curiously round it.

'Might that have been long ago?'

'Ay, a goodish bit ago. When I came off my last voyage.'

'Then you have not been to sea lately?'

'No. Been in the sick bay since then, and been employed ashore.'

'Then, to be sure, that accounts for your hands.'

The man with a keen look, a quick smile, and a change of manner, caught her up. 'You're a good observer. Yes. That accounts for my hands.'

Pleasant was somewhat disquieted by his look, and returned it suspiciously. Not only was his change of manner, though very sudden, quite collected, but his former manner, which he resumed, had a certain suppressed confidence and sense of power in it that were half threatening.

'Will your father be long?' he inquired.

'I don't know. I can't say.'

'As you supposed he was at home, it would seem that he has just gone out? How's that?'

'I supposed he had come home,' Pleasant explained.

'Oh! You supposed he had come home? Then he has been some time out? How's that?'

'I don't want to deceive you. Father's on the river in his boat.'

'At the old work?' asked the man.

'I don't know what you mean,' said Pleasant, shrinking a step back. 'What on earth d'ye want?'

'I don't want to hurt your father. I don't want to say I might, if I chose. I want to speak to him. Not much in that, is there? There shall be no secrets from you; you shall be by. And plainly, Miss Riderhood, there's nothing to be got out of me, or made of me. I am not good for the Leaving Shop, I am not good for the BoardingHouse, I am not good for anything in your way to the extent of sixpenn'orth of halfpence. Put the idea aside, and we shall get on together.'

'But you're a seafaring man?' argued Pleasant, as if that were a sufficient reason for his being good for something in her way.

'Yes and no. I have been, and I may be again. But I am not for you. Won't you take my word for it?'

The conversation had arrived at a crisis to justify Miss Pleasant's hair in tumbling down. It tumbled down accordingly, and she twisted it up, looking from under her bent forehead at the man. In taking stock of his familiarly worn roughweather nautical clothes, piece by piece, she took stock of a formidable knife in a sheath at his waist ready to his hand, and of a whistle hanging round his neck, and of a short jagged knotted club with a loaded head that peeped out of a pocket of his loose outer jacket or frock. He sat quietly looking at her; but, with these appendages partially revealing themselves, and with a quantity of bristling oakumcoloured head and whisker, he had a formidable appearance.

'Won't you take my word for it?' he asked again.

Pleasant answered with a short dumb nod. He rejoined with another short dumb nod. Then he got up and stood with his arms folded, in front of the fire, looking down into it occasionally, as she stood with her arms folded, leaning against the side of the chimneypiece.

'To wile away the time till your father comes,' he said, 'pray is there much robbing and murdering of seamen about the waterside now?'

'No,' said Pleasant.

'Any?'

'Complaints of that sort are sometimes made, about Ratcliffe and Wapping and up that way. But who knows how many are true?'

'To be sure. And it don't seem necessary.'

'That's what I say,' observed Pleasant. 'Where's the reason for it? Bless the sailors, it ain't as if they ever could keep what they have, without it.'

'You're right. Their money may be soon got out of them, without violence,' said the man.

'Of course it may,' said Pleasant; 'and then they ship again and get more. And the best thing for 'em, too, to ship again as soon as ever they can be brought to it. They're never so well off as when they're afloat.'

'I'll tell you why I ask,' pursued the visitor, looking up from the fire. 'I was once beset that way myself, and left for dead.'

'No?' said Pleasant. 'Where did it happen?'

'It happened,' returned the man, with a ruminative air, as he drew his right hand across his chin, and dipped the other in the pocket of his rough outer coat, 'it happened somewhere about here as I reckon. I don't think it can have been a mile from here.'

'Were you drunk?' asked Pleasant.

'I was muddled, but not with fair drinking. I had not been drinking, you understand. A mouthful did it.'

Pleasant with a grave look shook her head; importing that she understood the process, but decidedly disapproved.

'Fair trade is one thing,' said she, 'but that's another. No one has a right to carry on with Jack in THAT way.'

'The sentiment does you credit,' returned the man, with a grim smile; and added, in a mutter, 'the more so, as I believe it's not your father's. Yes, I had a bad time of it, that time. I lost everything, and had a sharp struggle for my life, weak as I was.'

'Did you get the parties punished?' asked Pleasant.

'A tremendous punishment followed,' said the man, more seriously; 'but it was not of my bringing about.'

'Of whose, then?' asked Pleasant.

The man pointed upward with his forefinger, and, slowly recovering that hand, settled his chin in it again as he looked at the fire. Bringing her inherited eye to bear upon him, Pleasant Riderhood felt more and more uncomfortable, his manner was so mysterious, so stern, so selfpossessed.

'Anyways,' said the damsel, 'I am glad punishment followed, and I say so. Fair trade with seafaring men gets a bad name through deeds of violence. I am as much against deeds of violence being done to seafaring men, as seafaring men can be themselves. I am of the same opinion as my mother was, when she was living. Fair trade, my mother used to say, but no robbery and no blows.' In the way of trade Miss Pleasant would have taken and indeed did take when she could as much as thirty shillings a week for board that would be dear at five, and likewise conducted the Leaving business upon correspondingly equitable principles; yet she had that tenderness of conscience and those feelings of humanity, that the moment her ideas of trade were overstepped, she became the seaman's champion, even against her father whom she seldom otherwise resisted.

But, she was here interrupted by her father's voice exclaiming angrily, 'Now, Poll Parrot!' and by her father's hat being heavily flung from his hand and striking her face. Accustomed to such occasional manifestations of his sense of parental duty, Pleasant merely wiped her face on her hair (which of course had tumbled down) before she twisted it up. This was another common procedure on the part of the ladies of the Hole, when heated by verbal or fistic altercation.

'Blest if I believe such a Poll Parrot as you was ever learned to speak!' growled Mr Riderhood, stooping to pick up his hat, and making a feint at her with his head and right elbow; for he took the delicate subject of robbing seamen in extraordinary dudgeon, and was out of humour too. 'What are you Poll Parroting at now? Ain't you got nothing to do but fold your arms and stand a Poll Parroting all night?'

'Let her alone,' urged the man. 'She was only speaking to me.'

'Let her alone too!' retorted Mr Riderhood, eyeing him all over. 'Do you know she's my daughter?'

'Yes.'

'And don't you know that I won't have no Poll Parroting on the part of my daughter? No, nor yet that I won't take no Poll Parroting from no man? And who may YOU be, and what may YOU want?'

'How can I tell you until you are silent?' returned the other fiercely.

'Well,' said Mr Riderhood, quailing a little, 'I am willing to be silent for the purpose of hearing. But don't Poll Parrot me.'

'Are you thirsty, you?' the man asked, in the same fierce short way, after returning his look.

'Why nat'rally,' said Mr Riderhood, 'ain't I always thirsty!' (Indignant at the absurdity of the question.)

'What will you drink?' demanded the man.

'Sherry wine,' returned Mr Riderhood, in the same sharp tone, 'if you're capable of it.'

The man put his hand in his pocket, took out half a sovereign, and begged the favour of Miss Pleasant that she would fetch a bottle. 'With the cork undrawn,' he added, emphatically, looking at her father.

'I'll take my Alfred David,' muttered Mr Riderhood, slowly relaxing into a dark smile, 'that you know a move. Do I know YOU? Nnno, I don't know you.'

The man replied, 'No, you don't know me.' And so they stood looking at one another surlily enough, until Pleasant came back.

'There's small glasses on the shelf,' said Riderhood to his daughter. 'Give me the one without a foot. I gets my living by the sweat of my brow, and it's good enough for ME.' This had a modest selfdenying appearance; but it soon turned out that as, by reason of the impossibility of standing the glass upright while there was anything in it, it required to be emptied as soon as filled, Mr Riderhood managed to drink in the proportion of three to one.

With his Fortunatus's goblet ready in his hand, Mr Riderhood sat down on one side of the table before the fire, and the strange man on the other: Pleasant occupying a stool between the latter and the fireside. The background, composed of handkerchiefs, coats, shirts, hats, and other old articles 'On Leaving,' had a general dim resemblance to human listeners; especially where a shiny black sou'wester suit and hat hung, looking very like a clumsy mariner with his back to the company, who was so curious to overhear, that he paused for the purpose with his coat half pulled on, and his shoulders up to his ears in the uncompleted action.

The visitor first held the bottle against the light of the candle, and next examined the top of the cork. Satisfied that it had not been tampered with, he slowly took from his breastpocket a rusty claspknife, and, with a corkscrew in the handle, opened the wine. That done, he looked at the cork, unscrewed it

from the corkscrew, laid each separately on the table, and, with the end of the sailor's knot of his neckerchief, dusted the inside of the neck of the bottle. All this with great deliberation.

At first Riderhood had sat with his footless glass extended at arm's length for filling, while the very deliberate stranger seemed absorbed in his preparations. But, gradually his arm reverted home to him, and his glass was lowered and lowered until he rested it upside down upon the table. By the same degrees his attention became concentrated on the knife. And now, as the man held out the bottle to fill all round, Riderhood stood up, leaned over the table to look closer at the knife, and stared from it to him.

'What's the matter?' asked the man.

'Why, I know that knife!' said Riderhood.

'Yes, I dare say you do.'

He motioned to him to hold up his glass, and filled it. Riderhood emptied it to the last drop and began again.

'That there knife'

'Stop,' said the man, composedly. 'I was going to drink to your daughter. Your health, Miss Riderhood.'

'That knife was the knife of a seaman named George Radfoot.'

'It was.'

'That seaman was well beknown to me.'

'He was.'

'What's come to him?'

'Death has come to him. Death came to him in an ugly shape. He looked,' said the man, 'very horrible after it.'

'Arter what?' said Riderhood, with a frowning stare.

'After he was killed.'

'Killed? Who killed him?'

Only answering with a shrug, the man filled the footless glass, and Riderhood emptied it: looking amazedly from his daughter to his visitor.

'You don't mean to tell a honest man' he was recommencing with his empty glass in his hand, when his eye became fascinated by the stranger's outer coat.

He leaned across the table to see it nearer, touched the sleeve, turned the cuff to look at the sleeve lining (the man, in his perfect composure, offering not the least objection), and exclaimed, 'It's my belief as this here coat was George Radfoot's too!'

'You are right. He wore it the last time you ever saw him, and the last time you ever will see him in this world.'

'It's my belief you mean to tell me to my face you killed him!' exclaimed Riderhood; but, nevertheless, allowing his glass to be filled again.

The man only answered with another shrug, and showed no symptom of confusion.

'Wish I may die if I know what to be up to with this chap!' said Riderhood, after staring at him, and tossing his last glassful down his throat. 'Let's know what to make of you. Say something plain.'

'I will,' returned the other, leaning forward across the table, and speaking in a low impressive voice. 'What a liar you are!'

The honest witness rose, and made as though he would fling his glass in the man's face. The man not wincing, and merely shaking his forefinger half knowingly, half menacingly, the piece of honesty thought better of it and sat down again, putting the glass down too.

'And when you went to that lawyer yonder in the Temple with that invented story,' said the stranger, in an exasperatingly comfortable sort of confidence, 'you might have had your strong suspicions of a friend of your own, you know. I think you had, you know.'

'Me my suspicions? Of what friend?'

'Tell me again whose knife was this?' demanded the man.

'It was possessed by, and was the property of him as I have made mention on,' said Riderhood, stupidly evading the actual mention of the name.

'Tell me again whose coat was this?'

'That there article of clothing likewise belonged to, and was wore by him as I have made mention on,' was again the dull Old Bailey evasion.

'I suspect that you gave him the credit of the deed, and of keeping cleverly out of the way. But there was small cleverness in HIS keeping out of the way. The cleverness would have been, to have got back for one single instant to the light of the sun.'

'Things is come to a pretty pass,' growled Mr Riderhood, rising to his feet,

goaded to stand at bay, 'when bullyers as is wearing dead men's clothes, and bullyers as is armed with dead men's knives, is to come into the houses of honest live men, getting their livings by the sweats of their brows, and is to make these here sort of charges with no rhyme and no reason, neither the one nor yet the other! Why should I have had my suspicions of him?'

'Because you knew him,' replied the man; 'because you had been one with him, and knew his real character under a fair outside; because on the night which you had afterwards reason to believe to be the very night of the murder, he came in here, within an hour of his having left his ship in the docks, and asked you in what lodgings he could find room. Was there no stranger with him?'

'I'll take my worldwithoutend everlasting Alfred David that you warn't with him,' answered Riderhood. 'You talk big, you do, but things look pretty black against yourself, to my thinking. You charge again' me that George Radfoot got lost sight of, and was no more thought of. What's that for a sailor? Why there's fifty such, out of sight and out of mind, ten times as long as him through entering in different names, reshipping when the out'ard voyage is made, and what nota turning up to light every day about here, and no matter made of it. Ask my daughter. You could go on Poll Parroting enough with her, when I warn't come in: Poll Parrot a little with her on this pint. You and your suspicions of my suspicions of him! What are my suspicions of you? You tell me George Radfoot got killed. I ask you who done it and how you know it. You carry his knife and you wear his coat. I ask you how you come by 'em? Hand over that there bottle!' Here Mr Riderhood appeared to labour under a virtuous delusion that it was his own property. 'And you,' he added, turning to his daughter, as he filled the footless glass, 'if it warn't wasting good sherry wine on you, I'd chuck this at you, for Poll Parroting with this man. It's along of Poll Parroting that such like as him gets their suspicions, whereas I gets mine by arguement, and being nat'rally a honest man, and sweating away at the brow as a honest man ought.' Here he filled the footless goblet again, and stood chewing one half of its contents and looking down into the other as he slowly rolled the wine about in the glass; while Pleasant, whose sympathetic hair had come down on her being apostrophised, rearranged it, much in the style of the tail of a horse when proceeding to market to be sold.

'Well? Have you finished?' asked the strange man.

'No,' said Riderhood, 'I ain't. Far from it. Now then! I want to know how George Radfoot come by his death, and how you come by his kit?'

'If you ever do know, you won't know now.'

'And next I want to know,' proceeded Riderhood 'whether you mean to charge

that what you may call it murder'

'Harmon murder, father,' suggested Pleasant.

'No Poll Parroting!' he vociferated, in return. 'Keep your mouth shut! I want to know, you sir, whether you charge that there crime on George Radfoot?'

'If you ever do know, you won't know now.'

'Perhaps you done it yourself?' said Riderhood, with a threatening action.

'I alone know,' returned the man, sternly shaking his head, 'the mysteries of that crime. I alone know that your trumped up story cannot possibly be true. I alone know that it must be altogether false, and that you must know it to be altogether false. I come here tonight to tell you so much of what I know, and no more.'

Mr Riderhood, with his crooked eye upon his visitor, meditated for some moments, and then refilled his glass, and tipped the contents down his throat in three tips.

'Shut the shopdoor!' he then said to his daughter, putting the glass suddenly down. 'And turn the key and stand by it! If you know all this, you sir,' getting, as he spoke, between the visitor and the door, 'why han't you gone to Lawyer Lightwood?'

'That, also, is alone known to myself,' was the cool answer.

'Don't you know that, if you didn't do the deed, what you say you could tell is worth from five to ten thousand pound?' asked Riderhood.

'I know it very well, and when I claim the money you shall share it.'

The honest man paused, and drew a little nearer to the visitor, and a little further from the door.

'I know it,' repeated the man, quietly, 'as well as I know that you and George Radfoot were one together in more than one dark business; and as well as I know that you, Roger Riderhood, conspired against an innocent man for bloodmoney; and as well as I know that I can and that I swear I will! give you up on both scores, and be the proof against you in my own person, if you defy me!'

'Father!' cried Pleasant, from the door. 'Don't defy him! Give way to him! Don't get into more trouble, father!'

'Will you leave off a Poll Parroting, I ask you?' cried Mr Riderhood, half beside himself between the two. Then, propitiatingly and crawlingly: 'You sir! You han't said what you want of me. Is it fair, is it worthy of yourself, to talk

of my defying you afore ever you say what you want of me?'

'I don't want much,' said the man. 'This accusation of yours must not be left half made and half unmade. What was done for the bloodmoney must be thoroughly undone.'

'Well; but Shipmate'

'Don't call me Shipmate,' said the man.

'Captain, then,' urged Mr Riderhood; 'there! You won't object to Captain. It's a honourable title, and you fully look it. Captain! Ain't the man dead? Now I ask you fair. Ain't Gaffer dead?'

'Well,' returned the other, with impatience, 'yes, he is dead. What then?'

'Can words hurt a dead man, Captain? I only ask you fair.'

'They can hurt the memory of a dead man, and they can hurt his living children. How many children had this man?'

'Meaning Gaffer, Captain?'

'Of whom else are we speaking?' returned the other, with a movement of his foot, as if Rogue Riderhood were beginning to sneak before him in the body as well as the spirit, and he spurned him off. 'I have heard of a daughter, and a son. I ask for information; I ask YOUR daughter; I prefer to speak to her. What children did Hexam leave?'

Pleasant, looking to her father for permission to reply, that honest man exclaimed with great bitterness:

'Why the devil don't you answer the Captain? You can Poll Parrot enough when you ain't wanted to Poll Parrot, you perverse jade!'

Thus encouraged, Pleasant explained that there were only Lizzie, the daughter in question, and the youth. Both very respectable, she added.

'It is dreadful that any stigma should attach to them,' said the visitor, whom the consideration rendered so uneasy that he rose, and paced to and fro, muttering, 'Dreadful! Unforeseen? How could it be foreseen!' Then he stopped, and asked aloud: 'Where do they live?'

Pleasant further explained that only the daughter had resided with the father at the time of his accidental death, and that she had immediately afterwards quitted the neighbourhood.

'I know that,' said the man, 'for I have been to the place they dwelt in, at the time of the inquest. Could you quietly find out for me where she lives now?'

Pleasant had no doubt she could do that. Within what time, did she think? Within a day. The visitor said that was well, and he would return for the information, relying on its being obtained. To this dialogue Riderhood had attended in silence, and he now obsequiously bespake the Captain.

'Captain! Mentioning them unfort'net words of mine respecting Gaffer, it is contrairily to be bore in mind that Gaffer always were a precious rascal, and that his line were a thieving line. Likeways when I went to them two Governors, Lawyer Lightwood and the t'other Governor, with my information, I may have been a little overeager for the cause of justice, or (to put it another way) a little overstimulated by them feelings which rouses a man up, when a pot of money is going about, to get his hand into that pot of money for his family's sake. Besides which, I think the wine of them two Governors was I will not say a hocused wine, but fur from a wine as was elthy for the mind. And there's another thing to be remembered, Captain. Did I stick to them words when Gaffer was no more, and did I say bold to them two Governors, "Governors both, wot I informed I still inform; wot was took down I hold to"? No. I says, frank and openno shuffling, mind you, Captain!"I may have been mistook, I've been a thinking of it, it mayn't have been took down correct on this and that, and I won't swear to thick and thin, I'd rayther forfeit your good opinions than do it." And so far as I know,' concluded Mr Riderhood, by way of proof and evidence to character, 'I HAVE actiwally forfeited the good opinions of several personseven your own, Captain, if I understand your wordsbut I'd sooner do it than be forswore. There; if that's conspiracy, call me conspirator.'

'You shall sign,' said the visitor, taking very little heed of this oration, 'a statement that it was all utterly false, and the poor girl shall have it. I will bring it with me for your signature, when I come again.'

'When might you be expected, Captain?' inquired Riderhood, again dubiously getting between him and door.

'Quite soon enough for you. I shall not disappoint you; don't be afraid.'

'Might you be inclined to leave any name, Captain?'

'No, not at all. I have no such intention.'

""Shall" is summ'at of a hard word, Captain,' urged Riderhood, still feebly dodging between him and the door, as he advanced. 'When you say a man "shall" sign this and that and t'other, Captain, you order him about in a grand sort of a way. Don't it seem so to yourself?'

The man stood still, and angrily fixed him with his eyes.

'Father, father!' entreated Pleasant, from the door, with her disengaged hand nervously trembling at her lips; 'don't! Don't get into trouble any more!'

'Hear me out, Captain, hear me out! All I was wishing to mention, Captain, afore you took your departer,' said the sneaking Mr Riderhood, falling out of his path, 'was, your handsome words relating to the reward.'

'When I claim it,' said the man, in a tone which seemed to leave some such words as 'you dog,' very distinctly understood, 'you shall share it.'

Looking stedfastly at Riderhood, he once more said in a low voice, this time with a grim sort of admiration of him as a perfect piece of evil, 'What a liar you are!' and, nodding his head twice or thrice over the compliment, passed out of the shop. But, to Pleasant he said goodnight kindly.

The honest man who gained his living by the sweat of his brow remained in a state akin to stupefaction, until the footless glass and the unfinished bottle conveyed themselves into his mind. From his mind he conveyed them into his hands, and so conveyed the last of the wine into his stomach. When that was done, he awoke to a clear perception that Poll Parroting was solely chargeable with what had passed. Therefore, not to be remiss in his duty as a father, he threw a pair of seaboots at Pleasant, which she ducked to avoid, and then cried, poor thing, using her hair for a pocket-handkerchief.

Chapter 13

A SOLO AND A DUETT

The wind was blowing so hard when the visitor came out at the shopdoor into the darkness and dirt of Limehouse Hole, that it almost blew him in again. Doors were slamming violently, lamps were flickering or blown out, signs were rocking in their frames, the water of the kennels, winddispersed, flew about in drops like rain. Indifferent to the weather, and even preferring it to better weather for its clearance of the streets, the man looked about him with a scrutinizing glance. 'Thus much I know,' he murmured. 'I have never been here since that night, and never was here before that night, but thus much I recognize. I wonder which way did we take when we came out of that shop. We turned to the right as I have turned, but I can recall no more. Did we go by this alley? Or down that little lane?'

He tried both, but both confused him equally, and he came straying back to the same spot. 'I remember there were poles pushed out of upper windows on

which clothes were drying, and I remember a low publichouse, and the sound flowing down a narrow passage belonging to it of the scraping of a fiddle and the shuffling of feet. But here are all these things in the lane, and here are all these things in the alley. And I have nothing else in my mind but a wall, a dark doorway, a flight of stairs, and a room.'

He tried a new direction, but made nothing of it; walls, dark doorways, flights of stairs and rooms, were too abundant. And, like most people so puzzled, he again and again described a circle, and found himself at the point from which he had begun. 'This is like what I have read in narratives of escape from prison,' said he, 'where the little track of the fugitives in the night always seems to take the shape of the great round world, on which they wander; as if it were a secret law.'

Here he ceased to be the oakumheaded, oakumwhiskered man on whom Miss Pleasant Riderhood had looked, and, allowing for his being still wrapped in a nautical overcoat, became as like that same lost wanted Mr Julius Handford, as never man was like another in this world. In the breast of the coat he stowed the bristling hair and whisker, in a moment, as the favouring wind went with him down a solitary place that it had swept clear of passengers. Yet in that same moment he was the Secretary also, Mr Boffin's Secretary. For John Rokesmith, too, was as like that same lost wanted Mr Julius Handford as never man was like another in this world.

'I have no clue to the scene of my death,' said he. 'Not that it matters now. But having risked discovery by venturing here at all, I should have been glad to track some part of the way.' With which singular words he abandoned his search, came up out of Limehouse Hole, and took the way past Limehouse Church. At the great iron gate of the churchyard he stopped and looked in. He looked up at the high tower spectrally resisting the wind, and he looked round at the white tombstones, like enough to the dead in their windingsheets, and he counted the nine tolls of the clockbell.

'It is a sensation not experienced by many mortals,' said he, 'to be looking into a churchyard on a wild windy night, and to feel that I no more hold a place among the living than these dead do, and even to know that I lie buried somewhere else, as they lie buried here. Nothing uses me to it. A spirit that was once a man could hardly feel stranger or lonelier, going unrecognized among mankind, than I feel.

'But this is the fanciful side of the situation. It has a real side, so difficult that, though I think of it every day, I never thoroughly think it out. Now, let me determine to think it out as I walk home. I know I evade it, as many men perhaps most men do evade thinking their way through their greatest perplexity. I will try to pin myself to mine. Don't evade it, John Harmon; don't

evade it; think it out!

'When I came to England, attracted to the country with which I had none but most miserable associations, by the accounts of my fine inheritance that found me abroad, I came back, shrinking from my father's money, shrinking from my father's memory, mistrustful of being forced on a mercenary wife, mistrustful of my father's intention in thrusting that marriage on me, mistrustful that I was already growing avaricious, mistrustful that I was slackening in gratitude to the two dear noble honest friends who had made the only sunlight in my childish life or that of my heartbroken sister. I came back, timid, divided in my mind, afraid of myself and everybody here, knowing of nothing but wretchedness that my father's wealth had ever brought about. Now, stop, and so far think it out, John Harmon. Is that so? That is exactly so.

'On board serving as third mate was George Radfoot. I knew nothing of him. His name first became known to me about a week before we sailed, through my being accosted by one of the shipagent's clerks as "Mr Radfoot." It was one day when I had gone aboard to look to my preparations, and the clerk, coming behind me as I stood on deck, tapped me on the shoulder, and said, "Mr Radfoot, look here," referring to some papers that he had in his hand. And my name first became known to Radfoot, through another clerk within a day or two, and while the ship was yet in port, coming up behind him, tapping him on the shoulder and beginning, "I beg your pardon, Mr Harmon." I believe we were alike in bulk and stature but not otherwise, and that we were not strikingly alike, even in those respects, when we were together and could be compared.

'However, a sociable word or two on these mistakes became an easy introduction between us, and the weather was hot, and he helped me to a cool cabin on deck alongside his own, and his first school had been at Brussels as mine had been, and he had learnt French as I had learnt it, and he had a little history of himself to relate God only knows how much of it true, and how much of it false that had its likeness to mine. I had been a seaman too. So we got to be confidential together, and the more easily yet, because he and every one on board had known by general rumour what I was making the voyage to England for. By such degrees and means, he came to the knowledge of my uneasiness of mind, and of its setting at that time in the direction of desiring to see and form some judgment of my allotted wife, before she could possibly know me for myself; also to try Mrs Boffin and give her a glad surprise. So the plot was made out of our getting common sailors' dresses (as he was able to guide me about London), and throwing ourselves in Bella Wilfer's neighbourhood, and trying to put ourselves in her way, and doing whatever chance might favour on the spot, and seeing what came of it. If nothing came of it, I should be no worse off, and there would merely be a short delay in my

presenting myself to Lightwood. I have all these facts right? Yes. They are all accurately right.

'His advantage in all this was, that for a time I was to be lost. It might be for a day or for two days, but I must be lost sight of on landing, or there would be recognition, anticipation, and failure. Therefore, I disembarked with my valise in my hand as Potterson the steward and Mr Jacob Kibble my fellowpassenger afterwards remembered and waited for him in the dark by that very Limehouse Church which is now behind me.

'As I had always shunned the port of London, I only knew the church through his pointing out its spire from on board. Perhaps I might recall, if it were any good to try, the way by which I went to it alone from the river; but how we two went from it to Riderhood's shop, I don't know any more than I know what turns we took and doubles we made, after we left it. The way was purposely confused, no doubt.

'But let me go on thinking the facts out, and avoid confusing them with my speculations. Whether he took me by a straight way or a crooked way, what is that to the purpose now? Steady, John Harmon.

'When we stopped at Riderhood's, and he asked that scoundrel a question or two, purporting to refer only to the lodginghouses in which there was accommodation for us, had I the least suspicion of him? None. Certainly none until afterwards when I held the clue. I think he must have got from Riderhood in a paper, the drug, or whatever it was, that afterwards stupefied me, but I am far from sure. All I felt safe in charging on him tonight, was old companionship in villainy between them. Their undisguised intimacy, and the character I now know Riderhood to bear, made that not at all adventurous. But I am not clear about the drug. Thinking out the circumstances on which I found my suspicion, they are only two. One: I remember his changing a small folded paper from one pocket to another, after we came out, which he had not touched before. Two: I now know Riderhood to have been previously taken up for being concerned in the robbery of an unlucky seaman, to whom some such poison had been given.

'It is my conviction that we cannot have gone a mile from that shop, before we came to the wall, the dark doorway, the flight of stairs, and the room. The night was particularly dark and it rained hard. As I think the circumstances back, I hear the rain splashing on the stone pavement of the passage, which was not under cover. The room overlooked the river, or a dock, or a creek, and the tide was out. Being possessed of the time down to that point, I know by the hour that it must have been about low water; but while the coffee was getting ready, I drew back the curtain (a darkbrown curtain), and, looking out, knew by the kind of reflection below, of the few neighbouring lights, that they were

reflected in tidal mud.

'He had carried under his arm a canvas bag, containing a suit of his clothes. I had no change of outer clothes with me, as I was to buy slops. "You are very wet, Mr Harmon," I can hear him saying "and I am quite dry under this good waterproof coat. Put on these clothes of mine. You may find on trying them that they will answer your purpose tomorrow, as well as the slops you mean to buy, or better. While you change, I'll hurry the hot coffee." When he came back, I had his clothes on, and there was a black man with him, wearing a linen jacket, like a steward, who put the smoking coffee on the table in a tray and never looked at me. I am so far literal and exact? Literal and exact, I am certain.

'Now, I pass to sick and deranged impressions; they are so strong, that I rely upon them; but there are spaces between them that I know nothing about, and they are not pervaded by any idea of time.

'I had drunk some coffee, when to my sense of sight he began to swell immensely, and something urged me to rush at him. We had a struggle near the door. He got from me, through my not knowing where to strike, in the whirling round of the room, and the flashing of flames of fire between us. I dropped down. Lying helpless on the ground, I was turned over by a foot. I was dragged by the neck into a corner. I heard men speak together. I was turned over by other feet. I saw a figure like myself lying dressed in my clothes on a bed. What might have been, for anything I knew, a silence of days, weeks, months, years, was broken by a violent wrestling of men all over the room. The figure like myself was assailed, and my valise was in its hand. I was trodden upon and fallen over. I heard a noise of blows, and thought it was a woodcutter cutting down a tree. I could not have said that my name was John Harmon I could not have thought it I didn't know it but when I heard the blows, I thought of the woodcutter and his axe, and had some dead idea that I was lying in a forest.

'This is still correct? Still correct, with the exception that I cannot possibly express it to myself without using the word I. But it was not I. There was no such thing as I, within my knowledge.

'It was only after a downward slide through something like a tube, and then a great noise and a sparkling and crackling as of fires, that the consciousness came upon me, "This is John Harmon drowning! John Harmon, struggle for your life. John Harmon, call on Heaven and save yourself!" I think I cried it out aloud in a great agony, and then a heavy horrid unintelligible something vanished, and it was I who was struggling there alone in the water.

'I was very weak and faint, frightfully oppressed with drowsiness, and driving

fast with the tide. Looking over the black water, I saw the lights racing past me on the two banks of the river, as if they were eager to be gone and leave me dying in the dark. The tide was running down, but I knew nothing of up or down then. When, guiding myself safely with Heaven's assistance before the fierce set of the water, I at last caught at a boat moored, one of a tier of boats at a causeway, I was sucked under her, and came up, only just alive, on the other side.

'Was I long in the water? Long enough to be chilled to the heart, but I don't know how long. Yet the cold was merciful, for it was the cold night air and the rain that restored me from a swoon on the stones of the causeway. They naturally supposed me to have toppled in, drunk, when I crept to the publichouse it belonged to; for I had no notion where I was, and could not articulate through the poison that had made me insensible having affected my speech and I supposed the night to be the previous night, as it was still dark and raining. But I had lost twentyfour hours.

'I have checked the calculation often, and it must have been two nights that I lay recovering in that publichouse. Let me see. Yes. I am sure it was while I lay in that bed there, that the thought entered my head of turning the danger I had passed through, to the account of being for some time supposed to have disappeared mysteriously, and of proving Bella. The dread of our being forced on one another, and perpetuating the fate that seemed to have fallen on my father's richesthe fate that they should lead to nothing but evilwas strong upon the moral timidity that dates from my childhood with my poor sister.

'As to this hour I cannot understand that side of the river where I recovered the shore, being the opposite side to that on which I was ensnared, I shall never understand it now. Even at this moment, while I leave the river behind me, going home, I cannot conceive that it rolls between me and that spot, or that the sea is where it is. But this is not thinking it out; this is making a leap to the present time.

'I could not have done it, but for the fortune in the waterproof belt round my body. Not a great fortune, forty and odd pounds for the inheritor of a hundred and odd thousand! But it was enough. Without it I must have disclosed myself. Without it, I could never have gone to that Exchequer Coffee House, or taken Mrs Wilfer's lodgings.

'Some twelve days I lived at that hotel, before the night when I saw the corpse of Radfoot at the Police Station. The inexpressible mental horror that I laboured under, as one of the consequences of the poison, makes the interval seem greatly longer, but I know it cannot have been longer. That suffering has gradually weakened and weakened since, and has only come upon me by starts, and I hope I am free from it now; but even now, I have sometimes to

think, constrain myself, and stop before speaking, or I could not say the words I want to say.

'Again I ramble away from thinking it out to the end. It is not so far to the end that I need be tempted to break off. Now, on straight!

'I examined the newspapers every day for tidings that I was missing, but saw none. Going out that night to walk (for I kept retired while it was light), I found a crowd assembled round a placard posted at Whitehall. It described myself, John Harmon, as found dead and mutilated in the river under circumstances of strong suspicion, described my dress, described the papers in my pockets, and stated where I was lying for recognition. In a wild incautious way I hurried there, and therewith the horror of the death I had escaped, before my eyes in its most appalling shape, added to the inconceivable horror tormenting me at that time when the poisonous stuff was strongest on me I perceived that Radfoot had been murdered by some unknown hands for the money for which he would have murdered me, and that probably we had both been shot into the river from the same dark place into the same dark tide, when the stream ran deep and strong.

'That night I almost gave up my mystery, though I suspected no one, could offer no information, knew absolutely nothing save that the murdered man was not I, but Radfoot. Next day while I hesitated, and next day while I hesitated, it seemed as if the whole country were determined to have me dead. The Inquest declared me dead, the Government proclaimed me dead; I could not listen at my fireside for five minutes to the outer noises, but it was borne into my ears that I was dead.

'So John Harmon died, and Julius Handford disappeared, and John Rokesmith was born. John Rokesmith's intent tonight has been to repair a wrong that he could never have imagined possible, coming to his ears through the Lightwood talk related to him, and which he is bound by every consideration to remedy. In that intent John Rokesmith will persevere, as his duty is.

'Now, is it all thought out? All to this time? Nothing omitted? No, nothing. But beyond this time? To think it out through the future, is a harder though a much shorter task than to think it out through the past. John Harmon is dead. Should John Harmon come to life?

'If yes, why? If no, why?'

'Take yes, first. To enlighten human Justice concerning the offence of one far beyond it who may have a living mother. To enlighten it with the lights of a stone passage, a flight of stairs, a brown windowcurtain, and a black man. To come into possession of my father's money, and with it sordidly to buy a beautiful creature whom I love I cannot help it; reason has nothing to do with

it; I love her against reason but who would as soon love me for my own sake, as she would love the beggar at the corner. What a use for the money, and how worthy of its old misuses!

'Now, take no. The reasons why John Harmon should not come to life. Because he has passively allowed these dear old faithful friends to pass into possession of the property. Because he sees them happy with it, making a good use of it, effacing the old rust and tarnish on the money. Because they have virtually adopted Bella, and will provide for her. Because there is affection enough in her nature, and warmth enough in her heart, to develop into something enduringly good, under favourable conditions. Because her faults have been intensified by her place in my father's will, and she is already growing better. Because her marriage with John Harmon, after what I have heard from her own lips, would be a shocking mockery, of which both she and I must always be conscious, and which would degrade her in her mind, and me in mine, and each of us in the other's. Because if John Harmon comes to life and does not marry her, the property falls into the very hands that hold it now.

'What would I have? Dead, I have found the true friends of my lifetime still as true as tender and as faithful as when I was alive, and making my memory an incentive to good actions done in my name. Dead, I have found them when they might have slighted my name, and passed greedily over my grave to ease and wealth, lingering by the way, like singlehearted children, to recall their love for me when I was a poor frightened child. Dead, I have heard from the woman who would have been my wife if I had lived, the revolting truth that I should have purchased her, caring nothing for me, as a Sultan buys a slave.

'What would I have? If the dead could know, or do know, how the living use them, who among the hosts of dead has found a more disinterested fidelity on earth than I? Is not that enough for me? If I had come back, these noble creatures would have welcomed me, wept over me, given up everything to me with joy. I did not come back, and they have passed unspoiled into my place. Let them rest in it, and let Bella rest in hers.

'What course for me then? This. To live the same quiet Secretary life, carefully avoiding chances of recognition, until they shall have become more accustomed to their altered state, and until the great swarm of swindlers under many names shall have found newer prey. By that time, the method I am establishing through all the affairs, and with which I will every day take new pains to make them both familiar, will be, I may hope, a machine in such working order as that they can keep it going. I know I need but ask of their generosity, to have. When the right time comes, I will ask no more than will replace me in my former path of life, and John Rokesmith shall tread it as contentedly as he may. But John Harmon shall come back no more.

'That I may never, in the days to come afar off, have any weak misgiving that Bella might, in any contingency, have taken me for my own sake if I had plainly asked her, I WILL plainly ask her: proving beyond all question what I already know too well. And now it is all thought out, from the beginning to the end, and my mind is easier.'

So deeply engaged had the livingdead man been, in thus communing with himself, that he had regarded neither the wind nor the way, and had resisted the former instinctively as he had pursued the latter. But being now come into the City, where there was a coachstand, he stood irresolute whether to go to his lodgings, or to go first to Mr Boffin's house. He decided to go round by the house, arguing, as he carried his overcoat upon his arm, that it was less likely to attract notice if left there, than if taken to Holloway: both Mrs Wilfer and Miss Lavinia being ravenously curious touching every article of which the lodger stood possessed.

Arriving at the house, he found that Mr and Mrs Boffin were out, but that Miss Wilfer was in the drawingroom. Miss Wilfer had remained at home, in consequence of not feeling very well, and had inquired in the evening if Mr Rokesmith were in his room.

'Make my compliments to Miss Wilfer, and say I am here now.'

Miss Wilfer's compliments came down in return, and, if it were not too much trouble, would Mr Rokesmith be so kind as to come up before he went?

It was not too much trouble, and Mr Rokesmith came up.

Oh she looked very pretty, she looked very, very pretty! If the father of the late John Harmon had but left his money unconditionally to his son, and if his son had but lighted on this loveable girl for himself, and had the happiness to make her loving as well as loveable!

'Dear me! Are you not well, Mr Rokesmith?'

'Yes, quite well. I was sorry to hear, when I came in, that YOU were not.'

'A mere nothing. I had a headache gone now and was not quite fit for a hot theatre, so I stayed at home. I asked you if you were not well, because you look so white.'

'Do I? I have had a busy evening.'

She was on a low ottoman before the fire, with a little shining jewel of a table, and her book and her work, beside her. Ah! what a different life the late John Harmon's, if it had been his happy privilege to take his place upon that ottoman, and draw his arm about that waist, and say, 'I hope the time has been

long without me? What a Home Goddess you look, my darling!

But, the present John Rokesmith, far removed from the late John Harmon, remained standing at a distance. A little distance in respect of space, but a great distance in respect of separation.

'Mr Rokesmith,' said Bella, taking up her work, and inspecting it all round the corners, 'I wanted to say something to you when I could have the opportunity, as an explanation why I was rude to you the other day. You have no right to think ill of me, sir.'

The sharp little way in which she darted a look at him, half sensitively injured, and half pettishly, would have been very much admired by the late John Harmon.

'You don't know how well I think of you, Miss Wilfer.'

'Truly, you must have a very high opinion of me, Mr Rokesmith, when you believe that in prosperity I neglect and forget my old home.'

'Do I believe so?'

'You DID, sir, at any rate,' returned Bella.

'I took the liberty of reminding you of a little omission into which you had fallen insensibly and naturally fallen. It was no more than that.'

'And I beg leave to ask you, Mr Rokesmith,' said Bella, 'why you took that liberty? I hope there is no offence in the phrase; it is your own, remember.'

'Because I am truly, deeply, profoundly interested in you, Miss Wilfer. Because I wish to see you always at your best. Because I shall I go on?'

'No, sir,' returned Bella, with a burning face, 'you have said more than enough. I beg that you will NOT go on. If you have any generosity, any honour, you will say no more.'

The late John Harmon, looking at the proud face with the downcast eyes, and at the quick breathing as it stirred the fall of bright brown hair over the beautiful neck, would probably have remained silent.

'I wish to speak to you, sir,' said Bella, 'once for all, and I don't know how to do it. I have sat here all this evening, wishing to speak to you, and determining to speak to you, and feeling that I must. I beg for a moment's time.'

He remained silent, and she remained with her face averted, sometimes making a slight movement as if she would turn and speak. At length she did so.

'You know how I am situated here, sir, and you know how I am situated at home. I must speak to you for myself, since there is no one about me whom I could ask to do so. It is not generous in you, it is not honourable in you, to conduct yourself towards me as you do.'

'Is it ungenerous or dishonourable to be devoted to you; fascinated by you?'

'Preposterous!' said Bella.

The late John Harmon might have thought it rather a contemptuous and lofty word of repudiation.

'I now feel obliged to go on,' pursued the Secretary, 'though it were only in selfexplanation and selfdefence. I hope, Miss Wilfer, that it is not unpardonable even in me to make an honest declaration of an honest devotion to you.'

'An honest declaration!' repeated Bella, with emphasis.

'Is it otherwise?'

'I must request, sir,' said Bella, taking refuge in a touch of timely resentment, 'that I may not be questioned. You must excuse me if I decline to be crossexamined.'

'Oh, Miss Wilfer, this is hardly charitable. I ask you nothing but what your own emphasis suggests. However, I waive even that question. But what I have declared, I take my stand by. I cannot recall the avowal of my earnest and deep attachment to you, and I do not recall it.'

'I reject it, sir,' said Bella.

'I should be blind and deaf if I were not prepared for the reply. Forgive my offence, for it carries its punishment with it.'

'What punishment?' asked Bella.

'Is my present endurance none? But excuse me; I did not mean to crossexamine you again.'

'You take advantage of a hasty word of mine,' said Bella with a little sting of selfreproach, 'to make me seem I don't know what. I spoke without consideration when I used it. If that was bad, I am sorry; but you repeat it after consideration, and that seems to me to be at least no better. For the rest, I beg it may be understood, Mr Rokesmith, that there is an end of this between us, now and for ever.'

'Now and for ever,' he repeated.

'Yes. I appeal to you, sir,' proceeded Bella with increasing spirit, 'not to pursue me. I appeal to you not to take advantage of your position in this house to make my position in it distressing and disagreeable. I appeal to you to discontinue your habit of making your misplaced attentions as plain to Mrs Boffin as to me.'

'Have I done so?'

'I should think you have,' replied Bella. 'In any case it is not your fault if you have not, Mr Rokesmith.'

'I hope you are wrong in that impression. I should be very sorry to have justified it. I think I have not. For the future there is no apprehension. It is all over.'

'I am much relieved to hear it,' said Bella. 'I have far other views in life, and why should you waste your own?'

'Mine!' said the Secretary. 'My life!'

His curious tone caused Bella to glance at the curious smile with which he said it. It was gone as he glanced back. 'Pardon me, Miss Wilfer,' he proceeded, when their eyes met; 'you have used some hard words, for which I do not doubt you have a justification in your mind, that I do not understand. Ungenerous and dishonourable. In what?'

'I would rather not be asked,' said Bella, haughtily looking down.

'I would rather not ask, but the question is imposed upon me. Kindly explain; or if not kindly, justly.'

'Oh, sir!' said Bella, raising her eyes to his, after a little struggle to forbear, 'is it generous and honourable to use the power here which your favour with Mr and Mrs Boffin and your ability in your place give you, against me?'

'Against you?'

'Is it generous and honourable to form a plan for gradually bringing their influence to bear upon a suit which I have shown you that I do not like, and which I tell you that I utterly reject?'

The late John Harmon could have borne a good deal, but he would have been cut to the heart by such a suspicion as this.

'Would it be generous and honourable to step into your place if you did so, for I don't know that you did, and I hope you did not anticipating, or knowing beforehand, that I should come here, and designing to take me at this disadvantage?'

'This mean and cruel disadvantage,' said the Secretary.

'Yes,' assented Bella.

The Secretary kept silence for a little while; then merely said, 'You are wholly mistaken, Miss Wilfer; wonderfully mistaken. I cannot say, however, that it is your fault. If I deserve better things of you, you do not know it.'

'At least, sir,' retorted Bella, with her old indignation rising, 'you know the history of my being here at all. I have heard Mr Boffin say that you are master of every line and word of that will, as you are master of all his affairs. And was it not enough that I should have been willed away, like a horse, or a dog, or a bird; but must you too begin to dispose of me in your mind, and speculate in me, as soon as I had ceased to be the talk and the laugh of the town? Am I for ever to be made the property of strangers?'

'Believe me,' returned the Secretary, 'you are wonderfully mistaken.'

'I should be glad to know it,' answered Bella.

'I doubt if you ever will. Goodnight. Of course I shall be careful to conceal any traces of this interview from Mr and Mrs Boffin, as long as I remain here. Trust me, what you have complained of is at an end for ever.'

'I am glad I have spoken, then, Mr Rokesmith. It has been painful and difficult, but it is done. If I have hurt you, I hope you will forgive me. I am inexperienced and impetuous, and I have been a little spoiled; but I really am not so bad as I dare say I appear, or as you think me.'

He quitted the room when Bella had said this, relenting in her wilful inconsistent way. Left alone, she threw herself back on her ottoman, and said, 'I didn't know the lovely woman was such a Dragon!' Then, she got up and looked in the glass, and said to her image, 'You have been positively swelling your features, you little fool!' Then, she took an impatient walk to the other end of the room and back, and said, 'I wish Pa was here to have a talk about an avaricious marriage; but he is better away, poor dear, for I know I should pull his hair if he WAS here.' And then she threw her work away, and threw her book after it, and sat down and hummed a tune, and hummed it out of tune, and quarrelled with it.

And John Rokesmith, what did he?

He went down to his room, and buried John Harmon many additional fathoms deep. He took his hat, and walked out, and, as he went to Holloway or anywhere elsenot at all minding whereheaped mounds upon mounds of earth over John Harmon's grave. His walking did not bring him home until the dawn of day. And so busy had he been all night, piling and piling weights upon

weights of earth above John Harmon's grave, that by that time John Harmon lay buried under a whole Alpine range; and still the Sexton Rokesmith accumulated mountains over him, lightening his labour with the dirge, 'Cover him, crush him, keep him down!'

Chapter 14

STRONG OF PURPOSE

The sextontask of piling earth above John Harmon all night long, was not conducive to sound sleep; but Rokesmith had some broken morning rest, and rose strengthened in his purpose. It was all over now. No ghost should trouble Mr and Mrs Boffin's peace; invisible and voiceless, the ghost should look on for a little while longer at the state of existence out of which it had departed, and then should for ever cease to haunt the scenes in which it had no place.

He went over it all again. He had lapsed into the condition in which he found himself, as many a man lapses into many a condition, without perceiving the accumulative power of its separate circumstances. When in the distrust engendered by his wretched childhood and the action for evil never yet for good within his knowledge then of his father and his father's wealth on all within their influence, he conceived the idea of his first deception, it was meant to be harmless, it was to last but a few hours or days, it was to involve in it only the girl so capriciously forced upon him and upon whom he was so capriciously forced, and it was honestly meant well towards her. For, if he had found her unhappy in the prospect of that marriage (through her heart inclining to another man or for any other cause), he would seriously have said: 'This is another of the old perverted uses of the misery-making money. I will let it go to my and my sister's only protectors and friends.' When the snare into which he fell so outstripped his first intention as that he found himself placarded by the police authorities upon the London walls for dead, he confusedly accepted the aid that fell upon him, without considering how firmly it must seem to fix the Boffins in their accession to the fortune. When he saw them, and knew them, and even from his vantage-ground of inspection could find no flaw in them, he asked himself, 'And shall I come to life to dispossess such people as these?' There was no good to set against the putting of them to that hard proof. He had heard from Bella's own lips when he stood tapping at the door on that night of his taking the lodgings, that the marriage would have been on her part thoroughly mercenary. He had since tried her, in his own unknown person and supposed station, and she not only rejected his advances but resented them.

Was it for him to have the shame of buying her, or the meanness of punishing her? Yet, by coming to life and accepting the condition of the inheritance, he must do the former; and by coming to life and rejecting it, he must do the latter.

Another consequence that he had never foreshadowed, was the implication of an innocent man in his supposed murder. He would obtain complete retraction from the accuser, and set the wrong right; but clearly the wrong could never have been done if he had never planned a deception. Then, whatever inconvenience or distress of mind the deception cost him, it was manful repentantly to accept as among its consequences, and make no complaint.

Thus John Rokesmith in the morning, and it buried John Harmon still many fathoms deeper than he had been buried in the night.

Going out earlier than he was accustomed to do, he encountered the cherub at the door. The cherub's way was for a certain space his way, and they walked together.

It was impossible not to notice the change in the cherub's appearance. The cherub felt very conscious of it, and modestly remarked:

'A present from my daughter Bella, Mr Rokesmith.'

The words gave the Secretary a stroke of pleasure, for he remembered the fifty pounds, and he still loved the girl. No doubt it was very weak it always is very weak, some authorities hold but he loved the girl.

'I don't know whether you happen to have read many books of African Travel, Mr Rokesmith?' said R. W.

'I have read several.'

'Well, you know, there's usually a King George, or a King Boy, or a King Sambo, or a King Bill, or Bull, or Rum, or Junk, or whatever name the sailors may have happened to give him.'

'Where?' asked Rokesmith.

'Anywhere. Anywhere in Africa, I mean. Pretty well everywhere, I may say; for black kings are cheap and I think'said R. W., with an apologetic air, 'nasty'.

'I am much of your opinion, Mr Wilfer. You were going to say?'

'I was going to say, the king is generally dressed in a London hat only, or a Manchester pair of braces, or one epaulette, or an uniform coat with his legs in the sleeves, or something of that kind.'

'Just so,' said the Secretary.

'In confidence, I assure you, Mr Rokesmith,' observed the cheerful cherub, 'that when more of my family were at home and to be provided for, I used to remind myself immensely of that king. You have no idea, as a single man, of the difficulty I have had in wearing more than one good article at a time.'

'I can easily believe it, Mr Wilfer.'

'I only mention it,' said R. W. in the warmth of his heart, 'as a proof of the amiable, delicate, and considerate affection of my daughter Bella. If she had been a little spoilt, I couldn't have thought so very much of it, under the circumstances. But no, not a bit. And she is so very pretty! I hope you agree with me in finding her very pretty, Mr Rokesmith?'

'Certainly I do. Every one must.'

'I hope so,' said the cherub. 'Indeed, I have no doubt of it. This is a great advancement for her in life, Mr Rokesmith. A great opening of her prospects?'

'Miss Wilfer could have no better friends than Mr and Mrs Boffin.'

'Impossible!' said the gratified cherub. 'Really I begin to think things are very well as they are. If Mr John Harmon had lived'

'He is better dead,' said the Secretary.

'No, I won't go so far as to say that,' urged the cherub, a little remonstrant against the very decisive and un pitying tone; 'but he mightn't have suited Bella, or Bella mightn't have suited him, or fifty things, whereas now I hope she can choose for herself.'

'Has she as you place the confidence in me of speaking on the subject, you will excuse my asking as she perhaps chosen?' faltered the Secretary.

'Oh dear no!' returned R. W.

'Young ladies sometimes,' Rokesmith hinted, 'choose without mentioning their choice to their fathers.'

'Not in this case, Mr Rokesmith. Between my daughter Bella and me there is a regular league and covenant of confidence. It was ratified only the other day. The ratification dates from these,' said the cherub, giving a little pull at the lappels of his coat and the pockets of his trousers. 'Oh no, she has not chosen. To be sure, young George Sampson, in the days when Mr John Harmon'

'Who I wish had never been born!' said the Secretary, with a gloomy brow.

R. W. looked at him with surprise, as thinking he had contracted an unaccountable spite against the poor deceased, and continued: 'In the days when Mr John Harmon was being sought out, young George Sampson'

certainly was hovering about Bella, and Bella let him hover. But it never was seriously thought of, and it's still less than ever to be thought of now. For Bella is ambitious, Mr Rokesmith, and I think I may predict will marry fortune. This time, you see, she will have the person and the property before her together, and will be able to make her choice with her eyes open. This is my road. I am very sorry to part company so soon. Good morning, sir!

The Secretary pursued his way, not very much elevated in spirits by this conversation, and, arriving at the Boffin mansion, found Betty Higden waiting for him.

'I should thank you kindly, sir,' said Betty, 'if I might make so bold as have a word or two wi' you.'

She should have as many words as she liked, he told her; and took her into his room, and made her sit down.

'Tis concerning Sloppy, sir,' said Betty. 'And that's how I come here by myself. Not wishing him to know what I'm agoing to say to you, I got the start of him early and walked up.'

'You have wonderful energy,' returned Rokesmith. 'You are as young as I am.'

Betty Higden gravely shook her head. 'I am strong for my time of life, sir, but not young, thank the Lord!'

'Are you thankful for not being young?'

'Yes, sir. If I was young, it would all have to be gone through again, and the end would be a weary way off, don't you see? But never mind me; 'tis concerning Sloppy.'

'And what about him, Betty?'

'Tis just this, sir. It can't be reasoned out of his head by any powers of mine but what that he can do right by your kind lady and gentleman and do his work for me, both together. Now he can't. To give himself up to being put in the way of arning a good living and getting on, he must give me up. Well; he won't.'

'I respect him for it,' said Rokesmith.

'DO ye, sir? I don't know but what I do myself. Still that don't make it right to let him have his way. So as he won't give me up, I'm agoing to give him up.'

'How, Betty?'

'I'm agoing to run away from him.'

With an astonished look at the indomitable old face and the bright eyes, the

Secretary repeated, 'Run away from him?'

'Yes, sir,' said Betty, with one nod. And in the nod and in the firm set of her mouth, there was a vigour of purpose not to be doubted.

'Come, come!' said the Secretary. 'We must talk about this. Let us take our time over it, and try to get at the true sense of the case and the true course, by degrees.'

'Now, lookee here, by dear,' returned old Betty 'asking your excuse for being so familiar, but being of a time of life a'most to be your grandmother twice over. Now, lookee, here. 'Tis a poor living and a hard as is to be got out of this work that I'm a doing now, and but for Sloppy I don't know as I should have held to it this long. But it did just keep us on, the two together. Now that I'm alonewith even Johnny gone I'd far sooner be upon my feet and tiring of myself out, than a sitting folding and folding by the fire. And I'll tell you why. There's a deadness steals over me at times, that the kind of life favours and I don't like. Now, I seem to have Johnny in my armsnow, his mothernow, his mother's mothernow, I seem to be a child myself, a lying once again in the arms of my own motherthen I get numbed, thought and sense, till I start out of my seat, afeerd that I'm a growing like the poor old people that they brick up in the Unions, as you may sometimes see when they let 'em out of the four walls to have a warm in the sun, crawling quite scared about the streets. I was a nimble girl, and have always been a active body, as I told your lady, first time ever I see her good face. I can still walk twenty mile if I am put to it. I'd far better be a walking than a getting numbed and dreary. I'm a good fair knitter, and can make many little things to sell. The loan from your lady and gentleman of twenty shillings to fit out a basket with, would be a fortune for me. Trudging round the country and tiring of myself out, I shall keep the deadness off, and get my own bread by my own labour. And what more can I want?'

'And this is your plan,' said the Secretary, 'for running away?'

'Show me a better! My deary, show me a better! Why, I know very well,' said old Betty Higden, 'and you know very well, that your lady and gentleman would set me up like a queen for the rest of my life, if so be that we could make it right among us to have it so. But we can't make it right among us to have it so. I've never took charity yet, nor yet has any one belonging to me. And it would be forsaking of myself indeed, and forsaking of my children dead and gone, and forsaking of their children dead and gone, to set up a contradiction now at last.'

'It might come to be justifiable and unavoidable at last,' the Secretary gently hinted, with a slight stress on the word.

'I hope it never will! It ain't that I mean to give offence by being anyways

proud,' said the old creature simply, 'but that I want to be of a piece like, and helpful of myself right through to my death.'

'And to be sure,' added the Secretary, as a comfort for her, 'Sloppy will be eagerly looking forward to his opportunity of being to you what you have been to him.'

'Trust him for that, sir!' said Betty, cheerfully. 'Though he had need to be something quick about it, for I'm a getting to be an old one. But I'm a strong one too, and travel and weather never hurt me yet! Now, be so kind as speak for me to your lady and gentleman, and tell 'em what I ask of their good friendliness to let me do, and why I ask it.'

The Secretary felt that there was no gainsaying what was urged by this brave old heroine, and he presently repaired to Mrs Boffin and recommended her to let Betty Higden have her way, at all events for the time. 'It would be far more satisfactory to your kind heart, I know,' he said, 'to provide for her, but it may be a duty to respect this independent spirit.' Mrs Boffin was not proof against the consideration set before her. She and her husband had worked too, and had brought their simple faith and honour clean out of dustheaps. If they owed a duty to Betty Higden, of a surety that duty must be done.

'But, Betty,' said Mrs Boffin, when she accompanied John Rokesmith back to his room, and shone upon her with the light of her radiant face, 'granted all else, I think I wouldn't run away'.

"'Twould come easier to Sloppy,' said Mrs Higden, shaking her head. "'Twould come easier to me too. But 'tis as you please.'

'When would you go?'

'Now,' was the bright and ready answer. 'Today, my deary, tomorrow. Bless ye, I am used to it. I know many parts of the country well. When nothing else was to be done, I have worked in many a marketgarden afore now, and in many a hopgarden too.'

'If I give my consent to your going, Betty which Mr Rokesmith thinks I ought to do'

Betty thanked him with a grateful curtsy.

'We must not lose sight of you. We must not let you pass out of our knowledge. We must know all about you.'

'Yes, my deary, but not through letterwriting, because letterwriting indeed, writing of most sorts hadn't much come up for such as me when I was young. But I shall be to and fro. No fear of my missing a chance of giving myself a

sight of your reviving face. Besides,' said Betty, with logical good faith, 'I shall have a debt to pay off, by littles, and naturally that would bring me back, if nothing else would.'

'MUST it be done?' asked Mrs Boffin, still reluctant, of the Secretary.

'I think it must.'

After more discussion it was agreed that it should be done, and Mrs Boffin summoned Bella to note down the little purchases that were necessary to set Betty up in trade. 'Don't ye be timorous for me, my dear,' said the stanch old heart, observant of Bella's face: 'when I take my seat with my work, clean and busy and fresh, in a country marketplace, I shall turn a sixpence as sure as ever a farmer's wife there.'

The Secretary took that opportunity of touching on the practical question of Mr Sloppy's capabilities. He would have made a wonderful cabinetmaker, said Mrs Higden, 'if there had been the money to put him to it.' She had seen him handle tools that he had borrowed to mend the mangle, or to knock a broken piece of furniture together, in a surprising manner. As to constructing toys for the Minders, out of nothing, he had done that daily. And once as many as a dozen people had got together in the lane to see the neatness with which he fitted the broken pieces of a foreign monkey's musical instrument. 'That's well,' said the Secretary. 'It will not be hard to find a trade for him.'

John Harmon being buried under mountains now, the Secretary that very same day set himself to finish his affairs and have done with him. He drew up an ample declaration, to be signed by Rogue Riderhood (knowing he could get his signature to it, by making him another and much shorter evening call), and then considered to whom should he give the document? To Hexam's son, or daughter? Resolved speedily, to the daughter. But it would be safer to avoid seeing the daughter, because the son had seen Julius Handford, and he could not be too careful there might possibly be some comparison of notes between the son and daughter, which would awaken slumbering suspicion, and lead to consequences. 'I might even,' he reflected, 'be apprehended as having been concerned in my own murder!' Therefore, best to send it to the daughter under cover by the post. Pleasant Riderhood had undertaken to find out where she lived, and it was not necessary that it should be attended by a single word of explanation. So far, straight.

But, all that he knew of the daughter he derived from Mrs Boffin's accounts of what she heard from Mr Lightwood, who seemed to have a reputation for his manner of relating a story, and to have made this story quite his own. It interested him, and he would like to have the means of knowing more as, for instance, that she received the exonerating paper, and that it satisfied her by

opening some channel altogether independent of Lightwood: who likewise had seen Julius Handford, who had publicly advertised for Julius Handford, and whom of all men he, the Secretary, most avoided. 'But with whom the common course of things might bring me in a moment face to face, any day in the week or any hour in the day.'

Now, to cast about for some likely means of opening such a channel. The boy, Hexam, was training for and with a schoolmaster. The Secretary knew it, because his sister's share in that disposal of him seemed to be the best part of Lightwood's account of the family. This young fellow, Sloppy, stood in need of some instruction. If he, the Secretary, engaged that schoolmaster to impart it to him, the channel might be opened. The next point was, did Mrs Boffin know the schoolmaster's name? No, but she knew where the school was. Quite enough. Promptly the Secretary wrote to the master of that school, and that very evening Bradley Headstone answered in person.

The Secretary stated to the schoolmaster how the object was, to send to him for certain occasional evening instruction, a youth whom Mr and Mrs Boffin wished to help to an industrious and useful place in life. The schoolmaster was willing to undertake the charge of such a pupil. The Secretary inquired on what terms? The schoolmaster stated on what terms. Agreed and disposed of.

'May I ask, sir,' said Bradley Headstone, 'to whose good opinion I owe a recommendation to you?'

'You should know that I am not the principal here. I am Mr Boffin's Secretary. Mr Boffin is a gentleman who inherited a property of which you may have heard some public mention; the Harmon property.'

'Mr Harmon,' said Bradley: who would have been a great deal more at a loss than he was, if he had known to whom he spoke: 'was murdered and found in the river.'

'Was murdered and found in the river.'

'It was not'

'No,' interposed the Secretary, smiling, 'it was not he who recommended you. Mr Boffin heard of you through a certain Mr Lightwood. I think you know Mr Lightwood, or know of him?'

'I know as much of him as I wish to know, sir. I have no acquaintance with Mr Lightwood, and I desire none. I have no objection to Mr Lightwood, but I have a particular objection to some of Mr Lightwood's friends in short, to one of Mr Lightwood's friends. His great friend.'

He could hardly get the words out, even then and there, so fierce did he grow

(though keeping himself down with infinite pains of repression), when the careless and contemptuous bearing of Eugene Wrayburn rose before his mind.

The Secretary saw there was a strong feeling here on some sore point, and he would have made a diversion from it, but for Bradley's holding to it in his cumbersome way.

'I have no objection to mention the friend by name,' he said, doggedly. 'The person I object to, is Mr Eugene Wrayburn.'

The Secretary remembered him. In his disturbed recollection of that night when he was striving against the drugged drink, there was but a dim image of Eugene's person; but he remembered his name, and his manner of speaking, and how he had gone with them to view the body, and where he had stood, and what he had said.

'Pray, Mr Headstone, what is the name,' he asked, again trying to make a diversion, 'of young Hexam's sister?'

'Her name is Lizzie,' said the schoolmaster, with a strong contraction of his whole face.

'She is a young woman of a remarkable character; is she not?'

'She is sufficiently remarkable to be very superior to Mr Eugene Wrayburn though an ordinary person might be that,' said the schoolmaster; 'and I hope you will not think it impertinent in me, sir, to ask why you put the two names together?'

'By mere accident,' returned the Secretary. 'Observing that Mr Wrayburn was a disagreeable subject with you, I tried to get away from it: though not very successfully, it would appear.'

'Do you know Mr Wrayburn, sir?'

'No.'

'Then perhaps the names cannot be put together on the authority of any representation of his?'

'Certainly not.'

'I took the liberty to ask,' said Bradley, after casting his eyes on the ground, 'because he is capable of making any representation, in the swaggering levity of his insolence. I hope you will not misunderstand me, sir. I am much interested in this brother and sister, and the subject awakens very strong feelings within me. Very, very, strong feelings.' With a shaking hand, Bradley took out his handkerchief and wiped his brow.

The Secretary thought, as he glanced at the schoolmaster's face, that he had opened a channel here indeed, and that it was an unexpectedly dark and deep and stormy one, and difficult to sound. All at once, in the midst of his turbulent emotions, Bradley stopped and seemed to challenge his look. Much as though he suddenly asked him, 'What do you see in me?'

'The brother, young Hexam, was your real recommendation here,' said the Secretary, quietly going back to the point; 'Mr and Mrs Boffin happening to know, through Mr Lightwood, that he was your pupil. Anything that I ask respecting the brother and sister, or either of them, I ask for myself out of my own interest in the subject, and not in my official character, or on Mr Boffin's behalf. How I come to be interested, I need not explain. You know the father's connection with the discovery of Mr Harmon's body.'

'Sir,' replied Bradley, very restlessly indeed, 'I know all the circumstances of that case.'

'Pray tell me, Mr Headstone,' said the Secretary. 'Does the sister suffer under any stigma because of the impossible accusation groundless would be a better word that was made against the father, and substantially withdrawn?'

'No, sir,' returned Bradley, with a kind of anger.

'I am very glad to hear it.'

'The sister,' said Bradley, separating his words overcarefully, and speaking as if he were repeating them from a book, 'suffers under no reproach that repels a man of unimpeachable character who had made for himself every step of his way in life, from placing her in his own station. I will not say, raising her to his own station; I say, placing her in it. The sister labours under no reproach, unless she should unfortunately make it for herself. When such a man is not deterred from regarding her as his equal, and when he has convinced himself that there is no blemish on her, I think the fact must be taken to be pretty expressive.'

'And there is such a man?' said the Secretary.

Bradley Headstone knotted his brows, and squared his large lower jaw, and fixed his eyes on the ground with an air of determination that seemed unnecessary to the occasion, as he replied: 'And there is such a man.'

The Secretary had no reason or excuse for prolonging the conversation, and it ended here. Within three hours the oak-headed apparition once more dived into the Leaving Shop, and that night Rogue Riderhood's recantation lay in the post office, addressed under cover to Lizzie Hexam at her right address.

All these proceedings occupied John Rokesmith so much, that it was not until

the following day that he saw Bella again. It seemed then to be tacitly understood between them that they were to be as distantly easy as they could, without attracting the attention of Mr and Mrs Boffin to any marked change in their manner. The fitting out of old Betty Higden was favourable to this, as keeping Bella engaged and interested, and as occupying the general attention.

'I think,' said Rokesmith, when they all stood about her, while she packed her tidy basket except Bella, who was busily helping on her knees at the chair on which it stood; 'that at least you might keep a letter in your pocket, Mrs Higden, which I would write for you and date from here, merely stating, in the names of Mr and Mrs Boffin, that they are your friends; I won't say patrons, because they wouldn't like it.'

'No, no, no,' said Mr Boffin; 'no patronizing! Let's keep out of THAT, whatever we come to.'

'There's more than enough of that about, without us; ain't there, Noddy?' said Mrs Boffin.

'I believe you, old lady!' returned the Golden Dustman. 'Overmuch indeed!'

'But people sometimes like to be patronized; don't they, sir?' asked Bella, looking up.

'I don't. And if THEY do, my dear, they ought to learn better,' said Mr Boffin. 'Patrons and Patronesses, and VicePatrons and VicePatronesses, and Deceased Patrons and Deceased Patronesses, and ExVicePatrons and ExVicePatronesses, what does it all mean in the books of the Charities that come pouring in on Rokesmith as he sits among 'em pretty well up to his neck! If Mr Tom Noakes gives his five shillings ain't he a Patron, and if Mrs Jack Styles gives her five shillings ain't she a Patroness? What the deuce is it all about? If it ain't stark staring impudence, what do you call it?'

'Don't be warm, Noddy,' Mrs Boffin urged.

'Warm!' cried Mr Boffin. 'It's enough to make a man smoking hot. I can't go anywhere without being Patronized. I don't want to be Patronized. If I buy a ticket for a Flower Show, or a Music Show, or any sort of Show, and pay pretty heavy for it, why am I to be Patroned and Patronessed as if the Patrons and Patronesses treated me? If there's a good thing to be done, can't it be done on its own merits? If there's a bad thing to be done, can it ever be Patroned and Patronessed right? Yet when a new Institution's going to be built, it seems to me that the bricks and mortar ain't made of half so much consequence as the Patrons and Patronesses; no, nor yet the objects. I wish somebody would tell me whether other countries get Patronized to anything like the extent of this one! And as to the Patrons and Patronesses themselves, I wonder they're not

ashamed of themselves. They ain't Pills, or HairWashes, or Invigorating Nervous Essences, to be puffed in that way!

Having delivered himself of these remarks, Mr Boffin took a trot, according to his usual custom, and trotted back to the spot from which he had started.

'As to the letter, Rokesmith,' said Mr Boffin, 'you're as right as a trivet. Give her the letter, make her take the letter, put it in her pocket by violence. She might fall sick. You know you might fall sick,' said Mr Boffin. 'Don't deny it, Mrs Higden, in your obstinacy; you know you might.'

Old Betty laughed, and said that she would take the letter and be thankful.

'That's right!' said Mr Boffin. 'Come! That's sensible. And don't be thankful to us (for we never thought of it), but to Mr Rokesmith.'

The letter was written, and read to her, and given to her.

'Now, how do you feel?' said Mr Boffin. 'Do you like it?'

'The letter, sir?' said Betty. 'Ay, it's a beautiful letter!'

'No, no, no; not the letter,' said Mr Boffin; 'the idea. Are you sure you're strong enough to carry out the idea?'

'I shall be stronger, and keep the deadness off better, this way, than any way left open to me, sir.'

'Don't say than any way left open, you know,' urged Mr Boffin; 'because there are ways without end. A housekeeper would be acceptable over yonder at the Bower, for instance. Wouldn't you like to see the Bower, and know a retired literary man of the name of Wegg that lives there WITH a wooden leg?'

Old Betty was proof even against this temptation, and fell to adjusting her black bonnet and shawl.

'I wouldn't let you go, now it comes to this, after all,' said Mr Boffin, 'if I didn't hope that it may make a man and a workman of Sloppy, in as short a time as ever a man and workman was made yet. Why, what have you got there, Betty? Not a doll?'

It was the man in the Guards who had been on duty over Johnny's bed. The solitary old woman showed what it was, and put it up quietly in her dress. Then, she gratefully took leave of Mrs Boffin, and of Mr Boffin, and of Rokesmith, and then put her old withered arms round Bella's young and blooming neck, and said, repeating Johnny's words: 'A kiss for the boofer lady.'

The Secretary looked on from a doorway at the boofer lady thus encircled, and

still looked on at the boofer lady standing alone there, when she determined old figure with its steady bright eyes was trudging through the streets, away from paralysis and pauperism.

Chapter 15

THE WHOLE CASE SO FAR

Bradley Headstone held fast by that other interview he was to have with Lizzie Hexam. In stipulating for it, he had been impelled by a feeling little short of desperation, and the feeling abided by him. It was very soon after his interview with the Secretary, that he and Charley Hexam set out one leaden evening, not unnoticed by Miss Peecher, to have this desperate interview accomplished.

'That dolls' dressmaker,' said Bradley, 'is favourable neither to me nor to you, Hexam.'

'A pert crooked little chit, Mr Headstone! I knew she would put herself in the way, if she could, and would be sure to strike in with something impertinent. It was on that account that I proposed our going to the City tonight and meeting my sister.'

'So I supposed,' said Bradley, getting his gloves on his nervous hands as he walked. 'So I supposed.'

'Nobody but my sister,' pursued Charley, 'would have found out such an extraordinary companion. She has done it in a ridiculous fancy of giving herself up to another. She told me so, that night when we went there.'

'Why should she give herself up to the dressmaker?' asked Bradley.

'Oh!' said the boy, colouring. 'One of her romantic ideas! I tried to convince her so, but I didn't succeed. However, what we have got to do, is, to succeed tonight, Mr Headstone, and then all the rest follows.'

'You are still sanguine, Hexam.'

'Certainly I am, sir. Why, we have everything on our side.'

'Except your sister, perhaps,' thought Bradley. But he only gloomily thought it, and said nothing.

'Everything on our side,' repeated the boy with boyish confidence.

'Respectability, an excellent connexion for me, common sense, everything!'

'To be sure, your sister has always shown herself a devoted sister,' said Bradley, willing to sustain himself on even that low ground of hope.

'Naturally, Mr Headstone, I have a good deal of influence with her. And now that you have honoured me with your confidence and spoken to me first, I say again, we have everything on our side.'

And Bradley thought again, 'Except your sister, perhaps.'

A grey dusty withered evening in London city has not a hopeful aspect. The closed warehouses and offices have an air of death about them, and the national dread of colour has an air of mourning. The towers and steeples of the many houseencompassed churches, dark and dingy as the sky that seems descending on them, are no relief to the general gloom; a sundial on a churchwall has the look, in its useless black shade, of having failed in its business enterprise and stopped payment for ever; melancholy waifs and strays of housekeepers and porter sweep melancholy waifs and strays of papers and pins into the kennels, and other more melancholy waifs and strays explore them, searching and stooping and poking for anything to sell. The set of humanity outward from the City is as a set of prisoners departing from gaol, and dismal Newgate seems quite as fit a stronghold for the mighty Lord Mayor as his own statedwelling.

On such an evening, when the city grit gets into the hair and eyes and skin, and when the fallen leaves of the few unhappy city trees grind down in corners under wheels of wind, the schoolmaster and the pupil emerged upon the Leadenhall Street region, spying eastward for Lizzie. Being something too soon in their arrival, they lurked at a corner, waiting for her to appear. The bestlooking among us will not look very well, lurking at a corner, and Bradley came out of that disadvantage very poorly indeed.

'Here she comes, Mr Headstone! Let us go forward and meet her.'

As they advanced, she saw them coming, and seemed rather troubled. But she greeted her brother with the usual warmth, and touched the extended hand of Bradley.

'Why, where are you going, Charley, dear?' she asked him then.

'Nowhere. We came on purpose to meet you.'

'To meet me, Charley?'

'Yes. We are going to walk with you. But don't let us take the great leading streets where every one walks, and we can't hear ourselves speak. Let us go by

the quiet backways. Here's a large paved court by this church, and quiet, too. Let us go up here.'

'But it's not in the way, Charley.'

'Yes it is,' said the boy, petulantly. 'It's in my way, and my way is yours.'

She had not released his hand, and, still holding it, looked at him with a kind of appeal. He avoided her eyes, under pretence of saying, 'Come along, Mr Headstone.' Bradley walked at his side and the brother and sister walked hand in hand. The court brought them to a churchyard; a paved square court, with a raised bank of earth about breast high, in the middle, enclosed by iron rails. Here, conveniently and healthfully elevated above the level of the living, were the dead, and the tombstones; some of the latter droopingly inclined from the perpendicular, as if they were ashamed of the lies they told.

They paced the whole of this place once, in a constrained and uncomfortable manner, when the boy stopped and said:

'Lizzie, Mr Headstone has something to say to you. I don't wish to be an interruption either to him or to you, and so I'll go and take a little stroll and come back. I know in a general way what Mr Headstone intends to say, and I very highly approve of it, as I hope and indeed I do not doubt you will. I needn't tell you, Lizzie, that I am under great obligations to Mr Headstone, and that I am very anxious for Mr Headstone to succeed in all he undertakes. As I hope and as, indeed, I don't doubt you must be.'

'Charley,' returned his sister, detaining his hand as he withdrew it, 'I think you had better stay. I think Mr Headstone had better not say what he thinks of saying.'

'Why, how do you know what it is?' returned the boy.

'Perhaps I don't, but'

'Perhaps you don't? No, Liz, I should think not. If you knew what it was, you would give me a very different answer. There; let go; be sensible. I wonder you don't remember that Mr Headstone is looking on.'

She allowed him to separate himself from her, and he, after saying, 'Now Liz, be a rational girl and a good sister,' walked away. She remained standing alone with Bradley Headstone, and it was not until she raised her eyes, that he spoke.

'I said,' he began, 'when I saw you last, that there was something unexplained, which might perhaps influence you. I have come this evening to explain it. I hope you will not judge of me by my hesitating manner when I speak to you.'

You see me at my greatest disadvantage. It is most unfortunate for me that I wish you to see me at my best, and that I know you see me at my worst.'

She moved slowly on when he paused, and he moved slowly on beside her.

'It seems egotistical to begin by saying so much about myself,' he resumed, 'but whatever I say to you seems, even in my own ears, below what I want to say, and different from what I want to say. I can't help it. So it is. You are the ruin of me.'

She started at the passionate sound of the last words, and at the passionate action of his hands, with which they were accompanied.

'Yes! you are the ruin the ruin the ruin of me. I have no resources in myself, I have no confidence in myself, I have no government of myself when you are near me or in my thoughts. And you are always in my thoughts now. I have never been quit of you since I first saw you. Oh, that was a wretched day for me! That was a wretched, miserable day!'

A touch of pity for him mingled with her dislike of him, and she said: 'Mr Headstone, I am grieved to have done you any harm, but I have never meant it.'

'There!' he cried, despairingly. 'Now, I seem to have reproached you, instead of revealing to you the state of my own mind! Bear with me. I am always wrong when you are in question. It is my doom.'

Struggling with himself, and by times looking up at the deserted windows of the houses as if there could be anything written in their grimy panes that would help him, he paced the whole pavement at her side, before he spoke again.

'I must try to give expression to what is in my mind; it shall and must be spoken. Though you see me so confounded though you strike me so helpless I ask you to believe that there are many people who think well of me; that there are some people who highly esteem me; that I have in my way won a Station which is considered worth winning.'

'Surely, Mr Headstone, I do believe it. Surely I have always known it from Charley.'

'I ask you to believe that if I were to offer my home such as it is, my station such as it is, my affections such as they are, to any one of the best considered, and best qualified, and most distinguished, among the young women engaged in my calling, they would probably be accepted. Even readily accepted.'

'I do not doubt it,' said Lizzie, with her eyes upon the ground.

'I have sometimes had it in my thoughts to make that offer and to settle down as many men of my class do: I on the one side of a school, my wife on the other, both of us interested in the same work.'

'Why have you not done so?' asked Lizzie Hexam. 'Why do you not do so?'

'Far better that I never did! The only one grain of comfort I have had these many weeks,' he said, always speaking passionately, and, when most emphatic, repeating that former action of his hands, which was like flinging his heart's blood down before her in drops upon the pavementstones; 'the only one grain of comfort I have had these many weeks is, that I never did. For if I had, and if the same spell had come upon me for my ruin, I know I should have broken that tie asunder as if it had been thread.'

She glanced at him with a glance of fear, and a shrinking gesture. He answered, as if she had spoken.

'No! It would not have been voluntary on my part, any more than it is voluntary in me to be here now. You draw me to you. If I were shut up in a strong prison, you would draw me out. I should break through the wall to come to you. If I were lying on a sick bed, you would draw me upto stagger to your feet and fall there.'

The wild energy of the man, now quite let loose, was absolutely terrible. He stopped and laid his hand upon a piece of the coping of the burialground enclosure, as if he would have dislodged the stone.

'No man knows till the time comes, what depths are within him. To some men it never comes; let them rest and be thankful! To me, you brought it; on me, you forced it; and the bottom of this raging sea,' striking himself upon the breast, 'has been heaved up ever since.'

'Mr Headstone, I have heard enough. Let me stop you here. It will be better for you and better for me. Let us find my brother.'

'Not yet. It shall and must be spoken. I have been in torments ever since I stopped short of it before. You are alarmed. It is another of my miseries that I cannot speak to you or speak of you without stumbling at every syllable, unless I let the check go altogether and run mad. Here is a man lighting the lamps. He will be gone directly. I entreat of you let us walk round this place again. You have no reason to look alarmed; I can restrain myself, and I will.'

She yielded to the entreaty how could she do otherwise! and they paced the stones in silence. One by one the lights leaped up making the cold grey church tower more remote, and they were alone again. He said no more until they had regained the spot where he had broken off; there, he again stood still, and

again grasped the stone. In saying what he said then, he never looked at her; but looked at it and wrenched at it.

'You know what I am going to say. I love you. What other men may mean when they use that expression, I cannot tell; what I mean is, that I am under the influence of some tremendous attraction which I have resisted in vain, and which overmasters me. You could draw me to fire, you could draw me to water, you could draw me to the gallows, you could draw me to any death, you could draw me to anything I have most avoided, you could draw me to any exposure and disgrace. This and the confusion of my thoughts, so that I am fit for nothing, is what I mean by your being the ruin of me. But if you would return a favourable answer to my offer of myself in marriage, you could draw me to any goodevery goodwith equal force. My circumstances are quite easy, and you would want for nothing. My reputation stands quite high, and would be a shield for yours. If you saw me at my work, able to do it well and respected in it, you might even come to take a sort of pride in me; I would try hard that you should. Whatever considerations I may have thought of against this offer, I have conquered, and I make it with all my heart. Your brother favours me to the utmost, and it is likely that we might live and work together; anyhow, it is certain that he would have my best influence and support. I don't know what I could say more if I tried. I might only weaken what is ill enough said as it is. I only add that if it is any claim on you to be in earnest, I am in thorough earnest, dreadful earnest.'

The powdered mortar from under the stone at which he wrenched, rattled on the pavement to confirm his words.

'Mr Headstone'

'Stop! I implore you, before you answer me, to walk round this place once more. It will give you a minute's time to think, and me a minute's time to get some fortitude together.'

Again she yielded to the entreaty, and again they came back to the same place, and again he worked at the stone.

'Is it,' he said, with his attention apparently engrossed by it, 'yes, or no?'

'Mr Headstone, I thank you sincerely, I thank you gratefully, and hope you may find a worthy wife before long and be very happy. But it is no.'

'Is no short time necessary for reflection; no weeks or days?' he asked, in the same half-suffocated way.

'None whatever.'

'Are you quite decided, and is there no chance of any change in my favour?'

'I am quite decided, Mr Headstone, and I am bound to answer I am certain there is none.'

'Then,' said he, suddenly changing his tone and turning to her, and bringing his clenched hand down upon the stone with a force that laid the knuckles raw and bleeding; 'then I hope that I may never kill him!'

The dark look of hatred and revenge with which the words broke from his livid lips, and with which he stood holding out his smeared hand as if it held some weapon and had just struck a mortal blow, made her so afraid of him that she turned to run away. But he caught her by the arm.

'Mr Headstone, let me go. Mr Headstone, I must call for help!'

'It is I who should call for help,' he said; 'you don't know yet how much I need it.'

The working of his face as she shrank from it, glancing round for her brother and uncertain what to do, might have extorted a cry from her in another instant; but all at once he sternly stopped it and fixed it, as if Death itself had done so.

'There! You see I have recovered myself. Hear me out.'

With much of the dignity of courage, as she recalled her selfreliant life and her right to be free from accountability to this man, she released her arm from his grasp and stood looking full at him. She had never been so handsome, in his eyes. A shade came over them while he looked back at her, as if she drew the very light out of them to herself.

'This time, at least, I will leave nothing unsaid,' he went on, folding his hands before him, clearly to prevent his being betrayed into any impetuous gesture; 'this last time at least I will not be tortured with afterthoughts of a lost opportunity. Mr Eugene Wrayburn.'

'Was it of him you spoke in your ungovernable rage and violence?' Lizzie Hexam demanded with spirit.

He bit his lip, and looked at her, and said never a word.

'Was it Mr Wrayburn that you threatened?'

He bit his lip again, and looked at her, and said never a word.

'You asked me to hear you out, and you will not speak. Let me find my brother.'

'Stay! I threatened no one.'

Her look dropped for an instant to his bleeding hand. He lifted it to his mouth, wiped it on his sleeve, and again folded it over the other. 'Mr Eugene Wrayburn,' he repeated.

'Why do you mention that name again and again, Mr Headstone?'

'Because it is the text of the little I have left to say. Observe! There are no threats in it. If I utter a threat, stop me, and fasten it upon me. Mr Eugene Wrayburn.'

A worse threat than was conveyed in his manner of uttering the name, could hardly have escaped him.

'He haunts you. You accept favours from him. You are willing enough to listen to HIM. I know it, as well as he does.'

'Mr Wrayburn has been considerate and good to me, sir,' said Lizzie, proudly, 'in connexion with the death and with the memory of my poor father.'

'No doubt. He is of course a very considerate and a very good man, Mr Eugene Wrayburn.'

'He is nothing to you, I think,' said Lizzie, with an indignation she could not repress.

'Oh yes, he is. There you mistake. He is much to me.'

'What can he be to you?'

'He can be a rival to me among other things,' said Bradley.

'Mr Headstone,' returned Lizzie, with a burning face, 'it is cowardly in you to speak to me in this way. But it makes me able to tell you that I do not like you, and that I never have liked you from the first, and that no other living creature has anything to do with the effect you have produced upon me for yourself.'

His head bent for a moment, as if under a weight, and he then looked up again, moistening his lips. 'I was going on with the little I had left to say. I knew all this about Mr Eugene Wrayburn, all the while you were drawing me to you. I strove against the knowledge, but quite in vain. It made no difference in me. With Mr Eugene Wrayburn in my mind, I went on. With Mr Eugene Wrayburn in my mind, I spoke to you just now. With Mr Eugene Wrayburn in my mind, I have been set aside and I have been cast out.'

'If you give those names to my thanking you for your proposal and declining it, is it my fault, Mr Headstone?' said Lizzie, compassionating the bitter struggle he could not conceal, almost as much as she was repelled and alarmed by it.

'I am not complaining,' he returned, 'I am only stating the case. I had to wrestle with my selfrespect when I submitted to be drawn to you in spite of Mr Wrayburn. You may imagine how low my selfrespect lies now.'

She was hurt and angry; but repressed herself in consideration of his suffering, and of his being her brother's friend.

'And it lies under his feet,' said Bradley, unfolding his hands in spite of himself, and fiercely motioning with them both towards the stones of the pavement. 'Remember that! It lies under that fellow's feet, and he treads upon it and exults above it.'

'He does not!' said Lizzie.

'He does!' said Bradley. 'I have stood before him face to face, and he crushed me down in the dirt of his contempt, and walked over me. Why? Because he knew with triumph what was in store for me tonight.'

'O, Mr Headstone, you talk quite wildly.'

'Quite collectedly. I know what I say too well. Now I have said all. I have used no threat, remember; I have done no more than show you how the case stands; how the case stands, so far.'

At this moment her brother sauntered into view close by. She darted to him, and caught him by the hand. Bradley followed, and laid his heavy hand on the boy's opposite shoulder.

'Charley Hexam, I am going home. I must walk home by myself tonight, and get shut up in my room without being spoken to. Give me half an hour's start, and let me be, till you find me at my work in the morning. I shall be at my work in the morning just as usual.'

Clasping his hands, he uttered a short unearthly broken cry, and went his way. The brother and sister were left looking at one another near a lamp in the solitary churchyard, and the boy's face clouded and darkened, as he said in a rough tone: 'What is the meaning of this? What have you done to my best friend? Out with the truth!'

'Charley!' said his sister. 'Speak a little more considerately!'

'I am not in the humour for consideration, or for nonsense of any sort,' replied the boy. 'What have you been doing? Why has Mr Headstone gone from us in that way?'

'He asked me you know he asked me to be his wife, Charley.'

'Well?' said the boy, impatiently.

'And I was obliged to tell him that I could not be his wife.'

'You were obliged to tell him,' repeated the boy angrily, between his teeth, and rudely pushing her away. 'You were obliged to tell him! Do you know that he is worth fifty of you?'

'It may easily be so, Charley, but I cannot marry him.'

'You mean that you are conscious that you can't appreciate him, and don't deserve him, I suppose?'

'I mean that I do not like him, Charley, and that I will never marry him.'

'Upon my soul,' exclaimed the boy, 'you are a nice picture of a sister! Upon my soul, you are a pretty piece of disinterestedness! And so all my endeavours to cancel the past and to raise myself in the world, and to raise you with me, are to be beaten down by YOUR low whims; are they?'

'I will not reproach you, Charley.'

'Hear her!' exclaimed the boy, looking round at the darkness. 'She won't reproach me! She does her best to destroy my fortunes and her own, and she won't reproach me! Why, you'll tell me, next, that you won't reproach Mr Headstone for coming out of the sphere to which he is an ornament, and putting himself at YOUR feet, to be rejected by YOU!'

'No, Charley; I will only tell you, as I told himself, that I thank him for doing so, that I am sorry he did so, and that I hope he will do much better, and be happy.'

Some touch of compunction smote the boy's hardening heart as he looked upon her, his patient little nurse in infancy, his patient friend, adviser, and reclamer in boyhood, the selfforgetting sister who had done everything for him. His tone relented, and he drew her arm through his.

'Now, come, Liz; don't let us quarrel: let us be reasonable and talk this over like brother and sister. Will you listen to me?'

'Oh, Charley!' she replied through her starting tears; 'do I not listen to you, and hear many hard things!'

'Then I am sorry. There, Liz! I am unfeignedly sorry. Only you do put me out so. Now see. Mr Headstone is perfectly devoted to you. He has told me in the strongest manner that he has never been his old self for one single minute since I first brought him to see you. Miss Peecher, our schoolmistress pretty and young, and all that is known to be very much attached to him, and he won't so much as look at her or hear of her. Now, his devotion to you must be a disinterested one; mustn't it? If he married Miss Peecher, he would be a great

deal better off in all worldly respects, than in marrying you. Well then; he has nothing to get by it, has he?'

'Nothing, Heaven knows!'

'Very well then,' said the boy; 'that's something in his favour, and a great thing. Then I come in. Mr Headstone has always got me on, and he has a good deal in his power, and of course if he was my brotherinlaw he wouldn't get me on less, but would get me on more. Mr Headstone comes and confides in me, in a very delicate way, and says, "I hope my marrying your sister would be agreeable to you, Hexam, and useful to you?" I say, "There's nothing in the world, Mr Headstone, that I could be better pleased with." Mr Headstone says, "Then I may rely upon your intimate knowledge of me for your good word with your sister, Hexam?" And I say, "Certainly, Mr Headstone, and naturally I have a good deal of influence with her." So I have; haven't I, Liz?'

'Yes, Charley.'

'Well said! Now, you see, we begin to get on, the moment we begin to be really talking it over, like brother and sister. Very well. Then YOU come in. As Mr Headstone's wife you would be occupying a most respectable station, and you would be holding a far better place in society than you hold now, and you would at length get quit of the riverside and the old disagreeables belonging to it, and you would be rid for good of dolls' dressmakers and their drunken fathers, and the like of that. Not that I want to disparage Miss Jenny Wren: I dare say she is all very well in her way; but her way is not your way as Mr Headstone's wife. Now, you see, Liz, on all three accountson Mr Headstone's, on mine, on yoursnothing could be better or more desirable.'

They were walking slowly as the boy spoke, and here he stood still, to see what effect he had made. His sister's eyes were fixed upon him; but as they showed no yielding, and as she remained silent, he walked her on again. There was some discomfiture in his tone as he resumed, though he tried to conceal it.

'Having so much influence with you, Liz, as I have, perhaps I should have done better to have had a little chat with you in the first instance, before Mr Headstone spoke for himself. But really all this in his favour seemed so plain and undeniable, and I knew you to have always been so reasonable and sensible, that I didn't consider it worth while. Very likely that was a mistake of mine. However, it's soon set right. All that need be done to set it right, is for you to tell me at once that I may go home and tell Mr Headstone that what has taken place is not final, and that it will all come round byandby.'

He stopped again. The pale face looked anxiously and lovingly at him, but she shook her head.

'Can't you speak?' said the boy sharply.

'I am very unwilling to speak, Charley. If I must, I must. I cannot authorize you to say any such thing to Mr Headstone: I cannot allow you to say any such thing to Mr Headstone. Nothing remains to be said to him from me, after what I have said for good and all, tonight.'

'And this girl,' cried the boy, contemptuously throwing her off again, 'calls herself a sister!'

'Charley, dear, that is the second time that you have almost struck me. Don't be hurt by my words. I don't mean Heaven forbid! that you intended it; but you hardly know with what a sudden swing you removed yourself from me.'

'However!' said the boy, taking no heed of the remonstrance, and pursuing his own mortified disappointment, 'I know what this means, and you shall not disgrace me.'

'It means what I have told you, Charley, and nothing more.'

'That's not true,' said the boy in a violent tone, 'and you know it's not. It means your precious Mr Wrayburn; that's what it means.'

'Charley! If you remember any old days of ours together, forbear!'

'But you shall not disgrace me,' doggedly pursued the boy. 'I am determined that after I have climbed up out of the mire, you shall not pull me down. You can't disgrace me if I have nothing to do with you, and I will have nothing to do with you for the future.'

'Charley! On many a night like this, and many a worse night, I have sat on the stones of the street, hushing you in my arms. Unsay those words without even saying you are sorry for them, and my arms are open to you still, and so is my heart.'

'I'll not unsay them. I'll say them again. You are an inveterately bad girl, and a false sister, and I have done with you. For ever, I have done with you!'

He threw up his ungrateful and ungracious hand as if it set up a barrier between them, and flung himself upon his heel and left her. She remained impassive on the same spot, silent and motionless, until the striking of the church clock roused her, and she turned away. But then, with the breaking up of her immobility came the breaking up of the waters that the cold heart of the selfish boy had frozen. And 'O that I were lying here with the dead!' and 'O Charley, Charley, that this should be the end of our pictures in the fire!' were all the words she said, as she laid her face in her hands on the stone coping.

A figure passed by, and passed on, but stopped and looked round at her. It was

the figure of an old man with a bowed head, wearing a large brimmed lowcrowned hat, and a longskirted coat. After hesitating a little, the figure turned back, and, advancing with an air of gentleness and compassion, said:

'Pardon me, young woman, for speaking to you, but you are under some distress of mind. I cannot pass upon my way and leave you weeping here alone, as if there was nothing in the place. Can I help you? Can I do anything to give you comfort?'

She raised her head at the sound of these kind words, and answered gladly, 'O, Mr Riah, is it you?'

'My daughter,' said the old man, 'I stand amazed! I spoke as to a stranger. Take my arm, take my arm. What grieves you? Who has done this? Poor girl, poor girl!'

'My brother has quarrelled with me,' sobbed Lizzie, 'and renounced me.'

'He is a thankless dog,' said the Jew, angrily. 'Let him go. Shake the dust from thy feet and let him go. Come, daughter! Come home with me it is but across the road and take a little time to recover your peace and to make your eyes seemly, and then I will bear you company through the streets. For it is past your usual time, and will soon be late, and the way is long, and there is much company out of doors tonight.'

She accepted the support he offered her, and they slowly passed out of the churchyard. They were in the act of emerging into the main thoroughfare, when another figure loitering discontentedly by, and looking up the street and down it, and all about, started and exclaimed, 'Lizzie! why, where have you been? Why, what's the matter?'

As Eugene Wrayburn thus addressed her, she drew closer to the Jew, and bent her head. The Jew having taken in the whole of Eugene at one sharp glance, cast his eyes upon the ground, and stood mute.

'Lizzie, what is the matter?'

'Mr Wrayburn, I cannot tell you now. I cannot tell you tonight, if I ever can tell you. Pray leave me.'

'But, Lizzie, I came expressly to join you. I came to walk home with you, having dined at a coffeehouse in this neighbourhood and knowing your hour. And I have been lingering about,' added Eugene, 'like a bailiff; or,' with a look at Riah, 'an old clothesman.'

The Jew lifted up his eyes, and took in Eugene once more, at another glance.

'Mr Wrayburn, pray, pray, leave me with this protector. And one thing more.'

Pray, pray be careful of yourself.'

'Mysteries of Udolpho!' said Eugene, with a look of wonder. 'May I be excused for asking, in the elderly gentleman's presence, who is this kind protector?'

'A trustworthy friend,' said Lizzie.

'I will relieve him of his trust,' returned Eugene. 'But you must tell me, Lizzie, what is the matter?'

'Her brother is the matter,' said the old man, lifting up his eyes again.

'Our brother the matter?' returned Eugene, with airy contempt. 'Our brother is not worth a thought, far less a tear. What has our brother done?'

The old man lifted up his eyes again, with one grave look at Wrayburn, and one grave glance at Lizzie, as she stood looking down. Both were so full of meaning that even Eugene was checked in his light career, and subsided into a thoughtful 'Humph!'

With an air of perfect patience the old man, remaining mute and keeping his eyes cast down, stood, retaining Lizzie's arm, as though in his habit of passive endurance, it would be all one to him if he had stood there motionless all night.

'If Mr Aaron,' said Eugene, who soon found this fatiguing, 'will be good enough to relinquish his charge to me, he will be quite free for any engagement he may have at the Synagogue. Mr Aaron, will you have the kindness?'

But the old man stood stock still.

'Good evening, Mr Aaron,' said Eugene, politely; 'we need not detain you.' Then turning to Lizzie, 'Is our friend Mr Aaron a little deaf?'

'My hearing is very good, Christian gentleman,' replied the old man, calmly; 'but I will hear only one voice tonight, desiring me to leave this damsel before I have conveyed her to her home. If she requests it, I will do it. I will do it for no one else.'

'May I ask why so, Mr Aaron?' said Eugene, quite undisturbed in his ease.

'Excuse me. If she asks me, I will tell her,' replied the old man. 'I will tell no one else.'

'I do not ask you,' said Lizzie, 'and I beg you to take me home. Mr Wrayburn, I have had a bitter trial tonight, and I hope you will not think me ungrateful, or mysterious, or changeable. I am neither; I am wretched. Pray remember what I

said to you. Pray, pray, take care.'

'My dear Lizzie,' he returned, in a low voice, bending over her on the other side; 'of what? Of whom?'

'Of any one you have lately seen and made angry.'

He snapped his fingers and laughed. 'Come,' said he, 'since no better may be, Mr Aaron and I will divide this trust, and see you home together. Mr Aaron on that side; I on this. If perfectly agreeable to Mr Aaron, the escort will now proceed.'

He knew his power over her. He knew that she would not insist upon his leaving her. He knew that, her fears for him being aroused, she would be uneasy if he were out of her sight. For all his seeming levity and carelessness, he knew whatever he chose to know of the thoughts of her heart.

And going on at her side, so gaily, regardless of all that had been urged against him; so superior in his sallies and selfpossession to the gloomy constraint of her suitor and the selfish petulance of her brother; so faithful to her, as it seemed, when her own stock was faithless; what an immense advantage, what an overpowering influence, were his that night! Add to the rest, poor girl, that she had heard him vilified for her sake, and that she had suffered for his, and where the wonder that his occasional tones of serious interest (setting off his carelessness, as if it were assumed to calm her), that his lightest touch, his lightest look, his very presence beside her in the dark common street, were like glimpses of an enchanted world, which it was natural for jealousy and malice and all meanness to be unable to bear the brightness of, and to gird at as bad spirits might.

Nothing more being said of repairing to Riah's, they went direct to Lizzie's lodging. A little short of the hosedoor she parted from them, and went in alone.

'Mr Aaron,' said Eugene, when they were left together in the street, 'with many thanks for your company, it remains for me unwillingly to say Farewell.'

'Sir,' returned the other, 'I give you good night, and I wish that you were not so thoughtless.'

'Mr Aaron,' returned Eugene, 'I give you good night, and I wish (for you are a little dull) that you were not so thoughtful.'

But now, that his part was played out for the evening, and when in turning his back upon the Jew he came off the stage, he was thoughtful himself. 'How did Lightwood's catechism run?' he murmured, as he stopped to light his cigar. 'What is to come of it? What are you doing? Where are you going? We shall

soon know now. Ah!' with a heavy sigh.

The heavy sigh was repeated as if by an echo, an hour afterwards, when Riah, who had been sitting on some dark steps in a corner over against the house, arose and went his patient way; stealing through the streets in his ancient dress, like the ghost of a departed Time.

Chapter 16

AN ANNIVERSARY OCCASION

The estimable Twemlow, dressing himself in his lodgings over the stableyard in Duke Street, Saint James's, and hearing the horses at their toilette below, finds himself on the whole in a disadvantageous position as compared with the noble animals at livery. For whereas, on the one hand, he has no attendant to slap him soundingly and require him in gruff accents to come up and come over, still, on the other hand, he has no attendant at all; and the mild gentleman's fingerjoints and other joints working rustily in the morning, he could deem it agreeable even to be tied up by the countenance at his chamberdoor, so he were there skilfully rubbed down and slushed and sluiced and polished and clothed, while himself taking merely a passive part in these trying transactions.

How the fascinating Tippins gets on when arraying herself for the bewilderment of the senses of men, is known only to the Graces and her maid; but perhaps even that engaging creature, though not reduced to the selfdependence of Twemlow could dispense with a good deal of the trouble attendant on the daily restoration of her charms, seeing that as to her face and neck this adorable divinity is, as it were, a diurnal species of lobsterthrowing off a shell every forenoon, and needing to keep in a retired spot until the new crust hardens.

Howbeit, Twemlow doth at length invest himself with collar and cravat and wristbands to his knuckles, and goeth forth to breakfast. And to breakfast with whom but his near neighbours, the Lammles of Sackville Street, who have imparted to him that he will meet his distant kinsman, Mr Fledgely. The awful Snigsworth might taboo and prohibit Fledgely, but the peaceable Twemlow reasons, If he IS my kinsman I didn't make him so, and to meet a man is not to know him.'

It is the first anniversary of the happy marriage of Mr and Mrs Lammle, and the celebration is a breakfast, because a dinner on the desired scale of

sumptuosity cannot be achieved within less limits than those of the nonexistent palatial residence of which so many people are madly envious. So, Twemlow trips with not a little stiffness across Piccadilly, sensible of having once been more upright in figure and less in danger of being knocked down by swift vehicles. To be sure that was in the days when he hoped for leave from the dread Snigsworth to do something, or be something, in life, and before that magnificent Tartar issued the ukase, 'As he will never distinguish himself, he must be a poor gentlemanpensioner of mine, and let him hereby consider himself pensioned.'

Ah! my Twemlow! Say, little feeble grey personage, what thoughts are in thy breast today, of the Fancyso still to call her who bruised thy heart when it was green and thy head brownand whether it be better or worse, more painful or less, to believe in the Fancy to this hour, than to know her for a greedy armourplated crocodile, with no more capacity of imagining the delicate and sensitive and tender spot behind thy waistcoat, than of going straight at it with a knittingneedle. Say likewise, my Twemlow, whether it be the happier lot to be a poor relation of the great, or to stand in the wintry slush giving the hack horses to drink out of the shallow tub at the coachstand, into which thou has so nearly set thy uncertain foot. Twemlow says nothing, and goes on.

As he approaches the Lammles' door, drives up a little onehorse carriage, containing Tippins the divine. Tippins, letting down the window, playfully extols the vigilance of her cavalier in being in waiting there to hand her out. Twemlow hands her out with as much polite gravity as if she were anything real, and they proceed upstairs. Tippins all abroad about the legs, and seeking to express that those unsteady articles are only skipping in their native buoyancy.

And dear Mrs Lammle and dear Mr Lammle, how do you do, and when are you going down to what'sitsname placeGuy, Earl of Warwick, you knowwhat is it?Dun Cowto claim the flich of bacon? And Mortimer, whose name is for ever blotted out from my list of lovers, by reason first of fickleness and then of base desertion, how do YOU do, wretch? And Mr Wrayburn, YOU here! What can YOU come for, because we are all very sure beforehand that you are not going to talk! And Veneering, M.P., how are things going on down at the house, and when will you turn out those terrible people for us? And Mrs Veneering, my dear, can it positively be true that you go down to that stifling place night after night, to hear those men prose? Talking of which, Veneering, why don't you prose, for you haven't opened your lips there yet, and we are dying to hear what you have got to say to us! Miss Podsnap, charmed to see you. Pa, here? No! Ma, neither? Oh! Mr Boots! Delighted. Mr Brewer! This IS a gathering of the clans. Thus Tippins, and surveys Fledgeby and outsiders through golden glass, murmuring as she turns about and about, in her innocent

giddy way, Anybody else I know? No, I think not. Nobody there. Nobody THERE. Nobody anywhere!

Mr Lammle, all aglitter, produces his friend Fledgeby, as dying for the honour of presentation to Lady Tippins. Fledgeby presented, has the air of going to say something, has the air of going to say nothing, has an air successively of meditation, of resignation, and of desolation, backs on Brewer, makes the tour of Boots, and fades into the extreme background, feeling for his whisker, as if it might have turned up since he was there five minutes ago.

But Lammle has him out again before he has so much as completely ascertained the bareness of the land. He would seem to be in a bad way, Fledgeby; for Lammle represents him as dying again. He is dying now, of want of presentation to Twemlow.

Twemlow offers his hand. Glad to see him. 'Your mother, sir, was a connexion of mine.'

'I believe so,' says Fledgeby, 'but my mother and her family were two.'

'Are you staying in town?' asks Twemlow.

'I always am,' says Fledgeby.

'You like town,' says Twemlow. But is felled flat by Fledgeby's taking it quite ill, and replying, No, he don't like town. Lammle tries to break the force of the fall, by remarking that some people do not like town. Fledgeby retorting that he never heard of any such case but his own, Twemlow goes down again heavily.

'There is nothing new this morning, I suppose?' says Twemlow, returning to the mark with great spirit.

Fledgeby has not heard of anything.

'No, there's not a word of news,' says Lammle.

'Not a particle,' adds Boots.

'Not an atom,' chimes in Brewer.

Somehow the execution of this little concerted piece appears to raise the general spirits as with a sense of duty done, and sets the company a going. Everybody seems more equal than before, to the calamity of being in the society of everybody else. Even Eugene standing in a window, moodily swinging the tassel of a blind, gives it a smarter jerk now, as if he found himself in better case.

Breakfast announced. Everything on table showy and gaudy, but with a

selfassertingly temporary and nomadic air on the decorations, as boasting that they will be much more showy and gaudy in the palatial residence. Mr Lammle's own particular servant behind his chair; the Analytical behind Veneering's chair; instances in point that such servants fall into two classes: one mistrusting the master's acquaintances, and the other mistrusting the master. Mr Lammle's servant, of the second class. Appearing to be lost in wonder and low spirits because the police are so long in coming to take his master up on some charge of the first magnitude.

Veneering, M.P., on the right of Mrs Lammle; Twemlow on her left; Mrs Veneering, W.M.P. (wife of Member of Parliament), and Lady Tippins on Mr Lammle's right and left. But be sure that well within the fascination of Mr Lammle's eye and smile sits little Georgiana. And be sure that close to little Georgiana, also under inspection by the same gingerous gentleman, sits Fledgeby.

Oftener than twice or thrice while breakfast is in progress, Mr Twemlow gives a little sudden turn towards Mrs Lammle, and then says to her, 'I beg your pardon!' This not being Twemlow's usual way, why is it his way today? Why, the truth is, Twemlow repeatedly labours under the impression that Mrs Lammle is going to speak to him, and turning finds that it is not so, and mostly that she has her eyes upon Veneering. Strange that this impression so abides by Twemlow after being corrected, yet so it is.

Lady Tippins partaking plentifully of the fruits of the earth (including grapejuice in the category) becomes livelier, and applies herself to elicit sparks from Mortimer Lightwood. It is always understood among the initiated, that that faithless lover must be planted at table opposite to Lady Tippins, who will then strike conversational fire out of him. In a pause of mastication and deglutition, Lady Tippins, contemplating Mortimer, recalls that it was at our dear Veneerings, and in the presence of a party who are surely all here, that he told them his story of the man from somewhere, which afterwards became so horribly interesting and vulgarly popular.

'Yes, Lady Tippins,' assents Mortimer; 'as they say on the stage, "Even so!"

'Then we expect you,' retorts the charmer, 'to sustain your reputation, and tell us something else.'

'Lady Tippins, I exhausted myself for life that day, and there is nothing more to be got out of me.'

Mortimer parries thus, with a sense upon him that elsewhere it is Eugene and not he who is the jester, and that in these circles where Eugene persists in being speechless, he, Mortimer, is but the double of the friend on whom he has founded himself.

'But,' quoth the fascinating Tippins, 'I am resolved on getting something more out of you. Traitor! what is this I hear about another disappearance?'

'As it is you who have heard it,' returns Lightwood, 'perhaps you'll tell us.'

'Monster, away!' retorts Lady Tippins. 'Your own Golden Dustman referred me to you.'

Mr Lamble, striking in here, proclaims aloud that there is a sequel to the story of the man from somewhere. Silence ensues upon the proclamation.

'I assure you,' says Lightwood, glancing round the table, 'I have nothing to tell.' But Eugene adding in a low voice, 'There, tell it, tell it!' he corrects himself with the addition, 'Nothing worth mentioning.'

Boots and Brewer immediately perceive that it is immensely worth mentioning, and become politely clamorous. Veneering is also visited by a perception to the same effect. But it is understood that his attention is now rather used up, and difficult to hold, that being the tone of the House of Commons.

'Pray don't be at the trouble of composing yourselves to listen,' says Mortimer Lightwood, 'because I shall have finished long before you have fallen into comfortable attitudes. It's like'

'It's like,' impatiently interrupts Eugene, 'the children's narrative:

"I'll tell you a story
Of Jack a Manory,
And now my story's begun;
I'll tell you another
Of Jack and his brother,
And now my story is done."

Get on, and get it over!

Eugene says this with a sound of vexation in his voice, leaning back in his chair and looking balefully at Lady Tippins, who nods to him as her dear Bear, and playfully insinuates that she (a selfevident proposition) is Beauty, and he Beast.

'The reference,' proceeds Mortimer, 'which I suppose to be made by my honourable and fair enslaver opposite, is to the following circumstance. Very lately, the young woman, Lizzie Hexam, daughter of the late Jesse Hexam, otherwise Gaffer, who will be remembered to have found the body of the man

from somewhere, mysteriously received, she knew not from whom, an explicit retraction of the charges made against her father, by another waterside character of the name of Riderhood. Nobody believed them, because little Rogue Riderhood I am tempted into the paraphrase by remembering the charming wolf who would have rendered society a great service if he had devoured Mr Riderhood's father and mother in their infancy had previously played fast and loose with the said charges, and, in fact, abandoned them. However, the retraction I have mentioned found its way into Lizzie Hexam's hands, with a general flavour on it of having been favoured by some anonymous messenger in a dark cloak and slouched hat, and was by her forwarded, in her father's vindication, to Mr Boffin, my client. You will excuse the phraseology of the shop, but as I never had another client, and in all likelihood never shall have, I am rather proud of him as a natural curiosity probably unique.'

Although as easy as usual on the surface, Lightwood is not quite as easy as usual below it. With an air of not minding Eugene at all, he feels that the subject is not altogether a safe one in that connexion.

'The natural curiosity which forms the sole ornament of my professional museum,' he resumes, 'hereupon desires his Secretary an individual of the hermit crab or oyster species, and whose name, I think, is Chokesmith but it doesn't in the least mattersay Artichoke to put himself in communication with Lizzie Hexam. Artichoke professes his readiness so to do, endeavours to do so, but fails.'

'Why fails?' asks Boots.

'How fails?' asks Brewer.

'Pardon me,' returns Lightwood, 'I must postpone the reply for one moment, or we shall have an anticlimax. Artichoke failing signally, my client refers the task to me: his purpose being to advance the interests of the object of his search. I proceed to put myself in communication with her; I even happen to possess some special means,' with a glance at Eugene, 'of putting myself in communication with her; but I fail too, because she has vanished.'

'Vanished!' is the general echo.

'Disappeared,' says Mortimer. 'Nobody knows how, nobody knows when, nobody knows where. And so ends the story to which my honourable and fair enslaver opposite referred.'

Tippins, with a bewitching little scream, opines that we shall every one of us be murdered in our beds. Eugene eyes her as if some of us would be enough for him. Mrs Veneering, W.M.P., remarks that these social mysteries make one

afraid of leaving Baby. Veneering, M.P., wishes to be informed (with something of a secondhand air of seeing the Right Honourable Gentleman at the head of the Home Department in his place) whether it is intended to be conveyed that the vanished person has been spirited away or otherwise harmed? Instead of Lightwood's answering, Eugene answers, and answers hastily and vexedly: 'No, no, no; he doesn't mean that; he means voluntarily vanished but utterly completely.'

However, the great subject of the happiness of Mr and Mrs Lammle must not be allowed to vanish with the other vanishments with the vanishing of the murderer, the vanishing of Julius Handford, the vanishing of Lizzie Hexam, and therefore Veneering must recall the present sheep to the pen from which they have strayed. Who so fit to discourse of the happiness of Mr and Mrs Lammle, they being the dearest and oldest friends he has in the world; or what audience so fit for him to take into his confidence as that audience, a noun of multitude or signifying many, who are all the oldest and dearest friends he has in the world? So Veneering, without the formality of rising, launches into a familiar oration, gradually toning into the Parliamentary singsong, in which he sees at that board his dear friend Twemlow who on that day twelvemonth bestowed on his dear friend Lammle the fair hand of his dear friend Sophronia, and in which he also sees at that board his dear friends Boots and Brewer whose rallying round him at a period when his dear friend Lady Tippins likewise rallied round him, and in the foremost rank he can never forget while memory holds her seat. But he is free to confess that he misses from that board his dear old friend Podsnap, though he is well represented by his dear young friend Georgiana. And he further sees at that board (this he announces with pomp, as if exulting in the powers of an extraordinary telescope) his friend Mr Fledgeby, if he will permit him to call him so. For all of these reasons, and many more which he right well knows will have occurred to persons of your exceptional acuteness, he is here to submit to you that the time has arrived when, with our hearts in our glasses, with tears in our eyes, with blessings on our lips, and in a general way with a profusion of gammon and spinach in our emotional larders, we should one and all drink to our dear friends the Lammles, wishing them many years as happy as the last, and many many friends as congenially united as themselves. And this he will add; that Anastatia Veneering (who is instantly heard to weep) is formed on the same model as her old and chosen friend Sophronia Lammle, in respect that she is devoted to the man who wooed and won her, and nobly discharges the duties of a wife.

Seeing no better way out of it, Veneering here pulls up his oratorical Pegasus extremely short, and plumps down, clean over his head, with: 'Lammle, God bless you!'

Then Lamble. Too much of him every way; pervadingly too much nose of a coarse wrong shape, and his nose in his mind and his manners; too much smile to be real; too much frown to be false; too many large teeth to be visible at once without suggesting a bite. He thanks you, dear friends, for your kindly greeting, and hopes to receive you it may be on the next of these delightful occasions in a residence better suited to your claims on the rites of hospitality. He will never forget that at Veneering's he first saw Sophronia. Sophronia will never forget that at Veneering's she first saw him. They spoke of it soon after they were married, and agreed that they would never forget it. In fact, to Veneering they owe their union. They hope to show their sense of this some day ('No, no, from Veneering') oh yes, yes, and let him rely upon it, they will if they can! His marriage with Sophronia was not a marriage of interest on either side: she had her little fortune, he had his little fortune: they joined their little fortunes: it was a marriage of pure inclination and suitability. Thank you! Sophronia and he are fond of the society of young people; but he is not sure that their house would be a good house for young people proposing to remain single, since the contemplation of its domestic bliss might induce them to change their minds. He will not apply this to any one present; certainly not to their darling little Georgiana. Again thank you! Neither, by the by, will he apply it to his friend Fledgeby. He thanks Veneering for the feeling manner in which he referred to their common friend Fledgeby, for he holds that gentleman in the highest estimation. Thank you. In fact (returning unexpectedly to Fledgeby), the better you know him, the more you find in him that you desire to know. Again thank you! In his dear Sophronia's name and in his own, thank you!

Mrs Lamble has sat quite still, with her eyes cast down upon the tablecloth. As Mr Lamble's address ends, Twemlow once more turns to her involuntarily, not cured yet of that often recurring impression that she is going to speak to him. This time she really is going to speak to him. Veneering is talking with his other next neighbour, and she speaks in a low voice.

'Mr Twemlow.'

He answers, 'I beg your pardon? Yes?' Still a little doubtful, because of her not looking at him.

'You have the soul of a gentleman, and I know I may trust you. Will you give me the opportunity of saying a few words to you when you come up stairs?'

'Assuredly. I shall be honoured.'

'Don't seem to do so, if you please, and don't think it inconsistent if my manner should be more careless than my words. I may be watched.'

Intensely astonished, Twemlow puts his hand to his forehead, and sinks back

in his chair meditating. Mrs Lammle rises. All rise. The ladies go up stairs. The gentlemen soon saunter after them. Fledgeby has devoted the interval to taking an observation of Boots's whiskers, Brewer's whiskers, and Lammle's whiskers, and considering which pattern of whisker he would prefer to produce out of himself by friction, if the Genie of the cheek would only answer to his rubbing.

In the drawingroom, groups form as usual. Lightwood, Boots, and Brewer, flutter like moths around that yellow wax candleguttering down, and with some hint of a windingsheet in it Lady Tippins. Outsiders cultivate Veneering, M P., and Mrs Veneering, W.M.P. Lammle stands with folded arms, Mephistophelean in a corner, with Georgiana and Fledgeby. Mrs Lammle, on a sofa by a table, invites Mr Twemlow's attention to a book of portraits in her hand.

Mr Twemlow takes his station on a settee before her, and Mrs Lammle shows him a portrait.

'You have reason to be surprised,' she says softly, 'but I wish you wouldn't look so.'

Disturbed Twemlow, making an effort not to look so, looks much more so.

'I think, Mr Twemlow, you never saw that distant connexion of yours before today?'

'No, never.'

'Now that you do see him, you see what he is. You are not proud of him?'

'To say the truth, Mrs Lammle, no.'

'If you knew more of him, you would be less inclined to acknowledge him. Here is another portrait. What do you think of it?'

Twemlow has just presence of mind enough to say aloud: 'Very like! Uncommonly like!'

'You have noticed, perhaps, whom he favours with his attentions? You notice where he is now, and how engaged?'

'Yes. But Mr Lammle'

She darts a look at him which he cannot comprehend, and shows him another portrait.

'Very good; is it not?'

'Charming!' says Twemlow.

'So like as to be almost a caricature? Mr Twemlow, it is impossible to tell you what the struggle in my mind has been, before I could bring myself to speak to you as I do now. It is only in the conviction that I may trust you never to betray me, that I can proceed. Sincerely promise me that you never will betray my confidence that you will respect it, even though you may no longer respect me, and I shall be as satisfied as if you had sworn it.'

'Madam, on the honour of a poor gentleman'

'Thank you. I can desire no more. Mr Twemlow, I implore you to save that child!'

'That child?'

'Georgiana. She will be sacrificed. She will be inveigled and married to that connexion of yours. It is a partnership affair, a money speculation. She has no strength of will or character to help herself and she is on the brink of being sold into wretchedness for life.'

'Amazing! But what can I do to prevent it?' demands Twemlow, shocked and bewildered to the last degree.

'Here is another portrait. And not good, is it?'

Aghast at the light manner of her throwing her head back to look at it critically, Twemlow still dimly perceives the expediency of throwing his own head back, and does so. Though he no more sees the portrait than if it were in China.

'Decidedly not good,' says Mrs Lammle. 'Stiff and exaggerated!'

'And ex' But Twemlow, in his demolished state, cannot command the word, and trails off into 'actly so.'

'Mr Twemlow, your word will have weight with her pompous, selfblinded father. You know how much he makes of your family. Lose no time. Warn him.'

'But warn him against whom?'

'Against me.'

By great good fortune Twemlow receives a stimulant at this critical instant. The stimulant is Lammle's voice.

'Sophronia, my dear, what portraits are you showing Twemlow?'

'Public characters, Alfred.'

'Show him the last of me.'

'Yes, Alfred.'

She puts the book down, takes another book up, turns the leaves, and presents the portrait to Twemlow.

'That is the last of Mr Lammle. Do you think it good? Warn her father against me. I deserve it, for I have been in the scheme from the first. It is my husband's scheme, your connexion's, and mine. I tell you this, only to show you the necessity of the poor little foolish affectionate creature's being befriended and rescued. You will not repeat this to her father. You will spare me so far, and spare my husband. For, though this celebration of today is all a mockery, he is my husband, and we must live. Do you think it like?'

Twemlow, in a stunned condition, feigns to compare the portrait in his hand with the original looking towards him from his Mephistophelean corner.

'Very well indeed!' are at length the words which Twemlow with great difficulty extracts from himself.

'I am glad you think so. On the whole, I myself consider it the best. The others are so dark. Now here, for instance, is another of Mr Lammle'

'But I don't understand; I don't see my way,' Twemlow stammers, as he falters over the book with his glass at his eye. 'How warn her father, and not tell him? Tell him how much? Tell him how little? I am getting lost.'

'Tell him I am a matchmaker; tell him I am an artful and designing woman; tell him you are sure his daughter is best out of my house and my company. Tell him any such things of me; they will all be true. You know what a puffed up man he is, and how easily you can cause his vanity to take the alarm. Tell him as much as will give him the alarm and make him careful of her, and spare me the rest. Mr Twemlow, I feel my sudden degradation in your eyes; familiar as I am with my degradation in my own eyes, I keenly feel the change that must have come upon me in yours, in these last few moments. But I trust to your good faith with me as implicitly as when I began. If you knew how often I have tried to speak to you today, you would almost pity me. I want no new promise from you on my own account, for I am satisfied, and I always shall be satisfied, with the promise you have given me. I can venture to say no more, for I see that I am watched. If you would set my mind at rest with the assurance that you will interpose with the father and save this harmless girl, close that book before you return it to me, and I shall know what you mean, and deeply thank you in my heart. Alfred, Mr Twemlow thinks the last one the best, and quite agrees with you and me.'

Alfred advances. The groups break up. Lady Tippins rises to go, and Mrs Veneering follows her leader. For the moment, Mrs Lammle does not turn to

them, but remains looking at Twemlow looking at Alfred's portrait through his eyeglass. The moment past, Twemlow drops his eyeglass at its ribbon's length, rises, and closes the book with an emphasis which makes that fragile nursling of the fairies, Tippins, start.

Then goodbye and goodbye, and charming occasion worthy of the Golden Age, and more about the flich of bacon, and the like of that; and Twemlow goes staggering across Piccadilly with his hand to his forehead, and is nearly run down by a flushed lettercart, and at last drops safe in his easychair, innocent good gentleman, with his hand to his forehead still, and his head in a whirl.

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